



The Friends of Oxford Botanic Garden & Arboretum
Rose Lane, Oxford, OX1 4AZ | 01865 610303 | friends.administrator@obg.ox.ac.uk

Annual General Meeting held at 7.30pm on Monday, 25th January 2021 via Zoom

Apologies were received but none were noted. 71 members and 7 Directors attended.

1. Chairman's Report Sarah Taylor

The time since we last met has been transformative for technophobes like me, as personal contact has been thwarted by the pandemic. The Directors had hoped to have this meeting in person, hence its delay, but the virus had other ideas so here we are on Zoom. Old dogs can learn new tricks.

As we go through this third lockdown, my main impression of the last year is one of firefighting. However, when I go back over the year in detail, much has been achieved despite everything and we have cause to be more grateful than ever to you, our Friends, for your support of the Botanic Garden and Arboretum that we love so much.

In turn, we all have reason to be extremely thankful for our wonderful administrator, Isabella Raeburn. She has worked from home since March, with only rare forays down the road into the Garden, and worked like a trojan, putting in long hours dealing with the many telephone calls and emails coming in from concerned Friends. She encouraged more people to allow us to communicate by email, so saving us money that we can give to the Garden. She has transformed the administration of the Friends, setting up a new database – which meant dealing with the IT of the University as well as with the database provider – and cleaning up our data while she was at it. Thanks to this, people are now able to buy membership online. The next task is to set up online direct debit instructions. You will soon be able to apply for tickets for Friends events such as garden visits online too. We are future proofed for GDPR compliance, Gift Aid compliance, everything else compliance.

Isabella has also helped me with the administration of the Paths Appeal and for example with typing up thank you letters. The Christmas email you all got with news of what had been achieved this year was her idea and her execution: typically crisp, informative and to the point.

Communication during a year such as we have just gone through is vital. I hope you feel that you have been communicated with enough but not overloaded with information. As well as the regular *Newsletter*, which Carol Maxwell continues to work hard on, our communication has been a mixture of emails, post for those not on email (expensive at an estimated cost of £1 a letter) and the e-bulletin. Seonaid Danziger has done an excellent job of keeping you in touch via the latter, with news, views and photographs. Not only is she entirely self-taught but halfway through the year she managed the switch from Mailchimp to Blackbaud, our new database provider. This was not entirely straightforward. Now, having published the e-bulletin for a number of years, she has decided to move on to other things for a change. That means we are looking for someone else to do the job. If any of you loves the media and communicating, is passionate about the Garden and would like to help, please do get in touch.

On a more sombre note, we have lost a most valued friend and colleague. At the last AGM, I spoke about the immense contribution that Jennie Turner had made to the Friends for 20 years and continued to make to us, particularly latterly with the Bobarts Group and as a Garden guide. Very sadly, she died



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just before Christmas after a short illness. Many of us counted her as a good personal friend and it is hard to comprehend her passing. Tributes to her have poured in from Bobarts members, speaking of her enthusiasm, her charm, her knowledge so readily imparted, her great kindness.

Other colleagues have left us for distant shores. The talented Taeko Seiki who helped in so many ways at coffee mornings and at events has now returned to Japan, and we wish her well.

The other person who leaves a huge hole in our organisation is Maura Allen who has returned to her native Tasmania. She ran everything, from May morning to the Plant Sale to decorating marquees for events like the Christmas Fair to organising all the catering at Friends' parties to getting the Danby Patrons' group up and running – something that she is keen to continue to be involved in even now. Her stupendous energy, her empathy with everyone at the Garden, her creativity, are badly missed and we are still looking for the person or more likely persons who will take her place. We would love more young blood on board, so do please consider joining our fantastic volunteers, and persuading others to do so.

I referred earlier to the contribution that you, as Friends, make to the Garden and Arboretum. Even in this tough year, you have been able to give the Garden over £130,000 in funds, for things as diverse as: interpretation panels in the glasshouses to the tune of £7000; lighting in the Garden for events in the future for £5000; buying plants for all parts of the Garden, including thousands of bulbs at the Arboretum, with an investment of £34,000; propagation facilities in the Glasshouses worth £7000; and emergency repairs to the paths at the Arboretum for £17,400. We have enabled the planning application, at a cost of £46,500, for the upgrading of the paths at the Arboretum, the subject of our major current special fund-raising project. In this too you have proved more than generous. As of today, we have raised some £220,000 of a total target of £750,000. So, there is some way to go, but there is enough in the kitty for us hopefully to be able to make a start in the coming year on the much-needed upgrading of the access to that beautiful site. The Arboretum has benefitted from a record number of visitors since reopening post the first lockdown, up from an annual average of 35,000 to 42,000 in just 5 ½ months, as people look for fresh air and nature to refresh their souls and bodies – but this has highlighted yet further the urgent need for better paths!

