

Society of Genealogists

Annual General Meeting 2023 Minutes

Minutes of the 112th Annual General Meeting of the Society of Genealogists was held on Saturday, 29th July 2023 at 1pm. There were 67 people recorded as having attended online, and 29 people attended in-person.

The meeting was presided over by Patric Dickinson, LVO, MA, FSG, President of the Society.

The meeting Chairman, Patric Dickinson, reported that the minutes of the 111th Annual General Meeting were approved by the Board of Trustees at their meeting on 12th September 2022 and were published on the Society's website.

1. THE AUDITOR'S REPORT

The Chairman invited members to note the Auditor's Report contained in the Annual Report 2022, which had been published on the Society's website. He highlighted that the Auditors were satisfied the Society's Accounts gave a true and fair view of the financial position. He took the Auditor's Report as read.

No comments were made.

2. THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The Chairman invited Mr Ed Percival, Chair of the Board of Trustees, to speak on the Annual Report. Before doing so, Mr Percival was thanked for his 6 years of service to the Society. Mr Percival had guided the Society through many changes during his tenure and had left it in a better place. The Society's new premises on Wharf Road in London was further testament to his efforts.

Mr Percival acknowledged the departure of the Society's previous CEO, Dr Wanda Wyporska, and welcomed the arrival of Patrick Barker, as interim CEO.

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He observed that the Society's online presence had become ever more important for members and to anyone with a passion for genealogy. Among the Society's other priorities was the need to continually invest in new systems to improve the experience for those researching from home. This included images of handcrafted historical family trees, which had been scanned, indexed, and uploaded to the Society's new family tree explorer application called Tree Search; all made possible with SoG and Art Fund funding.

Mr Percival gave special thanks to Mr Alan Pursell who had personally scanned nearly 20,000 of the large-scale documents, for online publication. He remarked it was a staggering piece of work and was delighted that Mr Pursell had agreed to bring his considerable project management and IT experience to the Board of Trustees (see item 6).

Mr Percival recognised the Society's digital offer could never replace a physical home, and in October a new property on Wharf Road was purchased. The new premises would be a physical manifestation of the Society as a forward-thinking organisation. This would provide the Society with a secure foundation for years to come. It would combine a library and archive, events and meeting space.

Mr Percival reported four new Trustees were successfully recruited to the Board following a recruitment drive in 2022. He wanted to place on record his thanks to all those who had taken the time to apply.

Mr Percival concluded his reflections by paying tribute to members, volunteers, and all the staff for their support and commitment to the Society. He also thanked fellow Trustees and highlighted the contribution of Robert George, who's Trustee term also ended at the AGM.

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Mr George's knowledge of governance and his calm, reason, and judgment over the years had been invaluable.

He also expressed his gratitude to those who left the Society gifts in their wills and donations.

He wished the Society the very best of success for the future.

3. THE ANNUAL ACCOUNTS 2022

Mr Ray O'Connell, Treasurer, presented the Annual Accounts for the year 2022, full details of which were in the published figures on page 15 of the Annual Report. Mr O'Connell highlighted a few points:

- There was another strong year for income in 2022; it topped £2m similar to the preceding year. Of this, legacies and donations were by far the major component. Nearly £1.6 million in total were notified to the Society throughout the year.

These donations and legacies have been recognised in the 2022 accounts and further reinforce the Society's strong financial position.

- The Transformation Program was completed in 2022, but the Society continues to invest in providing an ever-greater service to its members.
- The major financial item was the purchase of the Society's new premises at an all-in cost of £3m. The fit-out of Wharf Road is currently underway to agreed specifications and it was acknowledged to be a very tightly managed process. The costs for fit-out and furnishing were fully provided for and could be seen in the

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designated funds within the accounts. This still left a surplus that could be invested in the Society.

- In Mr O'Connell's opinion, the financial picture was broadly positive. Although the Society faced challenges, he thought they could be met with further investment in its future.

Question: A member from the floor asked about the inclusion of membership subscription in the accounts.

Mr Ray O'Connell responded membership income was included in the charitable activities section of the accounts.

