



KEMP TOWN  
ENCLOSURES

# Head Gardener's Report to AGM January 2021

The year started with a very wet winter, which coincided with more people using the gardens because of the covid restrictions. This meant there were certain paths and areas of lawn near the gates that became very waterlogged and muddy. We did some work to try and improve the worst areas and so far this winter it has been a bit better. But it's almost impossible to grow grass where there is such a heavy footfall on waterlogged ground. There are no easy answers, but I will continue to monitor the situation and look for possible solutions.

One of the muddy paths that we will be changing is the one from the SE gate round to the Secret garden, we are going to turn that back to a gravel path, which is how it would have been originally. That will also hopefully stop the puddles building up by that gate.

When the endless, cold, wet spring finally finished, the garden burst into a riot of colour as the delayed early spring plants bloomed at the same time as the late spring plants. So although the spring was late, when it came it was better than usual.

While the rest of the summer was not ideal weather for humans, it was perfect for growing plants, with an above average amount of rain between the sunshine.

I've often said what a difficult month August can be when the garden gets too hot and dry. The grass turns brown and the border plants struggle to stay alive. But this year the grass stayed green and lush, while the border plants kept growing and flowering, putting on a great summer show. I don't think the garden has ever looked so floriferous in August before.

The area that I probably heard most compliments about was the new area of wildflowers on the South West lawn. It seemed to be really appreciated by residents and by the insect life that enjoyed it as well.

The only downside to all the abundant growth was that the weeds loved it too, especially the bindweed, which we really struggled to stay on top of, by the end of the summer it had invaded several areas where it had not been before. This is an ongoing problem and it's almost impossible to get rid of once it is established under shrubs. It will just be a question of trying to stop it taking over as best we can.

Hopefully you will have noticed the work that Kyle has been doing on the hedges. His care and precision when he works has made a real impact on the hedges this year and that's made a big difference to how the garden has looked.

I'm sure you will have seen the work that has started in the secret garden. It's obviously looking very bare and open at the moment, but once the wall has been rebuilt and the area replanted, it will eventually be more enclosed and secret again.

I think that by the time the building work has finished this year it will probably be too late to plant up in time for this summer. I'm expecting to plant it up in the autumn (with perhaps some temporary summer plants) which means it's first full summer with a new wall and new planting will be next year - the bicentenary year.

As you probably read in the report, the board decided to stop the use of glyphosate in the garden. This does mean that it's very much more time consuming to keep the paths free of weeds, we will do our best to keep them as weed free as possible, but there will be times when that won't be possible. This also applies to the cobbles where our only option is to weed them by hand and we don't have the manpower to do that regularly, so the cobbles will be weedy at times, especially in the summer.

We have been looking at the future and how we can improve biodiversity and climate resilience in the garden.

One of the least ecologically friendly areas of the gardens are the lawns. Traditional lawns need fertilisers from fossil fuels and weed killers to keep them in good condition and they support very little biodiversity.

They also don't respond well to hot dry summers or wet winters, which are becoming more frequent and extreme.

There is a big movement around the country to change how lawns are maintained and part of that is to change perceptions of what a lawn should look like. Letting the grass grow a bit longer and allowing more weeds and wildflowers are all part of that. However there is a balance to be struck, because the back drop of green lawns is an integral part of the look and history of the gardens. They are also an important part of the recreational use of the gardens. So I will be doing more research on different maintenance regimes and looking at different options for how to make them more wildlife friendly, while not losing the integrity of the garden. There is luckily a lot of interesting research being done on creating new types of lawns for the 21st century.

Having said that, one of the things that has already been put in action is the creation of a new wildflower area on the South East lawn along the southern hedge near the secret garden.

This has already been sown with a mixture of wildflower seeds and will be left to grow longer over the summer. Hopefully it will be enjoyed as much as the other ones in the coming years.

Despite all the challenges I think it was in general a good year for the garden. We have a great garden team, with Kyle and George joining Ben and myself in 2021. We have also had several new Voles who have swelled the numbers on a Tuesday and make a big difference in helping to keep the borders maintained. So I would like to say a big thank you to my team, the Voles and everyone who has helped keep the gardens looking so good this year. Thank you.