STATION SANCTUARY

GARDEN NEWSLETTER SUMMER

Your bimonthly dig into garden happenings!



RACHEL SHORE, MASH

Rachel Shore is the Project Coordinator at Manchester Action on Street Health (MASH), where she has worked since 2018. MASH is a local award winning charity that supports women who sex work and experience homelessness . As part of her role, she leads engagement projects that bring together women who access MASH's services through creative, public-facing activities that build skills, confidence and connection.

A couple of years ago, Rachel came up with the idea of creating a peaceful garden space close to the MASH centre. She wanted it to be somewhere women could learn gardening skills, create nature-inspired art and contribute to a welcoming space that could also be enjoyed by the wider public.

After approximately one year of approaching a range of organisations, Network Rail enthusiastically agreed to become the project's first supporting partner. The project quickly grew, with collaborating partners including the National Trust and Sow the City helping to co-design, and build the garden. Women from MASH took part in planter-building workshops, used power tools, learnt about wildlife, created bee posts, contributed to the design of the space and helped to plant the garden.

Rachel says the project has become much more than a garden. As redevelopment continues around Piccadilly, she believes Station Sanctuary gives the women who access MASH's services a positive visible presence in an area where community groups and people who rely on local services can often be overlooked. Further plans include pop up nature based workshops, poetry and art in the space.

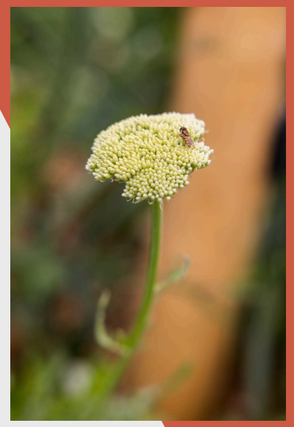
The garden also has a strong personal significance. Women have engraved bee posts with the initials of friends who have passed away, dedicated plants to loved ones and added their own creative artwork. Seeing the garden grow and flourish has been incredibly rewarding, and Rachel is proud of everything the women and project partners are achieving together.



ALL OTHER PHOTOS SHOW THE STATION SANCTUARY GARDEN IN BLOOM









sow the city

MASH

National Trust

NetworkRail







WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE GARDEN?

June brought a burst of colour to the Station Sanctuary garden, with an array of blossoming flowers, a blanket of vibrant poppies and, by the end of the month, a striking sunflower standing tall in the central bed. A heatwave in July put the garden to the test, with weeks passing without rain. Thankfully, the planting scheme had been carefully designed with a changing climate in mind and the knowledge that the garden has no water source other than Manchester's rainfall. Despite the dry conditions, the garden continued to thrive.

In June, Network Rail's Placemaking team spent time in the garden carrying out essential maintenance, watering and seasonal tidying. Working alongside Emily from Sow the City, they helped care for the planting on Station Approach as well as the beds within the Station Sanctuary garden that needed a little extra attention. While working in the garden, the team also explored the iNaturalist app, which allows users to photograph plants, animals and fungi—or record their sounds—to identify species and contribute observations to a global community of scientists and nature enthusiasts. Since the garden was created, it has become an increasingly valuable habitat for a wide variety of pollinators including honey bees, bumble bees and solitary bees, demonstrating the important role even small urban green spaces can play in supporting biodiversity in the heart of the city.

Throughout June and July, Tom visited Armitage School and Ladybarn Primary School to deliver positive poetry workshops, which included a train journey to the Station Sanctuary garden. The two schools experienced the space in very different conditions: Armitage arrived in torrential rain, while Ladybarn visited on one of the hottest days of the year. The Ladybarn pupils embraced the opportunity to create 'pavement poetry', leaving uplifting poems for visitors and passers-by to discover around the garden. Tom's also been carrying out his regular 'Poe-tea' sessions at Station Sanctuary.

Rebecca continued her photography workshops throughout June and July. Beginning in the Station Sanctuary garden, each session included an urban nature walk to Mayfield Park, encouraging community groups to explore green spaces in Manchester city centre that they may never have visited before while developing their photography skills.

Also in July, the women of MASH have started to carry out monthly maintenance and clean up sessions in garden to make sure that it is being cared for. They're called the 'Sanctuary Guardians'.









What's growing?

CALIFORNIA POPPY 'IVORY CASTLE'

They are native to California and parts of the western United States and Mexico, where they thrive in sunny, dry conditions. Their resilience has made them a favourite for wildlife-friendly and drought-tolerant planting schemes around the world.

- Well suited to gardens designed for a changing climate or where watering is limited.
- Their silky flowers open in bright sunshine and close in the evening or during cloudy weather, a behaviour known as nyctinasty. This helps protect the pollen from damp conditions.
- They readily self-seed, often returning year after year in slightly different places, creating a natural, informal display.
- Although delicate-looking, they are surprisingly hardy once established and cope well in poor, free-draining soils.
- Their finely divided blue-green foliage provides attractive texture even when the plants aren't flowering.

California poppies dislike having their roots disturbed because they develop a long taproot very early in life. For this reason, gardeners usually direct sow the seed straight into the soil rather than raising plants in pots and transplanting them. Once established, that taproot helps the plant find moisture deep underground, making it remarkably resilient in hot, dry weather.

California poppies are often associated with hope, resilience and rest. While these meanings aren't scientific, they're a fitting symbolism for a community garden intended as a sanctuary—a place where something beautiful can flourish even in challenging conditions.



Meet me at the garden

Who's using the Station Sanctuary Garden? Garden users have an informal chat with resident photographer, Bec, about train journeys, green spaces and wellbeing

Bec: Please could you introduce yourselves and tell me why you're here today?
Bill: I am Bill
Lucy: And I'm Lucy, Bill's Mum. We thought we might look at some trains and do some shopping in town. We often use the Metrolink to travel around Greater Manchester.

Bec: Do you have a favourite train journey?
Bill: My favourite train journey is the trip from Manchester to London, although I also enjoyed exploring the art-filled stations of the Stockholm Metro during a holiday with my mother. I've travelled extensively by train across the UK, visiting places including Morecambe, Blackburn, Burnley, York, Leeds, Scarborough, Halifax and Bradford. My fascination with railways extends beyond travelling—I enjoy learning about train history and hope to work in the railway industry in the future.

One particularly memorable experience was spending a week over Christmas in a converted EMR train carriage in Northumberland. I'm also keen to travel on the new Lumo service on the West Coast Main Line and hope to take a trip on the Eurostar in the future.

Bec: Do you have a favourite green space that you've visited?
Bill: When it comes to green spaces, my favourite is Wythenshawe Park because of its hidden paths and opportunities to explore. I also fondly remember visiting Middlewood Station, surrounded by woodland, where the railway and nature meet in a unique setting.

Bec: How do you like to stay happy and healthy?
Bill: To stay healthy, I enjoy walking and swimming. For my wellbeing, spending time on trains, exploring new places and seeing friends are all important to me. I'm currently working towards a personal challenge of visiting every railway station in Greater Manchester. While I've already visited many stations across the network, some still on my list include Daisy Hill, Moses Gate, Farnworth, Walkden, Swinton, Mills Hill, Castleton and Westhoughton. I hope to tick off the remaining stations during the school holidays, combining my love of trains, exploration and the outdoors.