

## Minutes of the 26<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting Chatsworth Hotel, Worthing, Sussex, BN11 3DU Saturday 28 May 2011 at 11.30am

Michael Alder, Chairman, welcomed everyone.

### 1. Message from the Plant Heritage President

As President of Plant Heritage I'm delighted to welcome you all to the 2011 AGM and Conference weekend in Worthing and hope that you will have a really enjoyable and instructive weekend. Sussex has some of the greatest gardens in England and with any luck you will have an opportunity to visit some of them during your stay.

The conservation of garden worthy plants is of immense importance to all of us and the lecture programme will give you an opportunity to learn more about some of the valuable collections held within Sussex, including the nationally important scientific collections held at Wakehurst Place Gardens.

Although Sussex gardens are perhaps best known for their fine Rhododendron collections, such as those held at Borde Hill, Wakehurst Place and Sheffield Park, the garden visits have been arranged to demonstrate the wider diversity of gardens within the county. The new formal garden at Arundel Castle was designed to reflect some of the former glories of English garden design, whereas the Sussex Prairie garden is very much a garden of the 21st century.

There are many other essential elements that contribute to the success of the annual Plant Heritage weekends including the conservation of important garden cultivars through the plant exchange scheme. But not least among the advantages of such weekends is the inspiration that comes from meeting with like minded people in convivial surroundings.

I am sorry that I cannot be with you during this weekend – it's that Chelsea Flower Show thing again! - but sincerely trust that you will all take away fond memories of your time in Worthing.

Alan Titchmarsh MBE VMH DL

### 2. Apologies for Absence

#### Group

Bucks, Berks & Oxon  
Dorset  
Grampian & Tayside  
Guernsey  
Herefordshire/Trustee

#### Member

Helen Moorcraft  
Anne Jonathan  
Sue Hewer  
Annie Fisher  
Stuart Donachie

#### Nominated Proxy

Kent	Jude Lawton	Daphne Eatwell
Norfolk	Brenda Reed	Margaret Ford
North East	Veronica Goulty	
Suffolk	Margaret Thorpe	
Somerset	Mary Sephton	
Treasurer	Nicholas Stephens	
Trustee	Sue Dawson	
Members	Margaret Owen, Pat Huff	

3. The minutes of the Twenty-fifth General Meeting held on Saturday 15 May at Longhirst Hall, Northumberland were accepted as a true record, and signed as such.
4. There were no matters arising

### 5. **Chairman's Report**

It gives me great pleasure to present my Chairman's Report at the 2011 Annual General Meeting of Plant Heritage. This year, for the first time, an annual report written by myself accompanies the annual accounts and reflects on our activity over the last financial year. I have also written about my views for the future of Plant Heritage in the Journal and, indeed, made presentations to the Board and Council on how I see the work of Plant Heritage developing.

Let me therefore start my report for this year by saying that any charity should be judged on how well it achieves its objectives. I believe we in Plant Heritage can be confident we are achieving our objectives well; that is the conservation of cultivated plants. I believe that we are only scratching the surface in the work we do and we can say with absolute certainty that there is much more we can do.

What I have been acutely aware of since I became Chairman is that we cannot expand our activities or concentrate on improving the quality of what we do without having a sound financial base. When a charity is running in deficit all the attention of the officers and trustees is focused on improving finances and the objectives of the charity take a back seat. Nevertheless, without sound finances no organisation can move forward. I am pleased that in my three years as Chair the charity has moved from recording a significant annual deficit to a break-even last year and this year to a good surplus. I hope we will continue producing a surplus and, in that way, will build up our reserves. It is however important that a charity does not hoard money. Money it has in reserves needs to be used to protect it from any future disaster, but must also be used to fund the charity's objectives. When I have spoken of the future I have spoken about where I see our finances being used. I see the need for more staff to develop our plant conservation work, to increase the number of collections and to ensure all of these are of the highest quality. I believe our Threatened Plant Project brings a focus to what we do and I would like to expand and accelerate the activities of this project. As an educationalist I also believe that we need to educate our members, our collection holders and the wider horticultural world about the importance of our work. I therefore see the need for some staff to assist in this area.

We need to look at all our activities to ensure they are appropriate; in Education now we have £100 prizes to give to successful students at three horticultural colleges.; we need to look at our publications which the Publications Committee is doing; we need to look at possible research activities; we need to always look at the efficiency of what we do.

Our current structure is one of a membership organisation. This is the one area that does give me cause for concern as our membership continues to decline. There are alternative organisational structures that do not necessarily need to involve membership as we now

know it, but I would prefer not to go down this route in the immediate future. This therefore represents a challenge for every one of us. How do we maintain and increase active members in all our counties? Therefore, there are many challenges ahead of us but I believe we can meet these and grow and improve what we do.

I must thank all our council, all our members and all our trustees for their support in running the organisation. In particular, I must thank our staff at Head Office for their hard work in all areas of what we do. My final thanks must go to you in Worthing and to your committee in Sussex who have organised yet another successful AGM. I am sure we all look forward to the rest of the weekend and, indeed, future AGMs.

