

OXFORDSHIRE HISTORIC CHURCHES TRUST

Minutes of the 50th Annual Review Meeting held at St Michael's Church, Blewbury, OX11 9QH, on 30 July 2016

The President, the Rt. Rev Bishop Colin Fletcher, took the chair; there were 52 members present. After leading an opening prayer, he thanked the Jason St John Nicolle, the Rector, and the Parish of St Michael's for making the church available. He noted that change had been a characteristic of the Church of England down the ages and praised the forward-looking move by OHCT to extend its grants to areas beyond maintenance to cover development of church buildings – in order to keep them vibrant. He also described OHCT money as “sticky money” – it attracted other funding to projects because it was clear they had been properly looked at. He also thanked the officers, the members of the Council and all members for their efforts. Without volunteers, nothing would happen. 2016 had been a year of achievement, notably in fundraising, but there were challenges too – Ride & Stride, the newsletter and the website. He also thanked OHCT for publishing the book “Churches for Communities” – which had helped to encourage and excite vision across the county and beyond.

1. Apologies: Apologies had been received from Patrick Boyd Maunsell, Kate and David Crennell, Debbie Dance, Norman and Elizabeth Dawson, Stephen Dawson, Giles Dessain, Milli Eaton, Joanna Karmowska, Mark Phillips, Rodger and Jennifer Powell, Joan Trowell, David Warr and Martin Wellings.

2. Minutes of the last Annual Meeting: These were approved without amendment, on the proposal of Charles Hebditch, seconded by Basil Eastwood.

3. Chairman's Report: The Chairman also thanked Jason St John Nicolle for his organisation of today's meeting. The gist of his report was covered in the Trust's Annual review, while he also drew attention to the Trust's Statutory Report. Since the Review had been sent to all members, he would not repeat his printed Chairman's Report but would update members on developments since April and on the Objectives set by the Trust for the current year.

He noted that grants had increased slightly, from £194,000 to £197,000; this had been possible due to the successful conclusion of the Jubilee Campaign launching a Heritage Fund with donations and pledges now totalling £3 million. In the long run this would yield an ever-increasing income for grants. Other trusts had shown interest in replicating OHCT's campaign, though most did not share the same broad base as OHCT. He expressed great thanks to Bernard Taylor and the Campaign Committee; Bernard and Sir Hugo Brunner had both agreed to be Patrons of the Trust. The Campaign had concluded with a service in Dorchester Abbey in February, led by the President, while a media event would be held at Chalgrove on 18 September. The Campaign had also been successful in raising the profile of the Trust across the county.

Ride & Stride had had another record year, on the same level as the record in 2014. Our objective now was to persuade more and younger people to take part, but this was still to be achieved and remained one of the Trust's major objectives in the future.

The Trust had been less successful in addressing its personnel issues; the post of Communications Officer remained unfilled, with consequent effects on publicity. He sought the help of members in addressing this. The new Constitution was not yet concluded, but much progress had been made and the matter was now in the lap of the Charity Commission.

The Trust had experienced problems with its website, with some built in snags needing to be ironed out. The Trust was now working with a commercial service provider and this was a major factor in its outreach activities. The move to a single database was not yet under way.

The Objectives for 2016/17 therefore focused on both completing those so far incomplete from 2015/16 and developing a plan for outreach and community engagement. He thanked Michael Sibly for his work on the new Objectives.

The Chairman drew attention to the Who's Who list in the Annual review; it demonstrated the sheer number of people involved. He thanked Martin Trowell, John Yaxley and Mark Phillips for the work they had accomplished for the Trust. Cynthia Robinson had now taken over as Grants Officer, while Eluned Hallas had taken on the new job of Data Manager, David Meara, David Warr and Clare Fox formed the Visits and Lectures team. Finally, Alison Trowell had taken on the job of Alternate Area Representative for Wantage. He also welcomed Liz Kitch as the new Diocesan Advisory Committee Secretary. There were still vacancies for Communications, IT management, Editor of the annual review (Pat Yaxley had now completed 3 years' work). After stained glass in 2016 and wall paintings in 2015 he hoped that the Annual Review in 2017 would focus on stonework and gargoyles.

The 2016 Events Programme had, disappointingly, been less well attended than in previous years, especially for visits outside Oxford. He drew attention to the final church visit in August, to the Blenheim Lecture in October, and to the workshop on stained glass, with Sarah Brown, which was intended to take place in the spring of 2017.

