

Management Committee Report year end 2010

Bohemia Walled Garden Association
bohemiawga@yahoo.co.uk
ANNUAL REPORT – 2010
For the AGM: March 2011

This has been a very busy second year for the Bohemia Walled Garden Association. We gradually achieved our goal of clearing the site of obstructing brambles & saplings and progressed to an active & productive use of the walled garden. The more we used the garden, the more popular it became. The result is that we can now boast a full register of plot-holders. Our tool-shed has been put into good order, thanks to the efforts of Chris, Mat, Darren & Adrian.

In addition to our start-up set of tools from BTCV, we also received a quantity of redundant gardening tools from the Hastings Trust. (These are on permanent loan.) 10 more tools were donated by Brian from Westfield. A cash donation of £200 from Stephen Waters, one of our volunteer helpers, came at the end of March.

At the beginning of April, Amy Terry (Manageress of the Estates department) visited the site. She was able to see how much we had achieved and also access some problems, both for us as users and for the Council as owners. Upon our request, HBC paid for a skip to help remove most of the rubbish that we had uncovered. Mrs. Terry also asked Booker & Best to repair a large hole in the south wall; they duly filled in the brickwork on the inner half of the wall.

April was also a busy month for cultivation, with areas along the north wall steadily being cleared and planted with vegetables. Potatoes, broad beans, peas and onions went in, to start our communal vegetable plot.

Unfortunately, the month ended with a break-in and the theft of some tools. The loss of our sledgehammers, club-hammer & bolt-cutters were reported to the Police but not found. We have increased our security by fixing the Heras fence panels more firmly to the wall and putting 2 locks on the toolshed.

In May, Bob, Chris & Sue met HBC Councillors Dominic Sabatien, Kim Forward & Trevor Webb in Summerfields Wood. We wanted to show them the areas that needed attention, especially the paths that become extremely muddy and slippery. This was followed up by another visit by HBC officers. We hoped to get improved access to the walled garden, restoration of the top pond and essential tree pruning work scheduled; unfortunately, these items were not seen as “high priority” for municipal spending.

In an effort to increase our finances, we held a fund-raising event in May in conjunction with Heather Grief and her talk on the history of the Summerfield Estate. We raised over £300, selling books, cakes, bric-a-brac & plants at the Park Road Methodist Church vestibule.

The BBC took an interest in us as a community project demonstrating the “Big Society”. In June, a team came to film and interview us, but this was never actually broadcast on television. Council involvement was sought in July regarding the replacement of the missing coping-stones.

The HBC surveyor came to assess the deteriorating condition of the walls and was able to support our request for maintenance of the existing structure. This led to Booker & Best ordering and delivering the newly-manufactured coping-stones later in the year. Some have been put in place, but we await the return of Booker & Best to complete the majority of the work.

July was busy with our big social event. We had our annual “open day”, with the Mayoress Kim Forward attending and assisting in the naming of our lovely lad-scarecrow.

In August we received a cheque for £500 from the East Sussex County Council. This was a grant to encourage recycling and to pay for our composting equipment, both for our own use and for demonstration purposes as an education resource. More funding was sought to provide us with a wooden shed. “Hastings Voluntary Action” administered a grant from our local Primary Care Trust to provide us with a shelter; their cheque for £497 paid for a Skinner’s shed and the wood required for the base. (This was finally installed in early December.)

September brought the public into the walled garden again. We participated in the Heritage Open Day scheme, allowing people to see the “secret garden” and the Ice House. The other feature of the Summerfields Estate, namely the Roman Bath, was supervised by Friends of Summerfields Wood. Simultaneously, we also benefited from the creative energies of Miranda Sharp, an artist working with Coastal Currents. Miranda reminded us of the origins of the name “Bohemia” as used locally, by recreating al fresco (bohemian style) cream teas, on 4 separate occasions. These were beautiful and delicious events, which we hope will be repeated.

As the autumn weather became more cool and wet, we put the finishing touches on our preparations of the “reception area”. This entailed much digging and raking; then finally the ground was ready for the grass seed. The result is that we now have a lush green lawn, ready for social gatherings, picnics and cultural events.

Many long hours were also spent by Bob and Sue in the preparation of a bid for £50,000 from the Big Lottery, publicised by ITV as the “People’s Millions”. Unfortunately, our chairperson Judy Clark was unable to help during this critical time due to poor health. She offered her resignation in October, just as important legal and financial papers needed to be signed. We then turned to Chris, who had already shown great commitment to our project. He appreciated our dilemma and agreed to become “acting-chairman”. This enabled us to carry on with our bid. Filming for the People’s Millions went very well, with a terrific turnout from our volunteers and from the pupils of St. Mary’s Primary School (who have a large plot in the garden). The actual broadcast was on the 26th of November. After many hours of anticipation, we received the news

that we had been unsuccessful. Sadly, we lost this chance to win the funding to repair the damaged wall and thereby expand our growing area.

Despite this setback, the garden continues to thrive because of the commitment and energy of its members. In December, Mary Dawson organised a craft activity, primarily for the children, which involved making Christmas wreathes from natural materials. This was followed by a winter solstice celebration, led by Stephanie Fawbert. Both events helped to bring cheer into the dark days of winter.

Overall, the Management Committee can report another successful year. Our tenancy agreement with the Council has developed in to Draft Lease, for a 25 year period. We have negotiated over several contentious points and now await a reply over one last item. Once this lease is signed, the BWGA will be the legal tenant and custodian of the walled garden.

ST