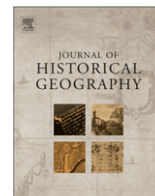


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Dig for Victory! New histories of wartime gardening in Britain

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Abstract

Prompted by the curious fact that both progressive environmentalists and Conservative Party politicians have recently drawn on popular understandings of austerity associated with Britain's wartime domestic gardening campaign, this article broadens the range of histories associated with Dig for Victory. It suggests firstly that far from simply encouraging self-sufficiency, the government conceptualised Dig for Victory as requiring the extension of order and control into the domestic sphere. Second, it shows how the ideal figure of a national citizen digging for victory elided differentiated gender and class experiences of gardening, and finally the article demonstrates that statistics of food production were more about fostering trust than picturing the realities of vegetable growing. By so doing the paper illuminates the particular ways in which present-day articulations of Dig for Victory's history are partial and selective.

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The language of culture and community is poised on the fissures of the present becoming the rhetorical figures of a national past.¹

In recent years Dig for Victory gardens have been re-appearing in many sites across Britain. In the summer of 2008 the Imperial War Museum planted two vegetable plots in a small enclosure in St James's Park, one following the guidance provided to British citizens as part of the wartime Dig for Victory campaign, the other adhering to modern, organic principles. The message of this installation, with its wilful mixing of old and new, was that the wartime and contemporary organic gardener share many concerns, such as 'having access to fresh healthy food, being active and living sustainably'.² Heads of state have also tapped the zeitgeist: in 2009 the Queen planted a chemical-free vegetable plot full of heritage varieties in the gardens of Buckingham Palace.³ Meanwhile, sales of

garden 'lifestyle' products like furniture and hardy nursery stock have fallen, but plant and seed sales have grown steadily, fuelled by interest in 'grow your own'.⁴ Where a decade ago 70% of the seeds sold by B&Q were for growing flowers, in 2010 78% of seeds were for vegetables.⁵ All this activity prompted one *Daily Mail* commentator to ask his readers: 'Do you get the impression that a new Dig for Victory campaign has been foisted upon us?'⁶

Growing your own vegetables is connected to environmental concerns with industrial agriculture, sustainable consumption, food security and climate change. A whole range of NGOs and local groups are campaigning for more local and domestic-scale production and distribution of food, often drawing on Dig for Victory as inspiration.⁷ For example, Archbishop Rowan Williams called for people to 'dig for victory over climate change' by growing more food at home and air-freighting less, while garden celebrity and Soil Association president Monty Don suggested that a revival of Dig for Victory spirit was

E-mail address: franklin.ginn@ed.ac.uk¹ H. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, New York, 1994, 203.² Imperial War Museum, *Digging for Victory: War on Waste, 22 May–30 September*, London, 2008.³ C. Davies, Queen turns corner of palace backyard into an allotment, *Guardian* (14 June 2009).⁴ Horticultural Trades Association, *Garden Retail Market Analysis*, May 2011; see also MINTEL, *Garden Products Retailing UK*, London, 2011.⁵ H. Wallup, Vegetable seed sales jump as grow your own takes root, *Daily Telegraph* (19 March 2010); the trend is also noted in J. Vidal, Coming up roses? Not any more as UK gardeners turn to vegetables, *Guardian* (22 March 2008).⁶ N. Colborn, A growing passion, *Daily Mail* (30 May 2009); ironically, it was the *Daily Mail* which originally coined the phrase 'Dig for Victory', not the government.⁷ See for example Royal Horticultural Society, *Garden Matters: Urban Gardens*, London, 2011; for a review see R. Bramall, Dig for Victory! Anti-consumerism, austerity and new historical subjectivities, *Subjectivity* 4 (2011) 68–86; E. Hinton and M. Redclift, Austerity and sufficiency: the changing politics of sustainable consumption, in: *Environment, Politics and Development Working Paper Series*, King's College London, 2009.

necessary to ensure the UK's food security.⁸ The reason that Dig for Victory continues to resonate is because it draws a direct comparison between the environmental concerns of today and a period of radically lower resource use, a time when people were not mere consumers of industrialised agricultural products, but producers of their own food. Arguably, the appeal of Dig for Victory for environmentalists lies in its capacity to make radical ideas, such as the production of food outside capitalist systems of exchange, appear 'unthreatening and even appealing'.⁹ Dig for Victory conjures up a safe and accessible vision of sustainable consumption. Drawing on Crouch and Parker, who suggested that heritage and 'common sense histories' could be used oppositionally as well as to shore up hegemonic positions, Rebecca Bramall concludes that although Dig for Victory may be a 'dominant-hegemonic history' this in fact gives it enormous potential to change people's behaviour because it is 'already common sense'.¹⁰ If the 'total war' threatened the continued existence of the nation in the 1940s, then present-day environmental crises pose a similarly radical challenge to continued consumption patterns, consumption patterns that have come in many ways to define Britain and the West today.¹¹ We might say that rhetoric supporting a present-day grow your own revolution draws on a shared understanding of the past, but places it in a forward-looking national narrative, in which we are no longer fighting the evils of national socialism but mitigating the self-inflicted wounds of industrial modernity. As the opening epigraph points out, the language of Dig for Victory works because it suggests the possibility of the figures of the present becoming, or at least connecting to, the imagined figures of a national past.

This (re)turn to the thrifty way of life figured by wartime vegetable growing for inspiration has occurred alongside the rise of another kind of austerity. At the 2009 Conservative Party conference, party leader David Cameron's speech painted a clear distinction between Labour's 'age of irresponsibility' and the coming 'age of austerity', which would echo Britain's previous age of austerity.¹² Since then, austerity has come to signal a certain set of fiscal policies aimed at reducing national budget deficits, cultivating individual financial responsibility and a sense that 'we are all in this together'.¹³ One implication seems to be that the economic downturn will lead to a return to the kind of frugality and austerity Britain experienced during the Second World War, which is both a solution and a response to the financial crisis.¹⁴ When the Prime Minister's speech deploys the phrase, 'Your country needs you' as a rallying call for 'Big Society spirit', he is implicitly drawing on

a certain time in the nation's past.¹⁵ This kind of rhetoric relies on already-circulating common sense ideas about the Second World War in the long tradition of using self-consciously nationalist heritage and history to reinforce ideologically conservative positions.¹⁶

In Britain, then, certain dimensions of the wartime experience are mobilised within not just an environmentalist vision of local embeddedness and sustainability, but also within a conservative articulation of historic values that pose austerity and self-sufficiency as a solution to economic inequalities. Lingering behind both conservative and environmental discourse around austerity and growing your own vegetables is a singular narrative about Dig for Victory, and the Home Front in general, during the Second World War. This narrative celebrates the war as a time when the British people set aside personal and sectional interests to unite as they had never done before.¹⁷ This rose-tinted view of wartime solidarity champions voluntary austerity: when it came to food supplies, for example, everyone was willing to accept the imposition of rationing for the greater good.¹⁸ This singular narrative has tended to displace alternative accounts, to suppress difference in the name of an authentic 'many as one' vision of nationhood that seeks to impose 'meaning on the past, on the nation and its history'.¹⁹ The diversity of motivations, goals, interests, dissenting voices and practices within the history of the Home Front are pruned in favour of a neater narrative, such that contemporary references to Dig for Victory are based in a very narrow, fetishized kind of history. Only by forgetting aspects of Dig for Victory's past can it be effectively used to support certain present-day aims.

This paper is therefore prompted by the curious fact that both progressive environmentalists and conservative politicians have drawn on the history of Britain's wartime domestic gardening campaign. Recent revisionist histories have questioned the heroic Home Front narrative; I review this work and put Dig for Victory a wider historical context in the next section, before three subsequent sections address particular aspects of the wartime gardening campaign. However, my aim is not to de-bunk the singular narrative of wartime 'consensus' – for this popular 'myth' does describe well certain elements of the past. Nor is the aim to show how one present-day use of Dig for Victory is more accurate than another by holding up the mirror of historical reality, for present-day references to Dig for Victory operate through their affective appeal to imagined historical authenticity, and not through the provision of logical information about the past.²⁰ Nor is the article based on the idea that there are many interpretations of the same historical events, but instead on the

⁸ B. Webster and R. Gledhill, Dr Rowan Williams: 'Dig for victory over climate change and grow your own food', *The Times* (13 October 2009); L. Hickman, Dig for Victory, *Guardian* (30 August 2008).

