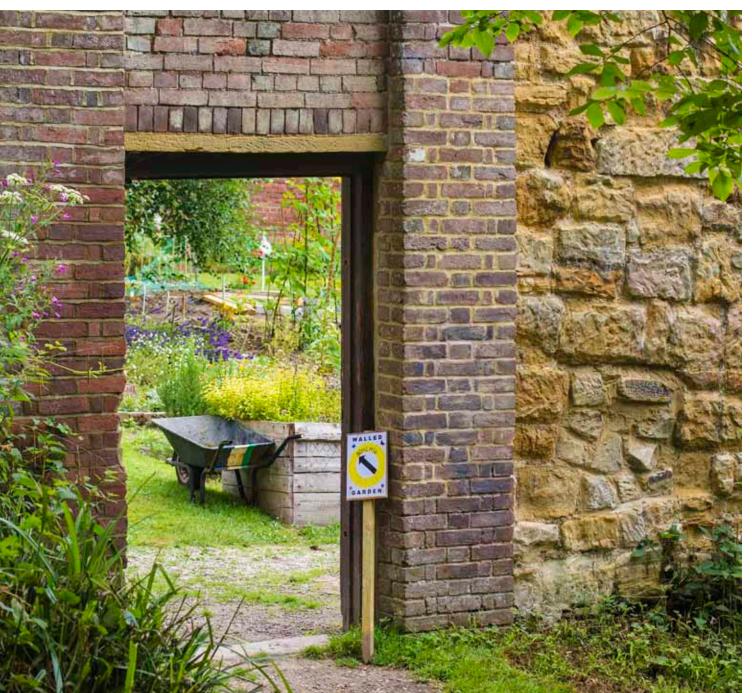


WELCOME TO THE BOHEMIA WALLED GARDEN







Welcome to the Bohemia Walled Garden. Hidden in Summerfields Wood, off Bohemia Road in Hastings, this Victorian walled garden was built in the grounds of the grand mansion owned by the Brisco family, around the mid 19th century. In this booklet, you can get an idea of its history, from providing abundant fruit and vegetables for the wealthy Victorian family to lying neglected for decades. It's also the story of how the walled garden was turned into a cherished and well-used community garden by a group of volunteers, the Bohemia Walled Garden Association.

The next stage in the garden's history is about to begin – we have just been awarded a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the fallen eastern wall, 18 metres long and requiring 13,000 bricks, will be rebuilt in 2017.

Join BWGA through bohemiawga.org.uk. You can put your name down for a plot, visit us during our weekly opening hours or attend one of our events. Visitors and volunteers are always welcome, and keep this garden thriving within its four walls.



1794

One of the first mentions of "Bohemia" is in the Hastings Guide, which gave visitors details of fine walks in the area. It recommended stopping off at "a farmhouse called Bohemia", famous for its cream, where visitors could have tea or syllabub (an old English dish of sweetened cream).

1820s

A new owner, George Newnham-Collingwood, demolishes the farmhouse and starts building a grand mansion which would become known as Bohemia House. It is built in a Jacobean style, with a grand staircase and two large bay windows looking out across the grounds. In 1824 the house is sold before it was finished to two brothers, Thomas and Boykett Breeds.







1831

Wastel Brisco, the younger son of an aristocratic family, buys the house at auction and transforms the estate. He creates a large flower garden in front of the house, and builds a replica Roman bath, ice house and walled garden in the grounds.



1901

Sarah Brisco, the last surviving of Wastel's children, dies. Bohemia House goes to her niece Frances Arbuthnot.

1878

After the death of Brisco, his three unmarried daughters remain at Bohemia House. They open the house and grounds to the public for the first time in 1886. 1903

Summer Fields, the famous boys' prep school in Oxford, acquires Bohemia House and opens it as a branch of the school, thinking some of the more delicate boys who would thrive in the sea air.



1966

The school closes in 1966 and Hastings council puts a compulsory purchase order on the house. It was used by Woodlands School, Tower Road, for classes.



1972

Bohemia House is demolished and the council plans to build a large civic centre on the land, to include the town hall, museum and an art gallery. In the end, only new fire, police and ambulance stations, and the magistrates court are built.



