

Bicester Local History Society

Annual General Meeting

Monday 17 September 2018

Venue: The Clifton Centre, Ashdene Road, Bicester

Present: 56 members

1. Welcome/Format of Meeting

Bob Hessian opened the AGM at 19:40. He welcomed members and outlined the format of the meeting. He then requested permission from members to stand down as Chairman of BLHS, in order to carry out the remainder of the meeting. Permission was granted.

2. Apologies

Apologies had been received from Gill King.

3. Minutes of AGM held on 18 September 2017

Bob Hessian summarized the key points from last year's AGM minutes, and asked for approval of these minutes from the members. The minutes were approved.

4. Chairman's Report/Presentation

Bob Hessian then gave the Chairman's report on the year's activities and highlights.

2018 had seen a good selection of talks. Of particular note were the talks on the Westgate excavations and windows (Pat Snelson), which had been very well-received. Thanks were given to Sally James and John Roberts for their tireless work in planning and organizing talks.

Earlier in September, there had been a village walk around Chesterton. This walk had proved a little contentious, regarding trespass issues. Bob Hessian apologised for the walk, which he had led, and said that he would try to put together information on Chesterton to include at a forthcoming monthly talk. The village walk around Aynho was scheduled for the coming Sunday. Thanks were given to John Roberts for organizing the accompanying Countryside Walks. In July, Liz Woolley had led another successful walk around Grandpont in Oxford.

The 2017 BLHS Xmas Tree had been well-received at the St Edburg's Xmas Tree Festival. The theme for the forthcoming 2018 BLHS Xmas Tree was going to be WW1, possibly celebrating serving Bicester men who had survived the war. In June, the BLHS stand at the Bicester Festival had been positioned next to the Dovecote. The owners of the Dovecote, Cherwell District Council, had cleared out this grade 2 listed building, and opened it to the public for the first

time. The BLHS stand focused on the history of Bicester Priory, and featured artifacts found on the site by local residents. The preservation and re-purposing of the Dovecote is an ongoing issue that BLHS are monitoring closely.

The two display cabinets allocated to BLHS in the Bicester library had been utilized throughout the year, and BLHS were now encouraging other local history societies and collectors to set-up displays.

The Society now had new archive storage space at St Edburg's School. This much-needed space would be used for storing papers and books as opposed to artifacts. BLHS were also in the process of buying a circular commemorative WW1 bench, to be positioned around a yew tree within Garth Park. It was hoped that the bench would be 'in situ' by the end of the year.

The ongoing success of the *Bicester Historian* (the monthly BLHS newsletter) continues. This success is due to Matthew Hathaway who produces and edits this valuable and popular newsletter. Sincere thanks were given to Matthew for all the work he carries out producing this newsletter every month.

Bob Hessian summarized the background of the Bicester Museum and Heritage Trust (BMHT). Pete Chivers and Meg Latham had formed a sub-group of BLHS to pursue the challenge of gaining a museum for Bicester. They then formed BMHT and obtained a charitable trust status. BMHT operated as a completely separate entity to BLHS, which, on occasion, had caused confusion to some people and organisations. BMHT had formed its own Committee, which had in later days, lost its momentum when Pete had moved out of the area, and Meg became ill and sadly died. It was now unclear what the future direction of BMHT would be, with dwindling Committee members. Also, there was some doubt whether BMHT would remain a separate group to BLHS. Bob Hessian was keen to explore the possibility of BLHS itself obtaining charitable trust status, which could then offer BLHS a far greater funding status. This matter was currently being discussed within the Committee. The Committee were also discussing the possibility of an amalgamation between BLHS and BMHT.

The future of the Magistrate's Court was still unclear, and efforts to find out who owns it had proved difficult. There was a covenant attached to the building that meant that the land cannot be re-developed. However, BLHS would keep a watchful eye on developments. Bob Hessian mentioned a recent letter he had seen in the local press stating that "...Bicester was rather bland, and didn't have much in the way of culture...".

Planning matters continue to take up time and effort, and there were several other BLHS projects the Committee were busy working on. Recruiting volunteers from the Society to help with various projects was also underway, and Bob Hessian said he would be sending out a communication to members regarding this topic.

Bob Hessian expressed his personal thanks to the Committee members for their work throughout the year. He also thanked those people who had helped with putting out chairs for the monthly talks, those people who had helped with sorting out refreshments, and Peter and Jean Crook for their assistance with organizing the raffle each month. Lastly, he thanked all the members of the Society for their ongoing support over the year.

5. Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer, Sally James, then gave her annual report.

A draft copy of the BLHS income and expenditure accounts for the year ending September 2018 had already been distributed to members prior to the start of the meeting.

The Society currently had 89 members, the same number as last year. Financially, BLHS were in a very good situation, with total assets of £9,158.43.

The new data protection laws had led to a notable increase in the paperwork/organisation required for booking speakers. Currently, there were three spaces in the 2018/19 programme of talks. Ben Ford's talk on *Excavations at the Westgate*, and John Beaumont's talk on *Wireless War Secrets*, had successfully attracted new groups of visitors to meetings.

The 'Extraordinary Women of Bicester' event at St Edburg's Church in September had unexpectedly boosted sales of BLHS books and DVDs. Bob Hessian had donated his fees for walks and talks to the Society, and the auditor of the BLHS accounts had been given a free BLHS calendar in exchange for auditing the annual accounts. The fee (£10 per hour) for booking the Clifton Centre had remained the same as the previous year.

There had been an increase in the amount of money the Society spent on subsidising refreshments for the programme of walks. Sally James encouraged more people to sign-up for the village walks in particular, so that the subsidies could benefit more members.

The Society's major purchase of the year would be the WW1 Commemorative bench (though this cost may fall into 2019/20). The cost of this item was estimated at £2,000, and Sally James commented that she thought this was a very worthwhile purchase.

It had been previously been agreed by the Committee that there would be no increase again in the annual subscriptions to members. Therefore for the year 2018/19, the subscriptions remain at £12 for Single Membership, and £18 for a Joint Membership. The visitor's fee for attending a monthly talk remains at £3. Sally James then asked the members to vote on the proposed 2018/19 subscriptions: all members were in favour, and there were no objections.

Finally, Sally James asked if members had any questions they wanted to ask her regarding the annual accounts for the Society. The members had no questions and then gave Sally a round of applause in thanks for her work as Treasurer.

6. Election of the Committee

Bob Hessian stated that in order to adhere to constitutional rules, all existing Committee members were now asked to stand down. Bob Hessian then asked members if they were in agreement for him to take on the role of Acting Chairman whilst voting for the new Committee members took place. Members agreed to this request.

Bob Hessian commented that at each AGM, the same appeal went out for members to join the Committee. He stressed that one or two additional people were now urgently needed to ensure the Society's current work was maintained. This message was emphasized. Unfortunately, no new volunteers for the Committee came forward.

All Committee members who had served during 2017/18 had said they would be happy to carry on in 2018/19. Members were then asked to vote on accepting the following BLHS Committee for 2018/19 'en bloc':

Bob Hessian, *Chairman*
Sally James, *Treasurer*
Sally Dexter, *Minutes Secretary*
John Roberts, *Membership Officer*
Matthew Hathaway, *Newsletter Editor*
Peter Crook

All members were in favour, and there were no objections.

The AGM closed at 20:20 hrs.

A break for refreshments followed, and then Bob Hessian gave a talk on the women featured in BLHS's display at the 'Extraordinary Women of Bicester' event at St Edburg's Church.

Note-taker: Sally Dexter