

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

**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held in Edington Village Hall
on Saturday 05 December 2015 at 12 noon**

Committee Members Present:

Mrs Sheila Chambers	- President
Mrs Mary Sephton	- Chairman
Mrs E Ann Celer	- Secretary
Mrs Penny Berry	- Treasurer
Mrs Pauline Clapp	- Programme Secretary
Mrs Joan Warren	- Plant Finances
Mrs Margaret Adams	- Minute Secretary
Mr Don Everitt	- Plant Fair Organiser
Mrs Noni Bemrose	- Part of the time

22 members were present.

1 Apologies for Absence

Rosie Lishman Ken and Sylvia Armstrong Barbara Barnwell Alan Shepherd Yvonne Radford
David & Margaret Lister Libby Winger and Jill Larbalestier

2 Minutes of the AGM held on 06 December 2014

An abbreviated form of the minutes of the AGM held on 06 December 2014 was read. Copies were available for members to read. Copies of the full minutes were also available and had been available to view on the website. The Chairman Mary Sephton asked members if they were willing to accept the minutes as a true record; acceptance was proposed by Pauline Clapp and Seconded by Pamela Burrough. The minutes were signed by the Chairman.

3 Matters Arising: None

4 President's Welcome:

Our new President Sheila Chambers welcomed everyone and said she felt very privileged to have been asked. It had been a momentous year for the Somerset Group as apart from the full programme of lectures, plants fairs and visits, in April we were the host Group for the National AGM. I am sure you will agree that this was an outstanding success due largely to the exceptional organising abilities of our Chairman Mary Sephton backed up by a great deal of work from the Committee and members. (I did hear that Shropshire felt quite concerned that they will have to keep up the standard next year!).

She thanked all who had helped with the Nursery List, the Collection Holder's lunch, which did so much to bring our Collection Holder's together, all involved with the Plant Fairs, Joan Warren, who is standing down, for the millions!! of labels she has sorted over the years from out plant sales and not of course forgetting Pauline for the speakers and wonderful outings she has arranged.

I will end with a plea – do get involved – the Committee does not have to do everything and a little help is worth a lot – we are not getting any younger! You will learn a lot and feel more a part of Plant Heritage. We look forward to another interesting year.

5 Chairman's Report:

The year 2014-2015 was dominated by the National AGM. The sorting out of what each delegate wanted for the two dinners was further complicated by the Chef who was not always co-operative and at one time had most of us down for ice creams!! Table plans took a huge amount of time to mix people from the different groups and some of the work was not finished until the small hours of the day before the arrival of delegates. The three speakers were very well received and the visits to Yeo Valley and the Bishop's Palace at Wells were much appreciated. The coaches even managed a quick visit to Cheddar Gorge.

New venues were found for our Plant Fairs and our thanks go to John Van de Plank and Moor Plants for their hospitality at Castacrete and Moor Plants Nursery. Glastonbury Abbey has offered us space next year and will do all the administrative work including publicity. We have high hopes for this.

Ken has worked hard throughout the year updating our web site. It is important that we look at this regularly so we keep up to date with what is going on in Somerset.

Sadly we have been unable to find anyone to carry on the Nurseries Guide. It seems a shame that all that hard work is going to be lost.

As usual our Programme of meetings was varied and interesting and included a short break to Hampshire and Bath Priory which houses the National Collection of Cotinus.

Jennie Baker has now taken over from Noni Bemrose as Collection Co-ordinator and has managed to get two more nurseries for our list.

I would like to thank members of the Committee for all their hard work during the last few years but especially during the time when we were organising the National AGM. I have very much enjoyed working with them as with you all and give Margaret my very best wishes for her time as Chairman which I hope she will enjoy as much as I have.

6 Programme Secretary and Delegate to Council Report:

Pauline Clapp read her Programme Secretary report and her Delegate to Council Report to the meeting and these will also be available on our Web site.

7 Treasurer's report:

Penny Berry had distributed copies of the accounts to members. These were unanimously agreed. Proposed by Jean Brewer and Seconded by Avril Vaughan-Lee.

It was unanimously agreed we should contribute £1000 to Head Office and continue to give a Bursary of £100 to Cannington College for the best student in 2016 together with a copy of our Newsletter. Skel

8 Collection Co-ordinator's report:

Jennie Baker reported that Cannington have had a good year and now have their Santolina collection status. Hopefully they will be able to get their Wisteria collection up together now. Noni is still trying to contact Lady Skelmersdale's about her collection of Narcissus. Jamie has left Tynings so his name will be taken of the registry when it is updated and the Thunbergias will stay registered with Jane & Toni at Tynings.

In Wales Rob Evans hopes to have his collection of Gladiolus "Nana" registered by the spring. John Vanderplank has written an in depth book on Passion flowers which is available to borrow.

It is hoped that we will soon have Sue Applegate's collection of irises. Sue together with Pat is opening a nursery of peonies and irises at Lower Severalls - this is however, no longer a venue for our Spring Plant Sale.

9 Election of Officers:

The following Officers had offered to stand again and were unanimously elected:-

Chairman Mrs Margaret Adams Vice Chairman Mrs Yvonne Radford Treasurer Mrs Penny Berry and Secretary Mrs E Ann Celer

Proposed - Donald Everitt Seconded - Sue Applegate

10 Election of Committee:

The following Committee Members had offered to stand again and were unanimously elected:-

Mrs Pauline Clapp Mr Don Everitt Mrs Barbara Barnwell Mrs Noni Bemrose Mr Ken Armstrong.

Proposed - Susan Boss Seconded – Avril Vaughn-Lee.

11 AOB

Car Stickers were available and we were asked to use them in our cars.

