

# FRIENDS OF ABBEY GARDENS



## Chair's annual report

Year ending 31 December 2014

## Introduction

Abbey Gardens is an open-access harvest garden in the East London Borough of Newham. It is a place where anyone is welcome to participate in the communal growing of flowers, fruit and vegetables. Unlike the traditional allotment system, in Abbey Gardens no one has their own patch and everyone gardens together at regular gardening sessions led by an experienced gardener. The produce is shared among volunteers and is also available to the local community in return for donations from one of the garden's two Honesty Stalls. Several regular free events are held within the garden, including a Summer Fair and a Harvest Festival.

The Abbey Gardens site is one of only two Scheduled Ancient Monuments in Newham and contains the remains of the gatehouse of a 12th-century Cistercian abbey where monks once ran a kitchen garden. In 2006 a group of local residents formed Friends of Abbey Gardens, initially with the aim of rescuing the derelict site from vandalism and neglect. With the commissioning of an arts project entitled *“What Will The Harvest Be?”* the plan was made to turn Abbey Gardens into an open-access park and harvest garden. The soil was found to be contaminated, but with time and effort this setback was overcome and a beautiful artist-designed harvest garden was created in 30 raised beds.

**“Unlike the traditional allotment system, in Abbey Gardens no one has their own patch and everyone gardens together at regular gardening sessions led by an experienced gardener.”**

## Friends of Abbey Gardens

We underwent some significant changes in 2014 in Abbey Gardens. We rearranged the governance structure of the garden into a CIO (Charitable Incorporated Organisation) which commenced on January 1st 2015. There is now a FOAG CIO board of trustees and a separate chairman of the Friends of Abbey Gardens Committee. The trustees of the unincorporated charity became the trustees of the CIO. Under the new constitution, neither the members nor the trustees are liable.

We held four very successful events in 2014. We have some new faces involved while retaining the old ones. We had some fun, made some new friends, endured some trials and tribulations, grew some great produce, continued to improve the garden and got to know one another just a little bit better.

The project continues to prove its worth as a long-term venture, through incorporating as a charity, and building on our community roots. This is demonstrated by our stable attendance numbers and the members who contribute and continue to hold the garden to the highest horticultural standard.

At the EGM on 5 July, FOAG resolved to adopt the FOAG's charitable incorporated constitution and is now entered on the charity commission register under number 1158147. The CIO came into existence on 1 January 2015 and the first AGM of the CIO will take place on 7 February 2015.

In 2015, we will continue to implement the important changes that were implemented in 2014. It will be our first full year as a CIO; we will continue to further improve our infrastructure, our relationships and connections to the community and our gardening abilities.

**“The project continues to prove its worth as a long-term venture.”**

## New faces

In the beginning of 2014 at our Annual General Meeting, we held an election to choose a board of trustees and to elect a new chairman for the garden committee. Nina Pope, Erwan Guillo Lohan, Andreas Lang, and Jen Currier were duly elected to be the Board of Trustees. Erwan Guillo Lohan was elected Treasurer and Kate Apps elected Secretary. Gordon Joly was elected to be the Chairman of The Friends of Abbey Gardens, also known as the 'Garden Committee'. Subsequently Gordon stepped down for personal reasons. Michael Grant stepped up to take his place in an interim role until a new chair could be elected. At the EGM meeting on July 2nd, 2014, an election was held and Michael was officially elected as the chair of the garden committee.

Running a garden requires significant paperwork and administration. One of the first tasks of the new trustees was to hire an administrator. In collaboration with other garden members, the trustees drew up a job description and ran a competitive search to find the right candidate. The job was advertised in the local press, in the gardening press and through our extensive network of social media. After a shortlisting process, four candidates were invited to interviews at the garden. The interviews were run by trustees and Liz Shearer, from Newham Council. Following the interviews, Vicki Lewis was chosen and awarded a part time temporary contract to perform administrative duties for us. Upon appointment, Vicki's main responsibilities were the creation of the CIO and applying for grant funding.

**“Running a garden requires significant paperwork and administration.”**

## Achieving our aims

As a registered charity, all our activities are undertaken with an objective of being faithful to our aims: to offer a green space that will benefit the inhabitants of Newham and surrounding areas, improving their quality of life. In doing so, we have worked on further developing our infrastructure, networking with other local groups, and staging successful events which celebrate our space and bring together the community.

