

BUSTARDTHORPE HISTORY

The history of the allotment site itself is fairly well known, but the question always asked is “where or what is Bustardthorpe”? Read on.... low lying remains of mediaeval ridge and furrow ox plough marks are visible behind the allotments on the slope down to the racecourse, so we know the land was farmed in the Middle Ages.



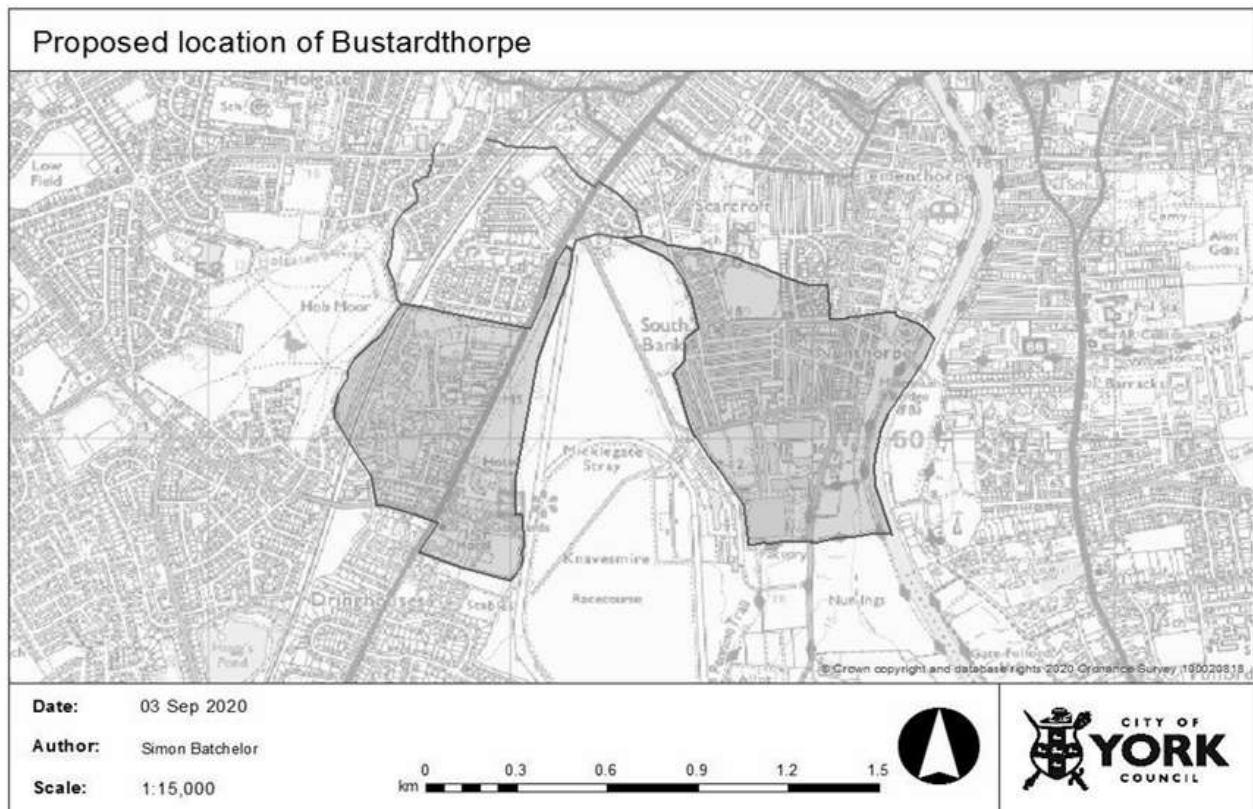
Bustardthorpe was probably carved out of lands belonging to the Archbishop of York immediately south of the City Walls, part of which is referred to as Clementhorpe in the 1080s, just before Domesday. Clementhorpe is not mentioned in Domesday, but the Archbishop's lands were known to extend south to Middlethorpe.

Middle Ages up to 1500: references to Bustardthorpe Manor. In this section I have extensively used Simon Batchelor's *Urbi et Suburbi* 2020

Simon Batchelor's plan showing the proposed location of Bustardthorpe Manor is below. The pink areas comprising the Manor are either side of the Knavesmire, which was 'stray', or common land and, being marshy, not suitable for agriculture.

The western side of the manor runs to the Hob Moor Stray boundary, and as late as the 1740s there are references to Bustardthorpe Garths in the Dringhouses area. Cherry Garden Lans is the southernmost boundary. On the eastern side, the northern boundary is the South Bank, the ridge that runs from the river along Southlands Rd and to the Mount, whilst the southern boundary aligns with the southern end of the former Terrys site where remains of a ditch are visible and might be the line of "Bustard Lane" which ran to the Knavesmire.

