

EXETER CIVIC SOCIETY

Minutes of Annual General Meeting held at the Devon & Exeter Institution at 6.30pm on Thursday 24 November 2011

1 Welcome

The President, Mr John Landers, welcomed 40 members to the meeting

2 Apologies

Apologies were received from Committee Member Richard Parker and 22 members

3 Minutes of the previous AGM

The Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of 11 November 2010 were accepted as correct and signed by the Chairman.

There were no matters arising.

4 Chairman's Report

The Chairman reported as follows:

A year ago Exeter Civic Society's very existence was under threat. We can all take pleasure tonight in knowing that it has not merely survived the past twelve months but has developed promisingly and now bids fair to continue safely into the future as a thriving contributor to the life of the city of Exeter. We have not yet ventured to celebrate our 50th birthday formally, but during the coming year we shall surely want to do this.

I do not need to recap in detail the steps by which progress has been achieved – they have been well covered in the year's Newsletters. Julian Nowill volunteered to hold the fort on financial matters, and Pamela Coleman joined the Society at the deep end as Secretary and Membership Secretary. With their support and also thanks to suggestions from members and input at the Extraordinary General Meeting last March we took action on several fronts, updating our membership records, redesigning our leaflets and other publicity, improving communications with members by setting up an email group, and establishing the monthly Open Morning which has had steadily increasing support and has encouraged new members to join. All this is quickly said but represents a huge input of Committee time and skill, chiefly, as the rest of us freely acknowledge, by Pamela Coleman as Secretary. I really do not think that we would have made much progress without her. We have benefited not only from her technical expertise but also from her reactions as a newcomer to the city and to the Society. She has made us look at ourselves with a critical eye and has produced positive suggestions for change.

What has not changed is our excellent relationship with the local planning department. The Planning Sub-Committee's regular reports provide the chief interest of our Newsletters, and our grateful thanks go to all its members, led by Pamela Wootton. May I remind members that we cannot adopt a whole-Society stand on planning matters – in theory we represent the full cross-section of Exeter opinion. However, when you write to the Council as an individual to criticise or praise, there is no harm in mentioning that you are a member of Exeter Civic Society.

During the year the Society has maintained a varied programme of one-off events, from hosting Tiverton Civic Society's visit to St Nicholas Priory to organising the recent talk by Judith Richardson-Dawes on the Green Man. It is Margo Swift whom we thank for this aspect of the Society's activities, and it is with great regret, but full understanding, that I report her wish to step down. Thank you, Margo, for your unfailing interest and reliability, often, I know, at times of great difficulty in your personal life. I am glad that Margo is willing to continue on the Committee, and hope that knowing that she is there to support will encourage a volunteer tonight to become Programme Secretary for the forthcoming year.

To return to the Open Mornings initiative: we are always looking for further ideas to keep members and visitors interested for an hour or so. The brief talks at 11am prompt, the opportunity to buy books on local history and other materials, and the members' second-hand bookstall, have all been well received, and I am grateful to those members who have volunteered to help at the coffee bar. Please do your best to bring newcomers along, and do consider offering a 10-minute talk.

Our future plans include the setting-up of a sub-committee to promote the installation of more blue plaques around the city, with accompanying explanatory leaflets as in Torbay. Two more named benches will soon be installed for the benefit of walkers in the river and canal area, and we await information on how we as a Society can contribute to the revived Living History project currently proposed for next September. We shall also be remodelling our website, which leads me in to the final part of this Report, namely to thank David Snell for his years of commitment to this aspect of the Society's publicity. The next Newsletter will give you more details about him but, in brief, he and his wife Françoise joined the Society in the 1970s and served on the Committee for some seven years. Later came the setting-up of our website and years of editing our Newsletters. We are glad for David that he is acquiring so much work elsewhere that he truly wants to retire from these responsibilities, but we shall greatly miss not only his expertise and efficiency but his patience – editing a Newsletter can be a thankless business of chasing after contributors.

David, I shall now ask President John Landers to present you with a cheque, together with the grateful thanks of Exeter Civic Society for your well over thirty years of service.

Adoption of the Chairman's Report was proposed by Jennifer Trusted, seconded by David Snell and carried by the members present.

