

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR 2022

Firstly I would like to say how lovely it is to be able to hold this meeting in person and not by Zoom. The Covid pandemic was ghastly in so many ways, and in my opinion the Garden AGM's were the lowest point of the whole experience. Many lessons were learned through the pandemic and I sincerely hope that these are not forgotten and that the Garden AGM can revert to its pre-pandemic atmosphere of neighbourly discussion, proposal and agreement for the wonderful community asset we are all part of through the good fortune of being eligible to pay the Garden Levy for our square.

Looking through the minutes of the year's sub-committee meetings many things remain the same both in a positive and negative way. We continue to wonder about the lawn but it certainly is happier from the deep aeration and feed we gave it a few years ago and as we watered as long as we were allowed to through the year – which believe it or not was incredibly dry for the most part - we were lucky to create one of the few green spots, I am reliably informed, that was visible from the air for those passengers looking out the window as they flew back to London! The tree pruning also helped both the trees and the lawns and as I assured you last year, the major surgery to the tree on the southwest side of the lawn did not have a detrimental effect.

Thankfully, the moment the hosepipe ban started temperatures dropped and it started to rain and it doesn't feel that it has stopped since. We have all noticed how bizarre the weather has been this year and the very cold snap in early December was very welcome. The joy of walking back from a carol service in the snow to find lots of people lobbing snowballs at each other in the square and their peals of laughter ringing in the air was a joy.

The decision in late 2021 to dig out the turf to allow for the slabs at the base of the Christmas tree to be in the lawn, with the view that the turf could then be replaced afterwards, was not a success. This is why for Christmas 2022 the committee decided that the tree would be sited on the gravel in the middle of the western side of the garden. It seems that this decision was a success, not only for the lawn, but also for the Christmas tree lighting and carols evening where feet did not get as wet, the cables were no longer a trip hazard and I know certain residents were thrilled because they could see the tree from their home this year whereas in previous years their view was blocked!

We continue to buy and plant lots and lots of bulbs and have also been able to get snowdrops and English bluebells in the green which have been planted for future enjoyment (we hope). The squirrels and parakeets continue their crusade to wreck as much as they can as well as the foxes and their digging sessions but that has been the case since time immemorial and no doubt will continue to be so. So be it. As with everything, time is also something with which gardens have to contend and we fear that age has caught up with our Pride of India trees opposite the north gate and by the shed. The trees are both about 50 years old and this is viewed as their natural lifespan. For several years we have been lopping off dead branches but the extreme conditions of this year may well have finished them off. Having consulted James Burton, the Council's arboriculturalist with whom we have worked for a long time, and also the RHS, we have agreed to see what happens in the spring. We will then decide whether we need to remove them and what to do with the areas where they are, as getting them out will cause major disruption. Obviously we will maintain the feel of the garden and we will reuse and replant as much as we can and can decide whether we get new Pride of India trees or perhaps

something different. Charlie Woods and his team continue to work their magic in the garden and I would like to thank them all, especially Charlie himself, Dan, Eyre and Ned.

We were delighted to be able to open the Square for the Open Garden Squares Weekend in June. The musicians were as lovely as ever and over 800 people enjoyed the garden. Our decision not to offer tea and coffee meant it felt slightly more relaxed from the Sub-Committee's point of view and it was a joy to welcome other residents in the square who came to help. If nothing else, we were all able to enjoy the sunshine and chat while interested and friendly people ambled around our garden and reminded us how lucky we are to have the garden – and how much they appreciated it being open for the weekend for others to enjoy inside the usually closed gates. We also took part in the competitions organised by Brighter Kensington & Chelsea and London Garden Society but despite both organisations sending their judges who enjoyed the square somehow we got lost by both organisations so never even made it to the 'here's a certificate for joining in' list! We will continue to support these events as even if we don't benefit many others do – not least our own Alan Malcolm!

The life and death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth affected us all – in June we had the pleasure of the Platinum Jubilee Tea Party organised with the Residents Association. A true community event which provided a delightful, relaxed and gentle afternoon in the garden. Sadly the announcement of her death on 8th September, while the final preparations were being made for the open air screening of Breakfast at Tiffany's, meant that this was immediately cancelled. Our thanks to Toby and Emily at TLC for all their hard work promoting this very popular event, and for their immediate cancellation of the screening and providing very loyal toasts to the late Queen, and to King Charles III.

