



## FRIENDS OF GRAPPENHALL HEYS WALLED GARDEN

[www.friendsofgrappenhallgarden.org.uk](http://www.friendsofgrappenhallgarden.org.uk)

\*Registered Charity 1141915\*

## BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FRIENDS

In 1997, Grappenhall and Thelwall Parish Council (G&TPC) was part of the Grappenhall Heys Walled Garden Conservation Charity that was set up to persuade English Partnership (EP) (formerly Warrington New Town, and owners of the garden) that the garden was “worth preserving and protecting”. As an offshoot of this charity, a Friends organisation was formed and more than 100 people signed up as members. It could not be very active as access to the garden was limited to a few open days.

On 1 April 2005, G&TPC took ownership of the garden from EP, appointed a Garden Steward, and opened the garden for 2 afternoons a week. In March 2007, G&TPC appointed a Gardener/Manager; at the same time it re-launched the Friends of Grappenhall Heys Walled Garden (the Friends) to “support the garden by co-ordinating gardening work, showing visitors around the garden, planning events in the garden, and researching the history of the estate”. Around this time, the number of opening afternoons of the garden was increased to 5 days – Wednesday to Sunday.

Volunteers were on duty as garden wardens during the week to answer any questions or show visitors around, but, due to the low number of visitors on weekdays, this was discontinued. A number of Friends did volunteer to help in the garden on Thursday afternoons and Saturday mornings – “Any member can turn up to gardening volunteer sessions at the times shown overleaf and non-members can also join on arrival. There are some tools at the garden, but it will often be useful if you can bring your own along.” (quote from the Newsletter of Summer 2007). From September 2007, volunteers could also work in the garden during opening hours on any day.

A number of events were held in 2007, including Easter activities, a members only Cheese and Wine Evening, a Bat Walk, Apple Day and a Christmas Fayre. Following the appointment of an Events Co-ordinator, in the following years the number of events was increased, so that, eventually, one was held on most Sundays from Easter to October (mainly aimed at children and families), plus the Christmas Fayre in November. Lots of Friends’ members volunteered to run and/or help at these events. These became very successful, with many local residents attending, particularly those for children. New events included making bird boxes or bat boxes, a Fun Day, Picnic in the Park and Bird Watching. Running alongside these events there were horticultural activities such as workshops on planting hanging baskets, pruning shrubs and trees, making Christmas wreaths, etc.

In 2008, as well as running events, the Friends opened a basic café, initially on the first Sunday of each month and at events. This was run totally by volunteers and became very successful, and renowned for its homemade cakes. (See separate history sheet on the cafe).

As more produce was grown in the kitchen garden, and whilst the volunteer gardeners took some it for their own use, an outlet was needed to sell the surplus rather than throwing it on the compost heap. It was agreed it should be sold on Sundays to garden visitors, and eventually a special cart from which to do that was purchased. During the week, produce could be purchased from the Gardener/Manager, or by putting money in an honesty box in his absence.

When the garden was transferred to G&TPC, with an endowment, the interest from which was to maintain the garden in the condition in which it was transferred, money was included to demolish the ruined glasshouses. However, G&TPC and the Friends decided that they should be regenerated, provided Lottery funding could be obtained. To this end, a working group made up of Parish Councillors and Friends was formed to apply for funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). The Friends agreed to put the surpluses from the café, and also eventually the produce as well, at the disposal of G&TPC to assist in the matched funding required. Once the HLF had agreed in December 2012 to fund the glasshouse regeneration, and work was to commence in 2013, most of the Friends' activities had to cease temporary as there were no usable facilities for the café or the public, including toilets.

On completion of the glasshouses, the programme of events recommenced and continue to this day. The café reopened in September 2014, but unfortunately, the Friends was unable to provide sufficient volunteers to carry on running this, so alternative ways had to be sought by G&TPC.

