

**PLANT HERITAGE
SOMERSET GROUP – 17 National Collections
(Reg Charity Nr: 1059504)**

**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held in Edington Village Hall on
Saturday 7th December 2013 at 12 noon**

Committee Members Present:

Mr Alan Shepherd - President
Mrs Mary Sephton - Chairman
Mrs Ann Celer - Secretary
Mrs Penny Berry - Treasurer
Mrs Pauline Clapp - Programme Secretary
Mrs Yvonne Radford - Vice Chairman and Plant Exchange Co-ordinator
Mrs Noni Bemrose - Collections Co-ordinator
Mrs Sheila Chambers - Publicity/Raffle
Mrs Joan Warren - Plant Fair Organiser
Mrs Margaret Adams - Minute secretary
Mr Don Everitt

In total 27 members present.

The president Alan Shepherd, welcomed Mercy Morris who is part of the skeleton staff who run Plant Heritage HQ. He asked her to thank all of the staff there for the work they do. He recounted memories of the beginnings of the Somerset Branch of Plant Heritage.

1. Apologies for Absence

Ken and Sylvia Armstrong, Joan Salmon, Sue Boss and Barbara Barnwell

2. Minutes of the AGM held on 1st December 2012.

An abbreviated form of the minutes of the AGM held on 1st December 2012 was read and was available for all members to read. Copies of the full minutes were also available. The President Alan Shepherd asked members if they were willing to accept the minutes as a true record; this was unanimously agreed and they were signed by the Chairman, Mary Sephton.

3. Matters Arising: None

4. President's welcome

Alan Shepherd thanked Chairman Mary Sephton for all changes under her leadership including spreading the load to committee members. Noni is one of the finest Collections Officers we have had and Penny Berry and Pauline were thanked for all they do. We now have a web site and "webmaster". He was so pleased to hear that Somerset is to host the 2015 National Plant Heritage AGM.

5. Chairman's report

Mary Sephton said how delighted we have been to welcome visitors and new members in the last year. We have had good speakers and an enjoyable trip to Holland. The Copse Hall Plant sale will be held concurrently with the NGS Open Day next year. We presented £100 to the top horticultural Cannington student and hope to award it in the coming year. The specialist Plant Nurseries Guide was well received again but needs someone to take it over. The website is up and running and is a useful tool for spreading information. Mary thanked everyone for their support and help throughout the year and wished everyone a Happy Christmas and a healthy and happy new Year. (full report attached)

6. Delegate to Council Report

Pauline Clapp has published reports of the Council meetings in our newsletter. She was unable to attend the April meeting due to our Holland trip but was able to attend the others. The Plant Guardian Scheme has been set up- English Garden has an article about it this month. Somerset is the 7th largest Plant Heritage Group. The 3 largest groups of Devon, Suffolk and Hampshire comprise about one quarter of the National membership of 3991. Many groups are finding it difficult to get new members. HQ is heading for a deficit but Michael Alder hopes to clear it before Mike Buffin takes over as National Chairman next year. Mike Buffin recognises that we need to attract more members. The new

National treasurer is Alan Radcliffe. Our President Alan Titchmarsh, has stated that he is unable to devote more time to Plant Heritage projects. The Open Days at Tynings Nurseries raised some money BUT WE need more publicity for such events.

7. Treasurer's report.

Penny Berry had distributed copies of the accounts by email. Alan Shepherd proposed the adoption of the account: this was seconded by Pauline Clapp and Maureen Hudson and carried unanimously by all members present.

8. Collection Coordinator's report

Noni Bemrose thanked Alan Shepherd and Mary Sephton for saying such good things about her. She hasn't had much time to spend working with the collections due to illness but there is someone who may be able to take over as Collection Co-ordinator next Summer. Noni is happy to help. Somerset has 17 collections. Sheila Tucker's *Epiphyllum* collection now has full status. Jane Lindsay and Toni O'Connor's *Thonbergia* and *Mandevillas* collections are in the pipeline.

