



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2020 MINUTES

Minutes of the 109th Annual General Meeting of the Society of Genealogists held online on Tuesday, 24 November 2020, at 6.30pm.

127 members were recorded as being present.

President of the Society, Patric Dickinson, LVO, MA, FSG, Clarenceux King of Arms, took the Chair.

The Chairman reported that the Trustees minutes of the 108th Annual General Meeting were approved by the Trustees in July 2019. They have been published on the Society's website and do not require the approval of this meeting.

1. The Chairman then invited the members to note the Auditors' report on page 16 of the Annual Report. He highlighted that the Auditors were satisfied that the Society's Accounts gave a true and fair view of the financial position.
2. Mr Ed Percival, the Chair of the Board of Trustees, presented the Annual Report of the Trustees for 2019.

He reported that in 2019, despite the best efforts of staff there was a fall in membership as there had been in the two years previous, resulting in a decline in income. The building was showing its age and there were no funds to replace aging IT systems.

In September last year the decision was made to sell the building. The process took six months, and was completed last month. This couldn't have been achieved without the hard work of June Perrin. We now have the money to invest in new systems, and a surplus to invest in a new home. As part of the sale agreement, we will lease the building for a maximum of two years, which will give us the time to find a new home and prepare for our move. This time, and our strategy plan will enable us to create a more sustainable society through accessibility to more people, unique physical collections and massive investment in our online resources.

He thanked June Perrin and her team for their continued hard work, and praised the society's volunteers without whom nothing would be possible. He thanked the volunteers and staff who have contributed to the success of the society's online lectures, and said that the first investment in technology is for a new online event registration system.

He thanked the dedicated member community for continuing to support the society in difficult and uncertain times. He said that while the sale of the building provides a financial windfall, it is a once-only occurrence and does not replace the society's reliance on membership income, and the generosity of its donors.

He looks forward to reporting at the next AGM in 2021, when the society's financial position will be much improved and there will be an exciting time ahead compared to the outlook in 2019.

3. The Chairman then invited the Treasurer, Ray O'Connell, to read the treasurers report.

The Treasurer reported that the full accounts are available online. The surplus recorded in 2019 is due to the support, donations grants and legacies of the society's members. There was a widening of the operating deficit in 2019 and this is being addressed by the transformation project. Considerable progress was made during the strategic review, which took place in 2019/20 – the aim of which is to achieve a financial model that is sustainable for the long term. Some progress on this will be seen in the accounts at the next AGM, and more over the next few years.

The President then invited questions on the Accounts and Report of the Board of Trustees.

Question: Which year is the sale of the building reported – 2019 or 2020? And how much was the building sold for.

The Chair of the Board of Trustees said that this will be for 2020, as the sale occurred at the beginning of October 2020. After costs of sale are covered, the society will see an amount in excess of £6 million.

Question: When does the two-year lease run out?

The Chair of the Board of Trustees reported that the two-year lease will expire in October 2022

There being no further questions, the Chairman stated that voting to approve the Annual Report and Accounts was carried out in advance.

Resolution to receive the Annual Report: Moved Michelle Patient, seconded Julian Duffus, 54 votes in favour and 1 against. The Annual Report was accepted.

Resolution to receive the Annual Accounts: Moved Ruth Willmore, seconded Di Swinfield, 54 votes in favour and 1 against. The Annual Accounts were accepted.

4. In accordance with Section 485 of the Companies Act 2006 the appointment of Richard Place Dobson as Auditors must be put to the meeting. Moved Rob George, seconded Graham Walter, 53 votes in favour and 2 votes against. The Auditors were appointed.
5. The President vacated the chair, and the Chair of the Board of Trustees put the motion that Patric Dickinson continue to be the President of the society. There were 54 votes in favour and 1 vote against. Patric Dickinson was confirmed as President and retook the Chair.
6. Election of the Vice Presidents:
William Bortrick (52 for, 2 against, 1 abstention)
Dr Colin Chapman (54 for, 1 against)
Miriam Margolyes (50 for, 4 against, 1 against)
Sir Mervyn Medlycott (53 for, 1 against, 1 abstention)
Dan Snow (52 for, 2 against, 1 abstention)
The Rt Hon Lord Sudeley (50 for, 3 against, 2 abstentions)
7. Appointment of the Trustees of the Society

The Chairman thanked Janice Tullock who is retiring from the Board of Trustees after three years.