⁹ Bramall, Dig for Victory (note 7), 68.

¹⁰ Bramall, Dig for Victory (note 7), 81; D. Crouch and G. Parker, Digging up utopia? Space, practice and land use heritage, *Geoforum* 34 (2003) 395–408.

¹¹ T. Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*, London, 2011.

¹² D. Cameron, *The Age of Austerity*, Speech to the Spring forum, Cheltenham, 26 April 2009; D. Kynaston, *Austerity Britain 1945–51*, London, 2007.

¹³ D. Cameron, *Together in the National Interest*, Speech to Conservative Party Conference, Birmingham, 6 October 2010.

¹⁴ D. Evans, Thrifty, green or frugal: reflections on sustainable consumption in a changing economic climate, *Geoforum* 42 (2011) 550–557.

¹⁵ Cameron, *Together in the National Interest* (note 13).

¹⁶ And a lengthy tradition of counter-criticism by polemicists like Patrick Wright, founded in the work of Raphael Samuel, Raymond Williams and the History Workshop.

¹⁷ The historical origins of this lie in Titmuss' seminal post-war history (R. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, London, 1950); see J. Harris, War and social history: Britain and the home front during the Second World War, in: G. Martell (Ed.), *The World War Two Reader*, London, 2004, 317–335.

¹⁸ L. Noakes, *War and the British: Gender, Memory and National Identity*, London, 1998, 3.

¹⁹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (note 1), 142; D. Bell, Mythscapes: memory, mythology and national identity, *British Journal of Sociology* 54 (2003) 63–81, 74.

²⁰ While there is a growing body of work within geography on historical affects (e.g. J. Lorimer and S. Whatmore, After the 'king of beasts': Samuel Baker and the embodied historical geographies of elephant hunting in mid-nineteenth-century Ceylon, *Journal of Historical Geography* 35 (2009) 668–689), or affect and landscape histories (e.g. C. DeSilvey, Salvage memory: constellating material histories on a hardscrabble homestead, *Cultural Geographies* 14 (2007) 401–424), there has been little empirical work on the affective force of historical narrative itself.

understanding that history is brought into being through its articulation, and that each articulation is inevitably different.²¹ The aim of this paper is therefore to broaden the range of histories associated with Dig for Victory, and by so doing show the specific ways in which present-day articulations are partial and selective.

Dig for Victory and the Home Front

At the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 Britain was importing 70% of its cheese and sugar, 80% of its fruit, 90% of its cereal and 50% of its meat. Overall, less than one-third of the nation's food requirements were grown in Britain.²² The government repeatedly emphasized that the war might be won or lost on food supplies; Lord Woolton declared that 'this is a Food War'.²³ One solution was to increase the efficiency of agriculture. Indeed, the war brought unprecedented modernisation and government control of the British agricultural sector, with subsidies to plough up pasture for cropping, targeted crop substitution, mechanisation, increased fertiliser use and state control over pricing and distribution, so that by 1944 over 6 million acres of pasture had been converted to arable land.²⁴ While to a large extent this represented the dawn of a national farming industry, recent work has drawn attention to the darker aspects of wartime agriculture, such as dispossession of farms, and more complex lived realities or resistance of farmers to national surveyors.²⁵

Wartime domestic food production should therefore be seen within the context of systematic government intervention in the agricultural sector. The Ministry of Agriculture launched a domestic food production campaign – Dig for Victory – in Autumn 1939, which, after a slow start, prompted a huge expansion in allotments, from 930,000 before the war to 1.7 million by 1943, and a growth in the number of private gardens with vegetables from three to five million.²⁶ Along with rationing, the domestic food campaign aimed to make up for the shortfall in food imports and free up space on merchant shipping for more important war supplies. By 1943 domestic vegetable production had increased to over six million tonnes per annum.²⁷ In section five I argue that such measurements are debatable, but this need not detract from noting here that the British certainly produced a lot more food in allotments and private gardens than they did before the war. Beyond such material gains,

growing vegetables was also seen as a way for families to display 'the highest form of citizenship' during the war.²⁸ In other words, Dig for Victory was apparently, along with Blitz spirit, rationing, women's work in factories or on the field and other wartime social changes, one way in which 'a new spirit of national co-operation emerged'.²⁹

However, much as Short et al. have argued that the British farming revolution was more complex than a simple success story, a whole range of work, beginning with Angus Calder's de-bunking of the myth of 'Blitz spirit' in *The People's War*, has begun to unpick the idea that the British population united in heroic self-sacrifice to defeat the Nazi threat.³⁰ For instance, there were a high number of strikes in key industries in the last three years of the war, the black market was prevalent, and there was popular resentment at government controls.³¹ In terms of gender, the war is now understood to have reinforced, rather than transformed, traditional hierarchies, in that although women had new roles the overall pattern of gender relations remained stable.³² And while rationing was broadly accepted as necessary, flagrant flouting of the rules by social elites who continued to dine in fine restaurants prompted considerable disapproval.³³ The overall thrust of revisionist history of the Second World War is that a singular narrative invoking a national 'consensus' fails to deal with the complexity of change or adequately account for a differentiated wartime experience.³⁴

It is clear that domestic gardeners produced a high volume of food to feed themselves and in doing so helped win the war, or at least eased pressure on shipping. The point of historical revision of the Home Front, Sonya Rose argues, is not to remove wholesale the idea of collective solidarity, but rather to show how unitary collective national identity was actually rather fragile.³⁵ In *Which People's War* Rose exposes how there was little agreement on what British citizenship meant, with fissures appearing along class, racial, regional and gender lines, even at a time characterised by an ethos of unity. Following this, the aim of this article is to unpack Dig for Victory, to explore its complexities and contradictions, and what other histories lie within or without the nationalist account of unitary self-sacrifice.

The article draws on several kinds of archival data. I analysed the minutes and papers of the Allotment and Garden Council (hereafter AGC), the Ministry of Agriculture body in charge of co-ordinating the wartime domestic food production campaign.³⁶ The AGC had a wide remit to stimulate, advise and fund local authorities on local

²¹ J. Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Chicago, 1995. There is a large literature on this post-structural understanding of history, particularly on archival authority and interpretation: J. Schwartz and T. Cook, Archives, records and power: from (postmodern) theory to (archival) performance, *Archival Science* 2 (2002) 171–185, remains a good early review, see also; A. Burton (Ed.), *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions and the Writing of History*, Durham, 2006; A. Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, Princeton, 2009; geographers have also been de-centring the 'national' archive (for a review see H. Lorimer, Caught in the nick of time, in: D. DeLyser, S. Herbert, S. Aitkin, M. Crang, L. McDowell (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Geography*, London, 2010, 248–273).

²² B. Short, C. Watkins, W. Foot and P. Kinsman, *The National Farm Survey 1941–1943: State Surveillance and the Countryside in England and Wales in the Second World War*, Oxford, 2000, 19.

²³ Woolton, Foreword, in: *The Vegetable Garden Displayed*, London, 1942, 1.

²⁴ Short, Watkins, Foot and Kinsman, *The National Farm Survey 1941–1943* (note 22).

²⁵ D. Harvey and M. Riley, 'Fighting from the fields': developing the British 'national farm' in the Second World War, *Journal of Historical Geography* 35 (2009) 45–516.

²⁶ R.S. Hudson, Address at the annual conference of the national allotments society, London, TNA MAF 45/9, 16th July 1943.

²⁷ Cabinet memorandum home food production, TNA CAB 66/32/43, 30 December 1942.

²⁸ Joint sub-committee of the publicity advisory committee and the domestic food producer's council, TNA MAF 43/50, 1940, 2.

²⁹ R. Porter, *London: A Social History*, London, 1994.

³⁰ Short, Watkins, Foot and Kinsman, *The National Farm Survey 1941–1943* (note 22); A. Calder, *The People's War*, London, 1969; A. Calder, *Myth of the Blitz*, London, 1991.

