

RCCC 3rd AGM on 11/3/15

Chair's report

Welcome to the third Annual General Meeting of the RCCC.

The last AGM was held in March 2014. With the tree planting completed at the end of 2013, this last year was the first in which the garden was fully operational, and the excellent summer weather meant that some areas of the garden were very productive. Of particular note but in no particular order were the apricots from the two trees on the Crinkle Crankle wall, beans galore from William's planting, a huge number of potatoes from Jeff's planting, and rhubarb, onions, courgettes, and beetroot from the communal spaces, strawberries from the NE corner, and a continual supply of spinach and herbs from the kitchen plot for the cafe. However, disappointingly, and despite all Tom's massive efforts the communal area in the SE corner was not as productive as we had hoped. The soil there is very heavy and it gets less sun than the rest of the garden. Nor was it a good year for our apple trees. In fact we had so few that we decided not to hold an Apple Day in October. All this reinforces the need to keep an ongoing record of what we are growing in the different areas of the garden year on year in order to get an idea of what works best where. And, as we have heard from Marianne, we are now doing this.

One highlight of last year was a very welcome donation from the Tanner Trust of £500 – with which we bought some new wooden composters, a wheelbarrow, a vegetable cage for the kitchen plot and some tools.

We held several working groups throughout the year. Now the structural work is all but complete (bar the final wiring of the fruit trees) a pattern of activity is beginning to emerge and we can identify most of the tasks that we need to undertake jointly throughout the year. These include compost shifting and keeping the compost bins in good order, the maintenance of the paths, the ever necessary weeding, pruning the trees, harvesting the crops, and so on. A helpful innovation this year was a regularly up-dated list of ongoing tasks to be done on the notice board in the shed. We had a delivery of compost from the Oxford University Parks Department in December, and, as always, thank them for this, and Ruskin for accommodating this process.

A planting scheme for coming year in the communal areas was agreed at a joint planning/working group meeting in the garden last September, and responsibilities allocated for different areas. These decisions are now reflected in the new plan of the garden which Jeff is incorporating into the revised RCCC website (on which he will update us in a moment). Karen Bell oversaw all these efforts as project co-ordinator until November, when she stood down and Jeff McIlhinney took her place. We thank Karen again for all her sterling efforts – without which we would not have such a productive garden today. Judith continued to mastermind the herb garden until November, when she also stood down from that role, and Marianne agreed to take over. We also thank Judith for the imagination and effort she has put into the design and maintenance of the herb garden. As before, Ellan provided regular contact with the cafe throughout the year, and also used her extensive contacts with Ruskin to promote the garden and drum up interest from staff and students. She has been indefatigable in identifying potential new members, some of whom are here today. Our membership has changed somewhat over the last year, and Ellan will provide further details

Last year we piloted a scheme in which produce from the communal areas (apart from the kitchen plot which is dedicated to the cafe) was allocated to contributing members of the RCCC - contributing members being those who provide work on the communal areas of at least three hours per month, and/or provide a secretarial or other non-manual labour contribution. Although it is not possible, or desirable, to oversee this allocation very exactly, it

appears to have worked well. Members appear, generally, to have been more willing than hitherto to take produce from the communal areas, and this has been helped by regular prompts on the board in the shed about what is currently available. Unless members object, I suggest we continue the same relatively informal arrangements this coming year. Another change agreed last November was that we would in future have three RCCC meeting per year, an AGM in March at the beginning of the planting season, a meeting in the Summer (preferably in the garden to see how things were going), and another at the end of the planting season.

As regards our liaison with Ruskin, Chris Wilkes has been confirmed as the new principal and under his tenure the general arrangements for the garden will continue as before. What has changed slightly is our understanding of the contribution Ruskin staff and students are able to give to the day-to-day maintenance of the garden. Each year we try to drum up interest in the garden at Induction Day. But, while some people are clearly interested initially, what we find in practice is that, with one or two notable exceptions among the students, neither individual members of staff nor students have, or can find, the time to work in the garden regularly. There has, therefore, simply not been enough regular commitment to support our original plan that we would dedicate one of the communal areas to the College to use as they wished. We will always continue to welcome Ruskin staff and students into the garden (it's their garden after all) and will always continue to seek their help. But what seems to work best is that those Ruskin people who want to work in the garden should do so alongside us on the communal areas rather than on their own space.

We had two planned open days and two unexpected ones last year. As previously, we opened the garden for the Ruskin Arts Festival on a rather wet day in May. The garden was also open formally as part of the National Garden Scheme Headington Gardens Group in July, in conjunction with a plant sale and teas supplied by the cafe, and overall this event raised over £850 for charity. We plan to repeat both these events in May this coming year (the Ruskin Arts Festival on May ?? and the NGS opening on May 17th), along with an opening for the Friends of Old Headington in June. We also hope to have a presence at the Headington Festival on May 30th and 31st. In September we were taken by surprise by Ruskin's participation in a two-day opening arranged by the Oxford Preservation Trust - we had no prior warning. Thanks to swift action by a Ruskin alumnus, Keith Holloway, on the first day, and Eilan's efforts on the second, the garden was open some of the time. But the lesson is that we need to know about these sort of events in advance in future if we are to play a proper part.

In summary, we have had a productive year (helped by good weather over the summer) and thanks are due to all those involved and, specifically, to Karen as project coordinator for most of the year and Jeff for taking over, Judith as Treasurer, and Eilan as Secretary.