

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2008

MINUTES of the 105th Annual General Meeting of the British Pteridological Society held on Saturday 5th April 2008 at the Natural History Museum, London at 1400 hrs.

[Preamble. These minutes are shorter than those of previous years as a result of most of the Officers' and Committee Appointees' Reports for 2007 being published in the *Bulletin* for 2007 in advance of this AGM. The exception is the report of the General Secretary, which was updated by Yvonne Golding, read out at the meeting, and thus also reproduced here. These minutes have been reviewed by Robert Sykes, Yvonne Golding and Alison Paul, and their approval will be sought at the next Annual General Meeting on 4 April 2009. Notes, not being part of the minutes, are enclosed in square brackets as is this one.]

IN THE CHAIR: The President, Mr Robert Sykes.

PRESENT: Graham Ackers, Pat Acock, Jo Basil, Clive Brotherton, A.R. (Matt) Busby, Rob Cooke, Richard Dadd, Gerry Downey, Adrian Dyer, John Edgington, Alison Evans, Lizzie Evans, Mary Gibby, Rowan Godfrey, Roger Golding, Yvonne Golding, Alistair Grandison, Nigel Hall, Nick Hards, Michael Hayward, Graham Hoare, Jack Hubert, Jennifer Ide, Howard Matthews, Frank McGavigan, Christine Mullins, Karen Munyard, Steve Munyard, Alan Ogden, Alison Paul, Anthony Pigott, Tim Pyner, Julian Reed, Martin Rickard, Fred Rumsey, Bryan Smith, Gill Smith, Barrie Stevenson, Sandy Strang, Matt Stribley, Alistair Urquhart, Philip Urquhart, Danny Vanstraelen, Alastair Wardlaw, Lesley Williams.

Item 1 – APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Ian Bennallick, Jonathan Crowe, Peter Freshwater, Elise Knox-Thomas, Frank Katzer, Bridget Laue, Sylvia Martinelli, James Merryweather, Mike Porter, Paul Ripley, Mike Taylor, Robin Walls.

Item 2 – APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES: Minutes of the 104th Annual General Meeting of the British Pteridological Society held on Saturday 24th March 2007 and published in the *Bulletin* (Vol. 6, No. 6) were approved and signed by the Chairman.

Item 3 – MATTERS ARISING: There were none.

Item 4a – REPORT OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY (Yvonne Golding):

2007 was another busy year for the BPS committee. We met in January in London at the Natural History Museum; we had our AGM in Edinburgh where we welcomed our new President Robert Sykes, two new Vice Presidents – Rob Cooke and Mike Porter, and four new committee members: John Edgington, Roger Golding, Howard Matthews and Matt Stribley. This new committee met for the first time in May, this time in Manchester, and went back to London for our October meeting.

This year we have re-written our constitution, a task that took much longer than we originally anticipated! There were many clauses that had to be changed to reflect our current situation and to make our Society more compatible with Charity Law. We have changed the wording of the Objects which we now think better describe the wide-ranging activities of our Society. We had a heated debate about whether we should change the name of our Society but for the moment we are leaving it as British Pteridological Society. We have agreement though that we can use a qualifying strap line along the lines of 'the society for fern enthusiasts' wherever possible. We finalised the constitutional changes at our committee meeting in January 2008. We have the full agreement of the committee for the changes. Today we will be asking you to vote for it.

After the successful indoor meeting at Wisley in November, a small working group met on the Sunday to discuss the future direction of the BPS and to try and come up with an

achievable three year plan. These Planning Meetings, a relatively new initiative, are held every three years during the first year of a new Presidency. Such meetings enable key members of the committee to discuss strategic issues unencumbered by routine committee business. One of the main topics identified for discussion was the desire to raise the profile of the BPS, both to attract new members and also to engage more with the general public, which is our statutory duty as a charity. We have come up with some ideas, which we are actively pursuing. These include a greater presence at flower shows, and fern meetings for the general public. Other issues discussed were education about ferns, both for our members and the public, what else we can provide for gardeners and how we can expand our regional groups to cover the whole of the UK.

We were sorry to learn of the deaths of four of our members. These were Dr Donald Carmichael of Devon who joined the Society in 1997, Dr Robert Finch of Cambridge who joined in 1968; in January of this year, Mr Alf Hoare aged 89 of Hertfordshire who joined the Society in 1969 and lastly in February of this year, Mr Wallace Fyfe who became interested in ferns when he discovered a Victorian fernery in his garden at Ascog Hall on the Isle of Bute. He raised funds to restore it to its former glory and it will be his lasting legacy. Obituaries for Alf Hoare and Wallace Fyfe will be published in the 2008 *Bulletin*.

Another downside of the year's end is marked by the retirement of some of our hard-working officers. We say goodbye to James Merryweather who has done a splendid job in editing ten issues of *Pteridologist*, the last six of which were very professionally presented and in full, glossy colour. We look forward to new input in *Pteridologist* from Martin Rickard, assisted by Alec Greening. I understand it is to be a bumper issue this year and published in the spring, so they have certainly got off to a good start.

