

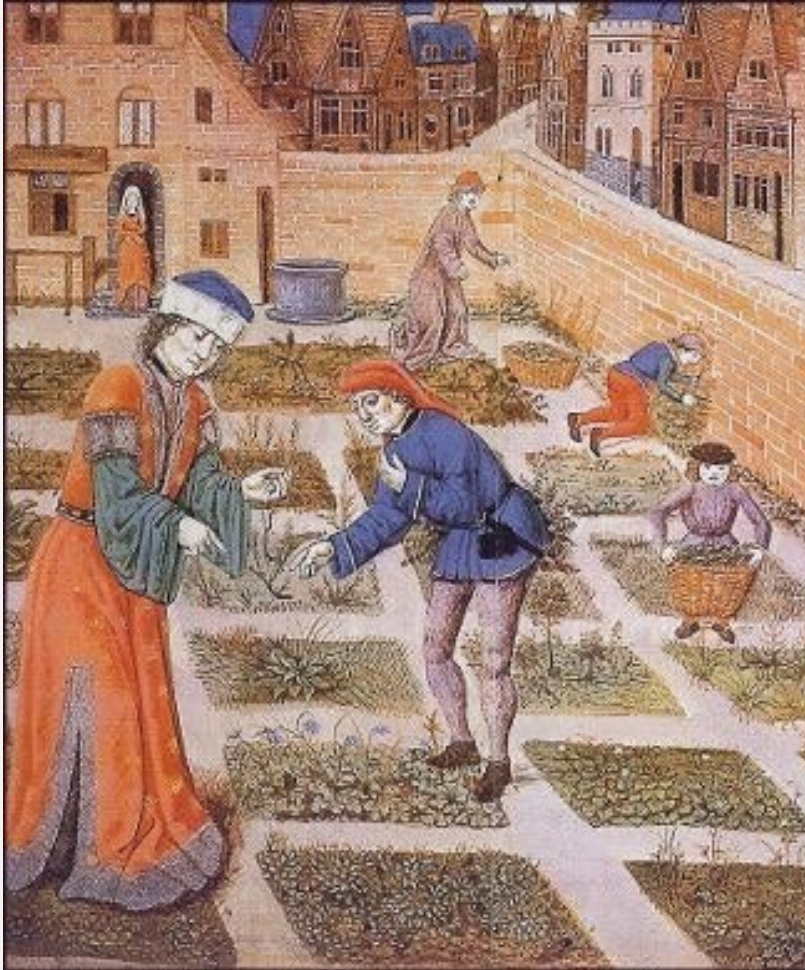


The Aber Medieval Physic Garden

Recipient of AU Education and Student
Experience Award 2025

14th AU Annual Education and Student
Experience Conference, 8 September 2026

Project Team



Staff

Dr Elizabeth New (HWH)

Dr Eleri Phillips (DGES/DLS)

Prof Emerita Siân Nicholas (HWH)

Student Steering Committee

Celia Lethaby (Year 3 Cultural Heritage)

Cameron Anderson (Year 3 Agriculture)

Del Weindling (Year 1 Maths)

Elizabeth Ingram (Year 1 Ecology)

Rose Patrick (Year 1 Cultural Heritage)

Monty Dyson (Year 1 Wildlife Conservation)

