

FRIENDS OF CRARAE
Scottish Charity SC 033244

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at Crarae Gardens on Saturday 20 July 2019.

Present: David Sillar (Chairman), Peter Hogbin (Treasurer), Victoria Winters (Secretary), Barbara Service (Committee Member), Dilla Patrick (NTS Visitor Services Manager), Robert Carroll (Head Gardener), John Hall, Janet Foster, Dorothy Hogbin, Alison Hay, Anthony and Alison Brown.

1. Chairman's Welcome

David Sillar welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Apologies

Ann Dodd, Elspeth Wells, Hew Service, Grace Macleod, Kim and Iain Ritchie, Ellie and David Bittlestone.

3. Minutes of the last Meeting - The minutes of the meeting held on 21st July 2018 were approved. They were proposed by Peter Hogbin and seconded by Barbara Service. 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

David Sillar began his report by thanking the committee for all their hard work and wanted it to be recorded that he thought that 'the team was wonderful'. He reminded the team that in their enthusiasm, should remember that they are not the marketing arm of the NTS and should not be doing their job for them!

He also would like to congratulate Crarae management and senior management on their approach to solving the crisis of resourcing last year and for the tremendous in roads that have been made on the backlog and in planning for the future.

One additional avenue for funds is the potential for underwriting the cost of an 'apprentice' for 3 months supplied by Mid-Argyll Youth and Development Services. Peter Hogbin is exploring the possibility with Robert Carroll.

The Friends of Crarae continues to receive support from its members and although there have been no payments to the National Trust for Scotland for specific items for use in the gardens funds are being built up in anticipation of extensive works to be carried out in the year to 28 February 2020, principally on the new footpath linking Minard village with the Garden, a proposed shelter for visitors at the Crarae beech and the projected revival for the Forest Garden, which may well require serious fund-raising efforts in the future.

The Friends continues to raise funds in addition to memberships by holding a Carol Concert at the Visitor Centre in December which is well attended, particularly but local families.

The Friends have greatly improved the on-line presence of the Garden through social media and by joining Heart of Argyll (which the NTS did not elect to do on its own behalf). It is

hoped that visitor numbers to the Garden can be increased by exposure to local tourist-aimed sites.

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 2019, income was down with reduction in subscriptions and donations. Membership is dropping away! In the last two years we have seen a decline in paid up members from 139 down to 93 - a loss of some 40 members. That said, we retain a healthy sum in the bank account which is available to fund more and better facilities in the Garden.

While the Trust has now moved forward by providing us with the superb team of gardeners in Robert and Derek, we can now plan to use some of the accrued funds to substantially enhance their work in the Garden. Your committee will be drawing up plans in the next few weeks to ensure that the Friends of Crarae can make this special place even better.

The accounts were proposed to be adopted by John Hall and seconded by Janet Foster.

Friends of Crarae		Scottish Charity No: SC033244	
Income and Expenditure for the year to 28th February 2019			
2017/2018		2018/2019	
	INCOME		
1919.00	Subscriptions	1783.00	
904.00	Donations	480.00	
418.00	Carol concert	301.00	
	Gift aid	0.00	
0.00	Bank interest	0.00	
3241.00	Total Income	2544.00	
	EXPENDITURE		
	Donations to NTS	0.00	
58.29	AGM	21.10	
10.00	Events	0.00	
100.00	Promotion	100.00	
137.88	Website	143.88	
105.97	Postage/stationery	363.52	
	Insurance	99.31	
410.14	Total Expenditure	727.81	
2830.86	SURPLUS/DEFICIT	1816.19	
	Balance Sheet as at 28 February, 2019		
	CURRENT ASSETS		
	Cash on hand	0.00	
14859.46	Current Account	16745.25	
	Debtors	0.00	
	CURRENT LIABILITIES		
0.00	Creditors	-69.60	
14859.46	TOTAL NET ASSETS	16675.65	
	REPRESENTED BY		
12028.80	Working Capital at 1st March 2018	14859.46	
2830.86	Surplus/Deficit for year 2018-2019	1816.19	
14859.46	TOTAL FUNDS as at 28 February 2019	16675.65	
	All funds are unrestricted		
	 Peter Hogbin Treasurer		

7. Garden Report

The garden report was delivered in two parts – Dilla Patrick began:

2019 has seen many changes to the personnel at Crarae with Robert Carroll being appointed as Head Gardener, Derek Shankland is still First Gardener, and both are working very hard to improve the gardens. They are still under resourced and we are working hard to find volunteers to help them with upkeep and improvements.

The Visitor centre has also seen some change with myself (Dilla Patrick) taking over from Kim Cogan as Visitor services manager and Ealasaid Mackay and Sarah Clinton also joining the team along with Adam and Harley returning. The new team is working well together to improve the overall visitor experience.

