

# Urban allotment gardens in the eighteenth century: the case of Sheffield\*

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## Abstract

Many acres of the horticultural land surrounding Sheffield in the late eighteenth century were utilized as allotment gardens. Provincial town histories, apart from those of Birmingham (where small gardens were often different in character) make little or no mention of anything similar for this period. This paper makes the case for Sheffield being the first to experience workers' gardens *en masse* and demonstrates that there may have been, on a cautious calculation, 1500–1800 allotments available for rent in the town in the 1780s.

Given the rise to maturity over the past three decades of the discipline of Urban History, it is surprising that so little has been written about provincial town allotment gardens before the nineteenth century. That they existed is known from local studies of Newcastle, Nottingham and particularly Birmingham, and from books on allotment and garden history.<sup>1</sup> But the existing literature provides scant detail of early provision. Indeed, in the case of Birmingham, it partly obscures the picture by emphasising the proliferation there of the 'Guinea Garden', a form of leisure garden with little apparent resemblance to a working family's vegetable plot.<sup>2</sup> This article seeks both to fill a gap in the literature and to advance the case for Sheffield as not merely a major pioneer, but as the first town to possess large numbers of urban allotments, long before the era of statutory provision. It also seeks to provoke others to challenge the claim. It might well be that other towns also had large numbers of similar gardens which are as yet unresearched or unacknowledged.

\* The author wishes to acknowledge constructive criticisms of earlier drafts of this paper from Jeremy Burchardt and Malcolm Thick. The term 'allotment' is used throughout to describe a small individual parcel of cultivable land rented by an amateur gardener separately from a house, not adjacent to that house, free of any building, and usually in a block with other similar parcels.

<sup>1</sup> H. Thorpe, 'The homely allotment: from rural dole to urban amenity', *Geography* 268 (1975), pp. 169–183; H. Thorpe, E. B. Galloway and L. M. Evans, *The rationalisation of urban allotments systems: a case study of Birmingham* (SSRC Report, HR 979, 1977), pp. 2–4; W. Hutton, *History of Birmingham* (1795), pp. 7, 202; J. Drake, *A picture of Birmingham* (1825), p. 44; J. A. Langford, *A century of Birmingham life, 1741–1841* (2 vols, 1871), II, pp. 5–9; R. J. Charleton, *A history of Newcastle-on-Tyne* (1894), pp. 397–8; J. V. Beckett (ed.), *A centenary history*

*of Nottingham* (1997), p. 399; D. Crouch and C. Ward, *The allotment: its landscape and culture* (1988), pp. 64–7. Thorpe, 'The homely allotment' also mentions Coventry and Southampton as having early allotments, but neither urban histories nor enquiries at respective local studies and archives have provided any relevant information for these towns.

<sup>2</sup> Thorpe *et al*, *Rationalisation of urban allotments systems*, p. 2; Hutton, *History of Birmingham*, p. 7.

In Sheffield, individual lease agreements for a sample of 60 manorial garden plots averaging some 150 to 200 square yards indicate a charge of just under 0.3*d.* per square yard from the 1730s to the 1760s.<sup>3</sup> This is a clear suggestion that they were different in nature and usage from the typical 300 square yard Birmingham Guinea Garden priced at around 21*s.* or 0.84*d.* per yard.<sup>4</sup> As late as 1792, when demand for housing and inflation were raising rents, Earl Fitzwilliam's agent was about to let out small gardens to cutlers in Little Sheffield at the then customary ½*d.* per yard, double the rate charged to professional gardeners who usually rented by the acre, and, significantly, half or less than half of the usual rent for building plots.<sup>5</sup> Freehold parcels, particularly to the north and west of the built-up area, and largely belonging to industrialists, merchants, factors, attorneys, and others who had converted profits into landholding were also let as allotments.<sup>6</sup> As the town expanded, these gardens became building ground and their owners realised the full value of their investments. In the meantime, whilst the land was rising in value, a steady second best rental income was being earned. Yet it is not only rents charged to tenants which distinguishes their holdings from pleasure gardens on the one hand and market gardens on the other; size and the inclusion in lease agreements of tenants' trades – cutlers (mainly), button makers, miners, bricklayers, shoemakers, innkeepers, tailors, butchers etc, plus a few widows – make it clear they were, for the most part, workers' or craftsmens' gardens.<sup>7</sup> These tenants also need to be distinguished from the professional gardeners who appear in lease books, market traders' rent lists and all types of property indentures. John Cockayne, for example, who was established by 1773 to the south of the town in and near the Park, and had his own market stall, died in 1815 leaving a substantial portfolio of freehold and leasehold land and housing. The Winnell family, also stallholders, cultivated land at Brightside including three acres at Neepsend for more than fifty years. And three generations of Andrews, again market stallholders, were based in the same quarter for even longer, the Sheffield *Iris* noting in 1810 the death of a seventy year old 'who had worked

<sup>3</sup> Or c. £6 per acre. The notional rate may have been ¼*d.* per yard, but rounded upwards to a convenient sum. Sheffield Archives (hereafter SA), Arundel Castle Muniments (hereafter ACM), S376–378. Most manorial leases give no yardage, but, for example, the 18 gardens leased at 3*s.* each in Lambert Croft in 1745–6 do not suggest a higher *pro rata* price. From the ACM leases above, 43 with tenant's occupation appended have been found, although not exclusively among the 60 gardens with yardage noted in the text. They are as follows: Cutlers 28 (all categories, 64% of the total), button makers 2, shoemakers 2, bakers 2, innkeepers 2, widows 2, and one each for a clerk, a grocer, a schoolmaster, a husbandman and a gardener (who appears to be a worker).

