

A History of Kirklee Allotments

Kirklee Allotment is situated in the heart of Glasgow's West End, nestled in a bend of the River Kelvin as it stretches between the old Caledonian Railway viaduct and the grand and imposing Kirklee Bridge.



It is the oldest surviving allotment of the Kelvinside Allotment Association (KAA), which originally also incorporated sites at Kelvindale and Winton Drive, and went on to include sites at Bellshaugh and Julian. Not only has Kirklee endured since the inception of KAA, it could also be argued that its history reflects both the development of allotments in Scotland, and the story of the West End itself.

The Kelvinside Estate Company

Kirklee Allotments were originally part of the Kelvinside Estate, which in the mid nineteenth century extended along Great Western Road, from the gate of the Botanic Gardens out to near the Anniesland Toll, and on the Garscube Road from the old Toll House at Springbank to the Maryhill Barracks. In 1839 Matthew Montgomerie (1783-1868) and John Park Fleming (1790-1869) of the law firm Montgomerie & Fleming, bought 462 acres in Kelvinside for £53,354 5s. 0d, and formed the Kelvinside Estate Co. In 1845 the lands of Gartnavel were added, and the two men resolved to make Kelvinside the best residential district in Glasgow.ⁱ

The Glasgow City Assessor's Department noted in their Valuation Rolls for 1913-14 that the Trustees of James B Montgomerie Fleming, 'per Montgomerie & Fleming, 241 St Vincent Street, Glasgow,' owned the ground at Kirklee and that it remained 'unoccupied' and had an annual rent or value of £5.ⁱⁱ

Defence of the Realm

While the Allotments (Scotland) Act of 1892 'obliged local authorities to provide allotments for the "labouring population" if six or more ratepayers came forward with a request,' it wasn't until World War I that Kirklee was first used as an allotment as a result of the Defence of the Realm Regulations (1916). Kirklee was by no means alone in this, and the greatest extension of allotments in Scotland came during the First World War. In order to maintain the food supply the Board of Agriculture obtained powers under Regulation 2L of the Defence of the Realm Regulations, 'to enter on land for the purpose of cultivating it or using it for the keeping and breeding of live stock, poultry or bees, or arranging for its cultivation.' The Cultivation of Lands Order delegated these powers to the country's urban local authorities, which in Glasgow meant the Corporation. Thus during the war, as much land as possible was converted to allotments to grow food to supplement shortages and the Defence of the Realm Act enabled local authorities to commandeer land for wartime allotments. It would appear that this was the case with Kirklee, as the Corporation records reveal that in 1917 the Trustees of Montgomerie & Fleming claimed that the 'land was not suitable for vegetables.' However, their opposition was in vain, as by 1918 the Corporation recorded that 'there were 51 plots at Kirklee.'ⁱⁱⁱ

The response made to the Government's appeal to produce food from allotments, and thus assist in defeating the enemy, was reportedly 'immediate and universal.' And so in the latter part of WWI, reluctant owners Montgomerie & Fleming turned their unused land at Kirklee over to Glasgow Corporation to be run as allotments for the good of the local people and the country as a whole, when fresh fruit and vegetables were in short supply.^{iv}

North and South

Up until the late 20th century Kirklee was made up of two separate sites, one on either side of Kirklee Road: the larger area of land to the north of the road and a smaller triangular parcel of land to the south. The railway line that travelled north from Kirklee



Station created the western boundary of Kirklee North, having been completed in the 1890s. The station, which was designed by Sir John James Burnet, opened for business on 10 August 1896. However, between 1 January 1917 and 2 March 1919, as Kirklee plots were first being put to the hoe, the Glasgow Central Railway was closed due to the wartime economy. The northern and eastern boundaries are, as previously stated, created by the steep banks of the

River Kelvin, while the southern boundary runs along Kirklee Road, and behind a short row of houses that were constructed in the early 1900s. Kirklee South sat opposite these houses at 55-61 Kirklee Road, and the remainder of her boundaries were made up of Addison Rd and Wyndham Street. However, it was not until 1955 that the plots at Kirklee were first listed separately: 'Kirklee North 37; Kirklee South 16 - total 53 plots.'^v

