

***AN URBAN GREENSPACE  
STRATEGY FOR THE CHRISTIE  
CANCER HOSPITAL?***



**A project produced by Stuart & Kieron McGlasson of Roundhill,  
Grasmere, Cumbria & the University of Manchester – February 2000**

***This is a brief yet incredible account of the discovery of a lost rock garden within the urban setting of the Christie Cancer Hospital in South Manchester. The garden/green space was designed and made by a Mr P. H. Schill and it has close ties with a recently restored garden in the Lake District. It is a beautiful tale that has emerged out of personnel tragedy and we believe it has very strong potential to be of benefit to so many people - namely the patients and their families at the Christie Hospital, the staff and the local community.***

Many hours of research has already been done by Stuart McGlasson who is from Grasmere in the Lake District and his son Kieron, who is presently completing a degree in Town Planning and Landscape Architecture at the University of Manchester. Stuart is a successful landscape gardener who following college, trained at one of the biggest nursery's in the Lake District – Hayes. He then pursued his love for landscape design via a self-employed business for 20 years specialising in maintenance, construction and restoration of many grand country houses and estates within the Lakes.

However in 1993, Stuart's wife Carolyn was diagnosed with a vicious form of cancer and therefore had to visit the Christie Hospital in Manchester regularly. Eventually, Stuart had to give up his business to care for her full time. She battled the disease bravely over the following 4 years (when the family garden at home was a major therapy to the torment) until sadly she died in 1997. Similarly, Stuart's only break from the wrath of cancer at this time was his love for gardening. The extra time at home during this period gave him the chance to embark on restoring their own 2-acre garden. This included a very neglected, yet unique rock garden constructed by Carolyn's Grandfather and a retired businessman named Charles Henry Schill between 1929 – 1935. The garden was painstakingly restored with a determination that something positive should eventually come out of all this sadness (see figures 1 & 2).

In April 1999, Stuart answered an advert in the national press that was looking for unique or special gardens to be featured on a forthcoming television series



**Figure 1: Lake District – The beauty of Schill's rock garden in full bloom**



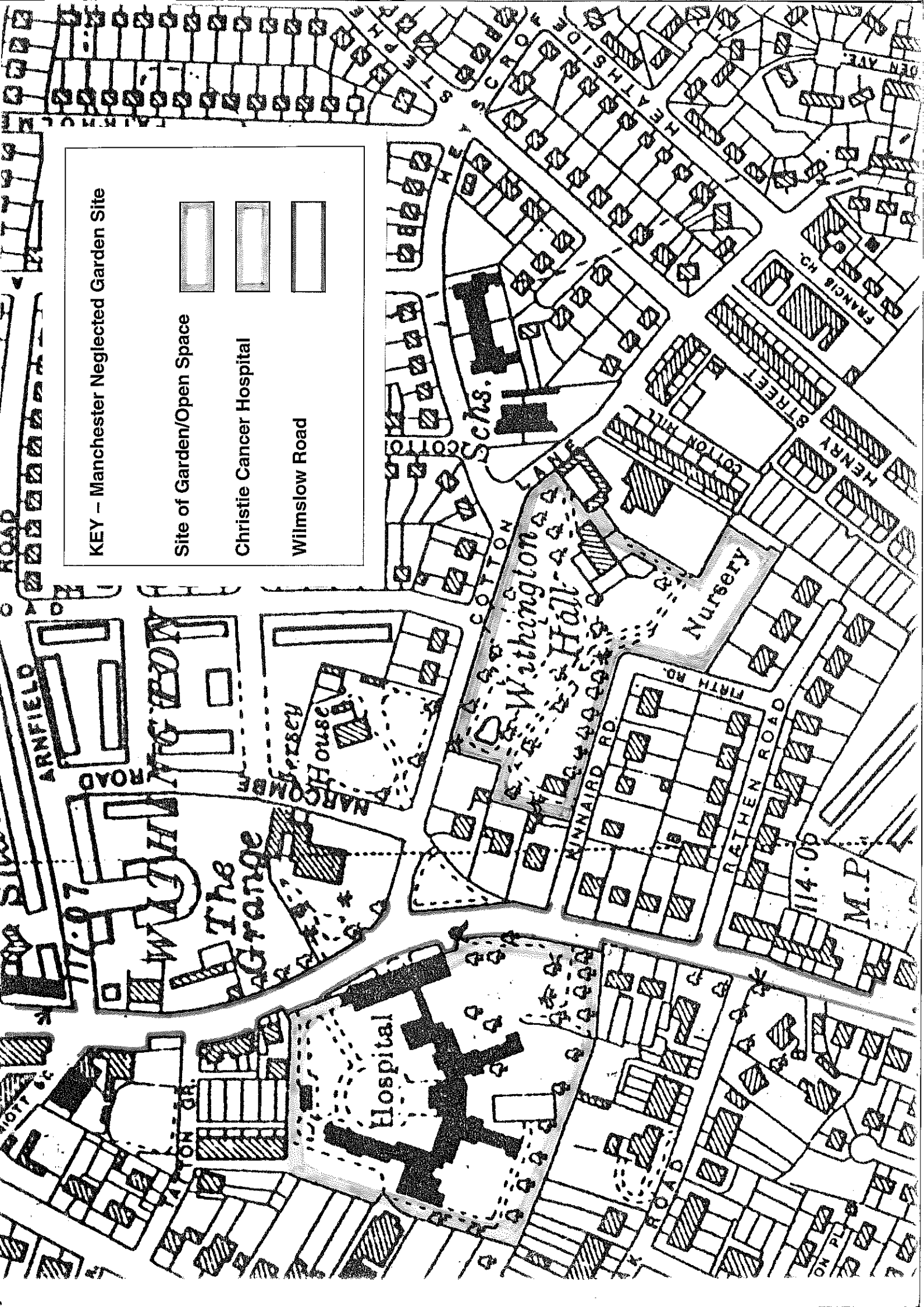
**Figure 2: Lake District – The extent and nature of Schill's creation, permeated by pleasant footpaths**