The cutlery trades included makers of files, scissors, shears, razors, tableware etc. as well as pen and pocket knives and surgeons', butchers', farmers' and joiners' blades and tools. Even so-called master cutlers were working craftsmen and rarely employed more than two or three journeymen and perhaps one or two apprentices

(evidence from the number of hearths recorded in cutlers' inventories in the Borthwick Institute, York).

<sup>4</sup> Thorpe, 'Homely allotment', p. 170. One guinea per 300 sq yds equals c. £17 per acre. Hutton in 1795 has 'about sixteen pounds per acre' (*History of Birmingham*, p. 7). The last few surviving Guinea gardens are noted as measuring 600 sq yds in *The Times* 'Weekend' supplement, 29 Aug. 1998, p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> SA, Wentworth Woodhouse Muniments (hereafter WWM), F121 (11). Professionals were leased land at £4–5 per acre, i.e. c. 0.2–0.25*d.* (one farthing) per yard. It was inevitable that as pressure of demand for housing and other construction grew, gardens would be overbuilt. At the stroke of a pen on a building lease a landlord's ground rent more than doubled.

<sup>6</sup> SA, Bagshawe Collection (hereafter Bagshawe Mss) 300 (copy and key of the original c. 1788).

<sup>7</sup> SA, ACM, S378, fos 67–80. The 40 gardens leased by the Duke of Norfolk in February 1760 near Broad Lane End averaged 167 sq yds.

for 40 years with Mr Andrews'. This latter detail is also a reminder that some gardeners were merely employees.<sup>8</sup>

# I

Evidence from documents and maps illustrates the increasing provision of allotments in Sheffield during the eighteenth century. The rate of increase was at first modest, but by the late 1760s, when Dr William Buchan was writing enthusiastically about craftsmen's gardens, the provision was clearly substantial.<sup>9</sup> The early manorial lease books show how 35 parcels had been let 'at will' to craftsmen between 1712 and 1730, and some 60 or more in the decade to 1746. The latter were mainly composed of apparently newly let blocks of 23 parcels at Millsands (1739), 18 at Lambert Croft (1745–46) and 14 in the Wicker (1746).<sup>10</sup> But these three sites had been established by the time Ralph Gosling's *Plan of Sheffield* of 1736 was surveyed, with a dozen or more in the well-documented Ponds area, and almost as many again near the Beast Market (Bullstake).<sup>11</sup> (See Map 1.) Non-manorial parcels divided into small gardens are illustrated by Gosling at Lee Lane (Moore's Gardens), to the south of Snig Hill (Gosnock Hall) and in the backsides of Prior Gate (High Street) and Fargate. All have archive evidence, but with no firm numbers.<sup>12</sup> The surveyor has drawn them as separate plots on each bigger parcel, as he has with most garden areas, whereas the Spittle Gardens (Duke of Norfolk's Nursery) outline to the north of the river is in total contrast. This suggests that *all* the sub-divided garden areas could well have been smaller gardens, if not necessarily allotments.<sup>13</sup> No evidence has been found to indicate that any of these sites were rented by men who described themselves as gardeners apart from Thomas Vessey who paid 7s. *od.* for a plot in 1745.<sup>14</sup> The total number of small gardens shown by Gosling must exceed two hundred, with half reasonably deduced from documentary evidence as allotments.

Similar evidence for the three decades following the 1740s is in relatively short supply. Thirty-five gardens at Broad Lane End and 12 more near the Walk Mill were let out by the Norfolk estate in 1760, the majority to men in the trades.<sup>15</sup> Twos and threes let separately from

<sup>8</sup> SA, ACM, S376, S377, S378, S343; West Yorkshire Archive Service, Wakefield, West Riding Registry of Deeds (hereafter WRRD) *passim*; Cockayne, SA, Younge-Wilson Deeds 974 (1815); Winnells, WRRD, MM 495/683 (1737/8) and DN 717/887 (1794); Andrews, ACM, S377 fo. 191 (1745) and *Iris* 17 July 1810. Between 1736 and 1800 more than 50 Sheffield gardeners apprenticed sons into the cutlery trades (Cutlers' Company Records Database, courtesy of Dr J. Unwin). They were garden workers, not proprietors.

<sup>9</sup> W. Buchan, *Domestic medicine* (1769), p. 144 and c.f. pp. 000–00 below.

<sup>10</sup> SA, ACM, S376 *passim*; S377, fos. 89, 121, 200. By 1750 there were 25 gardens at Lambert Croft. 'At will' leases for small parcels continued until 1770/1 when they were replaced by leases for terms of 99 years. Twenty-one year leases for larger properties, with occasional 63 year terms

for industrial sites, lasted into the nineteenth century.

