

Warriston Allotments History



Warriston Cottage 2025 (Photo by A Hewitt)

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A History of the Lands of Warriston

The Warriston area is in the north of Edinburgh, and according to *The Scotsman*, (2022), Warriston means “high estate” in Gaelic. The lands of Warriston lay in the area from Ferry Road to the north, the Water of Leith to the south, Inverleith Row on the west, and

Chancelot Grove on the east. It was in the Barony of Broughton, a feudal estate in the Parish of St Cuthberts. The Barony of Broughton was granted to the Abbey of Holyrood in 1128 by David I of Scotland, and the name of Warieston first appears in the stent rolls – lists of annual taxes due from residents, tradesmen and property owners – of the Abbey.



Figure 1. Map of Midlothian by John Adair, 1682 (National Library of Scotland).

West, and East Warriston were the two main large houses in the area. West Warriston House was built in the mid-18th century and demolished in 1966 to make way for a housing estate. (Ashford 1994).

The old house of East Warriston appears in several old maps and was sited where Warriston Crematorium is now. Figure 1 is a map from 1682 showing the areas around the Water of Leith. The winding road from Leith to Crammond and Queensferry was made straight in 1755–59 and is now the present Ferry Road, which left East Warriston House without access. The current Warriston Road was then built from Ferry Road down to Canonmills. The entrance to the house is now the Ferry Road Allotments gate. Figure 2 is a map published in 1817, from a survey in 1759, and shows the new Warriston Road and the outline of the East Warriston House estate. The Warriston land was fertile farming ground and rented out as tacks of lands to various tenants by the Governors of Heriot’s Hospital. (Ashford 1994).



Figure 2. Ancient Plan of City of Edinburgh 1817 from a survey in 1759. (National Library of Scotland).



Figure 3. East Warriston House 1928. (Photo by Violet Banks, trove.scot)

In 1792 the feu – a Scottish legal term for splitting land into smaller plots for sale or development - was acquired by Andrew Bonar, and he added additional feu's until he had increased his land to around 13 acres in 1816. He continued to live in the old house until 1808 when he demolished all the old buildings and built a new house. He added a stable for his

coach and horses, and cottages for his coachman and gardener around 1850, south of the main house. (Ashford 1994). Bonar's East Warriston House (Figure 3) was bought by the town council in 1920. It was remodelled and converted into the current crematorium by the architect Robert Lorimer and was opened in 1929. (Gazetteer for Scotland 2022). The Warriston cottage in the allotment car park is what is left of the stables and staff accommodation (Figure 4). This 1909 map (Figure 5) predates the allotments but does show the shape of the stable block and cottages, and the area that



Figure 4. Lodge East Warriston Estate 1920 (trove.scot)

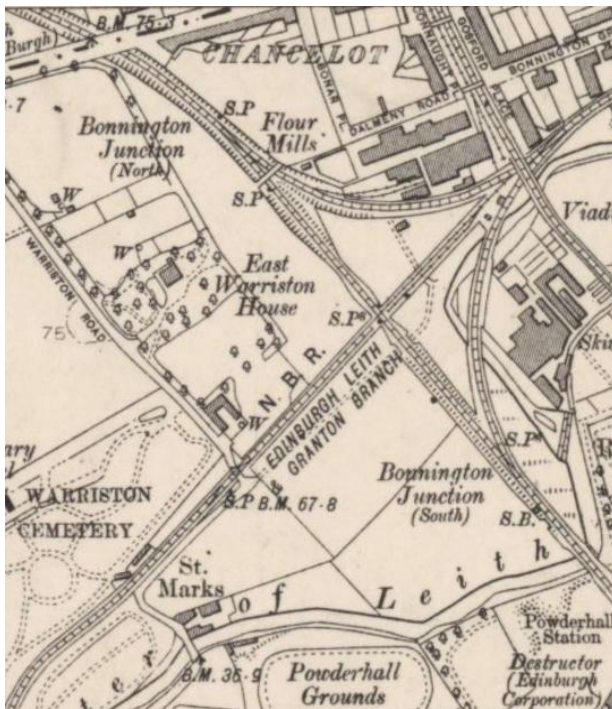


Figure 5. Part of Edinburghshire OS map 1909 (National Library of Scotland)

became Warriston and Ferry Road allotments. It shows the position of the Chancelot Flour Mill which can be seen in the background of early Warriston photographs.

Warriston cemetery, on the west side of Warriston Road, opened in 1843 and was extended north a few years later as it proved popular. The branch of the railway that ran through the cemetery on an embankment, and past the allotment site, opened in 1846. (Friends of Warriston Cemetery, 2025). It closed in 1960 and is now the Water of Leith walkway and cycle path.



Figure 6. Undated aerial view of Chancelot Mill.
(National Galleries of Scotland)

Andrew Bonar added to the East Warriston estate when he acquired the land of Chancelot in 1818. The land remained in the Bonar family and was rented out, and various villas built, the Victoria Park Hotel being one of them. In 1892 the Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society bought the land beside the railway, construction started on Chancelot Mill in 1892, and it opened in 1894. It suffered fire damage in 1915 and was gutted by a second fire in the mid 1960's. It was demolished in 1971 (Arthur 2022). Figure 6 shows the mill with the bottom of the photo showing

the land that became the allotment site. Land to the left is Lethem Park, now also an allotment site owned by the Boys Brigade.

The land to the south of the railway line down to the Water of Leith became St Marks Park. The 1937 photograph (Figure 7) shows part of Powderhall stadium, and the allotments on the area to the left, where the football car park and children's play park now lie, and what is now the south side plots at the top left. The east side of the park (centre top in the photo) was built up with ash and refuse from the 1950's and then landscaped with features like avenues of trees, creating the park we see today. (Google, 2025). The stretch of river from the Canonmills bridge to Powderhall was known locally as The Puddocky due to its shallow frog filled waters, puddock being an old Scots word for frog. (Arthur 2025).



Figure 7. Aerial photograph of Powderhall and St Marks Park 1937.
(Britain From Above)

Allotments in Edinburgh

Allotments in Edinburgh have a long history, interwoven with the expansion of the city's development. An 1851 town plan shows Patriotic Society Allotment Gardens in an undeveloped area west of the town centre just North of Dean Church. (Levenston 2025). The Allotment (Scotland) Act of 1892 obliged local authorities to provide allotments for the "labouring population" if six or more ratepayers requested them, allowing people experiencing poverty to grow food. (Jimmy Reid Foundation, 2025). This act was the basis for regulations created by the City of Edinburgh in 1913 and 1924 and led to the creation of many allotment sites, especially during the First World War. Allotment sites sprouted up all over Edinburgh in response to the U-boat blockade that threatened to starve Britain into defeat. Parks and playing fields became productive food growing areas. (Levenston 2025). After the First World War priority for allotments was given to returning service men and women who had been involved in agricultural work during the war. Having previously been for the poor and unemployed, the 1919 Land Settlement (Scotland) Act helped open allotment cultivation to anyone regardless of economic need or occupation. There were regulations set for proper conduct and aesthetic standards. Flower growing was discouraged, and produce was not to be sold. Vegetables were taken home to feed the family.



Figure 8. The allotments in the East Meadows. October 1964 which were World War II emergency plots until removed in March 1966. (The Scotsman, November 2025)

By the time the First World War ended the Edinburgh Corporation managed over 3000 plots on 200 acres of public and private ground. By the 1920's allotment holders were keen to retain their plots, but the public wanted their parks back and some areas were required for housing. With their interests under threat, allotment holders organised themselves and the Scottish National Union of Allotment Holders (SNUAH, which later became Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society in 1931) formed. They pressed for security of tenure and organised a

deputation to Parliament in 1921 citing the allotment movement as an economic, educative, hygienic, and recreative value as well as moral and spiritual venture. A year later the Allotments (Scotland) Act 1922 secured some legal rights for plot holders including the right to notice, and compensation for lost investments. This did not stem the dispossession trend and between 1920 and 1930 the number of allotments dropped to 1,900. (DeSilvey 2001). The Edinburgh and Leith Federation of Unemployed Allotment Holders was formed in the 1920's to protect and advocate for allotments. They met

monthly at different allotment sites around the city and organised a show of produce each August (*Edinburgh Evening News* 1938).

