

In the 16th of a series of articles profiling Wanstead's local community heroes, photojournalist **Carole Edrich** introduces us to Marian Temple

Angels in Wanstead

Marian Temple

"My generation were brought up to pay their taxes and expect the council to do everything for them. It doesn't work well because the council can't be everywhere and it breeds an unfortunate mindset," explained guerrilla gardener Marian Temple. Marian is the moving force behind Wanstead Community Gardeners, and I decided she should be this month's Angel after watching the flower beds around Wanstead Station spring into life.

It's difficult to say when her work evolved from simple guerrilla gardening to community gardening. Certainly the first changes she made were at the Corner House 12 years ago. Since then, one of the people whose enthusiasm in guerrilla gardening she ignited started planting the little plots by the motorway wall towards Leytonstone about three years ago and this year, her work has expanded to South Woodford as well.

Marian's passion is providing beautiful sustainable cottage gardens in small pieces of forgotten land all over the area. She does it for free – even the Corner House. Money just doesn't come into the equation. She explained: "I've never been a gardener. My mother was a cottage-style gardener and that's the only style I'm interested in. I started with the Corner House garden. I was aware of it on the High Street before then and knew it could be lovely – it's a wonderful spot – but that was when I was working and I didn't have time. Then 12 years ago, I decided to do something about it. Through the Wanstead Society I approached the council and asked permission to do the garden. They were fine about it, which is great because some councils wouldn't be. So we got a group of volunteers to take it on, got rid of the waist-high weeds and the rubbish and planted loads of stuff. Most was from my own garden".

It was a very good learning curve. It taught Marian what you can plant in public spaces and how to arrange the planting. Over time she learned what people will lean over and snap off or take, what works well in a public garden and what is going to disappear. She told me that since snapping a beautiful flower off is human nature, the best way to prevent it is to plant the more tempting plants far enough back that they can't be casually reached. Now volunteers

join in to plant new gardens and replant the old, and many plants are overwintered in peoples' homes. The geraniums are overwintered inside Wanstead Station. Apparently, the station staff have become quite enthusiastic about the whole thing.

Despite initial resistance, she and the working party now do five beds on Wanstead High Street, a little bit of ground in Snaresbrook on the wall behind the little cottage that used to be an office and the side and back of the Corner House, and other people have taken it further. Volunteers talk to Marian about what will and will not work and then take on other little plots of abandoned land in the community. Listening to her, it seems she can be persuaded – eventually – to tend any plot provided it's not private and that enough members of the public walk past and can benefit from it.

"If you understand them [the plants] they will thrive. You consider their needs. You don't put them where you want them to be, or force them in conditions they like, but consider what makes them do best. Some like full sun, some like shade, it's about understanding their needs. Then they'll improve over time and become really rewarding." Sounds to me that's how people thrive too.

For more information on Wanstead's community gardening activities, email **mariantemple43@gmail.com**

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