Annual General Meeting held at 7.30pm on Monday 25th September 2017
Jaqueline du Pré Music Building, St Hilda’s College, Oxford

Apologies were received but none were noted. 53 members and 7 Directors attended.

1. Chairman’s report

The Chairman reported that FOBGHA are arguably the most successful Friends group in the University of Oxford in terms of numbers, money raised and things the Friends do to help. She said she was deeply honoured to have taken over as Chairman from Richard Mayou who, over 13 years, did so much to put the Friends onto a sound administrative and financial footing and who oversaw a huge expansion in numbers. She noted this is particularly important in the run up to the 400th anniversary of the Garden. She also wanted to thank another member of the Board, who stepped down on 25th September: Mary Isaac. During her time as Director, Mary ran virtually every important event the Friends have put on, including three plant sales, several ‘Jazz in the Meadow’ evenings, May morning, the Volunteers group and the annual opera event. On the Board, Mary was invaluable in helping to push for matters to be properly understood before decisions were reached.

As the Friends grow, so the administration of Friends’ business grows. Sally Jeffery started as the new Friends administrator almost exactly a year ago and Freya Jones was appointed in July to help with visits organisation, both for the Friends and now for Bobarts. An exciting development over the last year has been the introduction of volunteer guides to the Garden, organised by Peter Girling. There are now 16 volunteer guides, with 6 of them at the Arboretum and 5 specialising in Garden History. They are on hand to show round large groups and small, either by appointment or as a regular service.

In the last year, the Friends have committed just over £250,000 to the Garden and Arboretum. This is a stupendous figure. It includes over £73,000 for enhancing the Garden’s plant collections, all part of the build-up to the 400th anniversary and ensuring the Garden becomes and remains the pre-eminent Botanic Garden that it should be. In addition, the Friends are funding the shade frame at the Arboretum, to the tune of £31,250; continuing to fund the interpretation of the Garden designed by Pia Ostlund (another £29,000 this year); and paying for two horticultural trainees at a cost of £40,000. The Friends have also promised matched funding of £38,000, for the conversion of the old education room into a wonderful new exhibition space for the Herbarium, allowing the countless treasures held there to reach a new audience. The Friends have also bought a chipper for the Garden, an essential piece of kit. One really useful and urgent project in the pipeline is the renovation of the paths at the Arboretum, to make that beautiful space more accessible to the disabled and to young mothers with push chairs. This is the sort of unglamorous but essential funding that the Friends are particularly good at, especially if matched funding can be gleaned from other charitable trusts. As always, the Directors will strive to ensure the money is wisely spent, on paths that are built to last, on budget and on time.

Before he retired, Richard’s parting shot was to launch an appeal to fund new benches round the fountain in the Walled Garden. The Directors allocated £8,000 to building new hard standing for the benches, but the cost of £28,200 for the benches themselves was sought from Friends, with any possible surplus going
The Friends of Oxford Botanic Garden & Harcourt Arboretum
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to bespoke benches elsewhere in the Garden. What followed was an extraordinary demonstration of support and generosity and in very short order there were donations of £33,500. The benches have been bought and the hard standing is going in.

The Friends really do make a difference to the Garden, whether it is with aesthetics and making the gardens more appealing to people looking for beauty and peace and quiet; whether it is with education; or with establishing and researching conservation and biodiversity.

2. Treasurer’s report and accounts

The Treasurer reported that during the year Membership increased from 3,164 to 3,247, an increase of 2.6% with 8% non-renewal. Total funds raised were £222k (2016 £221k) and grants made to OBGA £228k (2016 £164k). Reserves carried forward were £126k (2016 £191k). The Treasurer noted that £1.6m had been raised by the Friends in the 10 years to 2016/2017, an extraordinary achievement. Membership fees increased on 1 March 2016 by 2%-4% and the next increase is due on 1st March 2018. Excluding specific appeals and legacies, the long-term fund raising goal is to have available for distribution in excess of £300k on a two-year rolling average.

The Annual Report and Financial Statements have been examined by Critchleys as reporting accountants.

The Chairman moved to the Resolutions.

Resolution 1: That the Trustees’ Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 28th February 2017 and the Accountants’ Report be received and adopted. All present were in favour and the Resolution was adopted.

