

FRIENDS OF CRARAE
Scottish Charity SC 033244

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at Crarae Gardens on Saturday 23 July 2016.

Present: David Sillar (Chairman), David Green (Treasurer), Victoria and John Hall, Kim Cogan (NTS Visitor Centre Manager), Janet Foster, Margaret Green, Margaret and Bill Gray, Jan Alison Norman, Leonard and Catherine McNeil, Moira Smart, Laura Skelton, Fiona Campbell Rice (Secretary), Peter Rice.

1. Chairman's Welcome

David Sillar welcomed everyone to the meeting with a particular welcome to Kim Cogan and Victoria Winters as new committee members. A toast was raised to the Friends of Crarae on the 30th anniversary of its founding.

2. Apologies

Mark Jefferey (Crarae Garden and Property Manager), Chris Major (NTS), Bruce and Catherine Weir, M T Selby, Grace MacLeod, Theresa and Bill Newman, Ann Dodd, Romano Zavaroni, Noreen Gow and Sarah Calderwood.

3. Minutes of the last Meeting held on 13 June 2015: copies were distributed and approved by all.

4. Matters Arising - none

5. Chairman's Report

This is a very special event as we are not being eaten by midges, so coming back inside the Visitor Centre is brilliant for the AGM and for the Carol Concert which raised nearly £500 with a full house; everyone is able to enjoy the benefits of the new kitchen to which we contributed funding including the cost of the commercial dishwasher. Kim Cogan is to be congratulated on getting it all going. Thanks largely to Victoria we have a new website and have relaunched the newsletter, the membership list has been updated, and the Friends revitalised. Hopefully the new footpath between the garden and Minard will be achieved soon. David Sillar then read out the Letter from Keith Halstead, Assistant Director of the National Trust for Scotland, thanking the Friends for their financial contribution towards the NTS Visitor Centre kitchen.

6. Treasurer's Report and approval of Accounts 2015/16

The Treasurer circulated copies of Accounts, showing our contributions: computer to be available to visitors with a plant database, book on Rhododendrons, brush-cutter, contribution towards the kitchen and dishwasher etc. David Green said he hoped that the NTS will provide detailed accounts of the kitchen upgrade so we know how the money was spent.

We now have 164 members and 9 honorary members; the subscriptions are the major income with additional funds raised at the Christmas concert event. This year we have spent more

than we received, this was partly because we didn't spend anything last year. So now OSCR is happy we are doing what we were set up to do, and we still have £9,600.

Gift Aid question: Currently, OSCR is overwhelmed by charitable applications, but claiming is being simplified and they can take the information from the new website so it will catch up and come through eventually.

Kim thanked everyone for the contribution towards the kitchen without which the café couldn't have been extended; this attracts people to come in and then go round the garden. However, this does need to be better known locally and groups are always welcome.

7. Garden Report

Victoria read out the report from Mark Jeffery, the NTS Garden and Property Manager who sent his apologies, being unavoidably away.

Mark thanked everyone for their vital support of these wonderful gardens. The National Trust for Scotland is currently undergoing a period of restructuring with the aim to focus greater resources at NTS properties which it is hoped will benefit Crarae. Visitor numbers in May and June were very good, helped by the wonderful spell of fine weather. The new kitchen was installed at the beginning of the year which has been very popular with visitors. The major project this year is to apply for a bridge across the burn in the upper part of the garden so that staff can access the other side without having to go onto the main road and drive to Furnace to turn around; this would give safer access and open up that part of the garden for further development. The Rhododendrons and Azaleas were even more splendid this year than last, attracting many visitors. However, the challenge is to maintain visitor numbers more evenly throughout the season, especially during mid-summer. Various ideas are being considered: adding another spectacular plant range like the Cardiocrinums which are looking good this year, extending the Meconopsis collection and/or creating a fruit and vegetable garden. A path connecting the garden to Minard is being sought with funding possibly from A'Chruach windfarm via the West Loch Fyne Community Council. Mark thanked Kim and her family for all their work in the Visitor Centre, and also Jason and Andy for their work in the garden.

An idea was put forward by Moira Smart: the beautiful colours just now and at any time would be ideal for artist/photographic groups.

A photographic calendar of the garden for sale in the shop was suggested as another way to raise funds.

8. Election of Committee Members and Office Bearers – Victoria Winters was proposed by Janet Foster and seconded by David Green, all in favour. Kim Cogan continues as a co-opted member of the Committee as Manager of the Visitor Centre.

9. Any Other Business

A sheet was circulated asking for volunteer helpers for the garden/Visitor Centre.

Christmas event on Thursday 15 December 6pm doors open for shopping with a start time of 7pm at Crarae Visitor Centre.

Victoria encouraged everyone to visit the website www.friendsofcrarae.com for events, photos, information; ideas are welcome and the contact e-mail goes to Victoria. There have been 485 visitors to the website since April when it was set up. Victoria said that the daughter of the late Mrs Hersey Robertson (one of the founding members of the Friends) had visited last week and asked for anecdotes about the garden so that she could promote it. (It was suggested we send copies of the old newsletters to her) and Leonard McNeil suggested old newsletters could be available on the website – Victoria said this could be done, but would take some time, so in the meantime copies will be sent by post.

Kim said suggestions are welcome, especially anything members would like to see available in the café or shop or garden. She is encouraging local craft makers to approach her.

Laura Skelton was interested in the idea of a vegetable garden to grow produce for use in the café (and, possibly, as ‘pick your own’), although it would be a lot of work.

The Chairman acknowledged the work of the Committee and thanked them for all their efforts and in particular, Kim Cogan (and her family) for setting up the evening.

David Sillar was thanked for his work as Chairman.