

Walled garden to honour historic gardening group

A trust which has turned one of Scotland's biggest walled gardens from a neglected site into a thriving community venture is preparing to celebrate its 25th anniversary this summer.

[Amisfield Community Walled Garden](#), near Haddington, in East Lothian, was established as part of the private estate of the 6th Earl of Wemyss in the late 18th century.

For the last 25 years it has been looked after by Amisfield Preservation Trust, which leases the land from East Lothian Council.

And they have turned the gardens, which at eight acres are believed to be one of the biggest of its type in Scotland, into a visitor attraction and space for community groups and amateur gardeners of all levels to work in and enjoy.

With sensory gardens, walks lined with apple trees, vegetable beds and a maze, Amisfield welcomes more than 100 volunteers who help maintain it.

Excess crops from the gardens are provided to food banks and offered to visitors at the entrance with an honesty box system operating.

This summer the trust is planning an open weekend to mark its 25th anniversary at the gardens and they will pay tribute to an historic society of free gardeners who go back even further than Amisfield itself.

Records for the Ancient Order of Free Gardeners of East

Lothian date back to 1676 and describe a group of small landowners and farmers who came together to garden as a hobby. They followed strict rules which saw heavy fines for swearing, cursing or speaking ill of their brethren. Anyone caught hot sharing secrets of their own gardens could also be fined and they had to allow fellow members access to their private gardens and cuttings.

The Haddington branch of the society had offices in the market town which until a few years ago were home to the Gardeners Arms pub and bore their coat of arms on its wall.

Ruth Alder, from the Amisfield Trust, is planning to re-enact the annual parade the society held each year as they marched through town to their yearly meeting at the gardens during the open weekend in August.

She said: " We can't believe hardly anyone knows the amazing history of this ancient fraternity and we want to re-enact their parade somehow with flower bower, aprons and a piper, which traditionally led them through the town.

"We have managed to gather some images of items from the society and I am planning to give a talk on their work but we are keen to find as much memorabilia or information as we can as we would like to honour them during the weekend.

"We are keen to hear from anyone who can provide us with additional information about the society and their members ahead of our open weekend to make sure we share their story."

The Gardens are holding their **open weekend** to mark their 25th anniversary on **Saturday, August 24 and Sunday, August 25.**

They are also holding an **Easter Celebration on Saturday, April 6** this year with a **summer plant sale on Saturday, June 22.**

Anyone who can help provide information on the free gardeners can contact Ruth at ruthhelenalder@gmail.com.

To find out how to get involved and volunteer at the gardens or become a member visit the website www.amisfield.org.uk where details of the opening times for all events and the

gardens throughout the year will be available.

by Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter



Amisfield Community Walled Garden