Rob George and Ed Percival retired by rotation from the Board of Trustees after their first three-year terms and being eligible offered themselves for re-election. Heather Nowlan was co-opted.

Short biographies had been supplied to members on the proxy voting form. The Chairman reported that, as there were enough vacancies for the nominees, no election was necessary. He thanked them for their continued service.

8. Awards

Certificates of Appreciation: The Chairman stated that this year has been an exceptional year, and it feels almost wrong to highlight some as opposed to others. We will resume normal nominations next year but this year I would like to thank ALL Volunteers, staff, members and non-members for the huge support we have received in these times of crisis.

The Chairman announced that two new Fellows were elected in 2019; David Annal and Stephen Smyrl. New fellows for 2020 will be announced at a January Fellows meeting. We will then also announce them at the following AGM.

Dr Colin Chapman FSG announced the Certificate of Recognition, which since 2013 has been awarded to either individuals or organisations who have contributed significantly to genealogy. The recipient of the award in 2020 is Dr Janet Few, 'for long term services to family and local history, and encouraging the involvement of young people in history and heritage'.

Janet Few has given over 30 years' voluntary activities as an individual, a committee member, and leader of a number of family and local history organisations in Devon, Cornwall and the Isle of Wight. She was instrumental in the foundation of a Community History Group and the Society for One-Place Studies. She has written numerous articles and several books and has led transcription and indexing projects since the early 1980s. Janet has involved school children in discovering the history of their school, in researching names on local war memorials, and has aided children participating in history-based craft activities. She has organised day and residential conferences for the Family History Federation and the Guild of One Name Studies.

Dr Few will be presented with her award in 2021.

The Chairman announced that this year there is no Prince Michael of Kent Award.

There being no other competent business the Chairman closed the formal part of the meeting.

Informal Session

Neil Allcock, Interim Transformation Manager, gave a presentation about the development of the Society's Strategy and Transformation Plan.

- o The Strategy and Transformation Plan is based on the needs to transform the SoG back into a Member focused society with an appealing and complete set of features to retain and attract members.
- o Each element of the strategy has a clear plan of action now and summarises into four main areas: membership, collections, education and operations.
- o Part of the proceeds of the building sale will be invested in the delivery for this plan, and the plan lasts for two years
- o The plan was developed in consultation with a mix of at least 25 members, staff and trustees and their views on how to take the Society forward incorporated into 17 different work streams.
- o The Education and Events work stream is already underway with the implementation of a new education and events booking system and this is on target.

Open Questions

Question: Where is the society going to move to? Central London would be best.

The Chair of the Board of Trustees (CBT): Possible location is a complex question and people will have different views, this is why the Board of Trustees will engage an external property agency which can make recommendations based on the Society's needs. The Board doesn't have any preconceived ideas and will be open to the advice of experts.

Question: Is the Society considering raising subscription prices as a way to improve revenue and contribute to the Strategy and Transformation Plan?

CBT: We're not in a position at present to ask members to pay more. When we can offer more services and collections that are unique and valuable we may then look at increasing the fees.

Question: Are you planning to share experiences with other similar organisations that have relocated?

CBT: We are aware of some of them, there are some case studies, and would like to hear from others so we can learn from their experiences.

A later comment from an attendee encouraged a dialogue with the Royal Philatelic Society that moved its premises to the city last year and learned some lessons in that process.

Question: What plans are there to boost membership and membership income for the society?

The interim Transformation Manager (TM): In the plan we have been focusing in detail on membership, and with the involvement of the staff we have started to design packages that will suit a variety of members, with particular services that can be offered with those particular packages. With the new member packages built into our system we'll be in a position to market them. The only guaranteed source of income we have is membership going forward and this is an important part of the plan. He said that is all his previous similar work he has never seen a membership so loyal as the society's members – the average tenure of members is impressive and it would be good to reward this loyalty through the membership packaging.

Question: Are there any plans to simplify the *Genealogists Magazine* and produced it in a printed format again? This could improve membership as many do not like to read books online.

TM: Yes, we did talk about this during the development of the strategy. One of the problems with the hard copy is with the distribution of it, but people do like a hard copy of a magazine, and hard copy magazines are generally thriving again. Also mentioned in our discussions was the possibility of a higher end, and more book-like periodical produced annually and containing some in-depth articles and thought pieces by senior genealogists.

