

BRITISH AGRICULTURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Annual General Meeting 2019-20, 2020-21

The 68th Annual General Meeting of the British Agricultural History Society took place on Monday 12 April 2021 by Zoom.

47 members were present at the beginning of the meeting.

1. Apologies for absence:

Professor John Chartres.

2. The minutes of the 67th General Meeting were approved without amendment.

3. Matters arising:

No matters arising were drawn to the meeting's attention.

4. Election of officers

The following were elected unopposed: Dr Jean Morrin Secretary; Mr Derek Shepherd Treasurer; Prof. Paul Warde editor and Dr John Morgan Reviews editor.

Dr Alan Wadsworth asked about how the officers of the Society were nominated. Professor Henry French said that in practice the new officers were put forward by the officers of the Society and confirmed by the membership. Professor French outlined the way in which job descriptions for the officers had been drafted and would be implemented over the next year. Professor Hoyle pointed out that the AGM papers contained an invitation for members to nominate officers. It had been agreed by the Executive Committee that vacancies amongst the offices should be advertised within the Society and he hoped that this would be the practice in the future.

5. Election of ordinary members of the Executive Committee

The following were nominated as members of the Executive Committee: Prof. Mark Bailey; Dr John Broad, Dr Jordan Claridge, Dr Rebecca Ford, Dr Susan Kilby, Prof. John Martin, Dr Danae Tankard, Prof. Annie Tindley, Prof. Abigail Woods. As nine nominations had been received (a tenth one having withdrawn) for nine vacancies, all nine were declared election.

6. Report of the Chair of the Executive Committee

Professor French began by noting that this had been an exceptional time. The Worley Hall conference due to be held in April 2020 had had to be cancelled and so the AGM could not take place. The Executive Committee had considered and accepted the accounts but had agreed they would also be presented to this meeting. It had been proposed to hold the conference (and AGM) at Wortley Hall in September but this too had been overtaken by events.

The EC has met virtually throughout 2020 and 21 and like other organisations it had adapted its working arrangements to meet new circumstances. But apart from Covid this had not been an easy year for the Society and pre-existing weaknesses had been exacerbated. The first of these was the questions of officers' roles in the society. In particular it had been hard to find people to act as secretary over a number of years and this role had had a succession of short-term incumbents, most recently Richard Hoyle who has stood in for 2020-21. He hoped that the new members of the EC would provide a pool from which future officers could be drawn, but the society needed some stability in its offices.

The EC would see a big intake of new recruits which was to be welcomed, but there were dangers of a loss of institutional memory. Dr Broad as the incoming chair of the EC and Dr Morrin as secretary brought with them extensive experience of the Society. The EC had also met more regularly and this had been beneficial. It had helped resolve some of the communication problems between the officers and the EC which had been marked in early 2020.

The constitution of the Society had also been considered over the year. The constitution was a minimalist document which relied on the officers' knowledge of precedent to make it work: with the turnover of officers this has been dissipated. The EC has discussed revisions to the constitution but it seemed inappropriate to bring them to this AGM and they have been deferred to next year.

It had been suggested that we should employ an administrator to resolve some of the problems of high turnover of officers and responsibilities for which no volunteers could be found, but this raised its own difficulties and Professor French expressed a preference for the Society moving from being an unincorporated charity to being a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). He thought that this question would have to be addressed over the next few years and expected that the incoming EC would look at the issues.

COVID had forced the Society to innovate. The Winter Conference had been held online and the Spring Conference had been converted into a sequence of papers. This had attracted much larger audiences than our traditional meetings had done. Professor French thought that we were bound to continue to hold online events and stream others. We did however intend to hold the next Spring Conference at Harper-Adams in Shropshire on 4-6 April. The format of the winter conference was also to be confirmed.

As this was his last AGM as chair of the EC, he offered his thanks to those who have supported him as Secretary and Treasurer, especially Richard Hoyle and Bill Shannon.

Dr Paul Brassley, speaking as President, offered the thanks of the Society to the departing officers, especially to Professor French and Dr Bill Shannon, both of whom had served longer than they intended. Professor Hoyle was standing down as acting secretary but before that had been one of the 'great editors' of the *Review*.

7. Treasurer's Report.

Dr Shannon gave his seventh and final report to the AGM although as he noted, he had only agreed to serve for five years on his appointment.

