

**MINUTE OF THE 7th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING,
of the Friends of the Hermitage and Blackford Hill, held at the Cluny Centre, Cluny Drive,
Morningside on Thursday October 27th 2005 at 7.30 pm.**

The meeting was opened by Rob Elton, Convener of the Friends. He began by thanking thirty Friends and members of the public for attending (one of the latter joined). Eleven apologies were received, including that of Duncan Monteith, the recently-appointed Countryside Ranger Supervisor, who had hoped to give a presentation on mountain biking, but who had been assigned to attend a course in St Andrews.

The first item of business was the traditional briefing about the last year at Hermitage, given by Countryside Ranger, Fergus Cook. Using a computerised display, Fergus illustrated some of the activities recently undertaken in the Reserve, including work done under the auspices of the Friends. He believed that Himalayan Balsam presented a threat as an invasive species, and would require constant control, but was able to communicate the good news that Cala Homes have agreed to a substantial rebuilding of the Pond island, as swans have abandoned the present, eroding island. Fergus then took questions on a number of matters. Jo Doake was concerned about tree felling to the north of the Observatory, and Fergus explained what was being undertaken, and the importance of the unimproved grassland at the site. Regarding the Pond, concern was expressed about the breakdown of the banks, while Fergus explained how careless distribution of bread for the wildfowl was feeding a rat colony. Notices advising the public to be careful with bread had been removed, possibly, he believed, by intelligent rats! There had been no reports of unusual wildlife in the LNR, although the mink family on the Braid Burn was being monitored. The fireworks displays were expected to be continued, and the effect on the owl population was unknown. There had been two fires on Blackford Hill this year. Attention then turned to cycling in the Hermitage, and Fergus outlined how the new Land Reform Act required the Council to expedite cycling through the Reserve. He believed that experience in the Pentlands had shown that wheel damage could be minimised and that relations between walkers and cyclists, occasionally fractious, could be managed. This was challenged by a member of the audience, pointing out that while the human foot compressed earth, a wheel moved it, and this had led to a churning up of paths, forcing hillwalkers to walk round the site, thus enlarging the path into a midden. Fergus offered to pass on this comment to his colleagues who are studying the effects of the new Act over a 2-year period. A number of other remarks were made relating to cyclists' behaviour towards walkers, and there was a report of early morning trail biking using motorised vehicles.

Rob Elton then introduced the business part of the AGM, after saying that he would like to see more clean up work sessions, and for them to be better supported. Lindsay Walls advised that the Morningside Community Council would be happy to offer the Friends financial assistance if required, and he had queried with Planning the status of the Midmar Paddock, which should be carefully monitored. No information was available about the new golf course on the south of the LNR, but it was thought to be busy only at weekends.

The Minute of 6th AGM and the Annual Report 2004-5 were both unanimously accepted as correct. Treasurer Paul Mooney introduced the Accounts, explaining that the apparent increase in subscriptions was due to late banking during changeover of office-holder, but that there had been two generous donations, one of £500 from the McManus estate. He thanked Morag Smart for her work as the previous Treasurer.

Elections to the Committee. Rob Elton offered himself as Chairman for one more year, and he and Paul Mooney were re-elected unanimously as Convener and Treasurer respectively. There were no nominations for Vice-Convener and Secretary, and Rob felt that the filling of the latter post would be helpful. Andrew Coates was co-opted back onto the committee after stepping down as the longest-serving ordinary member. Other nominations: Elaine Abbot (nominated Rob Elton/Seconded A.J. Mullan), Jo Doake (Jeff Maguire/Goff Cantley), Moira Stevenson (Andrew Coates/Rob Elton). All were elected, as were, in their unavoidable absence, Karl and Sandie Lloyd (the latter previously Miss Ross and now re-elected).

Lindsay Walls was re-appointed Auditor, and thanked for his work for the Friends.

It was decided to reduce the retail price of sweatshirts, at the Treasurer's discretion. Six sold.

Meeting closed at 8.50, with refreshments, kindly organised by Andy and Victoria Coates.

Apologies received from: Wilma Elton, Rupert Forbes, Sandie and Karl Lloyd, Vivienne and Stewart Tod, Barbara Richardson, Susanna Dunbar, David Land, Duncan Monteith (CEC Rangers), and Suzi Wong (Chairperson, Morningside CC).