During the Great Depression between 1929 and 1939 more Edinburgh allotments were established as a response to food poverty and high unemployment. They provided people with fresh air and a source of food. Aid was given by the Scottish Allotment Scheme for the Unemployed (SASU) which helped with seeds, fertiliser, and tools at favourable rates. By 1934 a total of 74 arable acres in Granton, Warriston, Saughton and West Mains had been allocated as allotments.



Figure 9. Mrs Louisa Wyndham at Granton Parish Church Hall presenting Dutch sabots to the Unemployed allotment holders. (*Scotsman* 1933)

Aspiring plotholders were allotted plots on open days and if lucky they received a pair of



Figure 10. SASU gardeners pose in their clogs at Warriston Allotments for the unemployed. August 1932 (*National Archives of Scotland*)

wooden sabots (clogs) from Holland, donated by philanthropist Mrs Louisa Wyndham of Coates Gardens (Figure 9). Mrs Wyndham said the appeal made by the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VIII) to assist the unemployed, was what had influenced her to help (*Scotsman* 1932). Figure 10 shows plot holders wearing their sabots at Warriston in 1932. (DeSilvey 2021).

The Second World War again brought an allotment surge with the Dig for Victory campaign and by 1941, 5,543 allotments were in use. (Levenston 2025). The Edinburgh Garden Allotments Committee was constituted in 1940 to take charge of food production, and they endeavoured to secure more ground for cultivation (*Scotsman* 1942). There were allotments found in public parks including the Meadows (Figure 8), Holyrood Park, Blackford Hill and Inverleith Park as well as Craigentenny golf course. Edinburgh residents responded enthusiastically to the call to grow food, and many cultivated their own gardens. When the war ended Edinburgh saw a decline in allotment

numbers as local authorities redeveloped land for housing, schools, and leisure. This led to a loss of gardening communities and the benefits they provided. In response, groups like the Scottish Allotments and Garden Society (SAGS) campaigned for the protection and regeneration of allotment sites.



Figure 11. Dig for Victory campaign poster, 1940. (Imperial War Museum)

In 1947 Sir Robert Greig, (ex-Chairman of the Board of Agriculture in Scotland) of the Gardens and Allotments Committee, stated the need for maximum cultivation of allotments and gardens to continue. This was due to poor weather, expensive food from overseas, and post war rationing (*Scotsman* 1947). In 1948 Mr Arthur Woodburn, Secretary of State for Scotland, appealed to allotment holders to grow as many potatoes as possible to aid economic recovery, as there was a serious shortage. Grocers in Glasgow were unable to provide enough potatoes to satisfy rationing demands (*Scotsman* 1948).

Allotments faced a decline in popularity during the 1950's and 60's due to cheaper vegetables being available and changing leisure activities. They suffered a poor public image and there remained ongoing pressure from competing land uses. There were concerns about their appearance, particularly near city centre areas. Attempts to improve the image of allotments, by raising rents to rid sites of undesirables, were met with resistance. Plans to create permanent showpiece sites on the outskirts of the city failed due to a lack of resources and opposition from allotment holders who objected to increased rents and travelling long distances.

Despite this, improvements were being made to sites. Water pipes were installed and efforts made to re-let vacant plots in a timely manner. By the 1970's a new breed of gardener was emerging, possibly inspired by the 1975 UK sitcom "The Good Life" (Figure 12) where a couple set out to be self-sufficient in their Surbiton garden by growing vegetables and keeping livestock, to the horror of their neighbours.

Younger people, committed to ecological living and green cities, wanted a place to grow their organic produce. By 1976 all the vacant plots had been taken and there was a waiting list of 300. This encouraged the council to look for new land to develop into allotments, although there were lingering doubts about unsightly do-it-



Figure 12. Richard Briers and Felicity Kendall as Tom and Barbara Good in 'The Good Life'. (BBC Television 1975-78)

yourself type structures which upset residents overlooking the area. Some new sites were not allowed to build sheds, and communal buildings for storage were provided.

Over the past century allotments in Edinburgh have seen periods of growth and decline. These changes have been driven by the necessity of food shortages, post-war urban development and a growing interest in local food and community well-being. The last twenty years of the 20th century saw allotment holders actively fight to keep their growing spaces. In response to this the City Council developed its first Allotment Strategy in 2002 which aimed to improve and increase allotment provision. Nowadays with the waiting list over 6000 people, demand far outstrips supply of allotments and people can wait many years for a plot. The waiting list at Warriston can be as long as fifteen years.

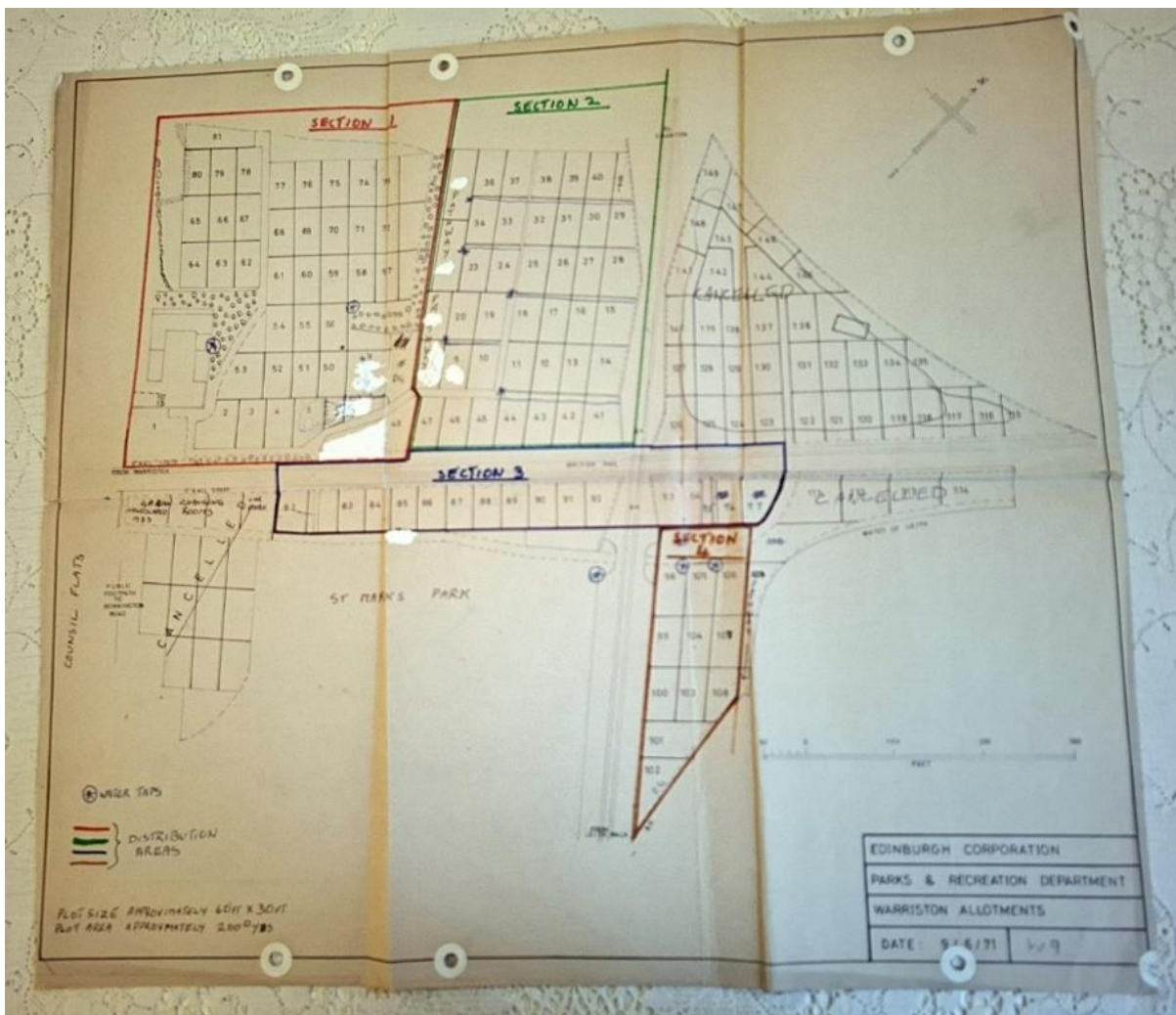


Figure 13. A site map dated 1971. It shows some of the cancelled plots in St Marks Park and those beside Chancelot Mill. It suggests that there were plots down the tree line from the Ferry Road gate which have been tippexed out and is now a pathway. It also shows the stable block as still standing although no information can be found about when it was demolished.