1987

The eastern garden wall is knocked down in the 'great storm'



1990

The probation service use the garden to grow vegetables



1999

The ice house and replica Roman Bath are given Grade II listed status. Summerfields Wood becomes a local nature reserve and Friends of Summerfields Wood is formed.



2008

Local residents set up the Bohemia Walled Garden Association to restore the walled garden and bring it back into use. By 2010, it was a thriving communal space, used by local schools, community groups and individual plot holders.



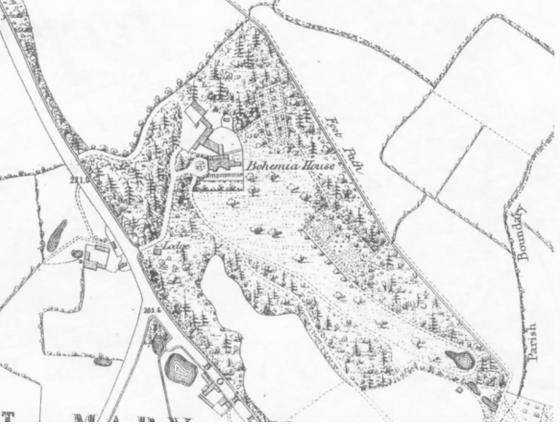
2016-2017

Heritage Lottery Fund Grant awarded. Work will start on rebuilding the eastern wall in 2017...











Ingredients 570ml/1 pint sherry or white wine 1/2 grated nutmeg Sugar to taste .900ml|1½pt milk Method Lut the wine into a bowl, with the grated nutmeg and plenty of pounded sugar, and add it to the milk. Glouted cream may be held on the top, with pounded cinnamon or nutmeg and sugar; and a little brandy may be added to the wine before the milk is put in. In some countries, cider is substituted for the wine: when this is used, brandy must always be added. Warm milk may be poured on from a spouted jug or teapot; but it must be held very high. Recipe from Mrs Beeton, BBC Recipe

BEFORE THE BRISCO FAMILY

Why this area, and this land, was called Bohemia, has long been a mystery, and not everyone has been pleased about it – one correspondent, a local councillor, wrote to the Hastings and St Leonard's Observer in 1897 suggesting it was an unseemly name because of its connotations with gypsies and unconventional living.

In the Domesday book, the land was covered by the manor of Crotteslei. By 1762, it was simply known as Mrs Collier's Land. Its next owner, General Murray, was a former governor of Quebec, and his tenant farmers included the Foster family who worked the land for at least 20 years. The Hastings Guide, published in 1794, mentions "a farmhouse called Bohemia, occupied by Mr Foster, and famous for plenty of fine cream; on which account it is much frequented in the summer by tea and syllabub parties." The name bohemia probably comes from this idea of outdoor parties.

This area had become a fashionable resort – one tenant, Anthony Crisp, had built a malthouse on the land so he could live in it and rent out the farmhouse to tourists keen to experience the seaside. A visitor, Mrs Newnham, was so taken with the house and land that her son, George Newnham-Collingwood bought it. He commissioned the mansion, Bohemia House, to be built on the site of the farmhouse. It was to be grand, with two wings, large bay windows overlooking the terrace, and gabled parapets.

"a farmhouse called Bohemia, occupied by Mr Foster, and famous for plenty of fine cream; on which account it is much frequented in the summer by tea and syllabub parties." He and his wife actually lived in Hawkhurst, and sold the Bohemia mansion in an unfurnished state in 1824 to Thomas and Boykett Breeds, brothers from the Hastings merchant family. During this time, the mansion attracted some high-profile visitors. The most exciting thing to happen during the Earl of Sheffield's stay in November 1829, were the two fires in one week, caused, reported the local paper, "by one of the female servants who, in a fit of delirium, had set fire to the curtains". In May 1830, Princess Sophia of Gloucester, the niece of King George III, arrived at the house, and stayed for three months. She celebrated her birthday in the town, where bells pealed and a royal salute was fired from the Stade.

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"No situation on the coast," noted the local paper, "can be said to rival this spot in beauties of romantic scenery, in fertility and richness of picturesque views."







The advertisement read: "For a Nobleman or a Man of Fashion desiring a Residence on the Coast". Bohemia House was for sale again. The auction catalogue described how it stood "in the bosom of the hills, the grounds falling from it in front of a woody ravine". The manor house had several rooms on the ground floor for entertaining, as well as five bedrooms and a dressing room on the first floor; it also had servants' quarters and a stable yard with room for six horses.