³¹ C. Barnett, *The Audit of War: The Illusion and Reality of Britain as a Great Nation*, London, 1986.

³² S. Gubar, This is my rifle, this is my gun: world war two and the blitz on women, in: M. Higonnet (Ed.), *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, New Haven, 1987, 227–259.

³³ J. Gardiner, *Wartime Britain 1939–1945*, London, 2004.

³⁴ Harris, War and social history (note 18).

³⁵ S. Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain 1939–1945*, Oxford, 2003.

³⁶ Originally titled The Domestic Food Producer's Council, the AGC included representatives from the Women's Institute, the Allotment's Society, the Royal Horticultural Society, Ministry of Food, the Board of Education, Society of Friends Allotments, Institute of Parks, National Council of Social Service, Townswomen's Guilds, Horticultural Education Associations, County Council Associations, Urban District Council Association and more. Most of the practical work issuing guidance and information, funding, fielding questions and providing information was devolved to a small Finance and General Purposes Committee, which met 8–10 times a year (see TNA MAF 43/43, 1941–1949).

campaigns, provide advisory literature and publicity materials. They co-ordinated the main delivery arm of the campaign, the Urban Horticultural Committees (County Garden Produce Committees in rural areas), which were comprised of local voluntary societies, often headed by the local parks superintendent. I also examined selected wartime reports and correspondence concerning Dig for Victory from the Ministry of Information. I also draw on research conducted by the Wartime Social Survey and Mass Observation. The Wartime Social Survey's mission was to 'provide a closer link between the administrator and administered than is normally possible' by keeping government abreast of public opinion and behaviour, using new market research techniques from the United States.³⁷ Mass Observation, the 'home anthropology' organisation founded in 1937 by Charles Madge, Humphrey Jennings and Tom Harrison, was on a monthly contract through the war to provide the Ministry of Information with qualitative information on the morale and behaviour of the population.³⁸

The rest of this article is divided into three sections, each addressing a distinct but related theme in the history of Dig for Victory. The first section argues that from the perspective of the government Dig for Victory can be seen as a failure, as their goal was to assert order and control over everyday life. The second section unpacks the 'we' of Dig for Victory, showing some of the gender and class-based fissures in the narrative of national solidarity. The final section considers the role of statistics in generating a positive view of the campaign. A conclusion reflects on how this revision might be important for present-day articulations of the Dig for Victory narrative.

Order and control

Dig for Victory seems to embody many of the central themes of organicist ideas about English nationalism.³⁹ The organicist movement brought together concerns with soil, labour, fertility, craft and landscape in a conservative vision of Englishness. Key figures of the movement, such as H.J. Massingham, argued that the earth was the key element in a down-to-earth materialism.⁴⁰ In this view of England, an 'organic relationship to land is presented as dependent on and necessary for an organic social order'.⁴¹ During wartime tropes of 'Deep England', the cherished countryside, the organic, democratic roots of the nation, were often contrasted to a machine-like, drone-like existence under fascism.⁴² For example, the Minister of Agriculture felt that, 'there is deep down in each one of us an instinctive love of the soil which now that it has been

allowed to grow will go on growing with increasing vigour'.⁴³ Wartime propaganda often drew not on political ideals, but instead on constructions of a mythical England, particularly tangible practices and emblems visible in everyday life:

The negative horror at the idea of German rule must be supplemented by pride in our own country. Patriotic appeals have lost some of their force; but even so, the simpler forms of patriotism have not been used enough in this war. Too much stress has been laid on abstractions like Liberty and Democracy, not enough on the things that people can see and hear – flags, brass bands, marching soldiers, the countryside, the home and garden.⁴⁴

Through Dig for Victory gardening was imbued with national significance. The garden, a place where craft, soil and blood mingled, was doubly inscribed not only as a place *from which* the war might be won, but also as a *reason why* the war should be won. Wartime agriculture offered an opportunity to widen the vision of organic Englishness through the craft and bodily labour of all.

However, the English organicist movement had a narrow vision rooted in extreme right-wing politics, a history the present-day environmental organic movement has been keen to forget.⁴⁵ David Matless's work on English identity has shown that the events of the Second World War were usually understood through a 'planner-preservationist Englishness' opposed to organicist ideals, prioritising instead a fine balance between order and preservation, with expertise allying tradition and modernity.⁴⁶ The war saw new landscapes of planned order extend into the agricultural sector, achieved in large part through the direction of local farming practices by War Agricultural Committees and up through a chain of command ending in Whitehall.⁴⁷ As order extended into the newly efficient agricultural industry, Matless argues, the previous organic and 'traditional' methods, or what he calls 'muddling agrarianism', migrated to the urban allotment and garden.⁴⁸ So Dig for Victory, at first glance, embodies certain ideas about organic England, which had begun to be displaced from the countryside by a modernising agricultural sector.

This is not the whole story, however. While Dig for Victory may have contained plenty of 'muddling agrarianism', the government's aims were quite different, and I will now argue that the campaign should also be seen as a failure of government to extend order into the domestic sphere. The campaign's objective was not, as is commonly assumed, to grow more vegetables, but was rather to ensure 'orderly cropping and year-round supply' and to enable

³⁷ K. Box and G. Thomas, The wartime social survey, *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 107 (1944) 151–189, 177. Beginning as an academic programme at the University of London, the WSS was absorbed into the Ministry of Information in 1941, prompting its staff to resign in protest at their loss of autonomy. WSS continued under government direction, and at its peak in 1944 employed 55 field operatives, all women, a clerical staff of 35, had a budget of £40,000, and had conducted 101 surveys and 290,000 interviews (see Report on history, functions and administration of Home Intelligence Division, TNA INF 1/263, 1944).

³⁸ Re-organisation of the Home Intelligence Division, TNA INF 1/101, 1940–1945. The role of Mass Observation was controversial in many quarters: Churchill believed he could get all the information he needed on public morale by reading the papers; newspapers accused the government of 'snooping'; and many within the MOI disputed the relevance of 'hearsay' and subjective opinion (I. McLaine, *Ministry of Morale: Home Front Morale and the Ministry of Information in World War II*, London, 1979). As Highmore notes, 'Continually weaving between a truly surreal anthropology at home, and the more banal and often oppressive practices of market research and governmental census, Mass Observation sticks out as an awkward moment in the study of everyday culture' (B. Highmore (Ed.), *The Everyday Life Reader*, London, 2002, 146). See also M. Toogood, Modern observations: new ornithology and the science of ourselves, 1920–1940, *Journal of Historical Geography* 37 (2011) 348–357.

³⁹ D. Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, London, 1998.

⁴⁰ R. Moore-Colyer, Back to basics: Rolf Gardiner, H. J. Massingham and 'a kinship in husbandry', *Rural History* 12 (2001) 85–108.

⁴¹ Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (note 39), 15.

⁴² See J. Short, *Imagined Country: Society, Culture and Environment*, London, 1991.

⁴³ Hudson, Address at the annual conference of the national allotments society (note 26).

⁴⁴ Report of planning committee on a home morale campaign. Meetings and reports of home morale emergency committee, TNA INF 1/250, 1940, 1.

⁴⁵ M. Reed, Fight the future! How the contemporary organic campaigns have arisen from their composting of the past, *Sociologia Ruralis* 41 (2001) 131–145; G. McKay, *Radical Gardening: Politics, Idealism and Rebellion in the Garden*, London, 2011.

⁴⁶ Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (note 39), 173.

⁴⁷ J. Murdoch and N. Ward, Governmentality and territoriality – the statistical manufacture of Britain's 'national farm', *Political Geography* 16 (1997) 307–324.

⁴⁸ Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (note 39), 179.

people to avoid inefficient planting.⁴⁹ In other words, the government's vision of the campaign was not simply organic, but one of rational planning. At the heart of the government's conceptualisation of the Dig for Victory campaign was the assumption that the masses were uneducated, inexperienced gardeners who would struggle without a firm guiding hand. This meant that Dig for Victory propaganda stressed not simply the need to grow vegetables, but 'the imperative to grow vegetables of the *right kind*'.⁵⁰ Choosing the 'right kind' of vegetables was not to be left to the dangerous vagaries of personal choice, but should be informed by sound technical knowledge. Horticultural Advisors to the Ministry of Agriculture warned that while 'one could ignore the teachings of the nutritional experts and include celery, asparagus, cauliflowers etc merely because we liked them', the vast majority of gardeners would wish to avoid this kind of 'haphazard planting' and 'arrange the cropping so as to produce a steady stream of vegetables for the kitchen every month of the year'.⁵¹ The government was not aiming for some anarchic free-for-all, but a planned and orderly supply all through the year via the application of the best scientific knowledge of the day.

