



Minutes of Friends of Pittville Annual General Meeting 5 October 2011

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

Executive Committee (ExComm) members present:

Hon Chairman Judy Langhorn (JL)
Hon Secretary Fiona Clarke (FC)
Hon. Treasurer Frances Gabriel (FG)
Judie Hodsdon (JH)
Henry Williams (HW)
Ward Cllr. Diane Hibbert (DH)

1. Apologies

ExComm Members: Christopher Archibald, David Roberts, Ward Cllr. Tim Cooper (TC), Desmond Fitzgerald (DF)

FOP Members: Steven Blake, Sarah Brice, Moira Edwards, Colin Eynon, Graham Lockwood, Monica Long, John Oates, Richard and Jennifer Payne, Anita Richards, Anne Roberts, Christine Sharpe, Peter Simmons, Mrs and Mrs M Stennett, Charles Yates

Invited guests: CBC Councillors John Webster and Roger Whyborn; CBC officer Karen Radford; Glos. Police PCSO Steve Yetton

26 FOP members and 8 interested members of the public were present.

2. Minutes of the previous AGM (21 October 2010)

The minutes for last year's AGM had been posted on the website throughout the year and a few copies were distributed around the hall. No queries had been brought to the Hon. Secretary's notice and as none were raised, the minutes were unanimously accepted as a true record of the 2010 Annual General Meeting. Proposed by Henry Williams and seconded by Eileen Lockwood.

3. Matters arising

The only outstanding matter JL was aware of was the date we may find a community bridge over the west (Lower) Lake. FOP has had no recent official notification but progress is being made so we hope it may be soon.

DH informed the AGM that November 2011 was now the target date for installing the bridge itself. It is currently being constructed off-site in the Forest of Dean.

4. Chairman's report

The Hon. 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 highlights of the year for the group. The third part was a summary of some of the other activity during the past year.

Part 1 reads as follows:

"Good evening everyone and welcome, thank you all for coming to the Friends of Pittville's AGM. For anyone who does not know us, I am Judy Langhorn, Chairman, and on my right is Fiona Clarke, Secretary. You will also be hearing from Frances Gabriel, co-opted Treasurer, Judie Hodsdon, Pittville Gates chair and Henry Williams, committee member.

This year has been a very busy one and I would first like to thank all the committee for pulling together so well as we travel down previously un-trodden paths and take on greater responsibilities.

We have been given a considerable amount of professional help and time by many Cheltenham Borough Council officers and elected members, and also by Gloucestershire County Council. There are too many names to read out, but we have placed a list on the board expressing our appreciation.

Another important contributor to the year's achievement has been James Hodsdon who used his expertise to winkle out as many Pittville Gates facts from the dark corners of archives and produce the only known booklet about the Pittville Gates (available here tonight). Thank you again, James.

During the year we thanked Anne Roberts who served on the committee from its inception but had to resign due to other commitments. Anne, however, still helps with the newsletter distribution for which we are most grateful.

We also thanked Andy Hopkins whose experience as an artist, teacher and sculptor of stone provided valuable knowledge as we began to get a better understanding of the fabric of Pittville Gates. Sadly for us, Andy is leaving Cheltenham and has resigned, but the Pittville Gates Restoration logo, which he designed for Friends of Pittville will, we hope, bring us good luck.

In January we welcomed Frances Gabriel as a co-opted Treasurer, and I am pleased she is standing to be elected as Treasurer for the coming year".

Part 2 reads as follows:

"I feel that during this year, as I said, extremely busy, we have made considerable progress in all areas of Friends of Pittville. You will hear details from the other reports so I shall only mention one highlight.

On 7 April we officially launched the Pittville Gates Restoration Appeal which was at and was sponsored by the hotel, Cheltenham Townhouse, on Pittville Lawn. A donation in kind from the owners, Jayne and Adam Lillywhite, (for rental of the rooms), is still very much appreciated. We also had support from the then Mayor, Cllr Anne Regan, Martin Horwood, Cheltenham Member of Parliament and many special guests.

The question of premises within Pittville is difficult for a group such as ours. We have no building at our disposal, so we borrowed and pooled equipment, including a portable gazebo to make a mobile base for events such as gathering local opinions, publicising Friends of

Pittville, entertaining members of the public or for fundraising activities. It was soon realised that this idea was a good one and we applied to CBC's Community Pride 2011 for funding to create a Roadshow belonging to the Friends, which we can use indoors or outdoors. We were delighted to be awarded £1000 and details of what we are purchasing are on the board. The tables purchased are also being used here tonight.

In parallel to the other grants we are seeking for the Gates project, which Judie will be telling you about, we have just this past Friday, applied to the 'Promoting Cheltenham Fund' for money to provide for the design, making and siting of three heritage boards for Pittville Park along with a self-guided historical walk leaflet. It is astonishing that heritage-rich Pittville does not already have these features. We await the result of this application.