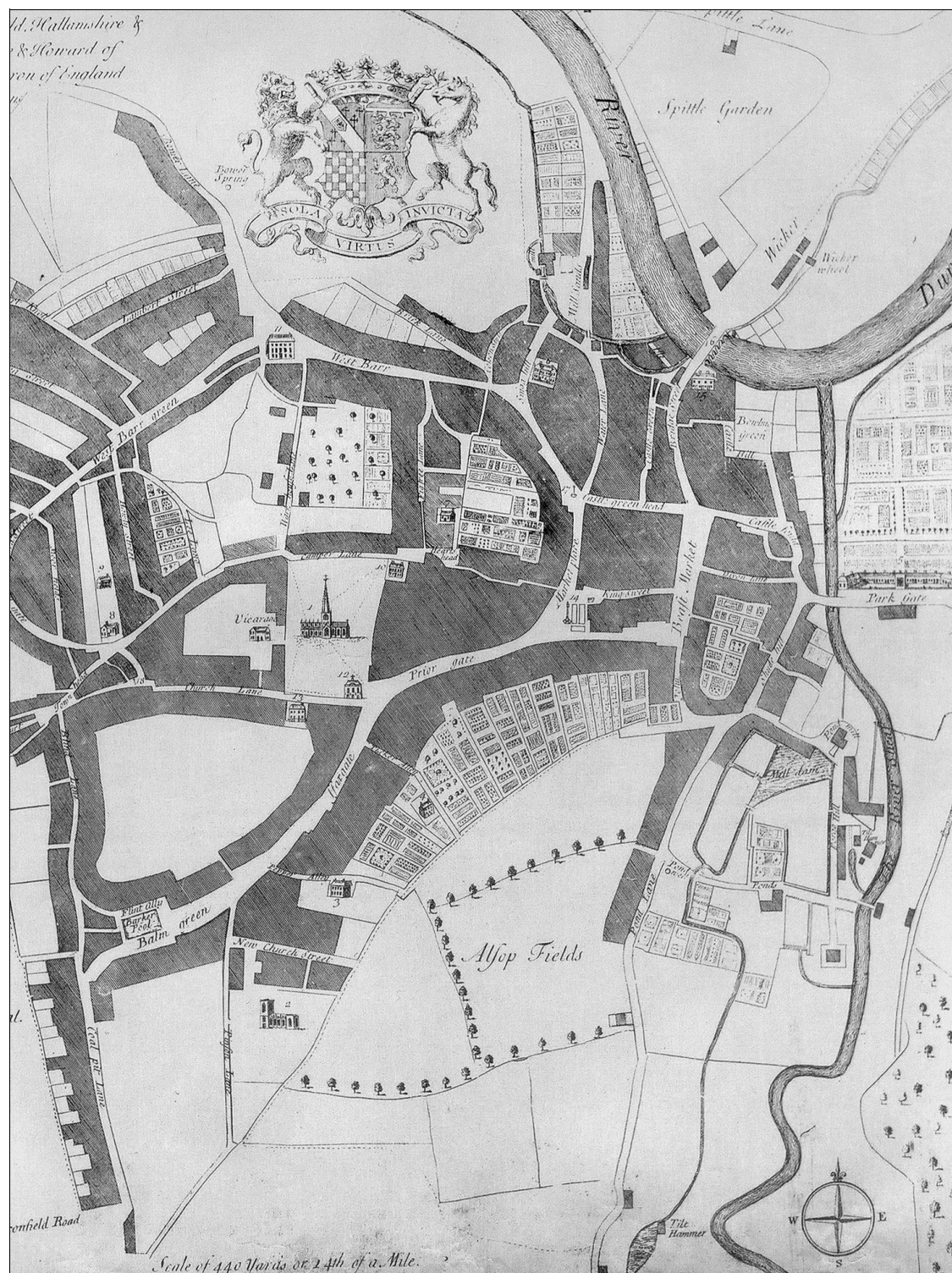
<sup>11</sup> SA, ACM, S376 part 3, fos 10–17 (1722–24); S377, 18 Apr, 14 July and 29 Sept. 1747 (lease renewals).

<sup>12</sup> Gosnock Hall, SA, Church Burgesses' Records, 870 (1730); WRRD, U 151/193, GG 401/563; High St., WRRD, C 125/173, L 6/9, R 462/623, GG 547/770, UU 405/543; Fargate, WRRD, H 83/113, EE 332/468, KK 123/155 and 385/508.

<sup>13</sup> Those gardens drawn at Castle Orchards (to the north of Park Gate) belonged to the Shrewsbury Hospital (adjacent), but were let as closes in 1745 to the proprietor of the nearby cutler's wheel (SA, ACM S377, fo. 193) and hence have not been counted.

<sup>14</sup> SA, ACM, S377, fo. 93. Vessey paid for a small part of Wright's Gardens (location as yet unknown).

<sup>15</sup> SA, ACM, S378, fos 67–82; 18 out of 35 and 8 out of 12 to cutlers and grinders; none to gardeners.



MAP 1. Central part of Ralph Gosling's Plan of Sheffield 1736 showing urban gardens.

houses at Portobello and Little Sheffield, six at Green Lane and nine at Portmahon are revealed in indentures in the later 1760s and 1770s, with 30 more at Moorhills (Little Sheffield) by 1783.<sup>16</sup> However, in 1787–88 the quantity of garden provision becomes much clearer. In those years William Fairbank made enclosure surveys within the township of Sheffield and mapped lands in the immediate vicinity.<sup>17</sup> The latter are particularly relevant as the urban core was already expanding into adjacent parts of Ecclesall, Brightside, Attercliffe and Nether Hallam townships, some part of which were nearer Sheffield parish church than the central township's most southerly and westerly properties. Our assessment of the area given over to allotments is largely based on the Fairbank maps and written surveys supplemented by other evidence.

