



LONDON HERITAGE QUARTER

King's Scholars' Passage Gardening Group

In this article on greening groups that are making a real difference in London Heritage Quarter, we chat with Bridget and Sarah who were instrumental in setting up a gardening group in King's Scholars' Passage.

How did the group start?

Early in 2020, a few residents got together to discuss how best to provide some desperately needed greening to our area and to make it less desirable for anti-social behaviour, for which King's Scholars Passage was notorious.

Residents of Carlisle Place and The Passage started working together on the project. Socially distanced and rugged up in winter clothes we planted up a small collection of secondhand terracotta pots and plants, everyone enjoyed the social interaction and making a positive impact to their community. With the wholehearted support from management team at The Passage momentum has been maintained and the KSP Project is now in its fourth year.

What tasks do the group undertake?

We meet twice a week throughout the year and volunteers drop into sessions whenever they can. Tasks range according to the season, but we tend to find there are always jobs to do, removing litter is a perennial job, as is watering. The benefit of our location is being shielded from the worst of the winter weather by tall buildings, but it does mean the plants don't always get the rain they need, although we have now installed 5 large water butts so our reliance on mains water is minimal.

Why do you do it?

All of us who volunteer love gardening and get a real sense of accomplishment from watching plants we have nurtured grow. Over the years we have got to meet so many people, other residents, local businesses and clients and staff from The Passage, and it's always a delight when passersby pay us compliments.

We have benefitted enormously from our relationship with The Passage and particularly the enthusiastic help of their corporate sponsors, who like to spend part of their volunteer day with us in the KSP garden. They undertake the really big jobs like hanging Christmas Lights, moving very large pots and putting up hanging baskets, we are always extremely grateful.

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What other greenspaces nearby do you mostly tend to visit?

Our very central location means we are extremely fortunate to be close to St James' and to Battersea Park, both are fabulously maintained green spaces. St James' Park is a heavily used space and yet the care and attention to keeping plants and the grass in good condition is remarkable. It's kept full of colour, and an early morning coffee on the terrace of the park café overlooking the fountain, watching the wildlife, sometimes you must be reminded you are in Victoria.

Which is the most memorable garden you have ever visited – either in the UK or abroad – and why?

Bridget: Not quite a garden as such, but a visit to the Chelsea Flower Show never disappoints. From the big architectural designs of the Show Gardens all the way to the small Artisan gardens and the exceptional plants in the pavilion, it never disappoints. Over the years we've learnt more about peat free compost, new ideas for plants that work well in containers, as well as cleverly disguised water butts.

Sarah: Locally I love Eccleston Square for its unmanicured, rambling informality and any London mews street where the residents have made an effort to green their roadway. Further afield I have been inspired by Hayden Lane Community Garden in Sydney (follow @haydenlanelife on insta) where local residents transformed a neglected alleyway with a tragic history into an urban oasis.

What's the best gardening tip or trick you have learned?

The KSP project was started by a small group of us with absolutely no gardening experience whatsoever, in an urban backstreet, to say the growing conditions are less than perfect would be an understatement. The garden is now well established and flourishing, and is known by the locals, many of whom now divert their journeys to make KSP part of it. Our best gardening tip would be that with a bit of care "plants will grow anywhere" and don't be put off because the area you have is less than ideal, just have a go.

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