

## **EXETER CIVIC SOCIETY**

### **Minutes of Annual General Meeting held at the Devon & Exeter Institution at 6.30pm on Tuesday 23 October 2012**

#### **1 Welcome**

The Vice President, Mrs Hazel Harvey, welcomed 35 members to the meeting

#### **2 Apologies**

Apologies were received from Committee Members Peter Caspar and Barbara Looser, and Jane Atkinson, Stephan Bouloux, Edwyn & Marie-Therese Crowle, Mary Evans, Susan Jackson, John & Stella Landers, John Monks, Julia Neville, Julia Sharp and Marion Vanstone.

#### **3 Minutes of the previous AGM**

The Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of 24 November 2011 were accepted as correct, proposed by Peter Wadham and seconded by Jean Hall, and signed by the Chairman.

#### **4 Matters arising.**

It was confirmed that copies of the Tram book had gone to Bookcycle.

#### **5 Treasurer's Report**

The Chairman explained that the Treasurer had had to go to Australia at very short notice due to a family emergency and that therefore the accounts had not been prepared for presentation. The finances of the Society are in good order and once the accounts have been prepared and audited they will be made available to all members.

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

##### **Website**

Since the last AGM we have had a new website which is slowly developing. A website has much greater scope for communicating with members than a newsletter although the content depends very much on the level of activity within the society. We felt that the range of our work and interests could be initially covered by seven pages dealing with our history, our objectives and our programme, then a page on Exeter Past and a page on Exeter Now. The members have a private login area with a database of our newsletters including one of our very first newsletters from December 1962. There is of course a page linking to other organisations which may be of interest to our members. Work is in progress on a special Blue Plaque area with interactive map which will hopefully be online before the end of the year.

##### **Newsletters**

We are saving a considerable amount on postage sending the newsletters by e-mail as we only currently have to send 44 by post instead of 192. At current rates that is a saving of £74 postage for each newsletter plus the printing and stationery costs. We have started gathering our old newsletters with the aim of having them all from 1962 onwards. If anyone knows where we can obtain any prior to 1985 please let me know because the December 1962 one is the only one from earlier years.

## **Gift Aid**

Since the last AGM Gordon Read has become our Gift Aid Co-ordinator and is working tirelessly to get our Gift Aid submissions up to date and also to ensure that we have in our files a Gift Aid declaration for every member who pays tax. This is no mean feat and he has spent many hours going through membership lists and gathering forms. Since taking over Gordon has submitted claims for 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 which should bring in £612. He will soon submit claims for the last two years which will bring us up to date.

## **Memberships**

The current paid up memberships for this year are as follows (received by 23 Oct):

Life Members: 55

Yearly members: 147

Total paid up members: 202

The number of people on the e-mailing list is 156 (including 10 Committee Members) though this includes some who have not yet renewed.

26 members have left during the last year and another 28 haven't yet renewed.

We had 15 new members during the last membership year and another 6 for the start of the new year in October 2012. This means our membership is decreasing and we don't yet know about the 28 who have not renewed so we may lose more there. This is in sharp contrast to 2006 when we apparently had a total of 326 members, although numbers were already decreasing. As there are currently no members involved in fund-raising we are virtually reliant on subscriptions for our income, so a decreasing membership means decreasing funds. A few of us got together to discuss ways of recruiting more members but there needs to be more active involvement amongst existing members to get the ball rolling.

In response to questions it was stated that membership application forms are available on the website and at Open Mornings. Copies of these and other publicity material are available for anybody who wants them. The Committee would welcome suggestions of places to display publicity material.

The Vice President reported that sales of the local booklets had raised £25,000 since 1980.

## **7 Chairman's Report**

I'm pleased to say that this is a cheerful report. Although the Society has yet to resolve all its difficulties, the past year has seen encouraging progress in several directions. SWACS (South West Association of Civic Societies) is disbanding but like Torbay we do seem to be bucking the trend by steadily gaining strength as a group with a role to play in the community.

Firstly, my committee report. We were successful in replacing our Acting Treasurer Julian Nowill with a more permanent Treasurer. We owe Julian very great thanks for helping to keep us legal at a time of crisis; I hope that when we come to the election of committee members you will be unanimous in confirming Peter Caspar as his worthy successor. In Peter Caspar's absence I can invite your sympathy for the struggle that he has had with NatWest to set up the current system of banking and signatories. It remains an inconvenience that a charity like ours cannot simplify the subscription system for members, Treasurer and Secretary by introducing a direct debit option; if you find Standing Orders irksome, please understand that they are not of our choosing. While I'm on the subject of finance I'll add my grateful thanks to Gordon Read, who stepped forward to help the Treasurer by sorting and updating Gift Aid.

