

Minutes of the 78th Annual General Meeting of the East Reading Horticultural Society held at St Peter's Church Hall on Tuesday 19th February 2019

Present: Don Palmer (President), Margaret Thomas (Secretary), Jeff Gardner (Treasurer), John Peacock (Chairman), Malcolm Iosson, Geoff Ruffles, Mike Fewtrell, Mike Smith, Neal Stockwell. Approximately 45 people attended.

Apologies: Phil Merrin, Mary Brooke, Carol Peacock, Roger Howard, Bill Barton, Roger Busk and Derek Press.

Opening

Mr Don Palmer opened the meeting at 8.00 pm and welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending. The minutes of the previous AGM, which had been made available before the meeting for those present to read were approved. They were accepted and signed as a true record of the last AGM. Proposed by Gwen Barton and seconded by Neal Stockwell. Don praised the Committee for all their hard work and said what a good year it had been with shows, visits and lectures and especially the great success of the Christmas Show again.

Matters arising

None

Chairman's report

John Peacock welcomed everyone and noted it was his sixth AGM as Chairman. He thanked them for attending and he asked Neal to pass on our kind thoughts to Mary Stockwell as she continues to recover from a serious illness.

He went on to thank committee members and others for all their hard work towards the smooth running of the society throughout the year and wish to point out that we are a voluntary run society and our success is a direct result of the enormous number of hours that every member of the committee contributes to the job they do behind the scenes to be the heartbeat of the ERHS.

John was pleased to welcome Ann Leslie as a newly co-opted committee member who has agreed to take over responsibility for organising our talks programme and he wished her every success. This was followed by thanks to Mike Smith who now retires from being the talks organiser, after arranging many splendid speakers over the past few years which have enriched our Tuesday meetings. It has been a significant contribution to our society. Our treasurer Jeff Gardner has advised us that he wishes to stand down in a year's time having served in the role for 25 years providing again a very significant contribution and we are hoping that a member will come forward with accountancy skills who might take on the position.

Thanks were also given to Dot and Bert Ballard, Maureen Wellman and Carole Peacock for working on refreshments at the talks evenings and Neal and Mary Stockwell's daughter and family for organising refreshments at the Autumn Show. Also, Roger Blay for his invaluable help to Carole at the Autumn Show.

John reported that Peggy Palmer one of our vice presidents had died late last year and ERHS was represented at her funeral in November. Phyllis Evans had retired from delivering newsletters due to ill health and was given flowers and a card.

The Autumn and Christmas Shows were very successful again and a big thanks to Carole Peacock for her excellent organisation of both Shows.

Trips to the Malvern Spring Show in May and Sheffield Park in October were excellent as was the visit to the Anvil Theatre in January. We are looking forward to a trip to the RHS Show in Cardiff in April, and our Summer Show will take place on Saturday 29th June.

The schedule is now available.

We plan to go to a NT property called Nymans in Sussex in September and we may go to the light show in Kew in December and later that month we will have our Christmas Show. We continue to need assistant shed stewards, and finally John wished us a successful and productive gardening year and invited us to enjoy the cheese and wine and buy the raffle tickets.

(See below for a full copy of his report.)

Treasurer's report

Jeff stated that we had a small profit of £267 and our finances were in good order, but it had been decided to increase the annual subscription fee to £3 for 2019-2020. A vote was taken to see if members agreed and there were no objections, it was pointed out that we do not pay for our meetings as many other societies do, and one purchase from the Shed can almost give you your sub back. The increase was proposed by John Peacock and seconded by Roger Blay.

From the 1st April there will be a reduction of 5% on new stock coming in to the Shed. Acceptance of the Treasurer's report was proposed by Penny Lowndes and seconded by Joyce Hatch. Jeff thanked Roger Howard for taking care of the weekly banking and Cathy Begg for carrying out the independent examination of the accounts.

(See below for a full copy of his report.)

Election of Officers

John Peacock conducted the election proceedings. The Committee were all willing to continue.

