

Report on a Meeting in Wootton Fitzpaine Village Hall to seek support for  
An Association of Friends of Monkton Wyld Court  
Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> July 2023

The first thing to say is that the meeting exceeded our expectations, not only in the number of people who came (>40) but also who came, including two current trustees, several past and present members of the community, at least three past trustees, and the author of the history of the school. There were also apologies from people who would have liked to be there, including three present and former parish councillors, who were away or unavoidably otherwise engaged. The meeting was skillfully chaired by Winston Chapman. A number of those present thanked us for organising the event and an astonishingly high percentage wanted to be involved in setting up the Association of Friends of Monkton Wyld Court. Support for launching the Association was close to unanimous and this support lent wings to our heels and, to mix metaphors, spurs us to get on with things. This note will be circulated to all those who attended, and gave us their email address.

Both Christopher Roper, a former Trustee, in setting out our reasons for calling the meeting, and Simon Fairlie, who has lived at Monkton for the past 13 Years, in closing, referred to the serious divisions that currently threaten Monkton Wyld, Simon calling them “the elephant in the room”. One of the questions raised was how the Association might influence the Trustees in resolving these conflicts. Christopher emphasised that the Association would not have any legal status vis à vis the Board of Trustees though he hoped, in the long term, it might provide the membership structure that Monkton Wyld Court had lacked since 1982. Both he and Simon referred to the fact that the Boards of Trustees had been self-selecting and unaccountable to either a membership or members of the resident community. It certainly would be an objective of the Association to engage with the Trustees on this issue. The question was raised as to whether the Association could propose candidates to be Trustees. Christopher felt that first we needed an Association, but once it was up and running anything was possible. Dan Powell, another former Trustee, emphasised the work involved in building the proposed Association.

Jyoti Fernandes, who had been a Trustee for 15 years and had led the relaunch of Monkton Wyld Court in 2013 as a Centre for Sustainable Living, recasting its charitable objectives, and setting its present character in a way that survived the pandemic, and remained its ethos through 2022. She reminded us Monkton Wyld Court has an important role to play in the Agroecology movement, meaning the movement to promote sustainable diversified small-scale farming through the educational experiences offered in the farm, dairy and walled garden. Visitors to MWC always want to experience milking the cow and the fresh vegetables and milk. Many volunteers, apprentices, and visitors as well as local people learn skills, which are rarely taught, in small-scale cheesemaking, scything, and gardening. The farm, as run by the farm team, has gained a national reputation for being one of the best examples of a functional micro dairy supporting wildlife through traditional meadow management. This land work is connected to Coventry University’s Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience, as a demonstration site and the association with the Land Magazine has gained a national reputation on par with colleges such as Schumacher.

In this time of the climate and biodiversity crisis it is of prime importance to promote education about sustainable land management that produces food for local people and looks after wildlife and soils at the same time..

Jared Hills then talked about the achievements of the past 15 years, highlighting advancements made by the community towards fulfilling the charitable objects, and implementing infrastructure improvements. A brief summary of some of the main developments from the 15 years since the overhaul in 2008 was given, including major building repair works, reinstating the dairy, and installing the WET system. Spoken from personal experience as a community member, some of the successes of the last three years were recounted, which saw the community survive with limited numbers through the lockdowns, with a lot of challenges, but ultimately keeping the charity functioning and in a solvent state, and able to undertake much needed projects like the rewiring of the main house. Also discussed were the links made and strengthened between MWC and the local community in recent years.

A number of people had written in with messages of support. Jasmine Hills who has been looking after the Kitchen Garden spoke for many of them when she wrote: "I first came to Monkton in 2019. What was really important to me was living in a community with like-minded people who recognised the need for a different way to feed ourselves and work with the land. Providing a vast quantity of the food we eat and educating others visiting the community about the importance of this, to me, is sustainable living. We value the need to be removed from the corruption of supermarkets and the effect they have on farming. Living as a community at MWC is a step outside the world of constructed linear top down systems, it has to my knowledge always been an example of self-governed, self-organised, consensus based, collective way of living. Currently both educational aspects, our sustainable food system and our sustainable living lifestyle, are under threat. I believe that a collective of like-minded individuals sympathetic to the wellbeing of the Community and its Charitable aims, could help us ensure that the sustainable way of life at Monkton Wyld Court can continue for the benefit of all."

Jon Hill talked about the ways an Association of Friends might work to support MWC. He saw that having a larger pool of people involved higher up in the charities structure, would offer a safety net, protecting the community from potential bad decision making. This would open MWC up to a wider range of opportunities for support, expertise and channels of positive input. Jon emphasised the importance of the interaction between MWC and the local community. Something which has been notably improved in recent years. Jon concluded by stating his view of the importance of learning from the mistakes of the past, and to turn the current crisis into a good event by the formation of this association.

There was then time to hear views from the floor. Caroline Neate, a former primary school teacher, told us how she had brought children from Kilmington School over many years for a Forest School in the grounds, and described it as a "high point of the year." Larry Leventhal, a former member of the Community, described his experience of writing in to the Charity Commission to express his concern at recent developments at MWC and urged others to do the same. Another former Community member, Ann Waldron from Bridport, described how important time at MWC had been to her and her daughter. Paul Archard, a local resident, asked the Trustees how they regarded the formation

of an Association of Friends of MWC. Rikki Johnstone, a current Trustee, said that in principle they were supportive. James Edgeworth, another former community member expressed strong support for the formation of the Association of Friends, and said he was willing to be part of the effort to get it up and running.

Christopher Roper spoke to Next Steps. We will convene a meeting of the embryonic Committee of the Association at some point in August, perhaps Working Party is a better description than Committee. He thanked everyone who had come and said the meeting had emphasised for him the long threads that bind us both chronologically and geographically to MWC, demonstrating the strength of local and national and international support for MWC as it had evolved over the past 83 years.

Since the meeting, Jon Hill has created a skeleton website for the Association [www.mwcfriends.org](http://www.mwcfriends.org). The email address is [info@mwcfriends.org](mailto:info@mwcfriends.org). Simon Fairlie has drafted Memorandum and Articles of Association that we will review at our first meeting. The wheels are rolling, and we feel grateful to everyone who is supporting us. This is not "I" masquerading as "we". I am taking the liberty of speaking for all of us who put the meeting together.