

## MELTON & OAKHAM WATERWAYS SOCIETY AGM – SATURDAY 13 NOVEMBER 2021

Minutes of the 24th Annual General Meeting held at 10.00am on Saturday 13 November 2021 at Sysonby Knoll Hotel, Melton Mowbray.

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the AGM.

### 1. Apologies

Apologies were received from C & I McDonald, J Evans, D Andow, V Brightwell and A & L Mills.

### 2. Chairman's Report and Accounts (23rd AGM, November 2020)

As last year's AGM was cancelled due to Coronavirus, the Chairman's written report and the accounts were submitted in November 2020. These were both accepted as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

### 3. Matters Arising from the Report and Accounts

None.

### 4. Chairman's Report

I cannot review the last 12 months without beginning with the devastating effects that the pandemic has had on all of us, both in the way that the society has functioned and also on a more personal level, the cost in human terms.

Shortly after last year's AGM minutes were sent out, I learned of the death of two of our founder members, Richard Booth and Ellis Homewood. Both were very influential in my early years with the society and as friends we shared some wonderful experiences together. They are sadly missed.

During the pandemic societies like ourselves had to adapt in different ways to continue their work, and we were no exception, staging committee meetings via Zoom, communicating by telephone and e-mail and holding sporadic two-man work parties to get little jobs done. In this respect, I thank everyone for their co-operation and patience.

Our Zoom meetings were peppered with technical problems at first, but at the time of writing this, we seem to have got to grips with it all, and our two new committee members, Gary and Lorrie, have taken it in their stride. I'd like to thank Gary for his hard work with our new business plan and the social media side of things and Lorrie for her work as Treasurer. To all of our committee thanks for a job well done, and wish our outgoing member, and former chairman, Mike Handford all the best for the future. Which means, we are now at least a body short, and I ask that if anyone can spare an hour every six weeks or so, we would welcome your input as a new committee member.

Our year as a committee has been plagued by niggling little things, such as the insistence of Companies House that we dot all the i's and cross all the t's, (in triplicate) but there have been brighter moments too – such as when the 1000<sup>th</sup> Facebook member came on board. Incidentally the total now stands at 1250 odd, but it was only a chance remark by our new social media person Gary, that made some people realise that we were a bona-fide society rather than just a Facebook page, and membership has slowly climbed ever since.

A further branch of MOWS that utilises Zoom are our Footpath Rangers who report back any problems or changes to their patch, at our regular meetings. Again, I would like to thank them for their vigilance and participation.

Talking of footpaths, you will all be aware of the series of leaflets that guide walkers along the "Wreake Valley Way" and have been in existence about 15 years. We have long believed that they were in dire need of updating, and thanks to our good friend Geof Malone, this has been done, and once approved will go off to the printers soon. This has been a labour of love for Geof and I am sure that his efforts are appreciated by us all.

Once the pandemic restrictions were slackened, we tentatively eased back in our routine work parties, and one of the first things we did was to review the condition of the boat-shaped planter outside of the council offices, which of course was where the original canal basin was located. We have agreed with our friends at Melton in Bloom that we will repair this prior to replanting, but this is dependent on funding, which has not yet come through.

Several of our work parties have been at Thrusington Lock courtesy of the owners who are society members. The extensive repointing and remedial brickwork will be followed with the rebuilding of the towpath side quoin, which will then allow further excavation of the remaining silt – who knows what we might find? The eventual plan is to tidy the whole site, install a fence alongside the footpath and fix an interpretation board showing how the lock used to look and function.

Our volunteers are essential to the success of our work parties and for all of their efforts since we got back together, I give enormous thanks for turning out, especially when the weather means you would rather stay in bed! However, special mention must be made of two of them, who due to their sterling efforts, have kept our work boats dry and latterly enabled the roof of "Mole" to be lifted clear, and put back into service. So, a big thank you to Stuart and Mark who have spent literally hundreds of hours designing and building the boat cladding along with a roof lifting gantry, which worked like a dream from the first go.

Their efforts would have come to naught if it were not for the generosity of our members who have responded to appeals and kindly donated all manner of equipment and materials – thank you so much everyone.

Much of this work would not have been possible, if it was not for the openness and generosity of spirit of the Melton Town Estate, whose new manager, Billy Boulding, has been so enthusiastic for our work. As a thank you we have agreed to try and do something with the stagnant pond in the park and this will give a first outing to our recently purchased bits of equipment, long- and short-reach dredgers who go by the nicknames of "Duncan" and "Banksy".

Other notable events during the last 12 months have been our expansion into other social media outlets, the loss of the Old Ratcliffe boat house, the finalising of plans for the MMDR and the ongoing damage and vandalism of the double-arch bridge at Syston, which is now thankfully in the hands of LCC. The idea of running a regular trip boat has been resurrected, and this time our pleas for funding have been listened to by Melton BID.

Over towards Oakham, we are encouraged by the progress of the Green Corridor Project, and Paul Dadford is to be commended for seemingly getting a good proportion of the population, as well as the army involved!

One of the things I do throughout the year is give talks about the waterway and occasionally attending other talks that have a direct bearing on the waterway. In September, myself and Jerry Filor attended a town centre regeneration meeting at Parkside where only a few of the attendees knew that Melton was once a thriving canal town, and the organisers did not perceive the local waterway as a tourist attraction, nor was it classed important enough to make it on to any of their PowerPoint slides! Save to say that we left them in no doubt that the waterway should feature prominently in future discussions on regeneration of the town.

