

Minutes of the 79th Annual General Meeting of the East Reading Horticultural Society held at St Peter's Church Hall on Tuesday 18th February 2020

Present: Don Palmer (President), Margaret Thomas (Secretary), Jeff Gardner (Treasurer), John Peacock (Chairman), Malcolm Iosson, Geoff Ruffles, Mike Fewtrell, Mike Smith, Neal Stockwell and Roger Howard. Approximately 30 people attended.

Apologies: Ann Leslie, Torkill Fozzard and Eileen Fullbrook

Opening

Mr Don Palmer opened the meeting at 8.00 pm and welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending. Don made an amusing comment about how he had reduced the crops he usually grew as it was a constant battle against pests and weather conditions. 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 Malcolm Iosson and seconded by Neal Stockwell.

Matters arising

None

Chairman's report

John Peacock welcomed everyone and noted it was his seventh AGM as Chairman. He thanked them for attending and he asked Neal to pass on our kind thoughts and best wishes to Mary 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 pointed out that we are a society of members who are getting older and a shortage of volunteers to help at the trading shed continues to be a serious concern. Our continued appeals has resulted in two new helpers coming forward, so many thanks to them. The time may come when the Shed will only open on either Saturday or Sunday and we will have to consider closing the Shed for months rather than weeks as our list of stewards and assistants dwindles. At the moment we are managing to keep the Shed open which is so important as it provides materials, equipment and support to run our gardens and allotments as well as providing a very friendly place to visit.

(Don asked how we can get more people to help when we have a membership of 721, it was thought that many people did not open their emails to read the newsletter.)

Jeff Gardner as our Treasurer had given a years' notice to stand down after 25 years' service but sadly the person we hoped would take on the position had a change of circumstance and had to decline, therefore we have nobody to take over from Jeff who has offered to keep the finances in order until a new person can be found, for which we are very grateful.

John invited Jeff to accept a vice presidency of the society and as a token of our appreciation of all that Jeff had done, presented him with a rose entitled 'Thank You' and gave flowers to his wife Carol.

Jeff thanked John and said how important it was to keep the society going, more so as he had been a member for over 60 years following in the footsteps of his father who one of our 'prize' cups was named after.

Dot and Bert Ballard were thanked for all their hard work in the kitchen at our monthly meetings, but they can no longer help due to illness and John thanked his wife Carole for taking on the role in the kitchen.

Last year included a successful Summer and Christmas Show, and Carole was thanked for her excellent organisation of these events along with Roger Blay.

ERHS had offered to fund a student or students at the Berkshire College of Agriculture but due to their lack lustre response we had withdrawn the offer, and instead were inviting local schools to have a 'Great Potato Weigh In' competition. So far only two schools had responded but the

closing date has been left open until the end of February.

A good trip to Nymans in West Sussex took place and it is hoped a visit to Stowe in April or May will be arranged along with a trip to see the Christmas Lights at Kew in late November/ early December.

We will have our Autumn Show on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> September 2020 and the Christmas Show on **WEDNESDAY** 9<sup>th</sup> December

John offered his warmest thanks to everyone who supports the society and wished everyone a successful and productive gardening year and hoped something wonderful would be grown for the Autumn Show.

*(A full copy of this report is appended below)*

#### Treasurer's report

Jeff said he was very disappointed that no one had come forward to be Treasurer out of 721 members.

There had been a loss of £333 at the Shed due mainly to bulbs not being sold.

From the 1<sup>st</sup> April there will be a price rise of 5% on new stock coming in to the Shed. The financing of the trips had gone well and overall our finances were in good shape.

The members present accepted the report which had been handed out to them. There were no questions.

Jeff thanked Roger Howard for taking care of the weekly banking and Cathy Begg for carrying out the independent examination of the accounts.

*(A full copy of this report is appended below.)*

#### Election of Officers

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

Chairman: John Peacock

Vice Chairman: Mike Smith

Treasurer: TBA (Jeff will stand in until someone is found)

Secretary: Margaret Thomas

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

This was proposed by Neal Stockwell and seconded by John Taylor.

#### Auditor

Cathy Begg had agreed to be our independent Auditor, and this was proposed by John Peacock and seconded by Neal Stockwell.

