

Village

THE PLACE WE LIVE

TOP MARKS MISS!

The school that
got its soul back

LAST LAUGH

Meet Village funny
man and TV comic
Mark Thomas

HANDY HEROES

The soldiers
swapping guns
for screwdrivers

AND!

FLOWER POWER

We join the crowds
flocking to a tiny
Clapham garden

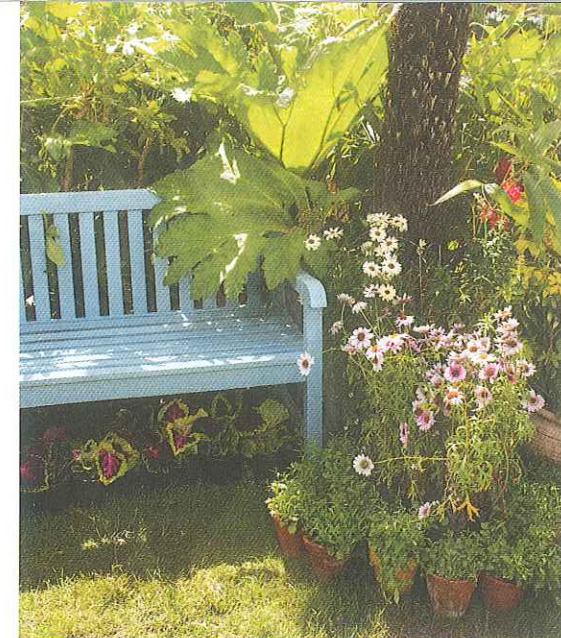
PLUS! Our TOP 5 summer pubs!



Blooming lovely

Village writer **Charlotte Peterson** unearths the roots of the National Gardens Scheme and talks to two Village gardeners taking part

I wouldn't have any grass at all – just one bench on which to sit and enjoy my tranquil oasis



"Sue loved it," recalls Wayne proudly. "The only improvement she suggested was to tidy up the lawn. Actually, if I had my way, I wouldn't have any grass at all – just one bench on which to sit and enjoy my tranquil oasis," he laughs.

For his first Open Garden in 2012, Wayne persuaded his nieces to help, leafletting the area and asking shopkeepers to promote the event. The girls also got cracking baking cakes and mixing Pimms, at first naively offered at 50p a glass, but quickly upped to £2.50. The increase didn't stem the thirst of visitors who came from all corners of the Village and beyond. Wayne and his garden had already been featured in *The Independent* and that, together with the local publicity, helped to attract a staggering 260 visitors during the day.

"I loved showing our garden to so many people. We were completely bowled over by the numbers and the wonderful enthusiasm of everyone who came," Wayne recalls. "Actually, I think my garden can be quite controversial. Lots of my friends ask why I don't put similar colours together, but I love mixing it up. Some visitors even left little notes saying how much they'd enjoyed it all. I was immensely touched by the response."

Sue Phipps was not surprised by Wayne and Richard's success however. "The Open Garden days are great community builders. Despite being in the city, the charity focus and the chance to have a look around a garden, especially to admire what others can achieve, often in very small spaces,

The English obsession with gardening and a natural curiosity for what's happening on the other side of the fence were the catalysts for the National Gardens Scheme, which raises millions for nursing and healthcare charities each year. This summer, several Village gardens will be open for us all to enjoy, and one of the most remarkable belongs to Wayne Amiel (pictured above) and his partner Richard Evans.

Wayne, a keen gardener, has travelled all over the country visiting gardens taking part in the scheme. But, living in the city, he felt it unlikely that organisers would consider his own Clapham plot as a candidate.

"I'd always loved the idea of being able to raise money for charity and having a good nose around someone else's garden at the same time, so I thought, why not have a go myself," he said.

The first thing Wayne did was contact Sue Phipps, Village resident and south east regional chairman of the NGS. The pair arranged to meet and Sue was delighted to discover a little corner of the Caribbean tucked away in Clapham.





reaches across different ages, classes and regions," she says.

Sue has been opening her own garden on Crescent Lane for five years. "I've loved being able to combine my hobby with raising money for charity and it's also a fantastic way to be part of the community. We have got to know so many of our neighbours and have had a lot of fun along the way."

In her first year, Sue made 300 sandwiches, but people only ate the cakes! She hired an urn from the local church for £50, but it burnt dry and she had to buy a new one. There was more to come too. Anxious to encourage a good work ethic in her two boys, she offered to pay them to let visitors in. It all added up to an excess of sandwiches, a burnt urn and a pair of expensive teenagers – leaving a large hole in Sue's pocket. She has since learnt what works and what doesn't (especially cake not sandwiches) and has been able to pass these pearls of wisdom on to fellow Open Gardeners in and around the Village.

The scheme is always delighted to welcome new participants and if you feel your fingers are green enough, it's worth getting in touch. For a garden to be selected, it must demonstrate excellence in some way. Organisers are looking for effort and commitment, as well as that special X-factor that comes shining through. Moreover, you won't be turned down just because your garden is the size of a postage stamp. And,

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In recent years, allotments have also been added to the list of openings.

Some gardens open more than once a year, depending on what's in bloom. "Variety is everything", says Sue, "that's why we're always keen to view gardens that can offer Londoners a fantastic mixture of size, creativity and colour."

The National Gardens Scheme was born in 1927, when visiting private gardens was a popular pastime, but only for the privileged few. Expanding this to the general public was a simple but radical idea, the brainchild of a one Miss Elsie Wagg, a member of the Queen's Nursing Institute. This organising body, which was fully established by the early 20th century with the support of such eminent people as Florence Nightingale and Queen Victoria, was entirely reliant on charity, so finding a reliable funding mechanism was crucial.

People with fine gardens were invited to throw open their gates and the first 609 made a charge of one shilling per head. More than £8,000 was raised – a considerable sum in those days – and with the support of King George V (who showed his own gardens at Sandringham), the scheme has flourished ever since, with some 3,700 gardens now taking part.

Over the last 10 years, the NGS has given £22 million to charities including Marie Curie, Macmillan, Help the Hospices and Carers Trust. There is growing evidence that gardens and gardening are hugely beneficial to the mental

BRANCH OUT

Village gardens taking part are:

- **28 Old Devonshire Road, SW12 9RB**
Sunday 14 July (2pm-5.30pm)
Wednesday 17 July (6pm-8.30pm,
no children)
- **20 Eatonville Road, SW17 7SL**
Sunday 14 July (2pm-6pm)
- **35 Turret Grove, SW4 0ES**
Sunday 21 July (10am-5pm)
- **Trinity Hospice, 30 Clapham Common North Side, SW4 0RN**
Saturday 3, Sunday 4 August
(10am-3pm)
- **51 The Chase, SW4 0NP**
Sunday 22 September (12-4pm)

and physical health of those dealing with serious, debilitating and often terminal illness. So, it is entirely fitting that our own Trinity Hospice should be opening its doors this summer. They have received sizeable donations from the NGS which has funded specialist training for their nurses. The two-acre gardens (pictured below) have been a haven of peace and a place of joy for many thousands of patients and their families for more than 100 years.

Recently restored as a memorial to garden designer Lanning Roper, the grounds, with their sense of space, series of soft colours throughout the year and long-established mulberry trees and horse chestnuts, create one of the most spectacular oases of calm within the Village.

To find out more visit ngs.org.uk