The Planning Sub-Committee has continued to monitor local applications and report on them most interestingly in our Newsletters. As ever, our grateful thanks go to all its members, led by Pamela Wootton. One member of the sub-committee, Keith Lewis, has been taking particular

interest in the wider and somewhat vaguer planning strategies that the City is putting forward. His initiatives, of which more later, are beginning to answer expectations that the Society was previously in no position to meet, and I am grateful for the time and energy that he has been willing to devote to developing our remit and raising our profile in the community.

On the personal front, we congratulated our Vice-President on the publication of *The Story of Exeter*, but were saddened to learn of the death of Jean Levers, a faithful committee member for many years.

Now for a brief report on the year's activities. The Saturday Open Mornings have been increasingly well attended, and have led to increased membership. The 10-minute talks have covered a wide range of Exeter topics, from trams, Little Silver, and the Localism Act to the first medical school here, the Twinning Circle and a talk from the outgoing Lord Mayor.

As you know, the Central Library closes shortly for refurbishment. Alternative accommodation is not available in November, so we look forward to our next meeting being in December, in the Hoskins Room.

Early this year Pamela Wootton and I took part in a Central Library workshop on the improvements to public meeting facilities that groups like ours would like to see in the refurbished building. All suggestions were sensible; let's hope that in 2014 we move back into a really well-designed space. Meanwhile do please come along to the Hoskins Room.

As well as our regular Saturday get-togethers we have enjoyed several other activities: jointly with Tiverton Civic Society a visit to Downes house, home of the Buller family, a walk around St David's, and talks on Canals of the South West and on the development of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum. These were all occasions full of interest, but not attended by large numbers of members. I must also report real attendance disappointments. Bad weather was responsible for the cancellation of an outdoor talk on the Veitch family but did not explain the lack of support for a walk to view our benches in Riverside Park, nor for the indoor talk on Underground Passages. In the past the Society has had good support for a wide-ranging programme ably organised by Margo Swift, and this is our opportunity to thank her for all that she has done. Our ongoing failure to recruit a successor to her as a programme co-ordinator suggests that there is currently little interest in this aspect of the Society's activities. We shall probably be wise to concentrate on other matters in the coming year.

We do, however, have one exciting date for your diaries: Saturday 9 February 2013 at 2pm in St Stephen's Church in the High Street – a joint talk by two of Exeter's noted speakers on historical matters, Todd Gray and John Allan, on Elizabethan Exeter and the Orphans Court. The cost to members is £3. Seating is limited: book this evening with our Secretary.

As I mentioned earlier, the Society has developed greater involvement in strategic matters, thanks largely to the enthusiasm and energy of Keith Lewis. He has monitored the Exeter Vision Partnership discussions, conducted meetings to air opinions on proposed development in the Alphington area and the bus station, and is currently fielding opinions on a theatre for central Exeter. We await the promised Spring 2013 public consultation on the development of the bus station, though it is clear that certain decisions, for example for a swimming pool, have already been made. It was good to see that a number of you (39) used our website version of the City Council's questionnaire to register your comments. This improved questionnaire was all Keith's work.

In the last Newsletter you will have seen John Monks' account of his work on blue plaques. I'm sorry that he is not able to be here tonight to be thanked in person. He has devoted much time to research on Exeter's notables and once plaques are in place we hope that our wyvern logo will

help make the public more aware of us. The plaque commemorating Franz Liszt's visit is now at the final stage – approval by the Conservation Officer.

What I would love to include in my report this time next year is that our membership has increased across the full age range. If you have ideas for attracting members, particularly younger ones, do pass them on to the committee. One suggestion made to me only yesterday is that we consider running some sort of competition for schoolchildren that will make their parents more aware of our existence. Perhaps invite them to draw a building, or write about a favourite place in Exeter? You may have further thoughts to add to these.

In conclusion, thank you, all you loyal members who have taken the trouble to turn out this evening. And I must add my personal thanks to the two on whom I have most relied this year: Vice-Chairman Peter Wadham, who held the fort for the two months or so that I was out of action, and Pamela Coleman, who as Secretary has kept her efficient eye on everything, organising, informing and innovating.

Now for an excellent year 2012 to 2013! My best wishes to you all.

Acceptance of the Chairman's Report was proposed by David Snell, seconded by Jean Hall and passed unanimously.

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

The following were nominated and confirmed:

Chairman	Felicity Murdin
Vice Chairman	Keith Lewis, proposed by Peter Wadham and seconded by Margo Swift
Secretary and Memberships	Pamela Coleman
Treasurer	Peter Caspar
Committee Members:	Susie Hewitt, Celia King, Barbara Looser, Margo Swift, Pamela Wootton

Another plea was made for a Programme Secretary. It was suggested that members should offer to arrange one event.

John Landers wishes to resign as President. Peter Wadham was nominated to replace him and confirmed by the meeting.

## **9 Any other business**

Brian George has expressed concern about the risk of flooding and asks the Society to support his plea to the relevant authorities to go ahead quickly with simple solutions to alleviate the situation (lowering Trews Weir and other measures upstream) without waiting for a major scheme to become possible. The meeting accepted this request.

The meeting closed at 7.20pm.