Before the virus struck, I set a foolhardy target (with hindsight) of reaching 4000 Friends by our 400th Anniversary. Sadly, numbers have fallen rather than risen in the last year, although they are recovering encouragingly now that both the Garden and the Arboretum are open again. We currently have just over 3300 members. We hope that in this momentous year, when we celebrate the founding of the Garden on 25th July 1621, the interest and enthusiasm will lead to more people being encouraged to join The Friends to support the work in conservation, scientific research, access to nature and horticulture done on both our amazing sites.

Much work is going on behind the scenes to plan the celebrations in July of this year. We are also celebrating the 30th anniversary of the founding of The Friends and a big party will take place at the Garden to mark this milestone, to which you will all be invited. More details will follow, once we are clearer on the timetable of post vaccination easing in social restrictions.

So, I close by saying that despite everything, this has been a positive year for The Friends. The future is onwards and upwards.



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2. Treasurer's Report Hemlata Bountra

The 2019/2020 financial highlights: membership decreased from 3,537 to 3,402 a decrease of 3.8% with 10% non-renewal; total funds raised were £361k (2019 £192k); distributable funds generated were £299k (2019 £137k) after all costs, of which £163k is for the paths; grants made to the Garden were £133k (2019 £192k); reserves carried forward were £243k (2019 £76k); the Danby group launched in 2018/2019 now has 18 members (2019:16).

The sources of net income for 2019/2020 were 36% membership fees, 10% events, 9% gift aid tax refunds and 45% donations and legacies. The grants were used for enhancing & developing the collections and improvement of facilities, both at the Arboretum and Garden; for professional development; for the Education Programme; reconfiguring the rock garden; and for further interpretation by Pia Ostlund.

Looking ahead, there was £456.5k cash in the bank as at 29th February 2020 less minimum reserve of £30k (2019 £290.5k minimum reserve £20k). Funds committed but not spent were £212.8k (2019 £204.8k); Paths Appeal (restricted) £163.2k; "Free Cash" available for grants was £50.5k (2019 £85.7k).

In other matters, 82% of Friends are now paying fees by direct debit; 77% of Friends have registered email addresses and 29% receive the *Newsletter* by email; fees increased on 1st March 2020 by 2%-4%, the next increase will be 1st March 2022; The Friends continue to benefit from the very considerable volunteer work of the Forum and other Friends.

The Friends have raised £2.55m since 2005.

There were no questions so Sarah Taylor moved to the formal business of the meeting. She informed the members that they would be able to vote on screen, using the tick boxes. For administrative reasons, proposers and seconders had been agreed among the Directors before the meeting.

3. Resolutions

Resolution 1

That the Trustees' Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 28th February 2020 and the Accountants' Report be received and adopted.

All present were in favour and the Resolution was adopted.

Resolution 2 relates to the appointment and remuneration of the Reporting Accountants of the Company. Critchleys are one of the leading firms of chartered accountants in the Thames Valley. They audit several of the Oxford University Colleges. They were first appointed as Reporting Accountants to the Friends of Oxford Botanic Garden & Harcourt Arboretum Ltd for the year ended 29th February 2008. Last year, they charged us a very reasonable £1500.



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Resolution 2

That Critchleys be re-appointed Reporting Accountants to the Company for the period until the conclusion of the next Annual General Meeting, and that the Directors of the Company be authorised to agree the remuneration of the Reporting Accountants.

Hemlata Bountra proposed the Resolution and Jane Annett seconded. All present were in favour and the Resolution was adopted.

The next resolutions relate to the re-election of Directors of the company. The Articles of Association of the Company provide that, excluding any Director appointed since the last AGM, at least one third of the Directors should retire by rotation each year. This year Jane Annett and Harriet Bretherton retire by rotation and stand for re-election.

Resolution 3(a)

The Chairman asked that Jane Annett who retires by rotation, but being eligible, be proposed for re-election as a Director of the Company.

Harriet Bretherton proposed the Resolution and Sarah Taylor seconded. All present were in favour and the Resolution was adopted.

Resolution 3(b)

The Chairman asked that Harriet Bretherton who retires by rotation, but being eligible, be proposed for re-election as a Director of the Company.

Helen Potts proposed the Resolution and Simon Hiscox seconded. All present were in favour and the Resolution was adopted.

4. Special Resolution

The members had had circulated to them the proposal that the Directors amend the Articles of Association to bring them into line with generally accepted practice that officers of the Company have limited terms of office and to allow electronic meetings.

Adoption of the changes to clause 10 and the introduction of a new clause in the Friends of Oxford Botanic Garden & Arboretum Articles of Association.

Sarah Taylor proposed the Resolution and Anna Nasmyth seconded. All present were in favour and the Resolution was adopted.

5. Any other business

There was none.

The Chairman declared the 2020 Annual General Meeting of the Company to be closed.



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Following the AGM, Mark Brent, Curator and Head of Horticulture at The University of Oxford Botanic Garden, gave a talk on the activities and developments in the Garden in 2020.

The meeting concluded at 8.30pm.

Sarah Taylor
3/2/21