To direct people's production the AGC convened a panel of experts to devise a universal cropping plan that would apply across the country, Growmore Leaflet no.1 (Fig. 1). This document took many meetings, reams of correspondence and hard-fought compromise to produce, as experts debated the relative merits of peas, root vegetables and soft fruits. This quotation illustrates the level of detail of their conversations:

In section A also it was decided that spinach should be replaced by spinach beet sown in the Spring. The true spinach should be inter-planted in Section B. A suggestion made by Sub-committee 3 at the meeting on 14 July that the crops of peas, broad beans, etc, should be increased to occupy at least one-tenth of the area of the allotment was discussed and it was decided that peas should be increased to four rows.⁵²

Some wanted nutritional values for each crop, others wanted crops grouped by type, no one could agree on the importance of manure. In the end, the first Growmore Leaflet was riddled with misprints, such as recommending three inches instead of three feet for spacing marrows.⁵³ It was also badly timed, coming out in the depths of winter 1939, when there was little gardeners could do except a few basic preparations.

The Wartime Social Survey's detailed evaluation of Dig for Victory suggests that these leaflets and the exhaustive committee work behind them were of more use in occupying civil servants and committee members than in guiding people's gardening practice.⁵⁴ Although about 40% of gardeners had seen the Ministry's cropping

plan, only 10% used it to guide their cropping. Instead of relying on committees of government or horticultural experts, people mostly relied firstly on notes in newspapers, other gardeners and radio (cited by 70% of respondents), the most popular show being Mr Middleton's *In your garden*.⁵⁵ Middleton, one of four sons of a farm bailiff, was a gardener and horticulturalist and was selected by producer John Green to present the BBC's first gardening programme. Green had been hired to redress the apparent left-wing bias of the BBC's producers, and designed a safe, comforting garden show for the suburban masses.⁵⁶ Middleton's weekly broadcast began at 12:15 pm, just before Sunday lunch, was down-to-earth, thoroughly practical, and reached an audience of 3.5 million with virtuous statements like, 'when you proudly carry home your first basket of broad beans and spring carrots you'll feel like a little hero'.⁵⁷ The direct use of government advice was, therefore, marginal. Indeed, only 34% of gardeners actually named Dig for Victory when asked what government publicity they had seen.⁵⁸

Overall, the Wartime Social Survey concluded that the government's mission of 'ensuring orderly cropping' was unfulfilled.⁵⁹ After cataloguing how few people (less than 10%) used the cropping plan as their main guide, the report concluded that 'there remains a very considerable amount to be done before the Ministry of Agriculture really has gardening habits in this country under anything like complete control'.⁶⁰ This goal – of 'controlling' gardening habits – reveals how the government understood Dig for Victory, not simply as being about organic craft but requiring expert direction. It suggests that the government's will to break down lay knowledges and replace them with an efficient, national production did not end with mass agriculture, but also encompassed domestic food production.

The evidence suggests, however, that this goal was unfulfilled and also exposes certain tensions within the government's project to extend order to the domestic sphere. One such tension was particularly evident when it came to what the AGC called the 'surplus problem'. Simply put, the government believed that without orderly planning, families would produce a glut of vegetables in the summer, and be left with nothing for winter. In Parliament, the Minister of Agriculture reminded the House that he had 'not encouraged the small grower and allotment holder to grow the maximum yield of vegetables in-discriminately' because this irresponsible policy would have led to 'production of a large inconsumable surplus of summer vegetables of the perishable type'.⁶¹ Instead, he said, the policy was that 'any production surplus to the grower's own requirements is of non-perishable vegetables which can be stored for use during the winter months'.⁶² Government advice for food surplus to requirements was preservation (through pickling, jams, storing non-perishables like onions) for personal consumption. This emphasis on avoiding surplus

⁴⁹ AGC sub-committee, Proposals for cropping in war-time, TNA MAF 43/63, 1939, 1.

⁵⁰ Memo from A.C. Sparks, Private Secretary, AGC minutes of meetings and papers, TNA MAF 43/52, 1941, 1, emphasis added.

⁵¹ Allotments and gardens sub-committee: proposals for cropping in wartime, TNA MAF 43/63, 1930–40, 1.

⁵² Horticultural advisory council, allotment and gardens sub-committee minutes, TNA MAF 43/63, 31 July 1939, 2.

⁵³ Gardiner, *Wartime Britain 1939–1945* (note 33).

⁵⁴ Wartime Social Survey No.20, *Dig for Victory: A Study of the Impact of the Campaign to Encourage Vegetable Growing in Gardens and Allotments for the Ministry of Agriculture* (hereafter WSS, 1942), TNA RG 23/26, 1942, 51. The Dig for Victory survey included a questionnaire to 3000 gardeners and allotment holders (1300 allotmenters, 1300 gardeners, 400 both) and interviews with a smaller sample.

⁵⁵ WSS, 1942 (note 54).

⁵⁶ A. Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*, Oxford, 1995; S. Nichols, *The Echo of War: Home Front Propaganda and the Wartime BBC, 1939–45*, Manchester, 1996.

⁵⁷ C. Middleton, *War Time Allotments*, London, 1940, 12.

⁵⁸ WSS, 1942 (note 54).

⁵⁹ WSS, 1942 (note 54); the phrase 'orderly cropping' appears regularly in AGC minutes and Ministerial speeches, TNA MAF 43/41.

⁶⁰ WSS, 1942 (note 54), 56.

⁶¹ Question to Hudson, Minister of Agriculture, on surplus food, AGC minutes of meetings and papers, TNA MAF 43/52, 1940–1941, 1.

⁶² Question to Hudson, Minister of Agriculture, on surplus food, AGC minutes of meetings and papers, TNA MAF 43/52, 1940–1941, 1.