TO BE UPDATED

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### New owner for the Walled Garden

On April 1, 2005, the Grappenhall and Thelwall Parish Council took over from English Partnerships (EP) as owners of the Walled Garden. The transfer of ownership was marked by goodwill on both sides and brought a happy ending to a ten-year period which had begun with concern for the future of the Garden. As early as the mid-1990s, the Warrington Organic and Wildlife Gardening Society (WOWGS), which was operating an allotment within the Garden, was talking to the Council about the Garden. As a result the Council expressed to EP its hope that the Garden would remain intact and from that point kept in touch with EP about it. At the same time, a charity was formed in response to public interest in the Garden, and the Friends group was set up as an offshoot from the charity. EP continued as owners of the Garden, however, and indeed maintained it to a very high standard. The brick paths, fine oak doors and restored backsheds that we see today date from that period, during which the three ponds were dredged. EP also opened the Garden to the public on several occasions but was not in a position to commit to a regular programme of opening. In 2003 came new Government guidance that meant that EP would have to dispose of the Garden, and on the basis of the earlier contacts, EP asked the Council if it would be interested in taking ownership. The Council was keen to see the Garden accessible to the public and was willing to take over with that objective in mind, on condition that an endowment could be provided to maintain the Garden. This was to ensure that the Garden would stand on its own feet and not rely on local ratepayers for its funding. Local EP officers were understanding and helpful and were willing to put such a proposal to their senior management. There was strong support from the MP for Warrington South, Helen Southworth. After some detailed negotiation, the financial details were agreed locally in autumn 2004 and were given final approval early in 2005, in time for transfer of ownership at the end of the financial year 2004/5.

*NEWSLETTER*  
**NOVEMBER**  
*2005*

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### A Thank-you for the Friends at Christmas!

On Sunday, 18 December the Garden will be open as usual, but on that day from 1pm until 4pm the Council will be offering festive mulled wine and mince pies to the Friends to thank you for past support and to start you thinking about the Garden's future and your role in it. Bill Leah will be there of course, plus Maria Luczak, who manages the Garden for the Council, and Cliff Taylor who chairs the Council's Walled Garden Working Group. Put it in your diary now! And remember to wrap up warm – there isn't much shelter in the Garden!

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### What does the transfer of ownership mean for the Garden itself?

Whilst the Council has always wanted the public to enjoy the Garden, it is also very much aware that the Garden is a gem which must be protected. There will be no immediate change in the way the Garden is looked after. The contractors who manage and maintain the pleasure grounds (the part with the ponds) now are those that EP would have employed. They are simply being paid by the Council from the endowment provided by EP. In the longer term the Council may wish to change these arrangements, especially if it decides to employ a gardener to run the Garden. Likewise, the WOWGS will remain as tenants of the Kitchen Garden. In line with its policy of making the garden accessible to the public, the Council held a series of Open Days during the past summer. The response was very encouraging. Recently, a Garden Steward, Mr Bill Leah, was appointed to begin a modest but regular programme of opening. The job title is enough to tell you that Bill has the difficult but rewarding job of balancing public access with the protection of the Garden. As of October 17, the Garden is now open from 1pm to 4pm on Fridays and Sundays.

### What Does The Future Hold?

What has happened so far is just the beginning of a new era. As time goes by, the Council will be looking for suitable ways of using the Garden for the public benefit – educational and horticultural activities spring to mind, and simply more hours of public opening. Then there is the question of the greenhouses – should they be restored, and if so, in what way and for what purpose? Whatever we do will need to respect the character of the garden and be affordable and sustainable. The existence of the Friends group has been a big asset in the past and will be in the future, and consultation with the Friends will certainly be part of the Council's approach. Hopefully, some Friends will want to do more, and play an active role, and we want to hear from them. The prospect is exciting. To be part of the Garden's future, please make sure that you fill in the form at the bottom of the accompanying letter.





Wreath Making



Picnic in the Park



Picnic in the Park



Fun Day



Produce cart

