



**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 24th September 2018 Jaqueline du Pré Music Building, St Hilda's College, Oxford**

**Apologies** were received but none were noted. 39 members and 7 Directors attended.

### **1. Chairman's report**

Sarah Taylor reported that the Friends were going from strength to strength. There were now 3,500 members, a remarkable number by any measure. The success in continuing recruitment is mainly down to the efforts of the ticket office staff, to whom the Friends are deeply grateful. It is also due to the continuous promotion by volunteers at coffee mornings and all other events put on by Friends.

Since the last meeting, Sally Jefferies resigned as Administrator and Jo Ashby started in April as her replacement. The combination of Jo and Freya, the Friends' visits tickets administrator, is an exceptionally strong one.

The new GDPR law regarding the handling of personal data, particularly on the internet, came into effect in May this year and caused many charitable Trustees a headache. As well as drawing up a privacy statement, the Trustees had to ensure that they had written permission from all members to be contacted. Jo's calm efficiency in dealing with this meant the Chairman could report to the AGM that the Friends were now in good shape.

The Friends changed their name to Friends of Oxford Botanic Garden & Arboretum in 2018, dropping the word Harcourt, in line with the new name of the Garden itself. The Board investigated the idea of becoming a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, the new structure devised by the Government to enable charities to benefit from unlimited liability for its trustees without having to be listed as a company at Companies House. The decision was taken not to convert.

Over the last year, the Friends committed £128,000 to the Garden, the main expenditure being a new chipper for the Arboretum, at a cost of £21,000, and further enhancements to both the plant collections of the Garden and Arboretum and their interpretation, to the tune of some £100,000. The Friends have also agreed to buy water fountains for the Garden, so removing the need for plastic cups.

This year, a member wrote to complain that the *Newsletter* was being sent out using plastic wrappers. The Board decided that she had a point and it was decided to act quickly to convert to paper envelopes for the forthcoming *Newsletter*. The weight of paper used in the *Newsletter* was slightly reduced to avoid additional postage costs. The 'greenest' way of receiving the *Newsletter* is by email but conversion is slow.

The *Newsletter* is one of the great attractions of being a Friend. The other is the wealth of events organised by the exceptional team of volunteers. The quality and number of garden visits on offer is extraordinary and reflects a great deal of detective work and quality control behind the scenes by the team of Harriet Bretherton, Jane Annett, Pauline Coombes and Diana Nauman. This year has seen a number of events of which by far the biggest was our biennial Plant Sale, organised by the indefatigable Maura Allen. It raised over £8,000 which, bearing in mind that the weather forecast for the 27<sup>th</sup> May was terrible (the actual weather was in fact fine), is a huge achievement. Just before that was the now annual opportunity for Friends to witness May Morning and hear Magdalen College choir singing from the top of the tower from



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the beautiful and exclusive setting of the Garden, with the added bonus of coffee and croissants. The event involves the organisers arriving at 3.30am in the morning to prepare. The annual Friends' Summer Party had a record turnout of 300 people on a glorious sunny evening. This party is currently free to Friends, but owing to its success, the Board may have to review that, as the cost of the drink is threatening to deplete the coffers more than is comfortable. The annual Opera event, organised by Mary Isaac, is a regular and valuable fund raiser, thanks to sponsorship from two generous benefactors. Besides all these Friends events, the Events Committee help produce tea and cake at several other events organised by the Garden and Arboretum, like the Spring Fair at the Arboretum, the Christmas Fair at the Garden and Alice Day.

The Danby Group of Patrons has now been launched, a joint venture between the Friends and the Department of Plant Sciences. This is a higher-level group, which cements the strong relationship between the Garden and Plant Sciences and will hopefully provide further funding both for the Garden and for the Herbaria at the Department. It fits in nicely with the new Herbarium room at the Garden, which will open shortly.

Finally, mention should be made of the forthcoming fund-raising plans in the run up to the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The Friends are going to try and raise up to £700,000 to build new paths at the Arboretum, as well as restore the existing ones. It is unacceptable in this day and age that access to that beautiful site is so very limited. Those in wheelchairs or with young children in push chairs are very constrained as to what they can see. Ben Jones has been working very hard to design new path routes that will open up more areas of the Arboretum, as well as improve access to "the party area" around the Barn. The brand-new composting toilets, made possible by an anonymous donor, are to have their ceremonial opening later this week. This will be the third major fund raising undertaken by the Friends over their twenty plus year existence. The first was the £500,000 endowment fund for public education, the second the £185,000 purchase of Palmers Leys at the Arboretum. Decent paths are desperately needed and are the sort of essential thing that the Friends should be supporting.

## **2. Treasurer's report**

Hemlata Bountra reported on the 2017/2018 financial highlights: membership increased from 3,247 to 3,317, an increase of 2.1% with 8% non-renewal; total funds raised were £239k (2017 £222k); distributable funds generated after all costs were £181k (2017 £162k); grants made to Garden were £176k (2017 £228k); and reserves carried forward were £131k (2017 £126k).

The sources of net income for 2017/2018 were membership fees, events, gift aid tax claim, donations and legacies, and interest. The grants were used for facilities, the plant collection and equipment. Excluding specific appeals and legacies, the long-term fundraising goal is to have available for distribution in excess of £300k on a two-year rolling average. The Friends have raised £1.7m in the ten years to 2017/2018 and £2.1m since 2005, a great achievement.

Other matters: membership fees increased on 1 March 2018 by 2% - 4%. The next increase will be on 1 March 2020. Visitor numbers to the year ending 28 February 2018 were: Garden 141,704; Arboretum 23,799; total visitors 165,503 (2017 135,079, +22.5%).

## **3. Resolutions**



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**Resolution 1**

**That the Trustees' Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 28<sup>th</sup> February 2018 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 and Harcourt Arboretum Ltd for the year ended 29<sup>th</sup> February 2008.

**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.**

Maura Allen proposed the Resolution. All present were in favour and the Resolution was adopted.

The final 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 Sarah Taylor is retiring by rotation and standing for re-election.

**Resolution 3(a)**

**The Chairman proposed that Harriet Bretherton, having been co-opted as a Director since the last AGM, be elected a Director of the Company.**

All present were in favour and the Resolution was adopted.

**Resolution 3(b)**

**The Chairman proposed that Simon Hiscock, having been co-opted as the University of Oxford Director since the last AGM, be elected a Director of the Company.**

All present were in favour and the Resolution was adopted.

**Resolution 3(c)**

**The Chairman asked Anna Nasmyth (Secretary) to propose Resolution 3(C). The Secretary proposed that Sarah Taylor who retires by rotation, but being eligible, be proposed for re-election as a Director of the Company.**

All present were in favour and the Resolution was adopted.

**The Chairman declared the 2018 Annual General Meeting of the Company to be closed.**



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Following the AGM, Dr Christopher Thorogood, OBG Head of Science and Public Engagement, and Kate Pritchard, Glasshouse Curator, both gave inspired talks about the glasshouse plants.

**The AGM was followed by wine and canapés and the evening concluded at 9.30pm.**