

Elford Hall Gardens - Newsletter 19 - June 2013

Things are really hotting up at the Walled Garden now that summer has finally decided to put in an appearance! The pressure is really on to try to get major jobs finished and the site tidied up for the Music & Real Ale Festival on July 6th. I know that I have sent out a couple of bits of information to encourage people to come along and bring as many friends along as they can muster BUT it really is an important fund-raiser for the gardens, particularly as our connection with the Heritage Lottery comes to an end. The day should really be great, with music all afternoon and evening, good food, a great range of real ales, ciders and wine, cream teas, activities for the children and a craft fair. **If you feel that you will be able to lend a hand for a couple of hours either during the event, during the preparations or with the clean up then please let Roger know.** Many hands make light work, as they say! Ring me on 01827383592 or email at rogersue680@gmail.com.

Spring Cleaning

An enormous amount of tidying up and finishing off has been going on for the past 3 months. The focus has been at the front of the house and along the outer north wall. Dave Watton set a tight schedule and the volunteers have risen to the occasion and brought the job in on time. Do we get bonuses I wonder? The path around the whole outer perimeter wall is now nicely surfaced with wheelchair friendly topping; the marquee area now has a neat retaining wall and terrace where picnic tables are positioned; in front of the house, the limestone topping now covers all of the untidy rubble and the same material leads up a ramp to the disabled toilets at the rear of the house. What an achievement! In just a few months the whole area has been given a facelift to be proud of!



TOP - Machinery arrives prior to starting the work. Much preparation had been done beforehand with hidden drainage, electrical work and the locating of a new septic tank but the 'icing on the cake' was about to begin! The path link to the sensory garden was first, followed by the new marquee terrace. Finally the finishing touches were completed in the rain on Thursday evening (as I write!). Next the driveway up to the house will be prepared for its final resurfacing and this will finish Dave's scheduled tasks. Thanks to all who bent their backs to make it all happen, especially Daves Hill, Kenny and Watton for their expertise AND hard labour and to Charles and Dick who turned out to work the machinery. Gavin took some holiday especially to be there to help and Sue Thompson, Sue Watton, Ted Taylor, Steve Eyley, Richard, Roger, Conrad, June and Ian Dobell laboured hard and long to get the job done. What a team!



As path topping has progressed, the green fingered members of our volunteer team have been planting up the new flower beds in front of the marquee so that they will look lovely by the time the Music Festival begins and visitors on the day will walk along the herbaceous border - now a blaze of colour - and into the garden alongside the rose garden which is now on the brink of bursting into bloom. Just today, the container has been 'hidden away' amongst the trees in the old melon house area.

A sense of sensory satisfaction

The cool wet spring has brought a few anxious moments to the team working on the sensory garden. The flower beds all looked very sad over the winter and for a long time, nothing seemed at all interested in growing. We began to worry that the winter had put paid to our planting. The soil was so wet that any work was really quite unpleasant and mucky but we struggled on. Thank heavens for some warm weather. A few brave plants threw up new growth; others followed suit and now the beds are looking really full and colourful. Oh ye of little faith! We did manage to complete the limestone surfacing of the paths so now it is possible to walk through without sinking into mud!



Left - the round house now has a splendid SUN for a floor, laid by Dick and Gavin. Dave Watton is constructing a roof to fit above the wall to create a bad weather shelter for visitors. Right - the spider web arch - built by Roger and painted by Sue - will eventually create a screen and so divide the sensory garden into a series of 'rooms'.

We are particularly proud of what we have achieved in the sensory garden even though it is far from finished. There are quite a lot of little bits to finish off and we are just discovering what a weeding task we have set ourselves. Bad weather doesn't seem to affect the growth of weeds unfortunately so we have a battle on our hands. In truth, we could do with a bit of help so if you feel inclined to do a little light weeding from time to time then you'd be welcomed with open arms (and not a little relief!). If everyone who walks through the sensory garden could pull out a few weeds as they pass then that would help enormously!

