

2014 The year of "GROWING community": The Chairman's Report

Well, 2014 has been quite a year for Thornbury in Bloom! We were asked to enter not one but two competitions. Having been judged in the South West in Bloom competition as the best town in our category in 2013 we were invited to enter the Regional Champion of Champions category and the National Britain in Bloom competition.

Entering two competitions in the same year was a challenge for the committee, but also for the town and all those who make Thornbury in Bloom such a wonderful enterprise.

This year we had two themes to work with. Britain in Bloom has now been running for 50 years and not surprisingly the RHS set a golden theme. They supplied sunflower seeds to all entrants and schools. So, together with stunning golden displays around the town, the displays on the Pump, Castle Court, the Castle at the top of Grovesend Road, to name but three, we clearly responded in emphatic style.

2014 also marks the centenary of the outbreak of WW1, so this presented an additional theme and challenge. The Castle on the Plain was turned into a cascade of red, a sizable poppy bed was planted along Morton Way and a truly stunning poppy shaped display was set up by Tony in the raised bed at the top of Grovesend Road to mark our commemoration of this event.

Britain in Bloom seeks to judge three aspects of our town: horticultural excellence; community participation and environmental responsibility. Our record of success can only be achieved by all three of these categories being of the highest standard. I would like to thank all those who provided their time and skill to ensure that we achieved equal success in all these categories. We gained Gold in the Regional Champion of Champions and Silver Gilt in the National competition.

Along with the main competitions we encouraged as many groups to enter the It's Your Neighbourhood Award competition and I am pleased to say that 9 groups took part this year. This competition encourages groups to gain recognition for their entries and I am pleased to say that a number of our entrants gained the highest level of attainment. I will be seeking repeat/new entrants to this category in the coming year.

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 was asked by one of the judges how many hours did I think all the volunteers put in to making all the displays possible. I was somewhat taken aback and simply commented that I knew it was extensive, but I was not aware that any of our volunteers clocked their time, they just got on and did the tasks that were there to be done!

I also thank Thornbury Town Council and South Gloucestershire Council without them we could not operate. It was a Herculean effort for the Town Council team who, for 15 weeks, a record, watered all the hanging baskets, troughs, tubs and planters around the town. Without their efforts the displays would have looked a very sorry site! But, what displays we enjoyed this year, they were simply stunning! My special thanks go to Tony, Sue, Jean and Fran for their hard work in designing, planting and caring for the schemes. We were also joined by a new band of volunteers who helped tend the troughs and beds through the summer, dead heading and weeding to ensure the displays looked their best at all times.

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.

We have been working with final year students from the University of the West of England and they have helped us launch a new website, and supported us in our use of Twitter, Facebook and our Blog.

We have had quite a successful year with our various fund raising activities, holding our first race night, quiz night and several successful plant sales. Pat Duru joined the committee to help with fund raising. Pat's work and support has been most welcome.

So, this year is now drawing to a close. What of the future? The committee did feel a sense of disappointment that we were awarded Silver Gilt in the National Competition. We achieved Gold in the National Champion of Champions category just two years ago. The Silver Gilt award was achieved in all the judging categories, so we could not say that any one category did not perform to the highest level. I have, though, concluded that judging is not an exact science. Not every judge will reach the same conclusion. But, more importantly, I feel that the result was not a setback, more an opportunity to renew our efforts and come back stronger than ever.....I hope you all agree?! Whatever the judge's award, we as Thornbury residents all know how wonderful our town has looked this summer. I have heard so many positive comments about the floral displays; in fact people have said that the town has looked the best it has ever looked! That to me is far more important.

In conclusion then, may I say a big thank you to the committee for all their contributions over the past year. Finally, to everyone in Thornbury who makes our Thornbury in Bloom project such an enjoyable enterprise, thank you all so much!

Guy Rawlinson, Chairman, Thornbury in Bloom