Others will be continuing the report and giving you more good news but now I must turn my attention to the less welcome news concerning **new membership fees** and hope that I can explain the reasons. This is the first rise in fees since the group was formed in September 2006.

We have discussed this within the committee several times this year and have been reluctant to take the leap that appeared necessary because of the present economic climate.

However, when making the recent applications to national and important local funders where every detail of our business is under strict scrutiny a fact revealed itself concerning our future budget for 2011-2012 for the general running of Friends of Pittville. We see this could let us down in the eyes of funders in the future if they were to spot it.

Firstly, we have a healthy balance in the current account and increasing surplus, but that is **entirely** due to the generosity of many members who pay far more than the basic £2. If everyone pays £2 we cannot stay in credit.

Secondly, when we planned for the year ahead Budget 2010-2011 we had sponsorship in place which went a long way to paying for the newsletters. This unfortunately wasn't forthcoming and very little sponsorship has been found to take its place.

Our ExComm members considered reducing the newsletter distribution and/or the quality of newsletter, but these are vital to our publicity and the new format seems to be popular. We want to keep people informed, and recruit and retain members. Membership recruits and renewals always follow a publication and this has helped our paid up membership to increase this year by over 60 per cent.

Another issue is if members are paying a much higher subscription what do they get that the general public do not get? At present they are kept up to date by frequent emails or less frequent letters if not on the internet (55 households without email need letters which we try to hand deliver if in the area). We felt that maybe we should offer more to members, e.g. events by invitation.

Taking these points, at the last ExComm meeting on 29 September it was unanimously agreed by vote that to present a credible budget, publicise our group within the local area AND look after the membership as well as possible, the following would be necessary:

Single Membership to Friends of Pittville to be raised to £5 a year, with £7.50 per couple
The usual print of 2,200 newsletters would be distributed as previously to the same households currently served (members and general public) but only twice a year, in September and in April

Plus there would be a members' only newsletter, which will be distributed to member's households in June and December. These newsletters may include notice of an event, or other benefit for members as we can arrange.

The print numbers/costs for this change would be equivalent to three full distributions a year as done in 2011. A review will be made at the end of the year to judge the result of the new fees and system.

Anyone joining or renewing tonight may do so at the old rate of £2.00 and those members who have standing orders for £2.00 which have probably already been activated from 1 October 2011 will not be affected this year. New membership charges will apply as from tomorrow, 6 October.

To briefly mention sponsorship again, if anyone knows of a small business in the area which would like to advertise in the newsletters please contact the Secretary.

On that note I will pass you over to the Secretary, Fiona, who will continue the general report".

There were two questions at this point. Nick Edwards asked what the total membership was. JL said there were 235 paid up members, 353 memberships had been issued. Ten members had sadly died; ten had left the area and others had not renewed.

Mrs Anderson asked how difficult it would be to send an electronic newsletter to members on e-mail and not deliver a printed newsletter to them. FC said it was not worth taking those people out of the physical distribution because as a proportion of the total distribution it was tiny. The newsletter is available on the website.

Part 3 (from the Hon. Secretary (FC) reads as follows:

"I want to cover three things – the volunteers' working party; the website and Heritage Open Days.

Volunteers – there are about 25 people on the list, with usually between 8 and 14 each month, spending two hours in various parts of the park and estate. In the last year the group has contributed 276 hours, bringing total so far since November 2009 (when the group started) to 447 hours.

The biggest achievement this year has been clearing the growth along the south side of the Upper Lake so that visitors can see across the water from Pittville Lawn to the Pump Room, and vice versa. It was lovely in the spring with the daffodils and we hope for more bulbs in the future. ExComm member David Richards has put about 200 in above the Upper Lake. We also hope to refurbish the flowerbeds near the aviaries. This has been agreed with CBC to complement a plaque we are putting there in memory of Gloucestershire Policewoman PC Lynn Aston who died earlier this year. She was known to many of you.

Thank you to all the volunteers and also CBC's Community Ranger Geoffrey Jenkins who accompanies us each month.

Website - since last AGM there have been some changes. Ron Pattinson, who set up the website in 2006, stepped down earlier this year and we purchased the domain name for the website www.friendsofpittville.org so now we fully own the website.

We have a new web manager. He is not able to be here tonight – Mr Dan Espley. Dan has a lot of experience with other websites and will help us develop our on-line presence. For example, we have already set up a Facebook site.

Between Ron Pattinson leaving and Dan starting, we are really grateful to Terry Langhorn for temporarily holding the fort. Thank you, Terry, for this much appreciated help.

Heritage Open Days – some of the audience here tonight attended our ‘postcard and photograph afternoon’ at Clarence Court Hotel in Clarence Square in February when historian and member Sue Rowbotham gave an interesting talk about using postcards and photos in local history research and we shared our own collections.

