

# A PHYSIC GARDEN FOR COWBRIDGE

*South & Mid Glamorgan Branch of the  
Welsh Historic Gardens Trust*



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## The Physic Garden

The South & Mid Glamorgan branch of the Welsh Historic Gardens Trust (WHGT) intends to recreate a physic garden in Cowbridge, on the site of an area that was once part of Old Hall, the home of the Edmondes family from the eighteenth to the twentieth century.

Historical records show that, at the end of the nineteenth century, the walled enclosure was laid out formally with paths and beds, probably to a design that had been established many years before. At one stage the site was used as a kitchen garden by the Grammar School but, in recent years, it has served as a tree nursery for the Councils of South Glamorgan and the Vale of Glamorgan. It lies opposite the old Grammar School building in Church Street, within the medieval town walls.

The site has been neglected for some years and is now a virtual wilderness. The first stage in the re-creation of the garden will involve clearance and archaeological investigation of the site. The project will complement the Cowbridge 750 celebrations to mark the creation of Cowbridge Borough by charter in 1254.

The South and Mid Glamorgan branch of the WHGT has been granted a one year option on the site by the Vale of Glamorgan Council. During 2004 we will explore funding needs and sources; prepare plans and initiate designs. A successful outcome to these initial explorations will allow the scheme to progress and a lease of the garden site will then be obtained.

## Physic Gardens

A Physic Garden is a garden where plants with medicinal properties are grown. Such plants have been known to man from time immemorial and grown in gardens for many centuries in countries throughout the world.

In the Middle Ages Physic Gardens were associated in particular with monasteries. In gardens close to an infirmary herbs such as rose, lily, cumin, lovage, tansy, mint and rosemary would be grown to treat fevers, aches and pains, and other ailments of the monks and their guests.

The first garden intended to provide plants to study was established at the medical school of the University of Padua in 1545. By the end of the seventeenth century physic gardens were proliferating across Europe, all linked with universities where medicine was taught. The Chelsea Physic Garden in London was established in 1673 by the Society of Apothecaries to train their apprentices in identifying medicinal plants.

By the eighteenth century (when the Edmondes family acquired Old Hall) herbs and medicinal plants were widely cultivated for both culinary and medicinal use. They were recommended by such writers on gardening as Batty Langley as 'absolutely necessary for the service of all gentlemen and other families'. Particularly recommended were feverfew, hyssop, gilliflower, marjoram, self-heal and violet...some of the plants described by the Swedish botanist and physician Carolus Linnaeus as 'medical jewels'.

## A Physic Garden for Cowbridge

The Cowbridge Physic Garden will be laid out as a 'parterre' with formal beds and paths. This is the traditional form which allows for specific beds for each type of plant.

The design of the garden has been entrusted to Anthony Jellard, a well-known landscape designer and to Robin Whalley, a garden historian and one of the country's leading authorities on parterres.

It is intended that a raised platform or mound will be incorporated into the garden design from which the pattern of the garden can be clearly viewed.

The Physic Garden project is envisaged as providing a unique amenity for the town of Cowbridge and the wider Vale of Glamorgan, an historical re-creation with contemporary relevance which will also be a tourist attraction. It will have an educational value by increasing awareness of the curative properties of plants and of the great debt owed by modern pharmaceutical medicine to the plant world.

As an extension of the present-day Old Hall grounds the Physic Garden will be freely accessible to the public from the existing entrances and from a proposed new entrance on Church Street.

## Why a Physic Garden for Cowbridge?

In 2004 Cowbridge celebrates the 750th anniversary of its first borough charter. The creation of a Physic Garden is planned as part of these celebrations.

## Where will it be?

It will be sited within the old walled garden, once part of Old Hall.

## What will it replace?

A site recently used as a tree nursery but which is now very overgrown.

## Who will use it?

The Physic Garden will be freely accessible to the public, to be enjoyed by both local people and visitors to Cowbridge and the Vale of Glamorgan. It will have both aesthetic and educational value.

## Can you help?

The South and Mid Glamorgan branch of the WHGT is looking for help in all sorts of ways: most of all we need the support of people from Cowbridge and the Vale of Glamorgan. If you are interested in the project and want to help (or just to find out about how the project is developing) please contact either Val Caple or Dan Clayton-Jones (whose addresses are on the front of this leaflet).

## Site of the Physic Garden



The map above (reduced from an Ordnance Survey Plan of 1887) shows the centre of Cowbridge. The site of the proposed Physic Garden is outlined in red.