

WILD FLOWER SOCIETY
Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at 2pm on Saturday 4th
September 2021, at Margam Field Studies Centre,
Margam Park, Port Talbot, SA13 2UA

Present: Sir Ghillean Prance (President), John Swindells (Acting Chairman), Robin Blades (Treasurer), Sheila Wynn (General Secretary), Anne Kell (Magazine Editor), Janet John (Meetings Secretary), Nichola Hawkins (Publicity Secretary), Helen Dignum (Website Manager), Roger Heath-Brown, and Pauline Wilson (Committee Members) and 32 other members and guests.

Sheila Wynn welcomed members to the Members' Weekend and said how pleased she was that the event had been able to take place.

1. Apologies for absence: Julie Clarke, Nicola Dixon, Ro FitzGerald, Doug Grant, Bill & Carol Hawkins, Pippa Hyde, Peter Jepson, Geoffrey Kitchener, Peter Llewellyn (Chairman), Sue Poyser, Ted Pratt, Tim Purches, Mary and Claire Smith

2. Election of Acting Chairman:

Due to the absence of the Chairman, Peter Llewellyn, John Swindells was elected to act as Chairman of the meeting.

3. The President, Sir Ghillean Prance:

Sir Ghillean spoke about the problems of climate change and the damage it is doing to the flora of the world. He said that, although its effects in the UK have so far been relatively mild, it is affecting wild flowers and gardening here too. He stressed the importance of all of us trying to reduce our carbon footprint and mentioned some of the measures he had taken. He went on to thank the Officers and Committee Members for everything they do to ensure the smooth running of the Society.

4. Minutes of the AGM held on 7th September 2019 and Reports published in Autumn 2020:

The Minutes published in the Winter 2020 Wild Flower Magazine and on the website and the Reports published in the Autumn 2020 issue of the magazine were approved as a true record.

5. Matters Arising: None

6. Financial Matters:

Robin Blades reported that the 2020 accounts were circulated with the previous magazine. They showed that the pandemic had no obvious effect on income with the exception that there were no receipts from the AGM. In particular, subscription income was similar to the

previous two years. We are very grateful for a donation of £2500 from one of our members, Judy Gosnell.

However, expenditure was significantly reduced with no field meeting or AGM costs, and reduced travel expenses. The AGM figure in 2019 was exceptionally high as it included deposits for the next two years' AGMs which we have been able to carry forward. Expenditure on the magazine increased, giving members something to enjoy when there were no meetings going on.

Grant expenditure of £4750 was also lower than normal as the Wildlife Trust training events, which we normally support, and FSC courses, for which we give bursaries to young people, did not go ahead. A new initiative was the first of five annual grants of £1000 for the trust set up by Dr Margaret Bradshaw to monitor rare plants in Teesdale. A project coming towards its end is BSBI's Atlas 2020, to which we gave £2000 to fund validation work, bringing our total contribution to £11950. We supported the publication of the Flora of Cornwall and the BSBI's book on the Hawkweeds of South-East England.

Total receipts exceeded payments by £1317. The value of our investments was 5.4% up on the year.

In 2021 we have received a legacy of £500 from our former General Secretary and long-standing member, Pat Verrall. Subscription income is already a little higher than it has been for several years and the Gift Aid claim has also increased. We have started incurring expenditure on the development of our new website. Grant expenditure is likely to remain at a relatively low level. Support for the Wildlife Trusts has resumed but the only publication supported is one on the wildlife of the North York Moors produced in association with FSC.

At the moment our investments are 7% up during 2021.

Robin thanked Sue Poyser for all her hard work as Membership Secretary and said that membership increased from 633 at 31/12/19 to 659 at 31/12/20.

The meeting approved the adoption of the accounts.

Robin thanked Bob Holder for carrying out the independent examination of the 2019 and 2020 accounts and proposed his re-election. This was agreed.

7. Officers' Reports:

Meetings Secretary:

Janet John said that she was pleased to report that we had been able to run our Field Meeting programme this year – we have proved we can adapt and be flexible, as we had to be, particularly at the beginning of the season. Altogether, the Field Meetings Programme for 2021 consisted of eight longer meetings and twenty-five one day meetings.

