

DORSET NATURAL HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

The Minutes of the 147th Annual General Meeting of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society held on Tuesday 5th December 2023 at Dorset Museum, High West Street, Dorchester, starting at 6.00pm

Present: Jean Lang (Chair of the Board of Trustees), Claire Dixon (Executive Director), Elizabeth Selby (Director of Collections & Public Engagement), Gaby Frost (Director of Operations), David French (Chair of the Finance Committee), Dr Clare Randall (DNHAS Editor) and 49 members.

In attendance: Philippa Jenkins (Executive Assistant)

Jean Lang expressed the museum's condolences at the death of Roger Peers, a former Director of the museum.

1. Chair's welcome and introduction

Jean introduced herself, Trustees of the Board and staff attending the meeting. She explained that as the President was absent, the Board had elected her to chair the AGM.

2. Apologies for absence.

Jean reminded everyone to sign the Attendance Sheet. Five apologies had been received and were accepted by the meeting. The Executive Director would give a presentation after the business meeting and the Special Exhibition – Elizabeth Frink: A View from Within would be open for a preview.

3. Minutes of the 146th AGM of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society held on Friday 2nd December 2022

The draft Minutes of the previous AGM held on 2nd December 2022 had been distributed to the membership. On a proposition by Sian Merriott, seconded by Jim Smyllie with all in favour, the Minutes were accepted as a true record.

4. Trustee Chair's Report

Jean presented her report, a copy of which is attached. She reminded the meeting that the year we are reporting on ended 8 months ago and so her report would also mention some of the changes that have occurred since then. She ended by thanking Sarah Welton, who is standing down as a Trustee after serving for two terms.

5. Report of the Board of Trustees of the Society and

6. Accounts for the period 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023

David French, Chair of the Finance Committee, gave a full report, a copy of which is attached.

He ended by thanking Claire and the team, Lisa Cartwright and the members of the Finance Committee for all their support and hard work.

7. To receive the report of the Mansel-Pleydell, Cecil and CD Drew Trusts

Anthony Moore, read his report, a copy of which is attached.

8. To appoint the Society Auditors

On a proposition by Tracy Chevalier, seconded by Tracey Parsons, with all in favour, Scott Vevers, Chartered Accountants of Bridport, were appointed the Society's Auditors for the year 2023/2024.

9. Re-election of Trustees

The following trustees had agreed to stand again and were re-elected:

Tracy Chevalier

David French

Jean Lang

Tracey Parsons

10. Election of Trustee

A recruitment, interview and selection process had taken place and details of the candidate to fill the vacancy had been distributed to all Members in November. Consequently, David Tucker was elected as a Trustee.

11. DNHAS Editor's Report

Clare Randall gave her report, a copy of which is attached.

12. Members' Questions

The following questions had been submitted:

- 1. Peter Runeckles: In the Digital Communications Mandatory Form there is no option to have the Proceedings sent to me digitally and a hard copy of the magazines Why is that as I would like to read the magazine but not have the hard copy of the Proceedings delivered which would save money and paper.**

This was a point also raised by the Chair!. The options given on the digital form were informed by previous surveys that indicated a strong preference for digital access to our publications and a large number of members who were keen to still receive a hard copy of the Proceedings. To date we have had a handful of requests for hard copies of the magazine, and we will include a question about this in the next member survey, which will inform ongoing changes. Our motivation is to meet the needs of our members but also to reduce our costs and we will keep these options under review.

- 2. Dr Giles Droop: Granted that volunteers are not legally subject to formal grievance procedures, does the Board place any obligation on Museum staff to treat its volunteers in such a way to respect their moral rights? Among others, these surely include (i) the right to be treated fairly and with respect, (ii) the right to explain or defend themselves when accused of malpractice, and (iii) the right to be able to discuss issues and grievances with staff. If not, why not?**

Volunteer management is a matter for the Executive and the Director, and all actions are taken in line with our Volunteer Policy. Both the Board and the Executive would hope always to treat people fairly and with respect. The Board are fully informed of staff actions in relation to significant incidents relating to both staff and volunteers. The Executive team manages the organisation and museum in line with sector standards and expectations.

- 3. Ronald Dowle: Members will have read in the press of thefts from the British Museum and subsequent criticisms of the Museum's security arrangements including some aspects of cataloguing. Are the Trustees satisfied with the security arrangements for our museum? Have these been recently reviewed?**

Managing large collections (and we have over 4 million items) is a complicated business and that means we are always looking at ways to improve how we keep them safe, secure and in good condition.

The Trustees are satisfied that within the constraints of the buildings and the storage facilities that the Museum has, the security arrangements are the best they can be. Indeed, earlier this year the Museum was reconfirmed for cover for the Government Indemnity Scheme covering items borrowed.

Following the report of theft at the British Museum, Liz Selby, our Director of Collections and Public Engagement, took a proactive approach to advise Trustees of our intended response at the following Board meeting. The curatorial staff undertook a full review of our procedures and are implementing some changes. We are going to be working with volunteers to ensure regular staff supervision and we have revised the means by which we provide access to collections and stores, to ensure our approach stands up to scrutiny. We have also introduced some new guidelines for those accessing our stores and are in the process of agreeing a longer-term plan for managing our documentation backlog, to better protect us against this risk. We have taken immediate steps when actual risks have been identified and we will continue to do so, acting in line with sector guidance and professional standards to ensure the ongoing protection and security of the collection, which is essential for maintaining our accredited status. Trustees receive regular progress reports on this work and the issue has also been added to our High-Level Risk Assessment, to acknowledge the potential risk but also recognise that it is well mitigated against. Trustees are confident that the curatorial staff are taking this issue seriously and implementing sufficient risk management as required.