Bob Evans has had a collection in the pipeline for 2 years. Noni is hoping that we will soon have Sue Applegate's collection of irises. We will hope to get up to date with information about the collections at the Collection Holder's lunch in the New Year. There was a question about Jane Alcock's proposed collections which were mentioned at the last AGM. Noni had no more news of those or of Jane Moore's collection at Bath Priory.

9. Election of Officers.

Mary Sephton was willing to stand again as Chairman, Yvonne Radford as Vice- chairman , Penny Berry as Treasurer and Ann Celer as secretary. Alan Shepherd proposed their election, which was seconded by Pauline Clapp and carried unanimously.

10. Election of Committee.

Pauline Clapp, Don Everitt, Joan Warren, Barbara Barnwell, Noni Bemrose, Sheila Chambers, Ken Armstrong, and Margaret Adams, of the existing Committee, had agreed to serve. Alan Shepherd proposed their re-election en bloc and this was seconded by Maureen Hudson and carried unanimously.

11. Special Business

- Pauline Clapp announced that there was a list to complete if members wished to attend the New Year meal at the Walton Gateway on 9th January 2014 – cost £13.95 for 2 courses, £17.95 for 3 courses (cheques can be made payable to Pauline and she will pay en bloc); 12.30 for 1pm.
- There being no further business, the meeting closed at 12.50pm.

Signed Date

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT TO AGM DECEMBER 2013

We have been delighted to welcome several visitors to our meetings during the last twelve months most of whom have subsequently joined Plant Heritage. We had some very good speakers and outings and we much enjoyed our trip to Holland although the cold Spring meant that there were few tulips in bloom. Sadly, Sue Boss fell on the first evening and broke her leg! Our Plant Sales have become a welcome fixture both at Lower Severalls and Nynehead Court. Taunton Show gives us a chance to advertise the Nynehead sale and they themselves have a stall. People now come looking for us as a source of interesting plants and information.

Copse Hall was again a disappointment held on one of the hottest days of the year - a complete contrast to the washout of last year's sale. Next year Sue Boss has arranged to hold the event to run concurrently with her NGS Open Day. A new venture was the sale at Yeo Valley Organic Garden which was a great success and we hope to be invited next year. None of the Sales made as much money as we would have liked, as you will see plainly from the year's financial report.

The sale at Cannington College was a disaster. As usual it was cold and wet and attended by very few people. Yvonne and I were invited to their Awards Evening in Bridgwater where we presented a cheque for £100.00 to their top horticultural student. She has gone on to more training at Bicton but has promised to keep in touch with us. While there we discussed the poor attendance with 'the powers that be' and expressed very strongly our views on the Show. They are to use a different format next year but it remains to be seen whether or not we shall be there. We hope to award another Bursary next year.

The Specialist Plant Nurseries Guide was well received again but we were asked by several nurseries to give them more copies. We are grateful to members who helped with deliveries. This year we concentrated on Tourist Information Centres. Yvonne and I cannot go on doing this for much longer and we really need someone to take over.

Noni Bemrose has also been looking for help with the National Collections and it is possible that she has found someone with the help of Jane Lindsay from Tynings Nursery. Noni has worked very hard over the last few years and is very pleased that several new collections have been registered in 2013. Alan Spencer has also been very ill and has resigned from the Committee. We owe a great debt of gratitude to them both. We also had sad news that Hilda Holdsworth had died . She was a great age and was one of the earlier members.

We've had some good publicity in various magazines for collections holders and Nurseries in the Area, including Tynings Nursery , Abbey Nursery and Sally Gregson in 'The Garden,' and Nigel Hewitt-Cooper in 'The Plantsman'. Both Tynings and Wild Thyme featured on television.

The Website is now very much up and running and proving a useful tool for spreading information. I am told that the way forward is to 'chatter' on all the social sites and ask you who are interested to get busy with Face book etc!

Arrangements for the AGM at the Webbington Hotel are at an advanced stage and we are working on a presentation to be given at the AGM in 2014.

