



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 6.30pm on Monday, 6th June 2022 The Riverside Pavilion, St Hilda's College, Oxford

Apologies were received but none were noted. 58 members and 8 Directors attended.

Chairman's Report

Sarah Taylor

It is only 8 months (but an eventful and busy 8 months), since our last AGM.

Under the energetic and highly capable leadership of Seonaid Danziger, the Events Team, which with the Garden Visits team is the engine house of the Friends, has grown in size in order to meet the challenges of returning to pre-pandemic normality. May morning, our exclusive offering to Friends and their guests, returned triumphantly with 200 people coming to the Garden to hear Magdalen College choir sing from the top of the tower and to enjoy coffee, croissants and Morris Dancers. One grateful visitor described it as a truly unforgettable experience, made particularly so by the warmth and shared enjoyment that radiated from those organising it.

As you will know, we had been planning to hold one of our legendary plant sales on the 14th of May at the Arboretum. Sadly, that fell victim to increasing concerns about the spread of diseases amongst plants: the Arboretum now hosts many really rare and precious trees and the uncontrolled influx of plants from all sorts of private and college gardens was a risk too far. Instead, Mark Brent and his team very kindly propagated some 500 beautiful plants from the Garden and these were sold in the Friends' Glade at the Spring Fair in the Arboretum, along with our traditional home baked cakes – there was even a Chairman's cake, in a dramatic departure from normal non-participation. There was also a Tombola and the opportunity to promote Friends' membership and of course our ongoing Paths Appeal. It was our momentous first venture into the cash free society thanks to Seonaid setting up SumUp card readers. The proceeds from both May morning and the Spring Fair amounted to a commendable £5,000 and have gone to the Paths Appeal.

This now stands at around £450,000, thanks to your generosity and that of a number of trusts. The Appeal is now being managed by Anne James and Cathy Stewart who have the task of raising the remaining £300,000 – 'only' £100 a member!

As our contribution to the Paths forms a part of the Garden's bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for funds to build a Visitor Centre at the Arboretum, we have discovered that if we spend what we have raised now, the money awarded by the National Lottery will correspondingly be reduced. Whilst frustrating, this would not be a sensible thing to risk. However, I am delighted to say that thanks to some money forthcoming from the University Estates and to a judicious amount from the Friends for detailed construction plans, remedial work on the paths will commence shortly and you will all be able to see just how much you are contributing to the future development of that most precious site.

Events in the Garden itself, of course, are being dominated by the postponed plans for the celebration of 400 years of its existence. The Friends are playing their own modest part in those. Our most significant contribution has been funding the development of the stunning Oxford Physic Rose created by Peter Beales



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for the momentous occasion. In recognition of that, Helen Potts and I were lucky enough to be present at the Chelsea Flower Show for the official launch. The rose is selling like hot cakes so that the initial offering of container grown plants is I believe sold out, but hopefully bare-rooted plants will be available come the Autumn. Keep an eye out also for beautiful, related, merchandise in the Welcome Centre shop, to be revealed tomorrow evening.

We will also be present on many days during the fortnight's celebrations starting on 15th July with a Friends' stand, promoting the benefits of joining and supporting our wonderful Botanic Garden. Most importantly, we will be having a fund-raising event, All About Trees, in aid of the Paths Appeal on the evening of the 20th of July, to include music and a performance by renowned storyteller Ashley Ramsden of Jean Giono's 'The Man Who Planted Hope'. Should you be interested in attending, do please contact Rebecca Mather or Seonaid Danziger, both present here tonight.

We also have the welcome return in July of the annual Opera performance, in the New College Warden's Garden, this time of 'La Astuzie Femminile' by Cimarosa, another fabulously convoluted plot set to glorious music. Coffee mornings continue successfully thanks to the Battersbys and the Garden Visits programme gets ever busier and more impressive. Finally, for now, we are planning our annual Friends' party in September at the Garden, a chance to wander round of an evening with a glass in your hand and meet up with fellow Friends.

All these occasions require a great deal of work and preparation, and I am deeply grateful to all our many volunteers who devote so much time and energy to making them a success.

In the midst of all this activity, we had to deal with a real crisis in January when our administrator of just 3 ½ months resigned suddenly, giving just a week's notice. This was just a week after your Board had reviewed its risk analysis and identified just this occurrence as our number one potential risk. In the risk analysis, the temporary solution had been identified as the Garden Office administrator whilst we looked for first a replacement. In the event, all this coincided with the departure of the long-term Garden administrator, Olivia Singh, and the arrival of Heidi el Megrisi in the new role of Head of Operations. Advertising for a temporary replacement from the University pool produced nothing, so plan C had to be brought into action. This was Hemlata, our tireless treasurer, who as well as dealing with her full-time day job here in St Hilda's and coping with a broken wrist, took on dealing with post and emails and most importantly doing the direct debits from Members, the lifeblood of the Friends. Our database providers also chose this moment to try and introduce a new software package which meant that they no longer interacted with Microsoft Word for our mailings. We had to call on Isabella, our previous administrator, to help us sort out this particular glitch, which she did with her usual efficiency and charm, thank goodness.

At last, after a really hairy month and a half that felt like a year, the wonderful Grace Denton-Spalding stepped in to help, becoming the almost full-time temporary administrator, since when things have returned to a more even keel, albeit still with extra input from Hemlata. The role of administrator, which as you will know is a University post, has now been reviewed and graded as full time and a full two points above where it was. This is a reflection both of the growth in our membership and the increased bureaucratic complexity that is afflicting us all, whether in our dealings with banks, with government offices or, dare I say it, academic institutions. It will cost more, but it is essential that we run efficiently.