Question: Mr Graham Ford asked about the process of appointing people to the Board of Trustees.

Mr Ed Percival explained the rationale was to ensure there was a good blend of skills across the Board, e.g. financial, marketing, organisational skills, as well as genealogy knowledge. The Board conducted a skills audit to identify gaps in expertise that could be filled with new appointees. Of the applications received, this was sifted to a candidate list of 15 people who were called for interviews. Of the 15 interviewed, 4 were selected.

Mr Percival assured the meeting that a robust process was undertaken to select the right candidates. Guidance from the Charity Commission was followed to ensure the vacancies were advertised in as many different areas as possible so that candidates with the right set of skills were selected to help meet the challenges the Society continues to face.

All those who submitted applications were contacted to explain the process and had the opportunity to put themselves to a vote.

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Question: Mr Patric Dickinson, Chairman, wanted to know if Trustees could only be nominated by the Board, or could ordinary members propose or second nominations?

Mr Ray O'Connell confirmed that any member could be nominated. The meeting noted the importance of having an open and democratic process in the appointment of Trustees.

Question: Clarification was sought as to whether the three new Trustees mentioned in the Annual Report were appointed or co-opted.

Mr Ed Percival confirmed that the paragraph in the report was written in error: the new Trustees had been co-opted and would be ratified at this AGM.

Question: A question was raised about the purchase of Wharf Road. Before doing so, the member commented how positive it was to see the Events department referenced in the report. He congratulated Ruth Willmore (Head of Events) and the Events team for their work in enlivening the Society's programme of events. He had attended a number of events over the last year and thought they were engaging and well run.

As to the purchase of the Society's new office, he wanted to know if the property had been purchased under freehold or leasehold and if there were any financial implications of that.

Mr Ray O'Connell responded that the property was bought on near freehold on a very long lease (almost 1,000 years). The Society had budgeted for the ground rent in the maintenance of the property, not only for 2023 but in the medium-term financial projections. In summary, all financial implications of maintaining the property to a high standard had been considered.

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Question: A member noted the generous donations and legacies that had been left to the Society over the last two years. He wanted to know if such beneficence was likely to continue.

Mr Ed Percival responded that it was difficult to anticipate the level of future bequests. He recognised the Society had been very fortunate over the last few years with donations and legacies. The Society's aim was to create a sustainable organisation in which more people wanted to join and continue to pay membership.

Question: A member noted the percentage of people who had not renewed their membership. The member wanted to know what efforts were being taken to increase membership such as through Corporate Membership. He also wanted to know the current membership figures.

Mr Ed Percival acknowledged it was disappointing membership had fallen but was confident that with a number of projects and systems in place this would improve. For example, the Society's new premises on Wharf Road will home an archive, a library, workstations, a place for members to meet, and offer an ability to access genealogical advice. The new online search would also provide powerful search capabilities to help people find their ancestors in the Society's extensive collections.

Mr Patrick Barker, CEO, added the current membership figures stood at around 6,700, which was lower than the figure in the accounts. The reasons often cited why people decide not to renew was due to the lack of access to facilities, which were significantly limited as the Society was in smaller temporary accommodation on the Holloway Road. Declining membership was also a challenge many similar organisations were facing. Mr Barker said the Society was working very hard to extend the range and quality of its already excellent

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events calendar, together with investing in its new permanent home. The Society was seeking to offer the best value to current and prospective members.

Question: Did the refurbishment for the Society's new premises include inflationary costs for labour and materials.

Mr Ray O'Connell confirmed that a provision for cost increases was included in the designated budget, appropriate to the timeframe in which the works were to be carried out. This provision has proven to be sufficient.

There being no further questions, the Chairman stated that voting to approve the Annual Report and Annual Accounts would be reported separately for the two items.

Resolution to receive the Annual Report of the Board of Trustees was moved and seconded. All in favour 76; all against 0; abstentions 0. The motion was carried.

Resolution to receive the Annual Accounts to 31 December 2022 was moved and seconded. All in favour 76; all against 0; abstentions 0. The motion was carried.

