

# EXETER CIVIC SOCIETY

## Minutes of Annual General Meeting held at the Devon & Exeter Institution at 6.30pm on Wednesday 20 November 2013

### 1 Welcome

The President, Peter Wadham, welcomed 40 members, particularly new members, to the meeting.

### 2 Apologies

Apologies were received from Committee Members Keith Lewis and Barbara Looser, Ben Bradshaw and members Jane Atkinson, Margaret Batten, Christopher Clapham, Wendy Dauge, Mary Evans, Bernard Frowd, David Harvey, Susan Jackson, Darren Marsh, Peter Nickol, Janet Robb, Julia Spruntulis, Louis Ten-Holter, Roger and Roslyn Thorne, Chris Watson, Robin Watson

### 3 Minutes of the previous AGM

The Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of 23 November 2012 were accepted as correct and signed.

### 4 Matters arising.

None

### 5 Chairman's Report

Three years ago I took over from a very long-standing Chairman (more of her later), and one of my objectives at the time was to ensure that in future the Society would have a steady turnover in leadership. The prospect of a fixed term in office will, I hope, encourage a variety of Chairmen to come forward in turn in the future, and thus continue to refresh attitudes and ideas within Exeter Civic Society.

As many of us here remember, refreshment was what the Society needed three years ago. This was no reflection on the previous committee: Margo Swift as Chairman had maintained the Society's traditional profile and activities to a high standard and with a great deal of personal input. Membership support, however, seemed ever-dwindling, to the extent that the future of the Society was in doubt. I truly feel that my only significant action as Chairman was in that first year, namely deciding, with Margo's support, to face up to the problem by calling an Extraordinary General Meeting. This, thank goodness, led in due course to our current state of good health. An inspiring presentation on Torbay's success gave us heart and some lucky recruitments to the committee enabled the Society to brighten its image and build up its place in the community. From then on I approved while others did all the hard work. I am delighted to report that today the Society is thriving.

Since I cannot take credit for any of the developments that followed that EGM three years ago, this address must chiefly be a list of those to whom I am indebted for their imaginative and energetic embrace of change. I ask you to join with me in appreciating their achievements.

At the top of the list I am putting our Secretary, Pamela Coleman. As a newcomer to Exeter who had only recently joined the Society with certain expectations, she helped us focus from the outset on essential updating, while her experience with website and poster design has been invaluable. Thanks to Pamela we moved from black-and-white to

colour; we now have far speedier two-way communication with members via the email database that she set up; as a result we now have many more members taking an active interest in our events and volunteering help.

Also high on my list of thanks are Peter Caspar, who as Treasurer not only ensures that we retain charitable status but also simplified our accounting system, and Gordon Read, who has toiled through past records to maximise Gift Aid. With increased income we are able to afford more blue plaques, so special thanks too to John Monks for his enthusiastic work on the two plaques unveiled this year and for the research that he has done on possible future commemorations.

I warmly thank Pamela Wootton every year and rightly so. She is a stalwart of the Planning sub-committee which has continued to give close attention to, and interesting reports on, planning applications that raise questions of practicality or taste. We are lucky to have this group's expertise, and their successful example of an informal group meeting outside the committee suggests that other informal groups might usefully evolve in the future, enjoying getting together to work on some other area of the Society's remit.

Via our Newsletter you have received regular accounts of the Society's doings since the last AGM, so I do not propose to report on the year 2012-2013 in detail. May I instead continue to highlight the particular contribution that individuals have made to the success of events that you have read about.

Firstly, our Saturday morning coffee brewers, coping with far from ideal facilities in the Hoskins Room and helping to make visitors feel welcome. When our Open Mornings had to decamp to this rather hidden spot we wondered whether they would continue to be well attended. We needn't have worried: the room is sometimes scarcely big enough, and it has been interesting to see how different speaker topics bring in newcomers – a good way to publicise the Society.

We have enjoyed a steady programme of visits this year, thanks initially to Margo, who was longing to retire, and then to Ruth McLeish, who kindly stepped forward to take over from her. Our list of events has also been strengthened by the introduction of Saturday afternoon seminars. Both of those held so far were sell-outs and we shall certainly be developing this aspect of our activities.