Further comments in the chat revealed that for an extra fee, people can have a hard copy of the *Genealogists Magazine* sent to them.

Question: With limited staff, is the society looking get specialised people on board to help with technological development?

TM: Yes, when there are technological transformation to be made you have to bring in expertise. There are some components that need to be joined together, and we'll be procuring suppliers to do this work.

Question: Has there been consideration of recording education sessions so they can be booked and paid for by people outside the UK who can't attend live?

Events Coordinator: This is something we do want to look into and expand.

TM: This is something we plan on expanding in the new events system, while ensuring that they are of good quality audio and video.

Question: What will FamilySearch get out of the proposed partnership in digitisation?

Else Churchill: The collection will be available on FamilySearch to the open public, but not for some years. The SoG will have exclusive use of the digital images in the meantime. Anything out of copyright will be available on the website and items still in copyright will be available in the library in digital form.

Question: What is the percentage of members who live outside of the UK, and what percentage do not live within reach of London?

TM: Without having the exact numbers to hand, there are a significant number of members without ready access to London. We do have the statistics compiled about a year ago and our property experts will take members' access to London into account in the relocation analysis.

CBT: Access to records online will continue to be popular beyond the impact of covid, but people will still want to access the physical collections. The society will need to be situated where people can access.

Question: Can the lectures be kept at the society and streamed? How many non-members attend the online lectures?

Lori Weinstein: About 15% of attendees at online lectures are non-members.

TM: Part of the strategy is the use of online lectures to try to encourage that 15% and more to become members.

Question: What role will the property agency play in finding a new location for the society?

CBT: Everything – to take all the data, look at opportunities, make suggestions about what is available, and give us a complete service that will allow us to get the best possible outcome.

Question: Do you know why the membership is declining? Is it demography, location, out-dated infrastructure?

TM: Yes to all of those things, a combination of things. Sometimes beginner family historians use the society for a short time but don't have an incentive to stay. Amongst members with longer tenure, the churn rate is much lower. Although the membership is declining it is gradual and the membership is very loyal compared to many.

Question: Do you have the intention to rent or buy?

CBT: After investment in the system upgrades we will have a substantial surplus. We'd love to have a home and a freehold is a good way to do that, equally productive investment may enable us to pay a rental. There is an investment stream in the plan that will look at the alternatives. We want to be somewhere that will enable the society to progress.

Question: What activities would you provide in the new building to attract membership?

CBT: We would love to have a whole range of interesting activities at the new building, but it's too early to say, as decisions about these will be made in due course.

Question: Would you consider having a life membership? It would be easier for some to make a one-off payment than annual renewal, this could be a way of establishing an endowment fund.

CBT: That sounds like a good idea, and we should find a way to make that happen.

A further comment in the chat said that the Guild of One Name Studies has a 10-year membership.

A further comment suggested offering 3, 5 and 10-year membership options alongside the annual membership.

The CBT encouraged people to send their ideas to Neil for consideration in the planning.

Question: Is the Society considering separate sites for the library and ancillary services?

CBT: Only if it makes sense to do so. It would be good to have everything in one place, but it may make sense to maximise the use of a space for visitors, and carry out things like processing and scanning at another site. As far as possible we will keep things together but nothing is ruled out at this stage.

Question: Could the new building be designated an LDS Centre rather than just an affiliate library? There are LDS resources that are available at the former but not at the latter.

Else: We could ask the question, but there is no LDS Centre in the UK that doesn't have a designation with the church itself.

Question: Are there any plans to share the financial aspects of the transformation plan?

CBT: We want to ensure a transparent process and the next AGM will be held in June 2021 when there will be more financial information available. He urged all members to attend.

Question: What is the calendar for updating members on progress?

CBT: Certainly there will be another open question session at the AGM in June and we intend to use the website to keep members updated on progress.

Comment: From a housebound member who said she was pleased with all the online activities that enabled her to be connected to the society.

Question: Could there be quarterly meetings to update members?

TM: The transformation is about regular delivery and lends itself to quarterly or other milestone meetings. We intend to keep communication with members going throughout the process.

Question: Are the proceeds of the building sale earning interest at this time?

Treasurer: There is an investment work stream in the plan and we are going through a process at the moment to select an investment firm or firms. With the current easy access arrangements there is of course little return but the intention is to get a proper return on the funds when invested.

Question: What is the cost of the two-year rental on the building?

£245K, which was not standard rent but factored in to the sale deal.