Contact us at: aberlearningfield@aber.ac.uk

The Aber Medieval Physic Garden project



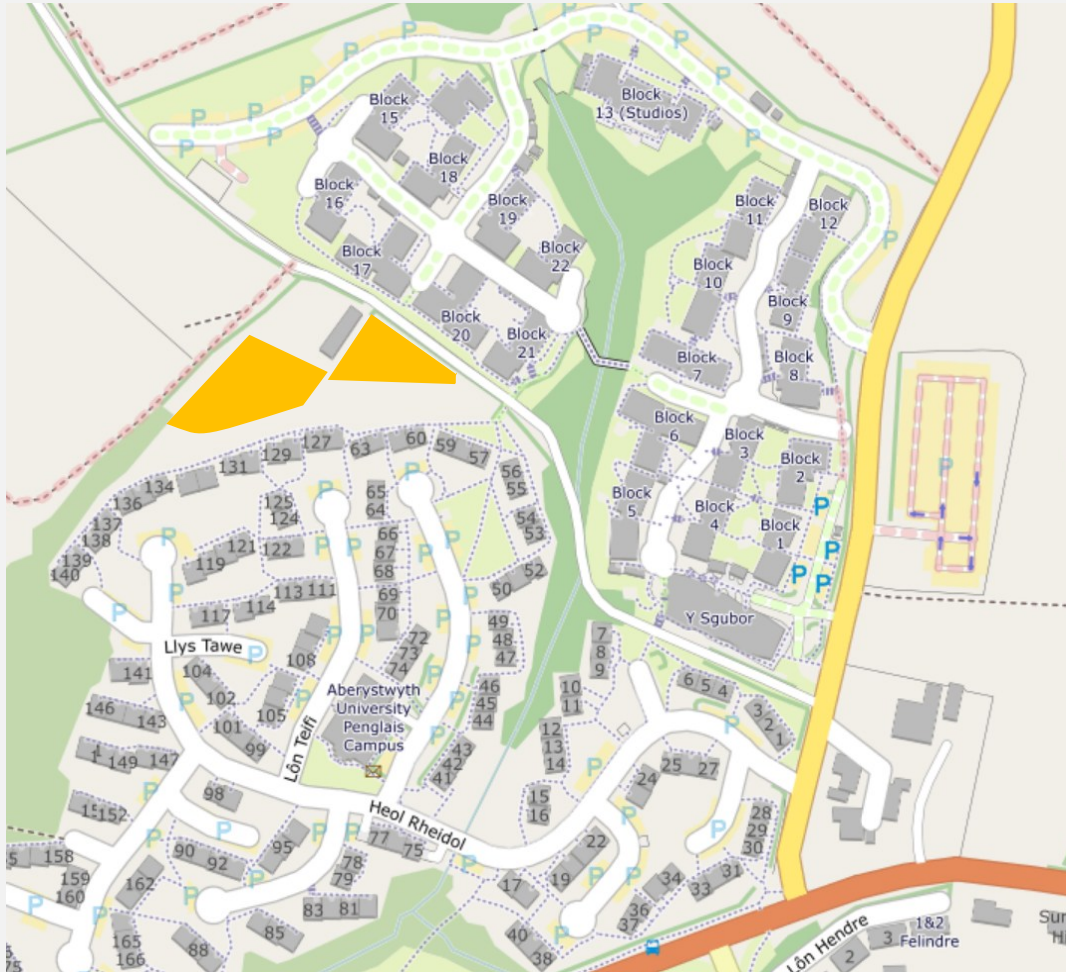
Two principal aims:

1. Create with students an outdoor 'living history' garden amenity that supports education, recreation and wellbeing on campus
2. Enhance students' learning through collaborative mentored historical research, gardening, and public engagement

Background:

- Strong AU community of academics teaching and researching medieval history
- Strong staff and student interest in heritage, sustainability, environmental issues
- Thriving student volunteer group for similar project, the Aber WWII Garden

