



The Friends of Ness Gardens - A Short History

The Friends of Ness Gardens charity was established on the 19th of September 1962 with the purpose of supporting and furthering the work of Ness Botanic Gardens. The charity disbanded on 31st July 2019 after nearly 57 years of amazing support through revenue raised and donated.

The charity began after a presentation given by the Director at the time, Ken Hulme. He was inspired by the model scheme he had been introduced to during his visit to The Bavarian State Botanic Garden at Munich which supported the work of the gardens there. Taking the name "The Friends of Ness Gardens" it decided on the following main points:

- A subscription of 25/- (£1.25) a year;
- The subscription money collected should be *"devoted to the supply of features and equipment in the Gardens of direct value to the general public"*;
- A newsletter issued six to eight times a year;
- Friends should be invited to visit the Gardens on one or two Open Days each year as long as *arrangements for such open days in no way interfered with the free access to the Gardens by members of the public"*.

A subscription of 25/- (£1.25) a year

The membership fees have obviously changed considerably over the years with several categories now on offer including concessions and family memberships, but what didn't change was the fantastic value for money the members enjoyed under the Friends of Ness Gardens.

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The income collected and donated from the membership scheme has helped the Gardens become the beautiful place it is today. The first significant project supported by the Friends was in 1964/65 with the construction of the Main Terrace

Walls, which were then renovated in 2012 (again supported by the Friends). Financial donations have also gone towards the development of the Audio-Visual Centre, the Hulme Deck and Restaurant, the Wedding Gazebo, Wildflower Meadow, the Pingo Waterfall and most recently the Play Area. Recent projects which have benefitted enormously from Friends' funding include Making Waves, Ness Botanische, the Ness Weather Station, the Pine Wood and the Wilderness Area.

Membership funds have also contributed to the purchasing of invaluable equipment such as composters, office equipment, picnic tables, plant labelling, tractors and wheelchairs, to name but a few.

A newsletter issued six to eight times a year

The first edition of the Friends' Newsletter was produced in February 1963 and until June 1987 this was a simple typed document which gave a wealth of information on the gardens. Over the years this evolved to become the printed colour magazine called "The Gentian" which we read and enjoy today. The Gentian is sent to members three times a year now and continues to provide informative articles and news about the gardens.

Further membership benefits

Some of the long term and varied membership benefits of the Friends scheme have included "The Sunday Lecture Series" and organised coach trips. Since the late 1980s there have been regular Sunday lectures provided by varied speakers, including Ness staff. In Spring 2019 there were lectures titled "Some outstanding 'Award of Garden Merit' plants from recent RHS woody trials", "Alpines for Everyone", "Bodnant - Restoration of a gardening masterpiece", "From wild wood to garden trellis: ivy in culture and cultivation" and "Wirral Geology: Lessons in Climate Change". Coach trips have been offered on a regular basis to members since the 1990s. Since this time there have been visits to a wide variety of gardens as well as historic castles and houses.

The University of Liverpool took over the membership scheme from 1st August 2019, and this is now known as the Members of Ness Gardens scheme. Current member benefits have remained in place, and 100% of funds raised via the new scheme are used to support the gardens.