This was a good introduction to Pittville history and we were really pleased when we were invited to be part of HODs by Cheltenham Civic Society. This was 8-11 September and about 30 other venues in Cheltenham participated, including Holst Birthplace Museum and All Saints’ Church. We were at Pittville Gates for six hours over two of the four days, and spoke to 65 people, which was really interesting. Many people were not from Cheltenham, going especially to different towns each year.

Our particular interest was to test our idea to have what we call ‘walks and talks’ in Pittville. The Hon. Chairman and Secretary researched less well known facts about Pittville, such as what the Scout Hut was before it was a scout hut; that there used to be three ceramic dragons on Central Cross Cafe’s roof; and unusual door knockers in Pittville Lawn which were designed to celebrate the Battle of Waterloo and proceeds of sales going to help soldiers.

Two guided walks were held (which were meant to be 45 minutes but went to an hour) with 10 people on Saturday and 16 people on Sunday. From this small success we are hoping to move to bigger and better things, which JL has already outlined – our application to CBC’s ‘Promoting Cheltenham Fund’.

5. Treasurer’s report

The Hon. Treasurer (FG) presented the Income and Expenditure for the twelve months ended 30 September 2011. The members’ subscriptions had brought in more than the minimum £470 (if everyone paid only the £2.00 fee). But, as had been already noted, many people paid much more than this, bringing the income to £949.50. For this we are very grateful.

FG also thanked DH for her help in preparing the accounts.

The Treasurer’s report was then accepted unanimously. Proposed by Nick Edwards and seconded by Jenny Ogle.

6. Pittville Gates Restoration Project Sub-committee’s Chairman’s report

JH outlined progress since the AGM last year when Dr Steven Blake gave a fascinating and thought-provoking presentation. He had left us with a challenge to find out more, as he had discovered how little was known!

This led to JH and her husband, James, researching local archives and newspaper records and talking to those involved with previous repairs. James had written an illustrated booklet which was launched at the public fundraising launch in April 2011 - all proceeds go to the Gates restoration appeal and copies are available this evening.

She then described the present condition of the Gates - the crumbling pillars, the missing ironwork, two different colours of green paint, an unattractive surrounding environment.

Consultations with the public and discussions with the county and borough councils and other organisations all indicate support for our campaign to have the Gates restored. There had been a couple of letters in the Glos. Echo in relation to the cost of the project, based on items in the newspaper.

Another issue has been ownership of the Gates and the borough council has accepted ownership, with the county council owning the Highways land on which they sit. It would be hard for us to raise funds for a structure which nobody owns.

We have worked on plans for the project, including the landscaping with much help from the borough council. This includes replacement of the existing crumbling pillars with new ones of the same Forest of Dean stone; renovation of the existing ironwork (the central screen, remaining gate posts and the small length of railings); and replacement of the missing opening gates and their posts. In addition four lamps of the original design will be placed on the four outer pillars, the central lamp below the municipal coat of arms will be replaced and the electricity supply restored using, perhaps, LED bulbs.

There will be a significant improvement of the surrounding area. The existing hard surfaces will be replaced with good quality man-made paving. The Pittville Lawn turning circle will be resurfaced in tarmac with a suitable edging to control the movement of vehicles but allowing bicycles to pass through the Gates. The overall design will be fairly simple in order not to detract from the ironwork of the Gates.

Other landscaping improvements will include replanting the existing grass triangle and replacing the missing railings along Prestbury Road using the original design matching those in Pittville Lawn. Hedging will be planted in front of the block wall to the west of the site and the wooden fence to the northeast. A granite horse trough will be placed in front of the Gates and filled with bedding plants. Bulbs will be planted in the grass verges of Pittville Lawn.

The proposals for improved street furniture include matching road signs for Prestbury Road and Pittville Lawn, a litterbin and a seat, all of an appropriate 'heritage' design. Two 'heritage' boards, one with information about the Gates, the other about Pittville Park, will be located adjacent to the pathway.

In order to make the funding of the project more manageable, it is proposed to split it into phases. The first phase will cover the new pillars, the renovation of the existing ironwork, the new surfaces and hedging, and the new street furniture, thus considerably enhancing the site. Later phases will cover the replacement of the missing ironwork on the Gates and the replacement railings along Prestbury Road.

JH outlined the public fundraising events, quite small scale, since the April launch, which had raised £3500. We have also submitted an application to two funding bodies with a 23 September deadline. JH thanked FC and JL for getting these in on time as she had been away. We also hope for financial help from GCC and CBC. Both have been very helpful with advice, information and obtaining estimates. We have a long list of other charitable trusts to apply to, companies to seek sponsorship from and will continue public fundraising. Finally, we had been the top scorer of Waitrose's Community Matters in August, obtaining £390.

