

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Combe Mill Society held on Friday 22 April 2016 in the Foreman's Office at Combe Mill.

1 Attendees

Tony Simmons, Steve Page, Phil Hawtin, John Ross, Ron Rutherford, Pauline Ross, Ray Pitts, Frank Huddleston, Gordon Lord, Mike Hallam, Tony Thurlby, Ron and Ann Winfield, Carol Thurlby, Clive Brimson, Peter Hirst, Alan Elger, Terry Bailey, Margaret Gruber, Sylvia Huddleston, Brian Layt, Jeff Broxholme, Dave Shirt.

2 Apologies

David & Alison Clare, David Jones, Richard Newman, Jen Hurst, Bill Keen, Sharon Keen, Gillian Oldfield, Ian Jackson, Sheila Hallam, Colin Wells, Bob Wheeler.

3 2015 Minutes

Accepted as accurate.

Proposed by Frank Huddleston, seconded by John Ross.

4 Directors' Reports

4.1 Chairman's Report

As is usual at an AGM I plan to remind us of what has happened over the past year and to pat ourselves on the back.

One of the highlights of the year must surely be the extra steaming day we ran for the Morgan Three Wheeler Club last April. We were asked to train volunteers from Chedhams Yard in how to do simple blacksmithing and this was much appreciated by them. We have seen more activity relating to the meadow and Mill Wood with Wild Oxfordshire holding several events here, the session on Logs-for-Labour and a training day for Oxford University PGCE students. The Kidlington Arts Group came here for a study location and the Berkshire and Oxfordshire Paranormal Group also held night time vigil.

For the first time we ran a Christmas Market which was well supported by visitors and stall holders. Many members spent weeks making rustic reindeers for sale including a large one that was raffled off. We made a good return from them plus the pitch fees from the various stall holders. Blenheim lent us a tree and several local businesses loaned equipment. A lot of work went into setting up the event and we plan to hold it again this December.

We held eight steaming events during 2015/16 which were attended by 1322 visitors. We opened for viewing on 46 Wednesdays and Sundays and received 491 visitors. A further 422 people visited as groups from time to time which included 4 school visits, 5 evening visits for cubs, beavers and guides and also a visit from the Warwickshire Tractor Club.

Our steaming days benefited greatly as usual from having the tea room and Beth Elger and Gillian Oldfield with help from Sheila Hallam deserve our thanks for looking after us and raising lots of money.

Also Tea Room catering on Wednesday (Hazel Bailey) and Sunday afternoons (Jan Stride) provided an added benefit for visitors and raised £820 and £105 respectively.

Schools seemed to want to learn about natural history rather than engineering subjects even though we had put a lot of effort in to making our offering fit with the latest STEM syllabus.

John Ross organised the stewarding roster again without which our open days would not happen. John and I appreciate those who give their time so freely to act as stewards for a few days each season. But we are having increasing difficulty filling the sessions. Non steaming open days generate 22% of our footfall and are important to our survival.

We received a grant from West Oxfordshire District Council of £500 towards the cost of printing our advertising leaflets, recruitment appeal flyers and event flyers The Trust for the Oxfordshire Environment (TOE2) has paid us £2,932 of a £5,000 award towards the work of our Mill Wood restoration and education project. Generous donations were received from both anonymous and named benefactors amounting to £2,480 – remember to treat every visitor and friend nicely because they may be one of our benefactors. And, please don't criticise our projects outside of the board meeting simply because you may not support them – that too can discourage and upset such donors. Our Tooth Fairy appeal for money towards replacing the pit wheel gear teeth is doing well and so far has raised £700.

We continue working closely with the Sylva Foundation, where Jen Hurst works as Education Manager, and are helping them develop learning opportunities based on the One Oak project. Wild Oxfordshire, which coordinates Oxfordshire's various environmental protection groups, is responsible for the Evenlode Catchment Partnership and has partnered with Combe Mill to promote educational activities on the river and they consider us the hub location for the Evenlode.

While a few of us put a lot of effort into raising funds via paperwork we also greatly appreciate the money generated by Bill and Sharon Keen from burger and plant sales, Ann Winfield from her tombola stall and various other money generating efforts such as Michael Hickman's wooden wedges, light pulls and pens. The blacksmithing experience vouchers continue to sell well with another six sold this year. We are also now offering beam engine driving sessions and so far we have sold five.

The hire of the Tea Room has been another good income source. Local businesses have booked the room on five occasions; party bookings reached fourteen.

We all owe thanks to the various members who 'keep the wheels turning'. Steve, Richard and Ray regularly put up and remove our steaming event signs. Our blacksmiths have worked overtime to run the blacksmithing experience sessions. Behind the scenes, there are members who tidy and clean up after the rest of us. Terrys Bailey and May look after maintaining and servicing things like fire and smoke alarms, lifts and taking meter readings. Members like John Ross and Richard Newman clean up after us by emptying rubbish and cleaning the loos.