By the end of the 1780s that part of Brightside closest to Sheffield township and near the River Don contained a large cluster of *market* gardens – upwards of 60 acres in parcels of mainly two to three acres.<sup>18</sup> Yet even here, and lying adjacent in a few cases, could be found allotments both in batches and piecemeal. The biggest group noted was of 23 gardens on manorial land at Bridgehouses let to William Dixon *et al* and averaging 233 square yards each.<sup>19</sup> A group of nine on half an acre plus other separately rented pieces at the Wicker, again manorial, were clearly a continuation of those illustrated by Ralph Gosling in 1736.

In broad contrast, across the river westward, near Penistone Road in the northern part of Sheffield township, gardens were almost all on freehold parcels and only 6½ acres were in the hands of three professional gardeners. Those 35 allotments on 2½ acres belonging to the Infirmary (an average of c. 350 square yards each) and six others individually let are easily countable, as are 25 in nearby Millsands. Yet, typically here and elsewhere in the surveys 'gardens' (almost always plural) and the phrases 'in the hands of several tenants' or 'held by sundry persons' present a problem of obtaining exact numbers from a huge raft of circumstantial evidence.<sup>20</sup> Single garden parcels found in this northern quarter range in size from 217 square yards (with other examples of 363 and 435 square yards) to possibly upwards of 800 square yards.<sup>21</sup> William Hoyle's five acres of gardens, whose tenants were not enumerated in 1787, were let to 63 individuals by his son in 1812.<sup>22</sup> Holdings then averaged c. 385 square yards and ranged from 206 to 825 yards. At the risk of anachronism these figures appear to give general confirmation of garden size in this area. With the most circumspect calculation, over

<sup>16</sup> WRRD, BL 128/188, BM 685/867, BX 507/701, BZ 426/550, CG 190/233, CL 718/919.

<sup>17</sup> SA, Fairbank Mss, Miscellaneous Books (hereafter MB), 387–90, 440, and Bagshawe Mss 300. The whole is illustrated by Fairbank's 1808 town plan, the first since Gosling's (1736) to show more than the streets and built up parts of the town.

<sup>18</sup> Pitsmoor, Neepsend, Farfields, Tom Cross Lane, Bridgehouses and Wicker. SA, Fairbank Mss, MB 440: of 30 parcels half were between 2 and 3 acres, and only two more than 5. (Thomas Calverley held 6.42 and Joseph and Michael Swallow 7.48 acres.) Joseph Bennett held more land (c. 10.5 acres), but in four separate pieces. The surveyor in MB 440 decimalises all acreages.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> SA, Bagshawe Mss, 300; ACM, SheS 1495L and

1496L (1781, 1789) show 33 gardens at Millsands (manorial property), but only 25 are allotments as defined since the other eight contain some form of buildings.

<sup>21</sup> Larger yardages, even when noted as 'garden' (singular), may well have been subdivided and sublet.

<sup>22</sup> SA, Bagshawe Mss, 300 and Tibbitts Collection (hereafter TC), 1076–1078 (rentals). Tenants' trades in 1811/12 were as follows: Cutlers (all categories) 34, saw-makers 9, other metals 2, cutlery ancillary workers (haft & scale pressers) 3, shoemakers 4, publicans 3, joiner 1, cooper 1, plumber & glazier 1, wheelwright 1, butcher 1, not known 6. There are more names than plots since some changes of tenancy took place. Most trades are noted in the rentals; others are from contemporary sources.

30 acres of parcels separate from houses in north Sheffield were devoted to allotments in the late 1780s.<sup>23</sup>

To the immediate west of town, in and near Broad Lane and Portobello, lay both lands of the Duke of Norfolk's estate and freehold also divided into gardens. Some, in Garden Street (off Broad Lane), the location of allotments in the 1760s, were already beginning to be overbuilt two decades later, but a little further out 20 acres and more were let to 'sundry persons'. John Hoyland's two closes of three acres, so divided, are further confirmed as small gardens in a subsequent sale and four of Robert Brightmore's nine acres in a demise. Fairbank, the surveyor, also measured 106 existing gardens on eight acres (an average of some 360 square yards) at nearby Brookhill for the Church Burgesses and others in 1798.<sup>24</sup>

The south-eastern part of the township, from Charles Street to Jessop Street (formerly Alsop Fields), destined from before 1771 to be a dense grid of manorial streets and housing, but still far from completion in 1808, contained numerous plots with building leases. Many of these were cultivated wholly or partly as gardens until eventually fully built-up. Fairbank set out 42 of them (averaging 230 square yards) 'in a manner corresponding with the General Building Plan' in 1783, and his son measured another eleven (c. 210 yards on average) on a different part of the grid nearly thirty years later for the attorney John Watson.<sup>25</sup> In 1787 Fairbank *père* surveyed another 12 acres a little way to the south and not yet let for building, near the White Lead Works. All the parcels counted are labelled 'several gardens'.<sup>26</sup> He also measured a total of 5½ acres of freehold close by, again described as 'gardens'. The parcels ranged from c. 260 square yards upwards.<sup>27</sup>

To the south, near Little Sheffield Moor, the entrepreneur Henry Tudor still held his gardens and a bowling green on seven acres. Nearby, in 1790–1 John Trevers Younge made eight building leases of plots of 300 to 400 square yards, not all contiguous, but several described as previously 'part of a garden'.<sup>28</sup> More of this adjacent land, in the township of Ecclesall, was part of Earl Fitzwilliam's estate for which no detailed description has been found. Even so, evidence for at least additional garden provision comes in a letter of 1792 (only four years after Fairbank's survey) from the Earl's agent, Charles Bowns, to Fitzwilliam, stating that the expected tenants for his newly enclosed 2 acres and 3 roods of garden ground on the Moor were journeymen 'from whom it is difficult to obtain the rent'.<sup>29</sup> However, in the eastern part of Sheffield — in the Ponds (site of some of the earliest allotments), the lower Park, Cricket Inn, Wybourn and Attercliffe — the

<sup>23</sup> 30 acres divided by, say, 350 square yards yields 415 plots. Another 4.605 acres near the Cotton Mills were confirmed as small gardens in 1806 (WRRD, EZ 67/114) and could perhaps have been added.

