



Minutes of Friends of Pittville Annual General Meeting 21 October 2010

Abbreviations used: CBC = Cheltenham Borough Council; FOP = Friends of Pittville

1. Executive Committee (ExComm) members present

Acting Hon Chairman Judy Langhorn (JL) Hon Secretary Fiona Clarke (FC)
Colin Eynon (CE)
Anne Roberts (AR)
Ward Cllr. Tim Cooper (TC)
Ward Cllr. Diane Hibbert (DH)
Park Watch - Desmond Fitzgerald (DF)

Apologies

Hon Treasurer Paul Weston (PW)
Annette Berg, John and Pauline Clayton, John and Gillian Godwin, Monica Long, Tony Mason, Richard and Jennifer Payne

Invited guests present:

Cllrs John Rawson (also a Friend), John Webster and Roger Whyborn; Karen Radford, CBC and Stephen Clarke, Cheltenham Civic Society

Invited guests unable to attend: Claire Stenson, CBC and PCSO Steve Yetton
40 FOP members were present and 24 interested members of the public.

2. Minutes of the previous AGM (20 October 2009)

Friends had been asked to check the minutes on the website prior to the AGM and no queries had been raised. Ten copies were made available at the meeting. The minutes were unanimously accepted as a true record of the 2009 Annual General Meeting. Proposed: Colin Eynon and Seconded: Ron Pattinson.

3. Matters arising

Acting Chairman noted one matter arising from the last minutes, which was progress on the Community Bridge. At this stage we know no more than Friends have been told in e-mails and letters from the Secretary and the FOP newsletters. Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC) is still planning to find ways of completing the project. We have no financial breakdown of the costs despite asking for it.

4. Chairman's report

The Acting Chairman's report was in three parts. The first part was to thank everyone who had contributed so much in the past year. The second part was a statement of where Friends of Pittville is at the moment as an organisation. The third part was a summary of the year's activity.

Part 1:

"I would like to thank all the Executive Committee members who have worked to revitalise and redirect the group this year. A special thank you goes to the Secretary, **Fiona Clarke**, who has the enthusiasm and drive we all appreciate.

Unfortunately three committee members are retiring without seeking re-election this AGM. Two are founder members from 2006 and we are sorry to see them take their well earned rest.

Colin Eynon, although living abroad many months of the year has used his local knowledge and expertise to assist and participate in all that has taken place. **Paul Weston**, who is away and cannot be with us tonight, has served Friends of Pittville calmly and efficiently as Treasurer and his help in setting up the Friend's HMRC (Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs) charity status this year has been invaluable. **Christine Sharpe** has recently taken a full-time job and is Chair of Pittville School governors. We will continue to work with Christine in her Pittville School capacity. I would also like to thank **Desmond Fitzgerald** and his unsung Park Watch heroes and heroines. Without their constant observation of detail in the park, with daily litter picking, the area would not look as good as it does.

Another behind the scenes worker is **Ron Pattinson** who has continued as webmaster and provides the space on his web-site for our internet friendsofpittville.org voice. We must thank him also for his production of the Christmas cards and postcards at cost price which we hope to sell widely for fundraising. They are available for purchase this evening.

Benjamin Bowen from The Hotel, on Evesham Road, has kindly paid for three issues of the printed newsletter this year, which has been a great help, so very many thanks to him.

Our own Friends of Pittville Volunteers, who work in the park and estate once a month, deserve special appreciation for turning out rain or shine. This group is led by the Secretary with the help and advice of CBC park ranger **Geoffrey Jenkins**. The Friends group has been supplied with its own fluorescent tabards which declare who we are. No longer are we looked upon by the public as community service workers "doing time" for Her Majesty.

Thanks also go to all the **Cheltenham Borough Council officers** who have given us their time and help. Their names are listed on the display board. (**Appendix 1: List of CBC officers.**)

Finally on behalf of all of us here, I thank **Mrs Price**, the Head teacher of Dunalley School, for the use of this hall."