Chairman: John Peacock

Vice Chairman: Mike Smith

Treasurer: Jeff Gardner

Secretary: Margaret Thomas

The rest of the Committee are: Mike Fewtrell, Torkill Fozzard, Roger Howard, Malcolm Iosson, Ann Leslie, Geoff Ruffles, and Neal Stockwell.

Auditor

Cathy Begg had agreed to be our independent Auditor and this was proposed by Jeff Gardner and seconded by John Peacock.

AOB

Gwen Barton told us that someone had tried to break into the Shed.

Ruth Palmer suggested as we had a subscription increase, we should put a note in the newsletter that our meetings were free which included refreshments, although a donation was sometimes made towards tea and biscuits.

Could members please contact Ann Leslie if they had ideas for speakers. John had some speakers from Bourne End HS to pass on.

We hope to have a better display at our stand at the Green Fair in August, more posters and possibly fruit and vegetables plus the flowers we usually have. Mike Smith made another appeal for Shed helpers.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 8.40 pm

After this, refreshments of cheese and wine were served, and the raffle was drawn. The raffle made a profit of £46.50.

Chairman's report

Thank you, Don, for your excellent opening remarks and presenting your comments and observations about our successful society.

Good evening ladies and gentlemen and may I add my welcome to this year's AGM and thank you for giving up your time to attend our annual review.

Reading my file the other morning I noted that this will be the sixth AGM I have attended as chairman. I also saw that my first report in 2014 just about covered two sides of A4 and last year I wrote six sides of A4. I plan to be a good gardener tonight and 'prune' my comments as I review the year and look ahead.

We must never ever forget that we are a voluntary run society and our success is a direct result of the enormous number of hours that every member of the committee contributes for the job they do behind the scenes to be the heartbeat of ERHS.

In previous years I have appealed for 'new' blood to the society and I am very pleased to officially welcome Ann Leslie as a newly co-opted committee member who has agreed to take over responsibility for organising our talks programme from now on and we wish her every success. It therefore, naturally follows that I must offer my thanks, on everyone's behalf, to Mike Smith who now retires from being the talks organiser. Over the years he has invited some splendid speakers and enriched our Tuesday evenings as he has presented a wide range of excellent subject matters, some closely linked to gardening and others of a wider interest. Thank you, Mike, very much for your significant contribution.

Another long-standing committee member, our esteemed 'old blood' treasurer Jeff Gardner has advised me of his intention to stand down from this role in a year's time so as to give us plenty of time to find a new financial supremo. This news came as a surprise and a disappointment, but I fully appreciate his thinking as he has served in this role for 25 years and is fully deserving of retiring from this role, but not of his association with ERHS which is well over 50 years. Balance sheets are a foreign language to me and I do hope we can find a member who has accountancy experience to consider taking on this role. In anticipation of your final year Jeff I extend my thanks for your significant contribution to the work of the society.

Besides Jeff Gardner's bewildering but superb contribution as financial supremo throughout the year and as the prize money man at the shows and to Ann Leslie on becoming our new talks organiser, I must mention other committee members tonight.

Margaret Thomas has grown confidently in her role as committee secretary after taking over from Mary Stockwell and Margaret's meeting minutes are amazingly in my inbox within 24 hours and I must also recognise her raffles that are becoming a serious source of fundraising. We send our very good wishes to Mary for her continued recovery.

Neal Stockwell continues his excellent editorship and co-ordinates the production of the newsletter and is fantastic with his computer to help Carole with the organisation of the shows and prize winners, Malcolm Iosson is supremely organised as our membership secretary and newsletter distribution co-ordinator, Geoff Ruffles enthusiastically and cheerfully devotes a huge amount of time as our shed steward to ensure we are always well stocked and is superb in advising us all when we layout the tables at the shows, Mike Fewtrell quietly, efficiently and effectively orders our stock in and Roger Howard is superb and awesomely organised with our Suttons seed orders. Mike Smith, besides his talks role, has been handling his 'vice' role really well and Torkill, new to our committee last year, has contributed loyally in the shed and at the piano. The visits secretary seems to be doing OK too.