for Channel 4. The TV Company fell in love with the garden and was very keen to film after their visit, which they have now done. Their subsequent research interest into the garden and its designer turned up 2 articles in the Alpine Garden Society bulletin; one about the Lakes garden and then another, quite intriguingly from 1941 titled 'Rock Gardening in Manchester', by P. H. Schill – Charles Schill's brother. This, you can imagine generated much excitement and a strong desire to find out more.

A Mr John Wilson (Stuart's father in law) can still remember Paul Schill visiting his brother at Roundhill for up to 2 months at a time but had no knowledge of another such garden existing in Manchester. The article detailing the scheme unfortunately gave no address other than it was 4 miles south of the city centre. This was a coincidence as Christies fits this vague description as does the area that Kieron currently resides at today. After many hours of research at the local studies unit Kieron and Stuart eventually found the various addresses of Paul Schill during his time in Manchester. His last residence sounded the most promising site for a rock garden/open space of the described scale and grandeur – namely, a Withington Hall.

Father and son, carried on this wave of excitement and anticipation set about finding the garden at its Withington address, though both were very sceptical that it would still remain today bearing in mind the rate of 20<sup>th</sup> Century urban development. However this was not the case and in July of 1999, the 750 tonne rock garden and open space was discovered in an overgrown and neglected woodland (see map) – opposite and under the ownership of the Christie Cancer Hospital! Unbelievable in terms of this coincidence yet true. Those at Christies were completely unaware of this asset; in fact it had been truly forgotten about for nearly 50 years. Withington Hall (the home of Paul Schill at this address) has subsequently been demolished and replaced by nurse's accommodation. Yet the garden/open space, due to its size and physical form remains, albeit in a sorry state (see figures 3 & 4).

The benefits of nature are well known and have been written about greatly in the academic literature accompanying Kieron's degree programme (i.e. the



KEY - Manchester Neglected Garden Site

Site of Garden/Open Space

Christie Cancer Hospital

Wilmslow Road

ARNFIELD ROAD

WATHLINGTON LANE

WILMSLOW ROAD

THE GRANGE

WATHLINGTON LANE

WILMSLOW ROAD

NURSERY

HOSPITAL

CHRISTIE CANCER HOSPITAL

WILMSLOW ROAD

117.07

114.06

114.06

114.06

114.06

114.06

114.06

114.06

114.06

114.06

117.07

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Figure 3: Christie's, Manchester – Underneath the overgrown foliage and rubbish in a neglected woodland lies a rock garden/open space, with the potential to be even more spectacular and useful than its Lake District counterpart



Figure 4: Christie's, Manchester – Massive rock formations have been solidly made to create an interesting and unique landscape. However 50 years of neglect have made this asset completely unrealised by those at the hospital – until now!

psychological benefits of contact with flora and fauna over staring at a brick wall). This fact was reiterated to Stuart from a Mrs Meg McCaldin, a cancer charity carer (CancerCare) who helps patients and their families come to terms with the pains of the illness. You can imagine (after initially being speechless) she is now very excited at the potential Christies has to capitalise on this unrealised asset and she has been a driving force of inspiration to make sure this very real idea comes to fruition further. In the words of Meg herself it is a beautiful story and it seems like it was meant to be. Getting back to television again, Meg personally knows the producers behind the BBC series 'Talking Cure', which is all about the links between cancer care and greenspace – and they too have expressed an interest in this story.

