

Newsletter



Review of 2017

Now we are well into the winter season and heading for spring, it is a time to look back on an action packed year! Just over a year ago the contractors started on the work of installing the new all-weather paths. These had to be left to settle in but were put to the test by two groups of 30 children from Emscote Infants School in March! The paths proved resistant and can be seen clearly from the air on the southern approach to Birmingham Airport, making them a major land-mark (or should that be air-mark?)! More importantly they have made the garden fully accessible to wheelchair users and pushchairs, and have enabled visits to the garden to be less weather dependent. We are grateful to the King Henry VIII Charitable Foundation for their help with this major project.



In 2016 we were unable to start work on the western beds until April due to the heavy rain and flooding in January, which persisted through March. In contrast, the winter of 2016-17 was dry and mild and we were able to start the cultivation of all the main beds in late February, giving us a head start to get things growing.

The mild weather also enabled work to start on developing a soft fruit bed in the area by the south wall. This involved much digging, weeding and soil preparation, and the laying down of a membrane through which blueberries, gooseberries, cranberries and raspberries were



planted, with a final dressing of fine chopped bark. A central feature of this new feature is a raised bed for the strawberries. We also developed a fern bed in the shaded south-west corner, which features the stump of a 30 year old Wellingtonia that was taken down early in the restoration work, and that was thought to be a threat to the integrity of the walls. The Victorians were avid fern collectors and responsible for the rarity of many of our native species!

All of this work pushed the number of volunteer hours worked in the garden since we started work in January 2014 beyond 14,000 in early Spring and by August we had gone past 15,000 hours, and as we begin the New Year we are close to 17,000.



The new paths enabled us to plan to be open for visitors to enjoy the garden more often last year, and a wider range of options were available. On Open Days we displayed our 'archaeological' finds, offered refreshments with cakes made from garden produce, and displayed a range of interpretative material. We also opened for visitors to drop in on a more casual basis to view the garden and to meet our volunteers. We hosted visits from three local schools as part of

the development of our education programme, and from a number of adult groups including Warwick University, U3A members, a group of European teachers, and local community groups. We have been grateful for the work done by groups from locally based companies as part of their community programmes and students from the Prince's Trust all of whom have helped with on-going maintenance.

For the first time we were invited to open as part of the National Gardens Scheme open gardens programme, and attracted over 300 visitors on the day. The garden was a blaze of colour and overflowing with produce, and the most commonly heard word from visitors was 'Wow!' The NGS day was also very special for us since we were pleased to host a visit from a BBC Gardeners' World film crew with presenter Mark Lane. The resultant feature was screened on 11th August and attracted much favourable interest on our Facebook page and a many hundred-fold increase of visits to our website. As in previous years we opened as part of the National Heritage Open Days programme in September, and attracted over 500 visitors over the two days.



It has become clear that the history of the Garden, and that of the Greatheed family responsible for its early development, is as much of interest to visitors as is the range of plants and produce being grown. Details of visiting opportunities are on our website, or in leaflets available at Hintons shop, and a number of local community and retail outlets. If you are a member of a community group or society please ask for details of opportunities for group visits. There will also be a number of general interest workshop events this year including, amongst others, opportunities to get up close to and learn more about ferns, bees and other residents of the garden!



We increased production of vegetables & soft fruit and now seem to have got the better of the pigeons and cabbage white butterflies. We aim to keep a supply of produce flowing to the shop at Hintons, and

have attracted a supportive group of regular customers. We experimented with providing bunches of cut flowers and since these have been popular we plan to grow more this year and to extend our vegetable season.



Plans for the near future include the important job of protecting and stabilising the walls by fixing the coping tiles and re-pointing with lime mortar, and other infrastructure projects. We have recently secured support from the Warwick Community Forum Fund to improve our interpretative materials and signage and will be working on this in the coming months to provide more information to visitors.



Thanks to the efforts of our hard-working volunteers, the garden has looked its best since restoration began. Our challenge now is to make it even better in this coming year. We also plan to build on our success by extending our education activities and encouraging more visits from groups and societies.

Specific plans for 2018 include increasing opportunities to visit and from the 1st April we will be open on every Wednesday, Friday and Sunday and on other days for booked visits. We will work on recapping the East wall and continue repointing as necessary (all 63 miles of it!). In addition we plan to bring the surviving section of the Peach House back into use as a facility not just for raising plants, but also as a shelter for visiting groups and education use. As always we seek to increase our volunteer team and welcome enquiries to help with all aspects of running the garden, including construction work, gardening, publicity, marketing, finance and fund-raising and 'do it yourself'. There are also opportunities to learn new techniques and skills, such as lime mortar work and the cultivation and care of fruit, flowers and vegetables. In the coming months we plan to extend our management capabilities by recruiting new Trustees – an opportunity to help shape the direction of the project and support our objectives of developing the Garden as an educational and community asset. Above all the ability to work as part of team and a sense of humour are the key criteria! Why not drop in on a volunteer day for a chat and to meet some of the team?

With best wishes for 2018 from all at Guy's Cliffe Walled Garden!



A
reminder
of
December
2017!

