

# A Warm Welcome to Unstone Grange Gardens!

Unstone Grange is a non-profit-making charitable trust providing residential workshops and conference facilities for community groups, schools etc. The site was purchased from Sheffield Council in 1997 and is now managed by the Trust and run day to day by three resident voluntary caretakers.

The Grange itself was built by a colliery owning family who added to the building as their wealth accumulated in the 18th and 19th centuries. Originally, the Grange and adjacent farm were operated together, but were split up when the council acquired the site in the 1950's. For more than a decade, the Grange was run as a resource centre by the Education Department, until the re-organisation of municipal boundaries, since when the site was rented from Sheffield Council by the Flame trust as a centre for complimentary therapy. For a short while in the early 1980's, the site was registered for organic production by a local restaurateur, who also installed the polytunnel. Also at this time, there was an attempt to use the gardens for a special needs project, organised by the Seven Hills Trust, when access to the site for the disabled was improved.

The restoration of the Gardens has been underway since 1995, at which time they had fallen into neglect and dereliction. The presence of the infrastructure for the kitchen gardens -- the paths, greenhouses and polytunnel frame -- offered great opportunities, although they were all in a considerable state of disrepair. Plans for the development of the gardens were drawn up and an initial phase of reclamation and fertility-building began, which included renovating and re-covering the polytunnel. Since last winter, the Grange has had a financially secure future, which means that long-term improvements such as fruit planting and bed-edging have been possible.

All the work on the gardens has been undertaken by volunteers working one day a week in accordance with organic principles. A core group of 4 committed volunteers has been supplemented by occasional contributions from a couple of dozen other helpers over the years. This arrangement provides continuity and allows people who would not otherwise have the time, money or opportunity to access practical organic food growing in pleasant surroundings, learning from more experienced growers. Volunteers are rewarded for their time and effort with fresh produce as and when it is available.

The Trust supports the development of the gardens by allowing them to be used rent-free and provides a small grant on an annual basis to cover the cost of seed and fertiliser. In return, the Trust benefits from the positive impression that active organic gardens produce for visitors to the Grange.

At the start of August, the gardens were opened as part of the HDRA's national promotion and received more than 500 visitors.

In the future, we would like to develop Unstone as a regional centre for organics, permaculture and sustainability to fulfill its potential for health, education and socio-economic benefits.

**THE SITE** The Grange has a wonderful aspect for cultivation, being sited halfway down a gentle southward slope, sheltered from the north by a wooded scarp and raised up above the frostpockets in the valley.

**SOIL** As with many residential and allotment sites, the antique soil at Unstone has been depleted over the years to the point where it has only minimal natural, residual fertility. Sensitive organic methods of cultivation are essential to restore the soil structure, which had been destroyed by the overuse of mechanical cultivation (a rotavator), and raise levels of fertility, which had been damaged in the past by the use of chemicals.

**THE SYSTEM** The methods of cultivation used here could be described as *indigenous* horticulture, combining elements of organics, permaculture and biodynamics. Many of the outdoor beds are still in the process of radical improvement with bulky organic matter (compost, leafmould, loam and green manures) to effect long-lasting remedial changes in the soil's structure and fertility. Once the soil contains over 5% organic matter, it supplies most of what the crops require and minimises the amount of watering. Seaweed, calcified seaweed and blood, fish and bone is supplied to crops which demand high levels of available nutrients, supplemented with liquid feeds of comfrey and nettle brews. Raised beds help to improve the soil's structure and avoid the use of mechanical cultivation. The majority of the seed we have used this year has come from stocks we have selected and saved from our own plants in previous years.

**PRODUCE** Our main aim is to generate a continuous supply of fresh produce throughout the year, to provide salads etc. to reward the volunteers and the resident caretakers. Occasional gluts are available to groups visiting the Grange. The gardeners are motivated by their hunger for fresh, organic

produce whose vitality and flavour is superior to anything you can buy. The two main co-ordinators of the project also run 12 allotment sites in Sheffield.

**COMPOSTING AREA** A collection of composts and leafmoulds at various stages of ripeness.

**SOUTH-FACING WALL** In the process of renovation, purpose built for heat-loving fruit. Last winter, we planted Apricots (Moorpark and New Large Early), Peaches (Pineapple and Rochester), Nectarines (Hales and Nectared) and a sweet cherry (Cherokee).

**GREENHOUSES** Victorian, possibly Paxton. Ancient Black Hamburg vine.

**SUNKEN GARDEN** Featuring a chamomile seat and a tripod of hops.

**MAIN BEDS** Still in the process of reclamation and fertility-building. Demonstrate various green manures, such as rye and field beans, and nitrogen-fixing crops such as peas. A whole bed of Asparagus Kale, which is a Heritage variety, not available commercially.

**POLYTUNNEL** The protected microclimate has allowed us to produce many early and out-of-season crops throughout the winter, as well as several quite exotic summer plantings, such as peppers, aubergines, luffas and physalis.

**ORCHARDS** The older trees are standards and half-standards, which have received major pruning to restore their structure and productivity. The younger trees are on dwarfing rootstocks and have had remedial treatment to form strong basic skeletons which they will fruit on in later years. Whereas the more recent plantings are mostly dessert fruit for immediate consumption off the tree, the older include varieties which can be stored through the winter and some can even last right through till the spring. Amongst the varieties of apples present are: Bramley, Howgate Wonder, Lord Derby, Blenheim Orange, Laxton Superb, Cox, Queen Cox, Reverend Wilkes, Lane's Prince Albert, Emneth Early Victoria, Ecklinville, Newton Wonder and Worcester Pearmain.

*"We believe that organic food growing is a complimentary therapy which has the potential to heal individuals and address the stress and bother of modern society.*

*We believe that every culture is founded upon its horticulture. We know for a fact that you are what you eat, and that by growing our own food we can guarantee the vitality of our produce.*

*The challenge of reclaiming, maintaining and developing the gardens with voluntary labour and on a shoestring budget has at certain times been awesome and daunting, especially when the weather conspires to make growing even more difficult. However, we are reassured by the knowledge that we are following in the footsteps of the gardeners who came before us .*

*At Unstone, the sense of a continuous tradition of centuries of similar usage is strong and we are proud to maintain this continuity into the next millennium. It is also reassuring for us to know that on the six days a week that we are not present, the gardens are still appreciated by the visitors to the Grange, some of whom remember the grounds from before we began our work and understand the scale of the achievement involved in bringing the gardens back to life."*