Warriston Allotments

In 1926 the Corporation secured the Warriston Estate on the north side of the city, on which ground would be available for houses, a public park and permanent allotments. (*Scotsman* 1926). On April 27th 1932, The Scotsman newspaper reported from a meeting held the previous day at the Old School, Mill Lane, in Leith, that ground for 130 allotments for the unemployed had been placed at the disposal of the Garden Allotments Committee. The charge had been fixed at 2/ 6d per plot, and application forms were to be given out during the following week (*Scotsman* 1932).

On May 3rd 1932, 155 unemployed people, mostly men, took up a plot at the newly established Warriston Allotment Gardens for the Unemployed. The gardeners were enrolled in the SASU scheme and received discounts on the cost of seeds, potatoes and tools. (DeSilvey 2003). By June 1936 there were approximately 1500 unemployed men cultivating plots around the city (*Edinburgh Evening News* 1936).

The site is the area we know it as today, with west, east and south sides. It also had 35 plots in the triangle to the top right of this 1931 map (Figure 14). These were surrounded by railway lines and were in the shadow of the then Chancelot Mill. It is likely the photograph of the men in clogs (Figure 10) was taken on this part of the site as there appears to be industrial buildings behind a high stone wall.

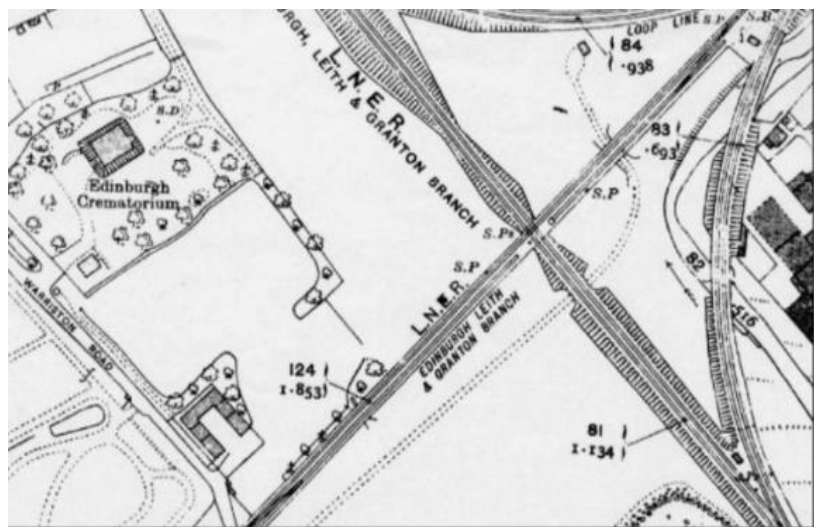


Figure 14. A web of rail lines, and river carves out irregular parcels of land at Warriston. 1931. (*Ordnance Survey Map*)

The 63 plots mentioned earlier in St Marks Park, were created as a response to First World War requirements to grow food.



Figure 15. Aerial photo of Powderhall 1962. (*Edinburgh Evening News* 2023)

A 1917 meeting of the Lord Provost's Committee recommended that an area of the recreation park at Warriston be used for the growing of food. This would be an example of self-denial and patriotism. The area is now the football clubhouse, car park, children's play area and open grass land. A 1962 aerial photograph (Figure 15) of Powderhall shows the area restored to parkland (*Edinburgh Evening News* 2023).

According to SASU, a typical 230-square-yard plot at Warriston would yield enough food to feed a family for an entire season: 6 cwt potatoes, 200 beets, 125 early turnips, 75 Golden Ball turnips, 100 Swede turnips, lettuce, peas, broad beans, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, Savoy and parsley. Apparently only about 6 men out of the 155 knew anything about gardening before starting, but their labours turned eight acres of semi derelict land into a productive landscape. (DeSilvey 2003).

A visitor to the site in 1935 noted that the unemployed men cheerfully made the most of their circumstances and the paths and roadways have been given nameplates. “We walked down Downing Street until we came to the point where Broadway branched off in one direction and Wall Street in another. Further on we passed through ‘The Tube’ – a low tunnel under a railway line – and later we passed under another railway line by the Marble Arch. We had no time to visit Pall Mall, which is somewhere in the allotments, but I saw the Strand. Lest it be thought that the entire scheme takes its names from London, it should be added that there are Edinburgh place-names included” (*Scotsman* 1935).



*Figure 16. Warriston Allotments looking west to east. 1933.
(SAGS, Victor Webb Archive, Glasgow University Archive Services)*

The photograph above from 1933 (Figure 16) shows the Chancelot Mill in the background and the line of trees that still exists, and how it looks now (Figure 17).



Figure 17. Warriston Allotments from a similar perspective as Figure 16. July 2020. (Photo by A Hewitt)

Gardeners were expected to cultivate and keep their plot tidy. They stored their tools and sheltered from the weather in the stone cottage, a relic from the East Warriston estate grounds. (DeSilvey 2003).

Mrs Wyndham, believing men working in the open get hungry, provided them with the utensils for making soup. The disused stables which had been converted into storerooms for various purposes, had one room with a warm coal fire and oil lamp, used as the committee room. According to a visitor to the site, it was like “sitting in a cottage kitchen in the Highlands”. As many as thirty allotment tenants sometimes shared soup using the stock pots and recipe provided, with ingredients they had grown. Sadly, the committee room was broken into one night and the pots and utensils stolen, thus ending the soup kitchen (*Scotsman* 1935).



Figure 18. Family outside their shed at Warriston. (National Archives of Scotland 1932)

Despite the allotments being a masculine endeavour, families did accompany the men. Some sheds were highly decorated to look like small houses, with curtains in the windows and picket fences, which suggests active participation by the women in the family. In the early years of the SASU scheme anything other than food provision activities risked a warning letter from the Town Clerk. The site association, SASU organisers, and local authorities controlled tenancies and men had to prove they were unemployed.

During the depression, families would spend the day at the plot and would make pots of soup on fires kept going by coal thrown from the railway engines by the rail workers. Undeveloped land to the north of the Warriston site up to Ferry Road provided another 48 plots during the Second World War, now Ferry Road Allotments. (DeSilvey 2003).

The questions over security of tenure continued. Warriston allotment holders found their site listed on the 1953 Development Plan with a proposed 3.5 acre decrease in land area to build houses. In 1965 The Scotsman newspaper reported that the rebuilding of Broughton school by Edinburgh Corporation was a matter of urgency. Due to an increase in pupil numbers, rebuilding on the same site was not an option. Warriston allotment site was suggested as one of the options since it was owned by the Corporation. Luckily the costs of infilling required, meant the site wasn't used, although Mr McIndoe, a town planning consultant, felt the allotments would be discontinued and become a housing development or an extension of St Marks Park soon (*The Scotsman* 1965).

Warriston managed to hold onto the acreage in 1953 and 1965 but was not so lucky in 1973 when the Estates Surveyor identified the triangular portion of land near the former Chancelot Mill property as being suitable for housing. After managing to hold off developers for two years, the Edinburgh councillors and officials decided that there was more value to the community to build 100 houses than retain 35 plots. This area along with the site of the demolished Mill, is now the Connaught Place housing development.



