

ROYAL SOCIETY FORMER STAFF ASSOCIATION

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 18 May 2015

Present:

Mary Manning (*Chairman*)

Chris Argent (*Jt Editor, BTT*)

David Griffin

Peter O'Rourke

Christine Brock

Marjorie Harris

Wilma Pereira

Ratti Bulsara

Ann Hicks (*Jt Events Secretary*)

Judy Rimmer

Choong Kar Chan

Joan Hurrell (*Jt Events*

Keith Root (*Hon. Treasurer*)

Diana Chapman

Secretary)

Beata Seymour

Frances Chetham

Christine Johnson

Jane Silverleaf

Vera Cockle

Jean Lamb

Nadia Slow

Peter Collins (*Jt Editor, BTT*)

Linda Mackenzie

Ling Thompson

Peter Cooper (*Hon. Secretary*)

Jennifer Malcolm

Peter Warren

Stephen Cox

Len Mole

Jackie Witchalls

Brenda de Vere-Lewis

Susan Moss (*Welfare*

John Deverill

Secretary)

Sandra Goodall

Laura Murphy

Mary Manning welcomed Stephen Cox, Laura Murphy and Jane Silverleaf to their first meeting.

1. Apologies for absence

Peter Cooper reported that 32 members had sent apologies.

2. Minutes of the 2014 AGM

Peter Cooper reported changes to the draft minutes previously circulated to members as follows:

Attendance: Addition of David Griffin.

Minute 4(b) (The future of the Association): final phrase of purpose (iv) to read "containing news of members and, ideally, entertaining, interesting or informative material".

With these amendments the minutes were confirmed. Copies of the confirmed minutes are available from the Secretary or from the website.

3. Matters arising from the Minutes.

There was none.

4. Report from the Chairman

Mary Manning said that the year had started with the news of the withdrawal of the RS's funding but much had happened since then. The Committee had met three times; there had been an active events programme; a new venue for a successful New Year lunch; a second Editor, Peter Collins, had joined Chris Argent on *Beyond The Terrace*, and Peter Cooper had been appointed as a Member-Nominated Trustee on the RS Pension Plan, facilitating communication.

Sadly, Maurice Oak and Don Harlow had died – two long-standing and highly-respected members.

Looking to the future, a 'brainstorm' had been held with some former RS staff who were not members, to look at what the Association could offer people in that position.

The relationship with the RS had waxed and waned, but she was pleased to say that, that morning, she and the Secretary had had a meeting with the Executive Director, Dr Julie Maxton. Dr Maxton had indicated that she remained sympathetic to the vision and culture of the Association, and recognised the benefits of the 'arm's-length' relationship, the ambassadorial role and the networking that the Association provided. However, some of the difficulties over the year had been the result of different cultures in some areas of the Society. She had reinstated the offer of three lunches annually at the RS's expense; one would be associated with the AGM (as had been enjoyed today) and the Committee would consider the best use of the other two. Mary had thanked Dr Maxton on behalf of the Association.

5. Making our way forward

Mary Manning reminded members that the AGM in 2013 had approved the report of The Way Forward group, including changes to the membership criteria and extension of the activities to

attract new members. The Committee had been working on a strategy to fulfil these aims, and the paper before the AGM (AGM15-1) outlined the steps the Committee was taking. Peter Cooper drew the meeting's attention to the main aspects of the strategy and sought members' comments.

Peter Warren commended the paper. He suggested adding mentoring as a way of supporting members still in employment. It should also be made clear that members did not need to be actively attending all events – being part of the network was, in itself, an adequate form of membership.

Stephen Cox noted that, with the outcome of the latest meeting with Dr Maxton, the ambassadorial and outreach roles of the Association could be usefully added.

Chris Argent wished to understand further in what way the image of the Association was poor, and how this might be changed. It was noted that the difficulties with the RS over the past year were a sign of this perception; the 'brainstorm' with former staff had also shown how little more recent staff members knew about the Association and its purpose.

