

The guerrilla gardeners' tour

Now you can visit green spaces created under cover of night

Ruth Bloomfield

THEY are tended under cover of darkness by a crack squad of guerrilla gardeners wielding trowels, watering cans and potting compost.

Now dozens of "secret gardens" across the city are being brought into the spotlight to raise awareness of neglected green spaces.

Richard Reynolds, who has been planting vegetables and plants covertly across the city for five years, is leading a walking tour of his most successful plots. "There are at least 30 actively maintained guerrilla gardens in London," he said. "The thing is that people don't look for them. When you do start to notice, it is quite amazing." The trend began in New York and Mr Reynolds brought it to London when he began growing plants in a neglected patch beneath a tower block in Elephant and



Seeds of revolution: Richard with Eva Wong, Ben O'Brian and Camilla Morris

Castle. He wrote a blog about his project, and rapidly attracted volunteers. In most cases the work they do is not legal – the land does not belong to them and they do not have permission from the owners – which is why they work at night, paying for tools, seeds and equipment out of their own pocket.

The tour will begin at the Triangle Garden in Blackfriars. Three years ago it was an unprepossessing traffic island on the south side of Blackfriars Bridge, at the junction with Stamford Street. Today it is alive with sunflowers, shrubs and vegetables. "When I first saw it it looked like a motorway verge. It was not very attractive and not very good for wildlife," said Mr Reynolds, 32.

"Now it is known as the sunflower



triangle, and there are strawberries we eat as we work. Over the last year I have been growing more vegetables. We also wanted to experiment with whether people would pick them – they have left them alone." The vegetables include cabbage, maize and mange tout.

The tour will take in "lavender fields" at the junction of Westminster Bridge Road and St George's Road. In 2006 Mr Reynolds decided to rescue the raised bank matted with weeds, grass and gravel. Poppies, Swiss chard, cabbages and an apple tree have been planted.

"We will be harvesting the lavender soon and making pillows to make money for the project," he said.

St George's Circus, at Blackfriars Bridge Road, is another site. "It is a forgotten landmark, basically a roundabout with an 18th-century obelisk," said Mr Reynolds. "The flowerbed was abandoned. We have gradually filled it with bay trees, lavender, flax, laurel hedges, sedum."

A key location will be the garden at Perronet House, Elephant and Castle. Mr Reynolds, who works for an advertising agency, lives in the block and it was his first attempt at guerrilla gardening. "It was a huge communal garden that had been utterly abandoned.

"It is amazing now. It has a herbaceous border worthy of the National Trust, in my opinion. We have planted yarrow, lavender, buddleia, rhododendron, petunias, clematis and passion flower."

The walking tours are being run with the Museum of London. David Spence, its director of programmes, said: "We want to be in touch with what is new and interesting and try and keep up with the zeitgeist of London."

"It fits with the greening agenda, and there is an international impetus towards looking at how to produce food from more sustainable sources."

A tour will take place on 29 August at 2pm. Advance booking is required and tickets cost £6.50.

For more info:
guerrillagardening.org
museumoflondon.org.uk



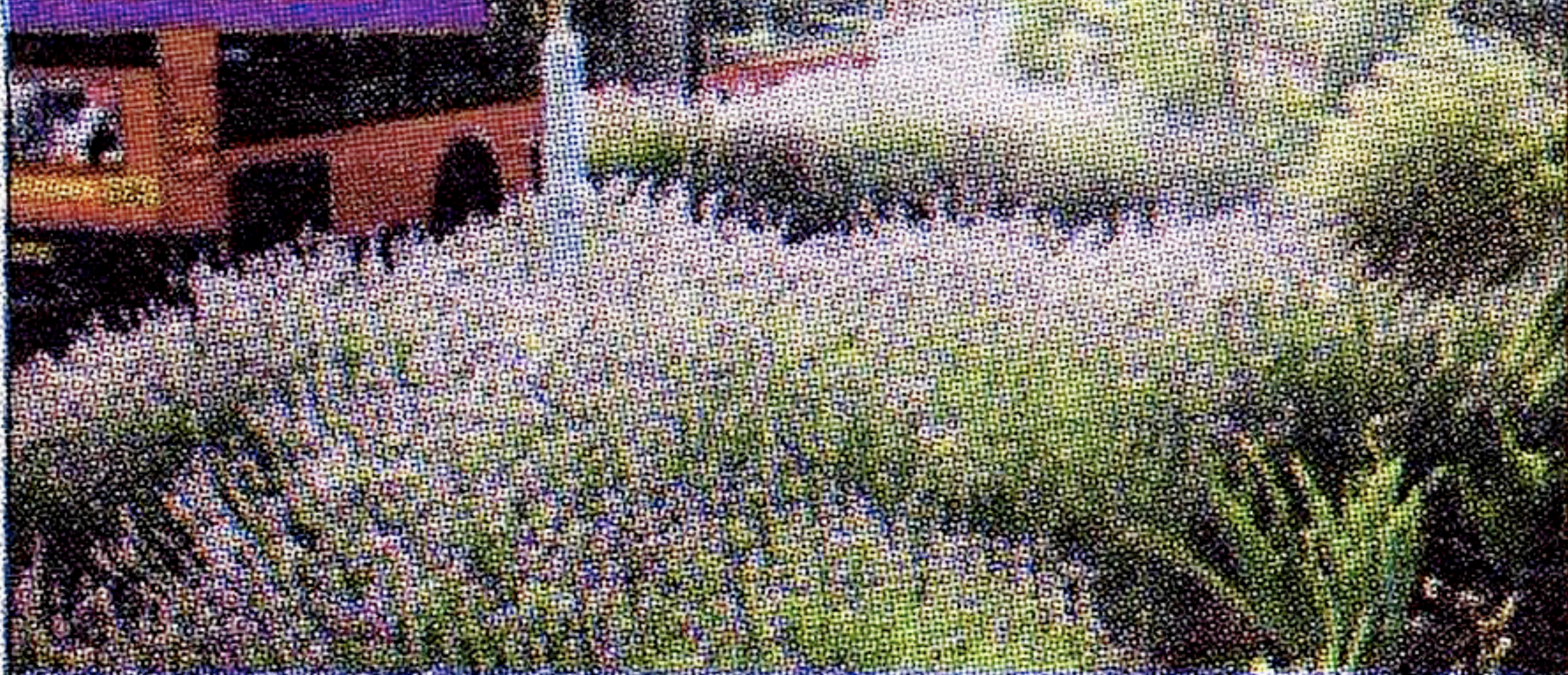
Roots and culture: Richard Reynolds in the garden he created outside the block where he lives in Elephant and Castle