Fitting in with Government guidelines caused us to cancel three one-day meetings early in the botanical season. Some meetings were adjusted to accommodate the "Rule of Six" either by inviting some members to the recce and others to the scheduled meeting, or by having a number of leaders and allocating people to different groups. For the Cookham meeting we had three groups with three leaders. She thanked all the people who stepped

up to be leaders at short notice. She said that there has been quite an influx of new members over the last eighteen months and it had been a pleasure to welcome many of them to field meetings and to get encouraging feedback.

Janet reported on the success of this year's innovation: the virtual field meetings held on Zoom. There were seven planned of which four happened in the first months of the year and the last three will be at the end of the year, the idea being that they extend the WFS botanical season and give more members the opportunity to 'attend'. These have been very popular and to date there have been 80-90 attendees at each. This initiative has significantly increased connection with members.

She went on to say more about the extent to which we reach and involve our members, reporting that in 2018 from a membership of around 620 we had 140 members who had attended field meetings in the year. Our membership is now 680 plus and, taking both field meetings and on-line meetings into consideration, this year we have had more than 230 participating members. This strong support of our field and on-line meetings brings the challenge of having to produce a wide and interesting programme of meetings next year to accommodate members but provides the satisfaction of positive feedback.

She then asked for suggestions of good locations and leaders for the field meetings, saying she would be grateful for input from those present as, at the moment, the spreadsheet is empty and will need to be filled in September and October.

On the virtual side she intends to try to extend our range of on-line talks. There is a possibility of an on-line fern identification course and again she asked for suggestions or offers of a talk or a workshop.

She appreciated that any such offer involves time, effort and expertise but it is a fundamental aim of our Society to spread the word and increase knowledge of and involvement with wild flowers.

In conclusion, Janet extended her own and the Society's thanks to the many leaders and speakers who have given their time and expertise over the last year.

Editor:

Anne Kell expressed a very big 'thank you' to everyone who has contributed to the magazine over the last two years and helped to sustain an interesting and diverse content despite the difficulties encountered in trying to get out in the field. For a while she was worried that, without the meeting reports to fill the pages, she would be short of copy, but she didn't need to worry and was very grateful for the fascinating articles on botanising during lockdown which she received.

She said that one of the successes of the last two years has been the rising interest in the 1km square study, with many more people concentrating on their home patches and several commenting how much they have found locally that they must have walked past on a regular basis and not really registered.

She went on to say that, as 2021 has seen a return of our field meetings, the reports of these are now appearing in the magazine again. It is very encouraging how many new

people are attending these meetings and are willing to write up a report. These are all favourable, with members saying how much they have enjoyed the experience and have felt welcomed and included.

The field meeting reports, diary records and reports from the different hunts fill the bulk of the magazine but she would still like to see more variety to sustain reader interest. Simple articles about specific species, your favourite plant, or areas of botanical interest would be most welcome.

Finally, she thanked her proof-readers, John Swindells, Rodney Burton and Sheila Wynn, for doing such a thorough job; Sue Poyser for maintaining and furnishing her with an up-to-date membership list every quarter and the printers, Printing for Pleasure, for always being on hand to answer queries.

Publicity Secretary:

Nichola Hawkins reported that our Social Media platforms are proving ever more popular, with our Facebook page having over 3200 followers and our Twitter Account having over 2500 followers. In the last year, Helen Dignum has set up a new WFS Instagram Page which is gaining in popularity and now has 86 followers. Peter Llewellyn opened a WFS YouTube Account on which the first three of this year's virtual meetings can be seen. These have had almost 500 viewings so far.

Nichola also said that this year she had updated the Membership Pack and the recommended book list. She plans to make more improvements in the coming year.

She had brought WFS Leaflets for members to take and distribute in their local areas.

General Secretary:

Sheila Wynn first expressed her gratitude to David Rich for the painstaking work he contributed to the planning of the weekend's field meetings. As well as recommending the sites we would visit and doing the recces, he provided information on the location of plants we might see and also gave all the detailed directions and travel advice in the documents she had sent out. She said how sorry she was that he couldn't be with us.