It is the goal of Abbey Gardens to be a project for the community, by the community. We are a self-organised, collaborative endeavour. Abbey Gardens has brought together local residents - people from different age groups, different abilities, different nationalities (21 at last count!) and from all walks of life frequent the garden.

**“People from different age groups, different abilities, different nationalities (21 at last count!) and from all walks of life frequent the garden.”**

And it's not just about gardening! There is, of course, always a lot to do in the garden. Hamish, the garden club leader, is there three days a week during the growing season. There is a small infrastructure team that looks after the structures and systems within the garden - things like our composting toilet, our watering system, even an off-grid electrical supply to run lights in the cabin. Vicki is there with us, helping out with the administration and funding at every turn as well as a team of graphic artists, twitterers, bloggers and web masters. There is a board of trustees that is constantly looking at the future and taking care of the legalities and finances of the garden. The will to create, grow, and organise amongst garden volunteers is intense. The group energy provided by the people involved is truly astonishing.

## Fundraising

Nearly half the funds we used in in 2014 came from The Tudor Trust. The remaining donated funds came from Newham (Get the Party Started grants), Aspers, Prudential, RIBA, Art Moves, Capital Growth, and ArcelorMittal Orbit. Erwan Guillo Lohan, through running a biathlon brought in several

hundred pounds in donations. The remainder of the funding came in through tea, cake, and honesty stall sales and workshops during the events. We are grateful to our sponsors and hope we can continue and grow our relationship with them.

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## Improving our infrastructure

The infrastructure in the garden continued to improve in 2014. The main projects were the composting toilet and the extension of the water pipe around the garden. This pipe extension made watering the garden significantly easier this season, especially given the long dry spell during the summer.

Other work included rebuilding the compost storage, reinforcing the ramp to the cabin, and removal of the ivy from the brick wall.

In 2015, we hope to continue improving the infrastructure of the garden. There are plans to add a ramp to the composting toilet and to build a larger greenhouse. Funding is presently being sought for these two projects; however the structure for the greenhouse has already been generously donated to the garden by Charlie Seber. This new greenhouse is more than twice the size of the existing one (whose structure was also donated by Charlie).

**“This pipe extension made watering the garden significantly easier this season, especially given the long dry spell during the summer.”**

## Working with other groups / communities

During 2014 we had several groups visit the garden to learn more about the project, what we grow, how we work together and discover how they can build upon what we have learnt.

### TERRA

On Saturday the 21st of June 2014, Abbey Gardens hosted 20 visitors from five different cultural organisations. Guests came from Spain, Italy, France and Germany as part of an adult learning exchange project called TERRA. TERRA focusses on the exchange of informal learning practices in order to support local residents to become actively involved in making improvements to their local areas.

The organisations that came to visit were: Land Kunst Leben (Germany), Abbey De Noirlac (France), Saline Royale d'Arc-et-Senans (France), Citema (Italy),

Fundacion Santa Maria La Real (Spain).

The visit was organised by Andreas Lang and Torange Khonsari from Public Works.

### School 21

Five teachers from School 21 came to the garden on a quest to explore local organisations in order to set up new links with the school and their students. This was followed by a visit by the entire year 9 of School 21.

### Santander Corporate Volunteers

A sunny warm October day saw eight volunteers from Santander come to the Garden and bag three time their body weights in ivy! Along with a number of other important clearing tasks, which were greatly appreciated and we are looking forward to seeing them again in 2015!

**“TERRA focusses on the exchange of informal learning practices in order to support local residents to become actively involved in making improvements to their local areas.”**

## Celebrating our space through successful events

This year, we held 4 seasonal themed events at Abbey Gardens, and the Abbey Gardens inaugural Pétanque tournament. All of the events celebrated our space and attracted local residents for afternoons of fun. The events were attended by 100 to 250 people, increasing the use and awareness of the Garden.

### Ready, Steady, Grow!

Our spring event in April kicked off the Year of the Pumpkin theme for 2014. At the event, people brought picnics and enjoyed some Spring gardening activities: planting pumpkins; attending the workshop Perfect Pumpkins - all about how to sow, grow and look after your seedlings; sharing favourite pumpkin recipes; making a stylish scarecrow; attending the grand opening of the new composting toilet, designed and built by our volunteers and of course enjoying the delights of the ever-popular tea and cake stall.

