

## RHODODENDRON, CAMELLIA and MAGNOLIA GROUP

A charitable Incorporated Organisation, number 1161254

Minutes of the ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING held on Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> May 2015

At 2.30 p.m. in The Hayloft, Bodnant

**Present:** Chairman Mr David Millais , Vice Chairman, Mr Philip Evans, Hon. Treasurer, Mr Alastair Stevenson, Hon. Secretary Mr Barry Haseltine.

Mr and Mrs P Bucknell, Mr T Brabin, Ms Alison Clarke, Mr D Faulkner, Mr and Mrs R Fulcher, Mr C Funke, Mr and Mrs M Gates, Mr and Mrs P Gunn, Mr G Hargreaves, Mr and Mrs A Hallett, Mr and Mrs D Hannon, Mrs S Haseltine, Mr A Hill, Mr and Mrs J Hillier, Mrs R Howell, Mr and Mrs J Mann, Mr C Mitchell , Mr C Mugridge, Dr R Newton, Mr and Mrs J Rawling, Mr R Rosendale, Mrs C Sapcote, Mr K Sprague, Mr I Stokes, Bro Vincent, Mr and Mrs J Warren, Mr and Mrs R Whiting, Mr and Mrs T Wood.

Guests: Miss Yin Hau, Miss Sally-Anne Lickley, Miss Lucie Yannacopoulo, students sponsored to attend the tour and AGM.

1 **Apologies:**

Mr E Annal, Mrs M Ashworth, Mr R Beeson, Lady Banham, Mrs R Legrand, Mr R Eley, Mr P Furneaux, Mr S Harding, Mr JD Harsant, Mr R Herbert, Lord Lansdowne, Mr S Lyus, Ms P Hayward, Ms S Hayward, Dr J Marston, Mr G Mills, Mr B Mitchell, Mr J Neal, Mr Reddington, Mrs G Ray, Mr J Sanders, Mr C Tomlin, Mrs J Warren, Mr. C Williams.

2 **The Minutes** of the Annual General Meeting 2014 held on Wednesday 28<sup>h</sup> May 2014 and published in Bulletin No. 115 July 2014 were agreed to be a true record, subject to the addition of Mr J Hillier to the attendance list, and were signed by The Chairman.

3 **Matters Arising:** There were no matters arising.

4 **Chairman's Report**

The most important event this year has been the granting of charitable status to the Rhododendron Camellia and Magnolia Group. After a detailed application process, the Charity Commissioners recognised the conservation, research and educational roles of the Group, and as from 13<sup>th</sup> April 2015 we are a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) as mandated to Committee at last year's AGM. This new status gives the security of limited liability with the benefits of being a recognised charity. We are hopeful that at least part of our annual subscriptions can be Gift Aided, and in due course we would welcome legacies to increase our charitable activities which include public Shows, travel sponsorship of young horticulturalists, commissioning the micro-propagation of rare plants, the sponsorship of several notable plant collections, and our work in supporting the RHS. Our charitable activities can be seen across our 3 genera, they help the public at large, and are not just for the benefit of paid up members.

In practical terms, there will be some statutory requirements to meet the obligations of the Charity Commission, and these will be managed by the 4 Trustees who are ultimately responsible to the Charity Commission to ensure we operate the charity correctly and for the public benefit. The initial Trustees are Philip Evans, Barry Haseltine, Alastair Stephenson and myself. One Trustee will retire in rotation annually starting in 2016. I would like to publicly thank these Trustees for everything they have done to help achieve our charitable status this year. It's a major milestone in the history of the Group.

Now we have this framework in place we can concentrate our efforts on what we should be doing, and that's promoting and working with our 3 genera. The recent membership survey has produced an outstanding response from more than 25% of the membership. It has highlighted our strengths and weaknesses, and will give the Committee plenty to think about in the direction we take over the next few years. I would like to thank Graham Mills for all his work on this, and of course for the significant rebuild of our website, so that it is now dynamic and viewable from tablets and phones. Graham has also set up a Facebook page for the Group, so do get involved and share your pictures and news.

I am delighted to welcome 3 new Branch Chairmen this year, and they are all trying hard to re-invigorate membership in their areas. Branch Chairmen play a key role in making contact at the local

level, and help to build friendships amongst like-minded enthusiasts. Friendship spreads knowledge and love for our genera, and will help to draw in others who should be welcomed and encouraged to join us. Offers to create Branches in other areas would be gratefully received.

I am also pleased to welcome Stephen Harding as our first Conservation Officer. Steve is exactly the right person to be taking on this important role as he is familiar with managing plant collections and has well established links with Plant Heritage. With an aging membership and poorly labelled plants, we only have a short timeframe in which to set up a database of rare plants, both species and hybrids, which need rescuing. We then need to propagate them and establish them in public gardens to safeguard them for future generations. Time is of the essence, and I do hope that you will help us with this huge project. In our Centenary year, and with our Charitable status, we can leave no better legacy than to ensure that the best plants collected from the Himalayas by intrepid plant collectors years ago, or hybrids raised as a result of a detailed breeding programme are not lost to obscurity but planted out for all to enjoy. Please help Steve as we embark upon this huge programme.