I am sorry that Keith Lewis is not here in person to receive our gratitude for all that he has done this year. He evolved our website version of the questionnaire on plans for the redevelopment of the bus station; he co-ordinated those who wished to pursue the idea of a central theatre for Exeter and currently attends their meetings as ECS observer; he keeps abreast of strategic planning in the city, for instance transport; he is full of energy and ideas, for instance New Members' meetings. Two of these were held this year, throwing up plenty of comment and suggestions.

Meanwhile our President has been representing us in a different sphere, at meetings concerning the future of the Dissenters' graveyard. You will doubtless hear more of this in the coming year.

If I have not mentioned your name or contribution, please forgive me. I have had so much kind support from members that I could have continued with my thanks for some time yet, but it is high time that I stopped. I have enjoyed being Chairman but I look forward to relinquishing this badge. The Society can safely depend on my successor and I know that this time next year you will be returning to hear an AGM report full of continuing good news of our progress.

My final act as Chairman is to ask our President to make two presentations.

There followed presentations to Celia King, Minutes Secretary retiring from the committee, and Margo Swift, former Chairman also retiring from the committee.

The acceptance of the Chairman's Report was proposed by David Snell and agreed by the meeting.

Thanks were expressed to Felicity Murdin on behalf of the Civic Society for her work as Chairman for the last three years.

## **6 Treasurer's Report**

The Receipts & Payments for the year to 30 September 2013 had been circulated to members by email prior to the meeting and hard copies were available.

Peter Caspar thanked Pamela Coleman for dealing with the finances while he was unavoidably abroad for long periods during the year. He also thanked Gordon Read for his hard and profitable work on claiming back gift aid.

He explained that subscription income was up on the year, publications sales were down and events income was unchanged. The costs of the Newsletter had disappeared because two-thirds were now sent by email and the cost of the remaining third was included within Stationery & postage.

David Snell suggested that the publications for sale should be advertised on the website.

The acceptance of the Treasurer's Report was proposed by Jennifer Trusted and agreed by the meeting.

## **7 Secretary's/Membership Secretary's Report**

**Website:** The website has continued to grow and develop, especially with regard to the Blue Plaque area which now holds a fascinating collection of pictures and information relating to the various plaques throughout the city. Apart from our web developer Sam there are three people who can log into the website and make changes, myself, Keith Lewis and John Monks. If you feel anything there is out of date or inaccurate just let one of us know. Members can join or renew through the website, and there are also Gift Aid and Standing Order forms there too.

**Events:** There have been two very successful events during the year which were open to the public and each sold 100 tickets. Room and speaker expenses are high, but the Elizabethan Orphans' seminar in February 2013 raised £171 and the Devon Gardens seminar in October 2013 raised £180. We are now looking for suggestions for the next double event, featuring two speakers who can wow an audience. The takings from these events subsidise costs for other events, such as Open Mornings and new members' evenings.

**Newsletters:** By sending three-quarters of the newsletters by email we continue to save about £300 a year in printing and postage. Newsletters are also available on the website for members to read in the future. Through these kinds of savings we are able to spend more on projects such as Blue Plaques, where we are leaving a permanent legacy to Exeter.

**Membership:** The membership figures for 2012-13 were as follows:

Life Members:	57
Yearly members:	180
Total members:	237

We had 3 new life members and 27 new yearly members

Another 12 people from the theatre group joined to cover their start-up costs which we subsidised.

There were 158 email addresses on the emailing list.

## **8 Election of Officers and Committee**

The following were nominated and confirmed:

Chairman Keith Lewis, proposed by Peter Wadham, seconded by Felicity Murdin

Secretary/Membership Secretary Pamela Coleman

Treasurer Peter Caspar, proposed by Felicity Murdin and seconded by Peter Wadham

Ruth McLeish, Programme Co-ordinator, proposed by Pamela Wootton, seconded by Susie Hewitt

Committee Members: Wendy Dauge, Susie Hewitt, Ann Kennedy, Felicity Murdin, Pamela Wootton, proposed and seconded by other members of the Committee

Following the election Felicity read a message from Keith Lewis setting out his hopes for the Society during his chairmanship.

## **9 Any other business**

John Monks spoke to his motion 'That the Civic Society should establish a Canal, River & Quayside Group to preserve and enhance the character of these important and historic aspects of Exeter life and examine matters affecting them'. Following discussion during which some contrary opinions were expressed, the meeting accepted the motion by a large majority.

The meeting closed at 7.40pm.