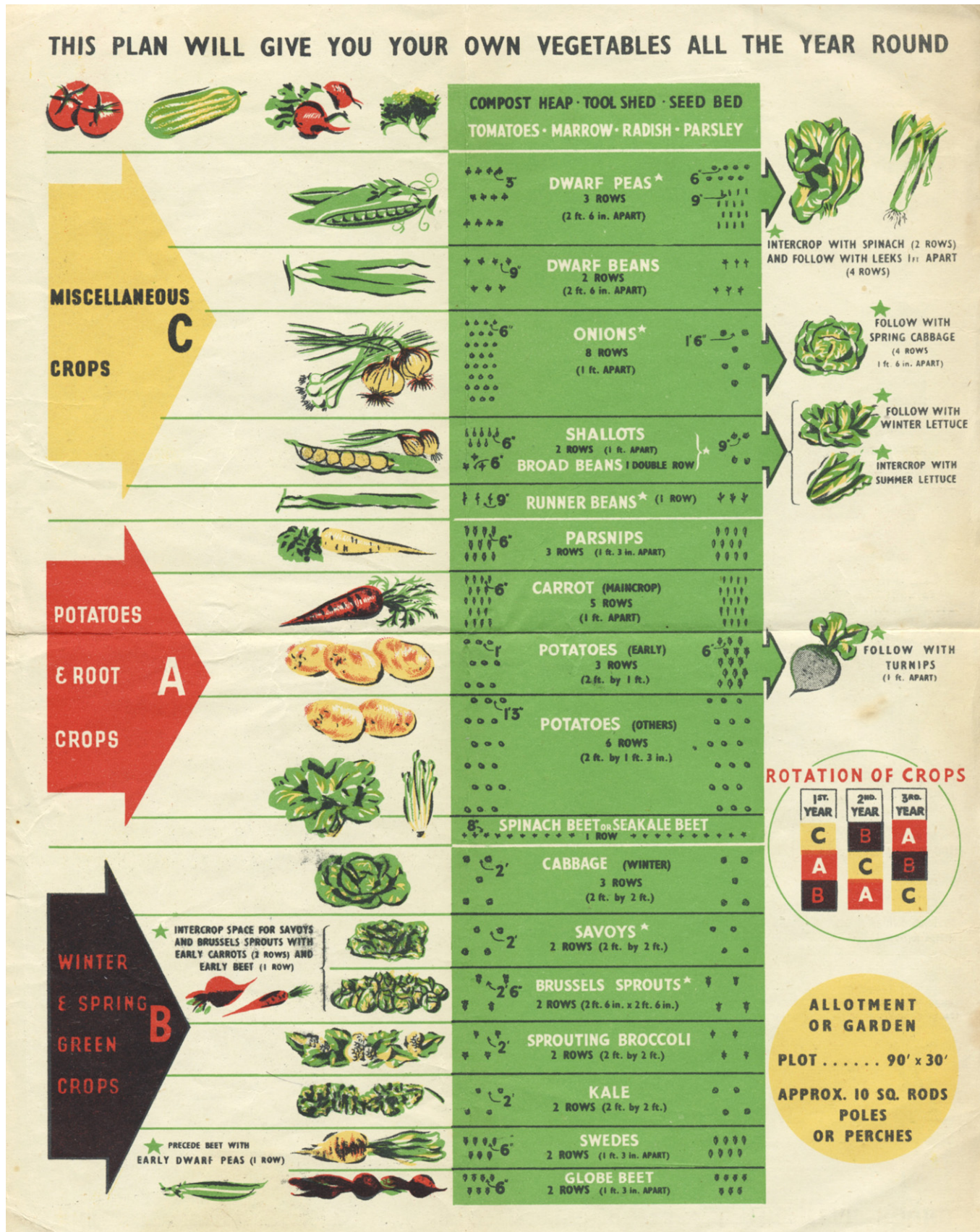


Fig. 1. Government cropping plan, *Grow for Winter as well as Summer: Dig for Victory Leaflet no.1*, London, 1940, 2–3, Crown Copyright, Imperial War Museum.

production reflected the Ministry of Agriculture's fear that a domestic oversupply would unbalance their central planning of the agriculture industry; for example, in 1941 there was an adequate commercial supply of potatoes, so the government launched a campaign to get people to grow more 'other vegetables'.⁶³ In addition, due to the commercial pressures of wartime, the poultry industry was not entirely supportive of efforts to encourage more backyard chicken rearing, and the AGC concluded that 'it is very probable therefore that any concerted and organised effort by, or sponsored by, the Government at the present time would still further exacerbate the poultry industry and give rise to much indignation'.⁶⁴ Many of the more left-leaning members of the Council in charge of co-ordinating Dig for Victory pressed for more communal gardening, suggesting greater co-ordination of the consumption of garden produce and going so far as to encourage people to grow a surplus, proposing that local garden clubs should have explicit aims to make each district self-sufficient in vegetables.⁶⁵ The Ministry remained adamant, however, that individual consumption was the preferred approach.⁶⁶ The so-called 'surplus problem' showed the limits to collective action: the government's solution was to ensure that through orderly cropping families supplied themselves, but that no glut flooded local markets in summer, or that poor planning led to a winter shortfall, or that local networks of informal trade evolved. The problem was that a really successful gardener could create disorder by growing more than they needed for their own family, thereby subverting the centrality of the family unit to food supply: for the government, too much 'muddling agrarianism' endangered their wider agricultural objectives.

When it came to private gardens, as opposed to production on allotments, a rather delicate line had to be taken by the wartime campaign, one that emphasised the collective nature of the campaign without sanctioning communal gardening, due to ideological commitments to family and bounded domestic space. The AGC discussed the perennial problem of gardens that were uncultivated, neglected or abandoned as their owners moved to the countryside. Such gardens were problematic: they exposed the weakness of government; they fostered resentment among those who were undertaking cultivation; they put the ideal of private property into direct conflict with the national good. The AGC agreed that growing vegetables in unused properties was desirable in principle.⁶⁷ They argued, however, that the legal barriers to getting local authorities to assess or manage the patchwork of under-used gardens were insurmountable, and that furthermore there would be no way to ensure that those who took over uncultivated gardens would not be liable for rates – if the property was rateable, then the law had to be applied.⁶⁸ These difficulties meant there was no real government sanction for cultivating neglected private gardens. Instead, the government merely advised that people who strongly desired to use untended private gardens should only grow perishable vegetables, lest they become embroiled in arguments about who owned the produce or was liable to pay rent when the owners returned. While in rhetoric and propaganda tropes of 'togetherness' and national collective action were stressed, in practice limits were set by the spatial boundary of private property and the norm of the family unit. People may have been digging for victory, but this was

not to be done by diluting the importance of family-based, private property boundaries. For the government, the scalar logic of the Dig for Victory was one of national order built on orderly, family-based supply. Intermediate-scale local or regional informal economies of production and consumption were discouraged, and individual taste and preference in vegetables were to be subsumed within national guidance for planned, year-round supply.

Does this mean, then, that Dig for Victory as a whole was a failure? Clearly not, as people did garden and more land was brought under cultivation, but did so in a way that did not simply replicate government desires or instructions. The idea that Dig for Victory represents spontaneous, citizen-led action is therefore far from mythical – people did dig – but this interpretation persists only because of the failure of government wartime aims. From the government's perspective there was continuity between attempts to extend national management on to the farm and order into the domestic food production campaign. The government's idea of Dig for Victory was not rooted in ideas of an organic England alone; people were exhorted to work with the soil, but to do so in an orderly, modern and efficient way. Furthermore, individual tastes and surplus supplies were to be curtailed in the interest of orderly national supply. There was, however, a tension between this project to order domestic production and the simultaneous affirmation of hegemonic ideals of private domestic space. This tension thwarted government ambitions, as shown by the WSS's conclusion that the government was failing to bring gardening habits 'under anything like complete control'.⁶⁹

Who digs?

If the historical narrative of Dig for Victory works today by connecting us to the 'rhetorical figures of a national past', then one task is to unpack how the figure of the wartime gardener has been defined. Accordingly, this section unravels the gender and class distinctions elided within Dig for Victory and considers the role of patriotism. Here is a typical Ministry of Agriculture assessment of the benefits that accrued to the Victory gardener.

He is generally better in spirit because cultivating his plot took his mind off the burdens of office or workshop; he has benefited his family by providing fresh vegetables that kept them fit and incidentally helped his wife in trying to make ends meet and avoid queues; he and his fellow 'Victory Diggers' benefited their country by contributing in every year a substantial and indispensable quantity of food to the national larder, without which the nation might well have had to go short.⁷⁰

The Victory Digger was a paragon of enlightened, patriotic self-interest, but was also – as the quotation demonstrates – definitely a male figure. While popular histories of the Second World War noted the emancipatory possibilities of new female roles, from assembling munitions, to manning anti-aircraft guns, to working in agriculture as part of the Land Army, revisionist histories have stressed that despite these new opportunities for women, established gender relations remained largely intact. Novel female jobs were regarded as temporary, and seen as at risk of encroaching on

⁶³ Letter from Dutton to Mares, TNA MAF 38/172, 1942.

⁶⁴ Briefing on backyard poultry, TNA MAF 43/48, 1941, 1.

⁶⁵ Miss Talbot, Garden owners and food production paper twelve, AGC minutes of meetings and papers, TNA MAF 43/52, 1940.

⁶⁶ Minutes of joint sub-committee of the publicity advisory committee and the domestic food producer's council, TNA MAF 43/50, 5 September 1940.

⁶⁷ AGC minutes, TNA MAF 43/50, 19 September 1942.

⁶⁸ Extract from minute sheet, AGC minutes of meetings and papers, TNA MAF 43/52, WTA 1010, 5 August 1940.

⁶⁹ WSS, 1942 (note 54), 51.