The Acting Chairman went on to say that this evening the event we are most looking forward to must surely be the talk Steven Blake has prepared for us concerning Pittville Gates. To reach this point in the evening as speedily as possible we shall try to conduct our business as smoothly as possible. We shall therefore take questions at the end of the evening

Part 2:

"Without trying to sound like a political party, I think the theme of this year's Friends of Pittville AGM has to be '*change*'. So first, *what was Friends of Pittville?* It was set up in 2006 to support the Cheltenham Borough Council's application for Lottery money to improve the Pittville Estate. In that role Friends of Pittville represented the residents' varied interests in the area, showed support for the bid and encouraged CBC to include their ideas. As you all know, the final bid was unsuccessful even though it won the Western regional round.

What is Friends of Pittville today? In 2009/10 Friends of Pittville is a group that is working to initiate action needed to achieve some of the things identified during the bid process. It seeks, now, the support and advice of CBC and other bodies to get things done. Something of a role reversal has taken place. As you are all aware, in the climate of the times, any extra direct

financial support from CBC is difficult to obtain. But we are looking for their indirect help and whatever financial opportunities and improvements they can offer Pittville.

Finally, *what Friends of Pittville is not?* It is not a group which concerns itself with pot holes, traffic conditions or planning applications, unless they are of huge impact on the area. Pittville is lucky in that it has two hardworking and well respected Ward Councillors, Tim Cooper and Diane Hibbert.

Please contact either of them directly as they support residents in these matters. Also, as they are both members of the Executive Committee, they will alert Friends of Pittville to any planning or traffic matter that may require our membership's attention. Criminal damage and anti-social behaviour which members witness or are worried about is the concern of the local police and needs to be directed to them as soon as possible. In the near future the police are hoping to set up a Neighbourhood Community Group for Pittville alone as, at the moment, Pittville is divided between Whaddon and St Paul's. They will be looking for local groups and individual volunteers to contribute".

The Acting Chairman concluded the second part of her report by reminding Friends that they had been kept informed throughout the year, mainly by the Secretary, through the printed newsletter, emails, letters and the web site, so at this point she handed over to her to summarise the year's activity. This is the third part of the Chairman's report.

Part 3:

"The Chairman mentioned the list of CBC officers with whom we have worked in the last year. We have already talked about the Community Bridge, so now I'll tell you a little about other projects and activities.

The first is the **Friends of Pittville volunteers group**, to which the Chairman referred earlier. This group was set up after the last AGM. Between 6 and 12 of us have met every month and we've provided about 180 hours of help. This complements the routine maintenance carried out by CBC staff. We keep the underpass, Pump Room gates and Pittville Gates areas in reasonable condition; we cut back the lavender beds and roses near the aviaries; we clear paths edges near the playground and bridges and we litter pick throughout the park. New members are always welcome.

With the two ward councillors, Diane Hibbert and Tim Cooper, we participate in a **monthly walkabout** of the whole estate and/or meeting with CBC staff. We note things that need attention, e.g. broken lights in the underpass; items thrown into the lake; stonework on the bridges that needs repair etc. and monitor action.

FOP took on responsibility for keeping the three **notice boards** in the park up to date and clean.

We took an active interest when it was rumoured that the **Pump Room** would be closed to visitors because of staff restructuring. We are really pleased to see an improved service for visitors and hope that the new management can demonstrate sufficient footfall to expand what is offered. We hope to continue discussions with them on this, e.g. regular talks on the history and significance of the Pump Room. Unfortunately we have still been unable to convince the management of the Pump Room to provide refreshments of any kind. Quite rightly, they are trying to maximise revenue through events and in fact this is proving successful – nearly every Friday and Saturday well into 2011 is booked for weddings.

We have had a minor success by continuing to push for full use of the **ice-cream bicycle** which CBC bought several years ago. Despite several false starts, they have had it out on weekends reasonably often over the summer. But not often enough, and we are still amazed that they seldom have refreshments available on Sunday afternoon 'Bands in the Park' concerts.

We were invited to participate in a CBC-run focus group in January to consider outsourcing the **catering facilities in Montpellier and Pittville Parks**. This includes Central Cross Cafe and the Boathouse. We await the outcome of the expressions of interest, but in the meantime we sent the ExComm's thoughts on the issues raised to the CBC officer managing it.