Proposed garden site

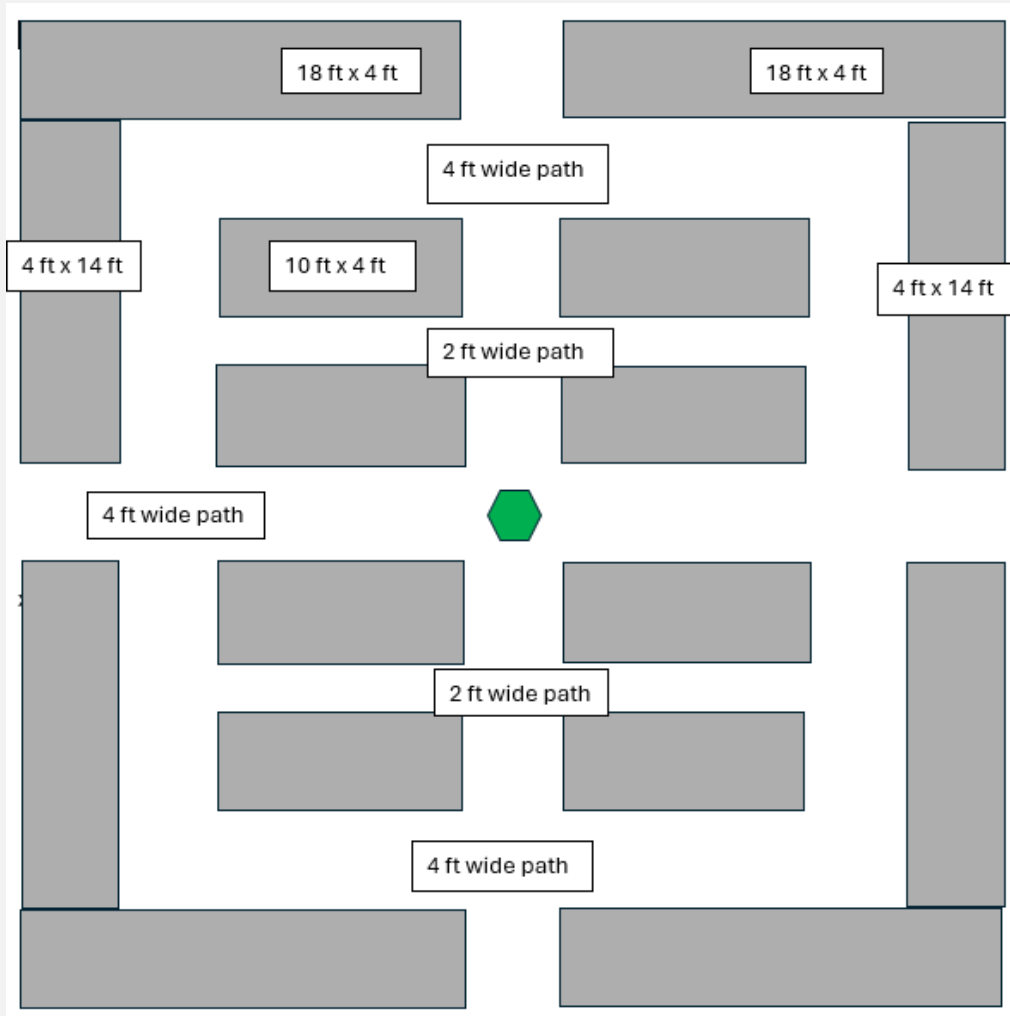


Maes Dysgu Aber Learning Field (formerly the Aber Living History Garden Project)

- Aber WWII Garden
 - Penglais Heritage Fruit Orchard
 - ACV 'Three Sisters'/*Milpa* Bed
- **Location:** field between Fferm Penglais and Pentre Jane Morgan student residences
 - **Purpose:** to create historically-inspired garden projects for AU staff, students and the broader Aber community

'We grow veg, inspired by history'

Proposed garden plan



- Based on the herb garden at the medieval Abbey of St Gall, Switzerland
 - outer perimeter 40x40ft (12x12m)
 - four outer perimeter beds to contain 'sweet-smelling herbs and flowers'
 - eight themed inner beds to contain era-appropriate herbs and other medicinal plants, based on student-led historical research and student vote
 - tree at centre



Project design (i)

1. Research element:

- Researching medicinal herbs and wildflowers, using primary and secondary sources, to build up database of plants that the project can cultivate on site
- Identifying themes for each of the eight beds and suitable plants for each of them

2. Practical element:

- Creating, planting and tending a medieval-style medicinal herb garden based on the project's research

3. Dissemination element:

- Creating QR code labels for the beds and plants
- Organising visits and events for student, school and community groups



Project design (ii)

- Students invited through emails and other publicity to participate in project (Nov 2025)
- Preliminary introductory meeting (Dec 2025)
- Introductory workshop (Jan 2026)
- Two collaborative research workshops (March 2026)
- weekly meetings, either on campus or at garden site, from March 2026
- student steering committee appointed to lead on specific elements of project, including garden design, site logistics and communications

Student interest in the project



What interests you in the project?