4. THE APPOINTMENT OF THE AUDITORS

In accordance with Section 485 of the Companies Act 2006, the appointment of Richard Place Dobson as Auditors was put to the meeting.

There being no questions concerning the appointment of the auditors, the Chairman asked if a member would like to move and second the appointment of Richard Place Dobson as auditors of the Society.

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Resolution to appoint the auditors: Richard Place Dobson as auditors of the Society was moved and seconded. All in favour 76; all against 0; abstentions 0. The motion was carried.

5. CEO'S REPORT AND UPDATE

The Chairman introduced the interim Chief Executive, Mr Patrick Barker, who gave a short presentation and update.

Since being fortunate enough to become the Society's interim CEO in February 2023, Mr Barker said he was struck by the real potential that existed within the organisation. He saw his priorities as falling into the following broad areas: library and archive, community and learning. Specifically, he pointed to work such as:

- Scanning and digitisation - making a growing share of the Society's rich resources available to people wherever they are in the world.
- The Society's digital presence remained increasingly important in terms of its Collections and also the organisations position in the wider digital landscape. The Society invested last year in improving its website, and work was ongoing to streamline it to make it more efficient and user-friendly. This was part of the effort to improve the Society's tools and systems. All of this was made possible through investments in terms of targeted finance, resources and generosity of time from members, volunteers, and through donations and legacies.
- A project was also undertaken to move 157,000 items into storage including 13,000 boxes of collections, and staff are now working hard to move into their new home on Wharf Road later in the year.

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- Membership - In 2022 the Society's community included 6,880 members and 130 volunteers (not all of whom were members). Whilst he acknowledged there was some attrition, there were increases in Associate membership. Work was being undertaken to improve the Society's membership offer. To this end a survey was recently launched to garner views and suggestions from members.

It was hoped that by the time of next year's AGM there would be discernible improvements in the Society's membership numbers.

- Members would be kept informed of developments as part of the Society's aim to improve communication and engagement going forward.
- External Engagement - The Society had a presence at Rootstech in March 2023, and sought to maintain those important linkages with genealogical organisations across the world.
- Learning and Events – The Society's programme of events remained a success, with attendance levels above pre-covid levels. The Society ran 127 events in 2022 with over 4,000 attendees. Those events incorporated courses, talks, walks, book clubs and other activities.

Mr Barker thanked all the volunteers who played such a pivotal role in the delivery of events and library-related work.

In summary, cutting across all the Society's work, was the much-anticipated move to new premises at Wharf Road later in 2023. Along with the new office opening would be the launch of a new online search tool, again improving the digital offer of the Society.

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Mr Barker also paid tribute to Mr Ed Percival and Mr Rob George whose terms of service on the Board had come to an end.

6. THE APPOINTMENT OF TRUSTEES OF THE SOCIETY

The Chairman moved to the next item of business which was to elect new members to the Board of Trustees. Before doing so, thanks and appreciation was given to Ed Percival and Robert George who were both retiring after two terms at the AGM.

The Chairman reminded the meeting that Trustees were to be elected for terms of three years, with a maximum of six years of service. After six years of service, Trustees were required to stand down, unless in exceptional circumstances.

The Articles of the Society currently provided for a maximum of ten members of the Board of Trustees. Three vacancies and the end of two trustees' terms meant there were five vacancies, plus three Trustees were standing for re-election: the Society's Treasurer Ray O'Connell, Vice Chair Graham Walters, and Heather Nowlan. The Articles allow that if the number of those nominated or standing for re-election are fewer than the number of vacancies, those offering themselves can be appointed to the Board of Trustees without a formal election. After the appointment of the four proposed Trustees, the Society would be below the maximum number of Board members, therefore the nominees were automatically elected.

Alan Pursell, Hayley Hall, Sheila Mercieca and Sophie Hutcherson, were offering themselves for election. Graham Walters, currently the Society's Vice Chair was also being recommended to the position of the Society's interim Chair, in light of Mr Percival's retirement as a Trustee, and a pending recruitment process.

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Short biographies of the candidates were included within the proxy voting forms circulated in advance of the AGM.