#### AOB

Ruth Palmer suggested we open the Shed either Saturday or Sunday but Mike Smith said it was difficult as some people worked on Saturdays but suggested we only needed 2-3 people to make it more viable. Malcolm asked about the Shed opening on Wednesday pm in April & May but there was no problem with that as the same two people were on duty.

Neal and John will look into more publicity, and Carol Gardner suggested we might put a slip in the new membership cards asking for help and John thought this was an excellent idea. We could advertise in the free Berkshire Magazine which comes through the doors in Earley. It was suggested we should have an allotment holder on the committee so that new allotment holders would be informed of our society, John Saunders will ask if anyone is interested as he is involved in the Bulmershe allotments and it was suggested that our Shed price list might go up there, as well as the Reading Road allotments (formally Woodley) who already have a price list from Huntley & Palmers Trading Shed.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 8.45 pm

After this, refreshments of cheese and wine were served, and the raffle was drawn. The raffle made a profit of £26.50.

## Chairman's Report AGM February 2020

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 on Sunday morning, having checked first that our house roof was still on and that Storm Dennis had not been a menace in the garden, I noted with that this will be the seventh AGM I have attended as chairman. As I mentioned last year my first report in 2014 just about covered two sides of A4 and in 2018 I wrote six sides of A4. Tonight, I will continue to be a good gardener again and 'prune' my comments as I review the year and look ahead with some trepidation to the future of ERHS.

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. I must also point out that we are a society of members who are getting older and a shortage of volunteers to help at the trading shed continues to be a serious concern. You cannot make members do anything that we need to have done and our only avenue is to appeal for help. Our continued appeals for shed helpers have happily resulted in two new members assisting us and Mike Smith, whose job it is to organise the shed rota, has welcomed them with open arms. So many thanks to them. But it is not enough.

In previous years I have appealed here and in the newsletter for 'new' blood to join the society and I have to be very frank and honest and remind you that only two members have offered to help us at the trading shed, where it can involve lifting, carrying and wheeling barrows to cars. I know that we all have our physical limitations and we can only offer to help if we think we can do it. However, there will come a time, when we will not be able to open the shed on Saturdays and Sundays as we will not be able to man it. We are very unusual locally as we keep our trading shed open all year round, bar 4 weeks over the Xmas period and so we may have to consider closing the shed for months rather than weeks as our list of stewards and assistants dwindles.

This will sound serious to you and it is. The shed is a very comforting and agreeable place to go to at the weekend and Monday mornings and this 'old friend' needs some serious support. Our trading shed is the main reason we exist to provide the materials, equipment and support to run our gardens and allotments.

At the AGM last February, I informed you that our esteemed 'old blood' treasurer Jeff Gardner had advised me of his intention to stand down this year in order to give us plenty of time to find a new financial supremo. I fully appreciated his decision as he had served in this role for 25 years and was fully deserving of retiring from this role, but not of course, from his association with ERHS which is well over 50 years. As I told you balance sheets are a foreign language to me and I did hope we could find a member who had accountancy experience to consider taking on this role. For most of last year Jeff and I thought we had found his replacement. Unfortunately, this member's domestic circumstances changed as he felt that he could no longer offer his services. So we thank him for his offer and wish him well. I have made approaches to others since then but without success. It is a measure of the integrity and generosity of spirit that Jeff has offered to maintain our books until we solve the problem of running our finances. I have even considered going to night school for a basic accountancy course but luckily for me there is not one available!!

Jeff Gardner's has, over the years made a superb contribution as a member and a financial supremo to ERHS and to mark his retirement I have the very greatest pleasure to invite him to accept a vice presidency of the society. Jeff, you have lived and breathed ERHS and we all value your significant contribution so I would like to present you with this gift as a token of our appreciation for all your efforts and would you also give these flowers to Carol. (I have the receipts by the way)

I must also 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 that her excellent raffles that are becoming a serious source of fundraising. We again send our very good wishes to Mary Stockwell 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 and knows exactly how many paid up members we have, Geoff Ruffles enthusiastically and cheerfully devotes a huge amount of time teasing me about Reading football club, but as our shed steward he also ensures that 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, besides being the man who banks our weekend takings.

Ann Leslie has made an impressive impact with her talks programme and her swap table initiative, but I know that she is frustrated at the low turnout of members. Mike Smith continues his successful juggling role of staffing the shed with stewards and helpers and Torqill, newest to our committee the year before last, has contributed loyally in the shed. The visits secretary seems to be doing OK too.

