

**MINUTE OF THE 6th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING,
of the Friends of the Hermitage and Blackford Hill,
held at the Cluny Centre, Cluny Drive, Morningside
on Thursday October 28th 2004 at 7.30 pm.**

The meeting was opened by Rob Elton, Convener of the Friends, who thanked the 25 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 described the main management activities of the past year, including the opening up of the conifer woodlands south of the Burn to increase diversity and remove non-native species of trees, the continuing efforts to remove laurel around the pond and the disposal of diseased elms. Other non-native invaders subject to continued clearance were giant hogweed, himalayan balsam and Japanese knotweed. Tree felling in front of the Doocot had been mainly aimed at increasing its visibility from the main drive. BTCV had helped with practical work in blocking off verges near the summit of the Hill and in re-surfacing the path near the Midmar field. The wild flower meadow had been cut and raked, and provided a diverse show of native species in season. Digging out stumps of felled trees on the hill was proving difficult, and some were instead being treated with biodegradable chemicals. The new path from the Doocot to near the Scout Bridge had been subject to some drainage problems. The work at the Royal Observatory was nearly finished and new juniper hedging had been planted round the car park. Condition surveys were needed for the Doocot roof and the main drive, but these had not been funded yet. It was hoped to do a grassland survey on the Hill, which was important as one of the few unimproved grassland sites in the area. The new volunteer ranger Des would need help cutting and raking grass on the Hill.

In answer to questions from the floor, Fergus reported that no noticeable effects had been observed in the lower Burn from the new golf course, and that the Community Woodland on the old quarry landfill site was not yet incorporated into the LNR. He was in favour of creating steps up to this site from Blackford Glen, and this was something the Friends might be able to help with. He also announced that the newly-appointed Ranger Hamish Bell would soon be joining the team. Fergus was warmly thanked for his informative contribution.

After 14 apologies had been announced (see below), the minute of the 5th AGM was accepted as a correct record (proposed Jeff Maguire, seconded Morag Smart). Under Matters Arising, Fergus confirmed that the historical survey had not yet been funded by the council.

Rob then presented the Annual Report for 2003-04, which had already been circulated to members. He reported that the Friends had had a low-key year because of a shortage of active committee members and in particular the lack of a Secretary, but that core activities had been maintained. A full programme of events had been put on thanks mainly to Pete Matthews' efforts, four excellent issues of Hill and Hermitage had been produced by the new editor Andrew Coates and the website had

been maintained by Morag Smart. Less active areas had included the Wetland Patch, campaigning, practical work and applications for grants, but there had been two burn clean-ups and plantings of sticky catchfly and primroses as well as further work on putting up bird and bat boxes. Possible areas for future practical work included clearing non-native plants, grassland cutting, building steps up to the landfill site and maintenance of the Wetland Patch, while the required surveys of the Doocot, the Burn and the main drive could be the subject of Friends' grant applications. Rob also solicited ideas for future activities from the audience, and suggestions included leafleting of the surrounding area to publicize our existence, different timing for practical events to encourage turnout, more liaison with local schools and greater publicity for forthcoming events on the noticeboards in the LNR.

The previously-circulated annual accounts for 2003-04 were then presented to the meeting, and Rob thanked the outgoing Treasurer Morag Smart for her work on the Friends' finances and also Lindsay Walls for auditing the accounts. A sum of £65 was taken at the door in subscriptions and donations, with a further £15 having been received earlier with apologies.

The meeting then proceeded to elect the committee for 2004-05. Rob Elton was re-elected as Convenor (Susanna Dunbar, Sandy Mullay) and Pete Matthews as Vice-Convenor (Jeff Maguire, Rob Elton). No candidates were put forward for the post of Secretary, so it was agreed that this would again have to be left vacant for the present. Paul Mooney was elected as Treasurer (Rob Elton, Pete Matthews). Three new committee members had been nominated prior to the meeting, and two further nominations were received from the floor. Thus the following five members were elected to the committee: Sandy Mullay (Brian Smith, Susanna Dunbar), Jeff Maguire (Morag Smart, Wilma Elton), Lindsay Ross (Rob Elton, Jeff Maguire), Goff Cantley (Rob Elton, Morag Smart) and Sandie Ross (Margaret Williams, Susanna Dunbar). As the three longest-serving ordinary committee members, Brian Smith, Andrew Coates and Mark McInnes were not eligible for re-election, but were coopted by the meeting in view of the fact that vacancies still remained on the committee.

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

The main point raised under AOCB was a discussion of the pros and cons of allowing cycling through the Hermitage, and Rob also reminded those present of the forthcoming Burn clean-up planned for the following Sunday.

The formal business of the meeting was followed by refreshments kindly provided by Morag Smart and Lindsay Ross, and the meeting closed at 9.45 pm.

Apologies received from: Andy Coates, Wilma Elton, Rupert Forbes, Jo Doake, Andrew Jeffrey, Pete Matthews, Miss C Thin, Barbara Richardson, Fred Mackintosh, Mark McInnes, Rosemary Davidson, Deb Allen, Brian Smith, Lindsay Walls.