<sup>24</sup> SA, ACM, SheS 1533 (1777 plan). Building leases from 1782 in ACM, S382, fos. 51–132, but overbuilding often took at least a decade, sometimes several decades. It is clear many gardens still continued at Broad Lane to the 1790s and beyond (ACM, S158, Michaelmas 1793–1802; manorial rentals still showed gardens here); SA, Bagshawe Mss, 300. Fairbank's 1808 plan of Sheffield shows most gardens intact in this western sector. WRRD, DN 728/902 (1794) and EX 353/442 (probably a sale 1805). SA, Fairbank Mss, SheS 157L (1798).

<sup>25</sup> SA, Fairbank Mss, Town Plans 1771 & 1808; ACM,

S382, fo. 125r, S383, fo. 56. ACM, SheS 1758S (Union Lane 1783); Fairbank Mss, SheS 387S (Eyre Street 1810).

<sup>26</sup> SA, Bagshawe Mss, 300. A two-acre piece belonging to a gardener, John Milner, and garden ground with buildings have not been counted.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* Thomas Holy, entrepreneur, held half the parcels and John Watson, attorney, two large plots jointly 1.9 acres. All the bigger plots are described as 'several gardens'.

<sup>28</sup> WRRD, GN 483/403 (1817) The bowling green and most gardens were still extant, with more gardens added on adjacent enclosed land by this date; SA, Younge Wilson Deeds, 2127 (1790–1).

<sup>29</sup> SA, WWM F121 (11). Bowns also noted that because of clay extraction and brick-making, much newly enclosed land was only suitable for building, but gave no quantities.



MAP 2. Part of William and Josiah Fairbank's Plan of 1808 illustrating most of the later eighteenth century allotment usage described in the text and showing new areas of expansion to the south west.

survey is much clearer. There lay another 20 plus acres of parcels, most described as made up of 'several gardens', together with a similar quantity of market gardens in the hands of gardener John Cockayne and a much smaller acreage of pleasure gardens belonging to larger houses.<sup>30</sup>

When the area given over to allotment ground in and around the town in the late 1780s is estimated (counting only those pieces which are clearly sub-divided or made up of 'several gardens' or 'let to several tenants'), the total comes to more than 90 acres. Since some of the evidence reviewed before suggests an average plot to be about 350 to 385 square yards, a cautious calculation indicates that there were, at this time, around 1200 individual gardens available for cultivation by Sheffield families. This may seriously underestimate contemporary provision. It is very likely to be too low because the criteria applied have been too strict, thus excluding many acres of small gardens. It has not counted gardens linked to houses, nor even those which have any other building on them like the dozen or so (*circa* one third) at Millsands and many others in the surveys which fall outside the definition of 'allotment'. It cannot more than partially include garden ground in the extensive township of Ecclesall for which the vital Fairbank survey is not extant and other sources are quite limited. Nor has it been possible to make a full count for those several hundred building plots, *i.e.* those with building leases, on the former Alsop Fields and elsewhere (Broad Lane, for example) sometimes standing potentially idle or only partially overbuilt and for which new or continued garden use would offset the heavier rent.<sup>31</sup> And finally it may well be that 200–300 square yards, as at the Ponds and in Union Lane, was a more realistic average with a greater *pro rata* number of parcels per acre.<sup>32</sup>

How many gardens might there have been, given various shortcomings in primary sources? Is there another approach? Dr Buchan implied that almost all *journeymen* cutlers had ground that they cultivated. Had that been broadly true in 1787 when contemporary evidence showed some 6000 families in Sheffield township plus others at the periphery, we may deduce that there were around 1500 'journeyman cutler' gardens.<sup>33</sup> However, this figure would have excluded the freemen (*i.e.* those who had taken their freedom of the Cutlers' Company and their own mark, and some of whom it is known had allotments).<sup>34</sup> As an incomer, Buchan was probably not really aware of the difference. But neither garden rentals nor parish registers make any distinction either. So whether we count all cutlers as one group or add freemen to journeymen matters little. Then there are the many other tradesmen who held plots, fewer in number than the cutlers, but still very significant. The outcome using this method is an overbold 'top end' reckoning of around 3000 allotment holders, or a suggested half of Sheffield's families with their own allotment. The true figure in the later 1780s falls somewhere between 1200 and 3000

<sup>30</sup> SA, Bagshawe Mss, 300, Fairbank Mss, MB 390. Cockayne's parcels ranged from c. 1.5 to c. 2.9 acres and were mainly grouped together between the River Sheaf and Park Grange.

<sup>31</sup> SA, ACM, S382, S383 (manorial building leases of the 1780s) at 1d. per square yard contrast with gardens at ½d. The Norfolk estate made 750 plus leases for house and other building between 1771 and 1797.