Noni and Sue have offered take over plant finances and will be discussed at our next Committee Meeting

Gaye Hicyilmaz had some good suggestions for simplifying the teas/coffees and has offered to take over the rota and be responsible for providing Milk and Biscuits. This will be further discussed at our next Committee Meeting.

Our new President Sheila presented gifts to Mary Sephton Joan Warren and Noni Bemrose thanking them for all their hard work over the years.

- There being no further business, the meeting closed at 12.55pm.

Report to the AGM of Somerset Plant Heritage Group from their National Council member and Programme Secretary

December 2015

This year has been an eventful one, including as it has the successful hosting of the National AGM in the Spring, some inspiring talks from our speakers, enjoyable trips to local gardens and the National Collection of Cotinus in Bath and finally our trip to the best gardens of Hampshire. All our visits and the National AGM in April were blessed with beautiful weather, despite the rather wet summer.

Our Plant Fairs have not been so successful, mainly because of the need to build new venues. Our two most successful were those at John Vanderplank's former Nursery site in Congresbury, now known as Castacrete, in May, and at Moor Plants in Ashcott in September. We thank our hosts at each of these sites and hope to continue at the same sites next year.

To these we will add a Spring Plant Fair to be held at Glastonbury Abbey on Saturday, April 16th, 2016. The officers at the Abbey have been very helpful at what promises to be an excellent site - well-known, a magnet for visitors and ecologically very suitable, with its large collection of trees, some dating back hundreds of years to their planting and a huge collection of wild and cultivated plants identified on the site. Members will see from the accompanying chart of membership retention that only seven groups have actually increased their membership since 2007 and three have folded, their remaining members amalgamating to form East Midlands Group. Our membership has dropped over the past eight years from 195 to 142. We are not alone and the retention of 73% of our 2007 membership is middlingly respectable if you compare retention throughout the County groups.

The fall in membership has many causes - decrease of older members, increasing problems of travel as we age, failure to attract and retain new members, especially males and younger people. We are not alone in these failures. Many organisations share similar problems, due to an aging population, the extended longevity of women compared with men, the problems of young families with both parents working, childcare duties, long commutes, modern houses and flats with little or no garden etc. The problem for Plant Heritage is how to combat these trends, while keeping our finances in order.

Much thought has been given to its resolution by our new Chairman, Mike Buffin, the new Chief Executive, Sara Quatermain and our new Treasurer, Alan Ratcliffe, supported by their staff and volunteers at HQ and the Board of Trustees.

First there is good news: the budget deficit at HQ, which eighteen months ago stood at an eye-watering £56,000 and, after much effort on the part of Michael Alder, the then Chairman, was reduced to an expected £30,000 or so at the beginning of this year.

Now at the years near end, it is reduced to £6,000 or maybe even less, a sum which the Treasurer says he may well clear from the £241,000 held on deposit by HQ, so that we begin 2016 with a clear balance sheet. However, we need to continue to make savings.

Various measures are being considered to reduce costs:

- 1) Reduce the number of National Council Members by having Area Representatives, instead of one for each County group, thus saving on hotel and travel expenses.
- 2) Reduce the number of National Council meetings to two annually, one to be held following a meeting of the Board of Trustees earlier on the same day. This would have two advantages: a saving on venue costs and an opportunity

for Council members to meet with all the Trustees, which never happens at present. As, under the present constitution, only Council members can vote at the Plant Heritage AGM, this annual joint Council meeting with the trustees present would become the AGM. The present format would become a Members' Weekend, offering the opportunity to visit another group in a different County, to meet up with other groups to share discussion on various topics of interest or necessity and to experience visits to gardens beyond our home county environs, having an enjoyable time together and opening new horizons. These proposals would need to be agreed by County groups, but it is hoped to change the format of the AGM and Members' Weekend by 2017.

- 3) Members are to be consulted on possible changes in the frequency of publishing the National Collections Plant Directory. Updates would appear online, but only be updated in print every two or three years, giving a large saving in costs. The frequency and quantity of printing and posting the two annual National Plant Heritage newsletters may also be reviewed.
- 4) To apply for a National Heritage Lottery Grant to further our Conservation work, the main focus of the group at present. Some of this money would be used to hire consultants to advise on recruitment of members, how to encourage an increase in the number of Collection Holders and Plant Guardians and the general direction the Charity should take in the fulfilment of its aims.

To this end and to show that we mean to persevere and progress, Plant Heritage will be seeking to co-operate more closely with other charities, such as the R.H.S., the National Trust and Kew, who may well be able to help us even further in the achievement of our aims in the future, for example, helping to protect National Collections when the owner dies or becomes unable to maintain them or, indeed, their heirs are also unable to look after the Collection or disinterested. Members may well be asked to make provision in their will or by arrangement with Plant Heritage when they become a Collection Holder or Plant Guardian. This is only one aspect of the closer co-operation Plant Heritage will hope to encourage with other plant and garden charities as well as educational institutions.

I personally feel that the lack of national publicity persistently inhibits our progress as a National Charity. We are not well enough known – we seldom get a mention on television, never on the national radio programmes, probably only our members follow us on Twitter etc. The nearest group analogous to our situation nationally is probably the Hardy Plant Society and they do not have a National Executive body to support financially in the way that we do. Without an increase in membership and much more publicity on a National level it is difficult to see how our Charity can advance. There are certainly lessons to be learnt from much larger plant charities and maybe from some smaller ones. This means more co-operation, not to say amalgamation. We want to retain our separate identity, but I feel that too many of the resources of our diminishing membership go to support an overlarge and unwieldy governance of a Charity whose aims are simple: to preserve plants, especially cultivated ones, and the gardens in which they grow and also to educate the public in the importance of our aims and to teach them how they can help in their achievement. Pauline M. Clapp.