Plans are afoot for a Coronation Celebration on 6th May with a fancy dress pageant for children. Plans are not finalised and we look forward to working as a community to create another happy occasion for those residents who would like to join in.

Age has also caught up with the playground and so we have started the process of looking at how we can replace the climbing frame. We have received one quotation as a starting point but would like to create a working group with parents so that future generations of children are able to enjoy the garden and continue to make friends. I would like to thank Harriet Worsley for her wonderful Garden Club which was enjoyed by many and helped to encourage children and adults in the square to enjoy the garden and to learn and remind them that the garden is for everyone and the plants and flowers have to be respected and to behave accordingly. Sadly for us, Harriet's professional life has now taken off to such an extent that she is unable to continue this wonderful exercise but we really do hope to be able to offer something similar again in the future. My thanks also to Sarah Wadey whose technical expertise helped enormously with the reservation and booking process and the revitalised website!

The release of covid restrictions did mean that people could travel again and, being such an international community, it seemed that in general there were fewer people in the garden over all. The Committee did make the decision to ask families not to hire in professional entertainers for children's parties. It was felt that the majority of entertainers viewed their success on the volume of participants screams and there seemed to be a direct link between children's screams and the pain of other residents. Generally most parties were delightful, friendly and welcoming though we did wonder at the behaviour of some adult guests who seemed to feel that urinating in public was perfectly acceptable. It's not, and unfortunately the

emu thought process of I can't see you therefore I can't be seen, does not work. I would remind all key holders that they are responsible for the behaviour of their guests, and equally that all key holders are able to remonstrate with those whose behaviour is unacceptable. I would also mention that while the garden is not a public garden, it is equally not a private garden or a public beach and an element of modesty would be welcome when sunbathing.

The garden continues to be a selling point for properties in the square and the waiting list for the Subscriber keys has continued all year at twenty plus people. We continue to remind estate agents that it is only properties that pay the garden levy are entitled to keys and Stacy Bouvier continues to explain to those who have been told otherwise. We understand new residents' frustration but we are bound by the Kensington Improvement Act. Previous AGM's have settled on the number of 75 Subscriber keys and while I agree that the number should be restricted, there are varying opinions within the sub-committee as to what this number should be and granting access to this wonderful community asset.

Kevin Colgan continues to be the glue which holds the garden together – as well as the gates, the irrigation system, the Egyptian dogs, the Chairman and many other things too. His knowledge and experience, his kindness and good humour and his love of the garden are invaluable and appreciated more than he will ever admit! We know the lighting has been problematic this year – the electricians will be returning with the hope of finding out why the north of the square has been so problematic!

The good humour and engagement of the rest of the sub-committee not yet mentioned is much appreciated: Cilla Ware, Heidi Bradner, Alan Malcolm and our treasurer Tom Brown who has also put time into the documentation of the ownership by us all as the Garden Management Committee of the Freehold and the Trustees thereof for which many thanks and which will be explained more fully later in the meeting. I would like to mention Stacy Bouvier especially. On your behalf I would like to thank her for 35 years of time, effort, energy, active and emotional engagement in the Earl's Court Square community and especially the Garden Sub-Committee. She has told us that she will be retiring from the sub-committee in 2023 as she and Alain create the next stage of their lives away from London. Her warmth, kindness and generosity in welcoming people to the garden and the community will be missed enormously – she will leave a huge gap which will be very difficult to fill and we will send them on their way in due course with love, grateful thanks and affection ... and a party in the garden at a date to be confirmed when they know what their movements are!

As Chairman of the Sub-Committee it would be lovely if we could continue to welcome younger people on to the sub-Committee as fresh eyes and fresh opinions are always welcome. The election of the committee has never been on a rotational or fixed term basis but perhaps it should be going forward and perhaps this should be considered. It would be great if we could create working groups for the playground refurbishment and perhaps a group of residents who are willing to understand the maintenance needed for the irrigation, gate and lighting systems. We are open to offers and will be organising social occasions for those who might like to volunteer to come and find out more!

Thank you to the sub-Committee and thank you to everyone who makes Earl's Court Square and the garden the happy and content place it should be.