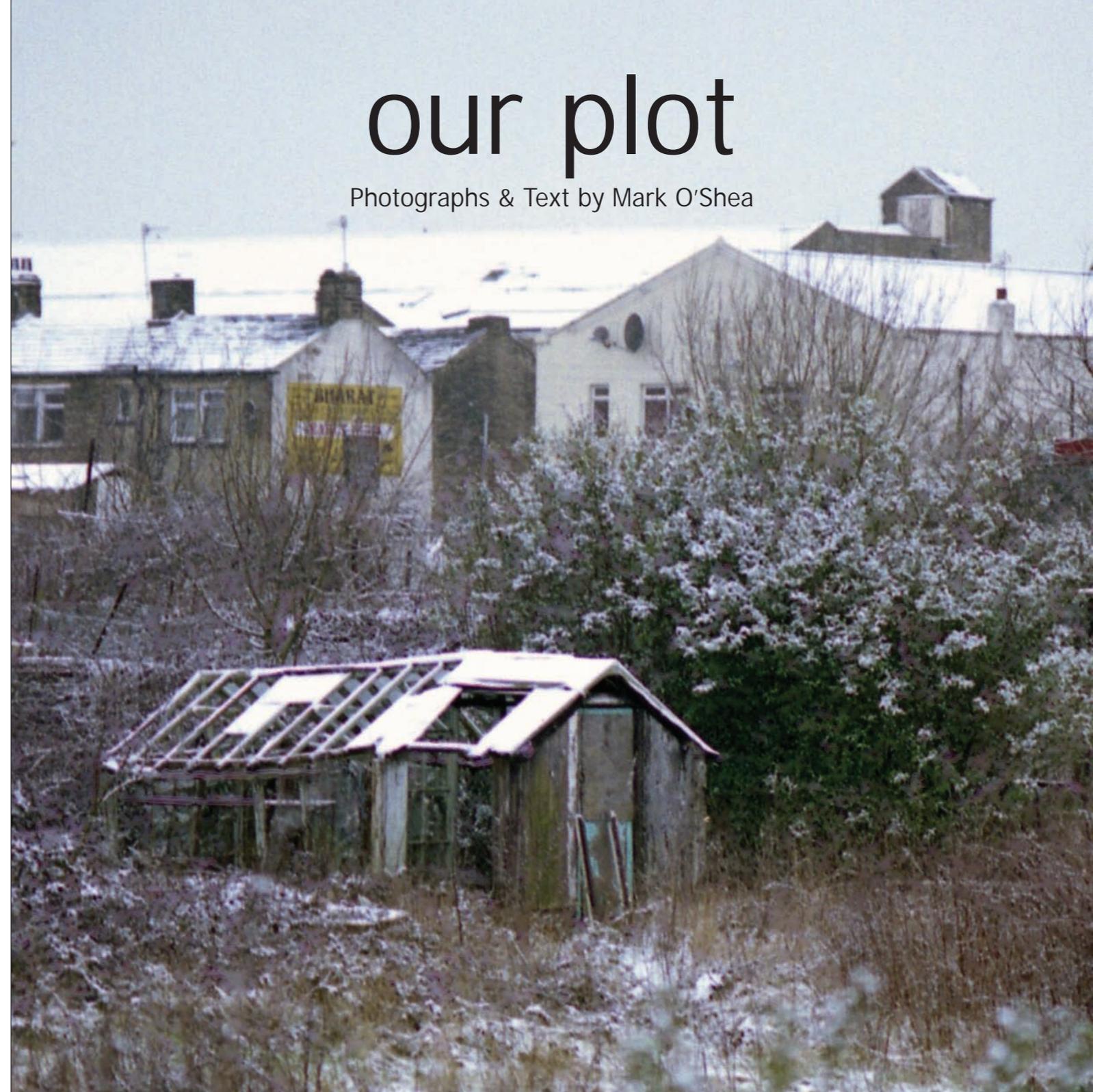




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# our plot

Photographs & Text by Mark O'Shea





## Introduction

Most people do not even know these allotments exist. They are hidden away from the outside world through a locked gate next to a telephone exchange on a busy main road. Lots of people use them on a daily basis. Some can be found unwinding from the riggers of day to day life, while others spend their time growing their own fruit and vegetables. Thankfully, everyone manages to happily coexist with the diverse flora and fauna of the site. This book's aim is to give you a glimpse into this hidden world.

Unfortunately it appears that the local council is running the allotments down in what some tenants think is a cynical attempt to make the site ideal for redevelopment. If the council has

its way the allotments could be bulldozed aside to enable the building of a new housing estate in what is already a very densely populated urban area.

The Cecil Avenue Allotments were placed in trust by Sir Francis Sharp-Powell, Freeman of the City of Bradford, for the benefit of local people. About ten years ago these allotments were even designated as a Third Tier Nature Conservation Site because of the rich diversity of species that can be found here. Sites like these act as lungs for the city and once lost can never be replaced.

