

FRIENDS OF CRESCENT GARDEN

MINUTES OF THE 25TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Held in St Mary's Parish Centre, Alverstoke on Saturday 24th February 2018

1 Welcome from the Chairman

The Chairman welcomed all the Friends present and especially the Deputy Mayor of Gosport, Councillor Diane Furlong and her consort, Raymond, who had stepped in at very short notice as the Mayor, Councillor Linda Batty was unwell and sent her apologies.

She also welcomed Councillor Alan Scard and his wife Judy, Councillor Phillip Raffaelli, Caroline Smith (Parks & Gardens Officer GBC) and Mr and Mrs Ian Gallett. Peter and Gilly Jaynes also received a special welcome, having travelled from Northamptonshire to be present.

2. Apologies

Julia Porter, Brian Wright, Tony Whetstone and Jean Fulford.

3. Acceptance of Minutes of last AGM held on 11th March 2017.

With the amendment of Pat Jackson to Pam Jackson, the Minutes were accepted.

Proposed by V Whelan and seconded by P Mawby.

4. Chairman's Report – Elaine Martin

She couldn't believe that her first year as Chairman had passed so quickly.

The Garden was awarded a 13th Green Flag and, in the Gosport in Bloom competition, it won the prize for the best Volunteer Community and Neighbourhood Group. It also won the Mayor's Special Recognition Award to the delight of everyone involved. Annie Sayle and Lesley Flett – our Head Gardeners – would probably report on all this later.

She offered congratulations to them and all the members of the Green Team for their continued hard work and enthusiasm. They work every Wednesday, rain or shine, keeping the garden looking wonderful.

The Friends' first Chairman, Admiral John Hervey, generously left a bequest of £5000. In his memory it is planned to spend the money on more iron obelisks in the rose garden. Sadly, the fountain was vandalised in early April, and although cleverly repaired by Ian Drummond, she realises that one day it will have to be replaced. Some of the bequest is, therefore, being kept in reserve for a replacement fountain for the future.

The weather in May and June was wonderful, which helped the Plant Sale and Garden Party to be very successful.

The Plant sale gets bigger and better every year thanks to the efforts of the Green Team and Rita Rundle's careful nurturing of plants and cuttings in her back garden.

The Garden Party, the biggest event of the year, was held on a lovely warm June evening. Ticket sales were up on last year, and what with the Pimms, canapés and live music it made for a most enjoyable evening.

She thanked Rosemary Harrison, who handled the ticket sales and everyone who helped and supported the event.

During the year Enid Billington organised two outings. A spring visit to Great Dixter – A lovely garden and house but a freezing easterly wind all day made it particularly memorable. The autumn visit to the Wisley show was super - lots of interesting stands and a florist competition - plus - the wonderful gardens!

She offered thanks to Enid for her hard work and organisational skills.

On the Heritage Day in September the Garden participated on the Saturday only, and this time teas and cakes were served. Rita and Annie did two very interesting tours of the gardens.

In December, the Friends sponsored a tree at the Christmas Tree Festival which looked lovely – she thanked Rita, Sarah and Kate. Also, the Committee hosted a Christmas coffee morning for the Friends, to replace the Winter Fair, which is no longer financially viable.

In January this year Richard Martin gave a talk called ‘Alverstoke Past and Present’ - so successful that tickets were almost sold out in the first week of sales. There is now a waiting list if he wants to give it again.

She thanked Richard very much and said it made a good start to the year.

The Chairman emphasised the close working relationship with Gosport Borough Council and said how much their continued support and guidance through Caroline Smith was appreciated.

She expressed her sadness at having to announce that Lesley and Annie were stepping down as Head Gardeners. She said they had done a fantastic job for five years but they felt that now was the time to retire. A larger team would take over from them, which would be a more flexible arrangement – not such a tie for any one or two persons.

She thanked both of them and could not express enough what a wonderful job they had done and how much they would be missed.

Also, after ten years of diligent and loyal service, David Merritt is stepping aside as Honorary Secretary as he has not been too well this past year. She said he would not be leaving altogether, as he would still help to organise events and be a committee member, just doing a lot less.

She thanked David, for all that he had done and for being such a support in her first year as chairman

Three people are leaving the committee: Irene Buggle, Stephanie Fisher and Sharon Miles as they are now part of the new garden team that will replace Annie and Lesley.

Finally, she thanked everyone for coming today, and for the continued support of Friends of Crescent Garden.

The garden brings so much pleasure to so many people.