Figure 19. Connaught Place Housing Development. Previously allotments and Chancelot Mill. (Google Maps 2026)

City planners defended their decision to reduce allotment numbers in Edinburgh by calling attention to neglected and untenanted plots. Enthusiastic plotters were also being actively discouraged. In 1954 the council attempted to terminate the tenancy of a woman gardening at Warriston saying she had no claim to the plot which she had inherited from her father. Her husband protested the decision calling it a dictatorship (DeSilvey 2023), although there is no record of the outcome. In October 1962 a woman was fined £1 for stealing a cabbage from plot 35. She was caught following an after dark vigil by two men. The plot holder was summoned to come and identify his cabbage, which he had been saving to enter in a show. (*Edinburgh Evening News* 1962). In recent years the allotments changed from an unemployed men's refuge to a communal space, open to all applicants.



Figure 20. Plot 93 became a specialised wildflower nursery.
(Edinburgh Evening news, 1989)

In 1989 plot 93 on the south side was taken by The Lothian Urban Wildlife Group to grow wildflowers, like red campion and cowslips, to help teach children about the environment. Their aim was to grow a variety of native species to be transplanted into gardens at schools and nature areas. (Edinburgh Evening News, March 10th 1989).

At the lower end of the south side the plots are very close to the Water of Leith, with only a wall and a path separating them. In 2000 there was extensive flooding and around 500 homes were damaged by flood water. Some of these were across the river opposite the allotments. This prompted the council to start looking at strengthening the flood defences. Planning permission was sought and granted in July 2004. Tenders were invited and a construction firm was appointed. They started work in March 2011 but ran over budget and time, due to contractual disputes. (City of Edinburgh Council, 2013).



Figure 22. Further flooding 25th May 2024 on the south side, (Photo by A Hewitt)

The wall on the far side was built up to protect the houses, but this left the allotments on the flood plain very vulnerable to the water coming over the wall into the plots in the enclosed area beside the river.



Figure 21. Flooded allotments on the south side of the site. 30th December 2022. (Photo by A Hewitt)

At the end of December 2022, the water did come over the retaining wall, (Figure 21) and the allotments were under four feet of water causing damage to sheds, greenhouses, and overwintering crops. It happened again in May 2024 (Figure 22) with seedlings and spring crops destroyed causing great distress to the plot holders in that area.

Warriston Allotment Association

15th August 1935 to 24th November 1938

The committee has received a collection of meeting minutes from past committees dating back to the 1930s and 1950s. (Figure 23) There are many themes running through the minute books from then, that are recognisable to the committee of today, such as maintenance issues, unmanaged plots, and thefts.

In 1935 the committee was responsible for collecting rents, allocating plots and serving notice. If a previously unemployed person was in work for two years, they were obliged to give up their plot and were summoned before the committee to be interviewed. Notices to quit were decided at committee meetings and the Secretary or the Corporation would write to the offender. Letters were given for dirty plots, theft, arrears of rent, harbouring evicted ploholders, and in one case, having “a girl about his hut”.

Tenants with dirty plots were allowed two weeks grace to improve them and were given four weeks’ notice if there was no change.

One tenant was given a notice to quit because he broke Rule 4 (see Figure 24) and his conduct was detrimental to the association, although sadly we don’t know what he did to deserve this. He appealed and a vote was taken, which he lost. He appealed to the Edinburgh and Leith Allotment Federation who were sympathetic to his cause, although the Corporation upheld the complaint and a notice to quit was issued. This incident led three committee delegates to withdraw from the Federation due to their interference with Warriston matters.

There were several complaints from Mr Brodie of the Cleansing Department that tenants were rummaging through the ‘dump’ (Powderhall Refuse Depot) and removing items (“a bag of rags”)



Figure 23. Warriston Minute Books

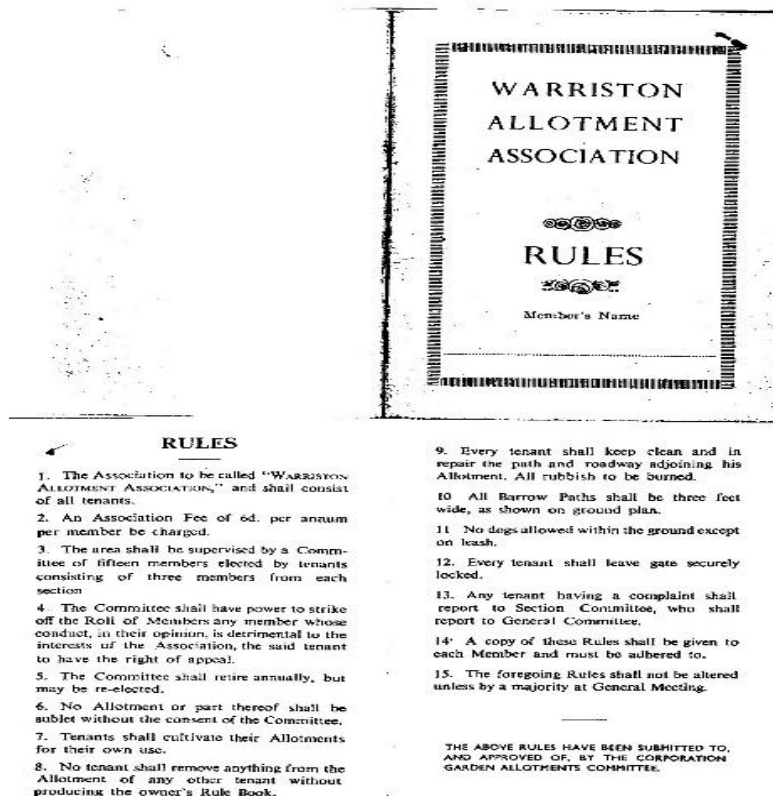


Figure 24. Warriston Rule Book given to plot holders. Date unknown but likely 1930's

which meant the gate would be locked at certain times. This caused upset as the dump was used by ploholders to dispose of allotment waste. The taking of items continued, and notices to quit were issued to the offenders.

There were problems with eelworms (potato cyst nematodes) damaging potato crops, and ploholders found growing non-immune types of potatoes without a permit from the Department of Agriculture would find themselves in trouble. The Department of Agriculture came and conducted experiments on a couple of plots on the site, yet eelworm remained a significant problem. Eelworm damage was the chief subject for discussion at the monthly Federation meeting held at West Mains in July 1937 (*Edinburgh Evening News* August 1937). There was also advice provided regarding the Colorado beetle, but it was only referenced once.