We were very concerned by the wilful damage to the **Boathouse** and last year to the **Bandstand**. We were relieved that the former was attended to quickly, and that damage was not worse. We are extremely grateful to the RAFA (Royal Air Force Association) for contributing half the cost of the Bandstand restoration. This amounts to over £3500. And thank you to Desmond Fitzgerald, co-opted ExComm member, who liaised with CBC and RAFA over the restoration.

We are still hoping to have the **vista** from the Pump Room to Pittville Lawn opened up further so that park users can see more of the lake and the Pump Room. One or two trees have been taken down as they were dead or damaged, or are causing damage. We want to have the blackberries, ivy and tree suckers etc. around the southern side of the upper lake taken out over the winter.

We are still thinking of installing coin-operated **dispensers for duck and swan food** but there are a few issues to resolve, e.g. security of cash. The reason for this project is that CBC asks the public to feed the birds appropriate food but there are no reliable outlets for people to buy it. We could provide this service and make a little revenue from it. We will be looking for a few volunteers who could manage the dispensers.

We want to hold a couple of events each year. Our **members' picnic** in May this year was a lovely day. We had many apologies and expressions of support, so we will have one again in 2011.

We still plan to hold a **postcard, photos and picture** evening. It will be early next year and we hope another Cheltenham historian, Sue Rowbotham, will give a short talk on writing and illustrating local history. We will focus on Pittville, and Pittville Gates in particular.

We **participated in two events**, run by the Cheltenham Local History Society and the Cheltenham Horticultural Society. These were most useful and interesting - we have raised awareness of FOP and the Gates project in particular, got feedback from the public on park matters, recruited two gardening volunteers and several new members.

We looked into becoming involved with **Cheltenham in Bloom**, attending two of their committee meetings, and we invited you to participate in a 'Plant for Pittville' display competition. Perhaps the timing was not ideal - June - and we didn't receive any entries. We may try again next year.

We have two FOP **Christmas cards and two postcards** as mentioned earlier. These are an important part of our fundraising efforts and we encourage you all to buy some tonight. Once we have covered our costs on these, any profit goes to the Pittville Gates restoration project."

5. Treasurer's report

In the absence of the Hon. Treasurer, the Hon. Secretary read the Treasurer's report, which is as follows:

"The figures before you give the Friends a small surplus of income over costs of £159.64.

Our main regular source of income is, as always, the subscriptions of the members. This year has seen a 226% increase, partly through an increase in membership, but also because of the additional subscription amounts donated by many members over and above the minimum we request. We thank you all for that.

You will all be aware that HMRC have approved our use of the Gift Aid scheme which will enable us to recover the 20%+ of tax already paid on those subscriptions by taxpayers. **We commend as many of you as possible to complete a form for us.** The benefits of the scheme will take a little while to show in future accounts because of the way HMRC want returns made to them, but we will be claiming on all eligible donations since October 2009.

Among the costs shown in the accounts you should be aware the item 'Newsletters' relates only to one issue as the costs of all the others were kindly sponsored. Costs of Christmas and postcard printing appear out of line with the income shown. That is because we had to bear all the costs at the time of printing, but have stock to continue selling. Other costs are in line with previous years."

There was one question, clarifying the amount spent on the printed newsletter. One issue was paid for, the other three were sponsored. The Treasurer's report was then accepted unanimously.

6. Election of officers and committee

The Acting Chairman explained that the FOP Constitution allows that the Executive Committee shall consist of no fewer than 5 members and no more than 10 members, being three honorary officers - chairman, secretary and treasurer, plus up to seven other members. All members of the executive committee must retire at the end of the AGM unless they have sought re-election.

There are two steps to the election. First, candidates must be nominated and all nominations for election must be received by the Secretary at least 14 days before the AGM. Nominees must have been formally nominated by a member of Friends of Pittville and have signed a declaration of acceptance and willingness to act in the best interests of FOP. Second, at the AGM, they must be proposed, seconded *and a vote taken*. All paid up members are entitled to vote which will be done by a show of cards. The members of the newly elected committee shall hold office from the conclusion of the AGM.

The executive committee can then appoint not more than 4 co-opted members, one to represent Park Watch plus the two Cheltenham Borough Councillors of Pittville Ward. Currently there are the three co-opted members just mentioned and they have expressed their willingness to be re-appointed - Desmond Fitzgerald, Park Watch and Diane Hibbert and Tim Cooper, Ward Councillors.