The red edged unshaded area is the proposed north-west area, which Simon Batchelor suggests runs along Holbeck, but this is now culverted and less easy to follow.



Sim

on Batchelor *Urbi et Suburbi* Map 18

In 1971, Professor Maurice Beresford concluded there was a deserted mediaeval village named Bustardthorpe, with the centre located opposite the vehicle entrance into the racecourse car park (see downloaded map, right), so both works place the manor in the same general location.

12th /13th Centuries: the land belonged to the Archbishop of York. In 1207, King John argued with the Archbishop, confiscated much of the Archbishop's lands around York and granted some to the Lutterell and Lardiner families, who were his own supporters.

1175: Osbert Bustard is farming land northeast of Middlethorpe Manor.

1270: first mention of Bustardthorpe as a specific place in the *inquisition postmortem* (mediaeval equivalent of assessment for inheritance tax) of David Lardiner, states that Thomas Bustard pays 7shillings (35 pence) annual rent for Bustardthorpe.



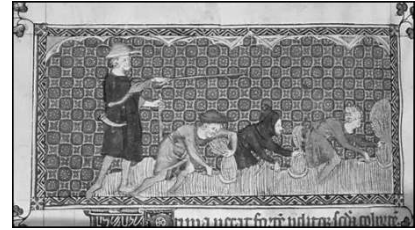
1285: Bishop John de Kirkby's national enquiry into landholdings states that Bustardthorpe was owned by Geoffrey Baron Luttrell and David Lardiner. Robert Bustard was tenant of David Lardiner, occupying 240 acres, whilst Thomas Bustard rented around 7.5 acres of the Luttrell land.



1300: *Inquisition postmortem* describes Lord Lutterell's land at Bustardthorpe as including around 12 acres of meadow, 130 acres of pasture and 208 acres of arable land

1301: Thomas Bustard of Bustardthorpe dies, passing the manor to his son Robert.

1304 and 1305: debt actions against Robert Bustard of Bustardthorpe heard before the Lord Mayer of York: 31 marks owed to Walter de Harome, 6 marks owed to Robert de Seizevaux, and 8 marks 11 shillings and 4 pence owed to Robert Verdinel. All were trade debts, and considerable sums of money at a time when a labourer earned 1 penny a day and a master carpenter might earn 4 pence a day. A mark was worth 160 pence or around 14 shillings (£1.10).



1484 Sir Miles Wilstrop of Tockwith acquires Bustardthorpe Manor: it seems that the previous owner had died without heirs.

1521: Guy Wilstrop is stated to be the owner of Bustard Hall.

1533: court papers concerning mortgage deeds for Middlethorpe, Bishopthorpe and Bustardthorpe states that Bustardthorpe no longer exists. This may refer to the 'Hall' mentioned in 1484 and possibly there was now only land leased for agriculture.

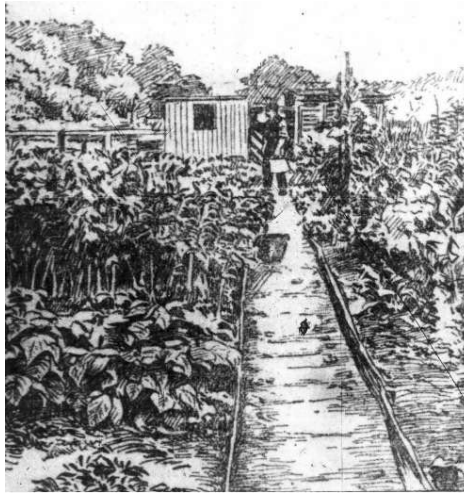
1564: Bustard Hall and nearby fields purchased by York City Council and leased out as agricultural land.

1721: City Council report detailing the boundaries of York City electoral wards; Micklegate ward description states Francis Barlow, whose father built Middlethorpe Hall in 1699, owned a field next to Bustardthorpe, which marked the ward boundary – this might be the lane opposite Middlethorpe Hall which runs to the racecourse. So, even if there were no longer any buildings, the area retained a specific local identity.

Allotments in Bustardthorpe in the 20th Century. For this section we are indebted to Professor Ross Wilson's "*York's Allotment Heritage*" which has been extensively quoted

In the mid-late 19th century employers in York begin to provide allotments for their workers, e.g. 104 Rowntree allotments on Haxby Rd. In 1887 the Allotments and Cottage Garden Compensation for Crops Act empowered local authorities to make allotments available if residents campaigned for them. The power was not greatly used, but by 1908 there were allotments at Clementhorpe, Nunthorpe and South Bank, all provided privately.