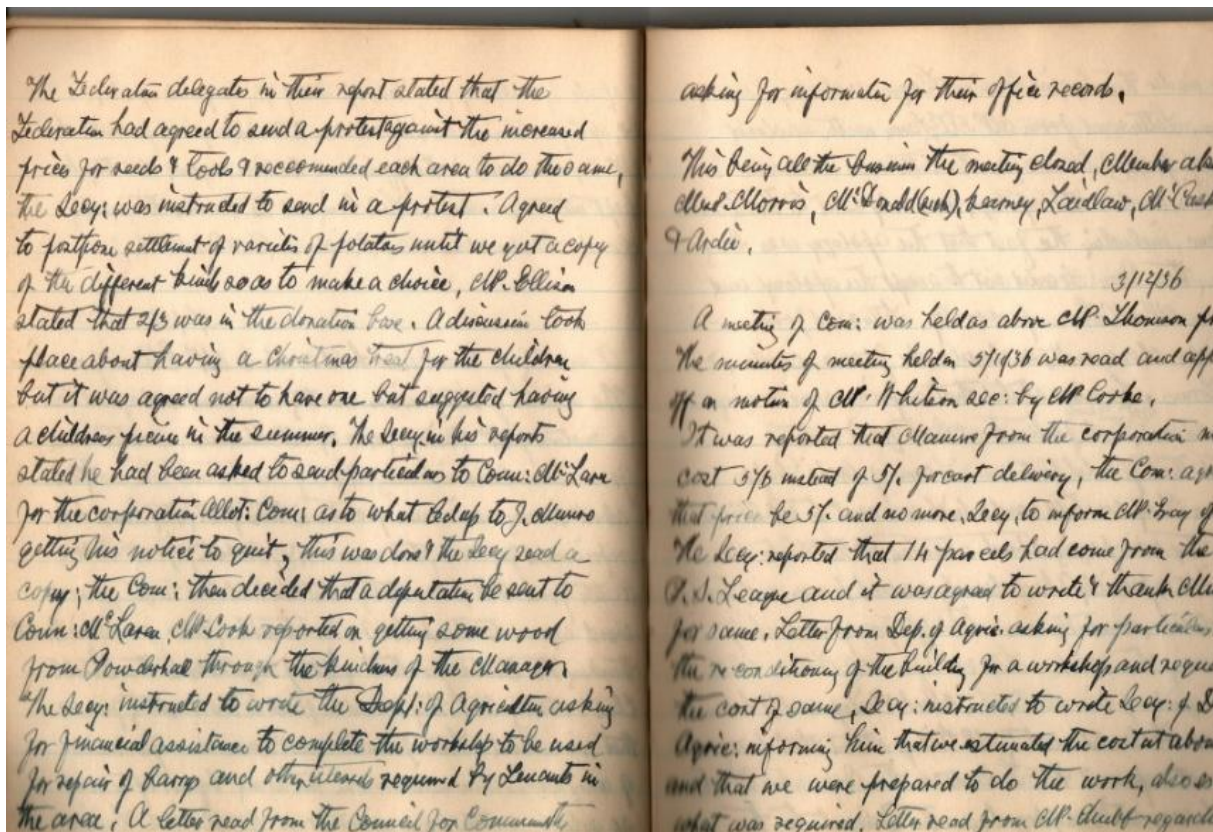


Figure 25. Warriston Allotment Association Minute book from August 1935 to November 1938

Despite the apparently authoritarian manner in the way the committee dealt with problems with tenants, they also worked hard to improve conditions. They organised cart loads of manure deliveries, and ashes to be laid on paths. Any broken taps or burst pipes were reported to the Corporation. Reports are made of flooded plots, but not where they were. Several mentions are made of buying, using, and repairing what appears to be “barrys” – these may be wheeled wooden barrows for use on site. Vandalism, break-ins, burst padlocks, and theft were reported to the police. The office was broken into on one occasion and two parcels of clothes and five pairs of clogs taken. A report of stolen beetroot by another plot holder was not upheld as the tenant did not make a complaint. The police response was poor after 14 huts were broken into, and the committee decided to look in at night and take the names of any tenants seen on the

site after dark. Nobody was seen. The railway police investigated after stones thrown from the railway damaged glasshouses, and police patrols in the area were increased.

The committee organised seed and potato deliveries, and tools were purchased. Red Cross parcels of boots and clothes were distributed to the poor. About 250 children of plotheolders were given a Christmas treat in 1935 – an outing to the Henderson Street picture house. They were also given a bag with cake, a new penny, and a toy. A summer picnic for them was organised at Davidsons Mains in 1936 and 1937. Rail transport was arranged and catering supplied by the then Leith Provident Co-operative Society. In 1938 and 1939 the picnic was held in Spylaw Park (Figure 26). Money to fund the picnics was raised by holding dances at Eldorado Dancing Hall in Leith, tickets were sold and raffles held.



Figure 26. WAA Children's Picnic in Spylaw Park 15th July 1939. (Edinburgh Evening News)

Holidays for unemployed families at Rothsay were organised by the Corporation at a cost of 10/- per family. Two Warriston families were permitted to submit applications, although, in 1939 complaints from the Secretary of Niddrie Allotments mentioned cold weather, cold food and young children being separated from their parents at night in the camp (Edinburgh Evening News 1939). Every year, the Daily Record held a competition for well-maintained plots, and the judging process was taken very seriously. The garden next to the office building was planted with flowers, and refreshments were served to the judges. The Federation held a Vegetable Exhibition each year and trophies and medals were awarded. After the committee withdrew their delegates over the notice to quit, the Federation demanded their trophy and medal back as the winners were no longer members.



Figure 27. Part of an aerial photo from 1937 showing buildings and St Marks Park plots. (Britain from Above)

Applications for financial support were submitted to the British Legion for general funding, to the Community Council for clothing and material, and to the Hibs and Hearts football clubs. Mrs Wyndham, who donated the clogs, was an ongoing supporter of the site, buying sacks of coke and coal for the fires in the office buildings. She also supplied tea and cakes on the occasions of her visits. In the 1930s, the stables, coach house, and cottages were still standing, (Figure 27) and a request was submitted to the Department of Agriculture for £10 to renovate the buildings and create a functional workshop and recreation room. Despite being keen to help they were only able to give £5. Appeals were made for donations of wood, glass, and paint

for the buildings. An Evening News report in 1938 details the work planned – painting is being undertaken and there are proposals to alter the interiors to make a separate committee room from the office and make an occupational section for autumn and winter evenings (*Edinburgh Evening News* 1938). A wireless radio was donated to the office by Mrs Wyndham, and four new valves were purchased for it. There was frequently debate at meetings about who would clean the office and WC, clearly not a popular task.



Figure 28. Open day display of vegetables to raise funds for the Queens Institute of District Nursing. August 1937. (*Edinburgh Evening News*)

Each August, the grounds were opened for two days to raise funds for the Queens Institute of District Nursing. The admission fee was 6d and there was a display of fruit, vegetables and flowers. Tea, also 6d, was served by the wives of the allotmenters (*Edinburgh Evening News* 1938). Figure 28 appears to be beside the current day Plot 6 next to the cottage, judging by the position of the railings and wall.

A 1937 newspaper article about an open day mentions “dozens of greenhouses laboriously constructed” for growing tomatoes. They were made from used photographic plates, obtained in 1935 from a photographer, by Mrs Wyndham. (Figure 29). The plot holders had cleaned several hundred of these plates by placing them in boiling water and soda (*Scotsman* 1935). These tomato houses “evoked many expressions of appreciation.” (*Edinburgh Evening News* 1937).

Vegetables were also donated to the Salvation Army for their Harvest Festival, as well as to the Citadel Club in recognition of their support.



Figure 29. Men at the Warriston site constructing a greenhouse from old photographic plates. (*The Scotsman* January 1935)



Figure 30. Exhibition and sale at Warriston in aid of Leith Hospital. Opened by Mr Dave Willis. (*Edinburgh Evening News* August 1939)

In 1939 there was an open day on 5th August for Leith Hospital and just over £15 was raised. It was opened by Mr Dave Willis, a Scottish comedian and music hall star in the 1930's and 40's. Entertainment was provided by Miss Beatrice Miller, and a football match was played between the Persevere Rovers and Leith Citadel at St Marks Park (*Edinburgh Evening News* 1939). Figure 30 appears to show part of the previous buildings before their demolition, possibly the entrance to the coach house or stables.

If a tenant became ill, a committee member would write or visit. If a death occurred, condolences would be offered, the funeral attended, and a wreath sent. Although women were present, their involvement was seldom noted except when recognising contributions, handling raffle ticket sales, and organising refreshments or vegetable displays. The minutes do not appear to record any female tenants (WAA minutes 1935–38).

4th December 1952 to 30th September 1956

The minutes for the 14 years between 1938 and 1952 are missing, unfortunately. By 1952, plans to convert the estate buildings into workshops or a recreation room are no longer recorded, and most of the structure may have been demolished during the intervening years, although it still appears complete on a 1955 Ordinance Survey map. The photo from the railway line is undated, but as the line closed in 1960 it will have been before this. In the 1920's photo of the cottage (Figure 4) it has two chimneys, yet there is only one visible in Figure 31 which suggests the demolition has taken place pre 1960.



Figure 31. An undated photograph from the railway with the main site in the top right hand corner with the cottage just visible. (*EdinPhoto*, www.edinphoto.org.uk)

There is only the committee room or office mentioned, which is the cottage we see today.

Calor gas lighting was installed in the committee room by a plot holder at a cost of £5/12/6 for materials. The slate roof was repaired and a shed erected at the west wall for storing paraffin for a flame thrower that had been purchased for the use of tenants. A large teapot was bought for meetings. The Caretaker received £1 or £2 for site work.

By 1956 the committee was finding the trading scheme run by FEDAGA (Federation of Edinburgh and District Allotments and Garden Associations, formed in 1952 by Gilbert Clark and Victor Webb) unsatisfactory, and they started purchasing sacks of potato fertiliser, lime, bone meal and Gamalin (an insecticide), to sell to plot holders in small quantities.