- gardening; plant science/chemistry; construction;
- medieval cooking; medieval remedies; herbs;
- researching; living history; community building;
- media production; outreach

What skills do you have?

- research skills; content creation; public speaking;
- gardening; planting; weeding; cutting grass;
- "Immense social skills and a mystical affinity with plants 😊"

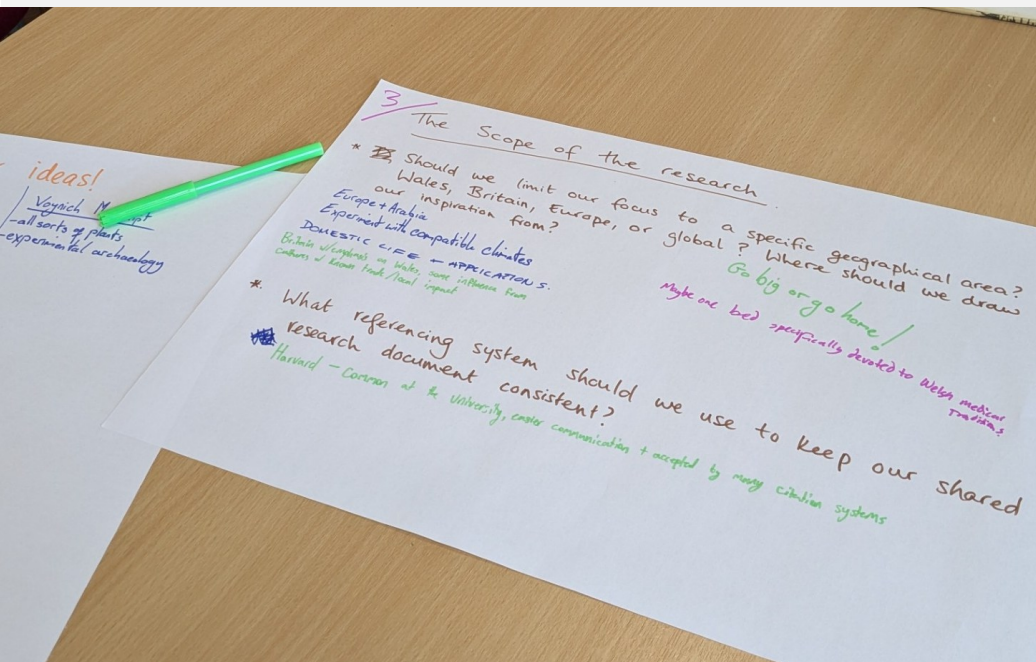
What skills would you like to develop?

- better knowledge of modern & medieval gardening
- knowledge of medieval medicine
- research skills
- project planning



Introductory workshop

- Roundtable, with breakout groups
- Preliminary research (books provided)
- Discussion tables, eg:
 - Aims and ambitions for the project
 - Project scope
 - Themes to research
 - Key research interests/ skills
- Students proposed a longlist of themes, incl:
 - Stress and anxiety support
 - Common ailments, e.g. coughs, colds, indigestion
 - Medieval beauty and skincare
 - Veterinary care
 - Medieval charms
 - Dyes and pigments





Research workshops

- held in Pantycelyn computer room
- protected time for students to conduct targeted research in a group environment and input information into the shared OneDrive spreadsheet
- Spreadsheet also available on OneDrive for students to work on in their own time

1	shepherd's purse	oleoselin on (MM)/ St James' Wort (HH)	<i>Capsella bursa-pa storis (HH)</i>	herb	name comes from small heartshaped seed capsules, that looks similar to a shepards purse, same family as cabbage and same botanical group as Honesty and wallflowers. Dark, deeply cut leave like dandelions, can get to 30cm < high. prefers sunny spots, thrives in poor soil. (HH) DW	Main uses are medicinal, Generally used for bleeding related issues, wounds, heaving menstral bleeding.
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Ubernystwnth Medieval Physic Garden

Volunteers Needed!

Are you interested in joining a community living history project?

We need volunteers to help research, plant, and maintain a historically inspired medieval herb garden.