<sup>32</sup> SA, Fairbank Mss, SheS 913L and ACM, SheS 1758S.

<sup>33</sup> [Joseph] Gales and [David] Martin (comp.), *A directory of Sheffield including the manufacturers of the*

*adjacent villages ...* (1787), John Robinson, *A directory of Sheffield ...* (1797) and J. Aikin, *A Description of the Country from 30 to 40 miles around Manchester* (1795), pp. 539–51. Over half of adult males in Sheffield were in the cutlery trades; less than half of these took their freedom, so remained journeymen (J. Unwin, Cutlers' Database).

<sup>34</sup> See n. 3 above. Freedom of the Cutlers' Company did not necessarily imply 'master' or 'employer'. From the Cutlers' Database it is clear that freemen were often tenants of gardens.

although a reasoned judgement might be a quantity below the mean, perhaps 1500–1800. Some idea of the extent at this time can be obtained from the Fairbanks' plan of 1808 (Map 2).

Frustrating though it is to be so imprecise in this matter, the large number of allotments in proportion to the population is still remarkable. Nothing comparable in such magnitude or significance has yet emerged for the *eighteenth* century from studies of Birmingham, Newcastle, Nottingham or elsewhere.<sup>35</sup> Sheffield appears unchallenged as the pioneer of large scale allotment provision, although with no claim lodged for any pre-planning or social policy, but rather a wide-scale response to unprecedented demand.

## II

Details of the crops grown by either the professional or amateur gardeners in Sheffield are, unfortunately, far from abundant. Dr William Buchan, who had lived in the town from about 1760 to 1769, gives an inkling when he uses the place to illustrate the advantages of a regime of healthy living in his book *Domestic Medicine*.<sup>36</sup> The relevant section is worthy of quotation:

It may seem romantic to recommend gardening to manufacturers in great towns; but observation proves that the plan is very practicable. In the town of Sheffield in Yorkshire where the great iron manufacture is carried on, there is hardly a journeyman cutler who does not possess a piece of ground which he cultivates as a garden. This practice has many salutary effects. It not only induces these people to take exercise without doors, but also to eat many greens, roots &c of their own growth, which they would never think of purchasing.<sup>37</sup>

James Montgomery, editor of the Sheffield *Iris*, was slightly more specific in 1808 at a time of 'extreme dearth' when he wrote of the great value of home grown produce, especially potatoes, to the 'very numerous proprietors of small gardens in the neighbourhood of this large and populous town'.<sup>38</sup> This last reference is rather late, but certainly potatoes were grown for sale locally by 1759. William Fairbank, surveyor, measured two 'potato pieces' in that year for Thomas Handley and another in 1761 for gardener John Dixon, each at around one acre.<sup>39</sup> It seems logical that this vegetable would be one of the cutlers' roots noted by Dr Buchan a few years later, along with peas, beans and turnips. These three were grown as field crops respectively at Walkley Bank in 1764, at Attercliffe in 1768 and near the Infirmary in 1799 and 1806. All would have appeared on market stalls of which sixteen were listed as being let to local 'gardeners' in 1790.<sup>40</sup> Nothing in the records indicates what other vegetables these professionals might have been growing and

<sup>35</sup> See the references at n. 1 above. Drake and Langford give the clear impression that the heyday for Birmingham's small gardens was the early nineteenth century, and Thorpe *et al* say 1820–1830.

<sup>36</sup> Buchan, *Domestic Medicine*, p. 144. The book went to at least 19 editions before 1810.

<sup>37</sup> The theme of good diet (with a variety of essential vegetables) and exercise was voiced by Charles Deering in his *History of Nottingham* (1751, repr 1970), pp. 70–1, and closely echoed for the early nineteenth century in Drake, *Picture of Birmingham*, pp. 44–5. The latter sounds like a reborn Buchan: 'They [small gardens] pro-

mote healthful exercise and rational enjoyment among families of the artisans; and, with good management, produce an ample supply of those wholesome vegetable stores, which are comparatively seldom tasted by the middling classes when they have to be purchased'.

<sup>38</sup> Editorial in the *Iris*, 26 Apr. 1808.

<sup>39</sup> SA, Fairbank Mss, Account Book 4, fo. viii and Field Book 19, fo. 23.

<sup>40</sup> SA, Fairbank Mss, Field Books 27, fo. 83; 35, fo. 12; 87, fo. 6b; 98, fo. 49; ACM, S343 (1–3). All the rents were £1 11s. 6d. or £1 16s. 9d. per half year. All addresses noted were in Sheffield parish.

selling, but onions, leeks, spinach, cabbages, radishes and lettuce had been cultivated in England since the fifteenth century and Pehr Kalm, a visiting Swedish botanist, found, in mid-eighteenth century, many commercial gardeners growing as their main crops cauliflowers, radishes, asparagus and turnips.<sup>41</sup>

For the amateurs, some evidence comes from the accounts of a Sheffield innkeeper who, himself tenant of a small garden, turned his hand to buying and selling a wide range of goods including scissors, penknives, hardware, flax, cloth, timber, and seeds before going bankrupt in 1767. Joseph Rowbotham of the 'Horse and Garter' purchased from William Perfect of Pontefract in the spring of 1763 an (unspecified) parcel of seeds and plants 'per Acct' at £1 2s. 6½d., a pound each of best onion seed (2s. 6d.), radish (1s. 0d.) and parsley (1s. 0d.), and a smaller amount of 'Best Lettuce of Sorts' (4d.). Three and a half years later his account detailed an October delivery of 800 cabbage plants in two baskets at 8s.; in April 1767 one peck of long Hotspur peas at 2s. 0d; in May, two quarts of Ledman's dwarf peas at 8d. together with another parcel of seeds 'pr Acct' at 10s. 11d.; and in June, four quarts of Kidney Beans at 2s. 4d. A similar receipt for the same period given to Rowbotham's son by a William Wragg includes one peck of early peas at 3s. 0d, and two half pecks of beans at 1s. 0d and 10d. respectively.<sup>42</sup>