From 1952 to 1954 there is discussion about buying a communal hut. An application for a grant was made to St Andrews House for money towards the hut, and permission was granted by the Dean of Guild to erect it. In March 1954, the hut is still being awaited. The hold up seems to be that it had a tenant in it. A deposit of £50 had already been paid, when news comes that the Corporation are supplying Inverleith with a hut free of charge. Discussion followed about making contact to see if Warriston could get one too. The ordered hut is cancelled and a refund requested. By August, questions are being asked of the Association Secretary about the refund. It was issued to the Secretary and cashed in April but has not been put in the bank account. On examination of the accounts, other mismanagement of association funds by the Secretary, to the tune of around £90 were discovered. It was decided not to involve the police if the amount was paid back in full. Lawyers were hired and eventually money from the hut deposit was returned.

Efforts started again to procure grants towards purchase of a hut. The Secretary was given notice to quit his plot, and his wife appealed it and was awarded the tenancy instead. The Town Clerks Department said, "a very wise decision had been made as a case against Warriston could have been made". A delegation was sent to view huts in Sighthill, but they were too small and in bad repair. The hut in St Marks Park was offered for use at any time, and it was booked for the Flower Show and two General meetings. There seems to be no further mention of a communal hut purchase after this.

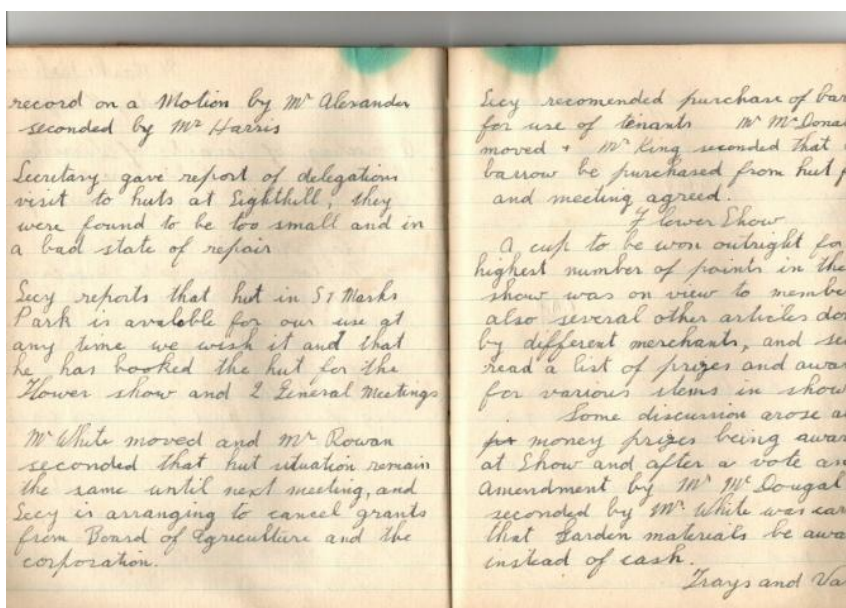


Figure 32. Warriston Allotment Association Minute Book from December 1952 to September 1956.

In 1953 the allotment rent was 9/- (rent 7/6, Association 1/- and FEDAGA 6d), and rents continued to be collected by the Warriston Association. In 1954 Inverleith rents went up by a substantial amount to 15/- and FEDAGA were watching developments closely and would fight any unfair increases. Fees were paid to join, not only FEDAGA, but also the Glasgow Federation, and delegates attended a meeting of the Glasgow association in Dunfermline and £1 was given for expenses. An application to join the Royal Caledonian Society at the cost of 10/6 was approved. It was decided not to join the Scottish Federation as Edinburgh's FEDAGA provided the same service.

There continued to be reports of plots being “entered and pilfered”, the Water Bailiff complained about rubbish being dumped in the Water of Leith, and the police reported someone staying overnight in a hut in Section 1. There were complaints about a gambling school spending a few hours at the plots and “using very dirty language which was not nice for women and children to hear”. Chancelot Mill was requested to stop their employees using the site as a short cut on the way to work, and there were reports of railway workers stopping trains and removing vegetables from plots. The Town Clerk has written to a Chimney Sweep who repeatedly dumped soot outside the site office, and the police were watching for him.

The Department of Health visited after there were complaints about rats, and warfarin was put down. Following an allotment inspection big bud disease was found on blackcurrant bushes. Tenants were notified that the affected bushes were to be removed and burnt. Failure to comply carried a penalty of £5. The Department of Agriculture used part of a plot to conduct experiments on carrot pests. There were 4 applications of BHC (benzene hexachloride, an insecticide) put down. Plots 4 and 84 were recommended by the Parks Department to be condemned due to waterlogging, but instead the rent was reduced to 5/- in the hope it would help bring them up to standard again.

There continues to be reports of “dirty plots” and women were mentioned for the first time as tenants. Notice was given to Mrs Preston as she had been keeping her plot in name only and “something would have to be done” about the state of it. Mrs Lucky had sold all her tools but not given up her plot. She was to be “watched carefully” and did eventually resign her plot. When plots were vacated, huts were often sold to the new tenant or another plot holder, along with any tools. Mrs Black of Broughton wished to be put back on the waiting list as she was now fit again. Any widows of tenants were given a rebate on the rent, and Pensioners were given poor relief by the Women’s Voluntary Service according to correspondence received by the Secretary.

Warriston’s first Flower Show was held in August 1953 in the St Marks Hut. It started as a small affair and difficulties in its infancy were alluded to. A Challenge Shield awarded to the winner was insured. The show made a profit and continued for the next few years, growing in popularity and size. Classes for jams, home crafts and children’s classes were included. Diplomas and prizes were sought, and a silver trophy was donated. The need for more crockery soon became clear, leading to the suggestion of creating a Ladies’ Committee. A Show Committee was also formed, and it was to have two ladies on it. It was agreed that crockery, cutlery, a tea set, and a kettle could be bought, provided the total cost did not exceed £7.



Figure 33. FEDAGA Poster 1953 (Private Collection)

In 1953 Warriston won the Corporation Allotments competition with a score of 48.8% out of 55% which carried a prize of £3. FEDAGA organised its inaugural Flower Show and Garden Fete in 1953, (Figure 33) and at the 1954 event, Warriston received commendations for their contributions. Mr Gordon collected the Blue Ribbon of the show, and a total of 40 prizes were awarded to the Warriston plot holders. There was much enthusiasm

amongst the tenants to grow and display their produce in the early years of the 1950's. (WAA minutes 1952– 56).

30th September 1956 to 19th October 1986

In September 1956 the committee voted to hold a spring show in the office the following April and initially agreed to one in 1958, however it was decided not to hold the second one, but the reason is not recorded. The August flower show continued in 1957, although after the 1958 show the Secretary complained that members were not helping with the show or plots. The show was held again in 1959 and show entries were reported to be down. The show was held for the last time in 1963. There was discussion about the poor state of the site overall, a lack of interest in entering the show and tenants demanding to be left alone to grow food for their table, and the show was cancelled.

In 1957 the site won second prize in the Gardens and Allotments competition but was unplaced in 1958. The minutes between 1957 and 1965 document a general decline in the repair and upkeep of the site. The Caretaker had died in 1961 and not been replaced. Some drains were

supplied by the Corporation and laid by the committee, but water pipes were of concern. Areas 3 and 4 (the south side) had no water due to vandalism and lack of repairs, and frequent requests were made to the Allotment Officer about this. Lots of tree work was required and one tenant was observed cutting down branches in an unskilled manner and had been “very difficult” when spoken to, and everyone was warned not to cut trees indiscriminately. The paths between plots were not being kept clear, and rubbish was being dumped around the site.