Within the main Building all items are recorded and most catalogued however we are aware that Library books have been removed and not returned and we are looking into the use of the library.

Outside the Museum matters get more difficult. All Saints is not a fit place to store items however there are at present no easy alternatives. The problem there is not security (as no-one has access save for the removal of items into the Museum) but environment. The Society does not have the money to deal with this as it would need the employment of full-time staff not only to properly catalogue items but also to find alternative storage facilities – there is not room in the CDC to take everything. The two units we have are accessible only by staff and whilst the items at the Old School are listed, they are not necessarily catalogued to a current standard. The staff will, under Liz's leadership continue to improve the security of items and when we have the funds we would hope to deal with All Saints.

4. **A. Harry Cripp: What does the ongoing monitoring involve in the context of major catastrophe-type risks? More specifically, I would like to be confident adequate measures are in place to minimise the risk of damage to the collections in the event of fire. The likelihood of a fire at the museum may be low, but wherever there is anything combustible it is never possible to reduce the risk of a source of ignition to zero. Though relatively few items in the collections may be particularly combustible, the same may not apply to the containers in which they are displayed or stored. Moreover, some items could be destroyed by firefighting water, and inert gas systems would be unsafe to use in areas where personnel are present without breathing apparatus.**
- B. Is a summary available for members to see on request, outlining the methodology used to identify fire risks to the collections and the measures in place to minimise them?**
- C. Are there areas in which multiple items are stored close together, where a small fire in one container could escalate by spreading rapidly to others (eg cardboard or similar boxes on open shelves)?**

D. In the event of a significant fire, is the local firefighting service set up to handle safe removal of high-value or hard-to-replace items in the collection?

DNHAS have a new, high level risk assessment in place that details the ways in which we are managing risks and health, safety and fire features prominently. It is much more detailed than the one included in our accounts. This document is not appropriate for the public domain due to sensitive content, but it reviewed by the Board of Trustees quarterly.

A new Health & Safety working group consisting of the Chair, Executive Director, two further Trustees and the Facilities Manager, meet regularly to review progress in relation to our H&S Action Plan.

Following the annual H&S audit, an external consultant has completed full fire evacuation procedures for all buildings and the Museum was closed for a day last week so that all staff could be fully trained. Our Fire Policy and Procedures are available on request. In January a new pre-season conference will ensure all volunteers are also fully trained and we will be rolling out specific training for those working in other buildings. This audit included recommendations in terms of fire prevention, identifying types of extinguishers required and reviewing fire prevention infrastructure and equipment, including the dry risers. We are confident that our current measures and action plan meet the needs of our current buildings, especially as works on paper are stored securely and appropriately at the Dorset History Centre and we are in the process of either disposing of or moving any remaining paper items. We do however recognise that need to move forward with a plan to remove collections from All Saints. As referred to in the previous answer, this will take at least five years and the first step is to secure funding for a specialist archaeological curator to understand and define the collections, which we are in the process of applying for.

As an accredited Museum & Art Gallery we have a full emergency plan that focuses on the treatment of collections in case of fire. As part of this process, we are required to identify items to be prioritised for rescue and the emergency services also have copies of these lists and perform site visits, to ensure familiarity. Due to the sensitive nature of these documents in terms of collection security, it is not appropriate for them to be shared beyond essential staff and fire personnel.

Finally, we are members of the Harwell Priority User Service, which secures access to recovery and triage teams to ensure damaged objects are quickly stabilised and damage is mitigated.

5. Robert Lancaster: "Why was the Chilfrome Hoard of Roman coins not considered important enough to be acquired by Dorset Museum?"

There were two hoards.

The first consisted of 97 silver Roman denarii. The group is typical of coins in military circulation, and they not only relate to our growing understanding of the immediate invasion period in Dorset but complement the later 1st century Askserswell Hoard. Given the highly significant date of T194 and its research potential, as well as complementary possibilities of interpretation with other parts of the collection, it was recommended to acquire and we are moving forward with this,

The second hoard consisted of three coins, two silver denarii and one silver denarius copy. This is a small group, of considerably different date to the earlier hoard, their presence indicates continued use of the areas into the Mid-Roman period but are of themselves of little research potential. It was recommended to decline these.

The current financial constraints means that for the foreseeable future the Museum may not be able to fund further acquisitions and we will depend on local fund raising as we did so successfully with the Milton Abbey pendent.

The following questions were raised by members in attendance:

6. Anthony Gould: How did the revaluation of the pension scheme come about?

David French explained that the pension scheme is revalued every 3 years by revaluing the investments and assets of the scheme. Obviously, these valuations can go up or down, but it is not related to the payment of pensions to staff. Staff are protected as members of the scheme.

7. Anthony Moore: As there is currently no funding to sort out All Saints and the collections stored there, would crowd funding be a way forward?

Jean Lang said the trustees were looking of other ways to raise the money needed. Crowd funding had been used to raise money for the Frink exhibition and all ideas would be considered in the future.

8. Furze Swann: There is a model ship that was a gift to Thomas Hardy which is in poor condition and displayed in the corner of the museum. Why is it where it is and is it being looked after?

Jean Lang said she was not aware of this particular item, but a lot of expert advice was taken on the placement of artifacts when the museum reopened. Repair and conservation work is always dependent on funding. Jean will speak to Liz Selby about it. *

9. Liz Arkell: Does the museum know where the brass plaques that were on the stairs are, and will they be replaced? The previous Director said they were being cleaned.

Liz Selby said she did not know where they were, but a board had been put up at the entrance to the Victorian Hall that contained all of the names originally on the plaques.*

Following the formal business, Claire Dixon gave a presentation about the future vision for the Society and Museum & Art Gallery, her slides can be provided on request.

*After the meeting further information was established relating to these questions and is available on request.