

## The Friends of the Hermitage of Braid and Blackford Hill

Minutes of the 8<sup>th</sup> AGM held at Cluny Centre, Morningside, on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2007 at 7.30 pm

**Welcome:** The Chairman Rob Elton opened the meeting by welcoming those present: Committee Members Jo Doake, Moira Stevenson, Helen Gardner, Paul Mooney and Goff Cantley (minuting), plus 11 ordinary members. He particularly welcomed City of Edinburgh Council Ranger Service member Jessica Morgado and invited her to start the proceedings with her presentation.

**Presentation:** Jessica gave a PowerPoint presentation in which she highlighted the staffing changes that had taken place over the last year leading the appointment of a new full-time Senior Ranger, a part-time Senior Ranger and 2 new Countryside Rangers. The part-time Senior Ranger is to help Jessica with Blackford Hill and specific projects. A new development is the secondment of a Park Ranger to the Reserve. Jessica went on to detail some of the main achievements of 2006/07 and the planned projects for 2007/08 (subject to funding) under the headings of the Visitor Centre, Hermitage Wood, Blackford Pond and Blackford Hill:

Visitor Centre: 06/07 - new displays and games provided. 5 days of HBOS staff in garden work around Hermitage House and elsewhere.

Projects for 07/08 - restoration of three Adam fireplaces, provision of a Friends' Display Board in the Centre, and development of handcraft projects for the public.

Hermitage Wood: 06/07 - Hogmanay storm had necessitated a major clearance of damaged and dangerous trees, replacement of 6 large trees on the main drive, and an ongoing tree survey to check the rest of the woodland. On the burn 2 clean-ups had been carried out, dead wood had been reduced and low branches cut back. Primroses had been introduced to several areas. 8 new benches had been provided, and others moved. The Wildflower Meadow had accidentally been cut and the extent of natural seeding would need to be monitored. Work had started on the restoration of the Howe Dean path and its bridges. Projects for 07/08 - Development of a new woodland management plan, increased use of volunteers for projects and maintenance, replacement of all bird boxes, installation of barn owl box, ongoing monitoring of the wildflower meadow and a structural survey of the Braid Burn (where some of the side walls are collapsing).

Blackford Pond: 06/07 – 2 clean-ups undertaken, outlet monitored against flooding risk, bench positions re-planned and benches moved, water-edge shrubbery controlled, algal bloom measures taken, new playground created.

Projects for 07/08 – increasing volunteer input, controlling of edge vegetation, outlet monitoring, ensuring good algal bloom control.

Blackford Hill: 06/07 – New footpath created from Observatory Road to the Hill, thanks to SNH funding, firebreaks created by volunteers in the gorse, rock whitebeam trees planted, vegetation cut back in areas, paths and steps cleared, Himalayan balsam controlled by 111 volunteer days of pulling plants, no raves in the Quarry. Projects for 07/08 – increasing volunteer input on projects and maintenance, ongoing balsam control, monitoring whitebeam trees, changing the cutting regime on grassland areas, particularly at Observatory Car Park.

In conclusion Jessica highlighted key areas of her work this coming year as being;  
Working towards a new woodland management plan and getting Friends input to this.  
Working increasingly with the Friends.  
Increasing the input of all volunteers to help on projects.  
Controlling the balsam in the LNR, including that on the Hermitage Golf Course if possible.  
Providing an enjoyable visitor experience to those visiting the park.

A short question and answer session followed in which issues around the above topics were discussed in more detail. The Chairman then thanked Jessica for her presentation and for her willingness to work well with the Friends.

**Business of AGM:** The Chairman then proceeded with the business of the AGM:

**Apologies:** Committee Members Harry Henniker and Elaine Abbott. Members, Jeff Maguire, Sandy Mullay, Geoff Ball, Frank and Shirley Howell, Christian Thin, Kathy Englemann, Fred Mackintosh, and Daphne Walls.

**Previous Minutes:** The minutes of the previous AGM held on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2006 were approved, (proposed by Paul Mooney, seconded Moira Stevenson).

**Matters arising:** None

**Annual Report:** The Chairman presented his annual report for the year, referring to the work of the Committee most of which was covered in articles in the Hill and Hermitage Newsletters. He thanked the Committee members for their contribution, and for their particularly good efforts in publishing the attractive Nature Trail leaflet which had been well received. The creation of the Nature Trail with its supporting marker posts had been the Committee's main achievement this year. He also thanked Stuart Hamilton for his assistance with maintaining the Friends' [www.FOHB.org](http://www.FOHB.org) website. This had received a remarkable 6,704 hits during the year. In response to a suggestion that the website be given more prominence, the Chairman had to report that, unfortunately, none of the Committee members are experienced in website updating and this made it difficult to keep the website as up-to-date and forward looking as he would have liked. The current Nature Trail leaflet and Hill and Hermitage Newsletters did quote it for all to note. [Comments were invited on the work of the Committee at all stages.] Whilst indoor meetings had been limited to one poorly attended meeting, a programme of outdoor events had been well attended. The Dawn Bird Watch had seen or heard a record 33 birds. The balsam bashes, Moth Night and Fungus Walk had all been well attended. Practical conservation works had focused on the balsam removal during June, and the removal of tree protection boxes from the young trees in the Community Woodland, a task that is ongoing and strictly speaking outside the LNR. A picnic table had been provided in the Wildflower meadow, thanks to a generous bequest from the estate of Mr Brian McManus. Plans were in hand to replace the viewfinder on the top of Blackford Hill, for which SNH had just offered some two-thirds funding. The Chairman recorded the Committee's appreciation of the good relationship and cooperation with Ranger, Jessica Morgado. In response to questions, the Chairman advised an enquirer to contact Morningside Community Council on the issue of old water courses and possible flooding issues, although Scottish Water was the best contact over specific issues. A concern was expressed to the Chairman regarding damage to water life arising from the flood protection measures. The Ranger confirmed that the contractor, Carillion, are working closely with her and showing a very good concern over wildlife matters.

**Audited Accounts:** The Chairman drew members attention to the audited accounts circulated with the meeting papers. The Treasurer clarified that the apparent trebling of income from the previous year was due to an increased number of subscriptions, particular donations, an SNH grant and a 5-year gathering in of Gift Aid amounting to some £850. Expenditure had increased due to planned projects, particularly the Nature Trail leaflet production and the associated marker posts. The Treasurer stated that he felt the Friends' financial position was sound. He encouraged all members to ensure that they had signed the Gift Aid declaration, since he was able to recover income tax paid to increase the value of the funds. The accounts were approved without dissent.

**Elections:** The Chairman advised that there was, once again, no nomination for Vice-Convener. There being no other nominations, the following persons were elected;

Rob Elton – Convener (Proposed M Stevenson, seconded J Doake)

Goff Cantley – Secretary (E. Abbot, H Gardner)

Paul Mooney – Treasurer (R. Elton, G Cantley)

Ordinary Members of Committee: Helen Gardner. No new members offered their services.

Anticipated Members to be co-opted to the Committee: Elaine Abbot, Moira Stevenson. Jo Doake.

In response to a question, the Chairman confirmed that office bearers had to be elected/re-elected every year and committee members every three years.

**Independent Examiner:** The Chairman confirmed that Lindsay Walls had examined the year's accounts and was willing to do so again. No alternative action was proposed.

**AOCB:** No issues raised. The Chairman then invited the assembled company to partake of the refreshments available.

Goff Cantley, Secretary, 13 November 2007