Hopefully Roundhill Rock garden could be open to the public in spring 2000 now that it is fully restored. Our vision is to somehow renovate the similar yet larger garden/open space in Manchester to the same standard (see figures 5 & 6). However the amenity would not be for the pleasure of tourist's but instead would play a valuable role for the patients, staff and local community at and around the Christie Hospital. Those high up at the hospital have already been contacted by Stuart and all the feedback has been positive, not least from a Mr Mike Fry (the Chief Executive) who has expressed a very keen interest and wishes to take this project further.

There are many Great connections from this project that have already been mentioned. Another one is that the great poet William Wordsworth from the Lake District actually wrote about the Schill's ancestor in one of his sonnets (see figure 7, at the end of this paper). There is not the time nor space to tell the tale fully of the many other amazing coincidences with great literary writers in history that these gardens have. Briefly, the Schill's back in time even had close contact with the famous writer Voltaire. His most well known novel 'Candide' contains many references to the power of the garden/nature, such as:

*"...our sole salvation lies in the fruitful work cultivating our garden."*



**Figure 5: Lake District – A therapeutic garden walk...with a proper strategy/funding can this sort of product be recreated in...**



**Figure 6: ...Manchester? – Our vision is to fully restore the Christie's garden/open space to former glories based strongly around incorporating the needs of cancer patients...for example wheelchair paths, plenty of seats...even a water feature for its soothing benefits etc etc.**



Both Paul and Charles Schill were fanatical gardeners and we believe the quality of their designs demonstrates this vividly. Our point is that as well as the great physical asset, the Manchester site is a truly historic garden with close literary connections. It deserves in itself to be restored, but the fact that the scheme would generate so many social, environmental and psychological benefits, really gives it such positive potential.

So that's our story and we're sure you'll agree for lovers of quality landscape projects it is an inspiring yet challenging period ahead. But we don't want it to end there. What we would dearly love to hear from you is your thoughts, suggestions and advice about how to go about implementing this scheme. For example it's obviously going to require funding, a strategy, community involvement and so on. Again coincidentally, Kieron's degree course under the tuition of Alan Barber has brought to attention a scheme that we believe sounds suitable - namely the New Opportunities Fund (NOF). We have included the Green spaces and Sustainable Communities document so we can highlight our reasoning for this, for example, amongst others there are;

- Possible links to other NOF projects, for example the £150 million allocated for cancer detection, prevention, treatment and care
- Opportunities to address the needs of the disadvantaged in society
- Plentiful opportunities to make better use of an existing green space
- Benefits of improving the quality of life for local communities and involving them
- Very clear ways of aiding biodiversity and local community plans

However, what is your view - is this project suitable for the fund awards? If not, what other mechanisms are there? If it is, how do we go about applying...and who should be involved? (Etc). For the time being we hope you can share our vision. We very much look forward to hearing your views, which we hope will contribute greatly to the project to top all millennium schemes. If you would like to contact us, Stuart McGlasson's home address is:

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### **“ BRAVE SCHILL! BY DEATH DELIVERED ”**

Brave Schill! By death delivered, take thy flight  
From Prussia' s timid region. Go, and rest  
With heroes, 'mid the islands of the Blest,  
Or in the fields of empyrean light.  
A meteor wert thou crossing a dark night:  
Yet shall thy name, conspicuous and sublime,  
Stand in the spacious firmament of time,  
Fixed as a star: such glory is thy right.  
Alas! It may not be: for earthly fame  
Is Fortune's frail dependant; yet there lives  
A Judge, who, as man claims by merit, gives;  
To whose all-pondering mind a noble aim,  
Faithfully kept, is a noble deed;  
In whose pure sight all virtue doth succeed.

Figure 7: Wordsworth, William. 1888. Complete Poetical Works