

WESLEY SQUARE GARDEN REPORT 2021 – FROM HILARY ARNOLD

After ten years running our glorious garden I have decided to step down. It has been a great privilege and pleasure to be your Head Gardener, and an extraordinary opportunity to advance my gardening skills. Thank you for the support you have given me.

During lockdown, a small army of resident volunteers, aided by exceptional weather, ensured the Square never looked better. Huge thanks to Kathleen and Simon Slater, Rachael Vick and George Little, Anna Gardiner, Claudio Napolitano and Stephen Swarray, Cerys Matthews and Steve and Red Abbott, Robert Larkins, Sarah Collison, Chris Bushell, Shahraz, Mariella and Anneliese Razzaq, Yoko Kudo, and David and Harvey Kitchen. Sincere apologies if I've missed anyone.

Italian visitors to the Square, Marco Nieri, a Bioenergetic Landscaper, and his partner Alessandra Pergreffi, came to provide insight to our garden and especially the power of our trees. They were stranded by Covid and stayed rather longer than intended – to our gain. Marco's report is on the website.

As many of you may know, I resigned from the Committee after the November meeting. I would like to take this opportunity to explain why.

During the meeting, I was challenged for my approach to refurbishing our rotting fences and asked for repair and replacement details that architect Murray John had previously provided for the Committee - who had fully supported our proposals. Following Committee approval, the majority of co-owners had already agreed to the substantial spend on this essential maintenance. This ill-timed and surprising challenge resulted in the meeting overrunning for an hour, which meant many of those attending drifted away before the end.

I felt extremely uncomfortable and exposed, not at being criticised, that is to be expected. Rather I was concerned by the Committee's lack of authority. The meeting was not effectively run, and the Committee was unable to defend its own decision in support of two of its most hard-working members.

At present the Square is without a Chair, and it lacks an engaged and proactive Treasurer managing our money, scrutinising expenditure and planning for the future. Those of us who undertake key roles, however experienced and effective we may be, need to be supported by a senior management team. I hope going forward officers for the roles will step up, and my resignation will have played a part in disrupting this stagnant status quo.

A strong and structured management committee is also essential to support a fundamental asset of this community: the way we get involved and get things done. Long may that

continue in the wake of such people as Lawrence Dorman, Kirsty Malcolm and Russell Mulchansingh, quietly but effectively restoring our pull-ins, providing bicycle sheds and installing CCTV. Carrying out the wishes of the residents by running complex projects, without fuss or payment. People in key roles, important volunteers and those who are employed by us, should be free of harassment.

Residents can become highly agitated. I am aware of email campaigns. People working on behalf of residents have been shouted at in meetings, and in the square, many times. It goes with the territory, unfortunately. David Barrable, a Wesley Square original owner, carved out our landscape and lay the foundations for the wonderful garden I inherited. He tended it for years until forced to resign, he has told me, because of verbal 'abuse' from his neighbours. It was unacceptable then and is now.

I believe this square is unique in its vitality, neighbourliness and high standard of maintenance: a model community. It is such a joy to hear the sound of children playing safely outside in the early evening or to wander out at dawn to the peace of this lovely oasis. Going forward, I urge the establishing of a dedicated garden committee who can take time and care to decide how to replace my role. I am very happy to help in any way I can and will post on the website a comprehensive overview of what I did.

I want to thank two people. John MacArthur has been by my side throughout my tenure as head of the garden. He has endured my stubborn, bossy nature and put in more hours of hard work than anyone, including myself. And he has done so with a modesty belying his gardening talent, wonderful wit and an infectious sense of joy.

I also want to thank managing agent and all-round storm trooper Marie Travers. Without her, quite frankly, we would not have survived these years without a Chair. It is easy to take Marie for granted, but please do not.

Last but not least, this year has seen Reg Groves embrace retirement and his 90th birthday. For those not lucky enough to have known him, he worked as our gardener and grumpy groundsman for forty years. A legend. I see him regularly and will bring him to the square to say hello as soon as possible.