

The Secret Garden

Posted on [April 19, 2013](#) by [Catherine](#)

Last week I ventured off the beaten track a bit, and headed into our wonderful Borough to take a look at a hidden gem over near the village of Hawkhurst. Heading down a small track, I headed into the grounds of the imposing St Ronan's School, where another driveway led off to my destination, [The Walled Nursery](#).

The weather hasn't been great for all you green fingered gardeners out there so far in 2013, but even if you can't head out into your back garden quite yet, it's worth still popping along to see what The Walled Nursery has to offer.



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Once part of the Tongwood Estate, which dated back to the 13th Century, the Walled Nursery is in fact one of the few extant Victorian walled kitchen gardens remaining in the country and is considered one of the five best preserved too. With 13 glasshouses, built by Foster and Pearson between 1898 and 1910, every single space is used to house and grow the plants that you can buy. It's so wonderful to see these 100 year old glasshouses actually in use. Yes, they even grow peaches in the peach house and melons in the melon house!

Since 2010, the nursery has been run by Emma and Monty Davies, who live, breathe and work the garden. Literally; they actually live in the old gardener's bothy within the walls! Their passion and enthusiasm for this rare gem that they've been privileged enough to become custodians of is infectious. Emma gave me the grand tour around, and even if you have little knowledge on plants and gardening, the site is fascinating.

Both Monty and Emma have horticultural backgrounds; Emma having previously worked at nearby Sissinghurst Castle in the world famous gardens created by Vita Sackville-West, and Great Dixter, Christopher Lloyd's garden over near Rye in East Sussex. Taking on the Walled Garden hasn't been easy, these glasshouses are in constant need of restoration and of course that costs money. However, the Davies' have come up with an ingenious solution to their dilemma- you can sponsor a pane of glass or a glazing bar (for only £10 or £30 respectively) on The Wall of Panel!



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Entrance to the Walled Nursery is in fact free, all money raised from the sale of plants and seeds go towards the upkeep of the Nursery and the part time member of staff who assists Monty and Emma. It's a small operation, but wonderfully done, and there are ambitious plans for the future. Currently they welcome schools, groups and individuals to enjoy activities, courses and talks all

year round, plus there is a small museum of gardening implements, and boards around the vinery with information about the history of the site. There is also a small cafe, for refreshment, plus public toilets, and ample parking. However, the aim is to eventually have a fully running restaurant using produce grown on the site, perhaps even extending the current cafe in the Vinery, into the Fernery, which is in fact incredibly rare, as it is the only L shaped Vinery/Fernery in the country; plus many more talks and activities on site.

In the summer there are also open air events, including a magical sounding Rajasthan inspired Bazaar which runs for 4 days over the August Bank Holiday weekend, which sees the Nursery transformed into an Indian wonder, with tents and silken drapes, beautiful crafts and gifts to be bought, and Indian food cooked and sold outside.

Currently The Walled Nursery has its dedicated clientele and although I would hate it to lose its unique charm as an off the beaten track wonder, it does need as much public support as possible, or else it may be lost forever. So [take a look](#) at the popular courses they run throughout the year and see if there is something that appeals, go to one of their many events, including the upcoming Chelsea Fringe (May 25th & 26th) with BBC1's *One Show* gardening expert Christine Walkden; go pick up some plants or heritage seedlings (Drunken Woman lettuce anyone?!), or just head out for an exploration and stumble across this secret garden, it's well worth taking the time to do so.