



Did your New Year go with a bang? Maybe it didn't have quite the sparkle of last year's Bonfire celebrations, & January is usually a dismal month -- marked this time by some truly Arctic weather. But the good news is that an unprecedented number of dates have already been announced in this year's all-important social calendar:

First up will be the **London Open Gardens Weekend** on **8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> June**, in 2024 celebrating its Silver Jubilee. Formosa will again be participating as one of the city's most delightful "secret" gardens.

Next up will be **Shakespeare in the Squares** on Wednesday **12<sup>th</sup> June**, this year once again being held in our Garden after last year's event in Crescent turned into a bit of a disaster – the only production ever in the company's eight-year history ever to be rained off! This year's play will be *All's Well that Ends Well* – perhaps not the

most obviously bucolic of Shakespeare's comedies but many of us will remember what an excellent job they made of a similarly rather left-field choice, *The Tempest*, two years ago.

Following that will be the **Family Fun Day** on Saturday **29<sup>th</sup> June**. Last year that too fell victim to some dreadful weather, but it's hoped that this time around the children's rides will be back, along with the ever-popular bouncy castles. There'll be live music & a DJ to round off the day.

Back for its fourth outing will be the ever-popular **wine-tasting** on Saturday **20<sup>th</sup> July**, with wine kindly provided as always by the Winery on Clifton Parade. The Just Two duo of Cassandra & Rodrigo, who were a great hit last time, will also be returning.

Another success of 2023 which is due to be repeated will be the **Open-Air Film Night**, on Sunday **8<sup>th</sup> September**. Around 80 people turned out last year to enjoy the debut outing *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, chosen by a residents' poll.

And last but not least will be **Bonfire Night** on Saturday **2<sup>nd</sup> November**. Last year's was widely held to be the biggest & best yet (see pic above) courtesy of our new supplier, the multi-award-winning company Firework Crazy, who did the after-party fireworks for 2022's Brit Awards along with many other high-profile events.

After some spells of heavy rain earlier in the day the weather finally decided to play ball, enabling the bonfire to be lit as usual. The display then went ahead without a hitch, with the pyrotechnics firing off at various different levels, culminating in a stunning finale. The scores of residents who'd crowded onto the edge of the Garden also had the chance to admire the new improved illuminations on the big plane tree, lit up for the

first time to signal the beginning of the countdown to Christmas.



The plan is that the lights will stay switched on now until the end of January. As one Board member commented: "We need something joyful to get us through Winter and these troubling times!"

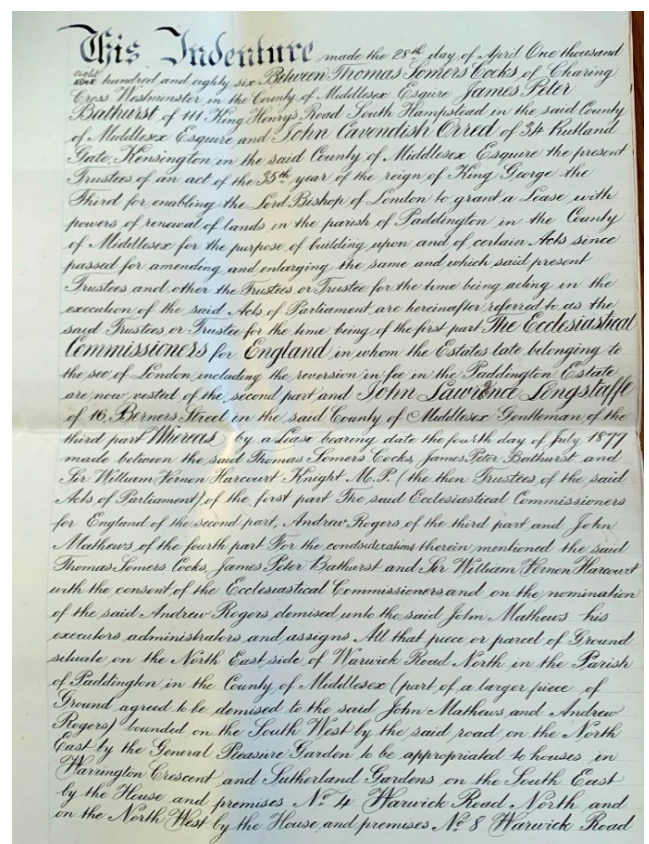
## FORMOSA HISTORY UNCOVERED

It's long been known that the Formosa Garden has existed since the 1860s, but now for the first time the original deeds have come to light after Board member Peter Cross bid for them in an auction on eBay, & they make for fascinating reading. They date back to 28<sup>th</sup> April 1886, when two of the roads bordering the garden were differently named – Castellain Road was called Warwick Road North & Sutherland Avenue was called Sutherland Gardens -- & the Garden itself was simply known as a "general ornamental pleasure garden", owned by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners for England.

