

FRIENDS OF CRARAE
Scottish Charity SC 033244

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at Crarae Gardens on Saturday 23 July 2018.

Present: David Sillar (Chairman), Peter Hogbin (Treasurer), Victoria Winters (acting Secretary), Barbara Service (Committee Member), Kim Cogan (NTS Visitor Services Manager), John Hall, Hew Service, Janet Foster, Jan Alison-Norman, Kim Ritchie, Ellie Bittleston, Sally Lovell, Dorothy Hogbin.

1. Chairman's Welcome

David Sillar welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Apologies

Simon Jones (NTS), Romano Zavoroni, Ann Dodd, Mr & Mrs Anthony Brown, Lord and Lady Weir, Grace Macleod, Alison Hay.

3. Minutes of the last Meeting - The minutes of the meeting held on 22nd July 2016 were approved. The group were reminded that previous AGM minutes are posted on the Friends Website (www.friendsofcrarae.com).

4. Matters Arising - None

5. Chairman's Report

The Chairman commented that continued good work has been done by our Secretary Victoria Winters and our Treasurer Peter Hogbin on sorting out the membership database and files.

He also reminded those present that because of GDPR The Friends need to make sure we have the necessary consents in place to be able to hold personal details and contact everyone on the members list in the way that they have chosen.

It was confirmed that it will also be necessary to obtain renewed consents for Gift Aid and we cannot reclaim outstanding Gift Aid until this is done.

The Chairman acknowledged that The Friends need to tread carefully in our relationship with the NTS; we are not the managers of the Gardens but are there to support the Trust in its work of managing and promoting Crarae.

In this context, and because of locally expressed concerns about the state of the garden earlier in the summer, he felt constrained to write to NTS management in highly critical terms about the staffing level at Crarae and lack of resources allotted to the Garden and the effect this has had on the security of some of the important species collections in the garden as well as the image projected to visitors by overgrown paths, weed infested flower beds and uncut grass.

The Chairman confirmed that he had been invited to a meeting with senior managers early next week but it is pleasing to see that emergency steps taken since he wrote have resulted in a much better appearance of the garden in the last few weeks. POST MEETING NOTE: Meeting postponed to 20 August.

He went on to mention that, thanks to Victoria's PR efforts, the Garden is now represented and mentioned editorially in several websites and publications including 'The Heart of Argyll' (www.heartofargyll.com), and through this website it is included in both the 'My Argyll' and 'Heart and Soul' tourism campaigns featured in 'The Scottish Field' this month. There was a substantial article in June in 'The Scots Magazine' featuring Derek Shankland, our 1st Gardener, and lots of Friends of Crarae website photographs. The garden will also be featured in the 'Holiday West Highland Magazine' later in the summer and "The Scottish Field" again over the Winter. This will all help to increase visitor awareness and numbers.

This year Crarae celebrated the centenary of the planting of the species *Rh falconeri* grove. These substantial big-leaf rhododendrons form one of the most spectacular displays in the early spring. The Friends have offered to fund the replacement of the plaque that celebrated their planting (it mysteriously disappeared last year).

The Treasurers Report is to be covered later in the meeting; the Chairman reported that we are conscious of the fact that we are holding too much money. The reasons are twofold; first that quite deliberately we decided not to further support projects like the development of the Forest Garden project until the NTS had sorted out their staffing and resource problems and second there have been no calls for smaller amounts of funding from the garden's management and no progress at all on the development of the garden entrance project as we had expected. We will look for secure short term investments in order to make something out of the cash surplus that we hold.

The 'Carols at Crarae' musical evening was held at Furnace last December and was a great success. At the end of the meeting we will have a chance to discuss whether we should continue with that venue or return to the Visitors Centre here.

6. Treasurer's Report and approval of Accounts 2017/18

The Treasurer gave a verbal report for the past year's accounts. In the year to 28th February 2018, income was maintained with a small increase with funds from a bank account that was closed as part of the tidying up of the finances. The increase in expenses was due to the subscription to Heart of Argyll Tourism Alliance and development of the website while postage was down as a result of increased usage of emails.

Overall, finances are healthy with over £14,000 in the bank available for future projects in the Garden.

No progress was made with recovering Gift Aid tax from HMRC as there were insufficient records available to support any claim. It is intended to obtain fresh signed forms from members wishing to gift aid their subscriptions and donation in order to be able to make a claim in the current financial year.

PH also confirmed that he has been 'tidying' up the accounts and we now only have one account, with electronic banking access.

Friends of Crarae

Scottish Charity No: SC033244

**Income and Expenditure
for the year to 28th February 2018**

2016/2017		2017/2018
	INCOME	
2133.00	Subscriptions	1919.00
	Donations	904.00
383.00	Carol concert	418.00
	Gift aid	0.00
0.00	Bank interest	0.00
2516.00	Total Income	3241.00
	EXPENDITURE	
	Donations to NTS	0.00
	AGM	56.29
	Events	10.00
	Promotion	100.00
	Website	137.88
184.00	Postage/stationery	105.97
184.00	Total Expenditure	410.14
2332.00	SURPLUS/DEFICIT	2830.86
	Balance Sheet as at 28 February 2018	
	CURRENT ASSETS	
0.00	Cash on hand	0.00
12028.60	Current Account	14859.46
	Debtors	0.00
	CURRENT LIABILITIES	
	Creditors	-0.00
12028.60	TOTAL NET ASSETS	14859.46
	REPRESENTED BY	
9696.60	Working Capital at 1st March 2017	12028.60
2332.00	Surplus/Deficit for year 2017-2018	2830.86
12028.60	TOTAL FUNDS as at 28 February 2018	14859.46

All funds are unrestricted

7. Garden Report

The garden report was delivered in two parts – VW read extracts from the report provided by the 1st Gardener, Derek Shankland with additional comments by Simon Jones, (Gardens and Designed Landscapes Manager – Glasgow and West) and Kim Cogan provided her Visitor Centre report.

