



The poet Keats was famously keen on Autumn: he once described it as the “season of mists & mellow fruitfulness”, & that was without the benefit of having seen Formosa Garden through the gauzy light of a late September morning. But memories of an equally glorious Summer can still be found in our special supplement capturing the best moments from the **Summer Party** in June & the **Wine-tasting** at the end of August, courtesy of our ace resident photographer Cheryl Prax. The season’s other two mainstays were the **Open Gardens weekend** at the beginning of June, where the attendance of over 130 was twice the number of previous years, & **Shakespeare in the Squares** in early July, whose production of *The Taming of the Shrew* was this year held in neighbouring Crescent Garden.

Among the high points of the Summer Party was a deserved win for 10-year-old Olla Brazg in the Bake-Off competition with her colourful cup-cakes. And the

wine-tasting also brought success for one Sutherland Avenue resident:

JULIEN HITS BROADBAND JACKPOT

by Susan Wright



We’re delighted to announce that Julien Nasser has won the raffle for Formosa residents organised by Hyperoptic as part of their generous sponsorship of this Summer’s wine-tasting. His prize: one year of free 1GB fibre broadband.

Prior to his win Julien was an EE customer but with his contract ending he was persuaded to make the switch, drawn by the impressive speeds that fibre optic offers.

Hyperoptic’s fibre optic broadband requires a dedicated network to be installed in each household

and they have made excellent progress in rolling out their service across the Formosa neighbourhood.

To further promote their service, they are still offering an exclusive discount for Formosa residents. For full details of this special offer, visit their dedicated page on the Formosa website:

👉 www.formosagarden.co.uk/hyeroptic-offer.



That then was the Summer – but there's still one more big social event before we kiss Goodbye to 2025 & that's the traditional Bonfire Night celebration, this year being held on November 8th. You will find more details on page 5.



HULLO & GOODBYE...

The Formosa Garden Committee is delighted to welcome back Arabella van Niekerk, who re-joins its ranks after an earlier stint as Director from 2009 to 2013. Arabella has lived in Little Venice for over 45 years, the past 28 of them on Formosa Garden where her two daughters grew up.



She says of her new role: "I believe these gardens are such a wonderful privilege & resource, but a good deal of time and effort is required to keep everything running smoothly. As a beneficiary I felt it was the right time to get involved again. In

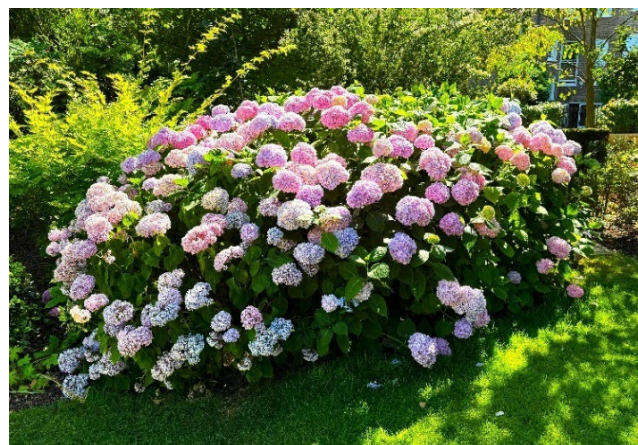
particular, I hope to contribute to the review of the Garden Master Plan and overall planning issues."

Less happily, we are saying goodbye to Irina Miklavchich, who has done sterling work in the Garden in the course of her two stints on the Committee.

Peter Cross writes on behalf of the Board: Irina's retirement from the Board comes as a heavy blow to us all. She has served it throughout with care, professionalism and a determination to act in the interest of the whole community. Her greatest achievement however must be the fabulous summer

garden parties and family fun days she organised so meticulously, bringing in sponsorship to ensure the burden on residents was lessened. She will leave a gaping hole which will urgently need filling if some of these much-loved Garden events are to continue.

HOW COME THE GARDEN STILL LOOKS SO GOOD?



After four months of no significant rain, Gravitas head Jan Melkenbeek freely admits "it's been a tough Summer to keep everything going". But somehow he & his ever-energetic team have managed it, with the aid of the irrigation system in the flower beds & also manual watering of the trees. The tree rings at the base of each one have been increased so they get more water & oxygen.

There have been benefits from the hot sunny weather as well – the tree fern has been doing exceptionally well, with fronds two metres long which Jan says is quite unusual. And there's a magnificent display of red cana & pink & white begonias towards the Warrington/Castellain Road corner of the garden, an area which has previously lacked colour as being some distance away from the main beds.