Dr Shannon's report covered 2019-20 as well as 2020-21. The earlier accounts had already been accepted by the EC and submitted to and approved by the Charity Commission but it had been agreed that they would be brought to this meeting. The accounts for 2019-20 had had to be recast from being based on accruals to a simpler receipts and payments method of accounting following advice given to our examiner. Income and expenditure is now treated in the year in which it occurred.

There was a small operating loss over the three years 2018-19, 2019-20 and 2020-21, but this had been projected and arose from the investment the Society had made in LIBRAL (about £15,000 over the three years).

Dr Shannon reviewed the recast accounts for the year to January 2020. This included some timing issues especially payment for the publication of the *Review*. He reported an operating loss in the year to January 2021 which he attributed to the loss of deposit for the Spring Conference, the refunding of members' payments to attend the conference and a loss on the preceding Winter Conference.

Dr Shannon also drew attention to a number of features of the accounts for the year ending 31 January 2021. Whilst subscriptions were holding up, there was a long term decline in membership numbers. He saw the decline in institutional subscriptions as perhaps inevitable but expressed some concern about declining numbers of individual members and thought that steps to reverse this needed to be considered by the incoming EC.

In the year about £8,500 was spent on LIBRAL. The fund established for the Thirsk Prize was now exhausted and from now the prize would be a revenue cost. The research fund which had been established contained about £50,000. The Projects and Initiatives fund contained about £25,000 and he thought that some of this would have been drawn on in the next few years for website development. Unrestricted funds fell but remained at 48k and as he pointed out, this was a whole year's expenditure. The Society was therefore in a comfortable position.

Thinking about the Society of the whole, Dr Shannon outlined how the individual membership rate plus gift aid covered the costs of the benefits that members received plus the costs of running the Society. The investment income covers the cost of LIBRAL and other charitable activities. The balance at the bank had fallen to as little as £3500 in the winter of 2020-21 and this had given cause for concern. There is no immediate need to consider raising the individual subscriptions.

Dr Shannon asked that we accept the accounts for the two years and reappoint the examiner of the accounts for a further year. This was agreed nem con.

8. Editors' reports

Professor Warde gave a brief report. The year had been a difficult one but the *Review* had been delivered in a timely fashion thanks for the work of Catherine Glover. Carnegie had been able to stick to schedules in rather trying circumstances. Submissions had remained at a healthy level but he reported a preponderance of overseas submissions and this was reflected in the balance of what it was possible to publish. He urged that more submissions should be submitted and he looked for ways for encouraging submissions. He looked forwards to receiving more work on the History of Science and mentioned the award of the Thirsk Prize to Dr Kirchhalla as an indication of the quality of the work being done in these areas.

Dr John Morgan gave a short account of his work as reviews' editor and again thanked Catherine Glover for her support. There were 35 reviews in hand with 77 commissioned.

Dr Rebecca Ford gave a brief report on *Rural History Today*. She welcomed more submissions and diversity in content.

9. LIBRAL Report

Professor Hoyle outlined recent developments on LIBRAL, commenting that as it had become a major activity of the Society, it was appropriate that a report should be given to the AGM.

There were now 875 items on LIBRAL and in the calendar year 2020 245 had been added. The intention was to offer a mixture of the classic agricultural literature and more modern grey literature. At the moment the contents are deliberately eclectic but in time it was attended to have a comprehensive range of the classic works of Young, Marshall, the *General Views* etc on the site

All the original *General Views* (of 1794-5) were now on LIBRAL. It was intended to build a collection of farming encyclopedias. The whole of Dudley Stamp's *Land of Britain* would be added over 2021-22. Over the next few weeks it was intended to add the first 25 volumes of the Board of Agriculture's/ MAF's journal *Agriculture*. Professor Hoyle expressed a willingness to add materials to meet teaching or research needs. Very little feedback was received about the contents, but what we had was complimentary.

10. Motions placed before the meeting.

The AGM had before it a motion from Mr B. Kennedy calling on the name of the Society to be amended. As had been explained in the papers for the meeting, this motion had not been received in time to be circulated to members (although this was not the fault of Mr Kennedy). Given that Clause 15 of the constitution had not been followed, the EC had thought it best that consideration of Mr Kennedy's motion should be deferred to the next AGM. A motion in the name of the EC was put to the meeting: this was agreed, 35 votes in favour out of 39 members present, none against.

The motion will be considered at the AGM to be held in 2022.

11. Any other business.

There were no items offered for consideration.

Professor French ended the meeting by hoping that it would be possible to hold an AGM in person at the next AGM. The meeting closed at 17.45.

RWH
19 April 2022