The Centenary sub-Committee are busy putting together our Centenary Programme, based at RHS Wisley Gardens on 7-10<sup>th</sup> May 2016, with 2 days of activities and archive material at the Hillside Events Centre, including a display of our Top 100 Rhododendrons. There will also be day trips to a selection of the best private and public gardens in the area. I do hope we can welcome as many local and international members as possible to this major 4 day event; it will be an opportunity to look forward, as well as back, and a great opportunity to promote our Group and to gain new members. Preferential hotel deals will be announced shortly.

Over the years we have all been amazed by the quality of Pam Hayward's yearbooks, and this is reflected in the universal high esteem they were given in the membership survey. The superb 2015 edition is no exception. She has promised a bumper Centenary edition for 2016, which will be the 10<sup>th</sup> Yearbook that she has produced. After this, Pam has indicated that she wishes to handover to another editor, so now the hunt is on for someone to come forward and take on this role so we can continue to offer a great Yearbook.

Finally, I would like to appeal for more participation from within our membership to help with manning Shows, and to take on roles within the Committee. Our large membership rightly demands a high standard in everything we do, but at present the duties fall on the shoulders of just a few. Our longstanding Yearbook Editor, Treasurer, and Events Co-ordinator have all indicated that they wish to stand down after many years of fantastic service. Each will be a hard act to follow, but it is only right that they be allowed to step down, and for others to step forward to take on these important roles. Please consider volunteering at Shows or for the Committee; you will find it immensely rewarding to meet many other enthusiasts and share knowledge about our plants.

#### **5 The Charitable Incorporated Organisation: moving forwards**

The Chairman explained that the running of the Group would be barely affected by the CIO status; there would be slightly more legal requirements, but accounting etc would remain essentially the same as before. The Constitution of the Group is now the standard one that the Charity Commissioners require, and in only two places are specific to the Group – the Objects and the Trustees. The Chairman read out the objects. The old Constitution that we had with the RHS will now become our rules, with a few slight changes to recognize the CIO and the Trustees. The Conservation officer has been added too.

The Chairman asked if there were any queries about the rules or other matters but there were none. The Trustees can now make the rules, which will be added to the web site.

#### **6 Treasurer's Report:**

The income and expenditure account, and the balance sheet for the year ended October 31<sup>st</sup> 2014 were tabled by Alastair Stevenson. He noted that there was a deficit for the year of £717, but this was largely a 'one off' as most of it was the fee to our consultant who helped us to get the CIO status. Membership income was down, but seeds sales and profit on sale of publications were up. Seed sales will decline until the Nagoya situation is clarified and resolved, however. Most costs were in line with previous years, and this should continue for the current year. Reserves stand at about £32 000, and no increase in subscriptions is needed. There will be costs associated with the Centenary events, but it is hoped that we shall get some benefit from gift aid.

Alastair, thanked Martin Gates for his help in preparing the accounts and John Harsant for examining them. On a proposal from Roger Newton with Tom Wood as seconder, the accounts were approved unanimously.

#### **7 Election of Auditors:**

The Treasurer explained that under the CIO, formal auditing is not required. However, the Trustees will require that the accounts are examined, as in previous practice, and approved by the AGM, before being submitted to the Charity Commissioners.

On a question from the floor, Alastair confirmed that there is no requirement for audit under the CIO.

**8 Group Events: Centenary Celebrations**

The Chairman gave only a very brief outline of thoughts of the sub-committee on the Centenary celebrations, as he had a series of slides to show after dinner on the subject.

There was likely to be a 4 day event, starting with a show at Wisley on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> May 2016, followed by several garden visits in the Wisley area and ending at Ramster for the AGM and a celebratory meal. The timing of the AGM and the meal was still subject to discussions. A suitable hotel in the area in which the events would be held was being selected, and further details would be sent out in the fairly near future.

On the basis of a show of hands about half the attendance at the AGM would wish to take part in the celebrations.

**9 Election of Officers for 2015/2016**

The following officers were proposed, seconded and elected unanimously:

Vice Chairmen:	Ivor Stokes
Bulletin Editor:	Peter Furneaux
Hon. Secretary:	Sally Hayward
Hon. Treasurer:	Alastair Stevenson
Hon. Membership Secretary:	Rupert Eley
Hon. Yearbook Editor and Archivist:	Pam Haywood
Hon. Events Organiser:	Judy Hallett
Webmaster:	Graham Mills
Conservation officer	Stephen Harding

The Chairman thanked Philip Evans for his long service as a vice chairman, particularly for having looked after the Group after Mike Robinson's death. He also thanked Barry Haseltine for stepping into the void after Pat Bucknell retired from the post of Honorary Secretary and for his work in obtaining the CIO status. David Millais presented Philip Evans, Barry Haseltine and Judy Hallett with rhododendron plants as a token of the Group's thanks.

**10 Any Other Business:**

Under this subject the Chairman gave a brief report on Membership numbers. Total membership stood at 634, now, compared with 658 at the same time last year. However, new members were appearing and the Chairman was most anxious to bring students more into the Group; in that regard he welcomed three students who had been assisted in attending the garden visits and the AGM and felt that doing so had been a great success.

**11 Date of Next Annual General Meeting.**

To be advised, but around 10<sup>th</sup> May 2016.

**The Meeting Closed at 3.11 p.m.**