

# London

## Isle of Dogs & District Allotment Society

London is often portrayed (usually by Londoners) as a collection of villages, and the Isle of Dogs has always been one of the most distinctive of them in London. It literally became an island in 1805 when the West India Dock and its associated canals, leading to and from the Thames, limited access to the island. Silt dug from the later Millwall Dock was put into settling ponds and were given the mudchute moniker. More relevantly that silt has provided the soil for the present lower site of the Isle of Dogs & District Allotment Society. Residential growth was relatively late as the area was prone to flooding. Cubittown, named after a one-time Lord Mayor of London, did provide housing for the growing number of workers employed in riverside industries and services.

The Isle of Dogs Allotment Society was formed in 1913 before the outbreak of the First World War and was clearly part of Poplar's municipal pride. In the 1920s the site was a lot larger than at present with a stretch of water to the south which Harry White, a longtime secretary of the Society, remembered as a child, fishing for newts and tiddlers until the Dock police came into view. Obviously during World War II, the allotments provided important fresh vegetables and fruit for the Island's people when they were being particularly hard hit – literally.

Post-war, the Port of London Authority (PLA) initially wished to expand the docks and served notice on the allotments, but with the help of the local MP Ian Mikardo and Lord Simon, that was thwarted and the land that now forms the lower allotments came under the ownership of the local authority, then the Borough of Poplar. But soon after that, the container revolution caused the traditional London Docks to become emptied of traffic and then close as the new sea traffic moved down river to Tilbury and the new contained ports. A period of uncertainty and decline of the established industries and services followed,



Oriental vegetables on Isle of Dogs



Lower site of Isle of Dogs allotments

although the allotments would have provided something of a bulwark against those shifts in employment. In 1975 the upper and lower allotments were combined under the present name of the Isle of Dogs and District Allotment Society. However, this was succeeded by another set of uncertainties when the London Docks Development Corporation was set up in 1981 and from which its uncertain beginnings have totally transformed the area. The investment that was brought to the area resulted in a building with all the necessary toilet and kitchen facilities and large enough for the Society to hold its meetings in and act as a social focus. Help for that was provided by the London Docklands Development Corporation, The Isle of Dogs Foundation, Tower Hamlets Council, and several local businesses.

As the Docklands changed so did the make-up of the allotment tenants, a transformation common to many city allotment sites and not just in London. Pensioners still form a significant minority of allotment tenants (about 20%) on the Isle of Dogs, but the presence of Turkish, Indian, Bangladeshi, Vietnamese and Chinese growing cultures provides an enlivening mixture of crops and cultivation practices.

The allotment land has always been under the control of the local authority; currently the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. The whole of the Mudchute area was leased



Members of the London Region on the upper part of the Isle of Dogs allotments



The Mudchute Allotment building

to the Mudchute Association in 1994 and this lease with Tower Hamlets was updated in 2003. The Mudchute Association runs the City Farm, a registered charity and membership organisation open all year free of charge and offering a very wide range of events and courses to the local community and beyond. It is a considerable attraction in its own right. The Mudchute Association is seeking to extinguish their current lease and enter into a new lease with the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. In 2017 The Isle of Dogs & District Allotment Association became an Asset of Community Value (ACV), a status recommended to all allotment sites. The Isle of Dogs and District Allotment is in the process of negotiating a sub-lease within the Mudchute Association's lease but to do so is also in the process of registering as and becoming a legal entity. Meetings with Tower Hamlets officers and with the Isle of Dogs and District Allotment Society members are ongoing with the aim of becoming a members' cooperative using the NAS template and thereby securing the future for an allotment site unique even within London.

I would like to thank Paula Owen, Brian Pietrzyba and Martyn Daniels of Isle of Dogs and District Allotment Society for their very considerable help in this article and for permission to use their archive material.

Visit the website: [www.iodadas.com](http://www.iodadas.com)  
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Upper site of Isle of Dogs allotments

## London Region meetings

The August meeting of the London Region took place at the Isle of Dogs & District Allotment Association. This distinct area has been totally transformed but remains a very unique part of London.

London members will have received notice of the AGM on October 27th this year. The meetings in 2019 will be held on the 16th February, 18th May, 10th August & 26th October (AGM). Full details will be sent out

about a month before the meetings with a short reminder a week before. A varied programme of meetings and activities is underway and your active participation would be welcomed.