

THE DORSET GARDENS TRUST

33rd ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

HELD AT MAPPERTON HOUSE ON FRIDAY 10TH MAY 2024 AT 3.30PM

MINUTES

1. APOLOGIES: Chris Clarke, Joan Dallyn, Lucille Williams, Rosamond Sweet-Escott, Christine Stones, Tony & Liz Malin, Madelaine Morris, D Penny Wilson, Caroline Montagu
2. 2023 MINUTES: The Minutes of Annual General Meeting held at Hanford School on 14th April 2023 were approved and there were no matters arising.
3. REPORT BY CHAIR: Thank you to Caroline and John Sandwich for allowing us to come here to beautiful Mapperton, which won the 2020 Historic Houses Garden of the Year Award and is what Country Life has described as “the nation’s finest manor house”.

Last year we reported that the financial position of the Trust had turned a corner following the pandemic, when our funds were at a low of around £18,000, and I’m pleased to say that our balance sheet showed a figure of some £29,000 at the end of last year, up £11,000 on the previous year.

This is mainly due to a healthy increase in income thanks to an invigorated Events team led by Henry Digby, who put together a busy program of visits and lectures, but we have continued to adopt a relatively conservative approach to handing out grants. Although we could be criticised for not spending more, as a charity we felt it was crucial to shore up the financial security of the trust in a year of inflation and economic uncertainty, by increasing the margin between our balance sheet and our reserve funds of £12,000.

In other news, I’m sorry to report that after 9 years Gabrielle Selson is retiring as of today as Membership Secretary. She has had her work cut out, not least in transitioning the management of subscriptions from a paper exercise to a digital one. She has kept the membership engaged and her efficiency in maintaining an increasing number of members is a cornerstone of our project. We will very much miss her, and we are now looking for a replacement so if anyone here is interested, or knows of anyone who might be interested, please do let us know.

I’m also sad to announce that Chris Stocks, Editor of our Journal, is also retiring. He has produced some outstanding publications over the last few years. As an accomplished author of titles such as “The Book of Pebbles” and a journalist, notably for Country Life, he was a great asset to this arm of the Trust, and again, if you can help us find a successor to his role, we would be grateful.

I also must report that Carol Carsley will also be retiring as Chair of the Schools Committee at the end of this year. She has done a tremendous amount to develop this important arm of the trust and we are very grateful to her for the enormous amount of time and energy she has devoted to the committee. Again, if anyone is interested in replacing her please do let us know.

We also lost one very unforgettable member of the DGT last year. Hugh Lindsay, who had been involved with us for 22 years, and had served as both Treasurer and Chairman, died in August, having lost his wife Carol 18 months earlier. They were both stalwarts of the trust, and together with earlier founder members such as Eddie Digby, Wilfred Weld, and William Gueterbock, they produced astoundingly successful events which made the DGT one of the most popular and well-funded County Gardens Trusts in the country. We are also immensely grateful to his family who donated generous funds raised in his memory to the Dorset Gardens Trust.

High praise is due to all our committees and the council for their untiring work to which to which some forty people give several thousand hours of work every year, free of charge. I believe all these volunteers commit themselves to this project because firstly they are interested and engaged in the purpose of the charity, which is to preserve our gardens and designed landscapes and to record their history for posterity. This is no easy task when you are dealing with potentially the most ephemeral and volatile assets within our heritage, but without the Gardens Trust and its County satellites, so

much knowledge of England's gardens, which with our ideal climate are the envy of the world, could be lost forever. Secondly, our volunteers find enormous satisfaction in promoting and sustaining an interest in gardens, and as with our Schools Committee, in encouraging this passion in the next generation.

The council has been discussing the subscription rates about which some members have pointed out that single members pay disproportionately more than other categories, so we have decided to amend them as follows: The single rate remains the same at £20, the joint rate will rise from £25 to £35, the corporate rate will rise from £30 to £40 while the young person's rate (for under 30s) will remain at £15.

I'm very pleased to say that our Instagram page, which Madelaine Morris is managing, now has 1,000 followers which is something of a landmark. If you do not follow us, please do so and 'like' our posts which all helps to raise awareness of the Trust and attract the attention of younger people.

