



Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust

Supporting Oxfordshire's Churches since 1964

Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Trust held at Ripon College, Cuddesdon on Thursday, 5th August 2022

1 Introduction

Mr Charles Baker, President, in the chair, forty members present.

The President welcomed all the members, and reserved a special welcome for Dr Stephen Goss whose recovery from illness would allow him to resume the chair in the Autumn. Dr Goss thanked everyone for their good wishes over his period of ill health, and especially Hilary who had undertaken so splendidly the role of Acting Chair.

2 Apologies

Apologies were received from the Bishop of Dorchester, Bishop Colin, Michael Sibly, Jonathan Scheele, Fiona Bartholomew, Holly Kilpatrick, Catherine Hitchens, and Alison Shaw.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the 2021 Annual Meeting were accepted as a correct record.

4 Acting Chair's Report

Hilary indicated that the main items for report had been covered in the Annual Review, and she would focus on a small number of key issues. To her pleasure, it had been possible to run this year's series of events, and the calendar of visits and talks would end in November when Professor Michael Wood would be the speaker at Blenheim.

Hilary warmly welcomed the sequence of online material which the Webinar Group was producing or had at the planning stage. Additional to the Talks series, Dr Coldstream and Camilla Finlay, would focus on a number of regular problems encountered in the care of historic churches. Church Wardens and those concerned with fabric would be the target audience. The first of this series would focus on the value of undertaking feasibility studies, a particularly appropriate topic since the Trust had recently introduced a system of grants for feasibility studies. These were to be approved by the Trustees in the light of the advice provided by the Area Representative.

The Trustees noted various recent reports, indicating the next few years were unlikely to be easy for historic churches. The Trustees were committed to doing all they could to support Oxfordshire historic churches in as many ways they were able: Council had recently been strengthened by the introduction of a Roman Catholic member, Mr Michael Robarts, and it continued to seek a Nonconformist member in succession to Dr Martin Wellings.

On other aspects, Council and the Trustees would particularly miss Gillian Argyle who had decided this was the time to stand down. She had been, as the members warmly acknowledged, a much valued and stalwart member of both the Trustees and Council. Grateful thanks were due to former Chair, Basil Eastwood, who with Alison, also a warm supporter of OHCT especially through Ride and Stride, were moving to Bristol. Hilary thanked Charles Baker for agreeing to take on the Presidency for 2021-2022, and providing a thought-provoking review of the Trust's activities. She paid particular tribute to her fellow Trustees for their enduring support during the Chair's absence as well as Council members.

Looking ahead, there were a number of other big items to tackle including the commitment to an Away Day for both Trustees and Council members in 2023, the creation of the pod casts or webinars dealing with characteristic church building tasks, and continuing work on updating the membership list.

In response to questions, it was confirmed that the short videos on buildings and fabric would be available beyond OHCT membership, and were particularly targeted at Church Wardens and other parish officers. On applications for funding, the Grants Officer confirmed that there was only a small drop off from the normal 30-35 annual applications. Two applications for feasibility studies had already been made, and underlined the importance of parishes contemplating a project being in touch with an Area Representative as soon as possible. In the current circumstances, it was likely that inflation would add to project costs and the Trust would not rule out considering top-up grants.

5 Treasurer's Report

Giles indicated that he would not reiterate the points set out in the Trust's documentation but seek to provide an overview of the Trust's resources. Market volatility had affected the Trust's portfolio, but it remained strong at the end of the financial year. Holdings were purchased with the longer term in mind and were appropriately diversified.

Given the size of the current reserves and the policy requirements relating to reserves encouraged by the Charity Commission, the Trustees had asked the Finance Committee to look at the Trust's current policy (which sought long term resilience while avoiding any implication of hoarding), taking note of any technical issues, and reporting back to the Trustees. It was important to note that the Trust now required a full audit and had received a clean bill of health. The Treasurer was thanked for his report and his invaluable work across the year.

6/7 The members received the draft Trustees' Statutory Report and the draft Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2022.

8 Ride+Stride Report

As in most other counties, there had been a small reduction in the total income raised by Ride+Stride, the 2021 event clashing with other events postponed from earlier in the year. In the circumstances the outcome was a considerable success and once again underlined the significance of Ride+Stride as an excellent flag-ship event for OHCT. In the context of the continuing concerns of some, Ride+Stride recognised different ways

of raising money to supplement bicycle riding and walking and flexibility to encourage new and younger participants.

9 Any further consideration of the impact of national circumstances

Attention was drawn to the use parishes were making of audits supported by the diocese to explore ways to reduce their carbon footprints, often focusing on heating and lighting. Simple but important ideas were emerging, e.g. changing the times of services, heating only particular parts of a building. The Trust welcomed these developments and the positive liaison with the Diocese.

On the national picture, Stephen Slack reported on the continuing after effects of the Covid pandemic, especially in relation to greater community use. He noted that it was something of a myth that medieval churches were often promoted for secular usage, but that the recent NCT survey was attempting to identify the extent of community use. The Trust's current initiatives through the Roadshows and the forthcoming webinars for Church Wardens, (alongside the liaison with the DAC), were surely positive ways to respond to the emerging national picture.

As an illustration of national thinking, the Secretary reported that he had recently been in touch with a senior officer from Historic England to supply the requested copy of "Churches for Communities" written by Becky Payne and published by OHCT. Richard suggested that the summary of Historic England's interest in parish churches provided in their correspondence gave a particular pointer to the approach likely to be taken at national level. It read: *'We're making the case for listed places of worship as heritage in their own right, as cultural centres for communities and as faith buildings. We support the people who look after them so they can share them with their communities and make them open as places of well-being for people of all faiths and none.'*

Dr Goss noted that this definition placed the major responsibility for the future of church buildings squarely on the shoulders of those in the parishes, and, specifically, whether they could sell the notion of wider community use, and find the means for long-term development.

10 Election of President for the year

With renewed thanks to Charles Baker, and confirmation that the Bishop of Dorchester would willingly serve as President, if elected, Bishop Gavin was proposed and seconded, and elected for the year 2022-23 *nem con*.