It caught the attention of Wastel Brisco. The Briscos were an aristocratic family whose seat was Crofton Estate in what is now Cumbria, but the family also had a Hastings branch, and Wastel, the younger son, was after his own grand house. He made it even grander. He bought more land, and had a wall built around his estate by his bricklayer John Jinks. Two statues of greyhounds – from the Brisco coat of arms – were installed in front of the house, and he built an ice house (to keep food cold) and replica of a Roman baths in the grounds.

He also built the walled garden. It was about 70 metres long, by 26 metres wide, and

the four-metre-high walls were built from sandstone and good quality bricks. The Gardener's Magazine, an influential periodical, ran a report on the grounds in 1841 which described the walled garden, noting the iron loops built into the wall, with willow rods threaded through to train the trees to.

The walled garden – as well as a glasshouse, grape house and further garden to the east of the house – would have supplied the Brisco family with fresh fruit and vegetables. The abundant garden would have been tempting for light-fingered locals too – in 1875, the local paper reported that a young man had been arrested for stealing peaches, apples, raspberries and grapes from the grounds.

When he was caught, his

After Wastel Brisco died in 1878, his three daughters, Maria, Eliza and Sarah,

jacket pockets were stained

with raspberry juice.

remained in the house (they divided their time between Hastings and a London townhouse). Although they were intensely private, they did open the grounds to the public for the first time. The Brisco sisters supported several charities in the town, and donated the building which became the Beau Site Convalescent Home (now called White Rock Mansion, you will find it on the corner of White Rock Gardens).

When it opened in 1886, they threw a garden party to celebrate, and raise funds. "It is remembered that for a very long time," noted the report in the local paper, "the [garden] in question, known to be peculiarly beautiful and much favoured with Nature's bounteous charms, has remained a mysterious and, to the general public, altogether unknown land". It reported how a large choir and band entertained the guests, and how the fruit gardens, paths, lawns, and the Roman bath "impressed one and all, and drew forth many warm expressions of admiration".

"...known to be peculiarly beautiful and much favoured with Nature's bounteous charms, has remained a mysterious and, to the general public, altogether unknown land"



Another garden party, this time for the Conservative association, was held in 1898. A palmist read fortunes, and another woman gave a lecture on physiognomy, the Victorian craze for the pseudo-scientific idea that you could tell a person's character by their facial appearance. People could fish in one of the ponds, and afternoon tea was served on the lawn. In the evening, according to the local paper, "Several thousands foregathered in the fields opposite Bohemia House in the evening where roundabouts, coconut shies and similar pastimes were indulged in."

In 1890, Sarah Brisco was the last remaining of Wastel's six children, and she died in 1901. But this is not where the Brisco family story ends. Recently Mary Sue Powell, a distant relation of Wastel Brisco, who lives in Texas, visited Hastings and was very

pleased that the walled

garden is still in use.

JOHN JINKS

The walled garden is around 70 metres long, by 25 metres wide, and is made from more than 100,000 bricks. The man who built the garden is believed to be John Jinks, a local man who had been part of the America Ground community in Hastings, where he had run a clothes shop. When he - along with the other squatters - were evicted in 1835, Jinks moved to Bohemia, where many other members of his extended family were living. A talented bricklayer, he built Bohemia's first pub, The Wheatsheaf. It is also very likely he built many of the features of the Brisco estate, including the sandstone wall along Bohemia road, the ice house and the walled garden.

Built on a south-facing slope, the garden walls are constructed in good quality Ashburnam bricks, and sandstone in places. It would have been very expensive. Its location, suggests local historian Heather Grief, in the grounds on the path to the "Roman" bath and its impressive sandstone southern wall, means it could have been "on show" to guests - they might have even picnicked here among the fruit trees.

Jinks was probably in his forties when he built the walled garden, and he was still recorded as a bricklayer in his seventies. The Jinks family still has a connection to the walled garden - one of the members of the BWGA is John Jinks' great-great-granddaughter.



1901-2008 SUMMER FIELDS SCHOOL & DEMOLITION OF BOHEMIA HOUSE



After the death of Sarah Brisco in 1901. Bohemia House (as well as other property and the Newtown Hall estate in Montgomeryshire) went to her niece Frances Arbuthnot.