Pat Acock retires after ten very productive years as Meetings Secretary, organising full and ambitious programmes of trips (which he almost always attended) up and down the country and abroad. But luckily Pat continues to help us out in so many other ways and long may it continue. We wish his successor Rob Cooke the best of luck in this role.

Frank McGavigan retires as an elected committee member and we shall miss his measured and logical approach on issues at meetings but he continues as Regional Organiser for Scotland where he has embarked on a recording project monitoring some of our rarest ferns. He also has input into the newly formed website sub-committee.

Matt Busby also retires as a committee member but he is still very much involved with the Society as Archivist and adviser on horticultural matters, and is about to embark on another important role.

And Anne Wright is trying to retire as Spore Exchange Organiser; Barry and Anne have provided this very popular and important service to members both in this country and abroad for ten years. We urgently need to find replacements for them so we can maintain this service for members. If anyone feels willing and able to fill this post Anne has agreed to give full training and work with you over the course of this year so the new person can confidently take over. It also comes with a fridge if that is any incentive!

Our Society is run entirely by a fleet of volunteers who work on behalf of our membership and I would like to thank all of them for their hard work throughout the year.

Item 4b – REPORT OF THE TREASURER (Gill Smith): The Treasurer referred the meeting to the accounts published in the *Bulletin*, and invited questions and comments. There were none, and the members agreed to adopt the accounts.

Item 5 – QUESTIONS ON OFFICERS’ REPORTS

Membership Secretary’s Report. Adrian Dyer asked whether the committee had any thoughts about addressing the gentle decline in membership. Mary Gibby reported that this was an issue with other specialist societies, caused perhaps by the lack of exposure in schools, and a decline in a passion for looking at plants in detail (although conservation does currently have a high profile). Both agreed that we should perhaps be seen to be doing something ‘useful’, such as recording. Robert Sykes reported that the Butterfly Conservation Society had a strong membership, partly because butterflies were good indicators of global warming on a year by year basis (plants only demonstrating global warming effects over a much longer time scale).

Danny Vanstraelen suggested setting up a web forum as a way of attracting new members, including younger people. It was pointed out that there were two fern forums in existence already – the USA-based Fernet, and the UK-based UKFerns. However, Rob Cooke maintained that to attract new members, a BPS forum was required. [Note, this will be discussed by the committee.]

Website Editor’s Report. Jennifer Ide enquired about progress on putting the Society’s journals on-line, wondering whether their absence could be one cause of declining membership. Anthony Pigott responded with the following points:–

- The committee had decided that there would be a two year delay before a journal could be put on the web.
- An investigation was underway to determine how many journals were currently available in electronic format (probably runs of about five years).
- Some editing work will be required before they could be put on-line.
- Then would follow the more significant work of including the majority of the journals available only in paper form. One possibility would be to pay for this to be done.

In answer to a question about whether the Society should have its own website, Anthony Pigott pointed out that the Society has its own domain, but is hosted on the Natural History Museum’s server.

Item 6 – QUESTIONS ON COMMITTEE APPOINTEES’ REPORTS

Archivist’s Report. Expanding on this report, Yvonne Golding reported that Manchester Museum had agreed to house our archives free of charge, and were in the process of drawing up a loan agreement. Jennifer Ide asked whether her own investigations into archive preservation should be continued, but it was suggested these be put on hold until after the removal of the archives to Manchester.

Fern Varieties Subcommittee Report. As an addition to this report, Robert Sykes reported that a Fern Registration Subcommittee had been formed with the intention of identifying one or more fern variety Registrars from within the Society. Although there were international Registrars for many other groups of horticultural plants, to date ferns had not been catered for. The first group to be addressed will be the genus *Polypodium*, because Martin Rickard had already performed much of the appropriate groundwork.

Item 7 – ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE, AND APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT EXAMINERS

Vice-Presidents. Nominations had been received for Mr A.R. (Matt) Busby and Dr Adrian Dyer, and they were elected unanimously.

Officers. All of the Officers except the two noted below were available for re-election. This was proposed by Nick Hards, seconded by Howard Matthews, and they were unanimously

re-elected en bloc. They are: General Secretary Dr Yvonne Golding, Treasurer Mrs Gillian Smith, Membership Secretary Mr Mike Taylor, Conservation Officers Dr Heather McHaffie and Dr Fred Rumsey, *Fern Gazette* Editor Prof. Mary Gibby, *Bulletin* Editor Miss Alison Paul, Website Editor Mr Anthony Pigott.

Meetings Secretary. Following ten years of service, Pat Acock was retiring, and nominations had been received for Rob Cooke as his replacement, and he was elected unanimously.

Pteridologist Editor. Following six years of service, James Merryweather was retiring, and nominations had been received for Martin Rickard as his replacement, and he was elected unanimously. He will be assisted by Alec Greening.

Elected Committee Members. The two longest serving members, Mr A.R. (Matt) Busby (elected 3/2005) and Mr Frank McGavigan (elected 3/2004), were retiring and were not available for re-election as Elected Committee members.