I climbed onto the top of the wall to view the finished paths and took a couple of photos before my legs began to wobble. This photo was taken about 3 weeks ago and since then the beds have filled out a little and the bridge has a new coat of paint. Doesn't it look splendid? Dick did the building and Roger added the colour.



It felt really good to finish off the pond edging and to hide all of the pond liner from view. A trip to the Malvern Show enabled Sue to buy all of the plants we needed so now our resident newt and the countless tadpoles have some kind of shelter. Eventually, the red bridge will be capped with turquoise finials - well it IS a sensory garden after all!

La vie en rose

The rose garden, heavily (and skilfully) pruned looked bare for most of the winter, and then the daffodils appeared and brought a welcome glow to the area. Finally the roses began to shoot and have now really put on a spurt. There are some already in flower and smelling gorgeous and masses of buds just ready to burst. It will be a wonderful place to enjoy your cream teas at the Festival on July 6th.

Visitors to the garden are often greeted by Sue Watton who is quick to offer pots of tea and biscuits. Once the site is tidy enough - in the next few weeks probably - we hope to offer this as a regular service to visitors. Refreshed and rested, we then hope our visitors will make a small donation to the funds and perhaps visit the produce table and pick up a few healthy vegetables or plants for their own gardens. Dick has created a wonderful produce stall especially for this purpose and this now stands proudly by the garden door, hoping to tempt people as they pass.



Now that the better weather is here, the numbers of visitors are increasing noticeably. Several groups have descended on the site, we've had a least one party in the marquee and the numbers of casual visitors are rising. It's great to see so many people using the garden. It's a great boost to the volunteers to see the pleasure on people's faces and to hear their praise for what has been achieved - it somehow makes all of the hard work and commitment worthwhile. Word of mouth is great publicity and from time to time, visitors return as volunteers.

We also need to start our volunteers young. Ryan Cox has been with us from the start. Now a young man, he has acquired really useful skills and plays a full part on site.





Joe Dugas is currently volunteering as part of his Duke of Edinburgh's Award and hopefully he will continue beyond this. Reg Cornell brings grandson Louis and Peter Kennedy often brings granddaughter Lara to help out and, to the left, Sue Thompson works with grandsons Jamie and Matthew. It could be sometime before Matthew (a Bob the Builder fan) gets to drive Scoop on site but I'm sure that Dick will be up for training him!

Dig this!

There is much activity on the allotments now that the weather makes for more pleasant working conditions. Early crops are looking good and everywhere is beginning to look cared for and tidy. It's hard work but the benefits of good food and the therapy of working in a lovely place make all of the sweat worthwhile. Last year the harvest was ruined by weather issues but in 2013 we hope to be better served. Look out for surplus crops on the produce table!



Social Services

Volunteers have been enjoying some social time. Jim Hartless organised a trip out to play bar skittles and a good night was had by all, Sue Watton taking the honours (as she did last year!). Peter Kennedy organised a circular walk around Repton followed by a Father's Day lunch (which took almost as long as the walk!) Reg has run 2 'fun' boules competitions. The first was washed out by rain but the second was lovely weather and a good time was had by all. Here, Reg and John Price are doing strange things in a photo which should be a caption competition, I think! Obviously, Reg's is somewhat smaller than John's! The next 'open to all' boules afternoon will be on Saturday 13th July so make a note of the date and come along and join us. Boules will be available during the Music & Real Ale Festival too.



Chain Gang

Here's Steve Eyley admiring his own handiwork. The new smarter front of house now has an elegant line of oak posts with chain link fence to just finish it off. It's all Steve's work and doesn't it look the business?

And Finally....

The rest of the summer looks like continuing busily. There is a lot happening - visits, weddings, RHS judging and before we know it, I will be writing to you about our plans for November 5th. Isn't life one long merry-go-round of fun and laughter? See you at the Music and Real Ale Festival. I'll be doing the cream teas so stop by and say hello.

Best wishes,

Roger