The garden saw a busy spring this year with increased visitor numbers, this year to date 7,897 compared with 5,911 last year and overall takings are up by 44% YTD

The Gardens recently had their VisitScotland grading and retained 4 stars with a score of 80%, despite the new tougher parameters for Gardens being introduced. The members of staff present on the day were all personally mentioned and complemented in the report. The Car Park was an area which could be improved and is something we have been in discussion about as a project over the winter.

This season we have had very many comments about how wonderful the gardens are even after the blooms have faded and the only complaints have been about the midges or the rain.

Robert Carroll provided an update to the Garden report circulated in the Members newsletter in April 2019.

Last week the garden welcomed the second of the three annual visits from the NTS Thistle camp volunteers and again many tasks were completed although the weather made it slightly more of a challenge, our volunteers were equal to the task working in really tough conditions at times. They cleared a lot of bracken from around the visitor centre and the high banking adjacent to the carpark along with clearing of lysichiton in the bog garden. The ditch along the top of the forest drive was cleared of Gunnera with all parts being dug out and burned in the yard, the group also erected some temporary fencing and planted a sequoia hedge at the back of the visitor centre and continued some re-graveling of some paths in the lower garden. New tables have also been erected in the greenhouse so it is ready to re-start as a nursery.

Although this help is much appreciated and makes a big difference much more is required and to that end, he will be looking at ways to increase our labour output by adding to the team through recruiting local volunteering and other possibilities in the pipeline? VW interjected that the establishment of a regular Friends day may help and that there have been some expressions of interest. Dilla commented that Sarah from the Visitor center has become the first volunteer!

As July nears its end the Garden is becoming a bit lost as is the case in most west coast gardens with the amorphous mass growth of greenery around every corner and summer holidays and training days taking a toll.

Derek and Robert continue with much grass cutting and now begin a long period of strimming in the further parts of the garden now that the bluebells are gone to seed. They also must continue with the removal of Gunnera and Lysichiton. All these tasks and maintenance jobs are becoming more efficiently tackled as they develop the work systems and improve the weekly and monthly planning and identify more efficient methods of working.

Feedback from the new team in the visitor centre has remained largely positive although they know much needs to be done, but on a whole we are achieving good customer comments and hopefully these same visitors will begin to see improvements each time they return. Robert's goal is to receive comments on how well tended the garden is, as well as how peaceful and lovely it is.

Robert went on to comment that he had found notes from Sir Ilay and would like to use these to improve the 'interpretation' in the garden as well as the plant database and labelling.

Comments from that time were on the natural beauty of the garden, but also how well tended and neat and tidy it was. Robert is recording the jobs that should be but aren't being done as well as keeping records of what is achieved to help support a case for additional resource. Peter Hogbin asked what resources Robert thought he would need – 3 gardeners and a Forester would be ideal.

8. Election of Committee Members and Office Bearers

David Sillar resigned as Chairman. The candidate for Chairperson of the Friends of Crarae, Alison Hay was nominated by Peter Hogbin and seconded by Victoria Winters.

Alison Hay then took her place as Chair of the remainder of the meeting. She began by thanking David and the committee for thinking of her and for the overwhelming support for her joining the team.

Her fondness for the garden has been developing since 1983 and that she has always felt a connection with the garden, particularly latterly as her son Andrew was employed there for a number of years. As a member of the local Minard community, she also commented on the fact that the path between the village and gardens has been talked about for years at the community council level and that she would like to ensure that project goes ahead. She also commented that she had experience in sourcing avenues of resource (manpower) from her involvement with Auchindrain and would welcome the opportunity to explore how that might be realised with the Crarae management team.

9. Any Other Business

Victoria Winters raised a number of points of AOB.

The website visitors are at 14,811.

The garden is mentioned in a recent guidebook publication by the Heart of Argyll Tourism Alliance and she ensures it is mentioned in any tourism related publication that she is working on. She also has started an Instagram account to start to tell the story of the garden (history and archaeology) and to ensure that when people are researching the area online Crarae Gardens gets captured as a visitor attraction for multiple interest groups.
@thefriendsofcrarae

The venue for the Carols was discussed and the date proposed was the 12th December, DP confirmed that she would like to open the Visitor Centre on the 3 weekends before Christmas for a series of workshops e.g. wreath making and Christmas shopping opportunities. Ideas would be welcomed. The committee will convene to discuss the carols venue and pros cons for each one.

VW continued by thanking DS for his time as Chairman (8 years?), commenting that the Friends would miss his support, obvious passion for rhododendrons and not to mention the excellent mulled wine. She went on to state that he should be proud and feel assured that he was leaving a positive, highly motivated team to continue the aim of the Friends to promote, protect and support the historically and botanically important gardens that we all love so much.

AH closed the meeting by sending her sincere thanks to DS as Chairman and hopes that he would continue to be in touch with the Friends and available should she require any advice.