

2013 The year of the growing community – The Chairman's Report

At least that was what we had on the front of our Judges Portfolio, which was in support of the RHS scheme to encourage everyone to grow edible plants. For Thornbury in Bloom it was certainly a year of change. I took over the role of Chairman at the last AGM. Taking over a very successful organisation, which, led by Sue during her 5 years as Chair, achieved a level of success which was truly outstanding. I am glad that Sue and Tony have remained on the committee, they have given invaluable support.

So, 2013 was a year of coming back to earth. We were back in the Regional competition. This is simply the way the competition in Britain in Bloom works.

Back in March it was rather nice to see the Sunday Times making Thornbury as one of the best places to live in the UK! They noted a great sense of community in the town; I would like to think Thornbury in Bloom added to the sense of community.

So, how did the year unfold? Firstly the weather was still having an impact as it did in 2012. We had to deal with the coldest March for 50 years thus delaying the onset of spring. As it turned out, I am not sure if spring actually occurred, we seemed to go straight from winter to summer, but what a summer it was!

We were visited by the judges on 17th July, a wonderfully hot sunny day. The weather in the run up was equally hot and sunny. Not ideal conditions in which to prepare the town, but, such is our resolve we all saw it as another challenge to overcome!

As I began to take the judges round the route any sense of trepidation about what they would think was quickly overtaken with a sense of pride. The town looked a picture; some people have told me it has never looked better.

As you doubtless know our efforts paid off; we picked up the gold award and best in class Sargent cup at the awards in September. The judge's feedback was extremely complimentary. They noted the enthusiasm of everybody they met on the tour and post tour buffet. They even noticed the 'Friends of Thornbury in Bloom' posters in peoples' windows! They praised all aspects of our entry: horticulture, community and environment. It was also gratifying to have certain features of our entry praised: the gardens at the Anchor pub, our judge's portfolio and Jack Ashton's garden were all nominated as best in their class in the South West. Jack's garden was only beaten by the gardens at Paignton Zoo, an interesting choice of entries to compete against one another!

However, success brings its own challenges. Preparing the town for the judges requires an immense amount of effort and additional help both financial and practical is always welcome, irrespective of how successful we are!

But Thornbury in Bloom is more than just preparing the town for the judges' visit! In Bloom activities go on throughout the year; autumn bulb planting, plant stalls, fund raising, (including a weekend collection at Tesco), so thank you to Tesco, schools painting competition, the garden competition, the list goes on! The challenges are many in an organisation that has to raise in the region of £14,000 a year.

In addition a new initiative introduced this year, is members of the committee have been posting notes through householder's doors where they feel the garden looks wonderful and thanking them for making Thornbury a lovely place to live.

We would not be able to be as successful without the help of many other groups. To name but a few: the Thornbury Allotment Association; Thornbury Community Composters; Community Garden at Turnberries; the Prayer Garden at Christ the King, The Lions Club, Rotary, Thornbury Museum, Filnore Woods and Thornbury Litterbusters.

I also thank Thornbury Town Council and South Gloucestershire council without whom we could not operate. It was a herculean effort for the Town Council team who, for 10 weeks, 7 days a week, watered all the hanging baskets, troughs, tubs and planters around the town. Without their efforts the displays would have looked very sorry site! But what displays we enjoyed this year, they were simply outstanding. And my special thanks go to, Tony, Sue, Jean and Fran for their hard work in designing, planting and caring for the schemes.

We thank local business sponsors and all the many private individuals who support us. No matter how large or small the contribution, financial and practical they are greatly appreciated.

So this year is coming to an end. What of the future? Believe it or not Britain in Bloom will be celebrating its golden jubilee in 2014. The RHS want to make it a special year. We are currently discussing with the organisers how Thornbury in Bloom will play a part in that celebration. Look out for further announcements in the New Year!

We have also just started working with final year IT undergraduate students from the University of the West of England in a project to give us social media tools to enable us to reach and approach to as wide a section of the community as possible in the future. They have already prepared a questionnaire we has been sent to the Thornbury Magazine to be published in January and will be posted on our website where it can be completed on line.

The committee are looking at a number of initiatives for 2014; adopt a planter is one such idea. Keeping all the planters, tubs and troughs in tip top condition through the summer is quite a task and the committee needs people to adopt them and care of them! Vacancies for this role are officially open? A quiz night is being planned and Juliette Pallott has agreed to work with me to set the questions. Juliette really enjoyed taking part in the quiz nights in August here in the Swan, she knows her music! Details to follow.

In conclusion, may I say a big thank you to the committee for all their support over the past year and a special thank you to Joan, who is stepping down as Vice Chair and Rachel who is stepping down as our Secretary and together with Jack, who is going to concentrate on ensuring his garden is so wonderful resigning from the committee. I thank them all for their support.

Finally to everyone in Thornbury, who make our Thornbury in Bloom project such an enjoyable enterprise, thank you.

Guy Rawlinson, Chairman, Thornbury in Bloom