

THE BEACON HILL SOCIETY

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held 8.00pm on Monday 29th March 2010 at the the Village Hall, Doultling, Shepton Mallet.

Present: Peter Banks (Secretary), David Brown, Eileen Bird, Jon Burgess (Woodland Trust), Alan Connock, Caroline Gentinetta (Editor), Joyce Jefferson, Phillip Malcolm, Mary Newman (Treasurer, MemSec & Doultling P.C.), Jennie O'Kane, Barry Pitcher, Alan Stone (Chairman), Bo Walsh (MDC).

1. Welcome & Apologies:

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting at 8.00pm. A special welcome was extended to Bo Walsh who would be representing Mendip District Council and many thanks were expressed to Sheila Petherbridge who had supported the Society in that role for many years; we were delighted to learn that she was continuing as a subscribing member.

Apologies for absence had been received from, Julian Back (Webmaster), Gloria Cawood (MDC), Peter Leach and Sheila Petherbridge (MDC),.

2. Officers Reports:

Chairman: Alan Stone thanked those who had supported the Society over the past year, he recognised his contribution had been somewhat low key due to other commitments. However, he had enjoyed several visits to the wood over the past year and was interested in future developments as the mature Beech in the centre continued to decline and change the appearance of the hill from a distance.

Secretary: Peter Banks confirmed there had been 3 Society meetings since the AGM last year; the latest being on 6th Feb'10 when a walk round the wood, picking up a bit of litter, concluded in the Waggon & Horses.

There had also been a litter pick in the wood on 31st Oct'09. More recently, whilst waiting to lead a party from the Mendip Society through the wood, Peter, assisted by Jennie, Brenda and Julian had collected litter around the lower entrance in Yellingmill Lane. This had been the site of some fly tipped rubbish in late December which had been promptly cleared by Mendip District Council. Society members also dismantled a downhill mountain-bike course which was being set up with jumps, etc; a notice to the constructors was tied to a nearby tree and there had been no further developments. Motorcycle 'scramblers' continue to visit the wood on occasion; an on-going situation which was difficult to address.

The Society display boards had been set up at the Midsomerset Show as usual and again at a Fair Trade event in Doultling Village Hall earlier this month. One event which had to be cancelled due to bad weather and poor support was the Family Tree Quiz on 27th May'09.

Peter reported spending much time on the archaeology aspect of the SALSF information project. The Bronze Age urn, discovered in 2007, had been the centre of a display at the Wells & Mendip Museum over the winter months and was now in store in Taunton awaiting the opening of the new County Museum. The remains found inside the urn were re-interred, on mid-summer's day (21st June). No 'digs' this year, but the final Carbon 14 dating reports have been received. The notice board at the entrance has been replaced, to better inform visitors of the history of the area, and we are preparing a Booklet on the topic of 'Beacon Hill - through the ages'; a preliminary draft was available for comment and we hope to go to the printer shortly.

Finally, Peter reminded those present that, last year, he had announced his intention to stand down as secretary. He still wished to do so but, in the event of no-one stepping forward he would continue for the following year, but this would definitely be his last; he had held the post since 2001 and included being Treasurer 1998 - 2004. The SALSF funded project having now come to a successful conclusion he anticipated the role would be easier.

Treasurer: Mary Newman circulated a financial statement which, due to the AGM being held earlier than usual this year, was for the period 1st Apr'09 to 28th Feb'10 (11 months); copies are available to members on request. There was a small increase in reserves once a loan to support the publishing of a book by Peter Leach, 'Fosse Way - Romans and Britons in Somerset', was taken into account; this had been repaid at the meeting.

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Archaeological activity had again been supported by generous grants from the Somerset Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund (SALSF) and Somerset Archaeology and Natural History Society (SANHS). Since 1st Mar'10 the final payment from SALSF had been received and used to settle invoices for:- the new information board (WT), some carbon 14 dating (SUERC), website update (JB) and booklet preparation (PL, PB & AS); details, available to members on request, would appear in next years accounts.

Membership: Mary Newman reported the year ending with a total membership list of 35; 25 subscribing, 7 representing various Local Councils and other interested bodies, plus 3 hon. members. Ashwick and Stoke St Michael where without representatives at present.

Editor: Caroline Gentinetta confirmed that the annual spring newsletter, as agreed at last year's AGM, was in course of preparation and should be available for publication shortly; more items for inclusion would be welcomed.

3. General Discussion on the organisation of the Society:

There being no further comment on the organisation of the Society, agenda item 6 - future activities and events, was discussed at this point.

Disappointment was expressed at the lack of interest in the Family Tree Quiz organised for May 2009. Only a few people booking a place, followed by bad weather on the day, caused the event to be abandoned.

Several members wished to see further guided walks open to the public being held. In particular, nature conservation and fungus identification. This needed someone to take on the role of organiser to ensure such aspects as, risk assessments, limited parking, advertising, taking bookings, etc, had been covered.

To make further progress on improvements to the easy-going path, Alan Connock offered to look into the possibility of obtaining materials and then carry the installation. His Road-Up Gang would like to hold another weekend event on 22nd - 23rd May when they could carry out the work. This generous offer was accepted and a site meeting would be held shortly to finalise details.

4. Election of Officers:

The following committee was elected:

Chairman; Alan Stone offered to continue and was duly elected for a further term.

Secretary; Peter Banks offered to continue and was duly elected for a further term.

Treasurer; Mary Newman offered to continue and was duly elected for a further term.

MemSec; Mary Newman offered to continue and was duly elected for a further term.

Editor; Caroline Gentinetta offered to continue and was duly elected for a further term.

Webmaster; Julian Back offered to continue and was duly elected for a further term.

5. Future Management:

Jonathan Burgess gave a short presentation on the current state of the wood and how it might evolve in future, including the likely state of the mature beech as they decline in old age. According with Woodland Trust policy, there were no plans to interfere with their natural deterioration so long as they presented no unacceptable risk to the public. The five year management plan was due for revision over the next three months and it was wished to incorporate the views of the Beacon Hill Society. The WT wished to encourage the regeneration of native species and this would involve further thinning of certain areas. This could be an opportunity for traditional woodland trades to be practiced, such as charcoal burning, extraction of timber by horses, etc. The contribution this might make to the work would be influenced by the extent of local involvement.

6. Date of Next Meeting:

It was agreed to next meet in the wood on Monday 24th May at 4.00pm to inspect the recent work on the easy-going path and discuss the management plan. A more formal meeting would follow in the Waggon & Horses at 6.00pm

PRB