5. Treasurer's Report – Trish Kelly

The Treasurer presented the financial statement for 2017 and said that FoCG had enjoyed another great year and that all the fundraising events had been very successful, thanks to the hard work of the committee and gardening team – plus of course the good weather!

She thanked everyone for renewing their membership and said that without their support FoCG would not exist. New members would always be made most welcome to the friendly group, so encouraged those present to spread the word.

She said that administration costs would continue to be monitored closely. Several changes had been made this year with regard to photocopying and the production of the lovely newsletters and website in order to control costs. She noted that a further payment in respect of design and production costs should be added to the balance sheet figure as this payment of £200 was made in February 2018, but related to 2017.

The planned 2017 Illustrated Talk by Richard Martin, scheduled originally for December 2017, took place in January 2018 and a profit of £400 was made.

A special thank you was given to the family of the late John Hervey for his generous bequest of £5000 left to Crescent Garden. Careful consideration would be made to ensure these monies would be used to benefit the garden as a tribute to John.

The Friends have a marvellous gardening team who work so hard. In order to make life easier for the Head Gardeners, our No 2 account 'Garden' has been managed by Lesley and Annie. These monies are used to assist with garden maintenance and replacement of plants. During the year £708 has been spent, leaving a credit balance of £1464 towards 2018 expenditure. This arrangement has worked well.

She said it had been a most rewarding and enjoyable year, thanks to the Friends and looked forward to 2018, promising to continue to control expenditure, as has always been done.

She thanked Ian Gallett for auditing the accounts and Elaine and the Committee for their help and support during the year.

6. Head Gardeners' Report – Lesley Flett & Annie Sayle

Our talk today is entitled '**Conserving Crescent Garden**'. Five years ago, Lesley and I became 'head gardeners' and we felt our role was to conserve the garden, as it was planned by the original Friends, back in 1991.

As you may well know, Crescent Garden was part of the plans of the architect Thomas Ellis Owen for "Angleseyville" in 1826 - and that he was commissioned by Robert Cruickshank, a notable Gosport entrepreneur who wanted to create a fashionable new watering place like Brighton.

However - By 1949, the Garden had become a wilderness, and Cruickshank's great grand – daughter Pauline handed over its control to the Borough Council to be used as an open space for the enjoyment of the people of Gosport. The council did not maintain the space as a Regency Garden but, in 1989, they began working with the Hampshire Garden Trust and Hampshire County Council to reclaim the Garden. The railings were re-made and paths were restored and gravelled.

We are indebted to the original Friends of Crescent Garden formed in 1991 by Wendy Osborne. The Friends grew in number, much encouraged by the Hampshire Garden Trust and the Garden History Society.

It was decided that the Garden's Regency character should be restored. Wendy Osborne devised a central planting based on a design by JC Loudon from the period and it was decided that no plants should be used that were not in this country by 1850. Lesley and I have sought to follow this example.

In order to do this we rely upon the hard work of the current Green Team. They are a wonderful group that carry out a variety of jobs from weeding, to cleaning the fountain, to pruning shrubs and small trees, sweeping leaves in the autumn that go on to produce our own fantastic compost. And of course the wonderful compost is created at the west end of the garden by our very own 'Compost Man', David Palmer.

To carry on the period planting we have reintroduced Tulipa Couleur Cardinal and Kaizerskroon and introduced Tulipa sylvestris. We have also reintroduced Tulipa Cluisiana. Of course in Regency times at the height of Tulipmania, these plants were prohibitively expensive. We are fortunate that today we can afford to create this magnificent display for the public to enjoy. We have used indigenous wild plants - e.g. actively splitting and encouraging the growth of snowdrops.

Tree work is managed by GBC and we liaise with Dave Stubington. Our priority is the specimen trees. To that end other trees have been removed, reduced or crown lifted to maintain the health of these special trees. For example this year the Amelanchier, Flowering Cherry and Slender Magnolia have performed very well since large trees surrounding them were pruned to give more space and light.

Conserving Crescent Garden is not without challenges. One of the main ones being fighting off the dreaded Honey Fungus. Despite many physical barriers having been put in place, every autumn we see more evidence of this fungus. There is no cure, but by keeping plants healthy, they will fight it off.

Another deadly disease is Fire Blight, and unfortunately *Pyrus Salicifolia pendula* succumbed to this and had to be replaced.

Another challenge is that some of the original planting has reached a stage where it needs to be overhauled. We had to make a difficult decision about the Cyprus trees. They had been badly damaged by snow in winter 2010, and despite remedial action, didn't recover. They looked ugly and became unhealthy, and so were removed.