Oscar Rowntree, who advised the City Council on the approach towards setting up allotments in 1906 stated that 'there is no reason why allotments should not be available in every district in York if so desired, for the town is not too large to make this impossible.'



Pencil drawing of an allotment garden of the early 1900s

In 1906 the amount of produce estimated that could be grown on one allotment measuring 345 square yards was considerable!

- Vegetables: 42lbs of brussels, 2 bunch of carrots, 24 celery sticks, 7 bunches of lettuce, 2 bunches of onions, 39lbs of peas, 8 bunches of radishes, 18 savoys, 50 cabbages, 96 cauliflowers, 12lbs of French beans, 8 bunches of mint, 14 bunches of parsley, 320lbs of potatoes, 9 bunches of rhubarb, 4 bunches of turnips.
- Fruit: 3lbs of gooseberries, 6 quarts and 2lbs of raspberries, 9lbs of redcurrants, 17lbs of strawberries.
- Flowers: 245 bunches of flowers, 60 iris blooms, 7 lily blooms, 2 bunches of polyanthus, 38 rose blooms, 16 tulip blooms, 2 bunches marguerites, 1 bunch of daffodils.

1904: York residents in the Holgate area, mostly connected to the railway, successfully petitioned the City Council for allotments, and Holgate allotments were laid out in 1905. These were the first publicly owned allotments in the City. Demand was phenomenal, encouraging others to come together to petition.

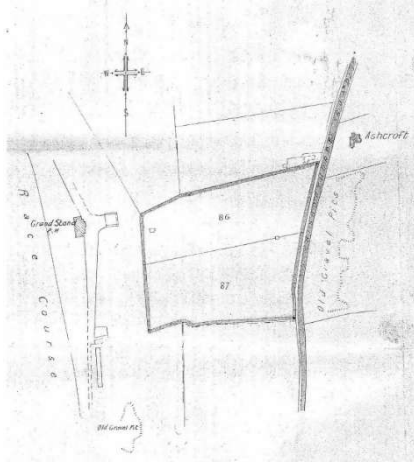
1908: Small Holdings and Allotments Act: consolidated and strengthened previous legislation and placed a duty on local authorities to provide allotments, including powers of compulsory purchase of land

1908: Bishopthorpe Rd and South Bank residents petitioned for provision of allotments and formed the South Bank Allotment Holders Association. A site search suggested land "at Bustardthorpe" behind the racecourse grandstand. Despite the Allotment Association initially rejecting the proposal for the Bustardthorpe site as too far away from residential areas, and the landowner initially refusing disposal so they could develop the land for housing, a contract was eventually agreed in September 1908.

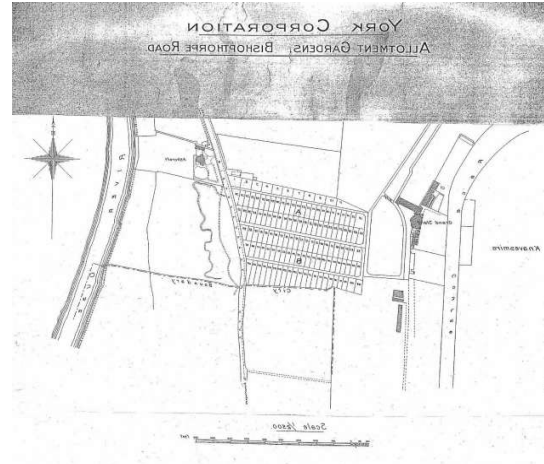
The contract described the purpose: "to provide Allotments for the labouring classes in the South Bank District of York". The proposal was 'The Bustardthorpe site provided 152 plots, the areas of which are for the most part $\frac{1}{4}$ rood (approx.. 300 sq. yds.) sections. Of the above number of plots 31 are larger than a $\frac{1}{4}$ rood, varying from an area of – 16 – 321 yards to 630 yards. Provision is made for 2 main roads 10 feet wide and 80 yards apart with five crossroads, 7 feet 6 inches wide and 40 yards apart. It is proposed to make these roads with

ashes only...12 standpipes fed from the Water company's main, with sunk tubs for the storage of water...Cost: £373-5-0.'

1909: land was acquired as 2 fields, North and South for 129 plots, this land is now the racecourse car park.