⁷⁰ Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, *Agricultural Statistics, 1939–1944: England and Wales*, London, 1948, 2.

male prerogatives.⁷¹ Government publicity drew on a rather narrow range of gender stereotypes, notably on the woman as domestic provider, or vulnerable non-combatants, or sexual predators (spreading sexually transmitted infections, for example).⁷²

When it came to gardening, traditional gender roles were highly durable and the pre-war norm of masculine control persisted. In the inter-war years, enabled by the Tudor Walters Report's emphasis on garden suburb design and a suburban expansion of some four million new homes, gardening became a mass leisure pursuit.⁷³ Gardening allowed people, usually men, to socialise over the fence, through informal barter economies in seeds and tools, or gardening clubs; the nine-volume *New Survey of London Life*, published between 1930 and 1935, consistently reported gardening clubs as the most common form of collective leisure, much celebrated by social improvers as forming bonds of community and good citizenship.⁷⁴ Wartime gardening advice of the day assumed that gardening was 'man's work' and certain parts of the garden – the borders, the vegetable patch, the shed – were men's territory, where women and children seldom entered.⁷⁵ Handbooks advised the gardener to avoid 'ladies' tools, which were for 'useless dabbling' not real work, while garden writer A.J. Macself complained that the housewife, in her search for flowers for the interior, was likely to cut and snip where she should not: to which Macself's solution was to plant a small patch of flowering annuals for the housewife where she could crop without risk of damaging important plants.⁷⁶ Women and children certainly gardened, and the Ministry of Agriculture appealed directly to women and children to get involved in growing vegetables, but the expertise and direction was supposed to come from men.⁷⁷ For example, the short film 'Dig for Victory', a didactic primer on how to double dig a lawn and how to plant, hoe and harvest, opens with a series of bucolic images of children, young men, old men and women all gardening.⁷⁸ After showcasing just how many different kinds of people are gardening, the film then exhorts us to 'learn how to do a good job' by watching an 'old hand' teach us how to perform common garden tasks. This 'old hand' then works with a woman – the film does not disclose the nature of their relationship – and directs her labour through the remaining 3 min of the film.⁷⁹ Similarly, an iconic Dig for Victory poster features a background of children and the exhortation to grow your own 'for their sake' (Fig. 2). We can assume that, as with other Dig for Victory posters, this foot belongs to a man, and so works off traditional gender norms of the father as provider. Indeed, Fig. 2 works to reinforce gender relations, and works to cast war as being about 'men's need to protect and defend women and families'.⁸⁰ Overall, then, Dig for Victory campaign legitimated masculine control over the garden and ensured norms of patriarchy were reproduced through the practices of domestic gardening.

Considering how propaganda posters, like Fig. 2, were received at the time reveals some of the class contours of Dig for Victory. One



Fig. 2. Dig for Victory: for their sake grow your own vegetables, Crown Copyright, Imperial War Museum.

of the key tools of Mass Observation was watching people's behaviour in public places, often noting down what was being said (they called these 'overheard conversations') as well as more formal interviewing. According to their research only about 5% of people actually looked at posters when they walked past them. Statements about these propaganda posters included the disinterested: 'I can't say I know. I haven't seen one for a long time. I don't know. I've not noticed what they say'; as well as the more dismissive, 'Those? Bugger them. And the rotten government responsible for them. What do you think of them then?'.⁸¹ Although 60% of people

⁷¹ M. Higonnet (Ed.), *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, New Haven, 1987.

⁷² Gubar, This is my rifle, this is my gun (note 32).

⁷³ S. Constantine, Amateur gardening and popular recreation in the 19th and 20th centuries, *Journal of Social History* 14 (1981) 387–406.

⁷⁴ S. Alexander, A new civilization? London surveyed 1928–1940s, *History Workshop Journal* 64 (2007) 296–320; D. Bayliss, Building better communities: social life on London's cottage council estates, 1919–1939, *Journal of Historical Geography* 29 (2003) 376–395; A. Olechnowicz, *Working-class Housing in England Between the Wars*, Oxford, 1997.

⁷⁵ L. Taylor, *A Taste for Gardening: Classed and Gendered Practices*, Aldershot, 2008.

⁷⁶ A.J. Macself, *The Women's Treasury for Home and Garden*, London: Amateur Gardening Offices, 1936.

⁷⁷ Mr Hudson launches third dig for victory campaign: appeals to women to dig, Agriculture briefs and speeches, TNA MAF 45/9, 29 September 1941.

⁷⁸ 'Dig for Victory', Ministry of Information, 7 minutes, 1942.

⁷⁹ Cinema attendance stayed high during the war, particularly among lower income groups, averaging between 19 and 30 million visits per week. During WWII the Ministry of Information commissioned over 1887 films; this included 87 short films giving gardening advice (see H. Waley, British documentaries and the war effort, *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 6 (1942) 604–609).

⁸⁰ Higonnet, *Behind the Lines* (note 71), 5; see Crouch and Parker, Digging up utopia (note 10), on the contemporary re-figuration of this poster.

⁸¹ Responses from working-class male, 45 and working-class male, 25, Report on government exhibitions, Mass Observation Archive (hereafter MOA) TC43/5, University of Sussex, 1941.

approved of the posters when prompted, 25% did not care and 15% disapproved, with higher rates of disapproval among the working classes.⁸² These surveys, while inconclusive, suggest that just as the government failed to extend order and control into domestic gardening, exhortations to 'dig for victory' were not received by a passive or always receptive public.

A Mass Observation assessment of government exhibitions – on many topics, from morale to gas masks, to food and gardening – was damning.⁸³ One gardening display entitled *New life to the land* in North London received only six visitors in one day. The researcher asked a 60-year-old working-class woman if she had considered visiting the display, which was in the local museum. She replied, 'What, go in there? I wouldn't like to. Not the likes of us'.⁸⁴ Mass Observation concluded that exhibitions were a failure because they were designed by 'a small select class of "intelligentsia" who were out of touch with popular taste and ill-equipped to express mass aspirations'.⁸⁵ One such group was the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS), which drew up a list of voluntary advisors to assist local horticultural organisations by giving lectures, running advice bureaux or helping with exhibition and demonstration allotments. Lectures were usually unsuccessful (being cited by only 0.5% of gardeners as a useful source of information) due to the upper-class membership of the RHS and their difficulty in securing large audiences.⁸⁶ In many ways this reflected the class dimensions of government. In his seminal history of wartime propaganda, McLaine argues that, for the first half of the war at least, the government's propaganda efforts were unnecessary and rather inept, based on distrust and lack of understanding of the public, problems which 'were products of the class and background of the propagandists themselves'.⁸⁷ The point here is that the government's propaganda efforts, based on certain assumptions about the need for guidance and leadership of a needy citizenry, did not really drive changes in people's gardening practices.

The WSS sheds further light on the question of people's motivations for gardening during wartime. Their survey of gardeners found that for the majority (51%) the main motivation was 'to get fresh food for the family'. 'Helping in the war effort' (15%) and 'because it was cheaper' (14%) came next.⁸⁸ 59% of survey respondents said there were no drawbacks to growing more vegetables, with lack of time (9%), too much hard work (9%) and not wanting to spoil the flower beds (5%) the only cited difficulties.⁸⁹ In addition, the survey offered evidence that 'the patriotic reason of helping in the war effort was more important in the two clerical groups and ... least important in the skilled manual group'.⁹⁰ This data reveals a much broader set of motivations than straightforward patriotic sentiment. It seems to suggest that while propaganda provided a patriotic overlay, people were undemonstrative and unconcerned to make explicit links between their own practice and their wider contribution to the nation. As Bhabha argues, there is always a gap between the ideal image of the national citizen and the actual playing out of nationalism in the lives of citizens.⁹¹ Thus the

Table 1

Class and wartime vegetable cultivation

Amount of vegetables grown	Unskilled manual	Skilled manual	Unskilled clerical	Skilled clerical
Same as before war (%)	53	43	39	32
More than before war (%)	47	57	61	68 ^a

^a Source: Wartime Social Survey, Dig for Victory: a study of the impact of the campaign to encourage vegetable growing in gardens and allotments, for the Ministry of Agriculture, TNA RG 23/26, 1942.

nationalist function of Dig for Victory lay in the gap between the ideal type of a heroic, patriotically-motivated Digger for Victory and people's need to grow vegetables for more mundane, inward-looking reasons.