I would also like to recognise the contribution of Dot and Bert Ballard, who is probably

the best washer up in the world, their friend Maureen and Carole Peacock for working on refreshments at the talk evenings and to Neal and Mary Stockwell's daughter and family for organising the refreshments at the Autumn Show. I would also like to recognise and thank Roger Blay for his invaluable help to Carole at the Autumn Show.

It is with sadness that I have to report that Peggy Palmer, one of our vice presidents, passed away late last year. She had been a stalwart of the society in a variety of roles and ERHS was represented at her funeral service in November. We also said thank you last year to Phyllis Evans who retired from delivering her round of newsletters due to ill health and we sent flowers and a card.

A brief review of the last year must include another successful Autumn Show and Xmas Show and as Carole is being a Grandma tonight I can, without embarrassing her, praise, recognise and thank her for her excellent organisation of these successful shows.

The visits secretary did quite well too in organising a good trip to Malvern Spring Show in May, gosh it was packed, an excursion to Sheffield Park in October and he chose the busiest day of the year but it was nevertheless, a tranquil and beautiful walk around the lakes and then on to the Anvil Theatre for a hilarious and very enjoyable musical trip down memory lane in January.

This year we look forward to a visit to Cardiff RHS in April and seats are still available.

The Summer Show will take place here on Saturday 29th June and the schedule is about to be published.

We plan to go a NT property called Nymans in Sussex in September and the visit's secretary is tempted to plan a trip to Kew at Christmas for their light show in December and later that month we will have the Xmas Show.

We continue to need assistant shed stewards and whilst we can no longer offer that 5 star hotel weekend away for in-service training, new helpers can now be assured of a very warm and friendly welcome at the shed for their induction into the running of the shed.

This neatly leads me on to say that there has been very little improvement in the correct stacking of compost and stable yard manure bags and I live in hope but I can tell you that unloading the delivery of seed potatoes does bring a flush to your cheeks.

I am now on page 4 and I need to stop talking.

So, to finish, I offer my warmest thanks to everyone who is associated with and supports the society and trust you all have a very successful and productive gardening year.

At the end of the formal proceedings I warmly invite you to enjoy some cheese and wine and to buy your raffle tickets as a matter of urgency.

Thank you for coming and be safe going home.

Thank you.

John Peacock
Chairman

Treasurer's report

Good Evening everyone, the audited accounts were on your seats I hope, and I am sure you have had time to digest them.

Therefore, as usual, I will just highlight some of the figures for you starting with the left-hand side, The Trading Account.

Surprisingly the second figure down, PURCHASES, is lower than 2017, but we sold more and have increased our gross profit, by £278 to £1398.

The overheads on running the shed are pretty static year on year and this year's costs of £902 has left us with £496 net profit on trading.

Looking at the right-hand side,

Membership of the society held up well this year and the subs were £1527 only down £10 on 2017, the total figure on the top line includes donations which were higher at £66 compared to £26 in 2017

Margaret Thomas has done a very good job in raising funds through the raffles at meetings and the shows and this raised £367. Keep up the good work Margaret and to the members keep buying the tickets.

Other cost heads are very much in line with last year, but we have once again ended with an excess of Expenditure of £229 making an overall net profit of £267 when the trading profit is added.

The Balance sheet remains healthy, with total assets of £33k

Debtors relate to a prepayment for our website subscription, and the creditors are for an overdue invoice for printing costs.

Over the past 20 years + I have been voicing my opinion that the shed trading should make small profits, and P & L side of the accounts should show a positive figure and not a loss. Regretfully this has not been the case in 8 years of the past 10 years. It is has therefore been agreed in committee to propose putting up the annual subscription to £3 per annum with effect from 1st April 2019. The last rise from £1 to £2 was 18 years ago and I would expect that this new sub of £3 would not increase again for a minimum of 5 years, (depending on BREXIT.)

The good news is that to compensate for this increase, shed prices will be reduced by 5% from April 1st, on new stock.

Once again, I thank Cathy Begg for completing the annual examination and to you all for your support during the year.

Jeff Gardner MBE 19/2/2019