

Earl's Court Square Garden Committee  
Report of the Chairman of the Sub-Committee to the AGM  
Tuesday 16 January 2024

It has been another year of activity in the Garden and it has been a delight seeing it enjoyed by so many residents. Charlie Wood and his team continue to do a wonderful job and their affection for the garden I am sure shows in the results.

An exciting year horticulturally as the tulip trees on the west and east sides of the garden both flowered for the first time. This took us all rather by surprise, not least because they chose to flower on the days the garden was being judged by the London Garden Society and by Brighter Kensington and Chelsea and during the Open Gardens Weekend too.

The resiting of the Christmas Tree in 2022 was deemed a success both to footwear and to the lawn but sadly the foxes decided it was their turn to dig in multiple places. We have filled, reseeded, refilled, reseeded and will continue the battle! As they are digging in a straight line I am wondering if there is a connection – perhaps a leak but more of that later. Another battle we have faced is the box moth and at the end of last year we decided that we will removed the box topiary from the centre bed and by the gates and replace it with taxus (yew) or another evergreen, attractive shrub of which there are many options. I am delighted to say that the council arboriculturalist did finally agree with us that the Pride of India in the north bed of the garden and the Photinia in the south were dead so Planning Consent has been given and they will be taken out on Thursday. We have planted a walnut tree already in the south bed – as a form of succession planning, which has taken well and, in time will fill in the gap. We are taking a breather as to a decision for the north bed. The Pride of India is such a pretty tree that we may replace it with the same, or perhaps a more colourful acer but it will give us the chance to reorder the flower bed opposite the north gate, reusing what we can but bringing some structure to the planting.

We have enjoyed lots of community events during the year, the Christmas Tree, the Coronation tea party where it did stop raining eventually and congratulations to our fancy dress winners who were awarded a Coronation mug with a jar of the kings alleged favourite sweets. The Open Squares Weekend was a success with a gentle flow of visitors to London's gardens and we welcomed over 400 people from all over the country and the world and enjoyed the live music in the afternoons. June 8-9 is the date for 2024. The Residents Associations summer bbq was a success and the festivities continued throughout the summer. As a community we had a tea party to remember Roger Dearden, Christine Powell and Frank Phelan; a Macmillan Coffee Morning raised £180; a fashion photoshoot; Breakfast at Tiffany's for the film night and we have been asked to host again in September and are open to suggestions for a suitable film; Halloween was a clear evening and the garden was invaded but lots of excited children and their parents all suitably dressed and who demolished hot chocolate and sausage rolls in the hope of calming them down slightly from the sugar rush before bed time. The leaf rake at the end of November saw over thirty families wielding rakes and scooping up over one and a half tons of leaves from the lawns in a couple of hours – with rewards of hot chocolate and sausage rolls due to popular demand. About twenty five residents asked to borrow the tables and chairs for events, whether dinners, drinks or gatherings to celebrate birthdays of all ages and important events from christenings to first communion, confirmations, engagements. The chairs and tables are such an asset and we will be replacing some pieces as they wear out.

As always, there were occasions when the noise was too loud, or people were in the garden and shouldn't have been, or behaviour was not in line with the by-laws. Governance needs to be by everyone because the garden belongs to everyone. It is not the responsibility of the Sub-Committee to police behaviour. It is your garden, and if people are flouting the by-laws then it is your responsibility to remind the perpetrator too. Thank you to those who have done this. We did cancel one key for a period due to breach of rules. We hope this reminds people that the by-laws are there for the general good.

There has been correspondence about allowing dogs in the Square but the sub-Committee has no desire to make this an option. There are other places which are more suitable for dogs to be exercised and again, thank you to those who let us know when key holders were flouting the by-laws.

All this activity is possible because of the Sub-Committee. You may notice that Stacy Bouvier is not here this evening. After 35 years she and Alain are moving away from the Square – but are still part of it till their sale completes – and Stacy has now resigned from the sub-Committee. We are very sorry to see them both go, and have much to be grateful to them both for their contribution to the Square and for Stacy being a mainstay of the Garden Sub-Committee for so many years. Sarah Wadey has agreed to take over the formal role of Secretary for the time being. Sarah has also revamped the website gloriously and has also been behind the launch of the on-line application for garden keys, their replacement and the renewals for the Subscribers. We will still issue the keys personally as we appreciate the value of human connection in a changing community. Tom Brown continues in his role as Treasurer and we are all grateful for his attention to detail and punctuality in settling our bills. Kevin Colgan continues to be the glue that keeps the garden together – his experience, practicality, knowledge, good humour and constant presence is invaluable both in the garden and on the committee. Dominic Bacon has joined the committee during the year and provided us with another voice of reason and perspective with a young family, as well as his professional expertise and willingness to join in and lock up the shed! Cilla Ware adds practical support and help (and without her we wouldn't have anything to drink out of this evening) and her joy and presence at garden events and the setting up and taking down of tents and tables is only the least of her skills. Alan Malcolm keeps us all in line and to the point and can play a mean devil's advocate. Heidi Bradner is a direct link between the Sub-Committee and the Residents Association and a strong advocate for the garden.

I am grateful to them all for their skills and contribution. We do not all agree on everything and there are heated discussions and I am very conscious that the Garden should be run in a way that the majority of garden rate payers would like – and we can only discern that through meeting and talking with people including the silent majority who use the garden, but we never hear from.

The Christmas tree closed the year as usual, with live music and carol singers, Alan's mulled wine, and mince pies and biscuits and created a lovely community event which is, after all, what the garden is for.