Our great British weather throws up challenges every year, and we often have standing water under the beautiful beech tree. This in turn stunts the growth of the grass, resulting in an area that we have found difficult to improve.

Having met many of the challenges as best we can, the Green Team have conserved a garden that is enjoyed by a wide range of visitors, such as wildlife – the birds and the bees, and hot and thirsty mallards en-route to somewhere else. Less welcome are nocturnal visitors like badgers and foxes that cause damage. Alfie and many other doggie friends visit the garden, such as Jasper and Archie, who is the first official canine Friend of Crescent Garden.

It is a pleasure to show people around the garden, talking about the history and horticulture that make this garden so unique. Among these are the local WI.

Our many fund raising events have seen growing numbers visiting the garden. Our NGS open day and plant sale attracts not only local people, but visitors from as far away as Dorset, the New Forest and Basingstoke. They all enjoy coffee, tea and delicious home-made cakes. To share the garden with others who will be inspired by it is an important element in ensuring its future conservation.

Celebrating successes is also important in maintaining enthusiasm. The annual garden party allows the Green Team and the FoCG to celebrate in mid-summer, and enjoy the roses and dianthus at their very best.

In 2017 we also celebrated another Green Flag award. At the Gosport in Bloom Awards 2017 the Green Team was presented with the gold award for Best Volunteer, Community and Neighbourhood Garden by Fred Dinenage, and then, at the end of the evening we were surprised and delighted to receive the Mayor's special award.

Conservation of Crescent Garden cannot be achieved without the help and support of our many partners. GBC have a huge part to play in Crescent Garden. Not only are they the owners, but many councillors, some in the audience, and officers give ongoing support. We would especially like to thank Caroline Smith for her unfailing faith in us and for sharing her practical advice and knowledge, over the last 5 years. We would also like to thank Dave Stubington, the arborist at GBC, for finding the funding for tree management, and to thank Gilly Drummond, President of the Association of Gardens Trusts, for contacting Wolfgang Bopp, director of The Sir Harold Hillier Gardens to give specific advice on the Mulberry tree. He thinks it is a magnificent specimen and advised us to "do very little!"

We would also like to thank Johnnie Bass from Mottisfont for his help with planning for the refurbishment of the Repton Baskets and advising us on choosing roses and dianthus

Many thanks to Pam Mawby and Elaine Martin, and all other members of the committee during our 5 years.

Thanks also to your good selves in the audience for supporting the Garden through your membership of The Friends of Crescent Garden.

Of course our greatest thanks go to all members of the Green Team, who work so hard in all weathers, to ensure that Crescent Garden is not only a joy to visit but also to conserve its very special Regency character.

7. **Election of Officers**

The results of the election was as follows:

Elected: Secretary, Gina Rowe, proposed Enid Billington, seconded Trish Kelly

Re-elected: Chairman, Elaine Martin, proposed Diane Furlong, Deputy Mayor, seconded Trish Kelly

Treasurer, Trish Kelly, proposed Irene Buggle, seconded Ginny Whelan

Re-elected

Ginny Whelan – Membership Secretary*

Rita Rundle - Committee Member*

Enid Billington – Committee Member* * denotes proposed by Pam Mawby

Rosemary Harrington – Committee Member* seconded by Elaine Martin

Jackie Askew – Committee Member*

David Merritt – Committee Member*

NB James Sykes has stood down from the Committee for the time being for health reasons.

8. **Visit Report** - Enid Billington

The next visit will be to Sherborne Castle in Dorset on Thursday 7th June, leaving the Parish Centre at 9.00am in a 34 seater coach (with no toilet facilities). The Castle is the home of the Digby Wingfield family and was formerly owned by Sir Walter Raleigh. It was landscaped by Capability Brown.

9. **Request for Food for the Garden Party** – Rita Rundle

Rita handed out lists for volunteers to sign up to contribute finger food for the Garden Party.

10. **Invitation to the Mayor to Speak** – Diane Furlong

The Deputy Mayor spoke of how, as a child, she had ridden a pony through what is now Crescent Garden and that last year she had been lucky enough to attend the Garden Party, as a result of which she would like to source some of the same plants for her own garden. She said that on the Mayor's Civic Day in September they had visited the Garden and it had been much appreciated. The mulberry tree was especially admired and she hoped it would bear fruit again soon. She expressed her thanks for the Garden and said that the Mayor sent her apologies for not being able to come.

11. **AOB**

None