What next? JH noted that the last significant improvement to the Gates had been for the then Prince of Wales's visit to Cheltenham in 1897, the year of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. We are hoping to link the beginning of the project to the current Queen's Diamond Jubilee in June 2012. And by the next AGM, Phase 1 might have been completed.

7. Election of officers and committee

The Hon. Chairman (JL) outlined the election process. Our 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 successfully sought re-election.

There are two steps to the election. Candidates must first be nominated and all nominations for election must be received by the Secretary at least 14 days before the AGM. They must have been formally nominated by a member of FOP and have signed a declaration of acceptance and willingness to act in the best interests of FOP. At the AGM they must be proposed, seconded *and a vote taken*. 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 and one other. The three co-opted members, Desmond Fitzgerald (Park Watch), Diane Hibbert and Tim Cooper, Ward Councillors, have expressed their willingness to be re-appointed and Frances Gabriel, the present co-opted Treasurer, is eligible and willing to be an elected member.

If all candidates are elected and co-opted as above, the executive committee will consist of three elected officers, four elected committee members, (totalling seven), plus three co-opted members, (giving a total committee of ten).

This balance does not allow us to co-opt a further member to the committee as no more than one third of the committee can be co-opted members (and a co-opted member cannot be chairman).

Invitations for new people to join the executive committee have been publicised to members and the wider public through the newsletter and website, but sadly nobody has come forward this year.

However, we welcome members who wish to assist the committee with special skills or knowledge as an invited guest. We already are lucky to have Anthea Millier working with the Gates Sub-committee in this capacity and would be happy to recruit others.

All paid up members are entitled to vote which will be done by a show of hands or cards.

There are six current members of the committee seeking re-election:

Judy Langhorn as Honorary Chairman, Fiona Clarke as Honorary Secretary, Christopher Archibald, Judie Hodsdon, David Richards, Henry Williams and one co-opted member seeking election as Treasurer, Frances Gabriel.

The following were voted onto the committee:

Judy Langhorn as Honorary Chairman was proposed by Henry Williams, seconded by Frances Gabriel.

Fiona Clarke as Honorary Secretary was proposed by Jenny Ogle, seconded by J Berg.

Frances Gabriel as Honorary Treasurer was proposed by Judie Hodsdon and seconded by Terry Langhorn.

As there were no objections, the following were elected en bloc: Christopher Archibald, Judie Hodsdon, David Richards, Henry Williams. They were proposed by Frances Gabriel and seconded by Jenny Ogle.

The Hon. Chairman then appointed the three co-opted members standing again, Desmond Fitzgerald, Tim Cooper and Diane Hibbert.

8. Any other business

The Chairman invited questions about any of the earlier items on the agenda and any other business.

8.1 Annette Berg asked if there was a specific budget for Phase 1 of the Gates Restoration Project. JH said there was an estimate for each element of the project but this had not gone to the competitive tender stage. The first phase would be about £150-160,000; the second £50-60,000 and the third, about £30,000.

8.2 Annette Berg asked if members needed to vote on the increased membership fee. JL replied that this was not required; it had been discussed by the committee and agreed on behalf of the members.

8.3 There was no other business.

9. Date of next annual general meeting

The date of the next AGM will be in October 2012, probably in the second or third week, and Members and the public will be notified at least 21 days before in the usual ways. This later date will allow more time to prepare the Financial Report.

10. Guest speaker: Mr Richard Gilpin, Head teacher Pittville School

Mr Gilpin gave an enthusiastic talk about the school, the pupils and the ambitions of both. He was keen to dispel any notion of a failing school, but rather that it was most certainly achieving very good results. He singled out mathematics as a particularly high achieving subject and spoke of the link that the school had with Balcarras School. He invited the audience to visit the school and take a tour at any time.

The Chairman thanked Mr Gilpin and spoke of the links the school and the Pittville Gates Restoration Project had made.

(See Appendix 1 for a longer version of the talk and questions asked).

Round up comments

The Chairman then thanked everyone for coming and invited them to have a cup of tea or coffee and a biscuit, look at the Pittville Gates booklet and display; also the other boards with information about the year's activities.

The audience was also invited to vote (with a red dot) for one or more of the sample Christmas cards on display. The three with most dots would be produced for Christmas 2011. They were also asked to vote for the wording they would prefer.

There were also some postcards for sale. These were donated to Friends of Pittville by the Executor for local photographer Rosemary Maidment and proceeds go to the Gates fund. There were also a few 2010 Christmas cards for sale.

Finally, the result of the Word Search was announced by Henry Williams. In fact there had been many correct entries so a name was drawn from a hat by Richard Gilpin. The winner was Mrs Colin Eynon.

HW alerted the audience to a concert by the Gloucestershire Police Male Voice Choir next March. Details would be circulated in due course and proceeds would be for the Gates fund.

The official meeting finished at 8.20pm.