

## **HYDE PARK SQUARE GARDEN COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2014**

### **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, MARCH 2015**

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2014 was an interesting year for the Hyde Park Square Garden. For the first time in years, we decided not to have our annual garden party – this was a strong departure from previous years, and was driven not only by the cost considerations in a year in which some major garden improvements were intended, but also by the absence of some of our key members in the Garden Party Sub Committee. This latter point is a worrying one, as it reminds us always that the successful running of the activities of the garden, and the garden itself, is usually in the hands of a few good people. This is something we do need to address, particularly when Committee members move on.

Notwithstanding these concerns, it was a good year for the garden in many ways. As we will hear from Robert Player's report, we were able, without much disruption, to remove the one plane tree that kept some of us awake at night, as it was leaning precariously across the road on the south side of the Square. We also finally removed the swings, and fortunately so, as the poles had become badly rusted and rotten below ground level. The resulting vista is absolutely wonderful, and gives full sweep to the lawns, greatly enhancing the tranquillity of the garden. We have not yet installed the replacement swing for our children, but Robert Player assures us that this will be done in time for the summer.

The other project, the pergola, proved to be too costly and perhaps over-ambitious in scale and scope for the intended area in the garden. Work has commenced to redesign a pergola on a more simple and sympathetic basis. We hope that this will come to fruition in this current year. Mauro Dell'Orca, the award-winning Architect and furniture maker from Workshop East, will still be assisting us with this project. It is regrettable that this is taking us quite some time, but, as we have discovered, good things in the garden take time to take root and grow.

A major project which now looms is the reinstatement of the iron railings that surrounded the garden prior to the Great War. In line with the excellent work the Church Commissioners are doing to beautify and improve the Hyde Park Estate, railings are being reinstated already in Sussex Gardens and Sussex Square, and will also be done in our Square. We have been talking about this for quite some time, and this will be a welcome and significant improvement to the garden in particular, and the area in general. We are no longer able to protect the security of the perimeter of the garden, as our fence is collapsing or has been broken in a number of areas, and parts of our hedge are dying off naturally. This has led to unwanted intrusion into the garden with some despicable behaviour as a consequence and the depositing of some truly disgusting rubbish and litter.

However, the installation of the railings will mean the destruction of some of our perimeter planting in the short term - it is unavoidable and we have to prepare ourselves for the impact thereof. Obviously our gardeners will work closely with the installers to ensure that there is as little damage as possible, and we will replant once the railings are in. I would like to stress that the Church Commissioners, the ultimate owners of the garden, are driving this initiative, and have already submitted plans for permission, but have been working quite harmoniously with ourselves to achieve this mutual objective, and are entertaining slightly higher railings than is normal to discourage future intruders.

No doubt there will be some discussion around how these railings will be expensed. The Church Commissioners have indicated that they are considering making a donation in the region of £50-60,000 to offset the eventual cost of about £300,000. They will then levy a charge to property owners and residents around the Square to offset this cost over a number of years. This time

period is obviously of crucial importance, and we will make representations to the Church Commissioners after this Annual General Meeting. In anticipation of the railings, we would like to make note of our appreciation to the Church Commissioners, but we also understand that this will be a massive disruption for the garden in the short term. We are not unmindful of the fact that, once the railings have been reinstated, as has been the case elsewhere, there will be a positive benefit to the values of the properties surrounding the Square.

On the topic of the Church Commissioners, we have informed them of our enduring frustrations and concerns with the managing agents and once we have discussed this topic at this meeting, I would suggest that we make formal representations to the Church Commissioners that, if Knight Frank are to continue as their managing agents for the Estate, we would like to appoint different managing agents for the Garden. It is simply too frustrating and annoying to have to deal on an ongoing basis with the gross incompetence of the current managing agents.

The Church Commissioners have also been very helpful in instructing a third party security company to present a proposal for the installation of a security camera in the middle of the north side of the Square. This will hopefully ameliorate, to some extent, the constant littering, unhygienic and unwanted practices of taxi drivers, and use of the parking areas at night for practices that simply do not belong in the Square. These discussions are proceeding.