Sale Plan for Bishopthorpe Rd Allotments 1908 (City Archives)



Bishopthorpe Rd Allotments Layout Plan 1908 (City Archives)

1910: 14 March the initial ballot for plots resulted in 31 of the 61 plots on the North field being let. Most plots were 300 square yards (quarter rood), sheds could be erected with permission of the newly formed Bishopthorpe Road Corporation Allotments Holders' Association and rents were set at 12 shillings and 6 pence annually (65 pence).

1911: January, the 46 plots on the south field were laid out and let following a ballot

BISHOPTHORPE ROAD Allotment Holders' Association

Schedule of 4th Annual Show, 29th July, 1914.

LIST OF OFFICERS.

President :—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Mayor of York
(Councillor H. Rhodes Brown.)

Vice-President :—The Sheriff of York (R. Newbald Kay, Esq.)

Patrons :—

His Grace the Archbishop of York; Arnold S. Rowntree, Esq., M.P.; J. G. Butcher, Esq., K.C.; M.D.; Viscount Helmsley, M.P.; Urban H. Broughton, Esq.; Jos. Rowntree, Esq.; Ald. S. W. Meyer, J.P.; Ald. Norman Green; Ald. Sir J. Sykes Rymer; Councillors J. B. Morrell, O. F. Rowntree, S. H. Davies, G. Sharp, and G. H. Mennell; W. Reginald De Burgh, Esq.; Harold C. De Burgh, Esq.; J. W. Procter, Esq., J.P.; W. F. H. Thomson, Esq., J.P.; B. S. Rowntree, Esq., J.P.; Rev. Canon Argles; Col. Meysey-Thompson; Dr. Raimes; R. Thompson, Esq.; L. C. Paget, Esq.; Sir A. Kaye Butterworth; Col. Wilkinson, D.S.O.; Major C. E. Wood; W. Northall, Esq., and C. E. Scott, Esq.

Chairman :—Mr. J. P. Gent.

Vice-Chairman :—Mr. S. Cram.

Committee :—

Messrs. E. Warrington, J. W. Collins, T. Acomb, I. Bowland, F. Birkett, W. Dwyer, A. Pratt, W. H. Barker, J. Ashcroft and G. H. Cooper.

1911: August 19th saw the first show of produce from Bishopthorpe Allotments, held at the then South Bank Adult School, now the working men's club on Belmont Terrace. The Yorkshire Gazette marvelled at the speed with which the Association had been able to

develop: “the exhibition of produce was based on 40 classes, with 30 classes restricted to Bishopthorpe Road Allotments only. Some particularly fine vegetables were shown – huge vegetable marrows and cabbages, potatoes of good size and quality, and kidney beans and peas also being noticeable.”

George Russell's Lupins. There is a separate page about George Russell and his wonderful lupins, developed at the then Bishopthorpe Road allotments.

World War 1

On the 8th of October 1914, just 2 months after the start of World War 1 a letter from a Mrs. North was received, the wife of an allotment holder at Bishopthorpe Road, whose husband was on military service; she asked to be relieved of the rent of the allotment for the present half-year. The City Council mobilised for food production, and by 1917 10% of the area of the city was under cultivation, with women increasingly taking on allotments to aid the war effort and to increase food supply.

World War 2

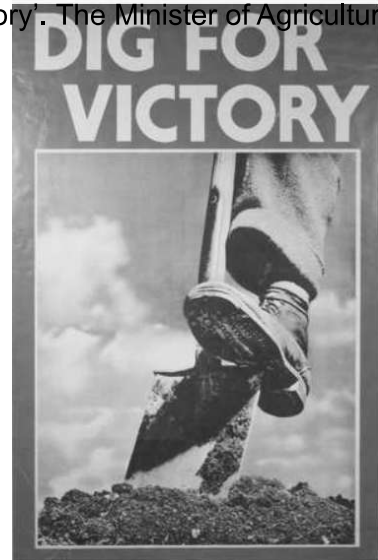
In August 1939, even before the war started, the Minister of Agriculture launched the ‘Grow More Food Campaign’, which became known as ‘Dig for Victory’. The Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries used the National Allotments Society to assist in expanding the amount of land available for civilians to grow food. Most of the allotment associations in York were affiliated to this national body and instructions regarding the need for cultivation were soon made clear to gardeners: they were warned to grow no more than 5% of flowers, and prizes were awarded for the best allotment growing food for the war effort.

