

FRIENDS OF DEVON'S ARCHIVES

Draft MINUTES of ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

29 September 2018, St Katherine's Priory, Exeter

Attendance-

Committee: John Allan (President), Ian Mortimer (Chairman), Frances Billinge (Secretary), Brian Carpenter, Sue Jackson, Ellie Jones (Publicity Officer), Richard Spear, Peter Towey (Membership Secretary),

Other members: Ellie Babbedge, Marcia Babington, Lynda Bailey, Beryl Bletcher, Ann Bond, Helen Davies, Jill Drysdale, Alison Edwards, Claire Greener, Frances and Malcom Grigorey, Shirley Hamblyn, David T. Hawkings, Veronica Johnston, Celia King, John Lamb, Anne Killingback, Andrew and Joanna Minnack, Kate Osborne, Sue Price, Valerie Ransom, Gill Selley, Dee and Mike Tracy, Brian Tubbs, Martin Watts, Christine Wills, Ann Marie Dick (Associate Member).

Visitors: Yvonne and John Amer, Peter Baker, Peter Child, Colin Kilvington, Angela Lamb,

Total attendance: 43

The meeting began at 10.00 a. m.

1. Welcome by the President

John Allan welcomed everyone and noted that the past year had been a successful one particularly with regard to lobbying and the significant improvement in the Newsletter. It is an active society with publications and a well-attended AGM.

2. Apologies

Mrs M Andrews; Lydia Burge; Andrew and Jan Jones; Robert Letcher; Ian Maxted (Treasurer); Graham Parnell; Bruce Peeke ; Maggie Rice; Maureen Selley, and on behalf of other Devon Family History Society members; Gillian Westell.

3. Confirmation and adoption of the Minutes of AGM of 30 September 2017

Noted incorrect spelling of Peter Towey's surname which Ian Mortimer will amend. Correct record proposed by Peter Towey, seconded Martin Watts, agreed unanimously.

Action -Ian Mortimer.

4. Chairman's report

(Posted on FoDA web-site) In sitting down to write my last Chairman's Report for the Friends of Devon's Archives, I decided to click on our website and look back at the reports I wrote for the last three AGMs. In doing so, I could not help but notice that in 2015, I enthusiastically announced that I hoped that FoDA would do 'more of everything' – more

events in more places with more newsletters and more purchases, and exerting more pressure on those who have the power to affect the future of our archive services. Well, in terms of more, I have lived up to my stated intention in this respect: each of my reports was longer than the previous one. However, that wasn't what I intended by 'more of everything' – nor is it what most of you would have wanted. I therefore am planning to keep this one short.

The year 2017-18 saw steady progress. We made two purchases of Devon deeds from ebay; bought a Sidmouth apothecary's notebook from 1830; and contributed £800 towards the Devon Medical Society's acquisition of five medical subscription books from the Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital from the 1740s. In addition, we supported further bids by Plymouth and West Devon Record Office and the South West Heritage Trust for archives that got away. However, we also helped the South West Heritage Trust win an £18,000 grant from the National Manuscripts Conservation Trust, to conserve the political correspondence of Henry Addington, Viscount Sidmouth, Prime Minister and Home Secretary, by donating £2,000. On top of these things, we tackled the problem of compliance with the General Data Protection Regulations. We held a very successful Spring meeting at Torquay Museum on 'unwritten archives', which saw presentations from four excellent speakers, and as part of the arrangements for that day, we shifted to the online booking of events through Eventbrite,. We have in addition continued to be a voice for archives, raising awareness of their importance to our community and their vulnerability. In particular, we were successful in alerting Torbay councillors to the dangers of following their mayor's plan to cut the last portion of the council's grant to Torquay Museum. Doing so would have sent all the wrong signals to those in a position to help the financially beleaguered institution; it was exactly the opposite of what was needed.

I'd like to think that this positive set of achievements characterises the whole of the last three and a half years that I have been chairman. We have a number of policies in place that were previously lacking. We have maintained a supportive core of members; we have acquired or protected many documents; we have helped the South West Heritage Trust gain recognition for its pioneering work in administering archives through grants and a prestigious award; we have revamped our constitution and made our administrative processes more efficient. We have published a book on reading and understanding Devon documents; we have reported news of archives and their accessions every six months through our newsletter; we have given advice on archives and the risks to certain forms of data (especially born-digital archives); and we have held two conferences per year involving over twenty speakers in all four 'corners' of the county – Exeter, Barnstaple, Plymouth and Torquay. Behind the scenes we have also dealt efficiently with the bureaucracy generated by HMRC and the Charity Commission, and have continued to maintain our own website and its very valuable resources, as well as the Devon Roll of Honour website put together and edited by Pete Best. We have passed the milestone of being twenty years old. And last but not least, we still have money in the bank. Hooray for that!