Bookings are handled by Richard Newman and last year he did much of the organisation of our event attractions and yet he still finds time to support Ron Rutherford in running the steam boiler, maintaining and running our barn engines, and is also a beam engine driver and forest trail guide.

Our current membership total is:

Full member	Family Member	Friend	Non-paying Friend	Volunteer	Honorary
31	20	15	12	17	5

Total 120 (counting 2 per family membership)

During the year we were saddened by the death of Julie Bouchier who contributed so much to develop and promote our educational offering. The school visits that did take place had been organised by Julie and we greatly miss her contribution. We named the water meadow after Julie and are currently planning an interpretation panel to overlook the meadow that will commemorate her.

We remembered that 2015 marked the 40th anniversary of the official start of the Combe Mill Society. This is a great achievement for a volunteer group and we celebrated it with an evening hot buffet provided by Laura Snook with guitar accompaniment from Nick and Judith Hooper.

During the year many project and maintenance jobs have been carried out. Weak floor boards have been replaced where necessary by Tony and Mervyn. Bob has refurbished the steam yacht engine, new member Charlie Rich has got the Lister D running properly and is now working to repair the vertical water pump at the head race. We have made display cases for the Combe musket ball log and the Meccano clock. I guess one project that we did not plan on was the rescue of the Foreman's Office ceiling from collapse after we found that the beam above where the dividing partition had once been was unsupported. Bob and Ron W did a great job of making sets of models to demonstrate the principles of steam power to add to the models Ron Rutherford uses for school visits. These were funded by the Edina Trust. Our biggest project, now almost completed, was the motorising of the line shafting so that visitors on non-steaming days can get a better idea of what the Mill was like when working.

To everyone who contributes their time, effort and experience in running the Mill I would say many thanks. It is team effort that makes the Mill so successful. I apologise for not mentioning everyone by name who contributes. We have missed David Jones for most of this year as he takes care of his sister Molly.

On a serious note, I must remind everyone that we operate a Health and Safety Policy that is compliant with what the legislation of the UK requires. We have a very pragmatic approach and work with all Heads of Technical Areas to achieve a sensible outcome. The doubters may wish they lived in a bygone time but please stop treating those of us who have to take

responsibility for our Company as if we enjoyed spending our time persuading and fending off criticism – we were once paid for doing that before retirement.

The Mill is a fantastic place to come and potter and relax and chat but that alone does not sustain our future. You all know that I plan to stand down as chairman at the next AGM. I am willing to carry on as treasurer and to produce the newsletter and contribute in other ways.

I am grateful to those colleagues who have begun to take on some of the tasks that I used to do. We do not have a chairman designate. With the departure of John Ross from the board we are down to the minimum number of directors allowed by our constitution. Two of the directors have demanding full time jobs and other outside interests. So only a few of us are carrying the load.

We have learnt that some people are reluctant to join the board because they do not enjoy meetings. I will be proposing to the new board that we hold fewer board meetings and no longer hold ‘committee’ meetings. The board will concentrate on setting objectives and budgets leaving working parties to carry out the various jobs, in particular organising events and open days. The working parties will responsible for their tasks will meet as often as they deem necessary to do their job and will be expected to report back to the Board on budget and progress. This will apply to running the various projects from time to time.

Without members stepping up to become Board Members (Trustees) we will have to consider looking outside into the business world to find suitable people to run Combe Mill. This is not a situation that I am comfortable with but I can see no alternative if we are to avoid ultimate meltdown.

4.2 Treasurer’s Report

End of year overview

We spent £123 less than we earned this last financial year.

We carried forward £16,602 at the end of March into our next financial year.

We have £10,000 set aside in savings reserve for unforeseen repairs and maintenance jobs.

The remainder is reserved for specific work defined by the fund providers or donors.

There was £147 in petty cash.

Our income was generated by:

Admissions	£10,712
Forge sales	£ 773
Tea Room sales and hire	£ 4,995
Retail sales	£ 720
Experience Vouchers	£ 550
Donations	£ 2,867
Grants	£ 3,432
Subscriptions	£ 868

Sub-total	£24,917
Other	£ 6,342
Total	£31,259
We spent	£31,136

Headline figures

We began the year with a total balance of £16,478 (£22,724)¹ (society and project monies).

Our operating income for this financial year was £31,259 (£30,063) and our operating cost was £31,136 (£24,950) – resulting in a surplus of £123 (£5,113).

We finished the year with a carry forward amount of £16,602 (£16,516).

To provide a little more detail, let's look at the **major cost categories**.

Fundraising activities generated £9,106 (£7,871) at a cost of £4,535 (£5,817). We had a surplus of £4,571 (£2,054). Within this figure the 100Club made a profit of £103 (£107).

The 100 Club was closed at the end of the financial year.

Income from the hire of rooms was £1,465 (£2,319). We have sold blacksmith experience vouchers to provide unusual gifts and have sold another six at £50 each this past financial year. Five beam engine experience vouchers have also been sold at £50 each.

