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Highgate allotments mark 100 years of growing and community

Celebrations include a film 'Where We Grow' - made by former BBC producer and director Ian Potts



Ruth Pavey with plot holder Juliet Mann who gave her a booklet written on the history of the allotments. Image: Marie Mangan

A north London allotments is marking 100 years of growing and giving back to the community with a film and a cook book.

Over the past century the Shepherds Hill Allotments has been a part of everything from digging for victory during the Second World War – to donating extra produce to the local food bank.

And it has also offered a valuable community for its lucky 230 plot holders.

The allotments stretch across a 6-7 acre site between Highgate and Crouch End skirting Queens Wood and Shepherds Cot

The plots are managed by the Shepherds Hill Allotment Association who are organising events to celebrate their centenary milestone.

They include a film 'Where We Grow' – made by former BBC producer and director Ian Potts – which will be screened at the ArtHouse cinema in Crouch End in October and December.

Ian is a plot-holder of many years and a member of the 10-strong site committee.

He said: "The film is an exploration of our allotment's history and the people who have worked this land.

"It's a celebration of the highs and lows of allotment life."

Jill Russell, also a member of the committee and has had her plot since 2012.

She has produced a short history of Shepherds Hill Allotments, including historic maps and photos.

"I have traced the growing of crops on the slopes of Shepherds Hill back to medieval times," she said.

"The booklet explores the many twists and turns in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that eventually led to Shepherds Hill Allotments becoming permanent, 'statutory' allotments."

The land and other open spaces in the area were first used as allotment gardens during the First World War.

It was originally managed by the quaintly titled Hornsey Brotherhood's Allotments Association, with Hornsey Council eventually purchasing the land and fulfilling their responsibilities under the Allotment Act of 1925 to provide permanent growing plots for residents.

The site expanded to include additional allotments during the Second World War and the post-war period to counter food shortages.

But it shrunk back to its original boundaries in the 1950s and has remained unchanged since.

In the 1980s, Haringey designated Shepherds Hill Allotments as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC).

Since the 1990s, demand for plots started to outstrip supply, with prospective plot holders now waiting years for one to become available.

Shepherds Hill Allotments has long-supported two local charities with money raised at their events – some held in their on site barn.

Highgate-based Harington, who support students with learning differences to develop life skills, and Hornsey Food Bank.

During the growing season, plot holders donate excess produce to the food bank.

Award-winning grower, Gary Sycamore, who has had his plot since the mid-80s, has a popular stall at Alexandra Palace Farmers' Market, selling flowers and produce grown by him and other plot holders.

They include offerings from Jenny Gledhill who is renowned for her magnificent flowers.

Over the years, Gary has raised around £80,000 for Harington including £7,700 in 2025 alone.

A Centenary Produce Show, judged by Ham&High gardening correspondent Ruth Pavey was another highlight – as is a cook book 'We Grow, We Cook, We Eat', with recipe contributions from allotment plot holders, due to publish next month.

Screenings of 'Where We Grow' take place at ArtHouse Crouch End on October 21 and December 10 (sold out), with further screenings in 2027.

Gary Sycamore's stall will be at Ally Pally Farmers' Market until the end of October.

■ ***More information at shepherdshillallotments.co.uk***



Shepherds Hill Allotments plot holder Jenny Gledhill with her magnificent flowers. Image: Marie Mangan



Shepherds Hill allotments plot holder Gary Sycamore selling produce at Ally Pally farmers' market to raise funds for local charities. Image: Marie Mangan