

# Nantwich Walled Garden Society Newsletter

Issue No. 1, Winter 2014-15

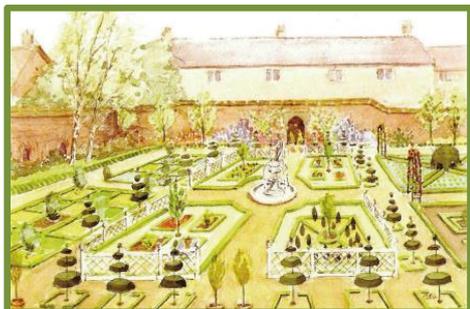
Welcome to this first issue of the *Nantwich Walled Garden Society Newsletter*. If you're interested in Nantwich's history, heritage and future, this Newsletter is for you!

Most Nantwich residents don't know that we have a "secret garden" very close to the town centre, just to the north of Welsh Row not far from the Wilbraham Arms. We don't suggest you visit it at present though, as sadly it's overgrown and neglected, owned by a developer (so anyone entering the garden would be trespassing), and a potential safety hazard as the walls are fragile in places and there's at least one old well within the site hidden by undergrowth.

So what is the Nantwich Walled Garden Society (NWGS)? We are a group of volunteers who care about Nantwich's heritage, but are also excited about the opportunities restoration of the garden could provide to our town. The NWGS was founded in 2005.

Our mission is to convert the garden from this:

to something like this:



Much needs to happen before our goal can be achieved, including resisting the proposed development of houses and apartments on the site, potentially acquiring the site, and restoring the walls and garden.

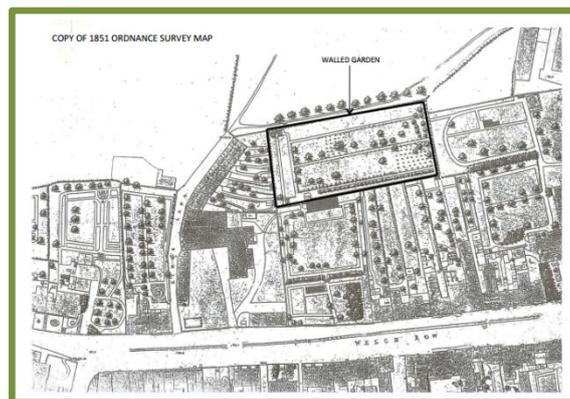
To quote the Chair of the NWGS, Peter Harrington, "I'm not a gardener or an historian, but the thought of a 400-year-old piece of Nantwich's history being trashed would be sheer vandalism and just goes against the grain".

## About the Garden

The garden consists of about half an acre of land surrounded by a 16th Century wall, which is listed Grade II by English Heritage. It's located within the Welsh Row Conservation area.

The garden was part of the site of Townsend House, which was situated to its west. The house, along with the wall, was built in the 1580s by the Wilbraham family. When built, unlike today, the site of the house and garden probably wasn't surrounded by other buildings.

Once the family moved out, the house gradually fell into disrepair, and the site had many uses. For the last ten years or so, the walled garden has been owned by property developers, but so far no building has started. The NWGS believes there's still an opportunity to save the garden and walls.



## John Gerard, Nantwich and the Walled Garden

John Gerard was a celebrated herbalist who was born in Nantwich in 1545 and learned about plants in the fields and by-ways of Nantwich. He later moved to London, and became herbalist to King James I. He is famous because he authored *The Herball or Generall Historie of Plantes*, which became the authoritative book that students and botanists used for 200-300 years.

Gerard shared interests with Sir Walter Raleigh (also a botanical collector), and William Shakespeare's interest in folklore. Gerard's *Herball* is known to have inspired some of William Morris's floral designs. If the garden and walls can be restored, our plan would be for it to be a tribute to John Gerard so that his contributions to botany and herbs, and his connections with Nantwich, can be commemorated.

## Hopes and Plans

We, or the most appropriate community body, would need to acquire the Walled Garden site - we would probably need to raise several hundred thousand pounds (if the current owners are willing to sell). We are aware of some potential sponsoring organisations and individuals, and are considering a programme of fund raising events and "crowd sourcing". We aim to partner with Cheshire East, Nantwich Town Council, Reaseheath College and local businesses to ensure the restoration can be achieved in alignment with local plans and for the benefit of all.

Our aspiration is that the Walled Garden becomes a living community project, which will evolve and develop over time. We'd aim to involve all parts of the community, e.g. local schools, Reaseheath College, organisers of events in Nantwich. The garden would become a jewel in Nantwich's crown and would complement Nantwich's many handsome 16<sup>th</sup> century buildings, enabling it to become a national and international visitor attraction, increasing tourism to Nantwich and supporting local businesses.

## Activities and Progress in 2014

2014 has been an active year for the NWGS. We have held several meetings with local councillors and our MP, Mr Edward Timpson, the culmination of which has led to English Heritage revisiting the site and reaffirming their 2006 statement on the historical national significance of the Nantwich walled garden, "The walled garden is of considerable national interest as an early example of an urban landscape structure, which is reinforced by the surviving documentary material about its form and planting".

We have also increased our outreach activities, highlights being:

- Participating at Nantwich's Societies Spectacular (photo to right, NWGS members and Mayor Christine Farrall) and the RHS show at Tatton Park (the latter courtesy of the Herb Society).
- Establishing a social media presence (Facebook and Twitter).
- Interviews with BBC Radio Stoke and RedShift Radio (the latter recorded as a podcast – see Further Information below).
- Following the sad passing of one of our NWGS members, Beth Bartlett, John Brough has taken over maintenance of the NWGS's display in Nantwich Museum, ensuring it's kept current.



## Plans for 2015

The NWGS is hoping to apply for charitable status, and this will be discussed at our AGM early in 2015. Charitable status would enable us to increase fund-raising activities.

In addition, we will be working on a business plan, to support our case for ensuring the sustainability of the garden and its walls should the opportunity arise for it to be purchased from the developers who currently own it.

We will also continue our outreach activities and seek to partner with other organisations to obtain sponsorship for our goals.

**Would you like to get involved?** If so, please send an email to our Chairman, follow us on Twitter or Facebook, and visit our web site. We welcome input from all members of our community to help us secure the future of this important historic site in our town.

### Further Information

Join the Nantwich Walled Garden Society: email: [chairman@nantwichwalledgarden.org.uk](mailto:chairman@nantwichwalledgarden.org.uk) or complete the form here [http://www.nantwichwalledgarden.org.uk/join\\_us.htm](http://www.nantwichwalledgarden.org.uk/join_us.htm). Annual subscription: £10 (family membership).

Visit: Nantwich Museum, Pillory Street, Nantwich.

Visit our website: <http://www.nantwichwalledgarden.org.uk/index.htm>



Listen to a podcast: <https://soundcloud.com/redshift-audiocasts/audioinform-nantwich-walled>



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