The Oxford boys' prep school Summer Fields had been searching for an outpost on the south coast, to suit some of the more fragile boys, and they found Bohemia House in 1903, drawn by its proximity to the sea but also its secluded grounds. E.D. Compton, the headmaster, and his wife, set up the school with just 11 boys.

A history of the school noted that the grounds were "a paradise...playing in the woods and making dams on Sunday afternoons were particular high spots of the week." In 1940, during the war, the boys were evacuated to the main Oxford school and the town council moved into the house. "If there is any truth in the argument that our surroundings affect our lives and our work," remarked the gossip column in the local paper, "what, I asked myself, will be the effect of such a magnificent pastoral setting on the minds and activities of our Town Hall staff!"

One activity was putting a Luftwaffe bomber, which had been shot down somewhere in the south, on show in the grounds.

People were charged sixpence to view it, to raise funds for a campaign to buy a Spitfire plane (100,000 shillings were needed).

After the war, Summer Fields school returned, and remained open for another twenty years, although numbers dwindled - at its high point it had 65 boys, but by the time it closed in 1966, just two were registered.

Local children probably made more use of the grounds. In the early 1960s, when Nigel Sinden was about 12, he and three or four friends would get into the walled garden on their way into the town centre, taking Brisco's Walk from their homes in Silverhill, and help themselves to pears from the orchard there. "The wall was down, and there were always ways to get inside," says Sinden, who is now Deputy Mayor (2016). The school, which was still running then, can't have used the walled garden as it was very overgrown. "The biggest problem was the brambles, which you had to get past. We called it the secret garden."

In 1966, Hastings town council bought the house and grounds under a compulsory purchase order. In the 1960s, architects and town planners embarked on a nationwide destruction of many Victorian





buildings, which they viewed as vulgar and outdated. In Hastings, Bohemia House was earmarked for destruction, to be replaced with a civic complex including council offices, a museum and art gallery.

It was demolished in 1972, and although the fire, police and ambulance stations, and law courts were built, the rest of the plans never materialised. Temporary buildings were constructed on the site of the house, which until recently housed the register office.

All that remains of the grand estate is the ice house, Roman bath and walled garden. Even the name Bohemia for the land didn't survive - it is now known as Summerfields. For a while in the 1990s, it was taken on by the probation service, where people who had been given a community sentence grew vegetables to be used by the Salvation Army, but after that it was abandoned and unloved. Trees seeded themselves within its walls and brambles grew high.











For years the garden lay neglected. Ivy covered the walls and a sea of stinging nettles surrounded it.

In 2008, a number of local people, including Susan Thomson, Bob Hart, Chris Jukes and Judy Clark, became interested in restoring it and the Bohemia Walled Garden Association (BWGA) was formed. "You could see it was a beautiful walled garden that was totally neglected," says Thompson. "It was so overgrown, you couldn't see the back wall."

The BWGA negotiated a lease with Hastings council and volunteers set about clearing the overgrown site, usually meeting for a couple of hours every Sunday morning. "The bramble had taken over," says Hart. "There were lots of tree saplings. The tree that still stands in the garden now is a typical example of the ones that had sprung up, which we cleared."

In Spring 2010, temporary steel fencing had been put up where the east wall had been –

most of the damage had been done when trees fell on it in the 1987 storm – and that year the first plants and vegetables were planted. By the end of 2011, the garden was almost unrecognisable – a lawn had been laid, and vegetable and flower beds created.

The BWGA had always intended that it should be a community garden, to be used and enjoyed by local people and groups, and two primary schools were given a plot each. The children grew vegetables and made scarecrows.

Over the years, other improvements have been made thanks to small grants. An Awards 4 All grant was obtained to install the waterless toilet. A grant from the Sussex Gardens Trust enabled the purchase of the marquee.

Fundraising events helped support the day-today running and development of the garden including creating terraces and planting fruit trees, a willow arbour, a shelter and tool shed. Over £4000 has been raised to help fund the next big project to rebuild the missing wall.

There are now 36 plot-holders, including a local primary school St Mary Star of the Sea.
Other groups, such as Treasure Tots pre-school



group, Hedge Home Education Group and two residential homes, use the garden. $\,$

Events are held throughout the year and you can find many volunteers here at the garden on most Sunday and Wednesday mornings. The brambles and nettles may be mostly gone, but there is always weeding to do.