5 Secretary's Report

We have had a new logo and several promotional items this year, poster, leaflets, flyers featuring the red Wyvern logo which I'm sure you've all seen, and in the new year we will be having a new website.

We have a very interested member, Keith Lewis, who is keen to participate in the setting up of the website. He put forward a couple of web designers and we met up with them to hear their proposals. After consideration the committee chose Sam Freeman to design our site and he will also be our Webmaster at a small extra cost until we are able to do this ourselves. He plans to start work in December so we can move forward with a new website in the new year.

Many people have suggested that to save a considerable amount on postage we can put the newsletter online for those who have internet access. So there will be a

Membership login area which can only be accessed by members, and the newsletter will be made available in this area. The newsletter will be sent by post as usual for those who have no internet access.

6 Membership Secretary's Report

Membership Renewals are continuing to trickle in, but the October bank statement revealed 50 members who did not increase their subscriptions as we requested and have paid the old rates by standing order. We are not too worried about chasing up the odd missing pounds this year, but amendments need to be made by these members well before they are due next year.

The current paid up memberships for this year are as follows (received by 24 November):

Life Members: 60 (36 singles and 12 joint)

Yearly members: 174 (96 singles and 39 joint)

Total paid up members: 234 (132 singles and 51 joint)

The number of people on the e-mailing list is 150 (including 8 Committee Members) though 20 of them are not paid up this year.

7 Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer tabled a Profit and Loss account for the year end 30 September 2011 showing a deficit of £1048.41 for the year, half of which was accounted for by the cost of the public seat on the canal bank. He reported that he is not worried by the deficit for the moment as the Society's balances were very high and now stand at £5140. However, increased activity recently also requires increased income and he would be concerned if the balance falls below £2000. Therefore it is planned to increase subscriptions for next year to £10 individual, £15 couples, £100 individual life and £150 joint life. This increase was proposed by Pamela Coleman, seconded by Julian Nowill and passed by the members present.

He reported that Gift Aid had not been claimed for four years and the records were not perfect and appealed for a volunteer to help him tackle this problem.

In reply to an enquiry about the value of books in stock it was explained that these had been written down to zero. The main stock now is of the trams book and despite great efforts these have proved very difficult to sell. A small stock will be kept, some have been sold to Postscript for remaindering and the rest will be sent to the Book Cycle charity for distribution worldwide.

Janet Robb emphasised the important of claiming the Gift Aid as far as possible.

Acceptance of the Treasurer's report was proposed by David Snell, seconded by Margo Swift and passed by members present.

8 Election of Officers and Committee

The following were confirmed:

Chairman Felicity Murdin

Secretary/Membership Secretary Pamela Coleman

Treasurer Julian Nowill

Committee Members: Peter Caspar, Celia King, Barbara Looser, Richard Parker, Margo Swift, Pamela Wootton

Following a plea for a Vice-Chairman, Peter Wadham was proposed by Margo Swift, seconded by Janet Robb and duly elected.

A volunteer is needed for the post of Programme Secretary.

Additional Committee members: Susie Hewitt and Keith Lewis were proposed by Pamela Coleman, seconded by Peter Caspar and duly elected.

9 Any other business

- i Pamela Coleman drew attention to a lecture by Todd Gray in the Guildhall on 3 December.
- ii Hazel Harvey expressed concern about the horse chestnut tree on the Cathedral Green which is currently roped off. Pamela Wootton explained that a large branch recently fell off it without warning and another has had to be severely pruned. While the tree is not under immediate threat, it is suffering from a disease which is threatening all horse chestnuts in the country.
- iii Paul Gibbons drew attention to the timetable for the traffic orders implementing the London Inn Square proposals.
- iv Devon County Council is currently consulting about the proposals for redeveloping Exeter Central Library.
- v David Snell suggested that before too much work went into putting the Newsletter on to the website, there should be a survey of how many people would be interested in this as the response was small to a similar proposal 2 or 3 years ago. However, it is hoped that the Society can encourage a younger membership who would be more used to obtaining information online.
- vi Pamela Wootton reported that Sheila Venn, who was for many years Membership Secretary, has recently died.

The meeting closed at 7.30pm.