7. TO ANNOUNCE AWARDS AND FELLOWSHIP OF THE SOCIETY

There were no additional Fellowships or certificates of recognition to award this year. The interim Chief Executive, Mr Patrick Barker was invited to award certificates of appreciation.

Mr Barker thanked all volunteers, staff, members and non-members for their huge support throughout the year. He also wanted to recognise the Fellows, who continued to be a great source of support to the Society. As the Annual Report observed, the Society was fortunate to have had an enthusiastic group of volunteers who worked from Holloway Road (soon to be Wharf Road) and from home. Though Mr Barker was only able to name a few individuals, he wanted to express his appreciation to everyone who helped to make the Society the success it was to date.

The following were thanked with certificates of appreciation:

- Cheryl Hunnisett: for excellence in hosting and valued assistance in supporting new events hosts and co-hosts
- Grant White: for flexibility, dedication and excellent service in hosting events
- Lore Schultheiss: for commitment to quality and productivity as a proofreader for the Great Card Index project
- David Horwill: for commitment to quality and productivity as a proofreader for the SoG Data Online indexing projects
- Di Swinfield: for excellence as Project Coordinator for the Pedigree Rolls Project

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- Phil Lobley: for essential imaging service to the Great Card Index project and extensive work to improve the library catalogue
- Neville Taylor: for essential support to the library and extensive work to improve the library catalogue
- Elizabeth Richards: for leadership and commitment to the development of the Archives Team

Those named who were not present at the meeting would have their certificates sent to them via post.

8. OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

The Chairman invited members to ask questions about any aspect of the reports or any other relevant matters.

Question: Mr Paul Blake asked if Mr Barker could give a firm date on the opening of Wharf Road.

Mr Barker assured the meeting that updates would be communicated on the premises fit-out project, together with an opening date as the project progresses.

Question: Mr Barker was asked to bear in mind that not all members had access to social media, so could other communication channels be considered, e.g. the Society's Newsletter.

Mr Barker said he would ensure there all channels of communication would be used including the Quarterly Socials, the Genealogists' Magazine, and the Society's newsletter.

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Question: What feedback had the Society received from members attending other events, e.g. visits to war memorials and other places of interest.

Mr Barker highlighted the range of walking tours, talks and other events on offer. The Events team would be happy to receive suggestions/ideas of other events from members and were invited to do so via email: 'events@sog.org.uk'.

Question: Two members queried the publicity around the AGM as they had difficulty finding information on the website.

Mr Barker apologised but said notifications were provided on the Society's communication channels.

Question: A member asked if minutes of the AGM could be published as soon as was feasibly possible, recognising they needed to be approved by the Board.

Mr Barker said he would take on board the comments and seek to expedite the publishing of the minutes.

Question: Would the Society host the Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain, as had been done in previous years?

Mr Barker said that he had spoken to a representative from the Jewish Genealogical Society but that he was not aware of the new location for the Society.

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Question: What were the Societies plans in terms of opening hours and days at its new premises on Wharf Road? Would the Society be opening on Saturdays?

Mr Barker said he recognised the strong support among members for Saturday openings. Opening times would very much depend on members needs and what the Society could realistically accommodate. The aim was to make opening hours accessible to the broadest cross-section of people as possible.

Question: What thought had been given to the engagement of young people, e.g. through educational materials?

Mr Barker said that this was a matter the Society was looking into, particularly for 2024. The intention was to explore ways in which the Society could improve its engagement with younger people, including a youth conference.

Question: Considering Wharf Road has a smaller footprint than Charterhouse, what materials are going to be held on-site and what is going to remain in offsite storage?

Mr Barker said that the Society is continuing its investment to digitise its collection so that ever more material is available from home. In terms of physical material, a core collection will be kept at Wharf Road, plus a rotating collection. What is included in that core collection will be based on member feedback and which items are in regular demand. Items can also be ordered in advance of a library visit, so that they can be made available for members and anyone who wishes to use our facilities.

The Chairman declared the formal part of the 2023 Annual General Meeting to be closed.