

'Nearer God's head

Gardens in Jerusalem

I have to admit to not being anything at all of a gardener (much to my mother's chagrin) but I do very much like to sit in the peace and tranquillity of a well kept garden or in one which has been deliberately allowed to become wild.

Wendy Robins

There is something very calming about them and it seems to allow me to sit and think more clearly. So, it has never really surprised me that Jesus and his disciples spent time in the Garden of Gethsemane.

But, what did surprise me, when I first visited the site of the Garden of Gethsemane, is that it was small – or at least it is today.

Here today on the site of the All Nations Church (so called because the gifts of many nations helped to build it) is quite a small garden full of ancient (and some not so ancient) olive trees.

I was helped to understand it more when I learned that the Garden of Gethsemane would have been right across the foot of the Mount of Olives, not just in the small space that it is now contained within. The Church itself was built over the rock upon which Jesus is to have prayed before his arrest and crucifixion.

The Church is also known as the Church of the Agony because of the agony that Jesus suffered during the night when the disciples could not stay awake to pray with him.

The Garden of Gethsemane



Above: The Garden Tomb

Below: the tomb



garden. When a small group of us visited it during the Diocesan Pilgrimage, there was quite a lot of maintenance work going on but it was still somehow wonderfully peaceful and a haven for prayer and contemplation.

Some believe that the tomb and the garden belonged to Joseph of Arimathea. If this is so, then it might be that this

is where Jesus was laid after he died as Joseph of Arimathea was given permission to bury him. The tomb gives those who see it today a very good idea of what the tomb that Jesus was buried in would have been like. Here in the place where Jesus may have laid, the garden has seats and nooks and crannies in which one can sit and contemplate Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

At Easter, especially on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday, it is good to find somewhere to sit and to contemplate all that Jesus has done and all that Jesus is to his people today. Gardens are an especially good place to do this as Easter is at the beginning of spring and there are signs everywhere in our gardens and parks and forests of new life. Spring bulbs and flowers are beginning to blossom and the trees are beginning to be in leaf again.

These reminders of the new life which we find in Christ can help us to see in a new way the gifts which God has given to us all both in sending Jesus to save us and in the world around us.

...and in Southwark Gardens and Church quiet reflection and

St Mary, Lewisham

St Mary's Therapeutic Garden opened in September 2017, after two years of working with the wider community and staff and patients from the NHS Ladywell mental health unit next to St Mary's.

With help and advice from the Sydenham Community Garden project, newly planted beds, landscaping and raised beds for vegetables, were developed in an area of the churchyard known as St Mary's Meadow. 'Community Build' days brought together budding gardeners, from the congregation, the Ladywell Unit and the community.

Local resident Flo Headlam, from BBC Gardeners' World cut the first turf and brought her colleagues to film the work.

St Mary's Vicar, the Revd Steve Hall said "Work has continued through the winter and now we are preparing and



planting for the year ahead. We are developing the ecological benefits, with bug houses and bird boxes.

"Not only has the Therapeutic Garden transformed an under-used area of our churchyard – and been truly therapeutic for everyone involved - it has become a precious, prayerful space, valued by the wider community".

St Andrew, Earlsfield

In 2010 the garden of St Andrew's Church in Earlsfield was transformed into an accessible garden for the local community. Five Trusts including Community Spaces/ Groundwork gave a total of £105,000 towards the construction.

The opening, by the then MP for Tooting, Sadiq Khan, was the culmination of a journey that started with a design competition to rejuvenate the area in the church grounds in 2006. The winning design centred on a labyrinth and, as the designer said, was a versatile space that could be used for relaxation, contemplation, play activities, church fêtes etc. The prayer labyrinth was not only an attractive paving detail but



being able to use it as an aid to prayer and meditation also added a spiritual dimension to the garden.

The garden is maintained by volunteers under the direction of a professional gardener.



Start in a garden...

Work

Churchyards: places for work and so much more...



St John, Malden

The whole of the churchyard is a conservation area, and two thirds of it are managed to a conservation model. It is home to a wide variety of wild flowers, including some rare species, as well as many insects and butterflies. Once a year it is given a 'meadow' cut and the grass is allowed to lie for a period before being gathered



up - letting any seeds in the grass drop out. The Revd Kevin Scott, Vicar of St John's says: "We sometimes have to explain that the effect is the result of management rather than neglect, but most people value the flourishing of fauna and flora".

God's Garden

THE Lord God planted a garden
In the first white days of the world,
And He set there an angel warden
In a garment of light enfurled.

