



Colourful Kilmacolm

Chairman's Report to the 11th AGM

Cargill Centre, Kilmacolm

Monday 15 May 2023

My daily walk to the village for the morning paper – admittedly not far in my case – takes me past many of our planters and allows me to keep an eye on them. Are any of the half-standard hollies leaning precariously and needing to be propped up again? Has anyone discarded a coffee cup or an empty bottle among the plants? Have birds been pecking at the bulbs and left them on the surface? Are any planters waterlogged and going to need to be emptied? This spring my observations have brought it home to me that Colourful Kilmacolm has a history, for planters that should have only small Tête à Tête daffodils have the occasional tall King Alfred, or a few rogue tulips, or even a crocus or two, all throwbacks to previous years' planting schemes, but also proof that our volunteer gardeners religiously carry out my instruction to plant bulbs deep. I hope I'm not a control freak!

So yes, we have a history, a 10 year history, for it was in May 2013 that we had our inaugural meeting, and many of you have been with us ever since. I thought it would be nice on this occasion to reminisce a little on what we, with your help, have achieved.

The initial idea came from Kilmacolm Community Council and at the outset we were very grateful to receive guidance from CVS Inverclyde, funding from the Inverclyde Community Fund, Inverclyde Council Small Grants and Awards for All (Lottery), as well as much appreciated encouragement from Councillor David Wilson, who has unfailingly supported us ever since.

Within the first few months we had about 70 members, half of whom were willing to be 'hands-on'. As early as June we had agreed to look after the planters at Birkmyre Park, our first project. (3 PHOTOS) There followed in November the large planters on the piazza. (2 PHOTOS) We also registered with 'It's Your Neighbourhood', a scheme run by the Royal Horticultural Society, which as the name suggests, is aimed at encouraging local groups to enhance their surroundings. We stayed with It's Your Neighbourhood for quite a few years, moving up the commendation scale, (3 PHOTOS) but eventually we felt confident enough to do our own thing without their input.

2014 was our first chance to plan a summer display. We were determined to make an impression and we packed in a wide range of colourful annuals which thrived in the good summer weather, even encouraging a young couple to have their wedding reception in the Cargill Centre in order to have photographs taken beside our flowers. (4 PHOTOS) If only we could be sure of a warm, sunny summer I would repeat that plant choice. 2014 was also the year we planted euonymous and daffodils round the Time Capsule, (1 PHOTO) started some planting at Market Place (we had to use a pick to make planting holes!) and put in crocuses and snowdrops at both laybys.

2015 was a busy year. We added the planter at Market Place, (2 PHOTOS) two half-barrels at the Time Capsule, (4 PHOTOS) and with the help of many of our volunteer gardeners, cleared the slope at the Pullman (Carriages) of large stones, concrete and weeds, discovering as we went that the soil actually seemed very good. Plants donated by members were put in and the area began to resemble a garden rather than a dumping ground. (8 PHOTOS) I can't leave this area without showing you a selection of photos taken by David Walker in 2017. (6 PHOTOS)

New developments in 2016 were 3 half-barrels at Moss Road (2 PHOTOS) and trying to establish a small bed for plants on the Port Glasgow Road layby. Some of you will remember that we bought a selection of small shrubs and herbaceous plants for the area, but lost a third of them to plant thieves within a few days. (1 PHOTO) Since then we have tried various ideas, (2 PHOTOS) but it is still a work in progress.

In 2017 and 2018, in conjunction with Inverclyde Council, improvements were made at Market Place, realigning some of the edging, adding topsoil and then plants, and the area began to look as if someone cared. (4 PHOTOS) I should let you know, however, to expect considerable upheaval at Market Place in the foreseeable future, as Scottish Gas Network will be siting a replacement gas governor there. We have been in discussion with SGN and have persuaded them to site it underground and they will then reinstate the area.

We were just settling in to a pattern when Covid came along, threatening to put a stop to our activities. However on-line plant purchases, socially distanced planting (the people, not the plants) and committee meetings by zoom allowed us to keep the show on the road. In the last two years or so we have added the two planters at the top of Smithy Brae, (2 PHOTOS) and we took up Angus Black's suggestion of barrier basket planters at the end of Whitelea Crescent. We supply the plants and Angus plants and looks after them. They have been much admired. (1 PHOTO)

In addition to all of this, over the 10 years we have had involvement with many local bodies. Kilmacolm Primary, St Columba Junior School, Duchal Nursery, local Guides, the Tennis Club and the Bowling Club have all been happy to receive bulbs at the end of the season. Committee members have helped pupils of St Columba School's holiday club do some gardening, and we have welcomed help from the local Explorer Scouts. We have had stands at the Farmers' Market, the Agricultural Show and St Columba School Fete, contributed an exhibit to St Columba Church Flower Festival, made scarecrows and bottle top displays for the locally organised trails, advised a similar group starting up in Inverkip, planted a Jubilee tree on behalf of Gryffe Rotary (1 PHOTO), given a talk to the Rotary and to Kilmacolm Horticultural Society, and finally several residents and businesses have allowed us to access their premises for water. Since April we have arranged for Inverclyde Council staff to uplift our bags of garden waste. Until then we – or rather Robert, for he very willingly did it most times – took it by car to Pottery Street. (PHOTO) We really should have thought about that years ago! Mentioning Robert allows me to thank him also for his exceptional practical skills. Just last week he made a superb job of trimming some of the conifers on the slope which were getting too tall. And no matter the job, Robert has exactly the right tools. As we come to the end of the slide show I'd like to thank Jill Russell for so willingly agreeing to lend us the Horticultural Society's superb projector. To finish the slide show, here are a few recording our involvement in the community. (13 PHOTOS)

Over these 10 years funding has come from many sources. Your annual member's subscription is a much appreciated regular base and generous donations continue to be made from time to time by local admirers. Inverclyde Council usually, though not always, give us what we ask for, and further grants and donations have come from Awards for All, Kilmacolm Community Council, Gryffe Rotary, Keep Scotland Beautiful, the Cargill Trust and the local Co-op.

Throughout the 10 years I have been supported by excellent committee members. All have contributed much, each in their own way, and Colourful Kilmacolm could not function without their support. I am, as I know you are too, extremely grateful to them all. In particular I want to give a mention to the office bearers. Diane MacDuff as our first secretary devoted much time and energy to help get us established over the first 4 years, and Liz has been an excellent support to me for the last 6 years. Alistair has been treasurer from the start and deserves our gratitude for his careful and meticulous attention to our finances, not to mention his stamina. I would also like to thank our account examiners. Edwin Fisher did this for us from the outset until quite recently, when Colin McKean took over. Their care, attention and advice are much appreciated. And finally, on a personal note, I would like to thank Sheena, my wife, whose support, encouragement and, yes, advice, have helped me greatly.

I am really pleased that so many of you have been able to be here this evening to celebrate 10 years of Colourful Kilmacolm. Colourful Kilmacolm would not succeed without the support and encouragement of the community, so on behalf of us all I thank you most sincerely. In a few minutes you will be able to drink to the next 10 years.