

MONTPELIER SQUARE GARDEN

Report of the Committee for the year 2013 to be considered at the Annual General Meeting to be held on Monday 25th March 2013 at the Montpeliano Restaurant, at 6.30pm

The committee as elected by the Annual General Meeting held on Monday 26th March 2012 consisted of:

Jane Bradbury (39)
Neil Carthy (26) – Secretary
Avril Cox (18) – Keys
Nicholas Davie-Thornhill (31)
Christopher Didizian (44)
Ali Malek QC (13)
Lady Janet Marshall (21) – Garden Chairman
Anica Nishio (25)
Daniel Quirici (8) - Chairman

GENERAL REPORT

It has been a busy year for both gardening and administration. A near-drought in the first few months of 2012, followed by endless rain meant the conditions were difficult for our gardeners but they have still continued to improve the garden since taking over in April 2011.

The rains held off for our summer party though and we also had a very successful Christmas Carol party, at which over £1,500 was raised for charity.

During the year we received temporary planning permission for the nighttime lighting of our trees. Due to fear of disturbing bats and other nocturnal residents of the garden we are allowed to have the lights on until 30th April and then they must be switched off, permanently. If we want the lights back on we must demonstrate that there are no negatively affected bats and then make a new application in the Autumn.

While we all get to enjoy the garden from our windows, the work that goes on behind the scenes is not so apparent and its fair to say that in the past year each member of the Committee has each helped to make the garden the beautiful and tranquil haven that it is. Special thanks must also go to Robert Player, our garden contractors. Whether its pruning and planting, re-gravelling the paths or putting up the Christmas tree, Robert and his team are top notch, present come rain or shine and knowledgeable and friendly to boot.

If you look on our website: (<http://www.montpeliersquare.org.uk/>) you can find news, minutes of committee meetings, our audited accounts and some historical information. If you would like to save a tree and receive information by email then please drop us a line at meetme@montpeliersquare.org.uk so that we have your email address.

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TREE REPORT

The main focus of the year was the fungal infection *Massaria*. This disease only affects Plane trees and it acts on the upper side of branches, slowly killing them. In some cases it causes the branch to drop to the ground, even while the tree appears healthy to a ground-based observer. The disease does not kill the tree but even large branches can be affected, creating a risk to public safety. The disease was first reported in London in 2010 and has been discovered in Hyde Park, Manchester Square, and Montagu Square, among other locations.

Once aware of the risks we commissioned a full inspection of all our trees, with special in-tree inspections of the Plane trees. We are pleased to report no evidence of *Massaria* was found. A copy of the report can be found on our website at <http://bit.ly/Y4sSG1>. The Committee will take advice on a future inspection regime and we have factored further inspections into our budget. The Committee takes its responsibility for the safety of the trees very seriously and will ensure that our actions are in line with current best practise.

This year saw three silver birches planted in the NW corner of the Square. A number of Acers have been added to brighten the garden in late Summer/Autumn. We also planted a Golden Catalpa (*Catalpa bignonioides 'Aurea'*) in honour of the Queen's jubilee.

GARDEN REPORT

The garden experienced adverse weather in 2012: a drought followed by a long period of wet weather. It was our newest plants that were affected the most: we lost and had to replace the 3 newly planted silver birches, for example. The gardeners have worked hard to cut back many of the overgrown plants on the South and East side, brightening some of the darker recesses. This has opened up a number of areas for planting in the coming season and we have already planted a young cherry tree in one of these sites. The gardeners are currently planting more bulbs including snowdrops throughout the garden. Additional suitable herbaceous plants will be added to the back area of the main herbaceous border in Spring.

We completely refreshed the gravel in 2012 and the paths are looking much better. We will continue to top it up every year, as before.

In the annual Garden Squares competition we were placed fourth, receiving a Highly Commended rating from the judges. This result was disappointing as we were in second place last year but we hope to achieve an improved position in 2013. It is a very competitive field, with over 50 entries in our category. Standards become higher every year and much depends on the weather conditions and plant performance on the day.

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SOCIAL REPORT

Summer Garden Party

In early June we each received an invitation to our Summer Garden Party, organised by Mrs Anica Nishio. Those who could make it will recall that it was a welcome respite from months of rain and that the garden was in excellent shape. We had not held a summer party for a number of years and everyone enjoyed it so much that it will surely become an annual event. Our thanks to Mrs Nishio and those who helped in setting up beforehand and tidying away afterwards.

Christmas Carols Party

On the night of December 13th we were joined by a dozen uniformed Blues and Royals from the nearby barracks to help celebrate our Christmas Carols Party. As in previous years Mrs Jane Bradbury organised the event, which raised £1,500 for charity: 60% going to the Salvation Army fund for the homeless and 40% going to the Household Cavalry Foundation (HCF). The HCF is a fund to help soldiers and their families, especially in case of need related to injuries sustained in operations conducted by the battalion. The Salvation Army provided the music, the soldiers their singing voices and Mrs Bradbury the warmth of excellent mulled wine. Thanks to all and we look forward to this year's party.

LIGHTING

In March 2012 we were informed by the Knightsbridge Association that we required planning permission for the lights that are on in the garden after dark. The lights had been in place for a number of years but the need for planning permission was not appreciated at the time of their installation, so in May we applied to the council.

The application attracted emails or letters of support from 15 houses on the square and objections from 2 houses.

As part of the planning process we have to demonstrate that the lights would not affect nocturnal wildlife, specifically bats. This might have only been a minor point except that the two objecting houses had reported that bats were regularly seen feeding and travelling through the square during the summer. We therefore commissioned a bat survey which took place in October 2012 and no bats were found.

Ultimately Westminster City Council determined that the survey we provided was insufficient evidence to prove there were no affected bats because it took place at the wrong time of the year. They decided to allow us the use of the lights with two conditions:

1. The lights had to go off on 30th April 2013.
2. The lights would go off at 10pm, instead of 11pm as before.

We will perform a second survey in July and then re-apply in September.

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FINANCE REPORT

Expenditure for the year 2012/13 will exceed income by approximately £4,000 after a number of years of income exceeding expenditure. This deficit is due to a number of factors:

1. Unanticipated tree inspection costs (£2,000) as the danger of Massaria disease became apparent.
2. £2,300 of costs on altering the horse chestnut light fixture and making the planning application for the lights.
3. The one off expenditure of £700 on a borehole survey.

The draft accounts for the year to 31 March 2013 are available on the website and will be distributed at the AGM. As the year to 31st March is not yet finished the draft accounts contain some estimates for expenditure in the month of March but no large deviations are expected.

For the 2013/4 year the Committee plan to keep expenditure on bulbs and plants (except for one-off items such as trees) constant at £2,500 per annum.

The Committee commissioned an expensive borehole survey in the hope that we would have our own water supply, insulating us from future hosepipe bans. Subsequent to the survey we received advice that to drill a well to the depth specified in the survey would totally destroy an area of the garden not less than 20m square. The resulting water supply could not be guaranteed either. The project will not therefore proceed.

2013/14 PRECEPT

At the AGM in 2012 the total precept was agreed at £32,500. This equates to £674 per house.