4. **TREASURER'S REPORT:** Valerie Lee (on behalf of Lucille Williams) reported that the Trust generated income of £26,832 in the year ended 31 December 2023, up 46% on the prior year. Expenditure in the year was £16,322, resulting in a surplus of £10,510. This compares favourably with 2022 when the Trust broke even. General funds stand at a healthy level of £29,439. The Trust received two bequests in 2023, which are shown in the donations line. We again maintained a tight control of costs with benefits from bringing the website in-house and obtaining the services of an Independent Examiner of the accounts on a *pro bono* basis.

5. **ADOPTION OF THE REPORT AND ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2023:** Proposed Henry Digby, Seconded Carol Carsley. All in favour.

6. **REPORTS OF THE COMMITTEE CHAIRS**

Conservation: Richard Burden reported that the role of the Conservation committee was to deal with legislation and planning. Most recently, the Trust has had input on a proposed development at Wolfeton which was rejected on appeal due to landscape issues. Discussions with Dorset Council have resulted in the Trust's Gazetteer being incorporated into the Dorset Explorer mapping site. The Gazetteer is therefore used as Dorset Council's Local List and this gives the Trust status. At a strategic level, the government's Levelling Up Act proposes that protection for historic parks and gardens should have special regard. This is positive news for those on the national register. Looking forward, we seek to engage with landowners to ensure that there is a Master Plan for their properties, rather than a drip-feed of small changes. This ties in with the Trust's Small Grants work.

Events: Henry Digby noted that income from events increased by 50% in 2023, albeit from a reduced base in 2022 caused by the pandemic. There were five lectures and eight days of garden visits in 2023. To date in 2024, we have had four lectures and there are eleven visits on the website, three of which (Crichel, Stanbridge Mill and Ashington Manor) have already sold out. More events will be added for September 2024 in due course. Henry thanked the Events committee for all their hard work. There will be a special event for new members on 21 May at Minterne, which is looking utterly spectacular.

The Events team is working with The Gardens Group Gold Club, which has 100 Corporate members, including the Trust. We plan to host a lecture at Castle Gardens, Sherborne in September, with discounted shopping. In future, we can use the Gold Club to advertise our own lectures at Minterne to a wider audience and which may result in new members.

The Events Committee now has more members and so can put on more events. We don't yet know what the critical mass is for events, but more events would allow us to push for a higher number of members.

Research & Recording/Small Grants: Sarah FitzGerald reported that over the years the Research & Recording group had looked at over 300 sites. The Gazetteer is being updated and thanks go to Sue Arnold and Joan Dallyn for their work on this.

The Small Grants scheme has been re-launched with more relaxed guidelines, such that applicants need not be on the Local List and do not need to provide matched funding. The Small Grants could be for hard landscaping and recent examples of private gardens that have received grants are the Shell House in Sherborne and Duntish Court, designed by William Chambers. The grants can also be applied to public gardens and have been awarded to renovate the bandstand in Sherborne and the floral clock in Weymouth. Small Grants can also be used to fund a management plan, such as the Trust funded for Durlston Country Park. There is one application in the pipeline for Springhead.

Schools: Carol Carsley reported that schools really appreciate our money and guidance and thanked the schools committee for their support. We don't beautify, rather we provide a learning environment and a place to do science, see nature and write stories, as well as helping children with emotional well-being.

We run Twilight sessions, which are after-school events to allow teachers to network and discuss how to maximise use of the school garden. The next Twilight session will be at Damers School in Dorchester, hosted by Edd Moore, who is involved with the Great Field project in Poundbury and for which the Trust has part-funded a noticeboard. The Twilight will focus on nature journals and growing vegetables.

We need more help and urge members to look at the schools' pages on the website.

7. ELECTIONS:

President, Lord Henry Digby. Proposed Sarah FitzGerald, Seconded Judyth Tuke,
Vice Presidents, Countess of Sandwich, Anthea Payne, Madelaine Morris Proposed Carol Carsley,
Seconded Richard Burden
Chairman Sir William Hanham Proposed Clive Carsley Seconded Judyth Tuke
Members of Council retiring by rotation and seeking re-election, Countess of Sandwich, Joan Dallyn
Proposed Gabrielle Selson, Seconded Annie Atherton
Accountant Mr Tim Alder Proposed Sarah FitzGerald Seconded Clive Carsley

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Clive Carsley noted that the acoustics at Minterne House are poor and that it is difficult to hear lecturers. Henry Digby understands this and is planning to invest in some new audio equipment.

Clive Carsley thanked the Chairman for presiding over the meeting and the Dorset Gardens Trust.

Meeting ended at 4pm