The remaining six members (Dr Michael Hayward, Dr Sylvia Martinelli, Prof. John Edgington, Mr Roger Golding, Mr Howard Matthews and Mr Matt Stribley) were available for re-election. This was proposed by Rob Cooke, seconded by Adrian Dyer, and they were unanimously elected en bloc.

In addition, nominations had been received for Mr Alec Greening, Dr Bridget Laue, Mr Paul Ripley and Mr Bryan Smith, and they were all unanimously elected.

Independent Examiners. Dr Nick Hards and Mr Alex Storie had agreed to act as Independent Examiners.

Item 8 – CHANGES TO THE BPS CONSTITUTION

Robert Sykes outlined the background to the re-drafting of the constitution, which had been circulated to all members. Some of the amendments reflect changes in the way the Society is run, and some merely tidy up the existing document. It was not possible to take amendments at this meeting, but it was necessary to vote on its adoption.

In clause 3.1, the replacement of the names of the journals with “regular publications” was queried, but it was pointed out that this was to allow more flexibility, and there was no hidden agenda to abandon any of the three current journals!

The votes for adopting the revised constitution were 45 for, 0 against and 1 abstention. [Note, the new constitution is published elsewhere in this journal.]

Item 9 – ANY OTHER BUSINESS

J.W. Dyce Award. This was a new award to commemorate the great contribution made to the Society by the late Jimmy Dyce. It would be presented annually to the writer of the best article (or book) to appear in the previous year, and consisted of a cash prize of £100. Five articles had been considered:–

‘The species and subspecies in the *Dryopteris affinis* group’ by C.R. Fraser-Jenkins in *The Fern Gazette*, vol. 18, part 1, 2007.

‘Dynamics of long-distance dispersal: the spread of *Asplenium adiantum-nigrum* and *Asplenium trichomanes* (Aspleniaceae: Pteridophyta) on London walls’ by J.A. Edgington in *The Fern Gazette*, vol. 18, part 1, 2007.

‘Male Ferns 2007’ by James Merryweather in the *Pteridologist*, vol. 4, part 6, 2007.

‘The Fine Ferns of *Flora Graeca*’ by Graham Ackers in the *Pteridologist*, vol. 4, part 6, 2007.

'Fern Collections in Manchester Museum' by Barbara Porter in the *Pteridologist*, vol. 4, part 6, 2007.

In the end, it had been decided to make the award jointly to Christopher Fraser-Jenkins and James Merryweather, having written technical and approachable articles respectively on the difficulties in identifying male ferns. Neither recipient was present, but Robert Sykes read out a rather entertaining e-mail from Christopher Fraser-Jenkins acknowledging the award.

Outstanding Service Awards. This was a new award initiated during the chairmanship of Adrian Dyer, and this time was awarded to two people. James Merryweather had edited the *Pteridologist* for a total of ten years (including a break), during which he had changed the format of the magazine to be artistically presented and very colourful. As well as his many other duties, Pat Acock had run many highly successful meetings, most of which he attended, both at home and abroad, and he was present to receive the award of an engraved cut-glass goblet.

Focus on Spleenworts Meeting 1 November 2008. Robert Sykes drew attention to this meeting, to be held at the Natural History Museum, and encouraged members to attend.

New Spore Exchange Organisers Needed. Following the request of the current organisers Barry and Anne Wright to retire, Robert Sykes emphasised the importance of finding replacements for what was one of the Society's most important jobs, and requested any volunteers to contact him.

Website Areas to be Delegated. There was a need for discrete areas of the website to be delegated to individual editors, and Robert Sykes urged members both to offer editorial assistance, and to accept editorial roles. [Note, this will be progressed by the committee.]

Restoration of the Fernery at Benmore Gardens. Mary Gibby had written to Robert Sykes concerning the restoration of the Benmore fernery. The letter had then been circulated to committee members, and some copies were made available at the meeting for attendees to read. A final £65,000 was still required, and Mary had asked whether the BPS could contribute, perhaps considering helping towards the cost of some interpretation on ferns that would complement the plantings. Adrian Dyer made a similar suggestion that we might consider sponsoring something. The previous feedback received from the committee had been variable, but the meeting was generally sympathetic to supporting this project providing BPS funds were available.

The Second James Bolton Fern Drawings. The first set of Bolton's fern drawings for the first British fern book [*Filices Britannicae*] were housed at the Natural History Museum. His second set of unpublished watercolour drawings were now up for sale by an American dealer at £65,000, and Graham Ackers had offered a contribution to the NHM to help acquire these. He asked the meeting whether BPS and/or individuals would be interested in contributing also. There was general agreement that BPS could make an offer, but that the amount of such an offer should be carefully considered.

A Week-long Field Meeting? Martin Rickard wished to test the idea of running week-long UK field meetings, and asked attendees whether they might be interested in attending such a meeting in the north of Scotland in say 2009 or 2010. A show of hands indicated considerable interest for this idea.

Robert Sykes closed the meeting at 15.10.

Graham Ackers
Committee Secretary