

# ABOUT LETT SOM GARDENS

May 1994

## THE GARDENS

Lettsom Gardens is a wonderful rarity in a city area - a small wild garden run by the community as they see fit. It's seven acres are used by young and old and provides a safe, enclosed, dog and car free area for all to enjoy. The hard core area is ideal for ball games, children's cycling and roller skating, while grassy and wooded areas are beautifully tranquil. Membership is open to all and subscriptions are kept to a minimum.

The Gardens are bordered by Grove Park, Camberwell Grove and Grove Hill Road with two entrances: one on Grove Park between nos. 8 and 9, and one at Grove Hill Road near the junction with Camberwell Grove.

The grounds are maintained by volunteers in an environmentally friendly way and specific areas are kept wild to protect the diversity of wild life. Assistance in preserving the ecology is provided by the London Wildlife Trust, the Council's Ecology Officer and Southwark Rangers Service.

## HISTORY

Lettsom Gardens occupies much of the site of Dr. John Coakley Lettsom's garden, the well known 18th century physician. As well as running a successful practice, entertaining Dr. Johnson and importing exotic plants, Lettsom was also the first to recognise and document DT (delirium tremens) withdrawal symptoms from alcohol.

His villa stood where Nos 9 - 12 Grove Park now stand and some of his garden was cultivated as a physic garden. Today' all of that is gone, but the fig, mulberry and acacia trees are probably descended from those in his original garden.

## HOW IT WORKS

In 1980 Southwark Council agreed to lease the site via three trustee to the Lettsom Gardens Association. We have a written constitution, regular committee meetings and an Annual General Meeting every May. The committee consists of Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Membership Secretary, Gardening Co-ordinator and Street Representatives for the local areas (the later collect subs and deliver newsletters). Committee members are elected at each AGM.

Importantly the garden is managed and maintained on a voluntary basis by local residents. Gardening Sundays are held on a quarterly basis and even the dustbins are emptied weekly by volunteers. A list of

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the committee members, a description of how to join and news of events is posted on the gate notices boards, weather and vandalism permitting!

For security reasons and because we need to raise money to run the Gardens we have a membership system with access by keys. However we keep as open a door policy as possible. The Gardens are open throughout the year on Sundays from 10:00 to 12:00 am via the Grove Park gate and events (autumn bonfire, barbecues, children's activities etc.,) are open to all.

Money raised through annual subscriptions is used to pay the insurance, buy gardening tools and equipment, subsidise events, buy benches, keep locks, gates and notice boards in order.

In short, the borough benefit from a free, natural park run by a voluntary organisation, the Lettsom Gardens Association. In turn, the act of running the park has helped bring the community together.

#### WHO USES IT

The membership has ranged between 350 and 250 members over the past decade. The exact number is difficult to assess as people can join as a family regardless of the number of family members. There are always new people joining which indicates that the Association is viable into the foreseeable future.

In addition Dog Kennel Hill Junior, Infants and Day Nursery are regular users of the Gardens for both environmental studies and as an open space. The Gardens also provide the Copleston' Road Day Nursery's only outdoor space.

The following list show the area covered by the Gardens membership: Camberwell Grove, Chadwick Road, Crofton Road, Dog Kennel Hill Estate, Grove Hill Road, Grove Lane, Grove Park, Ivanhoe Road area, Pelham Close and outlying areas.

The Crofton Road area includes: Shenley Road, Talfourd Rd, Bellenden Rd etc.

Ivanhoe Rd area includes: Copleston Rd, Choumert Rd, Oglander Rd etc.

Outlying areas have gone as far as Flodden Rd SE5, Henslowe Rd SE22, Wood Vale SE 25 and SE1.

#### WHAT WE ASK

We ask that if you join Lettsom Gardens, you help to keep it tidy by taking away any potential litter you may have brought. Please don't walk your dog through the Gardens as dogs are not allowed in, and if you use it as a short cut after dark (when the gardens are closed) you do so quietly in order not to disturb the neighbours. Thank you.