One further co-opted member can be appointed by the Executive Committee; no more than one third of the committee can be co-opted members, and a co-opted member cannot be chairman.

Invitations to join the executive committee have been publicised to members and the wider public through the newsletter and website and we are pleased to say we have had an excellent response.

There are three current members of the executive committee seeking re-election: Judy Langhorn as Honorary Chairman; Fiona Clarke as Honorary Secretary and Anne Roberts who is standing for the position of Honorary Treasurer. One Friends of Pittville member who has already been of great value to the committee as an invited guest is Judie Hodsdon, who seeks election as a committee member

There are five other new nominees for committee membership: Christopher Archibald, Andy Hopkins, Theresa Mayhew, David Richards and Henry Williams.

Those standing for election were invited to stand up. A list of nominees, with brief biographical details, had been available for members to consult before the meeting.

Election of Chairman: Judy Langhorn was elected unopposed to serve as Chairman. Proposed: Anita Richards and Seconded: Anne Roberts.

Election of Secretary: Fiona Clarke was elected unopposed to serve as Secretary. Proposed: David Richards and Seconded: Peter Simmons.

Election of Treasurer: Anne Roberts was elected unopposed to serve as Treasurer. Proposed: Terry Langhorn and Seconded: Tom Clarke.

Election of ordinary members of the committee: The nominees – Christopher Archibald, Judie Hodsdon, Andy Hopkins, Theresa Mayhew (who was unable to attend because of a last minute crisis), David Richards and Henry Williams were elected en bloc. Proposed: Anne Roberts and Seconded: Colin Eynon.

Re-appointment of co-opted members: the three co-opted members (Councillors Diane Hibbert and Tim Cooper, and Pittville Park Watch representative Desmond Fitzgerald) had also submitted forms. They were re-appointed en bloc by the Chairman.

7. Pittville Gates – a history; presentation by Dr Steven Blake

The Chairman explained that the Executive Committee has set-up a sub-committee to work solely on the proposed restoration of Pittville Gates. Judie Hodsdon (JH), who has been a volunteer observer on the ExComm since May 2010, will chair the sub-committee. JH was invited to say a few words about the project and to introduce Dr Steven Blake.

JH began by asking “why is the Pittville Gates our priority?’ She went on to say “You probably don't need me to describe the parlous condition of the Gates - the crumbling pillars, the missing ironwork, two different colours of green paint and now, sadly, some graffiti (now removed – Hon. Sec.). Truly, this is a sad example of neglect of one of Cheltenham's most important municipal structures.

The Gates were included in the lottery bid made by CBC to restore and improve various elements of Pittville Park. Unfortunately the bid was unsuccessful but a survey of Pittville Friends and the general public revealed that the condition of the Gates came top of the list of concerns. So they have become our priority.

The aim is the restoration of the Gates and the improvement of the surrounding area. This means replacement of the stonework pillars, the restoration and replacement of the ironwork and the repaving of the area around them.

We are at the stage of getting information together to support bids for funds and the launch of an appeal. At the moment it is not actually clear who owns the Gates but we are grateful for the support and help of CBC despite this uncertainty.

Of course it is not the best of times to be launching an appeal for money but it would be rather nice if the restoration work could coincide with the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 2012 as the decorative ironwork over the centre of the Gates dates from Queen Victoria's Jubilee in 1897.

As part of gathering information we are delighted that Steven Blake has agreed to give this talk about the Gates. With his background in the Museum, Steven knows more about the Cheltenham's most interesting buildings and structures than most and he is the acknowledged expert on the Pittville Estate.”

Steven Blake (SB) opened his talk by referring to several maps (from 1787 to 1880s) and images (from 1836 to just post World War 2) which were displayed on two tables. The audience was invited to look at these at the end of the meeting.