Derek Shankland joined as 1st Gardener in August 2017. Due to lack of garden staff over the prior period the garden was in a state of neglect when he joined, there were therefore some immediate priorities.

1) Improve sightline from Visitor Centre to the *Eucalyptus urnigera*, one of the showcase trees in the garden; they felled the *Thuja plicata* which was impairing the view. It was sad to see it go. However it was beginning to also cause problems with access to the burn and was also beginning to grow into the already partially eroded path.

2) In November they felled and removed a large *Picea sitchensis* which was suffering from ‘butt rot fungus’. It was overlooking the main entrance to the garden and no risks could be taken with it possibly coming down itself. Once felled (perfectly!), with the help of the team from Arduaine, they cross-cut and removed the timber. The operation was paid for by the landowner.

3) Clear and improve the hillside drainage. The vast network of ditches helps channel the water off of the hillside and into the Crarae burn and ultimately into Loch Fyne. Water management in the garden is vital due to the high mounts of rainfall and it is important that the network of ditches continues to do what they should be doing to allow the Rhododendron collection in particular to dry out.

Further work is planned through this season and into the winter on ditch/drainage clearance, path work and hand rails. Thistle Campers will be used to supplement the resource needed to do this task.

4) The Mecanopsis bed needed attention, unfortunately the ‘Crarae’ variety does not perform that well in heavy wet soil, it prefers more sandy free draining soil, a different variety had been introduced to this bed called ‘Lingholm’. They are planning to remove all the M ‘Lingholm plants and bring back the Meconopsis ‘Crarae’. The work was originally planned to commence February 2018. SEE LATER RE ISSUES WITH THIS AREA.

5) A new ‘Project’ for the future is the Forest Garden to the North and West of the existing boundary line of the garden where lies a series of hidden gems within the Trust owned land. Before Derek started with the Trust some work had been commissioned for the garden using the woodland consultants Eamonn Wall and Co. This work re-commenced in October 2017 and there has been an action plan report submitted to the Trust.

Derek and the team would like to open up the existing path network, thin out any dangerous trees, repair bridges and allow this to become a woodland walk. It’s possible that the development of this could occur in stages.

VW also added points from Simon Jones’ update noting that that Edmund Collin (Gardener) has now left the Trust and that the recruitment drive for the Head Gardener position at Crarae

is ongoing. Simon also confirmed that two seasonal gardeners have been employed until the end of October to help with the backlog of seasonal duties.

One issue that has come to light in working with the Mecnopsis bed is that all Crarae nursery stock and the Meconopsis river bed have a pest infection. It was confirmed that the garden centre sales stock are not affected as it is delivered directly to the sales area.

The Trust is going to use the £6k from the Lady Eda Jardine Trust to support the actions that are required to ameliorate the issue.

In summary the following actions have been taken or planned to control and limit the infection:

- 1) Remove all the meconopsis from the river bed and burn them and to cut back the edges of the bed to ensure no further spread. There needs to be a sign to explain the bed is to be left fallow for 2 years.
- 2) Sanitise the nursery
- 3) Strengthen biosecurity measures

Thistle Camps – Derek hosted a Thistle Camp group and they specifically worked on those areas that were causing concern to the Friends group mentioned in the Chairman's report.

Kim Ritchie commented that it had been some time since she had visited the garden and thought that both the garden and the new Visitor Centre were looking great. She had not been previously aware of the significant changes to the Visitor Centre and Café and was pleasantly surprised.

Kim Cogan presented her report as Visitor Services Manager. Crarae Garden has seen a lot of change since the last AGM. Following the restructuring of the Garden operations there is no longer a Property Manager. The new structure comprises a full time Visitor Services Manager (Kim) with support from seasonal Visitor Services Staff in the Visitor Centre.

Kim also confirmed the current garden resource structure.

Head Gardener – Vacant Post

First Gardener – Derek Shankland

Gardener – Currently covered by 2 Seasonal Gardeners (Derek & Arend)

She mentioned that the staffing situation has led to operational difficulties in both the Garden and the Visitor centre. She also explained that Arduaine gardeners are continuing to help and support where possible.

Kim confirmed they are still getting a lot of positive comments from visitors, she speaks to visitors on a daily basis and most are positive, however she confirmed that there have been a few that have been disappointed at the garden as it is at the moment, but when the situation is explained most fully understand.

Visitor numbers and income is not great this year as the staffing shortages and the timing of the restructure has meant that the Visitor Centre has occasionally had to close when it would have otherwise been open.

Visitors are down 17% and income is down 21% so far this year.

8. Election of Committee Members and Office Bearers – DS confirmed that he was ‘giving notice’ of intent to resign as Chairman; a new Chair will be required for the fiscal year 2019 onwards.

Victoria Winters confirmed that she was happy to take on the full role of Secretary as opposed to acting and was proposed by Janet Foster, seconded by Kim Ritchie. The motion was carried.

9. Any Other Business

The venue for the Carols was discussed and the members present voted to return the Carols to Crarae as long as the required conditions set by the NTS could be met. VW confirmed that she would follow up and confirm.

Victoria encouraged everyone to visit the website www.friendsofcrarae.com for events, photos, information.

The Chairman acknowledged the work of the Committee and thanked them for all their efforts and for setting up for the evening.

The meeting was closed.