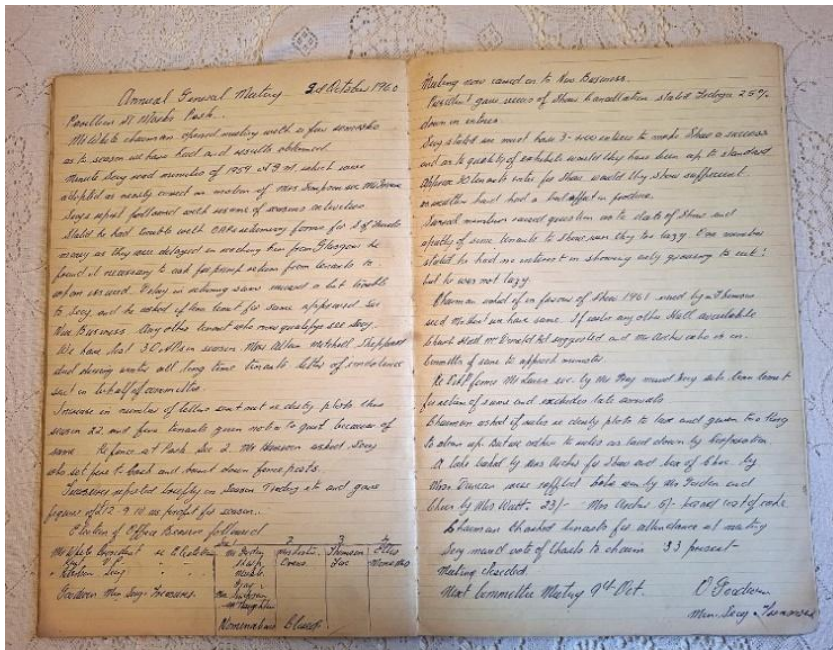


Figure 34. Warriston Allotment Association Minute Book from September 1956 to October 1986.

Big bud on blackcurrant bushes prompted more letters from the Department of Agriculture. Rats were still requiring poison to be bought and laid, and pigeons were causing a nuisance. The Corporation was contacted about the rising number of rabbits across the site, but there was no response, so plot holders exterminated large numbers by themselves. By 1964 there was a strong feeling of little support from the Allotment Officer and the Corporation regarding repairs and maintenance and that it had become a “Do It Yourself” situation.

There were still reports of thefts from plots, vandalism by local school children, and sabotage of asters, cabbage, and prize onions, by the spraying of chloral hydrate on a plot by an unknown person. Hut break-ins in all areas were investigated by the police with no success, as there were so many ways into the site. One case of indecent exposure was reported to the committee, but it was apparently too late to inform the police.



Figure 35. Allotment vandalism at Warriston. Likely to have been taken at the plots in front of Chancelot Mill looking south. (trove.scot, 1959)

The number of dirty plots were rising and in the worst year, 1958, twenty three letters were sent out about this. Special meetings were held to interview tenants about the state of

their plots. One man had sent a sample of his soil to the Board of Agriculture for testing and was told to leave his plot uncultivated for a year as the soil was in such bad condition. He was allowed to keep his plot if he kept it clean. There was little improvement by 1964, when 18 letters had to be sent, at which point there were 10 vacant plots. It was reported in the minutes that “good tenants are hard to get, and the committee was not much better.”

Regular committee meeting continued to be held until the AGM of 1962, where a new President, Mrs Simpson, was appointed. She had been active both on the Ladies’ and Show committees and reported back from FEDAGA meetings. However, there were no committee meetings held in 1963, and the next meeting was the 1963 AGM where it was announced that Mrs Simpson had resigned. She was not replaced, and the committee was short of members. Attendance at the AGMs was poor, and it was reported that the lack of enthusiasm was echoed around other allotment sites. The 1964 AGM still had no Chairperson, and no further meetings were held until the AGM in 1965 where an acting Chairman reported that the Scottish Gardens and Allotment Association gave £1/2/6 each for OAPs, and honorarium payments were agreed for the Secretary and Treasurer. The Treasurer reported that the cottage may need re-roofed in the near future and roofing felt might be an option if the roof timbers were sound under the slates.

There were no other meetings documented until February 7th, 1971, when a new four-member committee convened. Funds were withdrawn to buy paraffin and to donate £50 to a plot holder’s widow in recognition of his contributions to the site. The next meeting was an AGM attended by eighteen people in May 1973. The new Chairman proposed leaving the Allotment Association, and this was approved; it was also agreed that the Secretary and Treasurer would receive honorarium payments. The next entries in the minute book itemised cheque payments from the Director of Finance to the Association for the years 1976 to 1981.

In 1983, two committee meetings were held during which plot holders expressed concerns about the site's condition and were advised to submit a petition to the Allotment Officer. The Officer visited and was requested to arrange for several improvements: installing a new perimeter fence, adding water taps and pipes, blocking off the tunnel beneath the railway line (The Tube), closing the gate at plot 81 beside the crematorium, putting up a fence between the path along the Water of Leith and the allotments, and providing a notice board. He was also questioned regarding the paths between the plots, but he clarified that maintaining them was up to the plot holders. By 1984 new fences had been erected from Ferry Road allotments along the side of the disused railway track, and beside the Water of Leith, and measuring for new taps had taken place. A "Keep the Gate Shut" sign was posted and appeared effective. A notice board had been provided, and a post box had been found to put beside it.

Ashes had been requested for paths, and a list of plotholders had been provided. A request for keys to the main gate had been refused. Despite the amount of work completed by the council, the Allotment Officer was felt to be very negative, and the Secretary was to write to the Director of Recreation about this. There were flooding problems with rainwater running down the footpath from the Pavillion in St Marks into plots, a problem that still persists today. The toilet was to be demolished, and weedkiller bought for paths. A sprayer was already available. The 1984 AGM acknowledged the work that had been done to make Warriston a better and more secure site, although there was still "a long hard fight ahead".



Figure 36. Vandalism to plot 89 beside St Marks Park.
(*Edinburgh Evening News*, 1986)

Vandalism remains a problem, as reported by the *Edinburgh Evening News* in June 1986. Crops are pulled from the ground, and the shed was burst open, although nothing was stolen. (Figure 36).

In 1985, there was talk of purchasing a "roto cultivator" but concerns about potential theft led to the decision not to proceed. More plumbing works were required, and more fencing was requested. A new plot, number 9, came into being, and rubbish had been partly cleared from the site. At the

AGM, the report from the council was that there was no money for work on the water taps. A motion was passed to rejoin FEDAGA, and the site was unplaced in the allotment competition due to "insufficient effort by plot holders". The final documented meeting was the 1986 AGM, which had a low turnout. The Allotment Officer was to be reminded that the water situation is far from satisfactory. FEDAGA fees are to rise from 20p to 50p, and the committee will consider buying a strimmer for communal use. (WAA minutes 1956 – 86).

1987 to 2013

With the three Warriston minute record books, there was a box file with various correspondence from the council, the Allotment Officers, and FEDAGA representatives. In 1987 there was notification of Warriston Road being widened to accommodate building the footbridge over the walkway below, and the Allotment Officer warned there may be test drilling in the area. If any plots were to be affected it would only be plot 1 and only by a small percentage, if at all. The Secretary received a letter from the Assistant Director (Parks) complaining about the state of the paths between plots and saying that spraying of the main paths and perimeter by the Department seems invalid if other paths are ignored. The Secretary presumably writes back as the Allotment Officer says he will send a short note out with the bills, pointing out plot holders' responsibilities concerning the paths. There is also a response to requests for water piping and ashes for paths saying money is short and ashes hard to get.