The Interwar Years

The Land Settlement (Scotland) Act of 1919 'opened up allotment cultivation to anyone, regardless of economic need or occupation.' The following year Glasgow Corporation's Allotment Committee ruled that land like Kirklee, which had been taken under Cultivation of Lands (Scotland) Order, should continue as allotments 'so far as these may not be required for housing, etc., purposes.' In 1923 the Corporation records note that a sub-committee considered putting in a lavatory at Kelvinside and water at Kirklee. The Director reported at a later date that while a lavatory had been provided, the water was found to be too expensive. Plot holders at Kirklee would have to wait until the 1980s for toilet facilities, which were installed courtesy of Rab C Nesbitt.^{vi}

The records of KAA date from 1923 and include both rent books and minutes, while they are not inclusive with a gap between 1934-1943, they remain a rich source of information. These records reveal that the people who took up the allotments at Kirklee

came from across the west end and while the vast majority of those recorded are men, there were also women. One such plot, number 29, illustrates how in the years leading up to WWII having an allotment was a family affair. The plot is first recorded as being rented by Rev. W D Miller of 57 Kirklee Road, and over the subsequent 20 plus years first by Ian Miller and later by Miss Nora Miller, both of the same address. Indeed Nora stands out in the records as being the longest standing women plot holder at Kirklee in these early years.

In 1926 Nora, along with 8 others, was put off her plot, the rent book states that plots 29-37 'were taken away for building purposes'. Mr W T Denton, the president of KAA, wrote the following year to Glasgow Corporation Allotment's committee asking if the land formerly on lease to the Corporation could be re-let to the 9 plot holders until building started. He was advised to write directly to Messrs. Montgomerie & Flemming, and the following year these plots were listed as 'Private' and having been 'Taken direct for owners' at a cost of 7s each. By 1931 the rents had risen to 8s 6d for plots 30-37, while plot 29, perhaps a smaller sized plot was let at a rent of 4s 6d. Thus these Private plot holders who rented their allotments directly from the Kelvinside Estate Co. paid their rent and their KAA membership fee, while the other plot holders only paid the latter.

During WWII allotments became paramount again with the Dig for Victory campaign. In 1939 the Cultivation of Lands (Allotments) (Scotland) Order 'directed local authorities to make any arable lands (including appropriate private parcels) available to allotment gardening to stave off anticipated food shortages,' and allotments once again flourished. The railway, which had become part of the London, Midland and Scotland Railway in 1923, was closed permanently to passengers on 1 May 1939. Prior to the line's closure in 1964 and the demolition of the station in 1971, the rail yard was transformed into a car showroom in the late 1950s. However, more significant changes than new neighbours, were on the cards for the plot holders at Kirklee with a change of ownership.^{vii}

Expansion of the University

Questions of longevity for Kirklee Allotments arose in the immediate aftermath of WWII with the sale of the land by Kelvinside Estates Co, and have continued right up until the present. Like much of the west end, the land was seen as a prized asset ripe for

development, and in 1946 the University of Glasgow decided to pursue the purchase of three unfeued plots of ground situated in the neighbourhood of Kirklee Road. Kirklee North consisted of 11,000 sq yds (2.27 acres); Kirklee South was approximately 1.43 acres, and an additional plot of land at Kirklee Place was 0.6 acres. The University's Finance Committee agreed to recommend the purchase of these plots at a cost of 5s. per square yard, plus road charges.^{viii}