So near to the peace of Heaven,
That the hawk might nest with the wren,
For there in the cool of the even
God walked with the first of men.

And I dream that these garden-closes
With their shade and their sun-flecked sod
And their lilies and bowers of roses,
Were laid by the hand of God.

The kiss of the sun for pardon,
The song of the birds for mirth,--
One is nearer God's heart in a garden
Than anywhere else on earth.

For He broke it for us in a garden
Under the olive-trees
Where the angel of strength was the warden
And the soul of the world found ease.

*Dorothy Frances Gurney (1858 - 1932)
Published in Country Life, London 1913*

St Paul, Clapham

The Eden Community Garden is formed of part of the churchyard. Eden at St Paul's was founded in 2000 with the aim of turning a piece of disused church land into a green, organic inner-city space. Its Mission statement says that its objective "...is to provide a green, tranquil, inner city space; a pleasant place for all to sit, play or garden. Its aim is to create and maintain a sustainable habitat for wildlife and promote bio-diversity by planting British native species and through organic gardening".



The site goes back one thousand years to the original church of Clapham. Later, the land was part of the manor house owned by Henry Atkins, physician to King James I.

It was a burial ground for victims of the Great Plague of 1665 and later for Roundhead soldiers killed in the Civil War battle for Battersea Marshes.

Today's visitors to the garden (as well as humans) include: bats, endangered stag beetles, woodpeckers, crickets, dragonflies and the house sparrow.

St John, Hurst Green

Like so many others, the churchyard was derived from ancient meadowland.

In 1997 a purple spotted orchid was discovered in bloom in part of the churchyard and the Parochial Church Council decided to designate that region of the churchyard a conservation area in order to protect it and to encourage other wild plant species.

Much of the rest of the Churchyard is set aside as a Garden of Remembrance, an oasis of peace where the cremated remains of those who have lived in Hurst Green can be interred.

The good news is that the orchid has reproduced and there are now four separate orchids - so the parish have truly been responsible for conserving this plant. In addition, a wide

variety of grasses and colourful wild flowers flourish including violets, primroses, fritillaries, cowslips, ox-eye daisies and red campion.

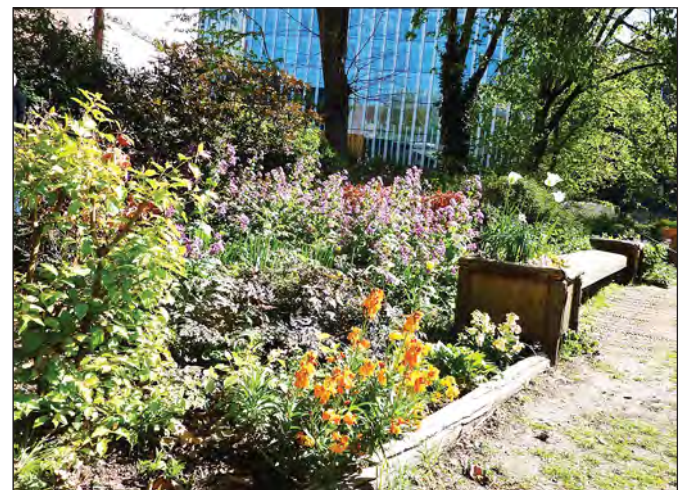


Christ Church, Southwark

Christ Church, on busy Blackfriars Road SE1 has a garden looked after by Bankside Open Spaces Trust.

The garden is in the middle of a number of major construction projects but has remained open throughout and the church itself has increased its opening times to six days a week 9 - 8 to give space for prayer and reflection.

The Revd Jonathan Coore, the Vicar of Christ Church, says that the garden and church are used



All Saints, Warmingham

churchyard is managed as a conservation area where grassland and hedges are

allowed to remain uncut in some areas until wild flowers have seeded and birds have fledged. It provides a haven for wildlife and surveys have indicated that there has also

been an increase in the species of flora. There are about 200 trees of many varieties including several ancient English yews. Volunteers undertake much of the management.

The churchyard is soon to be extended into an adjacent field bringing the total area to about 5 acres. This land will be consecrated by Bishop Christopher on 20 May.

The churchyard is a valued resource to the community. It is regularly visited by school children to study both history and the rich and diverse flora and fauna. It also attracts visitors interested in memorial design and for research of family or local history.



by dog walkers and residents as well as the large number of workers in the area.

Personal trainers bring their clients into the garden and whenever he has had the chance to speak with people in the gardens they all appreciate the peace, space and greenery in such a built up area.

It is also one of the few community focal points left in an increasingly built up area.