It would not be appropriate for me to give this report without mentioning our wonderful community itself. Notwithstanding the absence of a garden party in 2014, the garden was well-used and provided a magnificent focal point for the texture of interactions that constitute our community. In particular, we had an excellent Carols evening in the Square before Christmas, where our Garden Party Sub-committee members excelled themselves, learning from the experience of the previous year. Some 80 or so residents enjoyed the beautiful singing, magical decorations and delicious mince pies and mulled wine.

It remains for me to thank the real unsung heroes – the wonderful members of this Committee. In particular, we would like to thank Paul Green, who has extended his tenure on this Committee far beyond his original undertaking. He has been a stalwart member of the Committee, both as Secretary and more recently in a general capacity, and has always been a most helpful and dependable participant in our activities. We are grateful to Paul and also to Patty Johns, who, we are delighted to say, will continue for another term if elected.

Our Garden Party Sub-committee has been driven by the dynamic and very effective James Davies and Giuliana La Pera partnership, and we were most relieved to have them back from their extended stay in the United States – their absence was most certainly felt by the rest of us, and they are valued as highly contributing members of this Committee in every way. We were also very happy to hear that the visit had been successful for Luca. Our Secretary, Sarah McCarthy, has maintained her wonderful commitment to the Committee, for which we are grateful, but we sadly take note that Sarah will relocate overseas for part of 2015 for work reasons – we thank her for her contribution and look forward to her return.

A great thank you must go to our redoubtable Treasurer Maria Parpou, who has suffered the enormous frustrations of trying to do an effective and professional job while having to depend on the hopelessly inaccurate information provided by Knight Frank. Notwithstanding numerous emails, telephone calls and visits, it appears that Knight Frank are simply incapable of doing this job and Maria has nevertheless maintained a high level of endurance in her tireless pursuit of accurate information. She is a superb Treasurer and a wonderful colleague, and I sincerely hope that we can persuade her to continue in her crucial role. In our recent visit to confront Knight Frank with some of these difficulties, we discovered a lack of alignment between ourselves and them in expectations around roles. These will be addressed in this meeting.

I would also like to thank Saeed Barzin for the increasing role he plays on the Committee, and his energy and constant vigilance, and Justin Le Good for his willingness and help in both setting up and maintaining the website. I do not think we have served Justin well, with everything else that has been happening, as we have not fed him with sufficient material to maintain the interest levels of the website. Our promise must be to improve our commitment to maintaining what is in today's world a very important window to the garden. Our Health and Safety Officer, Caryn Solomon, has herself had a challenging year which has taken her out of the garden a bit, but we are glad for her return and look forward to her engaging once again in both the health and safety assessments of the garden, as well as in the great contribution she makes in assisting Robert Player with the design and planting decisions.

One of the less visible contributors to the activities of this Committee has been my personal assistant, Gina Carpenter. On behalf of all of us, I would like to thank Gina most sincerely for all the kind help that she gives us.

Finally, I would like to thank Robert Player and Garden Associates for the outstanding work they did during 2014. Not only did the garden look beautiful and continue to provide our community with an island of calm and tranquillity, but we also won the Gold Medal for Best Small Private Garden in London in last year's London Gardens Competition, again! And that is on top of another Gold at the Chelsea Garden Show! Garden Associates are increasingly busy, unsurprisingly, so we really value the love, care and commitment that they show to our garden, notwithstanding the frustrations caused by the inexcusable delays occasioned by our managing agents in paying them!

All in all, it has been a good year, and the Garden goes from strength to strength. Thank you all for your invaluable contributions – we are enormously privileged to have our garden, but more so to have the kinds of friends and colleagues in our neighbourhood who care enough to contribute to the spirit of community that so defines our joint purpose and our daily lives.

**Dr Allen Zimble**  
**Chairman**