### Abbey Gardens Inaugural Pétanque Tournament

May hosted the inaugural Abbey Gardens Pétanque tournament and the winners received the custom

made AGP trophy. As the setting sun brushed over the gardens, the 14 starting teams reflected on a successful afternoon in the sun bringing a little bit of French culture to this part of London. According to Wikipedia 'the casual form of the game of Pétanque is played by about 17 million people in France, mostly during their summer holidays...' In the UK the numbers are much smaller but we are pleased to have added a few new casual members to the Pétanque community.

### Summer Party

At this year's Summer Party we had delicious food and a cookery demonstration from Vegan Peasant, music from Theo Bard, a herb tour of the garden and tea tasting with Living Medicine, a word garden workshop, a garden to garden to garden walk with Newham Striders and a tea and cake stall with delicious home-baked goodies. We had visits from local MP Lyn Brown and our Safer Neighbourhoods team and we linked with West Ham Park's outreach team and Core Landscapes in Canning Town to connect up the spaces for people visiting as part of Open Garden Squares Weekend. >

## Celebrating our space through successful events *continued*

### Pumpkinfest

We dubbed 2014 as The Year of the Pumpkin and The Pumpkinfest was our grand finale to celebrate all things pumpkin, the most expressive of the vegetables...

The Pumpkinfest consisted of the following free activities and enjoyment of the garden: pumpkin carving; pumpkin exhibition; children's pumpkin craft workshop; delicious food created by Vegan Peasant; pumpkin face painting; get your photo taken as a Pumpkin Head; enjoy music from Regent Community Brass Band; learn the

history of pumpkin carving; buy fresh produce, as well as homemade pickles, jams and chutneys on our honesty stall; garden tours from our garden club leader, Hamish Liddle; test your knowledge in our Vegetable Quiz and our ever-popular tea and cake stall!

### Winter Fair

The Winter fair celebrated the season with: warming winter drinks; soup made from Abbey Gardens' produce; Christmas carol sing-along led by members of Regent Community Brass Band and lots of fairy lights

**“We dubbed 2014 as The Year of the Pumpkin and The Pumpkinfest was our grand finale to celebrate all things pumpkin, the most expressive of the vegetables...”**

## Off site events

We were invited to participate in several events outside of Abbey Gardens during 2014. This brought new visibility of the garden.

### Mayor's Newham Show

In July, Friends of Abbey Gardens were at the Mayor's Newham Show testing people's knowledge with the seed quiz and of course inviting people to be a Pumpkin Head as part of Abbey Gardens Year of the Pumpkin!

### Art Moves

In September, Friends of Abbey Gardens were invited by the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park to bring the Honesty Stall to Art Moves - a celebration of the extraordinary world of mobile art vehicles. Art Moves was a showcase of mobile architecture and art as

part of London's Open House weekend and the Park's arts and culture programme. This was a great outreach opportunity for FOAG and proved to be a very important vehicle for encouraging wider community engagement.

FOAG's presence was very kindly supported by the Prudential PLC.

### Urban Food Fortnight

To celebrate Urban Food Fortnight, EastTwenty (the café of the ArcelorMittal Orbit tower) and FOAG planned a special fundraising dinner for Abbey Gardens. Working with Abbey Gardens they served visitors a special menu of fresh, seasonal produce - that has been grown and made within London and some at Abbey Gardens! A donation from the ticket price was made to Abbey Gardens.

**"(Art Moves) was a great outreach opportunity for FOAG and proved to be a very important vehicle for encouraging wider community engagement."**

## Horticultural successes

The produce and flower arrangements provided to the ArcelorMittal Orbit was our first attempt at trying to market the produce from the garden out of our normal venue in an aim to become more self-sufficient.

Perhaps the most notable were Dasha's gherkins and tea blends.

The gherkin cucumbers were planted in the spring and harvested and pickled in the fall. Dasha was also responsible for creating a tea collection based on plants in the garden. Both items were offered on the honesty stall and at the events we attended throughout the year and proved to be extremely popular.

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## Challenges

One of our key challenges has been the amount of administrative work that has been required to keep the organisation running and the constant solicitation to share our experience, whether on site or off site. The amount of administration duties has had such a negative effect, that some of the original members have reduced their involvement. In response, we appointed a person to help run the organisation for a number of hours a week of administrative work, and also to look for additional funding to support this role and the rest of the garden's activities.

This year, like previous years, we had some vandalism in the garden. Not everyone who uses the garden is involved. The garden is treated as an open public space and as

such, we do not control access to it. Sadly this year we saw a small group of people visit the garden on multiple occasions to enjoy the garden in their own way. Newham's police force had to be called on several occasions. On the bright side, every single police officer, who came to our assistance, said they were delighted by what we had done to the space. We have now befriended some of the officers and they come to our events, even offering to help in the garden.

