



Tate Modern Community Garden - Opening Speech by Edith Slee - 20 June 2007

It was 10 years ago that the Tate started its community consultation about this area of land. It was 10 years ago that Bankside Residents Forum set up its gardening group to try to introduce a window box or even a tree to Bankside.

I am here today because I am the only original member of the steering group of this long drawn out process - and on behalf of that group - representing the resident and working community of Bankside - I want to say thank you. This is such a wonderful and exciting moment I am hard-put to keep still.

Tate Modern opened 7 years ago and has had in the region of 7 million visitors. Bankside Residents Forum Gardening Group has become Bankside Open Spaces Trust or BOST - recognised across the country for its work in greening communities. Now termed Breathing Spaces with the support of the BBC since they were so astonished by the scale of their Springwatch audiences. Green Community and Breathing Spaces is why I want to thank the Tate - today in the persons of Nick Serota, Donald Hyslop and Synthia Griffin - and BOST - today in the persons of Helen Firminger and Peter Graal in particular.

This community is asked to smile at an average of 80,000 visitors a day - 160,000 during the Mayor's Thames Festival. This garden is a resource for that community - a resource that can replenish those smiles and open people out - reversing a natural inclination for defence.

The green community says thank you in oft repeated phrases: "I feel so much better having planted a seed, pulled a weed, learnt about pruning"; "It is so wonderful to have a place I can care for"; or uniquely "I was the first the see 4 frogs". And it is a breathing space: "It is so calm when you walk through the gate"; "I came for a spot of bird watching"; "It is so good to come somewhere safe and be quiet".

There was a garden warbler here last year. She had come all the way across Africa, across the Sahara, across the Mediterranean and across France, across the Channel and Southern England, to Bankside. I was glad we had a green space to welcome her on her journey - and it made me realise the vital importance of learning about and taking part in the care of our world as a whole. Whether this particular space is sprayed weed and insect free - or whether it is green and full of life effects our life here at Bankside but all the way across the world into the southern hemisphere as well.

At a rough estimate this community has planted two hundred varieties of plant. Eighteen varieties of birds live near or visit - at least 6 more varieties fly over the top. The vital connection here are the insects - to pollinate the plants and as a food source. We have had 6 varieties of butterflies - but who are all those others with all those legs? Is a spider-eating fly a sign of our crazy world or a rarely observed member of our community - it was here in the garden last month

Thank you to and from our community.