She also thanked everyone who has contributed to the weekend's activities, particularly Stephen Clarkson, Roger Heath-Brown, Gareth Bursnall and John Swindells for agreeing to help to lead the meetings – a difficult task when you don't know the sites. She also thanked John Poland for his offer to run the two evening sessions on plant identification, our speakers David Albon and Steve Little and, as always, Ken Southall and Stephen Clarkson for the provision of our usual afternoon activities – the Shoot and Show Photo Competition and the Plant Quiz. And, last but not least, thanks to Priscilla Nobbs for her Hollyhock Competition.

Moving on to news of the last year, Sheila said that there had been two changes to our Branch Secretaries. Due to ill-health, Ted Pratt had resigned as Secretary of the Parnassus 2 Branch. She thanked him for all his efforts over the years as Secretary of various branches. Paul Harmes has agreed to take over from him.

She also thanked Jill Oakley who, at very short notice, took over as Secretary for the 10km Square (South) Study after we received the very sad news of Pat Verrall's unexpected death at the end of last year.

Rodney Burton had also said that he wished this year to be his last as Secretary of Parnassus 1. He will be replaced by Alan Leslie, a former Parnassus 1 Secretary, who has agreed to take up the mantle again.

Sheila thanked Rodney for his many contributions to the running of the Society. Over the last 40 years Rodney has been a major figure in the WFS. As well as being an outstanding botanist, he has held numerous roles in the Society, including Secretary of Branch V (Greater London) for 23 years from 1972 until 1994 and the Foreign Records Secretary for 17 years until 2012. He was Chairman for 9 years in two spells between 1995 and 2007, President for the year 2002-3 and for the last 8 years has been a Parnassus Secretary, as well as helping to proof-read the magazine to name but a few.

She gave thanks, as always, to all our Branch and Competition Secretaries who are at the heart of our Society maintaining contact with members and helping them to improve their botanical skills, as well as leading meetings and writing reports for the magazine.

Sheila reported that, on the administration front, the great step forward that has been achieved in the last twelve months, is the development of a new website. She particularly thanked Helen Dignum for offering to take on the role of manager of the new website and said that we were also grateful to the other members of the website sub-committee, Janet John, Roger Heath-Brown and Nichola Hawkins for all the work that they had put into this and particularly to Peter Llewellyn, who after setting up and running the present website for more than 15 years had also made a huge contribution to the development of ideas for the new website.

This year the Society's *Field Botanist's Record Book* had been updated so that both scientific and common names of plants are in line with the most recent BSBI guidelines and those used in the 4th edition of Clive Stace's *New Flora of the British Isles*.

Acting on a suggestion by former Chairman, Gill Read, we produced a WFS Gift Card. If you buy a year's WFS subscription as a gift for someone, you will receive the gift card to send to them. We also produced blank cards for greetings or messages, with the WFS Logo on the front, which can be bought from our Membership Secretary, Sue Poyser.

Recently we set up an online WFS Photo Library. The purpose of this is to build up a store of Members' images for use in the magazine, for publicity and on the new website. Sheila gave thanks to those people who have already responded to requests for photos, saying that we have received some wonderful images, but would like even more, particularly eye-catching images of plants in flower. Common plants are fine, they don't have to be rare or unusual. We would also like more images showing people botanising.

If you would like to share some of your photos, please contact either Sheila or Helen Dignum. If you have just a few, you can send them directly by email, but they must be full size files. If you have more, contact Sheila and she will send you a link so that you can upload them directly to the library. Or, if you prefer, you could send your photos to her on a memory stick.

8. Photographic Secretary:

Ken Southall said that he regretted that, for the second year in succession, we had been unable to hold the Photographic Competition. He hoped there would be a large number of entries next year. He said that it would still be possible to send entries by post but he expected that most would be sent as full-resolution files by email. The usual top three winners and any highly-commended entries in each class will be displayed at the AGM and the overall winner will receive the new Violet Schwerdt trophy to keep for one year. He asked members to give him their entries for the 'Shoot and Show' Competition and to vote for their favourite. He also said he hoped they would enjoy the display of his photographs of the wonderful flora he and Sue had seen while on holiday in Australia.

