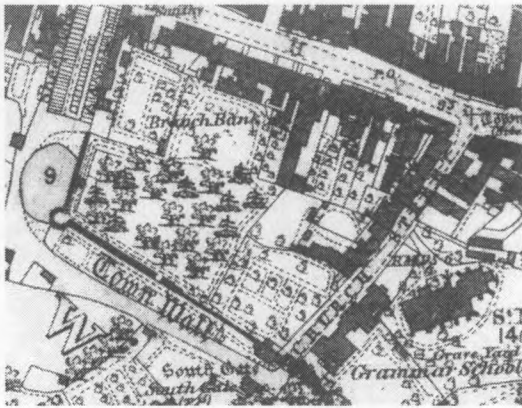


COWBRIDGE PHYSIC GARDEN

A BRIEF HISTORY



The earliest pictorial record of the garden is the first edition OS map of 1879, which shows a rectangular layout of paths in 'our area', quite different from the large trees shown in the main part of Old Hall garden. This must have been the organised, cultivated, part of the gardens of the property. Probably something like this existed on the site ever since the Edmondes family developed Old Hall in the 1740s.



*An Information Leaflet
For Visitors*

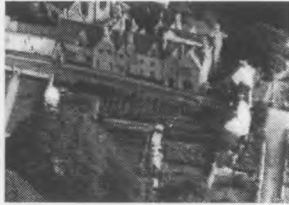
Prepared by
Jeff Alden

Cowbridge Physic Garden
Church Street
Cowbridge
Vale of Glamorgan

The History of the Physic Garden

The physic garden is a walled garden, bounded on the south by the early-medieval town wall of Cowbridge, on the east by the tall wall adjoining Church Street, on the north by another wall abutting former grammar school land, and to the west by the Old Hall garden.

This probably occupied a number of burgage plots (the building and garden plots laid out by the developers of the new town of Cowbridge which was granted its charter by Richard de Clare, the Lord of Glamorgan in 1254). Later this probably was part of a coniger (rabbit warren) where rabbits were reared for food.



The earliest records we have relating to today's physic garden this site are those of the Edmondess family, because for nearly two centuries this was part of the garden of Old Hall, which was owned by the Edmondess family.

John Edmondess (1688-1761) was a steward and agent to the Aubreys of Llantrithyd who also owned a sizeable estate in Boarstall, Bucks. His son Thomas Edmondess (1715-1790) also started off as land agent to the Aubreys but, like other land agents in the Vale of Glamorgan, rose to become a wealthy landowner in his own right. It was this Thomas Edmondess who bought a number of properties in High Street, Cowbridge in 1744

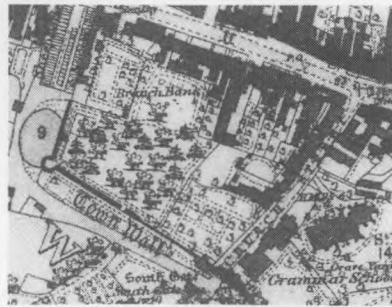


from John Towgood of Bristol (who had earlier bought them from the Wyndhams of Dunraven). They were described a century earlier as being two new houses, two adjoining plots, and at the rear – including our garden - a coniger and orchard.

Thomas was responsible for rebuilding and developing the property, and in particular for building the classical garden frontage with Venetian windows and for laying out the grounds. Presumably for effect, directly facing the front (garden) door he built the gateway now at the entrance to the car park, with two ball finials, even though that led nowhere other than to the gardens of the filled-in ditch around the walls. He also probably built the walkway near the top of the west wall, as there is a similar pillar with ball finial there. Thomas Edmondess married Mary Thomas of Llangynwyd who brought a great deal of property in the hilly areas of Glamorgan into the family – initially low-grade farm land but by the next century very valuable because of the underlying coal reserves.

His two sons, John and Thomas, both lived, at different times, at Old Hall, and an inventory of 1778, when Thomas took over, describes 'a greenhouse and gardens' as well as a stable and coach house. It is tempting to think that the recently-discovered slabbed floor, wall and flue of a boiler room in the north-west corner of the physic garden, directly under where a greenhouse stood till recently, dates back to this time; certainly the bricks were larger than usual and non-standard in dimensions.

The Edmondess were interesting people. The next Thomas Edmondess was the son of John, known as The Major. "He was sent to Ireland with his regiment to quell a rebellion, and rode away from Cowbridge with his wife on a pillion behind, and the manservant rode behind them with the cradle behind him".



The next Edmondess to live in Old Hall was another Thomas, the Revd Thomas Edmondess, vicar of Llanblethian with Cowbridge for 46 years. One of his sons recorded in his diary in 1868 (when he was courting his wife-to-be) that he had been 'under the plane trees' and 'under the laburnums' and that they had walked on the terrace – presumably the walkway near the battlements. He records playing croquet on the lawn, and that he had tried out the new mowing machine, made by Greens, for the lawn. He also wrote that he had helped to mark out the tennis court, which was where the library now stands.



The first edition OS map of 1879 shows something of the layout of Old Hall gardens, with a detailed path layout for our part. The second edition of 1899 shows less detail but does include three buildings – the greenhouses already

mentioned, together with the two sheds which have recently been restored for our use. A watercolour by Eleanor Edmondess shows our garden in the 1920s, then maintained as a flower garden but possibly with vegetables tucked away from the main path in the middle of the picture.

When Old Hall was taken over by Cowbridge Grammar School in 1932, our garden then became the boarders' kitchen garden, and supplied the boarding house of the school with vegetables, and some fruit. The greenhouses continued to be used. Boarding stopped in 1975 and from then on South Glamorgan used the site as a tree nursery, but this was soon abandoned. He trees grew close and tall so that it became an impenetrable woodland, which had to be cleared before the development of the Physic garden could begin.

