

Garden Report for AGM 2013

It seemed like a year of two halves in the garden, first we had a cold wet winter and spring that seemed like it would never end. Then almost overnight the summer came with plenty sun and just enough rain to keep the garden watered. One result of this was that in the early summer the garden looked particularly good as the late spring flowers all blossomed at the same time as the early summer ones.

Another advantage of the long winter was that we had more time to complete the winter tasks, so we did get quite a lot done.

One thing we had time for was to start cutting back some of the hedges from the railings. This was done on two sides of the North Garden where the hedges were thickest. Although it does look much worse to start with, the long term aim is to be able to cut the hedges from inside the railings. The main reason to do this is that it makes it so much easier to paint and maintain the railings, but it also has the advantage that when the hedges put on new growth it stays behind the railings keeping the garden looking better cared for even when the hedges need cutting.

Other winter projects included reshaping and replanting the East border on either side of the double gates.

Putting new bark in the children play area,

Putting new gravel on some of the paths.

Planting several hundred bulbs particularly in the Jubilee Garden.

One of the disadvantages of the long wet winter was that it seemed to finish off some of the benches, including the metal swing seat. In the spring we had to remove or repair 7 altogether. Luckily we have had several new benches donated and now have 5 new benches as well as having had 3 repaired. Unfortunately the metal swing seat was too rusted to be repairable.

During the summer we unfortunately lost 3 more trees to Dutch Elm Disease. These were all on the East side of the woodland where we have lost several over the last few years. I think it is almost inevitable that we will lose all the elm trees over the next few years. This will have quite an impact especially on the East side of the woodland where 60% of the trees are Elm.

This summer we also had a new Tree Survey done since it was 3 years since the last one. This highlighted several issues with the trees which need to be attended to. The most urgent work is cutting back trees that are hanging too far to too low over the roads, as well as removing dead wood especially over paths.

Ben is working a bit more in the garden again, and is even able to cut some of the hedges. Nevertheless we did have contractors in to cut most of the boundary hedges in August. They get a lot done in a short time, which keeps the hedges looking good through the late summer.

The volunteer gardeners, the "Voles", have been an enormous help as usual, several new members have joined this year which means they have been able to get even more done.

Looking ahead

This winter I am going to be away for December and January, I have taken 4 weeks holiday combined with a months unpaid leave in order to make and exhibit my sculptures in Pakistan. Ben and Afke will both be working in the garden when I am away and Afke will work extra days in November to help me get the garden ready before I go. With the extra help, I plan to achieve just as much in the garden this winter as normal.

Plans

Over the last few years I have spent a lot of time developing and improving the beds and borders so there is now much more colour and interest over a longer period than before. I will of course continue to maintain and improve these borders, but in addition to that I see over the next couple of years also developing some of the structure of the garden which basically means working on the hedges and trees.

With this in mind I plan to carry on the work of cutting back the hedges from the railings so that in the future we will be able to cut most of the hedges from inside the garden. The next area I would like to cut back is on the west side of the garden opposite the Language school and also behind the bus stop on Eastern Rd.

Another area of development is the tree work that is being planned. Over the years especially in the woodland area quite a lot of tree work has already been done. Tree canopies have been raised, overgrown shrubs reduced, and old, weak and crowded trees have been removed. We are getting to a point now where we now have several large beautiful trees with an understory of shrubs. In order to let in light and rain to support the shrubs and also to stop the large trees getting wind damaged they need to be contained to a certain extent. So over the next couple of years there will be some tree work done to reduce the over reaching branches of some of the larger trees particularly the Sycamores.

Another area that is going to need some development is the south east side of the woodland. This is where we lost the Elm trees in the summer. It is a tricky area to develop, but I plan to start by planting some shrubs in between the trees to try and get them established before we lose more trees. Assuming the Elms do eventually go I would then put in some new replacement trees. There has recently been a new elm variety developed that seems to be resistant to the european Dutch elm disease (*Ulmus* 'Morfeo'), I would like to try some of these when the time comes to plant trees.

While I do my best to plan ahead and anticipate developments in the garden, I find that it is often unexpected natural events that create new opportunities, like a tree blowing over or a shrub suddenly dying. In these situations, as with all the developments, my aim is to respond by creating a modern garden which can be enjoyed and safely used by the many different residents, while staying true to the spirit of the Regency style in which it was created.

Jeremy Mouldsdales
Head Gardener