It appeared that the writing might be on the wall for Kirklee Allotments when the University's Secretary of Court enquired: 'Presumably you will inform me what steps would require to be taken to cancel the lets of these allotments when the University decided to make use of the ground.' The agents acting on behalf of Montgomerie & Fleming confirmed the situation when they stated: 'As regards leases or other rights of possession... that portion north of Kirklee Road is let to the Corporation of Glasgow for allotments at a rent of £8 a year subject to three months notice in the event of our clients requiring the ground during the currency of any year, either for fueing or for commercial purposes: while the triangular piece of ground south of Kirklee Road is also let for allotments on a similar temporary let to the Kelvinside Allotment Association at a rent of £2 per annum.' Thus the University would be entitled to terminate the leases without compensation in any year at a date after 1st November or before 1st May provided six months notice was given. Termination on three months notice was possible but would involve liability for compensation.^{ix}

Kirklee North & South were acquired by Glasgow University in 1947 at a cost of £5,200, after planning permission had been given for the development of university facilities, in the form of either laboratories or student residencies. In September 1958 the Principal reported that he had asked the Secretary to take up with the Law Agents the question of resuming possession from the allotment holders of part of the ground at Kirklee. He had considered that it might be possible to use the ground for staff tennis courts. Intriguingly, and possibly in a related move, mineral reports on boreholes were undertaken in 1957/1958 by Messrs J H Ross. However, building on the land reportedly proved impossible due to mine workings and land was leased back to Glasgow Corporation for allotment gardens, with the Principal's hopes of staff tennis courts scotched. Unfortunately this was by no means the end of the story.^x

In 1972 an anonymous donor gave the University £350,000 'for the purpose of building accommodation for about 200 students and ancillary accommodation for academic and domestic staff, in a high amenity area within a 2 mile radius of University.' The acquisition of the site and planning approval in principle had to be completed by August 1973 with another 18 months allowed for formal planning approval and getting the project off the ground. The site chosen was Kirklee North, and the lease, which had allowed the land to be let as allotments, was terminated in 1972 in order to build a hall of residence.^{xi}

Architects were appointed in July 1973, and by December the consultant service engineers were looking for ways to consolidate the old mine workings. The allotment tenants had removed by 18 February 1974, but by the time a building warrant and full planning permission was granted, the high rate of inflation was such that the costs exceeded the capital funds set aside. Thus the project was abandoned at tender stage on 22 January 1976, and Kirklee North was leased back to Glasgow District Council as allotment gardens in 1977 on an annual basis.^{xii}