Choong Kar Chan wondered whether there was scope to forge relationships with other similar bodies; Mary Manning said that it had been considered but thought to be premature and would add to the work of already busy volunteer Committee members.

Mary Manning thanked the meeting for the useful feedback; the committee would continue taking matters forward, reporting back to the AGM.

6. Hon. Treasurer's report

Keith Root reported that regrettably Nigel Parfitt had had to withdraw as Auditor and, after consulting the Chairman and Secretary, had asked Nigel Hicks to undertake the role. He hoped that the AGM was content with that action, noting that Nigel Hicks was the husband of a Committee member.

He thanked the membership for their very generous support for the new RSFSA Welfare Fund, following the withdrawal of RS support last year. Inevitably the call on the Fund was unpredictable, and it would be necessary to ensure that it remained topped up to be ready for exceptional calls.

The surplus for the 2014/15 year was £288.61 compared with £449.97 the previous year (AGM15-2); rationalisation of postage, larger numbers of members receiving materials by email and frugal expense claims by Committee members had resulted in useful economies.

For 2015/16 there was an additional new cost of the printing of *BTT*, following withdrawal of the RS's support after this AGM. The Committee was of the view that, at least for the next year, *BTT* should continue to be printed in colour, and the position reviewed again next year. Costs would be met, if necessary, from the reserves and thus no increase in subscriptions was needed at this time.

The motion to accept the accounts for 2014/15 was proposed by Peter Warren; the meeting agreed the motion.

Agreed to ask Nigel Hicks to be Auditor again for the 2014/15 accounts.

Mary Manning thanked Keith Root for all his work over the year to manage the difficult transition in the Association's finances. She also thanked all members for their generous contributions to the Welfare Fund.

7. Report of the Hon. Secretary

Peter Cooper referred to his report (AGM15-3). Sadly, Maurice Oak and Don Harlow had died on 17 July and 9 September 2014 respectively; we had been notified too late to arrange for the Association to be represented at Don's funeral.

He was glad to report that Doreen Oak had joined the Association in her own right. In addition we had gained three new members – Sharon Fishwick (née Boylan), Peter Cotgreave and Liz Tennant (née Kewley). He thanked those members who had sent contact details of other former staff who

were not yet members; the Committee planned a major push in the next year to identify and approach new members.

He noted that 65% of members were receiving Events notifications by email, up from 55% last year, and 43% were receiving *BTT* electronically (35% last year). He thanked those who had opted for this form of delivery, which would be helpful in relieving pressure on the Association's finances. He asked that others consider the option of receiving some or all materials by email, but assured the meeting that distribution by post would continue to be available.

8. Report of the Welfare Secretary

Susan Moss reported on member welfare matters. She was in touch with several members to see whether there were ways in which the Association could help them.

She asked to be informed by anyone who was aware of any member who was ill, infirm or might otherwise be able to benefit from the Association.

9. Report of the Editors of *Beyond The Terrace*

Chris Argent reported on behalf of the two *BTT* Editors – as previously reported, Peter Collins had joined him as joint Editor. Three issues had been produced during the year, the latest had been distributed today. He and Peter Collins would welcome feedback on the content and any items members would wish to see added. They were also keen to have new copy.

In response to a question from John Deverill it was reported that the RS held a complete set of *BTT* in the Library, as also did Chris Argent, and PDFs of all issues were available on the website.

10. Report of the Events Secretaries

Ann Hicks, Joint Events Secretary, reported on events during the year. The visit to the Theatre Royal had been very interesting but had not attracted large numbers; the April visit to Freemasons Hall had been better attended. For the first time the New Year lunch had been held away from the RS and had proved popular and successful.

For the future, there was a visit planned to the Museum of Brands on 14 October 2015, the New Year lunch in early January 2016 and a visit to the Poppy factory on 12 October 2016. In addition, Peter Cooper was planning a members' visit to Hatfield House in June 2015, and Peter Collins a walking weekend in Berkshire in September. Peter Cooper would be discussing with John Deverill a visit to the Jane Austen Museum.