The only other continual challenge I will mention is the litter. Being right next to the DLR station, Bakers Row has a significant amount of footfall. We continue to do our part to keep this little corner of the world litter free.

## Looking ahead

**“It will be as important as ever to make sure that the garden is able to increase its financial autonomy by both hosting and / or providing fee-generating services and events.”**

In 2015 we hope to resolve the renewal of the lease with the council for usage of the space. Negotiations continue with the council and we have been assured that there will be a favourable resolution

As this is our first year without the Tudor Trust funding, it will be as important as ever to make sure that the garden is able to increase its financial autonomy by both hosting and / or providing fee-generating services and events as well as by continuing to maintain its expenses under strict control, as we have been doing for the past five years.

We look forward to growing our community involvement even more in 2015.

As chair, I would like to thank all the volunteers who have contributed endless hours in the garden and outside, contributing with their time and expertise, whether in designing our publications, manning stands at our events, updating our blog and social media, baking or cooking for the sessions or events, building and fixing things, or coming up with new creative ways to promote the garden.

I am so grateful to have been chair of this group, and look forward to 2015!

**Michael Grant**  
Chair  
Friends of Abbey Gardens  
Committee

## The year in pictures: gardening

Through the year, our garden club sessions have included sowing, planting and garden maintenance tasks. There has been a new watering workshop to help volunteers to understand the needs of different plants and how to judge soil condition.



## The year in pictures: horticulture

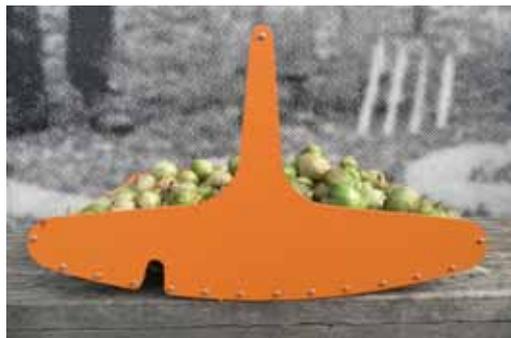
For the first year we've planned a themed crop: pumpkins and squash for our Pumpkinfest.



New varieties of plants grown have included Queen of the Night and species tulips, black and peach tomatoes and tomatillos.



Work on our fruit wall paid off with bumper crops of apricots and peaches and some tasty figs.



Mint and nettle patches have been cultivated for tea-making and cucumbers for gherkins.



One of our most popular decorative plants has been clary sage.

## The year in pictures: events

### Spring fair

The launch of the Year of the Pumpkin, a scarecrow workshop, tea and cake stall, honesty stall.



### Summer Party + Open Garden Squares Weekend

Herb tour and tea tasting, word garden workshop, walk by Newham Striders, food by Vegan Peasant, music from Theo Bard. We also made links with other local Open Garden Squares Weekend venues.



## The year in pictures: events

**Pumpkinfest**  
Vegan cooking, competitions, pumpkin display, pumpkin-themed face painting, tea and cake stall, music from Regent Community Brass Band.



**Winter celebration:**  
Hot drinks and cakes, brass band, carol singing, cards, honesty stall.



## The year in pictures: off site events

The Mayor's  
Newham Show  
Seaside meets  
gardening:  
social media  
engagement via  
'Pumpkin Head'.



Art Moves at the  
Queen Elizabeth  
Olympic Park  
A lively weekend  
engaging with  
artists and art  
audiences.



EastTwenty  
Local Feast,  
ArcellorMittal  
Orbit  
Showing off  
our produce  
and building  
links with other  
organisations.



## The year in pictures: food

### Adding value

This year we've made gherkins from cucumbers and teas from mint, nettle, milk thistle, camomile and burdock. We've also shared soups and used our ingredients for cake stall bakes.



### The Big Lunch

This year's Big Lunch has seen new neighbourhood visitors via local social website Streetlife.



## The year in pictures: the composting toilet

The build continued this year and the toilet was officially opened at the Spring event by our local councillors.



## The year in pictures: Abbey Gardens media coverage

This year we've been on local radio, with an interview at our Pumpkinfest by Pete Day from NuSound Radio. We've increased our Twitter following to 406 and used facebook to connect with regular gardeners and visitors.