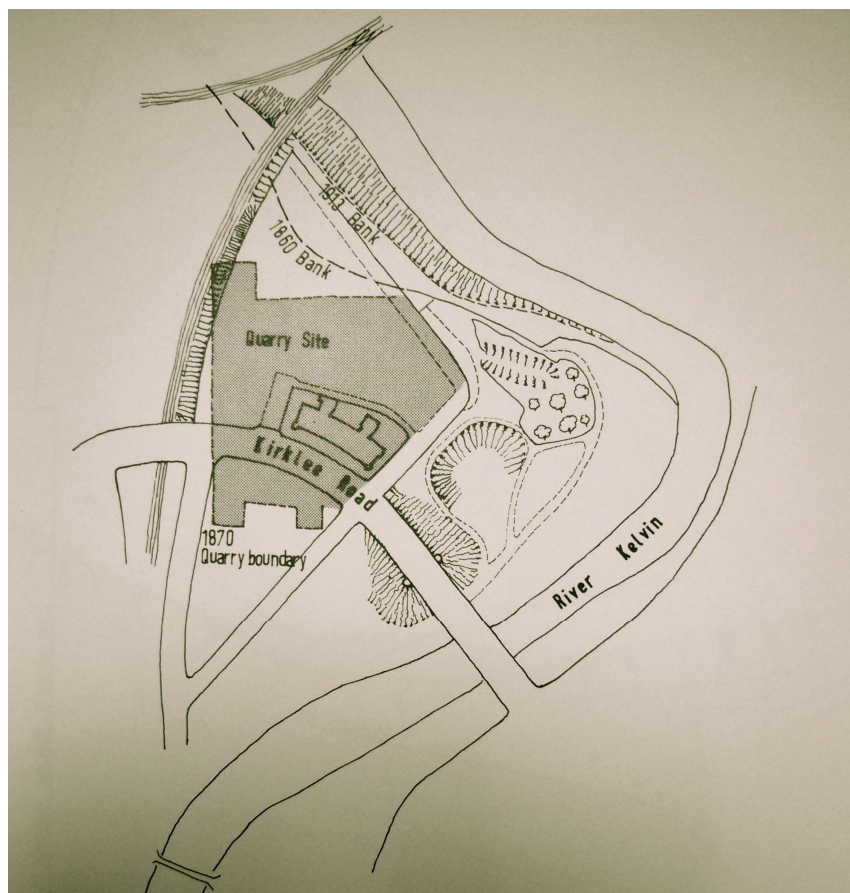
Unstable History

Interestingly the Hall of Residence Design Team Report, which had been undertaken in 1974, revealed pertinent facts about the previous use of the land that had implications for further development of the site. A study of the geological drift map showed that rock levels were near the surface with only shallow depths of sub soil. The rock strata were known to contain coal deposits, in particular the Knightswood Gas Coal seam at approximately 25 to 30 feet below the surface. A series of reports prepared by Messrs J H Ross in 1958 showed that a mine working existed throughout the major part of the site at a depth of 25 feet. In addition there were records of an ingoing eye (the mouth of a drift or mine from the surface) to work ironstone.^{xiii}

In order to discover more clearly the rock formation levels, tenders were obtained and a contract let to Messrs GKN for a site investigation survey. Although the engineers had expected to find a mound of rock in the centre of the site falling away at the west and east sides with the usual clays and silts above, the investigation revealed that there was no undisturbed subsoil in the centre of the site. Trial pits at the northwest corner

uncovered large deposits of loose fill. After an extensive search of old records a map was discovered which showed that the riverbank in that area had been artificially formed during the construction of the railway. Trial pits at the east side of the site located a deep hole, which appeared to be a mineshaft or a quarry face. The OS maps of 1890 leave the site blank with no detail given, while the maps of 1860 and 1913 give full details of the site. Thus it was concluded that the site underwent considerable changes between 1860 and 1910.^{xiv}

Extensive research discovered that the Glasgow Central Railway Company had applied to the House of Commons to construct the Maryhill Railway through the middle of Kirklee North in 1887. In the schedule of acquisition the site was listed as a quarry. Copies of the relevant parts of the Railway Act that were obtained from the House of Lords records, showed quite clearly that the major portion of the site belonged to a quarry company and that the rock extraction was made by shallow sloping workings.^{xv}



The Loss of Kirklee South

The whole experience in the mid 1970s might have appeared to put paid to ambitious development plans. However, this was not to be and plot holders were once again faced with the loss of their plots in the next decade. In April 1981, the University sought to increase the rental of Kirklee South from £30 to £500 per annum. The council found this to be too expensive and so the allotment lease was terminated. Plot holders first received Notice to Quit Kirklee South in August 1983 when Tayport Developments (Scots) Ltd were given permission to do test bore drilling on the site. However, adverse soil reports led them to withdraw their conditional offer and the plots were reoccupied. Thereafter several developers approached the University including Wimpy, who were given access and applied for Planning Permission in 1987. Two applications for 40-flat developments were refused, while a later application for a modified development for 21 flats went to all the way to a Public Enquiry. KAA fought a concerted battle to save Kirklee South, winning much support, including that of the city council who made an offer to buy the land in order to maintain the allotments. However, all was eventually in vain, as the Scottish Office enquiry report of 1990 found in favour of the developers.^{xvi}

Kirklee was making headlines again in 2004 when the city council decided to close the allotments after tests showed that the site contained amounts of lead that exceeded the recommended safety levels. Members of Kelvinside Allotments Association, angry about moves by the council to shut their site, gathered in Hillhead Library for a meeting. At the meeting David Boddy, the association secretary, stated:

Of course, we fully accept the need for adequate safety levels but in this case the action of Glasgow City Council is disproportionate to the risk. Lead is present in most industrial areas and we do not know how the allotment site differs from the surrounding area. They found no lead in the produce so we don't understand the problem. There was a total lack of consultation on the proposals, news of which appeared in the media before plot-holders were notified.