SB explained that in the 1820s the site of the Gates was still countryside and that the Pittville Estate was constrained by the two main thoroughfares leading north from Cheltenham, Evesham Road, developed in 1810 and the ancient route to Winchcombe, along what are now Winchcombe Street and Prestbury Road. The Gates themselves did not appear on Joseph Pitt's plans. The first reference to them is 1834; they were referred to in a publication in 1836, but were not the entrance to the Estate, which in fact started at the back of the terrace on the south side of Clarence Road. SB thinks they could have been designed as the entrance to the 'walks and rides of Pittville'. However, he could find no evidence, so far, of who designed the Gates, or where the stonework and ironwork was done.

Other questions remain unanswered. For example, who actually owns Pittville Gates? There are no references to the Gates in conveyance documents and very few in the Borough Council's meetings minutes. The earliest reference in CBC minutes is from 1921, which talks of repairs to the pillars, ironwork etc. A reference in 1940 is to removal of railings and the gates on either side to improve vehicular access. Another question is where has the horse trough gone? This is shown in Edwardian period photographs and postcards. Is it one of the troughs now in the Promenade and Upper High Street? Also, when were the lamps changed? There is quite a lot of information about the overthrow (the arch with the Cheltenham coat of arms, which was erected in 1897 to mark Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee) and the arc lighting which was installed in the lamps and the now missing central lamp.

Steven Blake then invited questions and comments.

Anita Richards thought that Gloucestershire Archives would have useful records; SB agreed and mentioned lists of street furniture etc. kept by CBC.

Tom Clarke thought that the erection of the overthrow in 1897 by the local council indicated a sense of ownership. He asked about the gates which used to be at the south west corner of Clarence Square. SB said he had seen a lovely photograph of this gate, which was relatively small. It was in an archive of the estate agency which took over the Estate from Joseph Pitt.

Colin Eynon thought that removal of railings and side gates in 1940 also implied CBC ownership. SB thought the transfer is relatively recent.

Henry Williams said that he remembered the horse trough, and three telephone boxes, being there in 1965. He thought the horse trough might be the one on Upper High Street. He also remembered the removed gates being in an earlier CBC store. He added that the Camera Club has many old negatives which might include ones of the Gates.

Peter Simmons wondered if removal of the horse trough was related to closing Pittville Lawn to traffic from Winchcombe Street. Both he and Henry Williams remembered being able to drive through the two openings on either side of the horse trough, which was set some fifteen feet in front of the central gate.

Karen Radford, from CBC, said it was a fascinating talk and asked SB if he was planning to publish. SB said there was not enough hard information to do this yet. He encouraged FOP to follow all these leads and suggestions, and presented his maps and images to FOP.

JH thanked Steven Blake very much for a wonderfully informative talk, despite his thinking it was not a lot, and presented him with a bottle of wine as a thank you.

8. Any other business

The Chairman invited questions about any of the earlier items on the agenda but there were not any. There was no other business.

9. Date of next annual general meeting

This will be in September or October 2010, on a date to be determined.

David Richards, a new committee member, and also an office holder in Cheltenham Horticultural Society had brought a tree for auction; this was sold to Colin Eynon for £5.00.

The Chairman thanked everyone for coming and invited them to have a cup of tea or coffee and a biscuit, look at the Pittville Gates photographs, early maps and plans etc. which were displayed at the front and on the display boards, and to talk informally with each other and ExComm members. The audience was reminded they could purchase postcards and Christmas cards; that membership renewal for 2011 is due today; and also it would be helpful for FOP is they completed a Gift Aid declaration if they are tax payers.

The official meeting finished at 8.15pm.

Appendix 1

Thank you to the following officers of Cheltenham Borough Council

who during this year 2009 -2010 have been willing to meet members of the committee to answer questions, support and encourage the Friends of Pittville ideas and projects.

In many cases they have taken, or at least promised, the requested action.

John Rees	Landscape Services Officer
Adam Reynolds	Parks Development Manager
Tom Mimmagh	Property Operations Manager
Gary Nejrup	Entertainment and Business Manager Town Hall and Pittville Pump Room
Wilf Tomany	Urban Design Manager
Jeremy Williamson	Managing Director, Cheltenham Development Task Force
Claire Stenson	Landscape Architect, Urban Design
Karen Radford	Heritage and Conservation Manager
Christopher Chavasse	Senior Trees Officer
Jean Smith	Recreation Manager

Judy Langhorn
Chairman on behalf of
the Executive Committee