Other activities may include crafting (e.g. willow bed weaving) or foraging/social days

Contact Information

-Email aberlearningfield@aber.ac.uk to join our mailing list for updates

-Find us on Instagram at [@abermedievalphysicgarden](https://www.instagram.com/abermedievalphysicgarden)

Location

The field between Pentre Jane Morgan and Fferm Penglais (parking available on the Uni campus)

What Three Words:
[tags.postage.sketching](https://www.threewords.co.uk/tags/postage.sketching)

All updates, meetings, gardening session, and activities will be shared via our instagram or mailing list!

Student participation

- Workshop attendance varied according to student timetables
- BUT wide and growing interest evident:
 - Project email group now 44 (from 28) students
 - Main subject area = DLS (incl. plant biology, agri, ecology, vet. science), followed by History & Welsh History
 - Also represented: DGES, TFTS, Interpol, Maths, Law & Criminology, Welsh & Celtic Studies, Fine Art, Cultural Heritage
- Central contact is through weekly emails
- Student-led promotion and contact through posters, WhatsApp, and Instagram
- Core of loyal researchers and gardeners, including through the summer

Marking out the site

- 12x12m plot, including inner beds, internal paths and outer beds.



‘The Big Dig’

- Removing turf from planting areas so we can plant directly into the soil



Edging the beds

- Using AU-grown willow instead of planned bought-in willow hurdles to build edging around the beds,
- Willow grown as part of an AU Farms field trial; would otherwise have been destroyed
- Redistributing sustainable materials around AU