The foregoing paragraphs may seem to suggest that Dig for Victory was based in an autonomous citizenry ready to 'do their bit' without government support or invitation. However, not everyone participated equally: there were class differences in the capacity and volume of vegetable growing during the war. Table 1 shows that most gardeners were growing more vegetables in 1941 than they were before the war. The survey from which this data was drawn also revealed that the higher the class, the more likely the person would be to cultivate, though this was influenced by the likelihood of owning a garden. Table 1 also records that just over half of unskilled manual gardeners were growing the same proportion of vegetables as they were before the war, compared to 32% of skilled clerical gardeners. The implication here is that working-class gardeners were already used to digging for their families due to economic necessity. This conclusion was explicitly reached by the Ministry of Information in 1943, when a Home Intelligence report concluded that some of the economies being suggested by the government's food campaign 'are regarded as "piffling" by working-class women, on whom such forms of thrift have long been imposed by necessity'.⁹² The survey also showed that vegetables were grown exclusively more by lower classes, and lower class gardens regularly featured a higher area given over to vegetables than flowers. In other words, there was less capacity among working-class families for more gardening and greater thrift than there was among the middle classes. Finally, there were also those who refused to follow the line of responsible national solidarity. The Ministry of Agriculture continually discussed problem behaviours: people leaving their gardens untended; persistent low-levels of theft; recurring vandalism and its impact on morale. Although the *Cultivation of Lands (Allotment) Order 1939* enabled local authorities to compel large land owners to provide land for allotments, and the government imposed draconian sanctions on farmers refusing to comply with the 'Plough up' campaign, there was no government sanction on 'everyday' citizens failing to comply with Dig for Victory. However, trespassing laws were tightened and magistrates were urged to inflict severe sentences on those stealing from allotments and gardens, while Defence

⁸² MOA, Report on government exhibitions (note 81).

⁸³ MOA, Report on government exhibitions (note 81).

⁸⁴ MOA, Report on government exhibitions (note 81), 7.

⁸⁵ MOA, Report on government exhibitions (note 81), 1.

⁸⁶ WSS, 1942 (note 54); Minutes of 15th meeting, Joint sub-committee of the publicity advisory committee and the domestic food producer's council, TNA MAF 43/50, 8th May 1940.

⁸⁷ McLaine, *Ministry of Morale* (note 38), 10.

⁸⁸ WSS, 1942 (note 54).

⁸⁹ In another piece of research, one Mass Observation respondent wrote that he had dug up half of his lawn to grow vegetables 'partly under the influence of the government campaign, partly for fear of the future price of food, but mostly to give me an outdoor interest, now that I am debarred from motoring' (MOA TC43/5, FR116, 17 May 1940, 160).

⁹⁰ WSS, 1942 (note 54), 20.

⁹¹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (note 1).

⁹² Cited in Gardiner, *Wartime Britain 1939–1945* (note 33), 160.

Regulation 62AA allowed local authorities to prosecute owners of disruptive dogs (a problem exacerbated by the wartime shortage of material for fencing).⁹³ The very need for this legislation suggests that not everyone was equally ready to participate in Dig for Victory.

The figure of the Digger for Victory, then, was rather more fractured than 'he' may at first appear. Following revisionist work on the Home Front, this section has shown how the domestic food production campaign reinforced many of the normative gender assumptions of pre-war gardening, with women's and children's labour firmly under male control. Just as the government failed in its mission to extend order and control into the domestic agricultural sphere, its propaganda efforts failed to direct people's gardening practices, with people motivated not simply by appeals to national solidarity, but by getting tastier food, avoiding long queues, and feeding their immediate family.

A technology of trust

In her popular *Little History of British Gardening* Jenny Uglow reports that in 1944 British gardeners produced three million tonnes of food; in 1943, according to the Imperial War Museum, British gardeners produced two million tonnes of food.⁹⁴ These figures, which vary but do feature in most descriptions of Dig for Victory, are deployed to convince the reader that there were significant actual, quantifiable changes in practice and production during the Second World War. Undoubtedly people did indeed grow more vegetables during the war, but there is much more going on than the neat, linear increase represented in Fig. 3 (which is based on original data). This section argues that the purpose of statistics on domestic food production was not to quantify the extent of vegetable cultivation, but rather to bolster morale and foster belief in the Dig for Victory narrative. These statistics were not an objective output of the government visualising reality, but are more properly understood as one of a set of techniques in circulation that sought to shape people's conduct.⁹⁵ The numbers are, in Theodore Porter's words, a 'technology of trust', a way for the government of the day to demonstrate objective reasons for why people should endorse their leadership and management of the Dig for Victory campaign.⁹⁶

Again, this can be situated within government's wider goals for national agriculture. Concerns over Britain's wartime food security and the desire to modernise the agricultural sector led to the National Farm Survey in 1940. This survey was to be a 'second Domesday book', a monumental catalogue of the productivity of the British land.⁹⁷ The Survey captured detailed farm-by-farm information on crops, livestock, infrastructure and an assessment of the farm's quality. Farms were classified as being of A, B or C class: farms of class C, some 5%, were at risk of forfeiture if not brought up to national standard.⁹⁸ Murdoch and Ward showed that

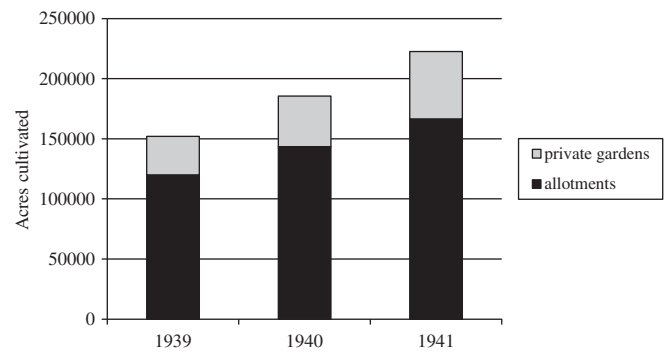


Fig. 3. Production on allotments and private gardens, England and Wales, 1939–41. Source data: Letter to A. Carrington, Ministry of Food, TNA MAF 38/171, 1942.

the National Farm Survey was a key instrument in bringing together a huge diversity of practices and lived realities under the idea of a 'national' farm, allowing the state to visualise this sector statistically for the first time.⁹⁹ The Ministry of Agriculture had precise figures on vegetable crops being grown commercially (in 1944 for example farmers grew 37,440 acres of Brussels sprouts, 42,849 acres of cabbages and kale, 229 acres of tomatoes) and wanted a similar statistical picture for domestic production, so that knowledge about the geographical spread of production and the types of vegetables being grown could improve their planning and forecasting; in other words, evidence that they were successfully ordering domestic production.¹⁰⁰

Gathering statistics for production levels in domestic gardening was extremely difficult.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, the Allotment and Garden Council had to produce some kind of figure. To do so, they firstly estimated how many homes in England and Wales had gardens, for which they 'tentatively adopted a figure of five million gardens in England and Wales'.¹⁰² This baseline of five million gardens is low: over four million new suburban homes had been built between the wars, in addition to the existing stock of houses with gardens.¹⁰³ For their 1942 report, the Allotment and Garden Council increased the baseline to 5.5 million gardens; their reasons were entirely arbitrary, indeed no supporting evidence or data was offered to justify the addition of 500,000 new gardens.¹⁰⁴ The 1943 report estimated that the area of private gardens under vegetable gardens had grown to 150,000 acres. A subsequent discussion in the Ministry concluded that 'this was felt to be "too high" and the total was simply reduced to 100,000 acres', and that there was no existing evidence for why the pre-war figure of 50,000 acres was chosen.¹⁰⁵ Calculations of the area of domestic cultivation were, therefore, conjectural. Data for allotments was similarly manipulated. The 1940 national survey revealed an increase of about 26% of total area under allotment cultivation in urban areas.¹⁰⁶ The 1941 survey

⁹³ Harris, War and social history (note 18).

⁹⁴ J. Uglow, *A Little History of British Gardening*, London, 2005; Imperial War Museum, www.imperialwarmuseum.org.uk (accessed January 2010); no sources are cited for their figures.

⁹⁵ On statistics and governmentality see T. Porter, *Trust in Number: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life*, Princeton, 1995.

