

## OXFORDSHIRE HISTORIC CHURCHES TRUST (2016)

### Minutes of the First Annual Meeting of General Members of the Trust, held at St Peter's Church, Hook Norton, OX15 5NH, at 2.00 pm on 29 July 2017

The President, the Rt. Rev Bishop Colin Fletcher, took the chair; there were 54 members present. After the President had led an opening prayer, the Vicar of St Peter's, the Rev. Wendy Cunningham, welcomed those present on behalf of the Benefice. The President also welcomed members and noted the importance of St Peter's as the centre of the community, to which the Trust had contributed. He noted that the church contained both font and fire engine – while Hook Norton itself maintained an excellent brewery!

He thanked OHCT's Trustees, other donors and Ride and Stride participants for their contribution to the grants made to churches – which constituted “sticky money” that attracted other donors for individual projects. He welcomed the presence of Liz Kitch, DAC Secretary, whose department was now processing around 700 faculties annually, and Sir Tony Baldry, now Chair of the Church Buildings Council. He also passed on the thanks of the Diocese for the OHCT Roof Alarms Grant Scheme, which should combat lead theft – this was a much welcomed and of huge benefit.

**1. Apologies:** Apologies had been received from His Grace the Duke of Marlborough, Lord Saye and Sele, Charles Baker, Patrick Boyd Maunsell, Milli Eaton, John Graham, Phoebe Hart, Peter Hughes, Maurice Humphris, Mary James, David Meara, Angela and John Morrison, Chris Riley and Pat Toms.

**2. Minutes of the 2016 Annual Meeting of the 1964 Trust:** These were approved without amendment, on the proposal of Basil Eastwood, seconded by Hilary Cakebread Hall.

**3. Chairman's Report:** The Chairman thanked all present for their attendance – this was testimony to members' care for the organisation and encouraged Trustees and Council members in their work. He hoped all had had the opportunity to read the Annual Review. The constitution asked the Annual Meeting to receive the Trustees' Statutory Annual Report to the Charity Commission; this was on the website and copies were available, but it covered the same ground as the Review.

The Trust had had a very successful year, with grants to churches totalling £264,500, up from £197,000 the previous year. £46,500 of this resulted from the emergency Roof Alarm campaign, but even without this, grants were up by £21,000 on the previous year. The Trust had also felt able to raise its maximum grant from £15,000 to £20,000 during the year. This growth had been possible despite net income from Ride & Stride being down by £10,000, due in great measure to the very wet weather.

Grants could nonetheless be increased because investment income was up by £23,000, due to the success of the Jubilee Campaign. The Heritage Fund was building up steadily thanks to the pledges and, although the Campaign had come to an end over a year ago, he hoped that members would continue to remember the Trust in their wills. He reminded members that Freeths Solicitors offered a free consultation on wills. OHCT's endowment would allow the Trust to help future generations to enjoy the county's church heritage.

The Heritage Fund was part of a long-term solution to a long-term problem, whose importance was only accentuated by recent developments. At the Trust-organised workshop in March, Tony Baldry had set the financial scene – government funding for church roof repairs was unlikely to be increased in the future; Bernard Taylor's review on church and cathedral sustainability might well highlight the problem but seemed unlikely to squeeze real money out of the government. At the same time, the Heritage Lottery Fund had, without any apparent consultation, announced the closure of its scheme for Grants for Places of Worship; from September, applications for HLF funding would be judged in competition with all other types of application. He had joined leaders of other county trusts and organisations in a protest to the Secretary of State; he encouraged members to contact their MPS – the NCT had produced a useful fact sheet on this.

On a happier note, the Roof Alarm Scheme had been a great success. Launched only in the autumn, generous supporters had donated over £69,000 to the special fund that OHCT had set up, and grants

of £46,500 had been made by the end of March 2017. Applications for grants were still coming in and the remaining £22,000 would probably be exhausted over the coming months. He encouraged members to tell churches thinking of applying to move fast.

In the Annual Review he had mentioned that church visits in 2016 had been undersubscribed and that remedial action would be taken. The events programme in 2017 had been very well received so far; one church visit had been moved to September, to ease the overcrowding of diaries in May and June and this, together with an effort to improve publicity, seemed to have done the trick. Indeed, the stained-glass event in June had been three times over-subscribed. Fortunately, Sarah Brown had kindly offered to repeat the workshop in 2018, but places would have to be more expensive. The move to online ticketing seemed to have gone smoothly, helped by Clare Fox acting as a help desk to members. There had been some glitches on the new website, but these were being addressed; he welcomed Gillian Coates, who had taken on the role of Website Editor.

The Trust was in the middle of a major transition in its IT systems, with a move to a centralised database, linked securely to the website. This was vital both to facilitate compliance with new data protection laws, but also to attract younger members and Ride & Striders. The latter aspect of the IT programme was going well, with online sign-up in operation. Other initiatives would also be trialled in 2017, including trying to take advantage of the Tour of Britain going through Oxfordshire on the day. The objective for 2017 was to match the record 2015 income for Ride & Stride.