Hopefully the Cecil Avenue Allotments will continue to serve the local community for many years to come.



In memory of  
Sir Francis Sharp-Powell  
1827-1911

Charlie:

"One of the hardest jobs is trying find where one plot ends and the next one begins. Have you any idea?"



A few days later I met up with Charlie again. Charlie and her husband Vicente had chosen a plot and signed the contract. It apparently forbids them from planting trees or keeping animals. All the couple's gardening tools have to be carried to the allotment in a rucksack as their shed is not secure yet.



**Frankie (Charlie's Mother):**

"We're hoping to get lots of lovely fruit from these trees."

Charlie thinks their plot used to be an orchard. They were all unaware that the last tenant kept turkeys in the shed. The last few birds were rescued a few years back by the RSPCA after being left for dead when the previous owner decided to give up the plot.



One sunny afternoon I passed this hen walking along one of the many paths. She had escaped from her cage and seemed a little excited with her new found freedom. Now safely back home, we met again.



This ginger cat can often be seen patrolling around its territory. It is lucky for him that most of the dogs in the area are kept on their leads. Notice the rubbish left in the grass. With no proper maintenance the allotments are left to fend for themselves. Whatever gets thrown over the wall tends to stay there unless one of the tenants decides to clear it up.



Bordering the allotments are a row of terrace houses. Here lives Rio with her owner Sue. House prices on this road have risen considerably over the past few years and are now out of reach for most people. Houses in the area are being bought by landlords who only let to the lucrative student market. Because of this, the community spirit of this area has suffered and now fewer residents are taking up allotment plots.



Rio is a rescued dog and is not happy about being photographed. Sue's plot is in the middle of the allotment and Dave helps her look after it. Sue admits to letting it get a little overgrown and as a result needs to do quite a lot of work on it now. Sue is concerned about the way some tenants are treating their plots. Rubbish is a constant nuisance and there is talk that some people are even living in a caravan on the site.



Khan and Zaffer like their caravan. It gives them a place to escape the hectic world outside. Khan loves to watch to the birds through his binoculars. There is a hole cut out in the window which provides a fantastic view. He used to grow potatoes a few years back but most were dug up by passers by and now he cannot be bothered anymore. Zaffer came from Pakistan about five years ago and his English is very poor. He is able to communicate through signs and hand gestures. Zaffer likes to sit and watch Bollywood movies on his DVD player which is powered by an old car battery.



**Khan:**

“The people around here are quite friendly but tend to keep themselves to themselves. I see them passing the caravan. Have you spoken to my friend over there with the goat and geese?” I had not, so it seemed like a perfect opportunity to take a look.



The geese were not happy to see me. I had heard their shrieks before from the other side of the allotment but was not sure who or what was making all the noise. There is still no sign of Khan's friend's goat.



So finally we meet. On occasions this goat has has been known to escape and go on a rampage, running wild through the allotment. When this happens it eats almost anything possible in its path.



This plot is run by the 1 in 12 Club collective. Everyone pitches in and the crops are used to help raise funds for the club. Each harvest time the produce is collected and used for the Peasants Banquet where they all meet for a slap-up meal. The goat has been through this plot in the past and left feeling very full.



Matt and Julia often come down with their two children, Annie and Jack. They always have lots to do. Today they are digging a new bed and have just told me that it feels as if the soil has not been dug for ages. The family have their own plot which also needs lots of attention.



Alongside the 1 in 12 Club's plot is Madie's. She has been working on it, on and off, for quite a few years now. It is time to dig up the weeds and plant some potatoes. Apparently they are very easy to grow. Madie has stories to tell about the goat eating her crops. She mistakenly thinks it no longer lives on the allotment.



Andy and Vicky have had their plot for a few years now. Their problem is that the weeds grow so quickly here. It used to be as overgrown as the plot to the right. Today they had both dug the patch of turned earth in the distance and are starting on a new area. Andy is a student at the University and finds working on the allotment a welcome break from his rigorous study routine. Vicky finds this rather funny.



Ely likes his bonfires. I would have completely missed him had it not been for the smoke rising high above his plot. It was almost like he was sending smoke signals to invite me in. What surprised me was his eagerness to have his photograph taken. He almost dragged me in through the gate. He was very particular about where I stood so as not to damage anything.



Angelo is a natural gardener. He really enjoys working on his plot and whenever time allows can be found here. He must have green fingers. Each day we meet he has something new to tell say. We spent many afternoons talking about his life in Spain, making fertiliser, grafting plants, cookery ideas, and how he managed to rise above a debilitating illness to make a full recovery. And he liked having his picture taken.





The importance of allotments in our urban environment should never be underestimated. All over Britain land like this is constantly under attack from developers. The only way these very special places can continue to exist is if we all start to use them.

