

# A hidden gem

Petersfield Physic Garden  
(Photo by Henry Ascoli)

Local garden designer Rebecca Smith uncovers a hidden gem in the heart of the town...

The Petersfield Physic Garden is a small haven of leafy quiet set back from the High Street. Officially opened by HRH The Duchess of Gloucester on 17 May 1990, it was once the back garden of the house of No. 16 High Street and originally a 'burgage' plot.

A burgage, or borough, plot was usually a rental property, often a long site with a narrow street frontage, as found in many ancient towns.

The garden was bought by Major John Bowen in 1956, whose family lived at No. 22 High Street. It was to be a 'secret garden' for his growing family.

By the 1980's, with his children grown up, John Bowen became concerned about the loss of wildflowers during farming and decided to donate his 'secret garden' to the people of Petersfield so that threatened species of wildflowers could be grown

there. The land was transferred during his lifetime, in 1987, to the Hampshire Buildings Preservation Trust to hold it for the benefit of the Hampshire Gardens Trust in perpetuity.

The first garden to be seen upon entering is the Knot Garden, which was donated by the Rotary Club of Petersfield and designed by Joanne Allen in 1990. Her original drawing can be seen in the office of the Physic Garden with the planting list.

The layout features a knot of dwarf box in a pattern similar to the bow in the family crest of the garden's donor, Major John Bower. This leads into the formal topiary walk, which features Irish Yew standards, clipped yew, bay and box.

A small area of orchard contains apples, pears and other fruit trees under-planted with spring bulbs such as daffodils and fritillaria meleagris, the snakeshead

fritillary, and several bunches of mistletoe decorating the branches. This area has several benches tucked away in shady spots for relaxation away from the hustle and bustle of the High Street.

The herb garden is the final section of the garden and the layout is typical of the formal style used in the 16th and 17th centuries. There are a number of small geometrically-shaped beds which allow easy access to the herbs without the need to walk across the earth.

*Petersfield Physic Garden is managed and maintained by the Friends of the Physic Garden. To volunteer or become a Friend, visit the garden or visit [www.petersfieldphysicgarden.org.uk](http://www.petersfieldphysicgarden.org.uk)*

**Rebecca Smith Garden Design,  
07985 290630, [www.rsgardendesign.co.uk](http://www.rsgardendesign.co.uk)**