BEFORE

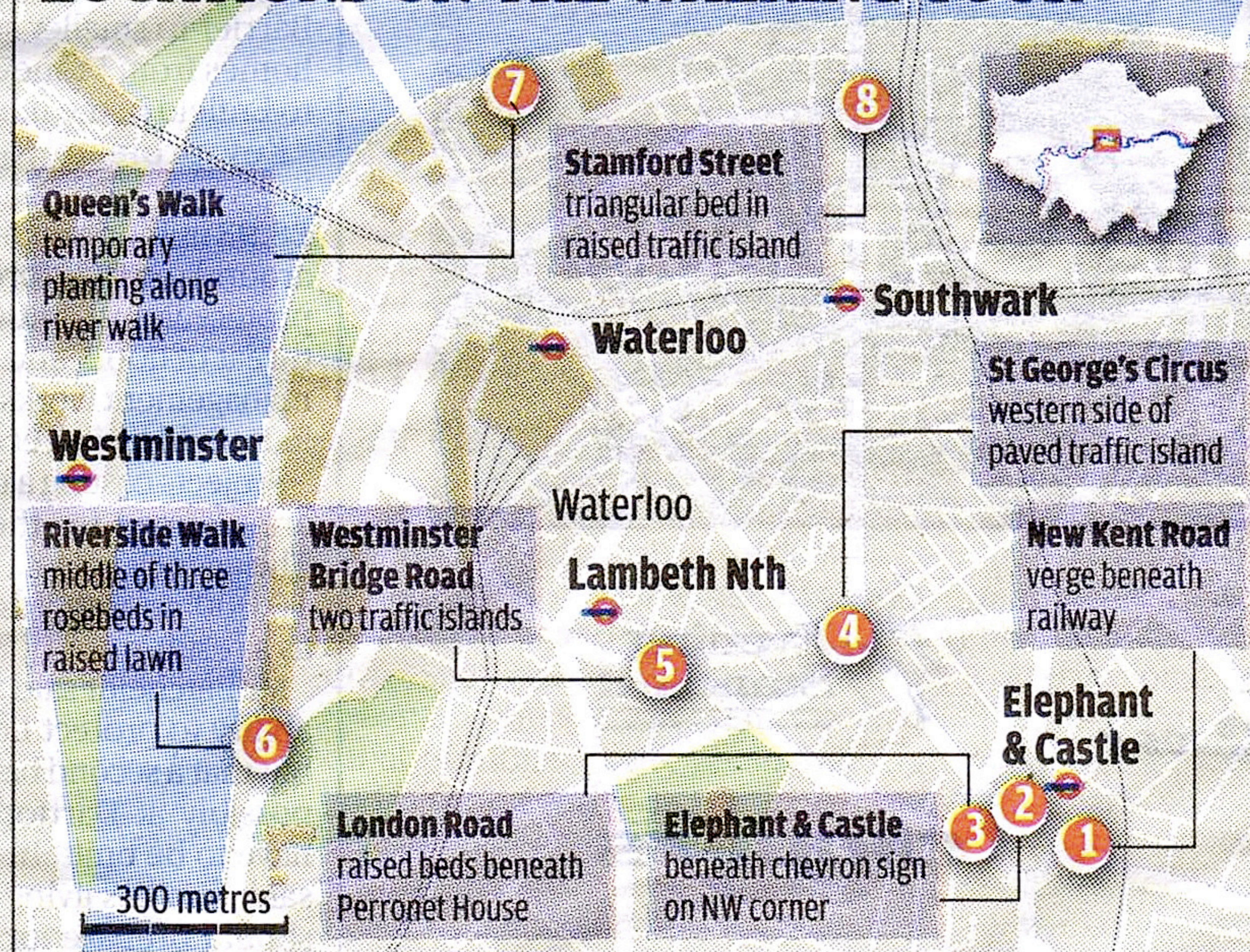


Lavender Fields: Westminster Bridge Road, junction with St George's Road. An apple tree has also been planted

AFTER



LOCATIONS ON THE WALKING TOUR



BEFORE



Transformation: St George's Circus, at Blackfriars Road, has been planted with bay, flax, laurel, lavender and sedum

AFTER

