

Glenside Hospital Museum – A Sensory Garden

Working on the Glenside Hospital Museum project, in which the final aim was to create a sensory garden inspired by historic, as well as modern, ideas around mental well-being and welfare, was an extremely interesting and rewarding experience. I became involved in the project as part of my placement with Local Learning for a third-year module focusing on 'History in the Public Space' and was drawn to choose Glenside due to my own interest in mental health and historic welfare. As placement students, our role in the project was quite varied, as we helped to facilitate the sessions by working with the Eco Club students to consider the activities and information they were given, as well as conducting research into various topics and creating ways for the students to engage with the information we found.

Some of the research we conducted included Victorian views on mental health and the outdoors – to help the students consider the historic aspect of mental health, as well as the importance of the outdoors and being in nature in Victorian welfare. The most interesting bit of research we conducted was into the medicinal use of herbs in medical, but particularly mental health, welfare – the purpose of this was to aid the students in considering what herbs they may have wanted to include in the sensory garden and why, and which ones wouldn't work for various reasons. We ensured that we selected some which would be familiar to the students, as well as some unfamiliar, and many which are still considered to have medicinal uses today.

Participating in this project has given us the opportunity to learn about historic mental well-being and welfare, as well as the very important history Glenside Hospital itself. It also gave us the opportunity to work with a variety of different people – including the Bristol Met Eco Club students, UWE master's Architecture students and Stella from Glenside Museum. Working with such a broad range of people made the experience extremely rewarding and we were all able to learn a lot from each other – working with the Eco Club in particular provided invaluable insight into what they considered to be the most important in creating the sensory garden. Stella continuously provided extremely useful information on Glenside's history, but also how to approach and speak about current, but especially historic, mental health issues to ensure that we were able to truly understand the topic at hand.

Overall, working on this project as placement students provided us with invaluable opportunities for collaboration and research, and a chance to participate in something extremely different to anything we had done before in our work in public history. It was extremely useful to gain insight into some more unconventional ways of getting the public, especially young people, involved in history and to consider how it is still prevalent today.