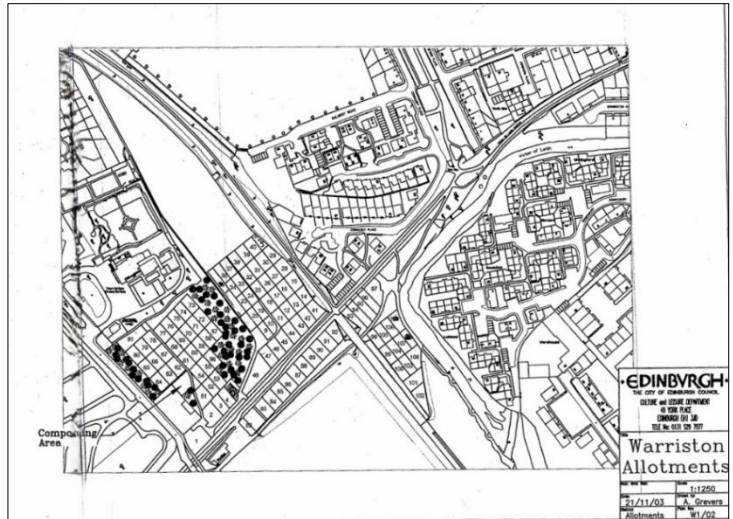


Figure 37. 2003 Map of Warriston Allotments
(City of Edinburgh Council)

The Secretary had obviously written to the Allotment Officer in 1988 about repairs to the building roof. The Technical Services Department had reported that all roof timbers were rotten including the joists, and stonework would have to be replaced as there were tree roots growing between the stone cavities. The total work would cost between £12,000 and £15,000. It was decided the roof would be removed and a decision made thereafter. The Allotment Officer felt it would be more prudent to demolish the building and erect something in its place. We do not know what response the committee gave to this news.

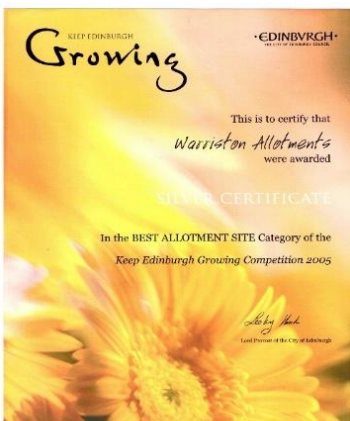


Figure 38. Silver Award for Best Allotment Site 2005. (Warriston Allotment Association)

During the 1990's the committee had a new Chair who seemed to make some headway with a new fence along the walkway and removal of the damaged wall in 1995. Requests for a toilet, and road planings – recycled asphalt or tarmac removed from old road surfaces during resurfacing – for the main path were made. Letters were sent out to 15 plot holders in May 1995 by the Allotment Officer, about dirty plots. The Environmental and Consumer Services Department requested sites to remove water containers, basins, tanks and tubs due a Health and Safety issue and to let taps run freely. There were warning letters sent from the Allotment Officer to Warriston and Ferry Road sites about bonfires, reminding people what and when to burn, as complaints had been received from local

residents and the crematorium in 2000. Warriston won a Silver Award for Best Allotment Site 2005 (Figure 38).

By 2011 the Chairman of the Committee informs FEDAGA that the committee is diminished due to people leaving the site and he hopes to form a new committee the following spring. Due to his ill health and subsequent death, he did not manage to achieve this and there was no committee until 2014.



Figure 39. Warriston, 5th September 2018, Photo by David Hay.
(kosmicapotheosis, Instagram 2018)

2014 to 2025

In 2014 a new temporary committee was formed after a Special General meeting in the Victoria Park Hotel and confirmed at an AGM later in the year. A Chair, Secretary and Treasurer were elected, along with committee members. The committee met regularly, a website was developed, and new signatories were authorised for the bank account. A survey of the cottage took place in 2014 which highlighted the dampness in the building due to earth and compost being above the level of the air vents at ground level. (Clark 2014). The committee undertook work to clear the outside cottage walls of earth and compost to help improve the dampness inside. To improve drainage, weed barrier fabric and stone chippings were laid. Solar lights were added inside the committee room and the storage area. At this point the roof was covered in felt and local lore says the slates had been stolen at some point previously.



Figure 40. Cottage with stone chippings laid. 2015.
(Photo by Rik Hart)

In 2016 there was a new committee Chair and Secretary, although most of the 2014 committee remained, and still do. The website was updated and newsletters were sent out a few times a year. In 2017 the first May Plant Sale was held and has continued every year apart from 2020 and 25

2021 due to Covid. It has proved very popular and people queue to get a bargain. The money made from the sale contributes to equipment for the site. In 2023 the Autumn Harvest Event was held for the first time and is a welcome social event. There is a display of produce, and a tasting session for tomatoes and cucumbers. At both these events the Warriston café is open serving tea, coffee and home baking as well as homemade soup in the autumn.



Figure 41. May Plant Sale vegetables for sale. (Photo by A Bain)



Figure 42. Plant Sale queue. (Photo by A Bain)



Figure 43. Warriston café home baking and preserves. (Photo by A Hewitt)

The committee meets six times a year and holds an AGM in October. Minutes of these meetings are displayed on the notice boards, and a paper copy is kept in the cottage for reference. The AGM's have a guest speaker as well as refreshments afterwards.

The committee works closely with the Allotment Officer, and all site maintenance issues are reported. The communal area we see today was developed from a heap of leaf mold covered in bindweed, nettles, and rubbish, by committee members with help from the council and is now maintained by a group of volunteers using equipment bought by the allotment association.



Figure 44. Communal area apple tree. (Photo A Hewitt 2025)

There are apple and pear trees growing there for everybody to enjoy. The site has been gifted an apple press and the first session in autumn 2025 was very successful.



Figure 45. Apple press in use. (Photo A Hewitt 2025)

Rainfall from the roof of the cottage has been diverted to a water butt and two large containers to help keep the floor dry as the cottage has no foundations. The committee maintain close links with FEDAGA and take part in their Trading Scheme. In 2022, the council provided a shredder, which has helped decrease the frequency of bonfires at the site. Also, in 2022 a new fence was erected down the south side. Water run-off down the south footpath from the St Marks car park has been an ongoing problem since resurfacing work took place. It required a letter to local councillors from the committee before a box drain was finally installed in December 2025.



Figure 46. A lunch time guest on the plot.
(Photo by Kay Stephen)

In 2023 Warriston joined the Keep Scotland Beautiful – It’s Your Neighbourhood scheme and has been awarded a Level 5 – Outstanding Certificate of Distinction for community participation, environmental responsibility, and gardening achievement. Plottolders garden alongside the wildlife that inhabits the site – the foxes, birds, bats, and amphibians. The central wooded area is a wildlife haven and provides valuable habitat for these creatures.

There are several talented artists, photographers, and sculptors (Figures 47 and 48) on the site who draw inspiration from the plots around them, and over the years visiting artists have also painted scenes from allotment life.



Figure 47. Warriston plots by Tim Bremner.
(www.bremnerdesign.co.uk)



Figure 48. Artichoke sculpture by Duncan Robertson.
(www.duncanrobertson.co.uk)

The history gained from the Warriston minutes, correspondence, and newspapers, gives a fascinating insight into how the allotment site came into being and how it has evolved over the past

century. Some of the challenges that faced the plot holders of the 1930’s are still with us today. Security of tenure is much improved, as is site security, although fences still get cut, sheds broken into, and crops stolen. Thefts of produce may be due to unwelcome and uninvited ‘visitors’ or local wildlife; there is much debate about this. It is very frustrating to see the fruits of our labours disappearing overnight.

Of the 103 remaining plots at Warriston, some are split into two to try and accommodate those on the waiting list. The annual turnover of plots is very low, usually below ten a year as people are reluctant to give up their long awaited plot. In the past there was the option to ‘inherit’ a plot



*Figure 49. Retiring Allotment Officer.
(Photo by A Bain, 2025)*

from a family member, but this option was removed with the new allotment regulations in 2021. Unmaintained plots are managed by the Allotment Officer now. The Council set the budget for maintenance, as well as collecting rent and Edinburgh allotment rents are among the highest in the UK.

October 2024 saw another change of committee Chair, and in March 2025 Ian Woolard, the Allotment Officer, who had been in post for 33 years, retired to the golf course, and committee members presented him with a Tim Bremner print of Warriston plots. (Figure 49). The Warriston Allotment Association look forward to continuing good relations with his successor, with FEDAGA, and all the Warriston allotment holders who work hard to make this an amazing site to have a plot on.



*Figure 50. Sunset over Warriston. 2020
(Photo by D Robertson)*

Many thanks to Barbara Simmons for editing assistance, (any mistakes are mine as I have added to it since then), John MacInnes for photographs, Carol Marr for information, and Richard Johnston for encouragement.

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Panoramic view of the allotments on the west side, on a bright, but chilly day in January 2026. (Photo by A Hewitt)