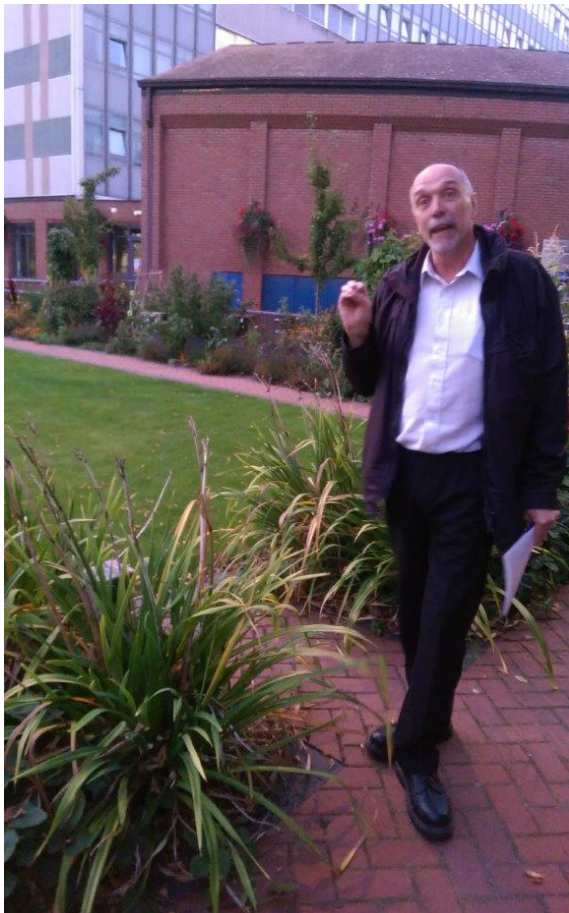


EDIBLE CAMPUS EVENT

One of the Landscape Institute Midlands branch's recent events was a tour of Coventry University's Edible Campus. Developed over the last three years, under the guidance of Stephen Beasley (the University's Estates Manager), this unique landscape was initiated for several reasons:

- To improve the University's sustainability credentials as part of their carbon reduction programme , leading to a coveted Green Gown Award
- To make the city centre a more attractive and welcoming environment for residents, students and visitors alike
- To offer opportunities for 'Inside Out' learning, taking advantage of the spaces between buildings
- To provide a base for horticultural therapy (the gardens are well used by the charity, Thrive <http://www.thrive.org.uk/>)
- To utilise the campus as a resource for learning, through the installation of permeable paving for instance, the performance of which can be monitored over the coming years.



During an Indian summer's evening in early September, the grounds were looking particularly atmospheric and our tour took in several recent developments, including:

- a new outdoor seating area designed in 2011 by Roger Griffiths Associates Ltd., specifically created for the delivery of lectures, individual learning and (in future) lecture or film screenings.



- a forest garden, where the selected plants create a uniquely productive habitat and all can be eaten, or put to other useful purposes. Alongside obvious edibles such as rhubarb, grapevines and strawberries this included some surprises in the form of *Rubus tricolor* (from which raspberry-like fruits derive), *Phormium tenax* (providing edible seeds and any number of practical uses for the strong, strap-like leaves) and *Mahonia sp.* (whose berries make an excellent jam).



- a well planned and executed edible garden in the heart of the campus, where fruit trees, herbs, permanent and temporary plantings offer a variety of edible offerings.



Awarded its first Green Flag award in 2014, this last garden is a wonderful example of an attractive, yet productive, landscape where everyone is invited to pick and taste the fruits, seeds and leaves as they mature. While most plants were instantly recognisable to us, recent additions that have been introduced to make Coventry University's high numbers of overseas students feel more at home, proved more of a challenge!

These edible gardens were first trialled in 2011 when two raised beds were planted with annual crops. Contrary to expectations, given the open city centre location, it was the reticence of students and the public to harvest ready crops rather than over-exploitation or vandalism that struck the researchers. The university's skilled team of gardeners started to leave mature fruits and leaves on the walls to encourage people to take them and Interactivity has increased, but in spite of sometimes enthusiastic harvesting by some students, the gardens remain well stocked and highly productive.



As with the forest garden, the plantings here were mixed rather than regimented, using the principle of 'stacking' – different plants occupying different vertical and horizontal zones both above and below ground, as in a natural ecology. This applied equally well to the permanent plants and the annual crops.

Sculptures, planters, and insect homes also add to both the form and function of the area, both increasing biodiversity and drawing attention to the importance of these habitats in a densely populated (and hard landscaped) part of the city.



Useful links...

Forest Gardening:

<http://www.agroforestry.co.uk/forgndg.html>

http://www.self-willed-land.org.uk/permaculture/forest_garden.htm

http://www.coventry.ac.uk/Global/06%20Life%20on%20Campus%20section%20assets/The%20University/Key%20Information%20Page/Governance/coventry_university_environmental_report_2013.pdf

<http://watkinsdesignassociates.co.uk/forest-gardens-an-ancient-and-modern-landscape/>