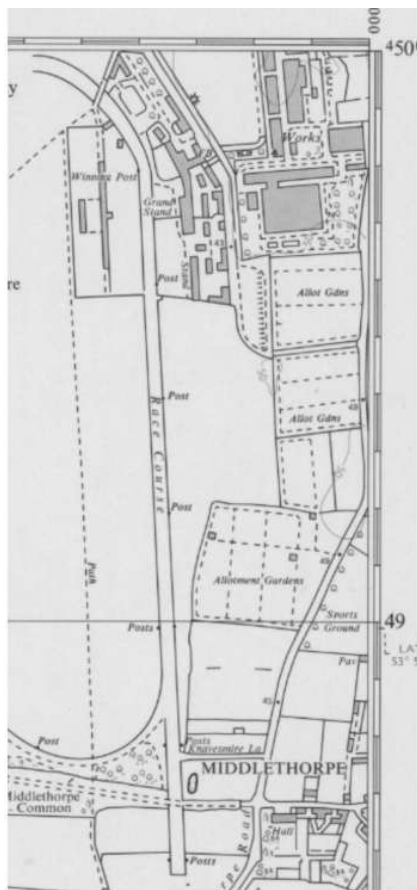
The amount of land taken on as allotments was immense, over 73 acres of the city was used for allotments in addition to people's own gardens. Bustardthorpe allotments were extended to include the existing site adjoining the old College of Law site.

Many of York's allotment holders remember friends and families being involved in the war-effort by working on their allotment and supplementing their rations. One recalled that on the Bustardthorpe Allotments that, ‘there was a man who used to keep pigs on his allotment and all the residents in the area would leave out their scraps so they could be boiled down and used as swill.’

Post War

1962: The most the most significant development in post WW2 allotments in York was the relocation of the Bustardthorpe North field plots.





Map extract courtesy of the National Library of Scotland.

The development of York Racecourse required car parks for racegoers. The fields behind the grandstand which included the original 1908 allotments appeared ideal. Tenants of the site were relocated to the new Bustardthorpe site developed during the World War 2. The City Council had to give a full 12 months' notice to plot holders with tenancies to expire during the winter months so work would not be lost.

This Ordnance Survey map from 1969 is interesting, as it still shows allotments on the land that is now the racecourse car park, as well as the current Bustardthorpe allotment site, meaning that the plots were not actually moved until 1970.

York Allotments in the 21st Century

Professor Ross Wilson interviewed allotment tenants across York about their experiences and reasons for having an allotment.

In 1969, nationally 62% of allotment holders were aged 40 or over, typically male, retired manual worker and that over 50% of allotment holders had held them since 1945. Women in York began to take on allotment plots for themselves or their families in the 1970s, into what was a solely male preserve, but in 2025 women comprise the majority of allotment holders in the country.

One of the first women in York to take on an allotment in York described the experience of being the only female allotment tenant: 'The men were very wary, and they would mutter, 'give her three weeks', but I stayed at it, and then they'd say, 'give her a few months', but I stayed at it, then they said, 'give her a year', but then after that I was accepted on the site.' I think they used to be suspicious about me because I grew flowers. They would grow chrysanthemums but not cottage garden flowers like me. There were some who were patronising. But the man next to me, he was wonderful: he used to give me all sorts of advice.'

Now, with less need to grow vegetables and fruit to ensure good food and good health, people garden their allotments for multiple reasons: overall it is the physical and mental well-being of allotment gardening that attracts tenants. One tenant said, 'it's an escape. To come and be with nature. To get away from work.'

The financial benefits of allotment gardening are appreciated by many, but for others this isn't important; 'it costs me money to have an allotment, but it's a lifestyle thing, getting out doing stuff. It's just my bit of space, if I am under stress I can come down and it's better. You're doing something and you have something to show for it and share with it as well.'

Eating the results of hard labour in the allotments, with family and friends, is for many the significant motivation in spending long hours at the weekend and evenings working on allotment plots. One tenant echoed the thoughts of many others when they mentioned that 'it tends to shape the process of cooking, you start to think in terms of, "what have you got?" I don't want to buy parsnips when I go shopping because I will be eating parsnips galore come October time. You tend to eat a lot of things at a particular time; at the moment I should be looking like a strawberry.'

A big part of allotment gardening in York is getting to know other people. 'Everyone is an individual, some people will share and give other people things, others are more private. But people are genuinely friendly'.

The growth in popularity of York's allotments and the change in the demographics in the city have brought many newcomers from outside the UK to share the pleasure of allotment gardening: people from Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, China, Nepal and India garden their allotments.

And we see the value of York's allotments to many *groups*. Allotments in the city are today tended by local schools, children with special educational needs, disability groups and young people in contact with the youth justice service among others.

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