After heavy pruning the olive tree in the Med bed has come back to life & could be bearing fruit in a couple of years. And the hostas currently rather tucked away by the Formosa St gate are soon to be transplanted there away from the depredations of the slugs.

Last but not least, we finally have two smart new benches made of teak, one in the Med Bed & the other in front of the bed on the Warrington Crescent side.



CUSTOMER CHAMPION SPREADS THE WORD

Most of you already know Peter Cross as a member & past Chairman of the Board & an energetic & enthusiastic cheer-leader for the Garden. Many will also be aware of his distinguished career in retail, including eight years in charge of customer experience at John Lewis & ten more as the business partner of Mary "Queen of Shops" Portas. Among his current roles he is Vice-President of the Institute of Customer Service. But now Peter has added a new string to his bow as a published author, with his book *Start with the Customer*, co-written with the Institute's Chief Executive Jo Causon, hitting the shops last month. I asked our own best-selling author Harriet Crawley to review it.

START WITH THE CUSTOMER

Review by Harriet Crawley

I only wish this book had been written 30 years ago when I ran my own business. Although back then there was no internet & no on-line shopping,

nevertheless the fundamental wisdom in this book would have helped me a great deal.



These days the tables are turned. I no longer worry about 'the customer' because I AM the customer, & yet this book still has so much to offer because it gives valuable insights into what I as the consumer could -- and indeed should -- expect.

Peter wants CEOs to step back & re-think how they view the customer & how they can serve us better. At the heart of each chapter is an in-depth interview with business giants such as Jon Paull, Global Director of Operations for Octopus Energy & Steve Heapy, CEO of Jet2 Holidays.

I was stopped dead in my tracks by the observation from Mary Portas in the book's introduction that today in our digital age "Customer service is actually going backwards."

Amen to that! How long have we all been at the end of a telephone, being passed from one robotic voice to another, listening to one menu with 6 options followed by another menu with 5, only, at the end of half an hour, to be cut off?

Read this book & pass it on, & let's hope Peter's solutions gain traction & we can all look forward to a better customer service experience!

Ed's Note: *Harriet is currently working on a sequel to her acclaimed first novel **The Translator**. And a shout-out too to fellow Formosa Resident Sir Tony Robinson, whose own first novel **The House of Wolf** was also published last month.*

SCENE ON THE STREET: NO 3



My eye was caught the other day by the faded name in the brickwork above the door of this house in Castellain Road: The Trossachs. In Victorian & Edwardian times it was common to have the house name displayed in this way, but this is the only remaining example I've come across in any of the streets that border the Garden. The occupants of the house have no idea of the name's significance – maybe it was just that the builder hailed from the Scottish Highlands!

DOG-WALKING HOURS TO BE EXTENDED

A message from the Board

Having the opportunity to allow dogs off-lead unlike other gardens has always been part of our unique culture and despite notable progress over the first half of the year thanks to the majority of owners a couple of outliers persist in leaving dog mess, ignoring the dog hours or allowing dogs to bark persistently.

The dog-owning community has requested that dog hours are yet again extended by 30 minutes to 10.30 am while the mornings are darker.

This will go ahead from November 1st to the end of February, but on the strict condition that no dogs that are prone to bark are walked before 9am, the dog mess situation is urgently resolved and these new hours properly observed.

DOGS ARE NOT THE ONLY PETS!

We recognise that there are plenty of devoted cat-owners out there too who like to give their animals the run of the Garden. Sadly, one of the best-loved regulars, Poppy the Siamese, died at the end of August. Her owner Mark Barclay says the year she spent on the Garden turned out to be the best of her life.



REMEMBERING POPPY

by Mark Barclay

Before living on Sutherland Avenue, Poppy had previously experienced only a small courtyard garden in which she wasn't very interested. When she arrived here having never seen grass before, let alone such beautiful open spaces, trees & plants, her existence was transformed. She immediately started roaming all over the Garden, exploring & charging about. Quite often she would do a 100 metre dash back home from the central plane tree looking as if she'd been shot out of a cannon, such was the sheer joy she evidently felt.

Having previously been a shy cat she made friends with so many people in the garden, especially some of the younger children who always treated her with gentleness. If Sue or I were walking in the Garden on our own quite often a child would ask: "Where's Poppy?"

It gives us great comfort to know that she loved her life in the Garden so much. She was a tiny cat, but she occupies a huge space in our hearts. We miss her dearly.