9. Website Manager's Report:

Helen Dignum said that she had volunteered to take on the Website Manager role and development of the new website, being keen on tech and having some experience as website editor for her local Natural History Society.

She reported that the website sub-committee had decided on the required content and key features required of the new website which crucially includes the ability for more than one person to add content to the website, allowing Peter to step down after his single-handed achievement and burden of running the website by himself for more than fifteen years. Acting on the sub-committee's specifications, she had obtained quotes from several website developers, focusing on those that had a track record in nature and wildlife and small charity sites, rather than the business and very commercial developers which tend to have a very different approach.

The Committee reviewed these quotes in May 2021 and chose Red Paint, based in Glasgow, which has developed and hosts sites for the Scottish Wildlife Trusts, National Biodiversity Network, British Dragonfly Society and the Natural History Society of Northumbria.

Helen went on to say that we wanted a fresh, modern and visually appealing site, easy to navigate, attractive and useful to current and potential members. Now all websites must be equally accessible on computers, tablets and smart phones which has implications for page size, design and type of images.

She explained that developing a website has several stages. First is the visual design, then the background coding, and finally loading up the text and other content.

After Helen had discussed our requirements with our designer Garry Stevens, he used images provided by Peter Llewellyn and other members to create the main page visuals. She had hoped to keep our WFS flower garland roundel as a header, but it was explained that the graphic will not work well in this way, so it is now in the footer, to keep design continuity with our other visual content such as the magazine.

She has created the strapline: Britain's society for wild flower lovers. Find, enjoy, learn.

Helen showed the design images already completed and went on to describe the content of the website:

1. There are major sections of **About, Events, Activities, News, Learn.**
2. **About** will include various pages describing the society, its branch structure, history, committee and description of the magazine.
3. **Events** will have options to filter by month or area, and see the dates on the calendar. We will be able to have the functionality of adding booking by Eventbrite, which many societies use, and is cost-free for no-charge events. It may be particularly useful for our Zoom talks.
4. **Activities** will include the spring and autumn plant hunts, diaries, surveys, photo competition and juniors, and allows us to emphasise all the year-round activities available in addition to the field trips.
5. **News** is self explanatory
6. **Resources** will include our downloads such as the Botanist's Diary; resources for juniors and other reference material. There is also an image gallery, and the section could include links to other photo resources such as our Google drive images.
7. Finally, we will have a section headed Join Us which will lead to information on how to join our society, with appropriate links and contact details.

The Website Sub-committee has had to take some difficult decisions. We decided to omit the List of all Plants as similar content is covered by other sites and it would require significant revision to be in line with the Stace 4 changes. Also, the Illustrated Diary will not feature in its present form on the new website, because it would have required a disproportionate amount of coding and image handling, and therefore cost to translate to a new site. It could remain accessible elsewhere.

Helen finished by saying that the next step is to proceed with the coding to translate the design into a working website which we will run behind the scenes while testing until we are ready to switch over. The new website will be based on Wordpress which is easy to use. She and other members of the team will be trained in how to upload new content to the website so that as well as herself keeping the site up-to-date, for example, Janet can add new events, Peter could add news and gallery content and Anne could add sample magazine content.

10. Election of Officers:

The following were re-elected unopposed:

President: Sir Ghillean Prance; Chairman: Peter Llewellyn; Treasurer: Robin Blades; General Secretary: Sheila Wynn; Magazine Editor: Anne Kell; Meetings Secretary: Janet John and Publicity Secretary: Nichola Hawkins.

11. Election to the Executive Committee:

As none of the terms of office of the current four General Committee Members was due to end this year, there was no election of a new member.

12. A.O.B: None

13. Date and venue of next meeting:

The 2022 meeting will be held at Preston Montford Field Studies Centre, Shrewsbury, on Saturday 3rd September.

SHEILA WYNN