The question which might be asked here is why there was a demand for such a variety of vegetables. London had initiated a long-term trend, beginning with the failure of grain harvests in the late sixteenth century, and continued by the acceptance by the populace of more garden produce in their everyday diet. Subsequently the rich developed a fashion-led taste for vegetables, leading to market gardeners around the capital producing roots for general consumption and the more prized greens for subtler preferences.<sup>43</sup> London exercised a widespread influence on the provinces, and Sheffield craftsmen, some very widely travelled, were well acquainted with its trends, the metropolis being the biggest single market for cutlery and hardware products, and for those most taste-sensitive luxuries, artefacts of silver and fused plate.<sup>44</sup>

All the above mentioned vegetables and more featured in the increasing numbers of gardening books.<sup>45</sup> *Adam's luxury, and Eve's cookery* (1744) has been described as 'an excellent little book', providing not only advice on cultivating a kitchen garden, but on cooking the resultant produce. Its rarity may well be due to the wear and tear of most copies from constant use.<sup>46</sup> Thomas Mawe and John Abercrombie's *Every Man his own Gardener* of 1767 went to twelve editions within two decades, such was its popularity. Abercrombie's *The gardener's pocket journal* of 1789, priced one shilling, was also extremely successful, achieving ten editions over a similar period.<sup>47</sup> Since Sheffield craftsmen commonly had books in their inventories, it seems unlikely

<sup>41</sup> R. Webber, *Market Gardening* (1972), pp. 27, 32; SA, Beauchief Muniments 54 (1). Two pounds of turnip seed were purchased in 1788 at Beauchief, then just outside Sheffield.

<sup>42</sup> SA, TC, 1045, fos. 50, 51, 58, 59, 114, 150.

<sup>43</sup> M. Thick, 'Market gardening in England and Wales', in Joan Thirsk (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales* V (ii) (1985), ch. 18, and M. Thick, *The Neat House Gardens: early market gardening around London* (1998), ch. 1. Artichokes, asparagus, cauliflowers, cucumbers, French and kidney beans, green peas, lettuce,

mushrooms, spinach and, later, broccoli were amongst the most valued.

<sup>44</sup> Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (1986 edn), p. 55. Fused plate (silver on copper, now known as Old Sheffield Plate) was invented in Sheffield c. 1743. The town had its own assay office for silver from 1773.

<sup>45</sup> Blanche Henrey, *British Horticultural Literature before 1800* (3 vols, 1999), II, *passim*, lists them comprehensively.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 459

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 369

that such writings would pass unnoticed. To add a degree of confirmation, Benjamin Lomas, described somewhat oddly after his death in 1795 as a 'cutler gardiner', had a gardening book worth two shillings noted in his inventory.<sup>48</sup> And many seedsmen from London, and later from the provinces provided free printed instructions for cultivating their seeds.<sup>49</sup> In addition, keen amateurs would probably want to experiment with different crops; others might keep to familiar varieties known to do well locally; and many were almost certainly influenced by observation of and advice from their fellows.

If Dr Buchan is to be taken at his word that the cutlers would never think of *buying* the greens and roots they grew and consumed (and, coincidentally, James Drake made similar observations about Birmingham artisans half a century later), we might ask 'why not?' Sheffield was not a low wage economy, as was the case with the nineteenth-century countryside where agricultural labourers were rented their allotments for the sake of subsistence.<sup>50</sup> On the contrary, Sheffield (like Birmingham) was a high wage town. The cutlery and allied trades are difficult to assess because of piecework and customary prices, but limited evidence indicates journeymen earning typically 11s. to 12s. per week in the 1740s to the 1760s, with a few workers reaching 20s.<sup>51</sup> As fifty to sixty per cent of adult males were in the trades, this group dominates wages.<sup>52</sup> In building for the same period bricklayers earned a similar 11s. *od.* per week, and labourers 7s. *od.* (or 1s. 2d. per day). The same day rate for mining and turnpike labourers contrasts with the 1s. *od.* per day paid to similar workers in much of the southern West Riding. The differential is most striking in the payroll of the Sheffield-Wakefield turnpike where Sheffield labourers consistently earned 2d. (16 per cent) per day more than their Barnsley and Wakefield counterparts, and broadly *pro rata* when wages began to rise with inflation later in the century.<sup>53</sup> Nor is it a matter of supply, for we have already noticed extensive areas of market gardening on the edges of the town.

The practice of 'Saint Monday' could well provide part of the explanation why cutlers would not part with money for vegetables.<sup>54</sup> Garden produce helped justify rents paid and perhaps,

<sup>48</sup> Borthwick Institute, York, Wills and Inventories, Apr. 1795. His total probate valuation was £34. He was son of William, gardener, apprenticed as a cutler in 1777 and took out his freedom in 1791.

<sup>49</sup> M. Thick, 'Garden seeds in England before the late eighteenth century' *AgHR* 38 (1990), pp. 58–71; id., 'Market gardening', p. 528.

