



Chairman's Report for the AGM The Bell Hotel March 7th 2017

It is perhaps the greatest privilege of the Chair of any organisation to have the opportunity once a year to describe in some small measure the myriad successes of the last twelve months. It is perhaps even more pleasurable when those successes have very little to do with him.

Tewkesbury-in-Bloom has for the seventh year secured a Gold Award in the regional Heart of England competition. We are lucky to have in Roger and Mark two fair and very positive judges who always encourage rather than criticise. They make the judging day almost pleasurable when it could be rather different. The judging seems always to go like clockwork largely because of the extraordinarily detailed planning organised mainly by Pete Aldridge. Chris Aldridge even provides us with carnations (or are they roses, which rather illustrates my limited horticultural knowledge!) This year we tried a slightly different route. The highlight of the tour is always Brian Reeve's incredible cinema style presentation. This year this was truly cinematic because we were privileged to be able to use the big screen in the Roses theatre. Indeed the judges even made a special mention of this in their report.

Not only does Brian produce a truly beautiful visual presentation - this year he added the birds eye view from his drone which gave the whole thing a new dimension. We could see the nature reserve, the ham and the Victoria gardens in ways we had never before imagined. If you add the work that Brian does to make our portfolio one of the best, if not the best in the circuit, his efforts are wholly invaluable.

However, what is really important is how much our work improves and enhances the visual beauty of our town. In this we work hand-in-hand with the battlefield society which provide such glorious colourful flags. The combined effect of flowers and flags makes our offer truly special. We are always adding additional displays. This year there has been a special focus on the back-of-Avon area. We have invested in additional planters and I believe this has really transformed a rather nondescript part of the town.

Without sponsors Tewkesbury-in-Bloom would simply not exist. In our earlier days it was Margaret White who more than anyone else kept our sponsors supportive and enthusiastic. I sometimes suspected that Margaret was not averse to using pretty strong arm methods - at least metaphorical! It is so sad to see Margaret ill and somewhat diminished in her nursing home in Cheltenham. Despite her situation, when I visit I have the strong impression that she is running that institution, rather as she did in Tewkesbury. Shelby Powell is a truly worthy successor and has built and extended on Margaret's success. Indeed I would go as far to say that without her we would not attract anything like enough supporters. The weeding and planting days she organises and her various contacts with community groups have further enhanced our support base.

The White Bear, the Royal Hop Pole, the Royal British Legion, the Anchor and the Bell all individually entered the Heart of England competition- more than ever before! They all did very well, but the Bell with a gold award and the White Bear with a silver gilt, were perhaps the stars of the show. Yet it was the residents of Hanover Court, many in quite poor health who perhaps achieved most in entering as a neighbourhood group and achieving a horticultural standard in their delightful garden which really impressed our judges.

On the theme of community activity it is difficult to beat the efforts of Tony Farmer and his newly created King John Court group, which have done such an excellent job in beautifying their immediate community area.

Jackie Dean has done a huge amount to develop a real interest in young people in flowers, through her flower arranging workshops. Some of the fruits of her efforts, flower cones created by her youngsters, were on display at the crescent on judging day. This really showcased these skills. It also added another dimension to our floral offer and was much appreciated by the judges.

The work undertaken this year by the volunteers in the relatively recently created Nature Reserve has been extraordinary and has included the building of a brand new footbridge over the Swilgate as well some very successful open days. Those of you who have visited Ashchurch Station in the last few months, will have seen the wonderful progress this group have made with developing their station gardens.

Although Dawn and her team at Victoria Gardens are a separate organisation, their efforts always impress. I remember in those sad days after the flood how dejected these gardens were. They have been transformed and are one of the jewels of our town - possible even the jewel! We are so grateful that Dawn finds the time to be involved in our committee too.

Stuart and Tony and their team in North Tewkesbury have made that entrance into the town truly beautiful. They do it with little funding and lots of hard work and enthusiasm. The beautiful displays that so enhance the twixtbears area are a testament to their skill and imagination as well as much spadework.

Most of the work of maintaining, watering and often planting is undertaken by Brian Williams of Cornerways Nursery. He always does more than he is contracted to do. When problems arrive he is always first on the scene, sorting things out. This year we have had more difficulties with vandalism in particular. Our displays at the back-of-Avon have been regularly tipped over and some of our coronets have been damaged by inconsiderate drivers. This has cost us money we can ill afford - I hope that this summer will see an improvement.

This AGM will be the last to be attended by Emma Booth who after doing such a splendid job as manager of Bell Hotel, has moved on to even greater challenges in Oxfordshire. Her efforts as our treasurer over the last few years has been invaluable and I know how much time she has developed to this in her very busy schedule. The job of treasurer is one of the most demanding in any committee and it is no different in Tewkesbury-in-Bloom. She has allowed us to use the Bell Hotel for so many of our functions and meetings as well as having a real love for horticulture, as her personal success in year's competition testifies. We will so miss her and her partner Gary. We wish them every success in their new endeavour.

However, both money and volunteers remain in short supply. This year we were lucky to have a generous grant from the Town Council as well as from the Mayor's fund. We hope that the parish will continue to support us - although we cannot take that absolutely for granted. Many of our

fantastic volunteers are like me getting rather long in the tooth. Some such as Pete and Chris Aldridge do amazing work maintaining their flower beds in Newtown in which they take a justified pride. Yet, we need more willing helpers, preferable ones without dodgy knees like me! All volunteer groups like ours face the same difficulties, younger people have busier and more demanding lives, but to keep our town uniquely special we do need more helpers. The important point is we are so grateful for those that do contribute so much.- we hope their dedication encourages others. Marion last summer for example was out every morning weeding and maintaining the 1471 bed in Gloucester Road. Karen Brennan who is so busy this year in her role as Town Mayor, still finds time to help out - for this we are especially grateful. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mrs Cadbury our President for her continued encouragement and support.

Thank you for attending our AGM and hopefully seeing for yourself the amazing work that is being done. If there is anyone who would like to join our committee that would be wonderful and we would be so grateful.

John Badham