Trevor Wilson and Phil Merrin deserve our thanks for their help unloading the lorries when they arrive particularly when people forget to turn up and Roger Blay is an excellent assistant to Carole at the shows. I would also like to recognise the contribution of Dot and Bert Ballard, who was probably the best washer up in the world until his very untimely fall, and this means that they can no longer help us at our talks evenings. I would like to recognise their contribution and send them both every good wish. I would like to thank Carole Peacock who now works on refreshments at the talk evenings and has been seriously encouraged to put more chocolate digestives out.

A brief review of the last year must include another successful Summer Show and Xmas Show and I want to recognise Carole's contribution and thank her for her excellent organisation of these successful events. Our dining room table disappears for a week before the show with cups and entry forms and stacks of cash. The visits secretary did quite well in organising a good trip to Nymans in West Sussex in September, which was a tranquil and beautiful walk around the woodland and gardens of the important arboretum.

One of the driving forces behind our society is to promote and support the benefits of gardening and as we all know that working outside in our gardens and allotments can make a significant impact on improving our physical and our mental wellbeing. So, during last year and with this philosophy in mind the committee of ERHS became involved with BCA at Burchetts Green and offered to fund a student or students with their college fees. I have to report that we were less than impressed with their lack lustre response and we eventually decided to withdraw our offer.

At our committee meeting in January we decided to invite 9 local primary schools to be involved in our 'Great Potato Weigh in ' competition. We have offered each school a growing bag, 100 litres of compost, some fertiliser, six chitted early potatoes and a child friendly set of growing instructions. So far only two schools have responded but we have left the closing date open until the end of the month.

This year we look forward to a visit to Stowe in April or May, the Autumn show on 12<sup>th</sup> September and very hopefully

a trip to Kew at Christmas for their light show in late November or early December and later that month we will have the Xmas Show. It is interesting to note that on 13<sup>th</sup> August I rang to book 57 places for the Kew light show to be told that they could only offer us 23<sup>rd</sup> December. I thought that was just too close to Xmas so declined their offer. This year I will be ringing much earlier.

I have to report that there has been very little improvement in the correct stacking of compost and stable yard manure bags at the shed, but I live in hope. I can also tell you that unloading the delivery of seed potatoes can bring a flush to your cheeks so long as you remember to turn up to help unload the lorry.

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 and enter something wonderful that you have grown or made in the Autumn Show.

At the end of these 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 tonight and be very safe and careful going home.

John Peacock  
Chairman

## Treasurers Report 2020

Good Evening everyone, I gave my first report in this hall, that is the old hall, in about 1962 for Earley Boys Club, now nearly 60 years later I had every hope that this would be my last, but alas it appears not. The audited accounts were on your seats I hope and I am sure you have had time to digest them.

Regretfully the year you will see ended up very disappointingly with an overall loss of £333

Last year we tried to be clever and reduce our mark up on shed sales, but this back fired and sales were down nearly £1500 and on top of that we were left with a large stock of spring bulbs, to the tune of £200+, so this all conspired to give us a trading loss of £450

Had our sales kept pace with previous years then I am sure we would not have made this loss, because overheads were slightly down year on year

Looking at the general income and expenditure on the right hand side, Membership income of the society increased, due to the rise in subscriptions from £2 to £3. Outings were successfully managed by John and gave us a surplus of £207. and Margaret's raffles despite a poorer turn outs at the talks produced £319.

Other cost heads are very much in line with last year, although we are seeing a marked increase in the fees that some of our speakers charge and this has left us with only a small surplus of £116 to help offset against the trading loss of £450, leaving the overall net loss of £333

The Balance sheet as you can see remains healthy, with total assets of £32732

It is because of this and the fact that I was supposed to be retiring that the committee have been trying to spend some money, and hence the mention of supporting local schools with a gardening project and initially we tried to support students with a grant to further their education and gain an RHS diploma or similar.

Any questions so far, ok

Then that leaves me to tell you the bad news is that shed prices will have an increase of 5% this year which hopefully will reverse last year's trend.

Finally thank Roger Howard for doing all the banking for me and Cathy Begg for completing the annual examination.

Jeff Gardner MBE 18/2/2020