Contrast that with a talk I gave a few days later at the Belvoir Rotary Club, where the members were very knowledgeable about the subject matter and ultra-supportive of our aims.

As the year draws to a close, one of the positives to come out of the last few weeks was the visit of Melton's MP, Alicia Kearns. We met in her constituency office and I apprised her of the history of the navigation, the formation of our society and the work we are doing to bring about a full restoration. One of her favourite plans whilst in office is to try and turn Melton into a must-visit long weekend destination, as the majority of this country's population lie within a 2½ hour drive away. She was very supportive of any tourism venture and as our restoration plans fall into that category, she had no hesitation in offering to write letters of support for our trip boat funding applications, the promise to carry our business plan forward to further sources of restoration funding, and putting our case forward in parliament whenever the transfer of EAs waterways to CRT is mentioned. Following our discussion, we walked over to the boat compound, where she was introduced to several of our volunteers and then agreed to accompany us on a short trip up and down the river, which I believe only served to strengthen her commitment.

At the time of writing, I am lined up for two talks at Sherard Primary School with the chance to influence not just present-day thinking but the hearts and minds of the generation coming next to carry on our work.

In conclusion it seems that although the last 12 months were cut short by coronavirus, we seem to have squeezed in much more than many thought possible in the time allowed to us, our membership has grown, albeit slowly, whilst our social media has been a runaway success story.

It just remains for me to thank all our members, and corporate members, for their help and support throughout the year, our volunteers for a job well done and, as always, a big thank you to the owners and staff at Sysonby Knoll.

## **5. Treasurer's Report**

The accounts were agreed and approved by the meeting.

## **6. Election of Committee Members**

During the year, two members had resigned from the committee, Linda Hulme and Dave Andow. We also had two new co-opted members, Lorrie Forman, who became the society's Treasurer, and Gary Jesionowski, who looks after our social media platforms and has recently taken over the Membership Secretary role. Retiring committee member at the AGM is Mike Handford, who had been a staunch committee member for 25 years. All other committee

members agreed to stand for re-election and were unanimously re-elected by the meeting. One new nomination was put forward from Jane Martin and she was unanimously voted onto the committee.

The society's committee now comprises:

Mick Clowes (Chairman)  
Jerry Filor

Lorrie Forman  
Jono Hewitt

Gary Jesionowski  
Jane Martin

There are spaces on the committee for more members, so if anyone wishes to put themselves forward or would like further information, please contact the chairman.

There was a break for refreshments, after which there was a short drone film showing the waterway from the junction with the Grand Union (Leicester Line) to 'The Gate Hangs Well'/Lewin Bridge. A longer film entitled 'How Water Adds Value' was shown after that, jointly commissioned by The Canal and River Trust and Inland Waterways Association.

## 7. AOB / Open Discussion

The first topic for discussion was funding. Cllr Rob Bindloss was the first to speak, giving his support to the society and would like to see it to move forward. He would be happy to help with this and added that if he could be of any assistance, we can contact him via his email address at Melton Borough Council. He said he was impressed with the 'How Water Adds Value' film and asked for the link to be sent to him.

The next person to speak was Eric Brown, who is a director of BID (Business Improvement District). He would fully support any application for funding through BID.

Glynn Cartwright of Melton Matters, reiterated Cllr Bindloss's words and said if anyone had trouble contacting Cllr Bindloss, he had a link so please contact him at [meltonmatters@gmail.com](mailto:meltonmatters@gmail.com).

Funding via ARG (Additional Restrictions Grant) was mentioned for further funding. This includes grants for tourism, etc, but not for assets. There is a form on MBC website so will look into this.

Mike Handford told the meeting that he recently knew of two other canal societies which had received massive amounts of funding.

The next subject for discussion was volunteering and work parties. The society has had offers from people to come and help at work parties. It has always been pointed out to them that, although extremely welcome to come and help, they would not be covered by the society's insurance. Although the insurance has third party liability this just covers members of the society. We may be able to get round this by officially calling all volunteers members, whether it be on Facebook or other organisations, or having a special non-members insurance for volunteers.

One of our not-so-local members, Paul Niblett, added that some of the canal societies he was also a member of, kept records of the number of hours volunteers put in, as this would be valuable information when they applied for grants. It was also pointed out that the number of members was something that was looked at too.

This brought up the matter of membership and how easy it was or wasn't to join online. Our website is old, so not the latest technology that most young people expect these days. The society needs to decide whether to go down the route of upgrading, but it was pointed out that the number of new members we get would not justify the cost.

The next issue for discussion was the state of the footpaths. A few of our Footpath Rangers were present and this was brought up by Rod Axon, who walks the path from Rearsby to the Three-Way Bridge at Syston. This part of the Wreake Valley Way was brought up to a good state many years ago by society volunteers, but in recent times has fallen into dreadful condition. Although this is the responsibility of the landowner, Rod was wondering if funding could be obtained for repairs. It was suggested that he should contact Ellen Senior, LCC's Footpaths Officer, and speak to her about the best way to tackle this problem. One of the other Footpath Rangers, Angus Walker, said he is a member of a Hoby village group which developed their local plan and this includes local footpaths.

The open discussion concluded with a suggestion regarding a future work party at Syston. Apart from the work being carried out at Thrussington Lock, the majority of work parties are based in and around Melton and it was felt that other areas of the navigation do not get a look in. It was agreed to arrange a work party in the new year.

The AGM was wrapped up by the Chairman thanking everyone for attending. The meeting was closed at 11.35am.