

## Detached Gardens

The Register entry for Hill Close includes this comment: *The survival rate for this type of site is extremely low, with most examples having disappeared under built development. Where they do survive, it is generally as allotment sites with hedges and buildings removed*

Detached gardens were first noted in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century but became more common in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries as the urbanisation of towns squeezed out garden land for more development.

Typically these were larger than allotments: of about an eighth of an acre, those at Gaping Lane are 23 poles (allotments being 10 poles) and elsewhere were let out by the year for £1 5s, hence Matthew Boulton's 'Guinea Gardens' around Birmingham. Thus they were more expensive to rent than an allotment and of higher status. From the first they were designed as pleasure rather than productive gardens and typically included lawns and fruit trees, summerhouses, sheds and glasshouses (privies and cooking facilities were also available on some sites). They were often used as weekend or holiday retreats.

The large size and individual enclosure of each plot by high hedges (more rarely walls or iron railings), offered those without a garden of their own some sense of private outdoor space and the surrounding hedges were a haven for wildlife and gave a sense of tranquillity.

However, the major threat, identified as early as 1873 in Sheffield was 'omnivorous builders' and many have disappeared under housing or been converted to mere allotments with the loss of hedges, wildlife, amenity value and privacy which that implies.

Few of these gardens now survive, those at St Ann's Hill in Nottingham (also on the HE *Register*) are now allotments but Hill Close Gardens in Warwick were saved from being built upon by a vigorous local campaign and are now a thriving tourist attraction and a viable set of gardens, with café and shop. These gardens are used for leisure or for vegetable production by individual plot holders and are open to the public (<http://hillclosegardens.com/>). Due to diligent research and careful restoration, these gardens show what can be achieved to demonstrate an important part of the history of towns in a period of intense urbanisation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the ingenious way gardens were provided for those who would otherwise have gone without.

See: Lambert, David, 1994. *Detached Town Gardens: A Theme Study for English Heritage*  
Harding, J and Taigel, 'An Air of Detachment: Town Gardens in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries.' In: *Garden History* Vol 24:2 (Winter 2006)