IT'S A WINNING FORMULA...



....so why would we think to change it?? For the third year running the multi-award-winning Firework Crazy will be in charge of our firework display on November 8th, the nearest Saturday to Bonfire Night. When the Board made the switch of supplier in 2023 the company's first outing was held by residents to be the best ever in the event's 25-year history, & yet miraculously last year's was seen somehow to improve on it! We're confident Director Mark Priest can pull off the same trick this year.

The display will start as usual at 7 pm (allowing residents to also catch the fireworks in neighbouring Crescent Garden at 7.30 pm as many like to do) but the bonfire will be lit a little earlier this year, at 5.30 pm, so it will be blazing nicely for any early arrivals. The entry point will again be the Castellain Road gate which will close 10 minutes before the show begins – late-comers will emphatically *not* be admitted! The spectator area will comprise the full Garden perimeter, plus the triangular corners at the Formosa Street & Sutherland Ave/Warrington Crescent ends.

A Health & Safety person will be located near the gardeners' gate in the corner of Castellain & Warrington & will be available from 5.30 pm to 8.30 pm, subject to rain. If it does rain a different location will be confirmed closer to the date.

The usual caveats apply about keeping windows closed & nervous pets indoors. Please also ensure that children are supervised at all times & that no personal fireworks or sparklers are brought into the Garden.

The event is kindly being sponsored by Winkworth's, one of London's oldest estate agents which first opened its doors in 1835. It now has 90 branches nationwide, including four in North-West London of which the one in Sutherland Avenue (taken over from Vickers) is the latest addition. All four are overseen by Managing Director Neil Sloam, who says: "Estate agents tend to have a reputation for taking rather than giving & we wanted to redress the balance. We actually do care about the communities we serve."

TUBE CLEAN-UP: STILL A WORK IN PROGRESS!



Transport for London have been working hard to remove the graffiti that have been heavily defacing Bakerloo line trains since at least the beginning of this year, & inside the carriages the situation has undoubtedly improved. However, this colourful effort was spotted in the first week of October, pretty much obscuring passengers' view of the station names from the inside. Roll on the introduction of new trains that have been promised before the end of the decade! Those running on the Bakerloo are the oldest on the Underground apparently, having been introduced 53 years ago.

COMPETITION TO THE SUMMER PARTY.....

...this year came from an unexpected & unintended quarter. For several days before the scheduled date mysterious flyers had been dropping through letterboxes in Castellain Road advertising something called Heyday & inviting all the residents, from Formosa Street to Elgin Avenue, to turn out on June 28th & say hullo to their neighbours.



Heyday was the brainchild of a lady called Poppy, originally born in Castellain Road & recently returned there. She was mortified to learn that she'd inadvertently chosen the same day as our Summer Party, which meant that Castellain road residents on the Formosa side of the street probably opted for that in preference to Heyday. Even so she reported afterwards that the event had been a great success, with around 60 people attending.

CHERYL BAGS A ROYAL FIRST!

In our last edition we reported on Cheryl Prax's ground-breaking visit to Buckingham Palace with her RAF veteran friend John Whitlock for the VE Day celebrations – ground-breaking because she was able to take some close-up photos which the public aren't normally permitted to do within the Royal estate. Now after the King's Personal Secretary wrote to say how touched the King had been to meet them both Cheryl sent back a selection of pictures, including a set for the young Prince George. As she explained: "I thought it would be nice for him to have photos of his first official major public engagement!"



NEWS IN BRIEF

- The consultation on a dedicated cycle lane for Castellain Road – hotly opposed by residents – is now closed & the findings will eventually go to the relevant Cabinet member on Westminster Council for a decision.
- This year's AGM was held on June 26th & attended by members of the Board, representatives of our new Agents AMSBM & 12 residents. The Minutes can be found on the Formosa Amenity website.
- I know it's been said elsewhere in this Newsletter, but it bears repeating: with the departure of Irina Miklavchich who organised many Garden events over the years there is an urgent need for volunteers to continue the good work. If new people don't come to the wicket, then some of the highlights of Formosa's social calendar such as the Summer party will simply disappear. If you are interested in a volunteering role, big or small, please [contact our managing agents AMSBM](#).

The Newsletter team are taking a break over the New Year so the next edition will be the Spring edition in mid-April. Way ahead I know, but any articles, letters or other contributions should be sent to me at vivvy.robins@gmail.com by March 28th 2026!! But meanwhile I will be blogging any news stories as usual on the Formosa Amenity website, www.formosagarden.co.uk.