

RCCC Chairman's Report, 5 December 2012

Welcome to the first Annual General Meeting of the RCCC. We have come a long way since the first meeting in February 2011, when about 15 of us met and formed the Ruskin Crinkle Crankle Club. At that time, the main layout of the garden had been completed, but it still needed paths and topsoil. We are enormously grateful to Ruskin for preparing the garden, making it available to us and supporting its development during the nearly two years since that first meeting.

We gained access to the garden at the end of August 2011. Since then, by the enormous efforts of Karen Bell, Jane Farrow, Stephanie Jenkins, and Jeff Mcilhinney especially, and with contributions from many others, the garden has been transformed. We are grateful to Headington Community Action for a grant of £125 towards the cost of the vine eyes and wires for the fruit trees, and to Jeff for installing the wiring. Only two major problems remain: the need to re-point the walls and to improve the drainage.

Bryony Rowe was responsible for clarifying the legal position of the RCCC in relation to Ruskin College through the licence agreement, and for developing an initial set of rules under which the garden will operate. Stephanie Jenkins has developed our very informative website and has supported it with a constantly updated supply of photos of the garden. We drew up a donations and recruitment leaflet which has already helped us to identify some donors. It is available to all RCCC members to use to publicise the garden and to obtain Gift-Aid on any donations. We have indeed received donations from many RCCC members in cash or kind (trees, seeds and various fixtures and fittings). Those who will be recorded as patrons on the website are (in alphabetical order): Ellan Derow, Rosamund Ions, Judith Marquand, Jeff Mcilhinney, Bryony Rowe and Alison Soskice.

We have had three successful Open Days. The first was an Apple Day in October 2011. The second was in June 2012, when the garden was open to visitors on an informal basis when a group of Headington gardens opened under the National Gardens Scheme (NGS). The third was the Grand Opening on October 27 this year, which was part of the Grand Opening of Ruskin College's new buildings. Peter Thoday cut the ribbon for the formal opening; poems about the garden were read, including one specially written for the occasion by Brian Aldiss. Among the visitors were the regional and local organisers for the NGS, who recommended that the RCCC should open the garden with the other Headington gardens on June 16, 2013, despite the pending re-pointing of the walls. We also made contact with other local gardens and garden organisations. The Barracks Lane Garden in Cowley sent two members to talk to us last February. The Oxfordshire Garden Trust sent a group during the summer to look at our walls as part of their project on walled kitchen gardens.

So now we are ready to move on to the next stage, in the changed circumstances where Ruskin College is all on this Ruskin Hall site. We need to do some strategic planning – not for the planting, but for the organisation - about how we shall handle this next stage. One key issue is the need to involve Ruskin members – students and staff – much more fully, along with the rest of the local community. Another key issue is to develop a financial plan to move

the RCCC towards viability. Although we have already had small sales of plants and produce, we are far from financial viability.

I finish on a personal note. Two years in any one office is enough, and my health has become rather unreliable. So I intend to stand down as Chair. But I look forward to continuing active involvement in a role where performance on the particular day is less important – and, of course, in the garden itself.

Judith Marquand