

MINUTES of the Fourteenth Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Hagg Wood held at the Reading Room, Dunnington, on Wednesday 23rd May 2012.

PRESENT Bob Missin, City of York Council Countryside Officer, speaker, David Mayston, Chairman, Alan Briers, Treasurer, Linda Maggs, Secretary, Michael & Diana Dunn, Alan & Wendy Worsley, Olwyn Fonseca, Diane & Tony Conway, Anne Heathcote, Barbara Pyrah, Nigel Emery, Judith Smart, Derek Utley, Elizabeth Tata, Helen McPherson, Mike Clarke, John Rodwell and Roger Widdowson.

APOLOGIES from Mr & Mrs East, Tony & Elaine Hudson, John Maggs, John & Margy Vernon, Ian & Lita Black, David & Lily Rowe, Revd Canon & Mrs Brian Pearson, Jennie Stopford and Pam Nyman.

MINUTES The minutes of the thirteenth AGM, 25th May 2011, were accepted as a true record.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

David welcomed the speaker, Bob Missin, and everyone to FHW 14th AGM. David said FHW had enjoyed another busy and successful year, with several hundred trees planted to celebrate the Jubilee, 80 young oaks, the remainder rowan and hazel and others, which will grow up over the next 200 years. A special oak tree had been planted in the corner of this area in memory of Ron Bielby, purchased from his commemoration fund. Wild flowers had also been planted with the help of families from the village. The Jubilee area had been cleared of conifer trees, largely Western Hemlock, by the Forestry Commission, in line with their latest Forest Design Plan (FDP). The FHW had been consulted about the FDP which laid out FC plans for the next 10 years; there would be no further planting of conifers but natural regeneration of deciduous trees, which is exactly what FHW want to see, so it was a very encouraging document.

More planting had taken place in the Millennium area. The FC had removed conifers around the bomb craters and the area had been replanted with rowan and hazel, with hawthorn and blackthorn against the edge of the wood with the help of the latest 'Awards for All' grant. The bomb craters and the pond had been cleared with the help of BTCV and Tony Hudson had prepared a leaflet about a new walk which contained research on the story of the Free French flights. (Members were given the new leaflet).

David outlined our busy programme of events through the year – the visit to Fulford Community Orchard, the Fungal Foray, the conference on Hedgerows in Historic Landscapes, the New Year lunch which had become an annual event in our calendar. In the spring we'd had a very interesting excursion to Hackfall, accompanied by a Woodland Trust Officer, and were planning a cycle ride to Askham Bog.

In the autumn David and Linda had been invited to meet members of the Independent Panel, set up to review the future management of FC lands after the public outcry over the government's initial plans to dispose of many FC woods and forests. They impressed upon the panel the virtue of our arrangement, that FHW were happy to work in the wood to obtain our long term objective of returning the wood to its ancient woodland beauty, but we wanted FC guidance and support. The Independent Panel interim report stressed the value for money which the FC represents at a net cost of £25 million. The Final Report is due out on the 4th July and David asked that everyone should remain vigilant.

David thanked the Committee for their work in organising the busy programme, with special thanks to Alan for managing the grant and Tony for his work on the leaflet.

Linda thanked David for his continued dedication over the many years he had spent as Chairman – it required great commitment and leadership. It had been an extra busy year, including writing letters to the Independent Panel but there was hope for a positive outcome.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Alan presented the FHW Accounts and gave details about the 'Awards for All' Grant of £5,650. He thanked BTCV for their hard work and enthusiasm, removing logs from the bomb craters and clearing-out the ancient pond, work that would have been beyond FHW members. Both the pond and the craters looked a lot healthier now and the work had enhanced the biodiversity of the areas. Alan was also grateful that the grant body had agreed to a 2-month extension, allowing for all the work to be completed. Alan then asked for questions. The accounts had not yet been audited but they were provisionally accepted.

ELECTION OF THE COMMITTEE

Members nominated for election: Alan Briers, Michael Dunn, Olwyn Fonseca, Tony & Elaine Hudson, Linda Maggs, David Mayston, and Alan & Wendy Worsley. They were duly elected. David said there was one unfilled place on the FHW Committee and any member who would like to join would be most welcome.

ELECTION OF THE INDEPENDENT EXAMINER

Matthew Parrott was proposed by Alan Briers as auditor and he was duly elected.