I cannot overstate the extraordinary work put in by Hemlata, not just during this difficult period, but over the last nearly 9 years. The Friends exist to raise money for the Garden and Hemlata has stewarded that money in the most rigorous way, overseeing both incoming and outgoing sums, monitoring expenses and



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preparing our annual accounts which give such a clear picture of what we do. She has done it this year in record quick time. We owe her an immense debt of gratitude.

Since lockdown, the debacle over our Administrator together with many, entirely positive, developments at the Garden, which have seen it grow in size and importance within the University, has led your Board, after much debate, to consider the process of changing how 'the Friends of Oxford Botanic Garden & Arboretum' is structured. We will be ending its legal entity as a separate charitable organisation and integrating the Friends with the Garden. This will bring us into line with all the other Friends' organisations within the University department, GLAM – Gardens, Libraries and Museums – such as the Ashmolean and the Bodleian.

This will not stop our wonderful volunteers continuing to support the Garden as they do now, whether it be organising Garden Visits, fund raising events or coffee mornings. It will simply mean that we no longer have a separate Chairman, Secretary or Treasurer. The success of the Friends over the last 30+ years has meant, as you have heard, that the administrative burden has got ever heavier and it will now be more efficient to centralise the organisation within the Garden.

This process will take some time, as legal and other issues are settled. However, the Bodleian has recently led the way so that we will be able to follow in what I hope will not be too onerous a process. I am happy to take questions afterwards.

As ever, I take this opportunity of celebrating what you, our members, do. Over the last 30 years, the Friends have contributed an enormous amount to the Garden, both in money (well over £2m,) and in time (infinity!).

Treasurer's Report

Hemlata Bountra

The 2021/2022 financial highlights: membership increased from 3,302 to 3,470, an increase of 5% but not yet at pre-pandemic levels; total funds raised were £284k (2021 £230k); distributable funds generated were £208k (2021 £183k) after all costs, with £100k for the Paths Appeal; grants made to the Garden were £359k (2021 £120k) including £300k for the paths at the Arboretum; reserves carried forward were £155k (2021 £306k); the Danby group launched in 2018/19 now has 23 members (2021:20).

The sources of net income for 2021/2022 were membership fees (£123k); Gift Aid tax refunds (£29.1k); events and visits, net of costs (£11.8k); donations and legacies (£98.6k); and investment income (£0.1k). The grants were used for a propagation unit; education technology grant-matched funding; education events; support for the OBG digital content officer; paths at the Arboretum; the Literary Garden plants and benches; plants for the Walled Garden and herbaceous borders.

Looking ahead, there was £349.9k cash in the bank as at 28th February 2022 less the minimum reserve of £30k; funds committed but not spent were £174.6k; Paths Appeal (restricted) £29.9k; "Free Cash" available for grants was £115.4k.

In other matters, 82% of Friends are now paying fees by direct debit; 86% of Friends have registered email addresses and 29% receive the *Newsletter* by email; fees increased on 1st March 2022 by 4%-5%, the next increase will be 1st March 2024; the new database allows online membership and eventually bookings for garden visits.



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The Friends have raised £2.16 million in the last ten years and a total of £3.08m since 2005.

The Friends continue to benefit from the very considerable volunteer work of the Forum and other Friends.

Hemlata invited questions from the floor. One member asked whether it was possible to reduce the cash holding. She answered that the directors were dependent on OBGGA making requests for funds. A follow-up question was whether these funds could be invested to protect against inflation. Sarah said that with interest rates so low it made sense only to invest long-term and this was riskier and also made it harder for the directors to react to sudden requests, for example, for matched funding.

A member asked if, when the charity is transferred to OBGGA, the University would see this as an opportunity to reduce funding. Sarah said that this had not happened with the Bodleian and the Ashmolean. She confirmed that the charity would continue to exist and be able to claim Gift Aid.

Sarah Taylor moved to the formal business of the meeting.

Resolutions

Resolution 1 Director's Report and Accounts

That the Trustees' Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 28th February 2022 and the Accountants' Report be received and adopted.

All present were in favour and the Resolution was adopted.

Resolution 2 Appointment and remuneration of reporting accountants

Wenn Townsend, one of the leading Oxford based firms of accountants, were appointed at our last AGM as our new auditors. They have proved very efficient as well as reasonably priced, charging us £1,500 to examine our accounts.

That Wenn Townsend 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.

Seonaid Danziger proposed the Resolution and Anna Nasmyth seconded. 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 Rebecca Mather, Anna Nasmyth and Helen Potts retire by rotation and stand for re-election.

Resolution 3 Election of Directors

3(a) That Rebecca Mather, who retires by rotation, but being eligible, be proposed for re-election as a Director of the Company.



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

Resolution 3(b)

That Anna Nasmyth, who retires by rotation, but being eligible, be proposed for re-election as a Director of the Company.

Sally Orriss proposed the Resolution and Richard Mayou seconded. All present were in favour and the Resolution was adopted.

Resolution 3 (c)

That Helen Potts, who retires by rotation, but being eligible, be proposed for re-election as a Director of the Company.

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

Any other business

There was none.

The Chairman declared the 2022 Annual General Meeting of the Company to be closed.

Following the AGM, Professor Yadvinder Malhi, Professor of Ecosystem Science at the Environmental Change Institute, School of Geography and the Environment, Senior Research Fellow at Oriel College and member of the Board of Visitors of Oxford Botanic Garden & Arboretum, gave a brilliant lecture on his work at Wytham Woods and the new Leverhulme Centre for Nature Recovery.

The meeting concluded at 7.30pm and was followed by drinks.