

OXFORDSHIRE HISTORIC CHURCHES TRUST

Minutes of the Fifth Annual meeting of General Members of the Trust held at Broughton Castle (by kind invitation of Lord and Lady Saye and Sele and the Hon Martin Fiennes) at 4pm on Monday, 19th July 2021.

In his unavoidable absence, members remembered the Chair Dr Stephen Goss and wished him an effective treatment for, and speedy recovery from, his recently diagnosed illness. The Vice-Chair warmly welcomed the President and some forty-two members of OHCT to the Annual Meeting, noting that members should continue wearing masks if they so wished. Hilary proposed a number of thanks: to Sir Hugo for taking on the presidency for 2020-2021 and presiding over the Annual Meeting; to Giles for the arrangements made in liaison with Lord and Lady Saye and Sele and the Hon. Martin Fiennes; and to the Rector for the church visit and Evensong. The Trust was enormously grateful for the opportunity to meet at Broughton. Another of the normal programme events to be salvaged was the August church visit (this year to Sutton Courtenay) for which booking was brisk. Finally the Vice-Chair thanked Holly Kilpatrick for her years as a much appreciated Membership Secretary, and warmly welcomed her successor Phoebe Hart.

The President added his welcome to members, and reiterated the Trust's thanks to its hosts and to Giles for making such enjoyable arrangements.

1. Apologies

1.1 Apologies were received from Dr Goss, the Bishop of Dorchester, the Archdeacons of Oxford and Dorchester, Sir Tim Stevenson, Jenny Haviland, Charles Baker, and Professor Malcolm Airs.

2. Minutes of the Annual Meeting of general members of the trust held on 30 September 2020.

2.1 The Minutes of the 2020 annual meeting of the Trust were approved as a correct record, and subsequently signed. There were no matters arising not covered elsewhere in the agenda.

3. Report on behalf of the Chair

3.1 Stephen Slack, Trustee, on behalf of Dr Goss, noted that the work of the Trust was continuing apace, and that Zoom had enabled the regular pattern of meetings to continue uninterrupted. Amongst the highlights of the year was the receipt of Dr David Booth's substantial legacy (which significantly strengthened the Heritage Fund and took its total over the original target of £3 million). The annual designation of one or two grants as 'David Booth Grants' was a welcome means of remembering Dr Booth and his generosity. As a consequence, the Trust has revised its grants policy and intends to award an annual total of circa £300K, including more generous grants for the installation of roof alarms.

3.2 It was no surprise that Covid had sharply reduced church incomes while at the same time underlining the importance of church-instigated activities to support and sustain their buildings. There would be an inevitable pressure on grant making, highlighting the importance of continued gifts, donations from grant-making trusts, legacies and bequests (marking with particular gratitude the recent bequest from the late Simon Haviland) as well the major contribution made each year by Ride and Stride. This last was outstanding for its continuation of income in 2020 despite the circumstances in which individual and parish fundraising Ride and Stride activities had to be undertaken.

3.3 Finally, Stephen confirmed that there had been no change in the Trustees and that the three trustees who occupied the key posts of vice-chair, treasurer and grants officer had been enthusiastically re-elected for a further term (following an enabling amendment to the Constitution). On behalf of the Chairman, Stephen thanked all those who made the work of the Trust possible, the Trustees, Council and the committees - finance and development. He paid tribute to the wise and generous chairmanship of Dr Goss. The Trust looked forward to getting to know the new Bishop of Dorchester and remembered in a minute's silence Christopher Walton who had been an outstanding promoter of the Trust's work.

4. Treasurer's Report

4.1 Giles said it was a privilege to report on a remarkably buoyant year for the Trust's finances, largely thanks to the receipt of Dr Booth's legacy. As one consequence, the Heritage Fund had topped its original target of £3 million, with assets standing at £3.8 million. As another most welcome consequence the Trust could make larger grants: in the early years the annual grant was approximately £1500 (£21K in today's money) as against the nearly £300K distributed in the year under report. As a further consequence of the legacy, the Trust's accounts had to be audited and Giles was pleased to report that the audit had been concluded successfully.

4.2 In the ensuing question time, the President remarked that the Booth family fortune originated in Liverpool. He also confirmed that Dr Booth was related to Charles Booth, the philanthropist and social reformer, who wrote the famous 'Life and Labour of the Poor in London'.

4.3 A comment from the floor noted the wide range of denominational church buildings helped by the Trust; a development widely welcomed. Basil Eastwood, drawing on his diocesan work, emphasised the growing number of church buildings seen to be at risk. Alongside these developments, and in response to a question, the Grants Officer, Cynthia Robinson, noted that the Anglican and other churches' move to net zero carbon by 2030 would be a growing feature of church restoration and maintenance. There was currently liaison with the DAC to help ensure that immediate work was in step with the zero carbon expectations. However the Trust's professional members sitting on Council frequently reminded the members that the work necessary to insulate and heat domestic buildings was often inappropriate for medieval and later church buildings. Cynthia reiterated this and noted

that applications were considered on an individual basis with area representatives meeting those responsible at parish or district level.

4.4 Cynthia also commented that the earlier emphasis on applications to install loos and kitchen facilities was slowing down, but it was too soon to see what other patterns would emerge. Current concerns related to the pressure on builders and building contracts, and especially the availability of suitable building materials for specialist restoration. Members particularly emphasised their gratitude for the continuing work of the Grants Officer. In answer to a question, it was confirmed that the Trustees saw the Trust's objectives as broad enough for the developing situation across historic church buildings. .

5/6 Receive the Statutory Annual Report and Accounts

1.

As customary, the members received the annual report and accounts.

7. Report on Ride and Stride

7.1 As already observed, and to a great extent thanks to the volunteers who worked to overcome all obstacles, Ride and Stride had been a real success. Hilary said that particular thanks were owed to area coordinators (especially in helping parish organisers with printing and distribution), and to Giles for resolving earlier financial complications and implementing a significantly improved procedure for the future. Ride and Stride remained a major source of Trust income. Members also noted how much thanks was due to Hilary herself, as County Organiser.

8. Election of President for the forthcoming year

8.1 In nominating Charles Baker as President for the coming year, Michael Sibly said that Charles' past work for the Trust was very well known; his willingness to accept nomination was much appreciated. Seconded by Jonathan Scheele, Mr Baker was enthusiastically elected as President of OHCT for 2021-2022.

9. AOB

9.1 It was noted that Ride and Stride took place across the three major counties in the Oxford Diocese, and gave opportunities for contact with schools. The Secretary/Grants Officer for Berkshire suggested that closer awareness between the three county organisations would be helpful.

Charles Powell commented that he had last attended an annual meeting in 2013. At that stage the Trust's assets were approximately £1million, and now eight years later topped £5 million. This was a significant achievement to celebrate, and he was confident that the Trustees and Council would seek to maintain this momentum.