

## **CULTER IN BLOOM**

### **CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT 2019**

I have to begin the report on a sad note as one of our members, Donald McDonald, died in February last year. Donald was a very long standing member of our committee and was always positive and willing to help with our projects. His wife Françoise joined CIB some years later to support him during his illness and is now a key member of our committee. I'd also like to say a few words of thanks to two members of Culter in Bloom who chose to retire in 2019 – to hang up their trowels so to speak. Sandy and Jean Cook were founder members of CIB and over the last few years have taken on major responsibilities in proposing and implementing the detailed planting plans which we need for all our containers. This called for design flair on the one hand and a strong grasp of the mathematics to get it right! Last year was probably the most attractive and colourful display we have had, and as a tribute to them we intend to repeat it with only minor modifications this year. I'm happy to report that they will still be helping us with tending the areas near to their home.

I'd now like to take you through the year 2019. Our committee met roughly every two months and were of course heavily involved in planning, planting and clearing in between. One of our first investments of the year was for new containers, buying a further six self-watering wall mangers for the walls on North Deeside Road, and also a number of new barrels which hopefully look like wood but are in fact plastic. We intend to replace them all with plastic in due course.

### **SPRING**

An early activity as every year was the Spring litter pick on the morning of Saturday 11 May, led by our secretary Carol Page. Unfortunately litter in our village seems to grow like a perennial weed, so you can be sure that this will continue to be a "hardy annual" event for us. I was not there but was pleased to hear that it was particularly well attended by young people last year.

### **SUMMER**

Moving on to the Summer planting, as mentioned the quality last year was a tribute to the Cooks. I've spoken before about the impressive number of containers we currently tend, and don't wish to bore you with the detail but it's worth mentioning that we buy flowers for 151 different containers and beds of various sizes around the village and plant them up twice yearly. Last year we added quite a few trailing plants to soften the shape of the larger new oval containers, and we have left them in over the winter to see if they survive. We also feel that these containers need a little more year-round height so we decided to put in a small evergreen shrub, a dwarf cypress or a viburnum.

June is also the month for our team of Sherpas ( Bill Cooper, Gibby Connon, Mike Mackie, Malcolm Sharp) who deserve credit for climbing 26 lamp posts, hanging up and removing the 52 baskets along the main road and the multi basket display at the West end. We pay for everything here, the brackets, the rearing of the flowers and even the watering of these baskets by ACC. There are also a few "Adopt a baskets" which we plant up and provide for houses with prominent frontages on the main road. Member Dick Gagel is the organiser here.

It's time to mention an area where we actually make some money. This is the Culter Gala where there is an opportunity to talk to the community and actually sell some flowers to the public. Where do they come from, since we have to buy everything else? It's normally Fox Lane, the local nursery who give us great support with a one-off, very favourable rate – and quite a lot completely free of charge - not only with these plants but at other times too. Thank you to Gordon and his team for your really excellent local support.

### **AUTUMN**

Autumn clearing and planting is a little less complicated than the summer displays. Thanks to Dr Stuart and Irene Duncan we have a raised bed at Kennerty farm, where we save some polyanthus from year to year and some covered space where we dry off the preceding year's bulbs for re-use. These bulbs are usually naturalised into grassy areas, as we buy fresh bulbs every year for the planters. So last year, after clearing all our summer containers we bought around 400 polyanthus, 900 pansies and 1200 early bulbs ( mainly Red Riding Hood tulips and February Gold Daffodils).

## **WINTER**

We finished the year with a long-overdue tidy-up of the orchard with a ton of bark to suppress the weeds around the fruit tree and bushes. . This is also the second winter when we've dressed some of the fruit trees with battery powered Christmas lights. By all reports the success here is a bit variable as the lights seem to have a mind of their own, but they look nice when they work. For greater efficiency, maybe we should invite a takeover by the Christmas lights team!

We've decided to try something new to make it more colourful in the upper, "non-fruiting" area of the orchard. The trees and shrubs in that area are mostly native species, as our grant for that area back in 2016 specified this, but as a new project for 2020 we've decided to brighten it up with some more colourful shrubs and flowering trees and a new central feature to give year round interest. This was made possible by a legacy donated to us the late Ann Watson, a Culter in Bloom committee member who died in 2018. You should see this in place by the Spring of this year.

## **THE FUTURE**

Looking further ahead, all the flowers we need for summer 2020 are already ordered, as they have to be by end year if we are to get the quantities and varieties we want, so you can be sure that Culter will remain as colourful as ever. As you probably know we decided not to enter the Beautiful Scotland scheme last year, having won a Silver Gilt in 2018. At that time the judges gave us some pointers if we want to improve our scores. We know that to gain a higher award would mean involving other volunteer groups in our community, each with its own ongoing project – the primary school, youth groups, older people, local businesses for example. We have not been successful with this to date. However this is still under consideration, ideas and offers of help are welcome and no decision has to be made immediately.

We are grateful for the financial support we receive each year from local businesses and the public and hope that this will continue, as it is certainly needed while we follow our present policy of buying in new plants twice yearly and purchasing the watering service for the hanging baskets, quite apart from any new projects. Consequently we have prepared our community fundraising leaflet for circulation with the next Courier, which always brings a great response. This year's "free gift" will be a pair of work gloves – for your own garden – or to help with ours of course! To close, a huge vote of thanks is due to our committee for their tireless work through the year - discussing, purchasing, planting, weeding and clearing, and to all in the community who already support us so well. I'd like to thank all members of the CIB committee personally for their tireless work: Vice Chairman Malcolm Sharp, Secretary Carol Page, Treasurer Catherine Lacy, Agneta Calderwood, Gibby Connon, Bill Cooper, Dick Gagel, Sean Hayes, Christine Mackie, Isabel McIntyre, Francoise MacDonald – and finally all our supporters for your encouragement with our tasks.

Erik Stien

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