

MINUTES

of the

61st ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE MEMBERS OF THE HARDY PLANT SOCIETY

Petroc College, Mid Devon Campus, Bolham Road, Tiverton, Devon, EX16 6SH

Saturday 24th March 2018 at 1.40pm

The 61st AGM of the Hardy Plant Society was opened by the Chairman Cathy Rollinson, who welcomed everyone and thanked the Devon Group for hosting a successful day.

There were 107 members in attendance.

Apologies were received from Dick and Lorna Fulcher, Chris Price-Morris, Pamela Clark, Karen Gimson and Helen Cleare.

1. The minutes of the 60th AGM held on 25th March 2017 were approved.

Proposed: Linda Crowther Seconded: Jenny Maunder

2. There were no matters arising.
3. The Chairman spoke to her annual report which was printed in the February 2018 Newsletter, number 171.

“As everyone knows 2017 was the 60th anniversary of the HPS and we kicked off our celebrations with the AGM so ably hosted by the Norfolk and Suffolk Group. Through the year many of our members opened their gardens and shared their love of plants. Awareness of the Society was raised and almost £9,000 was donated to the good causes chosen by the garden owners. Lots of groups put on special events so the anniversary was celebrated widely.

We are increasingly encouraging people to use our website, to keep in touch with what's going on and also to pay subscriptions and order seeds and booklets. A massive 57,000 people visited the website over the year. A number of our members write regular articles which are published on the website and they really are an excellent read. We are also increasingly using social media to communicate with people who are interested in plants – whether members or not. Although people here today may not be convinced of the benefits of the likes of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and so on, younger people – professional horticulturists and ordinary plant lovers – have embraced social media and share their knowledge and love of plants in this way. We set up a Twitter account only two years ago and now have over 4,000 followers.

I now need to update you on a couple of matters which came after the end of 2017.

Early in January we heard the shocking news of the sudden death of Pauline Cooper. Pauline was well known to many of us as the Seed Distribution Coordinator and, of course, as Derek's wife. Her passing came just days before the volunteers were to

get together and pack the seed orders. I would like to thank the Shropshire Group members who stepped up to make sure the seed distribution went ahead efficiently, despite the shock and grief everyone was feeling. I know Derek has been touched by the many expressions of support he and the family have received from HPS friends.

Shortly afterwards we heard of the death of Gwladys Tonge at the age of 97. Gwladys chaired the HPS from 1987 to 1990 and on her retirement was made a Vice-President. She set up her own local group – the Bucks, Northants and Oxfordshire Group and remained on the committee for several years. Her passion for plants didn't leave her and she continued to invite Group members to visit her garden until very recently.

On a happier note, I am pleased to announce that we have a volunteer to take on the role of Marketing and Publicity Officer. Ana Reynolds is here today and I am sure some of you have already met her. She works professionally in marketing and I know she's going to be an enormous help to the Society.

Now let me finish on a positive note. When I was first elected three years ago, I spoke about the need to make the Society better known and encourage new members. I'm delighted to say that, after 18 years of declining membership numbers, we are able to announce that numbers have now increased. Two years ago membership fell to its lowest level for nearly 30 years – just 6,829. But we now have 7,096 members, up nearly 4% on last year and back above the 7,000 mark. It's too early to know whether this is just a blip or whether we really have turned the corner, but the fact is that the hard work that everyone has put in to encourage people to join has paid off. Keep up the good work. And don't forget to tell your friends and neighbours how much you enjoy being a member and invite them to go with you to a meeting to try it out.

In my report I thanked many people who have contributed to the success of the Society and I don't want to go through the list again, although I must make special mention of the Officers with whom I have worked most closely and also our President, Roy Lancaster and his wife, Sue, who give tremendous support to the Society. So, thank you to everyone who has supported me over the last three years and I wish the Society all the best for the future. I know I am leaving it in good hands."

The motion to adopt the Chairman's report was proposed by Sandra Hartley, seconded by Ruth Plant and approved unanimously.

4. The Hon. Treasurer, Stuart Senior spoke to his Report which had been circulated. Stuart highlighted some positives – 492 new members since October; Gift Aid up by 14%; subscriptions to Cornucopia rising significantly; more bursaries being awarded – keep publicising the scheme. The increase in expenditure on shows was largely due to Chelsea, but we are also supporting more local shows. All bring excellent publicity. Stuart noted that a good portion of the £21,000 surplus for the year is attributable to a paper profit on investments.

ALISON LEVEY Proposer: June Saddington Second: Colin Ward

CATHERINE PART Proposer: Beverley Powlesland Second: Kathryn Hopkinson

8. Appointment of Haynes Watts as Independent Examiner of the Society's accounts:
Proposed: Anna Peacock Seconded: Henry Woolston

9. Vote of thanks to Cathy Rollinson proposed by Jan Vaughan

My first task as your new Chairman is to thank Cathy Rollinson for her 3 years in the job. She stepped in at short notice, but quickly proved the ideal choice, guiding the HPS through an exciting period of change. This has perhaps been most clearly seen in the huge project to produce our new website, in which she was personally involved on an almost daily basis in co-ordinating the Team and resulting in a first class resource for members and the public.

Cathy has been involved in HPS events up and down the country, giving her support to Local and Special Interest Groups. She has encouraged our wonderful Ambassadors to take up the invitation to spread the word that everyone interested in hardy perennials is welcome in the HPS.

She has frequently surprised her friends and fellow Officers and Trustees by her 'get up and go' attitude to everything from dealing decisively with issues as they arose to picking up new contacts and developing links - not least by embracing the power of social media on Facebook and Twitter, leading to an interview for the Sodshow podcast - all promoting the Society's engagement with a wider audience. I didn't realise just how determined she could be until I learnt the story of how, when she heard that seed had been donated by the Director of a Botanic Garden in Italy, she flew out to meet him and, being fluent in Italian (another talent I was unaware of) was able to tell him more about all things HPS.

So, to show our appreciation and gratitude for the time and energy that Cathy has put into sharing her passion for the Hardy Plant Society I would like to present her with this token of thanks from the Society.

Cathy was presented with a token for the Whichford Pottery

Cathy Rollinson responded with thanks, that it had been a pleasure and a privilege.

Open Forum

There were no matters raised.

The President, Roy Lancaster, rose to add a few words about the outgoing Chairman. He noted that under Cathy's leadership the Society has turned a corner as membership is starting to rise. It has been wonderful to know that the Society has had someone so good at the helm, with a wonderful team.

He thanked Cathy for all she has done, noting that her successor has the same enthusiasm and sense of humour and that he feels very happy about the way the Society is run.

The meeting closed at 2.30pm.