Truth be told, however, my policy of wanting FoDA to do more things in more places has not altogether been successful, and I think it is worth dwelling on that for a moment. This is not because of a desire to be self-deprecating but because it is important that we look on that

initiative as a learning lesson. Yes, we have made more purchases in the last three and a half years than we made in the previous sixteen and a half of our existence; and yes, we have held more events in more places, as I promised we would. However, we have significantly fewer members now than we had in 2015 – 160 compared with 200. Doing ‘more of everything’ did not lead to an expansion in our numbers but a twenty percent drop in three years. Moreover, fewer and fewer of our members turn up to meetings. This forces the question, why do we carry on? Ultimately, we do so for the archives and for our successors ability to learn from them and enjoy them. Our purpose is not self-satisfaction or popularity but the preservation and enjoyment of our heritage. There is also the fact that almost every historical society is currently losing members as the generation that supported such organisations moves on and those now in their forties and fifties come to the fore. People of my generation – I am fifty-one, by the way – are much less likely to join a historical organisation, let alone a whole series of them, and even less likely to want to take a leading role in running such organisations. It is not my place to suggest what my successor as chairman should and should not do but doing less rather than more, and focusing on the core activity of protecting archives and being a voice for our written heritage, should be given priority over everything else we might do – and thankfully that requires only a dedicated few, not legions of supporters.

Before I sign off, it just remains for me to thank those who have contributed to the running of FoDA over the last year. We have a superb committee who all work hard to keep FoDA going, and I am very glad that almost everyone is staying on: John as president; Frances as secretary; Ian as treasurer; Peter as membership secretary; Ellie as publicity officer; and Sue and Richard as committee members. The ex-officio members too do a sterling job – Janet Tall, Brian Carpenter, Deborah Philips and Louisa Blight – giving professional advice on matters that concern other archives besides their own. I am very pleased that Sue has agreed to be programme officer for the forthcoming year – a position that has been vacant for too long – and I thank her for that. Also I am very pleased that Katharine Chant has agreed to replace me as chairman. Thank you, one and all, for all you do for archives in Devon.

I cannot go without making a couple of special notices. As you all know, the Friends of Devon’s Archives was officially inaugurated on 8 July 1998. You will also be aware Graham Parnell has been a committee member for all that time. Although he cannot be here today, on behalf of the whole membership I would like to stress how grateful we are to him for his service over the twenty years of FoDA’s existence. On a personal level too, I would like to stress how grateful I am for his support – he always has a cheery smile whenever turning up to a committee meeting. I have thus sent Graham a book token on behalf of FoDA and myself as a small token of our appreciation for his years as a committee member. Last but not least, I would like to make a special mention of John Allan’s service as president of this organisation. Frankly, without him, we would have been rudderless. He has never stinted on turning up to committee meetings and helping with our visits to historical sites – whether in Barnstaple or Polsloe – and suggesting speakers and contacting people to take on new roles for FoDA. Most of us on the committee are here due to his persuasiveness as much as our experience or love of archives. And although our constitution states that the president should

only serve three years, it emerges that he has already done six. And he has agreed to go on longer! What a champion of Devon's heritage he is. For this reason, it gives me very great pleasure, as my last act as outgoing chairman of the Friends of Devon's Archives, to announce that the committee has unanimously agreed to make John an honorary Life Member of the Friends of Devon's Archives. Thank you, John, for all you have done for us, from all of us.

And that, I am pleased to say, is the shortest of my Chairman's reports for FoDA. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve.

5. Treasurer's Report

(Posted on FoDA web site) In Ian Maxted's absence Ian Mortimer presented the Treasurer's accounts as of 1 September 2018. Noted no reference about claiming Gift Aid, a query raised about the accuracy of the carry forward figure in the 2016/17 column; a missing negative sign in advance of the 936.29 'Income less expenditure' in the same column, and that the accounts have not yet been audited by a book-keeper. The book-keeper will receive the accounts in one week. Agreed to accept the accounts subject to clarification of the above issues. Proposed Ian Mortimer, seconded Claire Greener, all agreed.

Action- Ian Mortimer.

6. Membership Secretary's report

(Posted on FoDA web site.) The Friends' membership "year" runs from January to December. I hope that we have now ironed out the teething problem that we had in switching from the old system. Where members have not paid their subscriptions for a year and have not responded to my chasing letters or e-mails, I have treated their membership as having lapsed.