The Scottish Government had required all Local Authorities to identify potentially contaminated land in their respective areas, and as allotments had often been created on rather marginal lands, Glasgow City Council decided to include such sites in the survey. They found suspicious traces of lead early in the summer of 2004, and plot holders were required to stay off their plots during that growing season, apart from activities that did not require touching the soil. Dr Helene Irvine, consultant in public

health medicine at Greater Glasgow NHS Board, reported that the council was statutorily obliged to thoroughly investigate the entire allotment to reassure tenants that the soil was suitable for growing vegetables. Further tests in the autumn showed that there was no pollution, and plot holders at Kirklee were able to resume business as normal.^{xvii}

Thus despite the best efforts of landowners to develop the site, Kirklee Allotments have endured for almost a century, providing fresh fruit and vegetables and great pleasure to hundreds of allotment gardeners in Glasgow's west end.

i

[<http://www.theglasgowstory.com/image.php?inum=TGSB00290&t=2&urltp=search.php%3Fstart%3D0%26end%3D20%26what%3D%26where%3D%5BKelvinside%26who%3D%26period%3D%26collection%3D%26search%3D99%3D>];

[<http://gdl.cdlr.strath.ac.uk/mlemen/mlemen037.htm>]

ii [<http://www.theglasgowstory.com/imageview.php?inum=TGSV24157>]

iii Caitlin O'Brian DeSilvey 'When Plotters Meet' 2001 p.2; Departmental Committee on Allotments Report 1922 ACCN 21081/3 SAGS GUAS; ALLOTMENTS FOR ALL: THE STORY OF A GREAT MOVEMENT GERALD W. BUTCHER

http://www.archive.org/stream/allotmentsforall00butcrich/allotmentsforall00butcrich_djvu.txt; Minutes of GC/DC or CC, vol.56, p.739; Minutes of GC/DC or CC, vol.60, p.303

iv Departmental Committee on Allotments Report 1922 ACCN 21081/3 SAGS GUAS

v [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kirklee_railway_station]; Letter 17/10/1990 KAA archive

vi Caitlin O'Brian DeSilvey 'When Plotters Meet' 2001 p.4; Minutes of GC/DC or CC, vol.63, p.2525; Minutes of GC/DC or CC, vol.69, p.2053; Minutes of GC/DC or CC, vol.69, p.2229; Minutes of GC/DC or CC, vol.69, p.2430; Minutes of GC/DC or CC, vol.70, p.298

vii Caitlin O'Brian DeSilvey 'When Plotters Meet' 2001 p.54

viii Finance Committee 5/06/1946 GUAS

ix Sec of Court 12/06/1946 [GUAS 31530]; Mitchells Johnston & co... 01/07/1946 [GUAS 31530]; Montgomerie & Flemming... 18/06/1946 [GUAS 31530]

x SO Inquiry Report 21/12/1990; Finance Committee 5/02/1947 GUAS; Court 23/09/1948 GUAS; GUAS 12/08/2004

xi GUAS 12/08/2004

xii GUAS 12/08/2004; SO Inquiry Report 21/12/1990; Letter 3/04/1987 KAA archive

xiii UoG Hall of Residence Kirklee Design Team Report, May 1974 [53929]

xiv UoG Hall of Residence Kirklee Design Team Report, May 1974 [53929]

xv UoG Hall of Residence Kirklee Design Team Report, May 1974 [53929]

xvi SO Inquiry Report 21/12/1990; Works Committee 4/05/1984 GUAS; Letter 17/10/1990 KAA archive; SO Inquiry Report 21/12/1990

xvii <http://www.heraldsotland.com/sport/spl/aberdeen/allotment-holders-claim-closure-move-is-all-a-plot-survey-shows-soil-on-site-contains-lead-1.79897>