Appointment and remuneration of reporting accountants

Critchleys are one of the leading firms of chartered accountants in the Thames Valley. They audit several of the Oxford University Colleges. They were first appointed as Reporting Accountants to the Friends of Oxford Botanic Garden and Harcourt Arboretum Ltd for the year ended 29th February 2008.

Resolution 2

That Critchleys be re-appointed Reporting Accountants to the Company for the period until the conclusion of the next Annual General Meeting and that the Directors of the Company be authorised to agree the remuneration of the Reporting Accountants. Jennie Turner proposed the Resolution. All present were in favour so the Resolution was adopted.

3. Election of Directors

The Articles of Association of the Company provide that, excluding any Director appointed since the last AGM, at least one third of the Directors should retire by rotation each year. This year Maura Allen, Jane Annett and Jennie Turner are retiring by rotation and standing for re-election. No other nominations have been received.

(a) To re-elect Maura Allen who retires by rotation, but being eligible, was proposed for re-election. Re-elected unopposed.
(b) To re-elect Jane Annett who retires by rotation, but being eligible, was proposed for re-election. Re-elected unopposed.
(c) To re-elect Jennie Turner who retires by rotation, but being eligible, was proposed for re-election. Re-elected unopposed.

4. Any other business

There was none.

The formal business of the meeting was closed. The date of the next AGM will be advertised in the Friends Newsletter.

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Director's Report

Professor Simon Hiscock, Director of the Botanic Garden and Arboretum, reported on some of the highlights of 2016/2017. There had been record numbers of visitors to both sites; external funding had been secured for two horticultural trainees; the new collections strategy was in place focusing on 1) Evolution and Taxonomy, 2) Heritage and Landscape, 3) Conservation and Biodiversity, 4) Plants and People; and the first new displays were created in the Garden and under glass – ‘Plants that Changed the World’ – with full interpretation designed by Pia Ostlund (formerly Chelsea Physic Garden).

The planned Herbarium Room project will create a ‘mini museum’ at OBG to showcase Oxford’s world-class Herbaria. This has been funded (£95.5K) by a combination of grants from the Tolkien Trust (£38K), The Friends (£38K), Helen Rolls Charity (£6.5K) and GLAM (£12K). Work started in May 2017. The interior of the room has been inspired by Linnaeus’s study room at Hammarby, with bespoke botanical wallpaper and curtains designed by Pia Ostlund.

The restoration of the Serpentine Ride at the Arboretum is well underway. Over 300 specimen Rhododendrons have been planted through work funded by The Friends.

The OBG new glasshouse and associated buildings are on the University Capital Projects list and the Project Sponsor Group (PSG) have been meeting since Jan 2017; a Project Manager has been appointed from tmd Building Consultants and Nicholas Pearson Partners are the Heritage and Landscape consultants.

New events at OBGA have all been very successful: the first ever Apple Day and Autumn Fair (20 October 2016); the first ever Christmas Fair (2-3 December 2016); and the first ever Spring Fair (9 April 2016). Visitor numbers have been over 2000 for each event, resulting in increased income for both OBG and The Friends.

The pop-up café in the Garden by the Jericho Coffee Company has proved extremely popular throughout the summer and has generated income for the Garden and a small profit for the Company, such that they will continue providing the service in 2018.
The takings in the two OBGA shops were £7K, above forecast. A new OBGA-exclusive product range has been designed by Pia Oslund. The ‘Oxford Physicke Gin’ partnership with TOAD is reaching fruition and the first bottles should be available in time for the Christmas Fair.

Dr Chris Thorogood was appointed to the new post of Head of Science and Public Engagement in January 2017. He has planned a vibrant and engaging Public Education/Engagement Programme this year, including science lectures, horticulture training, botanical illustration, botanical excursions, nature printing and themed tours of the Garden and Arboretum.

Thanks to Chris and his team, there has been amazing exposure via social media. A ‘Twitter take-over’ with Oxford Sparks (14 March) - an online portal through which Oxford University’s scientists engage with the public – was one of the most effective Sparks Twitter take-overs to date, engaging with 4,600 online followers through a line-up of weird and wonderful plants. The top hit was *Psychotria elata* with its extraordinary lip-like floral structures. Overall the Twitter take-over earned an incredible 70.7K impressions in just one day.

Following the Director’s Report, Dr Christopher Thorogood, OBGA Head of Science and Public Engagement, gave an inspirational talk entitled “Modern Day Plant Hunting in Japan”.

The AGM was followed by wine and nibbles and the evening concluded at 9.30pm.