Our total paid-up membership at 23rd September 2018, counting Family members as 2, stands at 162 – compared with 169 this time last year. These include:

108 individual members - a loss of 1

17 Life members – the same as last year

11 Group members – the same as last year

13 Family members – ie 26 members – a loss of 6 members.

People who volunteer at the archives in Exeter and Barnstaple have also been invited to sign up to receive details of the Friends' events without subscribing. So far 11 have taken advantage of that offer.

Sadly I have to report that one member died during the year, Dr Jean Shields.

At this AGM it is not necessary for me to collect next year's subscriptions. They are not due, under the new arrangements, until 1st January 2019.

7. Proposal to amend the Constitution (which is available on FoDA web site)

Clause 4 reads: 'The Association may have a President at the invitation of the Committee, to be approved at the Annual General Meeting and to serve for a term of not more than three years.' It is proposed that the words 'and to serve for a term of not more than three years' be deleted and replaced with the words 'each year'. Proposed by Ian Mortimer, seconded Frances Billinge, all agreed.

8. (Subject to the approval of the above motion): Approval of the re-appointment of the President.

Proposed Ian Mortimer, seconded Peter Towey. All agreed, with applause.

9. Election of Chairman – John Allan now in the Chair

John Allan praised Ian Mortimer for his amazing contribution to the society. Ian Mortimer has given unstintingly of his time, and his extensive knowledge and expertise has been highly valuable. It is proposed that Katharine Chant formerly a Director of RAMM and responsible for leading its reconstruction, among many other achievements, be appointed as next chairman. Katharine Chant regretted that she could be present today owing to previous commitments. Proposed by John Allan, seconded Peter Towey. All agreed.

10. Election of the Officers standing for a further year

All officers were willing to stand again: the Secretary (Dr Frances Billinge), Treasurer (Ian Maxted), Membership Secretary (Peter Towey) and Publicity Officer (Ellie Jones). Sue Jackson agreed to stand as Programme Secretary and was thanked for this. Proposed *en bloc* by Claire Greener, seconded by Martin Watts, all agreed.

11. Election of Ordinary Committee Members Officers

Richard Spear was content to stand again as an ordinary committee member. Dr Ian Mortimer was also willing to stand as an ordinary committee member. Proposed by Claire Greener, seconded by Martin Watts, all agreed.

Graham Parnell has resigned from the committee. He was a founder member and has served for twenty years. His considerable support over all this time has been much appreciated. A small gift has been sent to Graham Parnell to express the chairman and members' appreciation. All other ordinary committee members willing to stand again. Proposed by Claire Greener, seconded by Martin Watts, all agreed.

12. 0.AOB

12.1. Thanks expressed to Mr Rockey of St Katherine's Priory and the Community Association for helping to make this meeting run so smoothly. It was noted as being a very

welcoming facility which is at the heart of its community. It was reassuring to see such an historic building being so well use and cared for.

12.2. David Hawkings asked for FoDA's financial support in obtaining a copy of Inland Revenue letters of administration 1812-1857, held by The National Archives. These include Devon records. David Hawkings has approached other agencies as well. These records are being digitised by TNA but it is unclear how these might then be made available for local researchers. David Hawkings was asked to liaise with Janet Tall of SWHT and to make a written request to FoDA for this to be discussed at the next committee on 7 November 2018. It might be appropriate for David Hawkings to be invited to the next committee meeting.

Action- David Hawkings and Janet Tall

12.3. Ellie Babbage raised the point that there are several Devon societies with a history interest and that the same people seem to belong to them all. She asked if perhaps there could be some amalgamation to assist with administration, dairying of events and membership, at the same time retaining each society's individuality. Ian Mortimer explained that this had been discussed extensively but that there were issues in connection with the charitable purpose of FoDA and that any amalgamation would have difficulty meeting its specific requirements in connection with the Charities Commission and HMRC. Ellie Babbage was thanked for raising this but John Allan explained that FoDA is committed to working jointly with other society's but it needs to maintain its independent stand campaigning for archives.

12.4. John Allan concluded the meeting by making a presentation of a North Devon sgraffito jug from all of FoDA to Ian Mortimer, the outgoing chairman, in recognition of and thanks for his distinguished service as chairman. Ian Mortimer expressed his thanks and said that when he took on the post no-one could have predicted the local authority spending cuts on archive services, and that now FoDA was needed more than ever. He urged that we continue to lobby for archives so that everyone's children and grandchildren will benefit.

12.5. John Lamb asked if voluntary contributions were wanted for refreshments, they were, and he was thanked for raising this.

The meeting ended at 10.47 a.m.