4. Trustees' Statutory Annual Report for the year ended 5 April 2016: The Chairman presented the Statutory Annual Report, copies of which were available in the meeting; he drew attention to the analysis of principal risks and uncertainties on page 5.

Charles Powell noted that the accounts showed a reduction in asset value of £96,000 and asked if there was a more recent valuation. Martin Trowell, as Secretary of the Finance Committee, stated that the present valuation was considerably higher.

5. Treasurer's Report: The Chairman, speaking on behalf of the Treasurer, referred members to the Treasurer's Report contained in the Annual Review. The conclusion was that the Trust was very solvent and he hoped that it was on track to increase the volume of grants. He noted that there had recently been a dearth of applications and encouraged more to be made.

The President noted that churches in the County had received around £300,000 in grants from the Government's Church Roof Fund.

Charles Powell sought assurances – which were given – that the income shown included donations received through the Jubilee Campaign. Richard Lethbridge asked how much cash had so far been lodged in the Heritage Fund. The Chairman stated that £774,000 in cash donations had already been received, with the remainder of the £3 million represented by pledged donations or pledges of gifts in wills.

6. Accounts for the year ended 5 April 2016: The accounts were received by members, on the proposal of Basil Eastwood, seconded by Charles Hebditch.

7. Constitution: The Secretary reported that, following the debate at the 2015 Annual Meeting, a small group including Trustees, Council members and ordinary members, in consultation with legal advisers, had been able to finalise a revised version of the draft CIO constitution. The main changes related to the designation of members as "General Members" and clarification of the role of the Annual Review Meeting (which was reflected in the agenda of today's meeting). This had been approved by Trustees in February and immediately submitted to the Charity Commission for registration. The Charity Commission had responded only on 1 July, requesting some adjustments to the proposed Objects of the CIO, essentially contesting that the encouragement of support for cultural heritage was a "charitable purpose". After consultation with Trustees and legal advisers, a revised version of the objects had been submitted on 27 July; it was hoped that this would be successful¹.

¹ Subsequently, the Charity Commission confirmed registration of the new CIO on 2 August 2016.

Trustees had agreed that the new CIO would take over the operations of the Trust with effect from 1 April 2017.

Anne Spokes-Symonds thanked the Trustees for the extra work done to give members a role. Richard Lethbridge considered that the changes represented a huge improvement.

8. Future priorities: The Chairman referred to the comments made by Loyd Grossman, speaking at the Wolfson Lecture after 9 years of experience as Chairman of the Churches Conservation Trust. He saw the state doing less and less. Just as the verdict Trip Advisor approach had replaced that of Egon Ronay, so the collective verdict of the general public had become more important than that of Pevsner and the expert. Social media were now critically important in educating public opinion. Experts might no longer have traction but heritage was increasingly vital, with two thirds of tourists visiting Britain for its heritage, of which churches formed an integral part. There was a need to identify and spread best practice and develop links to schools; raising awareness was the key. The Chairman wondered how else we could do this; one idea was to share the Ride & Stride income with other funds in order to penetrate beyond the immediate churchgoing community, increasing revenues for all parties.

Charles Powell noted that the new website was only a first step; it needed to be easily accessible to interaction with the younger generation. The Chairman responded that improvements had been made to its responsiveness, interactive mapping and social media; donations could now be made through Virgin Money. Jeanette Thomas recalled that the National Churches Trust had a Twitter feed, but only a couple of Riders had used it last year. Other points made included: the potential use of Pokémon Go to attract younger people to rural churches; the problems of poor mobile signals in rural Oxfordshire, which inhibited the use of social media; and a possible role for the Trust or the Diocese in developing websites for individual churches.

9. Election of President: *Sir Hugo Brunner KCVO, Trust Patron, took the chair for this item.* Sir Hugo drew attention to the Bishop Colin Fletcher's huge contribution to the County, beyond that to the Church, including to local government, to the lieutenancy and to the voluntary sector. On the proposal of Basil Eastwood, seconded by Jonathan Scheele, members unanimously re-elected, by acclaim, Bishop Colin Fletcher as President.

The meeting concluded at 3.05 pm.

Signed as a true record,

The Rt. Rev. Bishop Colin Fletcher
President

JS, BE: 22.11.2016