HERITAGE BORDERS BY SUSAN THOMSON

From the very start, the BWGA wanted to acknowledge our respect for Nature and for Heritage. This was reflected in our planting of two communal borders.

The Nature Border has been stocked with many different herbs, which provide insects with irresistible nectar. Most the shrubs in that border have been donated and provide height and structure. The most successful plant has been the mint, which spreads effortlessly and was very popular with honey bees.

The Heritage Border was initially planted with vegetables that are recognised as going back to Edwardian or Victorian times. Since then, we have filled it with plants generously donated to the garden. Every year we grow sunflowers, purely for the pleasure it gives everyone. We also have the hollyhocks which have self-seeded themselves from the original plant brought from my garden. More recently the echiums have joined the ranks of statuesque plants.

And so the borders continue to evolve...







The Bohemia Walled Garden Association has been awarded £97,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund to 'Restore & Develop the Bohemia Victorian Walled Garden for Heritage, Learning & Enjoyment.'

We raised £4000 at events which, with donations during the last four years for the wall restoration. We are thankful to all who have helped in many ways to support us in this venture.







NATURAL HISTORY DAYS



JULY & AUGUST 2016

These were held as part of the Heritage Lottery Fund project Restoration and Development of the Victorian Bohemia Walled Garden for heritage, learning & enjoyment.









FLOWERS & WOODLAND ANIMALS

We had botany experts who came to tell young naturalists how to identify flowers. They learned about woodland animals through stories, games and art, and made clay animals. A (taxidermied) badger and squirrel were brought from the Hastings Country Park.





BIRDS & MOTHS

Lucy Bowyer from Sussex Wildlife Trust came to talk about birds and we made bird feeders. Crystal Ray, a moth expert, showed us the beauty of moths. She talked about them and we released some into the sunflower border. It was great to have events that were of interest to parents as well as children. We hope to do more botany sessions for adults and a local moth-studying event in the future.



SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2016

- · Natural heritage and history events
- Heritage Open Day: Sunday, 11th September 10am-4pm
- Launch of history booklet
- Pumpkins & Heritage Apples: Sunday 23rd October 10-4pm,
 Pumpkin carving, talks about heritage apples, cooking with apples & apple juicing

JUNE-AUGUST 2017

- Rebuilding of the fallen East Wall
- Building paths through the wood to the garden entrance
- Design and installation of the two interpretation boards and notice board

MARCH-SEPTEMBER 2017

- Horticulture workshops during the growing season
- Open Day & Autumn Celebration 2017: Traditional skills workshops on e.g. spinning and willow basket making
- Evaluation questionnaires, film, photographic, and IT documentation throughout the project
- The website will have resources and information on the flora & fauna found in the garden and wood
- A second edition of this booklet will be produced when the Heritage Lottery Fund Project is completed











THANKS TO...

Heather Grief, Bob Hart, Susan Thomson, Mary Dawson and Nigel Sinden for providing a large amount of help, information and photographs.

Booklet Design & Photography: Kristina Alexander, Super 8 Design

Photography, Illustrations: Danielle Castelino

Research & Copywriting: Emine Saner

Photography & Editing: Mary Dawson

Printing: Martel Colour Print, Silverhill

Thanks to Hastings Borough Council and the Rangers for their continued support.





RESEARCH & SOURCES

Bohemia Farm to Summerfields Estate: a History, by Heather Grief (2010) is a detailed history of the land and house

The Bohemia Walled Garden Association website (www.bohemiawga.org.uk) has information and photographs

There are several websites which have a wealth of information, including Bohemia Brisco (www.bohemiabrisco.weebly.com) and 1066.net

The photos of Summer Fields School were donated to the Bohemia Village Voice by Mr Lee Browning. They were originally photographed and published by J H Blomfield at Royal Studios, 44 Robertson Street, Hastings, Sussex

You can find much more information in the study room of Hastings museum, including books, plans and documents.

& FINALLY...

MANY people have contributed to the garden development over the years. A few who have been there from the beginning and are still active: Susan Thomson, Lesley Bruce, Darren and Mat Windley and Bob Hart.

Charity Trustees are Susan Thomson, Christine M'Baye and Mary Dawson

Registered Charity 1167167

BOHEMIA WALLEDGARDEN