The hand-written document, which is 10 pages long, talks of the need to set up a Committee "for the purpose of maintaining & keeping in good order the walks, passages & ways", "supplying from time-to-time fresh turf, gravel, shrubs, plant & flowers", "keeping in proper repair the railings"

& "employing from time to time servants & workmen" – much like the requirements of the present day, only minus the servants!

The deeds also detail how the Church Commissioners, successors to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, released the Garden back into the community under the terms of a rent charge deed, which is how the individual patio gardens came into being.



The Board is now debating where to store the Deeds & ways in which they may be viewed by any interested members of the public.

## WAR VETERAN HERO REMEMBERED

There is now a permanent memorial to local war hero Flight Sergeant Peter Brown, whose death in December 2022 sparked headlines around the world. Peter, one of the last black "Pilots of the Caribbean", came over from Jamaica aged 17 in 1943 & went on to fly five operations in Lancaster bombers. After he died alone at the age of 96 at his home in Warrington Crescent with no known

family, he seemed destined for a low-key funeral, but that was before an appeal by Westminster Council to trace his relatives went viral & culminated in a hero's send-off at the RAF Church of St Clement Danes last May, attended by hundreds of people. Since then his friend & neighbour Paul Newman has organised a plaque on the bench at the top of Warrington Crescent where Peter often used to rest on his way to & from the shops



### WHEN A GARDEN IS A LIFE-SAVER

You may remember I wrote about local resident Harriet Crawley's latest novel, *The Translator*, in the Autumn Newsletter, with the promise that I would interview her for this edition. I wanted in particular to get her impressions of the Garden on which she has lived for the past 37 years -- although her varied career meant that she was very often abroad, basing herself in five different countries before returning to the UK for good in 2016.

She describes Little Venice as the nicest place in London, but as for the view from her flat in Castellain Road: "When I first moved in there was

only the big tree in the Garden – no flower beds. It was like living in a field!"

Since then as we know the Garden has been completely transformed, becoming for Harriet a place of both inspiration & solace. The inspiration came during lockdown when she worked on *The Translator* while enjoying the Garden view from her favourite spot at the kitchen table.

In fact, she put in a solid 36-hour stint to get the novel finished, to the bemusement of her son Spencer (who was living with her at the time), when he got up one morning to find her sitting in exactly the same position that he'd left her the night before.



As for the Garden as a source of solace, it's impossible for most of us to comprehend the amount of tragedy that Harriet has suffered in her life. Both her mother, the war correspondent & historian Virginia Cowles, & her two brothers Randall & Andrew died in accidents before she was 40. But the worst moment of all came while she was away on holiday in Sri Lanka with her second husband Julian Ayer when the Tsunami struck in 2004. Julian drowned after the bus in which they were both travelling was flooded & she did not know for several hours whether Spencer, who was in Sri Lanka on a cricket tour

with Harrow School, had survived. The Garden definitely played a part in her recovery, she says, & she recalls one particular moment that felt like a turning point:

“I woke up one morning & the sun was pouring in through the kitchen window & I thought: There is a way through this. Julian saved my life by pushing me through the window of the bus & I felt I had an obligation to him to survive & to live my life”.

- *The Translator is published by Bitter Lemon press at £16.99. The paperback & audio versions will be out on March 21<sup>st</sup>.*

### **A CHANCE TO PICK YOUR OWN HERBS!**

by Steff Roeg

Amongst the exciting plans for 2024 is a new raised communal herb garden which will be created near the Med bed on the opposite side from Sutherland Avenue where the natural light & irrigation is at its best.

The idea is that a selection of kitchen herbs will be planted including rosemary, oregano, basil, thyme, chives & tarragon & residents will be able to help themselves once the plants have become established.

Jan & the team will start work on the structure soon & will use treated sleepers to create a 2.5 metre raised bed. Children will then be invited to help with the initial planting via our Spring Newsletter, by which time the weather should have warmed up a bit!

### **WALKIES JUST GOT BETTER FOR FORMOSA DOGS**

We already know that Formosa is the most sought-after Garden for pet-owners in the whole of Little Venice because it's the only one that allows dogs to be exercised off the leash between the hours of daybreak & 10 a.m.

Now in response to several requests the Board have agreed to extend those hours to 10.30 a.m. for a trial period, subject to the usual requirements for dog-owners to pick up after

their pets & ensure their behaviour doesn't cause nuisance or upset to other users of the Garden.



One dog who's been happy to take advantage of this new-found-freedom is Oz the collie, a familiar figure in the Garden along with his owner, Board Chair Sandy David. The trial period runs until the end of February.