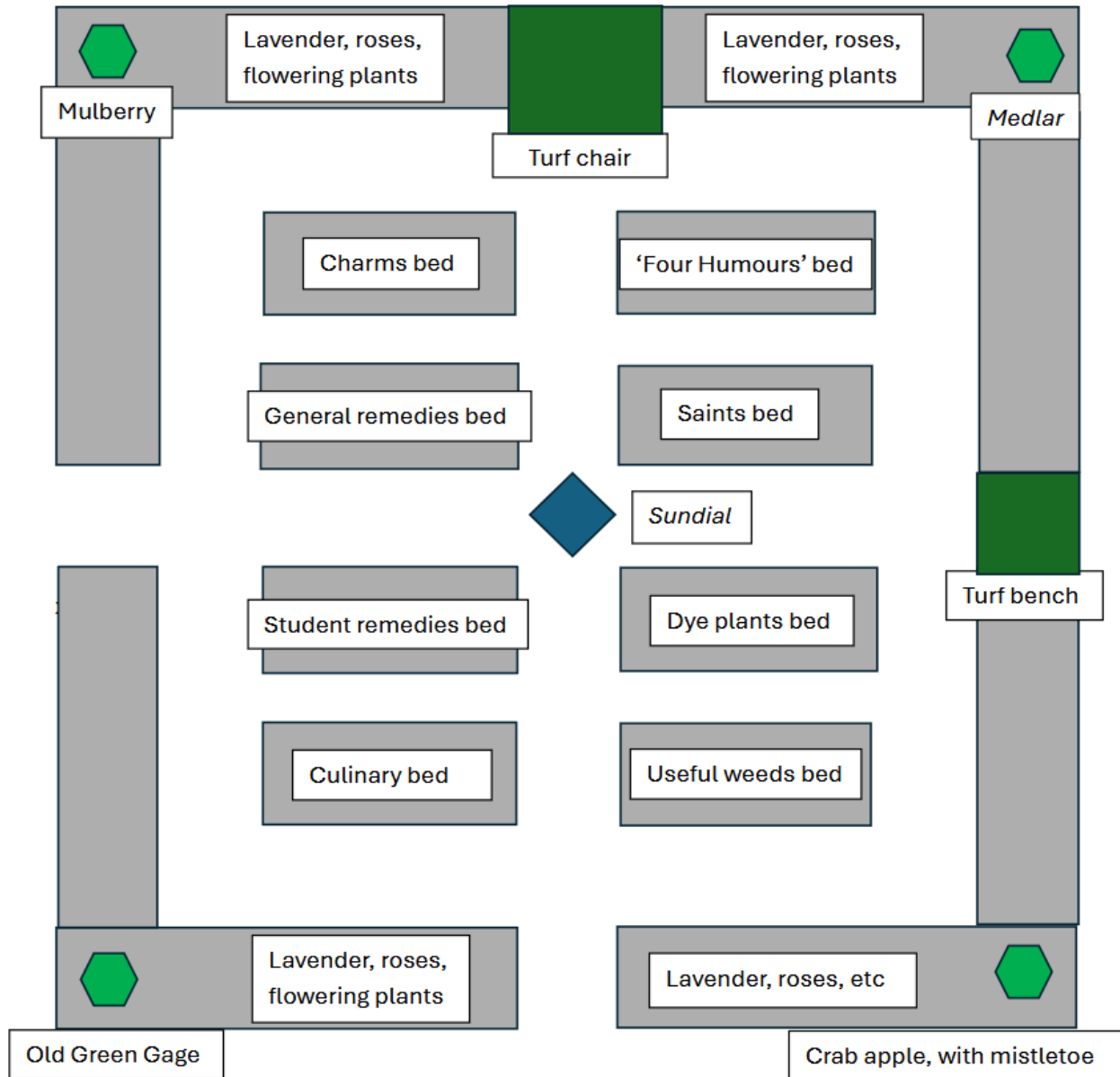


Planting out

- funds saved by building own willow edging used for sand and compost to improve soil



Final garden outline



- original plan broadly intact; a few modifications
- bed edging built by students from AU willow
- outer perimeter beds planted with roses, primroses, foxgloves, teasel, tansy, marigolds, vervain, Welsh poppies, etc., around lavender plants
- outer corners planted with historically appropriate fruit trees
- eight inner beds assigned themes based on student vote and planted with relevant medicinal herbs and wildflowers
- turf armchair and bench added to site at student request
- sundial donated by Dr Elizabeth New to be installed at centre

Project challenges

Time issues:

- weekly volunteer gardening sessions always difficult to schedule around student and staff availability
- delays in getting approval for changes in budget allocations
- unhelpfully early Easter
- Semester 2 deadlines and exams
- Ran out of time to finish labelling and plan summer events

Weather issues:

- Constant rain before Easter, followed by drought after, delayed plot construction and planting
- June heatwave (and July and August ...) meant cancellation of many weekly gardening sessions





Project successes

- student volunteers' enthusiasm and commitment to project
- student engagement in garden design and planting
- use of AU-grown willow - sustainable; cost-neutral; engaged students creatively
- sourcing of plants from local enterprises
- hard core of summer vacation volunteers
- unexpected resilience of most of our plants 😊



Aftercare

- Complicated by summer vacation; by drought followed by rain; but student volunteers now returning 😊



Feedback



- highly positive feedback from all participants

‘The garden project was one of the few social activities during my first year at university that felt accessible to me as a neurodivergent individual who prefers quieter and more slow-paced activities, the team are some of the friendliest people I've met while in Aberystwyth. I am very much looking forward to getting stuck in during my second year.’

Next steps:

- Re-engage with last year's volunteers, and recruit new ones for this year at Freshers Fair
- Plant medlar tree, spring bulbs, and any remaining herb plants
- Weed, tidy and mulch plot for the autumn and winter
- Label beds and plants for visitors (inc QR codes)
- Continue research on the eight bed themes including compiling a book of remedies
- Organise collaborations and events with other student societies (e.g, Phyte Club, ACV, Medieval Re-Enactment Society; Disability and Neurodiversity Society)
- Organise herb cuttings workshops for students
- Plan and run interactive guided visits to site for schools, students and community
- Potential for special events, e.g., online talks on medieval medicine; trip to NLW to view medieval herbals

Overview: collaborative and student-centred learning



Our project has integrated collaborative research with practical and creative outdoor activities

- It has provided opportunities for students to contribute and collaborate flexibly, according to their own individual strengths, interests and availability, and in ways that are comfortable for them
- It has provided a meeting hub for students on different degree courses, and encouraged participants to reflect on connections with both their own studies and other disciplines
- It will provide opportunities for participants to present their learning to other audiences going forward
- It is a tangible legacy project of which they can be proud

It could not have been done without our Education and Student Experience Award – many thanks!