Choong Kar Chan proposed a visit to the Chinese Community Centre in London. Founded in 1980, the Centre promoted Chinese activity and culture. The visit might include lunch, a presentation on the Centre, its work and outreach, demonstrations of Chinese calligraphy and music. Those attending would be asked to make a small contribution. There was some discussion about the proposal and it was agreed that the Committee should explore the proposal further with Choong Kar.

11. Report on pension matters

Peter Cooper, in his role as recently-appointed Member-Nominated Trustee of the RS Pension Plan, thanked the members who had put themselves forward for the vacant Trustee position. He reminded the meeting that there was not (and legally could not be) any formal linkage between the Association and the Pension Trustees. The Trustees were keen to improve information to Plan members, and thus were supportive of his acting as a communication channel. He had attended two Trustees' Meetings and was a member of the Admin subcommittee, looking at how the pension work was carried out. He was impressed with the way in which the Trustees and their agents fulfilled their responsibilities. Changes in pension law and requirements of the Pensions Regulator were continuing to have extensive and far-reaching effects. A major exercise was being carried out to check and fill gaps in members' data (particularly where deferred pensioners had moved on). The Plan had investments of around £32M and the Trustees were in the process of appointing new investment managers following a regular review.

He noted that the relaxation of pension rules in April had little effect on defined benefit schemes such as the RS Plan. However, there was a concern that members could be targeted by scams or put under pressure to make decisions without adequate professional advice.

Peter Cooper would be providing an update in each issue of BTT and was available to any RS Plan member who had questions.

12. Amendment to the Rules

Peter Cooper took members through a set of proposed changes to the Rules (AGM15-4). These had three objectives: to include the Welfare Secretary as a formal post on the Committee (as announced at the 2014 AGM); to reflect current practice, where things had moved on; and to revise the Rules in line with modern practice where beneficial.

Several comments were made and it was concluded that the proposed changes should go back to the Committee to take these points into consideration, bringing back a revised paper to the next AGM.

13. Elections

The following elections and re-elections to the Committee, as detailed in the circulated paper (AGM15-5), were approved by shows of hands:

Hon. Treasurer: the re-appointment of Keith Root (who had served for the full term of five years) for one further year, on an exceptional basis.

Hon. Secretary: the re-appointment of Peter Cooper (who had served for three years), as allowed under the Rules.

Welfare Secretary: the re-appointment of Susan Moss to cover welfare matters on the Committee.

Professional Programme Secretary: to allow the Committee to appoint a person to cover a programme of activities aimed at members still in employment. The appointment would be in an acting role until the 2016 AGM.

Ordinary Member: Wilma Pereira to replace Len Mole.

Co-opted Member: Peter Collins to work with Chris Argent as joint Editor of *Beyond The Terrace*.

The meeting expressed its thanks to Len Mole, who had served on the Committee for several years, including as an MNT to the Pension Plan.

14. Any other business

(a) Divestment in fossil fuels

Peter Cooper reported that Alan Clark, who was unable to attend the AGM, had asked that members' attention be drawn to *The Guardian* campaign 'Keep it in the ground' (<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/series/keep-it-in-the-ground>) and that pension funds should remove their investments from companies extracting fossil fuels. Peter, as RSFSA Secretary, had suggested that Alan should write an article for the next *BTT* as the issue would be of interest to members. As RS Pension Plan MNT, Peter said that the Trustees would be looking at their investment policy soon and he would report Alan's comment at that time.

(b) Thanks

Mary Manning thanked the Committee members for all their work and support over the year. The meeting concurred and also thanked Mary, especially as the year had brought her significant family difficulties.

15. Date for the 2016 AGM

The 2016 AGM will take place at 2:00 p.m. on Monday 16 May 2016.