ILLUSTRATED TALK ON YORK BIODIVERSITY AUDIT BY BOB MISSIN

David gave a warm welcome to Bob who began his account with the news that the City would have a new 7ha nature reserve now that the Monks Cross Stadium plans had been accepted. Although Bob had always wanted to have a comprehensive biodiversity audit of York, in the past there had never been sufficient funds. Now that it had become an essential part of the Local Development Framework (LDF), required by government, funds had been made available and 3 University of York students were going through aerial photographs to identify sites, some of no interest and others to review.

Out of 60,000ha of land in York, there was 24,000ha of grassland and Phase 1 of the survey placed all the fields into different habitat categories over a year, with the help of some field-walking. Initially 800 sites had been identified. 2 Contractors had been hired for 2 years to look at sites to see if a more detailed survey was required. They brought the number of special interest sites down to 200 and a different set of contactors will carry out further surveys. If sites are designated SINCS (Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation) then they are awarded special consideration in the planning process. So far 98 SINC sites have been identified, covering 1548ha of high quality land. Strensall Common and the Lower Derwent Valley are the two main sites, the latter managed by the Carstairs Countryside Trust (CCT).

Bob then went on to discuss various sites of special interest. Clifton Ings was a very special flood meadow with an abundance of wild flowers. The OU, which partners the Friends of Rawcliffe Meadows in the management of the area, used photographs of the meadow in their literature. Hessay Churchyard was another exceptionally rich meadow and Bob organised the hay-cutting, distributing the hay to sites in the City which benefitted from the flower-seeds. Danesbury Court had been a beneficiary of this scheme; the grasses were now full of Spotted Orchids and Bee Orchids. A new management agreement had been drawn up to cut the grass less often, not before July, to allow the carpet of orchids to expand.

Severus Hill had been identified as a special site, to the annoyance of the owners, Yorkshire Water, who wanted to develop it. YW will not allow access, so the area is suffering from lack

of sensitive management. Poppleton Glass Works had been granted consent to develop its land (allocated for development 20 years ago) so steps were being taken to trans-locate the specially rich soil which contained Haresfoot Clover, Knapweed, Centaury and Yellow Wort to Batchelor Hill, using Dobby's development money.

Woodlands were not well represented in York, but Park Wood in Askham Bryan and Taylor Hallfield, owned by the Halifax Estate, were very rich woods with Bluebells and Early Orchids. Fish Pond Wood, on the flood plain, had been planted with Poplars to dry up the water but these needed to be removed. The geomorphology was good for invertebrates and Michael Archer was helping to protect the 'Open Fen' nature of the flood plain. The Tansy Beetle Action Group (T Bag) had been given a 3-year grant from Sitar for habitat enhancement and to control balsam. The rare Tansy Beetle, known as the 'Jewel of York', had been used as an emblem for the CCT's new monument, to be unveiled at a joint celebration of the Queen's Jubilee and York's 800th anniversary, on June 9th at the Designer Outlet.

Bob encouraged farmers to take up the High Level Stewardship schemes and had been successful at Poppleton Ings, where the bird life had been greatly enhanced. At Gollie Ponds at Water Fulford there had been delicate pond clearance to encourage *Agabus Undulatus*, a rare beetle and Tyne Helleborine, a rare orchid which only grows on river gravels heavily contaminated with metals. At the British Sugar site a very rare bee, the Nomad Bee, had been discovered. The sunlight on the bank must be protected, to allow safe flight corridors to foraging areas. Old railway cuttings were excellent foraging corridors and Corncrakes, Corn Buntings and Skylarks were all on the increase. Bob raised the issue of a few anomalies such as the Creeping Marshwort found at Heslington Tillmire, a very rare plant and the possibility of a dormouse nest at Wheldrake. In his work, Bob had to maintain a strict role as he was sometimes in conflict with developers, in places such as Strensall village meadows where the rare Southern Marsh Orchid grew.

However, there were many positive and encouraging aspects to his work at the moment. The Strays and York City Walls had been granted £½ million funding towards management work to enhance biodiversity, including the improvement of hedgerows and planting wild flowers. 1000 wild flowers were going to be planted outside the new CYC Offices and more than 3000 wild flowers for the strays. The new Askham Lane roundabout scheme contained 4 small ponds and the Derwenthorpe development, with the new biodiversity offset scheme, would allow a new 12ha wildlife park to be created at New Earswick. Other exciting projects include a wild life garden in Yorkshire Museum Gardens and a wild flower meadow by Millennium Bridge. David thanked Bob for a stimulating talk and thanked the audience for their attendance.