My thanks to all of you for your support and help throughout the year and especially for help at outside events and for bringing lots of plants for our meetings. And, my thanks to the committee for their support and help. I'd like to mention them all but they all know how much they are appreciated.

Finally, my best wishes to all the membership for a Happy Christmas and a healthy and happy New Year.

Mary Sephton

AGM – REPORT OF NATIONAL COUNCIL MEMBER ON MEETINGS IN 2013

A full description of the salient points of the April 2013 meeting (which I missed due to the Amsterdam trip) but which I was able to follow via the preparatory briefing notes and the subsequent minutes; and of the July meeting, was reported to members in the Autumn newsletter.

The Plant Guardian Scheme has now sixty five plants registered and verified for Guardianship. This scheme has been publicised and applauded in several of the gardening magazines.

Membership nationally stands at three thousand nine hundred and ninety one (3991). Three groups, Devon, Suffolk and Hampshire, comprise approximately one quarter of the national membership. Somerset, with one hundred and fifty one (151) members, is the seventh largest group for the second year running.

Many groups, like ours, find it increasingly difficult to recruit younger members. This, I find, not at all surprising given the pressures of family life, work, cost of living and lack of leisure time for many young and middle aged people, who often face energy sapping long commutes to work or who have no access to a garden of any size within the constraints of modern housing.

The problems of recruitment bring with them a lack of funds – compared with the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) and the National Trust (NT), for example, our organisation has a very small membership. It is once again heading for a deficit this year Twenty eight thousand one hundred and fifty nine pounds (£28,159) is forecast. Michael Alder, our National Chairman, our groups and individual members have raised Twenty nine thousand six hundred and thirty four pounds (£29,634) to date (as at 07 November 2013) otherwise the deficit for which we are heading would be well over Sixty thousand pounds (£60,000). Michael Alder, who is relinquishing the Chairmanship next Autumn, hopes to clear the year's deficit by continuing the Appeal during the remainder of his Chairmanship but is disappointed that the amount raised will not exceed the current deficit and so leave his successor with a better financial outlook.

His successor elect is Mike Buffin, the current Chairman of the Plant Conservation Committee of Plant Heritage. He currently works for the National Trust as a Gardens and Parks advisor in London, the South East and Northern Ireland and is now a Consultancy Manager in London and the South East region. In his Manifesto setting out his criteria and aims for Plant Heritage, he states that “we need to ensure greater financial stability by making Plant Heritage more appealing to more people not forgetting our core members.... We are leading the way with the National Plant Collections and Plant Guardianship Schemes and the Threatened Plant Plants project; however Plant Heritage is not a household name and our membership is static..... Our approach must be to attract a more diverse range of members while keeping existing members engaged.” Here! Here! say we all. However he does not elaborate on how we shall achieve this but achieve this we must if Plant Heritage is to survive and continue its crucial work in the conservation of garden plants and in the education of the public in horticultural conservation.

Our new National Treasurer is to be Alan Ratcliffe, who from his curriculum vitae, would seem to have the necessary financial credentials and a pleasing and humorous deference to submit to the demands of horticulturists in describing his horticultural experience as "Assistant to the Head Gardner, Mrs Judith Ratcliffe" ie his wife! I suspect that like Mr Clapp and so many other Misters, he is chief lawn mower and chopper downer of plants, trees and shrubs too high to reach or requiring mechanics in the form of a chain saw to remove, strictly under the guidance of the Head Gardner of course.

Our President, Mr Alan Titchmarsh, has stated that he cannot devote any more time to projects like the Longstock Fund – Raising Event but is willing to support us with Press statements in support of new Ventures.

Finally, the thirty five Special Openings of National Collections was very successful and raised awareness among the public as well as Three thousand eight hundred and sixty two pounds (£3,862) towards the Appeal. It is proposed to continue the Openings. One Somerset Opening by Jane and Toni at Tynings Climbing Plants in Clevedon was a most enjoyable event, thanks to their excellent plants and a warm welcome with delicious refreshments from the families. BUT WE need greater publicity – any ideas?

Mrs Pauline M Clapp