

**MINUTE OF THE 5th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING,
of the Friends of the Hermitage and Blackford Hill,
held at the Cluny Centre, Cluny Drive, Morningside
on Thursday October 30th 2003 at 7.30 pm.**

The meeting was opened by Rob Elton, Convener of the Friends, who thanked the 24 members present for attending.

The first main item of business was a briefing from Fergus Cook, the Countryside Ranger, about the previous year in the Hermitage. Fergus began by explaining that the Ranger Service was still short-staffed, and that this had had an impact on the patrols and surveys they could do in the reserve and elsewhere, as well as their programme of school visits. He then went on to describe the main practical activities over the past year, including the installation of barley straw rafts on the pond to get rid of algal blooms, the cutting back of laurel, cutting of fire breaks in the gorse on the Hill and clean-ups by the Dirty Weekenders and the Girl Guides. Recent felling around the Doocot was intended to recreate its original setting under the policy of conservation of the built environment, and had mostly involved removal of non-native trees, especially sycamore. The long-awaited refurbishment of the sundial outside Hermitage House was now imminent. Plans for next year included resurfacing the path north of the burn, a historic landscape survey, investigation of the hydraulic rams in the burn, new signs for the Doocot, bicycle lock stands at the entrances, a grass survey, a wheelchair ramp for Hermitage House, removal of 16 diseased elm trees and the scalloping of the conifer woods south of the burn. Points raised by members included the issue of how much path restoration should be done, and clearly the policy on this needs to involve a compromise between access for the public and potential disturbance of wild life.

After eight apologies had been announced (see below), the minute of the 4th AGM was accepted as a correct record (proposed Mark McInnes, seconded Grant Fortune). The only Matter Arising raised was the flood prevention scheme, which was believed to be going ahead after objections had been resolved, but which was not expected to help prevent flooding in the Hermitage (indeed possibly to make it more likely) as its main priority was protection of built property.

Rob then handed over to outgoing Vice-convener Jeff Maguire, who presented the Annual Report for 2002-03 written by Sandy Mullan. This had already been circulated to members, so Jeff chose to discuss key themes rather than going through the report in detail. First he commented on the contrast between the good attendance at recent events such as the fungal afternoon and bat evening as against less enthusiasm from members for practical work on steps or helping with Sunday afternoon catering, and this may require a rethink as to the

Friends' priorities. However, the finances were sound, with three successful grant applications in the last two years, and recent innovations included the website, which was now being very successfully maintained by Morag Smart. Examples of our continuing contribution to the infrastructure of the reserve were the purchase and proposed installation of bat and bird boxes and the new four-way sign that it was hoped to install at the Scout Bridge. The Wetland Patch project had also progressed greatly during the year, although Jeff was too modest to stress his own invaluable contribution to this. Campaigning had also continued, with the golf course, Midmar field, floods and fireworks all requiring our attention. Finally Jeff mentioned some challenges ahead for the Friends: raising our profile, keeping up with planning applications and making an impact on the reserve.

Rob then thanked the outgoing Treasurer Susanna Dunbar for her work on the Friends' finances, and the audited accounts for 2002-03 were accepted as correct (Deb Allen, Jeff Maguire). A sum of £129.82 was taken at the door in subscriptions and donations, with a further £20 received with apologies by the Secretary.

After Rob had expressed his appreciation of the contributions to the Friends from the five members leaving the committee, Jeff took the chair temporarily for the elections to the new committee. Rob Elton was re-elected as Convenor (Jeff Maguire, Susanna Dunbar) and Pete Matthews was elected as Vice-Convenor (Rob Elton, Grant Fortune). No candidates were put forward for the post of Secretary, so it was agreed that this would have to be left vacant for the present. Morag Smart was elected as Treasurer (Sandy Mullay, Rob Elton). Brian Smith, Andy Coates and Mark McInnes were continuing on the committee, and Paul Mooney was elected as a new member (Rob Elton, Mark McInnes). It was also noted that Andy Coates had volunteered to take over from Sandy Mullay as the editor of Hill and Hermitage.

Lindsay Walls volunteered to be the auditor for 2004-05, and this was agreed by the meeting.

Points raised under AOCB include a reminder from Louise Maguire about the importance of monitoring planning applications, the announcement of a website morningside.org.uk recently set up by Morningside Community Council and the planned planting of Sticky Catchfly on Blackford Hill due to take place the following Tuesday.

The formal business of the meeting was followed by refreshments kindly provided by Deb Allen and Susanna Dunbar, and the meeting closed at 9.45 pm.

Apologies received from: Sandy Mullay, Andy Coates, Amanda Ingram, Wilma Elton, Rupert Forbes, Jo Doake, Kathy Engelman, Sheila Hunter.
