

FRIENDS OF CRESCENT GARDEN SPRING NEWSLETTER, 1998

Last year a Spring Newsletter accompanied the minutes of the AGM, (now again kindly - and promptly - recorded for us by Margaret Biggs.)

It seemed a good idea, to enclose the latest news. But this year's mild Winter has meant an earlier than usual rush to keep up with pruning, weeding and feeding, and I must apologise for the delay, caused by brandishing clippers and a hoe instead of a pen!

Copies of the Treasurer's Accounts were given to all who attended, and are available to any Friend who would like one on application to her - Jill Parry, 20 Crescent Rd.

For those unable to be there, here is a brief summary of the talk after the Meeting which took the place of a formal Secretary's report this year

We began with an imagined flight in a hot-air balloon, drifting low over some of the most spectacular 15th and 16th century gardens in Europe. Produced by a combination of wealth, literature and the arts, a few, like Versailles, became symbols of political power and instruments of diplomacy.

All were fantastic in concept, scale, and sheer extravagance.

After gazing at a Viennese Palace mirrored with sky and clouds in a vast sheet of tranquil water, landing in our weedy "Helipad" of 1992 was a shock, but we flew swiftly to 1997 and began the sequence of events in our Garden over the last 12 months, against the background of changing seasons.

In **March** there was the official Unveiling, by the Mayor and our Chairman, of the Interpretation Board produced by the Council, watched by Friends and Guardians. It has attracted a lot of interested attention ever since.

Then there were the **Four Tasks** - Weed, Prune, Feed and Mulch. Watering was also needed in such a dry Spring; more weeping hose was laid as the **first grass cutting** of the year was done by the Council's Contractors, Quadron.

April saw the spreading of a 4ins layer of B and Q compost (bought on a Wednesday!) which kept weed seeds from germinating and retained moisture, besides improving soil texture and looking good. A big investment, which paid good dividends.

A very happy **May** visit to Wisley saw us into early Summer, with Pinks and Picnics illustrated, being especially enjoyed by visitors old and very young.

There were pictures of some of the Bedders tending their **shrubbery beds**; this can be a family affair as James and Alice Cooke, with George, demonstrated very happily with their parents.

Special tidying before the visit of Jane Wyatt for Meridian TV was rewarded by sunshine and a lovely record of the Garden in **June** splendour, heady with Old Roses. They were still blooming for the **Garden Party** - (sun again - incredible!)

Other flowers - Geraniums, Violas, Petunias and Catmint, bloomed through **July**. In **August** came the Bouncy Castle for the Guardians Party, (ages 3 - 15), with Sack races, Treasure hunts, a *lot* of Bouncing, Hit The Rat - all thoroughly enjoyed though I suspect the helpers had a truly well-deserved stiff drink when they got home....

September saw the visit of County Garden trusts from all over the Country, and a flurry of Autumn Wedding photographs went on till **October**, when scarlet Dahlias, purple Heliotrope, Roses, Sunflowers and blue Salvias still provided brilliant colour. Bulb planting next, for Spring - 400 Bluebells along the Walk, in memory of some special dogs (and Sophie, a very small and engaging Jurd) - more Crocuses, and a gamble with some exotic, very Regency flavoured Crown Imperials in the Centre.

A late Autumn stroll down Terrace Walk, in morning mist and sunlight, admiring the long hedge slowly taking shape, prompted reflection.

Crescent Garden is very small, with few of the amenities required for a highly graded Park. To compare it with any of the fantastic gardens seen earlier - especially the enormous Versailles - seems ridiculous.

But there are similarities.

Both reflected the societies in which they were created. Crescent Garden certainly did. It may have been communal, but only for a privileged few. You only had to look at the fierce 1920's Notice there was on display to see how jealously guarded access to it was. "Keyholders only! Trespassers will be Prosecuted!! BY ORDER!!!" Secondly,

both have survived, through massive social changes: both are now in public ownership - in a word, they are now *shared*.

The pictures showed vividly how Crescent Garden was shared in 1997. The work, the responsibility, the expense. The fun, the pleasure, the solace: the scent, the colour, the happy meetings - the lot. This year more people will share it, through the Yellow Book, and perhaps through the new BBC2 TV Documentary series.

Of course, photographs tend to focus on the things we want to see. Everything in the Garden is never always lovely. You've only got to hit a heap of unseen dog-muck with a strimmer to realise that, very sharply! It's sad and disheartening when people spoil things for others by vandalism and pollution.

But the shared enjoyment must be the real proof of a successfully restored Community Garden. The aim isn't just to impress, either with horticultural expertise or historical knowledge. These are important aspects here, but they're not the heart of the matter. It's a living and beautiful thing, not a status symbol or a static museum piece. The true aim is to make it, within the limitations of its size, a special place where people enjoy being alive, which gives them interest and pleasure for all seasons, comfort if they're sad, and a sense of peaceful well-being. These things can only happen if they feel a part of it.

What has really breathed life into this Garden - and sustains it - is the generous interest, involvement, and appreciation of over 250 Friends.

Since the AGM. Belinda Cherrington, the BBC2 Producer, has visited the Garden, and we'll hear in May if it's been chosen for the series - she was looking at gardens all over the country, collecting stories; if you have one about ours, do tell us .

(One very short -sighted Friend chatted to me working in the Garden recently, concerned that I was very lightly clad for such a cold day. She must have thought me a lot quieter than usual - she suddenly realised she was talking to a tender Echium, shrouded in fluttery horticultural fleece against the frost. She said she laughed all the way home.)

Spring is breaking in a great green wave, although you know it's coming, the freshness and excitement of new shoots everywhere always seems amazing. Some casualties to be replaced - the Fatsia inexplicably died, so did the pink Thorn, and we lost some Cistus. But lots of plants seeded and spread, and many cuttings have rooted well. The Dogs' Bluebells are up! So are the Crown Imperials, but they aren't as fantastic as they should be. They came from Parkers, at wholesale prices, but I suspect you get what you pay for with Crown Imperials like anything else - better next year. Hundreds more Snowdrops "in the green" went in, in March.

We have carefully pruned every plant of the hedge along Terrace Walk to encourage them to bush out properly, providing the thick barrier desired to protect Fort Road Gardens and give more cover to small birds. *Why are there so many more Crows, Jays, Magpies and Pigeons? Where are the slug-eating Thrushes?*

We are so pleased that Dave Ternent of Gosport Council's Grounds Maintenance has arranged for the refurbishment of the Breedon Gravel paths this month, in partnership with the Friends, who are contributing to the cost of the labour. (It may be necessary to ask people not to walk through for 24 hours or so while work is in progress.)

Some concern has been expressed about the central area's grass. It is officially classed as "Prestige Category", but the schedule allows only one cut in March. It is so long by then that it can only be cut with a rotary cutter. This is again the case by the time it gets the first cut in April, resulting in the unevenness and yellowing you have noticed. But it was cut in time for the first Wedding photographs, on Easter Saturday.

As you may know, Gosport's entering the Britain in Bloom Competition this year. Judging's in July. We hope to add to the Town's chances when they come to Crescent Garden. *Any Friend who could manage half an hour's help - any time! - would be as welcome as flowers in January - just ring 586403.*

Another test will be an unheralded visit from "The Good Gardens Guide" area inspector. A bit unnerving, that one, we hope it won't be like the day the restaurant critics went to Fawltly Towers...

Have a lovely Summer - see you at the Garden Party!

Wendy Deane