Charitable activities – operating the Mill and demonstrating the forge and waterwheel raised £11,571 (£10,607) at a cost of £16,097 (£8,745) – a loss of £4,526 (+£1,862). Normally any surplus is considered as contributing to the cost of upkeep, maintenance and administration but within this figure for charitable activities is the cost of maintenance and project work cost £6,909 (£4,680). We also spent £2,772 on Woodland maintenance which was funded by a TOE2 grant of £2,932.

We also spent £712 (£1,247) on Interpretation and £3,079 (£847) on Learning Resources which covers the cost of buying materials, consumables and tools for our hands-on activities and demonstrations.

Voluntary Income comprises membership fees, donations and small grants. Our income from this was £7,834 (£8,797). Our volunteer costs consist of paying for sustenance and protective clothing, travel costs and publishing the newsletter. This cost £1,264 (£602). Within this voluntary income is included a Community Activities grant from WODC for £500, and £2,932 from TOE2.

We recovered £1,704 (£1,707) in Gift Aid rebate as a result of membership subscriptions, donations and gift aided ticket sales.

We also raised £702 towards the cost of replacing wooden pit-gear teeth.

Receipts arising from refunds on purchases amounted to £185 and will be assigned to offset various expenditure headings in the final audited accounts.

¹ Figures in brackets are for financial year 2014-15

Payments also relate to the **governance** of the Mill and comprise two parts – **upkeep** and **administration**. The cost of upkeep was £4,256 (£4,940) and the cost of administration was £4,756 (£4,874).

Under the heading of administration is the cost of PLI plus EL insurance, contents insurance and Directors and Officers cover. We have this year again re-assessed our insurance cover requirements and ensured value for money.

We received the full 80% Council Tax Relief because we are a charity but no discount from WODC as discretionary relief.

Our admission fees for 2015-16 were raised slightly on 2014 year's prices.

Looking at the effectiveness of our operations one needs to consider that the cost of keeping the Mill going each year is £13,189 (£15,390).

[This amount ensures that building and machinery are maintained, insured, managed and ready to deliver our charitable activities of education, opening to the public, running the engines, waterwheel and blacksmiths forge.]

Income from visitors this year was £10,712 (£9,461). The average income from each steaming event and open day visitor is £8.31 (£8.23) which leads to the conclusion that we need to welcome 1,587 each year to cover our basic costs. We welcomed 1,813 (1,999) last year and another 422(483) group visitors.

Thank you everyone who has worked so hard to generate our income and those who have spent our money on maintaining and developing the Mill and educating and informing all those who visited.

4.3 Secretary's Report

We were approached by our previous PL insurer to allow them to provide a quote for our business. Whilst the quote that came back was comparable to the one we received from our incumbent, it had a number of flaws in the statement of cover that would have left the Mill exposed. We therefore decided to stick with our current insurer (Alexander Rich) who is providing cover for Public and Employee Liability, our artefacts including the clocks, and the outbuildings which are the society's liability.

The current board has been considering the structure and role of board members going forward and this will be dealt with under a later section of the agenda

4.4 Report of the Director responsible for Safety and Training.

Philip Hawtin began by thanking the many members of the society who had in recent years adapted their methods of working so that they are compliant with modern health and safety requirements. He also supported the Chairman's request for greater cooperation from the minority who found difficulty in adapting.

He invited doubters to consider what can happen if sensible precautions are not taken. By way of example, he cited safety work that was carried out on the GWR in the early years of the 20th century. Following a series of accidents in which drivers passed signals

at danger, the Reading Signalling Department developed a repeater mechanism that sounded an audible warning in the cab. By the mid-1920s the system was in widespread use on the GWR and its beneficial effect on railway safety was widely known. Despite this knowledge the LMS declined to install a comparable system on its railway.

On a foggy night in 1949 a train left Stockport station despite the signal being set at danger. Shortly after starting, it ran into the back of a stationary train killing several people; one of whom was Philip's wife's father.

The essential point that underlay this "accident" was that its occurrence was not an accident. The hazard was widely known, the consequences were known to be serious and the risk was high: drivers regularly passed signals at danger. Yet the LMS Directors chose to do nothing and as a result men and women were killed.

Philip emphasised that the moral that we should draw from this event was that, as far as the Mill is concerned, we are the experts. We have knowledge that our visitors do not. If we see hazardous behaviour we have a duty to intervene. This duty is enshrined in law. He accepted that it was frustrating to observe behaviour suggesting that parents and/or guardians were not accepting responsibility for the safety of the children who were in their care. At moments of severe frustration he asked all volunteers to take the pragmatic view that whenever a significant risk exists it is better to know about it twice than not at all: it is never a good idea to ignore it.

In conclusion he appealed to Heads of Technical Areas to assist him by being timely in their review of amendments to Method Statements and Risk Assessments.

5 Election of Directors

John Ross resigned. Tony Simmons, Philip Hawtin, Steve Page, John Sylvester, Ron Rutherford and Jen Hurst put themselves forward again for re-election.

Proposed John Ross and seconded by Ray Pitts. Six directors were unanimously voted in.

6 AOB

There being no other business and no votes of thanks, the meeting was closed at 20:19hrs.