

# Elford Hall Gardens - Newsletter 26 - March 2015

At long last the short dark days of winter seem to be behind us and all around the garden there are signs of fresh growth. This week, bees have been busy and we have seen our first butterflies so things are definitely on the move. The snowdrops this year have been stunning!

We have worked hard over the winter to clear some of the undergrowth in the woods and hedgerows and as a result we have enjoyed better views of the snowdrops! Fine reward for our labours. We also have a good show of crocuses this year and daffodils are just beginning to open so it's a good time for a visit - especially now it's warming up a bit (if you can get out of the wind!).

This is always a good time for our volunteers - with improving weather and the first signs of spring - it certainly gives the old enthusiasm a boost.



## Christmas Cheer



The volunteers took a week off over Christmas but before we 'broke up' we all got together in the cosy Bothy for a celebration lunch and a bit of a sing song. Some old faces were welcomed and it was especially nice to see Vera McDonald back on site. Vera was one of our first volunteers with husband Alan who sadly passed away during the year after a prolonged illness. We hope to see Vera back on the workforce once the weather warms up a bit!

The Bothy was packed to the rafters and toasty warm. A good time was had by all!

## Brrr....

Winter is always a challenge here in the UK. The harsh winds all seemed to be cold and there were periods of heavy rain which made it very difficult to get onto the soil and by February, large areas of the garden were looking a little sad and battered! There hasn't been much snow to speak of (yet) which is a bonus. There have been hoar frosts to make the plants look lovely and have therefore kept the cameras clicking.



Above, a sprinkling of snow brightens up the sensory garden. Left, our wooden hedgehog family have been as active as ever during the winter - no hibernating for them!!!

## The guy who came in from the cold

Of course, winter weather makes you look towards indoor work and the results of this can be seen around the garden. Roger shaped some donated Perspex into giant flowers to brighten up the sensory garden and Perspex panels will allow people to get a view of the garden through a colour filter - all part of the 'sensory experience'. Just another part of the 'sensory experience'. Meanwhile Pete Kennedy has repainted

the Giant's Garden sign to great effect (see below). Dave and Richard have been missing the worst of the weather by working in the Gardener's House fitting the new fires. There's always something to do!



## Belfast re-visited

Another winter job was to re-cycle an old broken Belfast sink and to create a stone effect trough for alpine plants.



## Boys from the Boathouse

Lawrence Watton's work on the boathouse came to a full stop over winter when the river rose and flooded the area where he'd been working. However, it gave us the opportunity

to call in the tree surgeons to remove the trees that had self-seeded in the entrance to the boathouse. This was a major job, which left us with the problem of removing the rather heavy remains of the tree stumps. Gavin to the rescue! Using Tim Gilbert's digger, Gavin excavated around the stumps but they were still not prepared to budge and proved too heavy for the machine to lift. Alan Fitzsimmonds was called in with his chain saw to try to reduce the stump to smaller chunks. Gavin, back with the digger, this time was able to get the job done. Right, Dave and Lawrence inspect the results of considerable effort and find it, well, rather muddy! Job well done, though. Now, on with the restoration project. The plan is to restore the boathouse as close as possible to the original design but to use it as a wildlife observation room rather than launch boats from it.

Whilst on site, the tree surgeons went over the garden with a fine tooth comb, removing any dead wood and checking all trees for safety.

## Voluntary Service to the Community of Elford

Our volunteer force is always in flux. People join us for a while, make their impact and then move on to pastures new. This past year, we have been blessed by the appearance of at least 6 volunteers who have become 'regulars' and are having a real impact on the work we are doing. The majority of the newcomers are not villagers, so their selfless volunteering is even more remarkable since the gardens will not benefit them directly, as it does Elford residents. Take the team below. Mick, Jonathan, Nathan and Owen (not pictured) have transformed the orangery on the south wall. The Orangery was almost the first bit of the garden we tackled, way back in time. We blitzed the area and cleaned it right out and tidied everything up before moving on to the next job (which





happened to be clearing the ivy and brambles off the wall so that it could be properly restored). Oh, I remember it so well! The 'abandoned' Orangery soon became overgrown again and was left for 5 years before this team took on the task of sorting it out. The beds have been dug, manured and planted up with a variety of shrubs and the surrounding paths have been cleared and tidied so that the Orangery is once again 'presentable'.

In the centre of the raised bed we found a large brick-lined reservoir tank. It was around 4 feet deep, half filled with water and leaves and heavens knows what else. It had to be cleared out and made safe. At this point, Peter Kennedy stepped from the barn - his usual habitat - donned some wellies and stepped into the abyss! We all thought he would disappear from sight, but no! In less than a day, the reservoir was cleaned out - with help from Owen - and made safe. We rather fancy filling it with water, adding some plants and then introducing some fish. Any donations appreciated - if you are cleaning out your pond at home!

The bed will take a little time to mature but we hope that the shrubs will at least deter weeds and we have chosen for winter colour.

Top left - 3 men in a bed. Left - first plants go in. Below - Peter up to his knees in you know what!



## Star Quality

Peter really is a star - he achieves more with his one good hand than I do with two! Anyway, to celebrate his star status, Owen - with a little help - erected Pete's trophy on the back wall of the Orangery for all to admire. Of course, Peter had to build the star himself!



## Coming to a garden near you SOON

Here are some dates for your diary

- 24<sup>th</sup> March - we plan to put up the big marquee so if you are available to help out it would be much appreciated.
- 18<sup>th</sup> April - our thank you party for everyone who has helped us in 2014
- 24<sup>th</sup> April - boules evenings start up again - bring a bottle!
- 4<sup>th</sup> July - Our Real Ale & music Festival

## And Finally....

The allotments are looking great already this year with lots of good work being done; the fine weather is beginning to bring out the visitors - we had picnic parties last week! Oh, and don't forget that Friends of the Walled Garden subs are due on 1<sup>st</sup> April.

With that, can I wish you happy gardening and enjoy the spring.

**Best wishes, Roger**