⁹⁶ T. Porter, Making things quantitative, *Science in Context* 7 (1995) 389–407.

⁹⁷ B. Short and C. Watkins, The national farm survey of England and Wales, *Area* 23 (1994) 288–293.

⁹⁸ Short, Watkins, Foot and Kinsman, *The National Farm Survey 1941–1943* (note 22).

⁹⁹ Murdoch and Ward, Governmentality and territoriality (note 47).

¹⁰⁰ Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, *Agricultural Statistics, 1939–1944* (note 70).

¹⁰¹ Allotments and private gardens, estimated acreage and production, TNA MAF 38/171, 1941.

¹⁰² Extract from minutes, allotments and private gardens, TNA MAF 38/171, SSY2581, 24 April 1941.

¹⁰³ J. Whitehand and C. Carr, *Twentieth-century Suburbs: A Morphological Approach*, London, 2001.

¹⁰⁴ Circular revised estimates, allotments and private gardens estimated acreage and production 1936–1942, recalculated, TNA MAF 38/173, 1942.

¹⁰⁵ A. Cookman, Minute sheet, allotments and gardens: acreage and production 1944–1961, TNA MAF 266/56, SSY3798, 5 April 1949.

¹⁰⁶ Domestic food producer's council, TNA MAF 43/51, 23 June 1940.

Table 2
Garden acreage and vegetable cultivation, 1939–1942

Gardens		1939	1940	1941	1942
Urban	Growing vegetables (%)	33	44	50	75
	Average plot size (rods)	1	1	1.5	1.5
Rural	Growing vegetables (%)	85	90	100	100
	Average plot size (rods)	3	3.75	4	4.5 ^a

^a Source: Note on estimates of production from allotments and private garden in UK, TNA MAF 38/172, 1943.

showed a further increase of 172,000 plots. The 1942 survey return, however, contradicted the 1941 figures; it showed that in 1941 there had been only 96,000 more allotments, many fewer than previously recorded. The AGC simply loaded the figures to 150,000, which was considered 'to reflect fairly the true position', while noting that 'many local authorities are without precise information'.¹⁰⁷ The figures were essentially made up.

As well as estimating the overall area of domestic cultivation, the AGC had to calculate its productivity. To estimate what amount of vegetables the notional number of private gardens might produce, the AGC presumed that each garden would include 2.5 rods of cultivated space, and then estimated productivity from the allotment demonstration gardens and the cropping plan from their Growmore Leaflet no.1.¹⁰⁸ Needless to say, this radical curtailment of variations in morphology, local climate, aspect, soil and gardening skill to an estimate based on 2.5 rods was based more on a need for simplicity and communicability than in accurate assessment. Similarly, the Allotments Society continually disputed the AGC's estimates of how productive a given plot could be, arguing that the government estimates were based on demonstration plots, which being technically superior and specialist would not give a true reflection of the situation.¹⁰⁹ Regardless, the Ministry of Agriculture produced statistics like those in Table 2 with little evidence to back them up. The upward trends in Table 2 were designed to make it look like both the number of people growing vegetables and the area given over to cropping were increasing. In compiling Table 2, the AGC wrote: 'to allow for wartime increase in the number of occupiers growing vegetables and in the size of vegetable plots, the following figures have been taken'.¹¹⁰ The emphasis here on changing the figures to 'allow for' an increase reveals how figures were changed to illustrate the presumed success of the Dig for Victory campaign, not as accurate reflections of the realities of domestic production.

Brassley's reading of agricultural statistics suggests that during the war total overall agricultural farm productivity may in fact have decreased by up to 30%. He suggests, however, that whether productivity was growing or falling was almost irrelevant, as the assumption of agriculture's success was in everyone's best interests – it made the farmers heroes and the government look effective.¹¹¹ Similarly, while in public the Ministry confidently reported that domestic vegetable production had nearly doubled, in private officials admitted that food production figures were 'necessarily purely conjectural,' had 'no claim to anything other than a low order of accuracy,' were 'largely guess work,' and 'pretty phoney'.¹¹²

If on the one hand Dig for Victory posed a unitary national figure of self-sacrifice, then on the other hand the government needed to provide reassurance not simply that people were playing that role successfully, but that it was the right role for them to be playing. And so, by providing statistics (however conjectural they might have been) on the amount of wartime agricultural production, the government boosted morale by enabling people to believe that they were undertaking effective 'national service of the highest order' by growing vegetables.¹¹³ The point is not that the government lied. The point is not that the public actually produced only one million tonnes of food, nor is the point that they produced ten million tonnes and the government lied. The point is that really *any* figure would do – statistically visualising domestic food production was about one thing: victory, bolstered by trust in the government's competence through numbers.

Remembering Dig for Victory

This article has shown that behind the unitary idea of Dig for Victory as an exemplar of national solidarity lie a more complex set of stories. Despite this, I have followed revisionist work on the Home Front during the Second World War in emphasising that we should not abandon entirely the idea that Dig for Victory was an occasion when people united in toil and earthy craft, but that we should allow different understandings to exist alongside or within this dominant view. On first glance some of the evidence offered here might be more befitting of present-day conservative, nationalist articulations of Dig for Victory. This is because Dig for Victory can present historical lessons in support of small government and a resilient population; I have indeed suggested that the family-centred supply, not support for local or informal economies, was crucial to the government's conceptualisation of the campaign. Such a view is only possible, however, because the government of the day failed to meet its objectives of extending order and control into the domestic sphere, as it attempted more successfully to do in the national agricultural sector: citizen autonomy was only possible due to government failure. However, drawing differently on the celebration of community and family resilience during wartime can lend credence to the notion that present-day environmental action cannot and need not wait for government direction, but should come from voluntary changes to everyday production and consumption patterns. Such an environmentalist articulation would point to the communality of gardening advice (where vernacular gardening practices and advice from friends, family and certain media sources predominated), and to the enthusiasm with which low consumption patterns and reliance on local and seasonal produce were taken up. These parts of Dig for Victory's history offer a way to figure contemporary consumers in relation to austere subjects from the nation's past (even as they require a re-figuration of the gender and class dimensions of the Digger for Victory). Thus any mobilisation of the past always serves some contemporary ideological or cultural need; collective memory is characterised by selectivity, remembering certain parts while forgetting others.¹¹⁴ In present-day articulations of Dig for Victory the question is not really about the past, 'it is not the question of

¹⁰⁷ Memorandum, Allotments and private gardens estimated acreage and production recalculated, TNA MAF 38/173, 15 April 1942.

¹⁰⁸ Extract from minutes, allotments and private gardens (note 102).

¹⁰⁹ Correspondence in TNA MAF 38/173.

¹¹⁰ Letter Dutton to Mares, Allotments and private gardens estimated acreage and production 1936 to 1942, TNA MAF 38/172, 8 February 1943, 1, emphasis added.

¹¹¹ P. Brassley, Wartime productivity and innovation, 1939–45, in: B. Short, C. Watkins, J. Martin (Eds.), *The Front Line of Freedom: British Farming in the Second World War*, London 2007, 36–54.

¹¹² Circular revised estimates, letter to A. Carrington, Allotments and private gardens, TNA MAF 38/171, no date 1942, 1; draft letter response on future collection of data from Minister of Agriculture to an MP, no date 1953, allotments and gardens acreage and production 1944–1961, TNA MAF 266/56.

¹¹³ Minister of Agriculture, Foreword, in: C. Middleton, *War Time Allotments*, London, 1940, 5.

¹¹⁴ P. Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets*, Cambridge, 2009; G. Cubitt, *History and Memory*, Manchester, 2007.

a concept dealing with the past that might *already* be at our disposal' but rather a question 'of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow'.¹¹⁵ That is, just as there is no singular form of the national past itself, there is no one version of what our response to the gardening endeavours of the past should be. The problem, of course, is that while the present-day authority of narratives about Dig for Victory is rooted in a supposed 'pre-given or constituted historical origin in the past', these foundations are always contingent.¹¹⁶ The power of appeals to inherit the figures of a national past may break

down when confronted by the contingency of that historical foundation.

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¹¹⁵ Derrida, *Archive Fever* (note 21), 36.

¹¹⁶ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (note 1), 145.