

Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust (2016)

Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Trust held at St Mary's Witney on Monday, 24th July, 2023

The Bishop of Dorchester, President, in the chair; twenty-five members present.

1 Introduction

The President welcomed all the members, and thanked the Trust for its support to the county's churches over the past year. Bishop Gavin saw God growing his church through the mission and ministry of people, but also through the careful stewardship of buildings.

2 Apologies

Apologies were received from the Archdeacon of Dorchester, Bishop Colin, Sir Hugo Brunner, Professor Airs, Hilary Cakebread Hall, Michael Sibly, Dr Karmowska, Alison Butler, Fiona Bartholomew, Sarah Scheele, Diana Lethbridge, James Little, Naomi Bowen.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the 2022 annual meeting were accepted as a correct record and signed.

4 Chair's Report

Dr Goss began his remarks by indicating that Sir Hugo's absence was caused by a fall, and a card wishing him a speedy recovery was available to sign. The Vice-Chair and County Organiser for Ride and Stride, Hilary Cakebread Hall, had sent particular apologies for having to miss the meeting for urgent family reasons.

In welcoming Bishop Gavin to his first Annual Meeting of the Trust, Stephen thanked him for his enthusiastic participation in Ride and Stride. Warm thanks were due to the Rector and his staff for the use of St Mary's.

2022-23 was a year on which it was a pleasure to look back: increased resources within the Trust had allowed greater support for more churches, especially as they emerged from the lock-down and the pandemic. More support was also required as churches coped with significant inflation in building costs and materials: this could be seen in that the Trust's grants to churches – though well over £400k in the year – related to works that cost the churches a total of £2.3 million. In recent years, the Trust's resources had received an important and very significant boost through the Jubilee Appeal and the setting up of the Heritage Fund under Basil Eastwood (whose presence was warmly welcomed), but it was noted that maintaining the level of support that the Trust had provided this year would require a continued focus on fundraising. Since Dr David Booth's outstanding legacy to the Trust, it had been possible to make a number of enhanced "David Booth Awards", including two in the past year, to Buckland and to Woodstock.

Noting that The Annual Review contained details of last year's OHCT events, Stephen also drew attention to the recent newsletter and thanked all those involved in setting up the programme of forthcoming events. He noted that the online talk on the work of G E Street would be available on the web to those who had signed up for a period after the event.

Turning to the various offices associated with the Trust, Stephen reported the Trustees' pleasure in that Bishop Colin had readily agreed to become a patron. Michael Sibly had stepped down as a Trustee after a very valuable term of office, and two new Trustees had elected, both of whom were members of Council: David Warr and Natalie Merry had accepted appointment from September 2023. Gillian Argyle had decided to stand down from Council after long service to the Trust (including as a Trustee); and Elizabeth MacLeod, who was leaving the county, had stood down from Council following an exceptional stint as Area Representative for Deddington. David Meara had finished his role as lectures co-ordinator in 2022, and he and his range of contacts would be much missed. The Trust's gratitude to all these individuals was noted.

On a sombre note, Dr Goss reported the death of Council member Dr Mark Stanley Price whose wise and thoughtful advice would be much missed. Members kept a period of silence in his memory.

Finally Stephen asked members to make a note of the date for the Annual Meeting in 2024. Bernard and Sarah Taylor had generously offered Rycote Park as the venue on the afternoon of Wednesday, 11th September, 2024. We shall have the opportunity to visit Rycote's remarkable chapel where Elizabeth I had worshipped while she was detained before becoming Queen. This will be the Diamond Jubilee of the Trust, an occasion specially worthy of celebration.

Expressing his gratitude to Stephen for his work as Chair, Bishop Gavin invited questions. The question was raised as to the Trust's attitude to the reordering of churches which might involve controversial changes such as the removal of pews. In response it was noted that the Trust did not give grants for reordering that was strictly for liturgical purposes, and it customarily stood aside from discussing matters within the jurisdiction of the DAC (which gave due consideration to specific representations from groups like the Victorian Society).