### **IN OTHER GARDEN NEWS....**

The bi-annual tree pollarding will take place in late February or early March (exact date tbc) when three of the plane trees will be removed in line with the Garden Master Plan approved in 2015.

The abundance of plants & shrubs on private patios bring life, colour & pleasure to the Garden but please ensure that they & the patios are kept tidy & in good order & that greenery doesn't overhang the Garden paths in a way that creates an obstruction.

### **IT'S A LITTLE KNOWN FACT....**

.... that as well as producing the Formosa Newsletter four times a year I also blog regularly on the Formosa website at

<https://www.formosagarden.co.uk/garden-news-blog>. This means that you don't have to wait three months to get the news on social events & other developments in & around the Garden as I try to report them as they happen. To register for these up-dates click on "log-in" at the top right-hand corner of the website & set up alerts.

This is one of several features introduced by fellow Sutherland Avenue resident Susan Wright who has done so much to streamline the website & improve our communications & digital strategies of recent years, for which the Board and Communications team are extremely grateful.

*Now that Susan has moved on to other projects we are keen to hear from anyone else on the Garden who might be able to help produce the digital content or manage the website. Apart from anything else if we can find a volunteer it will assist us in keeping the costs down to the benefit of all! If you are interested, please contact me at the email address at the end of this Newsletter.*

#### **AIRBNB: STRICT RULES APPLY!**

AirBnb has really taken off as a world-wide phenomenon over the last decade or so, but success has brought with it concerns that it is fast becoming something of a free-for-all. Of late there have been stories in the media -- including our excellent local publication *Garden Square News* -- about Airbnb lets where tenants have been promised access to a communal garden. Most leases strictly forbid this, mainly because of security concerns & the danger that any damage will not be covered by insurance, & Formosa is no exception. However if you want to monitor the spread of this practice in the Westminster & Kensington & Chelsea areas you can go to a new website, <https://GardenSqua.re>, which contains links to individual listings where the presence of a communal garden is mentioned.

#### **SCENE ON THE STREET (AN OCCASIONAL SERIES)**

What on earth happened here? This burnt -out motorbike was spotted near the roundabout at

the top of Sutherland Ave on 5<sup>th</sup> January but had disappeared by the following day. It bore a learner number plate – a devastating discovery for some novice biker somewhere.



#### **NEWS IN BRIEF:**

- Which of us hasn't needed a reliable plumber in a hurry? Well there's one living right on the Garden whose name is George – he's competitively priced & can install, service & repair all makes of domestic gas-fired central heating boilers. Mention Formosa Garden when booking: 07769 555030; [heatinggw@gmail.com](mailto:heatinggw@gmail.com).
- Given that good tradesmen sometimes seem rarer than hens' teeth are there any others that readers would like to recommend – painters, engineers or odd jobs men for example? If so, please send us the names via our Westbourne email address [info@wb19.co.uk](mailto:info@wb19.co.uk) & we will see if we can build up a mini-database.
- You may remember that a couple of years ago I fulminated about the fact that the first collection time of 9 am from most local post

boxes was also the *last* collection time, but at the same time I'd noticed that the box alongside Tesco's at the junction with Maida Vale & the one further down Sutherland near the junction with Shirland Road fortunately offered a later collection time of 4 pm. However, the Post Office have now spiked my guns by introducing a uniform last post of 9 am from the beginning of this year, allegedly in the name of "efficiency" although I can think of some other words for it....

- Members of Formosa's two book clubs got together just before Christmas to share details of the titles they'd most enjoyed in 2023 over a festive drink & some delicious nibbles, courtesy of hostess Susan Wright. Everyone welcomed a chance to talk to the "other" group and to catch up with recently retired member Helen Burrluck who has moved away to Oxford. The two groups continue to operate very successfully, meeting approximately every six weeks on a Tuesday in the early evening.



#### Dates for the Diary 2024

- London Open Gardens Weekend - 8th & 9th June
- Shakespeare in the Squares - Wednesday 12th June
- Family Fun Day - Saturday 29th June
- Wine-tasting - Saturday 20th July
- Open-Air Film Night - Sunday 8th September
- Bonfire Night - Saturday 2nd November

- It is always a treat to see the brilliant green parakeets that frequently grace our garden along with more pedestrian birds such as finches & jays. But it seems they aren't the only more distinctive specimens to put in an appearance. This sparrowhawk was spotted in the garden of Castellain resident Cheryl Prax back in October &, she said, stayed quite a while!



*Don't forget we are always keen to hear from local residents, whether in the form of articles or letters or comments of any kind. The next Newsletter will appear at the beginning of April so please send any material to me at [vivvy.robins@gmail.com](mailto:vivvy.robins@gmail.com) by March 18<sup>th</sup>.*