<sup>50</sup> Drake, *Picture of Birmingham*, pp. 44–5; B. Moselle, 'Allotments, enclosure and proletarianization in early nineteenth-century southern England', *ECHR* 47 (1995), pp. 482–500; J. E. Archer, 'The nineteenth-century allotment: half an acre and a row', *ECHR* 50 (1997), pp. 21–36; J. Burchardt, 'Rural social relations, 1830–1850. Opposition to allotments for labourers', *AgHR* 45 (1997); id., 'Land and the labourer: potato grounds and allotments in nineteenth-century southern England', *Agricultural Hist.* 74 (2000).

<sup>51</sup> SA, TC 762 (1742); Rev. E. Goodwin, 'The natural history of Sheffield' in *The Gentleman's Magazine* 34 (1764), p. 157; superior skilled cutlers often moved into the silver plated trades, an important minority industry,

where they could earn 15s. per week and more (TC 833). A. Young, *A six months tour through the North of England* (4 vols, 1770), I, p. 125; W. Bray, *Sketch of a tour into Derbyshire and Yorkshire* (1783), pp. 246ff; F. M. Eden, *The State of the Poor* (3 vols, 1797), III, p. 874.

<sup>52</sup> Sheffield parish registers. The percentage of cutlery trades fathers of baptised infants (a very large sample) is consistent for the whole century. Burial Registers often omit trades/occupations, so are not helpful.

<sup>53</sup> SA, Fairbank Mss, Building Books *passim* for the 1750s–1790s. The most common cost was 3s. per day for bricklayer and labourer *i.e.* 1s. 10d. + 1s. 2d.; TC 364, 365, 452, and South Yorkshire County Record Office (now subsumed into SA as SYCRO) 22/Z 3/2 (Turnpikes); Osborne Records 7 (Mining). E. Gilboy, *Wages in eighteenth-century England* (1934), ch. 6.

<sup>54</sup> D. Hey, *The fiery blades of Hallamshire: Sheffield and its neighbours, 1660–1740* (1991), p. 102. Prolonging the weekend by not working on a Monday was commonplace in the trades.

in a piece-rate culture, Mondays' notional output lost. A garden had to pay for itself.<sup>55</sup> But primarily roots and greens freshly picked from a man's own garden would always be preferable to those bought, and, no doubt, bartering and exchanging among allotment holders was widespread. Taste, quality, convenience, cheapness, and perhaps a feeling of self-indulgence were an unbeatable combination. Crops harvested when seasonal market prices were high were an extra bonus.<sup>56</sup>

Other, more general, reasons for choosing to cultivate a garden also spring to mind. Yet no more than partial self-sufficiency could have been one of them. Some 300 square yards were needed to supply a family of three with all-year-round vegetables (and broadly *pro rata*) in Second World War Britain.<sup>57</sup> A typical household in eighteenth-century Sheffield was four or five persons; only a minority of allotment gardens were 400 to 500 square yards or more and yields were probably smaller. Rather, observable benefits may well have been, as Buchan claimed, those of better health and fitness for the individuals involved. That is not to say there was never monetary gain via substitution of, say, potatoes for bread. Montgomery's comment above clearly suggests this in economic recession. Nor does it preclude the selling of surplus crops. R. E. Leader concedes 'a few instances' when a working man may have been assisted by his garden to pay off enforced debts.<sup>58</sup> Further motives may have included, as in the present, enjoyment of the outdoors and of the camaraderie of fellow gardeners, perhaps friendly competition, the satisfaction of successful cultivation and escape from the home (many would hardly have been cosy). Dr Buchan certainly believed amateur gardeners enjoyed their pursuit: '... the very smell of the earth and fresh herbs revive and cheer the spirits, whilst the perpetual prospect of something coming to maturity delights and entertains the mind'.<sup>59</sup>

### III

In 1764 Rev. Edward Goodwin noted of Sheffield that 'The town is ... in general very healthy, seldom any epidemical disorders prevailing here except the small-pox, whooping-cough, or measles, the first of which, as inoculation has not gained much ground here, sometimes proves very fatal'.<sup>60</sup> His contemporary, Dr Buchan, was soon to commit to print his observations that allotment gardening and its concomitants of regular exercise and better diet were of major benefit to Sheffield's working families and an excellent example for others. Buchan's conclusion that: 'There can be no reason why manufacturers in any other town in Great Britain should not follow the same plan' does add credence to the view that Sheffield was indeed at the forefront of the provision of small gardens for craftsmen and other workers. The challenge is now for others to identify (if they can) similar areas on the fringes of industrialising eighteenth-century towns.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* Traditionally cutlers and others worked harder and put in extra hours later in the week. It was the attention paid to cutting costs and improving quality which gave the Sheffield cutlery industry its productivity advantage over all competitors by 1800.

<sup>56</sup> The problem for all growers is that vegetables are seasonal. Experience is needed to time and spread the various crops. Most roots will store under appropriate

conditions, but greens will not, unless pickled.

<sup>57</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 1950 edition, sub 'Allotments'.

<sup>58</sup> R. E. Leader, *Reminiscences of Old Sheffield* (1876), p. 147. Selling of produce at the garden gate was probably more commonplace than Leader supposed.

<sup>59</sup> Buchan, *Domestic Medicine*, p. 143.

<sup>60</sup> Goodwin, 'Natural history of Sheffield', p. 157.