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 financial position. The key event of the financial year was the doubling of grant giving from £212K in the previous year to some £434K in this. This reflected both the change in the Trust's reserves policy described in the 2022 report and the renewed emphasis on building works by churches as they came out of

the pandemic and lockdown. Drawing down on reserves while maintaining sufficient for the lean years followed the Charity Commission's guidance, and would allow the Trust to maintain the present increased level of grant-giving for several years to come. The value of the Trust's investment portfolio had fallen a little in the last year (following two years of exceptional rises): this variation was unavoidable and was not of concern given the long-term purpose of the investments. Administrative costs, which were incurred largely for data management and statutory audit, had been kept roughly constant. It was important to note that the Trust now had to undertake a full audit every year and had received a clean bill of health.

In response to a question, Giles said that it was difficult to forecast how long it might be possible to sustain the new level of giving. He hoped that four years might be possible but noted that grant giving could be scaled back at any point. The Trust was encouraging potential legators to specify where they wanted their gifts to be directed: in particular, the Trust is asking that legators give specifically to the Heritage Fund so as to secure our investment income for the long term. The Trust was not spending capital held by the Heritage Fund.

A member noted that this year's list of grant recipients did not include a Roman Catholic building. This had not been the case in previous years and the Trust hoped that the recent appointment of a Roman Catholic member of Council in parallel to our Methodist representative would encourage a broader range of churches and chapels to apply for grants.

The Treasurer was thanked for his report and his invaluable work across the year.

6/7 The members received the Trustees' Statutory Report and the Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2023.

8 Ride+Stride Report

The Chair gave the report in Hilary's unavoidable absence. As in most other counties, there had been a small reduction in the total income raised by Ride+Stride, the 2022 event having taken place within the mourning period for the late Queen. In consultation with Bishop Gavin, it had been decided to continue with a scaled down and quieter version of the day. This appeared to have been welcomed. That having been said, it is increasingly difficult to maintain a network of local contacts to promote the event, and recruiting new riders remains problematic. That we continue to do well underlines the effectiveness of Hilary's indefatigable work. She has continued to streamline the administration of Ride+Stride and is making increasing use of social media with the hope of attracting more young participants. Hilary was warmly thanked in her absence for her continuing work.

9 Reducing the carbon footprint of churches

The work of the DAC in this context had recently been described in Council by two DAC officers. The Grants Officer emphasised how useful this presentation had been. Attention had been drawn to what are called quick wins for parishes, e.g. green electricity tariffs, and new forms of heating which could be more economical and which could, if chosen with care, be of benefit in preserving the fabric and furnishings. A quarter of all parishes had taken up the Diocesan grants for energy audits, and of course OHCT now offered feasibility grants which could be used in this context. Parishes that relied on oil were often faced with difficult choices – especially the larger and more heavily used buildings. Many smaller churches were choosing to instal either under-pew or overhead electric heating. Under the changes to faculty jurisdiction, specific new responsibilities had been placed on the DAC, and this could result in an extended dialogue, notwithstanding the appointment of new and additional officers. For its part, OHCT had long supported grants for new forms of heating, and would continue to do so.

Members welcomed the Grants Officer's summary but endorsed OHCT's concerns about taking care to protect the fabric when changing to new forms of heating. It was accepted that there were no silver bullets; new heating systems for big churches in particular could be prohibitively expensive. Different solutions needed to be canvassed, as the DAC was well aware, both for different sizes of building and for different methods of heating. It was noted that new technologies for heating were evolving and were still very much under development: it remained to be seen how the needs of medieval buildings could best be met. There could be an argument for installing solar panels on church roofs when aesthetic concerns could be avoided.

Members noted the importance of involving young people in the debate and in demonstrating that the Church is doing its bit and can in, Bishop Gavin's words, act as a flag-waver for carbon reduction. Others commented on the relative smallness of the overall contribution of the UK to global warming, the distinction between 'net-zero' and 'carbon-zero', and the need to accept transitional approaches.

Bishop Gavin concluded by noting that these conversations will undoubtedly go on.

10 Election of President for the year

Having confirmed that the Bishop of Dorchester would willingly serve a further term as President, Bishop Gavin was proposed (by the Chair) and seconded (by Gillian Argyle). He was elected *nem con* President for the year 2023-24.