He was required by the new Constitution to inform members of changes to Trustees and the main officers. He thanked all the newcomers for their willingness to take up new roles, as well as their predecessors for their contribution. The changes were as follows:

- The new Bishop of Oxford had agreed to become a Patron,
- Cynthia Robinson had taken over from Martin Trowell as Grants officer, while Martin remained Secretary of the Trust's Finance Committee,
- Debbie Dance had stood down as a trustee and Area Rep for Aston and Cuddesdon,
- Michael Sibly, the Area Rep for Woodstock, had been elected as a Trustee,
- Alison Trowell had taken over from Sue Tyser as Area Rep for Wantage, while Sue remained a valued member of the Development Committee,
- Charles Hebditch had stood down after many years as Area rep for Islip and Bicester and Mark Stanley Price had taken over from him,
- Eluned Hallas took up the new post of Data Manager, Clare Fox another new post as Events Administrator, and Gillian Coates as Website Editor.
- Stephen Goss and Professor Malcolm Airs had been elected as Trustees earlier in 2017. Malcolm, a leading national expert in built heritage had also taken over as Area Rep for Aston and Cuddesdon.

The Chairman informed members that, in mid-July, Trustees had elected Stephen Goss to succeed him in December 2017, when he would be stepping down as both Trustee and Chairman; he would be taking over the role of Development Officer at that time. Stephen Goss had recently retired from his role as Pro Vice Chancellor of Oxford University; he was also a member of the Fabric Advisory Committee of Christ Church Cathedral and Keeper of Pictures of Wadham College. OHCT would be in good hands, as was shown by his work on the 2017 Christmas card, for which he was entirely responsible, and his work on drafting the Trust's objectives for 2017/18. These were important in particular for the emphasis placed on communication and outreach, and secondly the need for succession planning. The Trust needed to engage in a continuous process of renewal at all levels. He encouraged members to contact the new Chairman if they knew of anyone who might like to be involved.

**4. Trustees' Statutory Annual Report for the year ended 31 March 2017:** The Statutory Annual Report was received by Members on the proposal of Ann Spokes Symonds, seconded by Christopher Walton.

**5. Treasurer's Report:** The Treasurer, referred to his Report contained in the Annual Review, the key element of which was that the investment fund had grown from £1.6 million to £1.9 million during the year; it was now close to £2 million. This represented a very solid background to lean on in case

of a wet September. He referred to the Chairman's Report under item 3, which covered everything else that needed to be said.

Bill Bliss asked how the investment fund was placed. The Treasurer stated that of funds were held through Cazenoves, with some property investment through Savills.

**6. Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2017:** The accounts were received by members, on the proposal of John Yaxley, seconded by Joanna Karmowska. The Chairman thanked the Treasurer and Secretary for their work.

**7. Future priorities:** The Chairman pointed to the challenges the Trust faced of reaching out to the younger generation and supporting churches in reaching out to the wider community. Although these aspects were already part of the Trust's agreed strategy, how could more be done? What about guides for children or support for the exchange of ideas? Sir Tony Baldry, referring to the Friends of Bloxham Church, put forward the idea of encouraging an exchange of best practice, particularly in fundraising, between such organisations of Friends; the Chairman undertook to explore this idea. Sir Hugo Brunner noted that a maximum grant of £20,000 remained a very small proportion of the cost of larger projects; he wondered whether, exceptionally, in a restricted number of cases, this could be raised, or whether it was better to encourage churches to follow a "salami" approach, breaking a project into a number of smaller bites. The Chairman pointed to the importance of not squeezing out smaller projects, which were often funded to a higher level than 10% of the cost, but recognised the validity of the "salami" approach. Joanna Karmowska wondered about the fate of churches without communities, or with congregations unable to prepare grant applications; how could the Trust support them? Others recognised the challenge this frequently posed; the Chairman recalled the limited human resources in the Trust as well as the need to avoid any apparent conflict of interest between taking too much responsibility for preparing applications and the award of grants in response. The Secretary pointed to the value of professional project management for larger projects. Alison Eastwood recommended reaching out to toddler groups; Richard Lethbridge asked for grants to Roman Catholic churches to be identified as such in the list in the Annual Review. The President expressed the huge thanks of the Trust to Basil Eastwood; there was loud applause.

**9. Election of President:** *Sir Hugo Brunner KCVO, Trust Patron, took the chair for this item.* On the proposal of Basil Eastwood, seconded by Jonathan Scheele, members unanimously re-elected, by acclaim, Bishop Colin Fletcher as President.

**10. Close of the Meeting:** The President noted that Bishop Steven, the new Bishop of Oxford, had now visited all 29 deaneries in the Diocese; he had called for the Church to be contemplative, compassionate and courageous. Churches should be centres for contemplation, so keeping them open for much of the time was very important. They were also places for support, love and comfort – the compassion element. And they should be courageous before the rapidly changing course of life in the county; playgroups and church members played a vital role in their communities. All should continue to pray for the support given by OHCT in the past and in the future. The meeting concluded at 2.58 pm.

**Signed as a true record,**

**The Rt. Rev. Bishop Colin Fletcher**  
**President**  
**JS, SJG: 9.7.2018**