## **6. Plant Conservation Officer's Report**

Whilst the National Collections have been our *raison d'être* for the last 30 years and continue to be so, in the last year we have focused on defining and evolving our conservation activities in order to make them more relevant to the gardening world of today.

Our Threatened Plants Project really got under way in September 2010 with a guarantee of three years funding of £75K from Esmee Fairbairn Trust (amongst others). The focus of this project is to assess the availability, or conversely rarity, of cultivated plants within commerce. Our starting point has been the RHS Plant Finder from which teams of volunteers have created lists, comparing plants available to buy from nurseries over the last 5+ years. There are now nearly 200 genera in the process of being listed. Once other data on availability is added to the lists, including National Collection information, the list is assessed to establish an initial "Threatened List".

By 1st May, we had approximately 50 plant groups at this stage, of which a further 20 had been moved forward to the classification of "Critically Endangered in cultivation", "Endangered in cultivation" and "Vulnerable in cultivation". These lists will be put forward for input from the relevant plant experts and I hope next year to be able to give you details of those plants for which rescue plans have been established. As you can imagine, this is an ongoing process because of the vast number of plant groups so if you would like to get involved in the first stage of the project, please get in touch.

So that is what we have done for cultivated plants, now for species plants. We have recently conducted a survey into species based conservation within the National Plant Collections. The results of the survey are detailed (and so are available on request) but what has been learnt is that in terms of ex-situ conservation (i.e. conservation outside its natural habitat)

8.8% of those who answered are actively involved in re-populating or re-introducing plants from the collections to their native habitat.

12.1% of those who answered are involved in access and benefit sharing activities

13.3% of those who answered have actually investigated the genetic make-up of the collection to see if it is sufficiently broad to be useful

58.2% of those who answered have collection data for their wild-collected material, which makes it possible to use for re-populating or re-introducing, and makes it more valuable from a research perspective

This information, along with other aspects, will form the starting point for recommendations for enhancing and promoting the conservation of species within the collections.

And finally to the Collections. The Plant Conservation Committee has instigated the 2015 Review whereby all National Collections will be reassessed against the current RHS Plant Finder (or appropriate substitute) in 2015. The review will enable the charity to reassure the public that the status of each National Plant Collection is of the same standard, especially in terms of scope, given that different assessment process have been applied over the last 30 years as the charity has evolved.

The advance notice of this review will enable the Plant Conservation Committee plenty of time to work with collection holders and provide assistance to ensure that they are up to standard.

We are very proud of the National Plant Collection scheme as there are few countries/schemes which can match our diversity and range of organisations and individuals involved and we thank all our volunteers for their commitment and dedication to their plant groups.

If I can end on a quick note, we are still interested in old plant catalogues for research and I have now created two cycle routes for those who would like to take in a Sussex National Collection on the way.

## **7. Hon. Treasurer's Report and Presentation of Accounts**

In the Treasurer's absence, the Chairman took the meeting through each page of the accounts, highlighting points as follows:

- Page 4      Contains a reminder of our charitable objectives
- Page 5      Details our achievements and performance
- Page 7      Detailed the charity's fundraising Activities; the Chairman thanked all our sponsors for their support.
- Page 13     Plant Heritage is indebted to the many volunteers who work tirelessly for the charity.
- Page 15     Is the key page in that it reports income at £454K which is £42K up on last year. Less resources were also spent (£418K vrs £422 in 2009) which resulted in a net income of £36K as opposed to the deficit of £10K in the previous year.  
  
So at the year end, the charity had approximately £506K in reserves as opposed to £470K the previous year; of which £200K was held by the Groups.
- Page 18     Note 3 – this note had been redefined in light of recommendations from the Charity Commission. It resulted in showing a reduction in Governance Costs and an increase in Charitable Expenditure.

In response to a question, donations were not significantly increased in the last year although it included the first year of the Esmee Fairbarin funding and a legacy of £15K. The Chairman expressed his thanks for the Group donations.

It was proposed that the accounts were accepted and this was agreed.

## **8. Appointment of Independent Examiner**

The reappointment of Warner Wilde Limited, 4 Marigold Drive, Bisley, Surrey, GU24 9SF was confirmed by all present.

## **9. Close of Meeting**

Michael Alder closed the meeting. An Open Forum and discussion took place, the key topics being:

- Sylvia Bennett was the winner of the 2010 National Photographic Competitions. However after 3 years, the Surrey Group (who organised the competition in memory of Rachel Thompson) had decided to cease running the photographic competition on a national level due to a lack of entries.
- How the charity could encourage more students to join – a College Membership proposal is being developed and there is also a two year Plant Heritage Prize (sponsored by Troy (Energy Consultancy) Ltd) which will be awarded in 2011 to three students from

Warwickshire College (incorporating Pershore College, Worcestershire)  
Reaseheath College (Cheshire)  
Angus College (Grampian & Tayside)

The three students selected will receive £100 each and student membership of Plant Heritage for one year.

It was recognised that the younger community tended not to join organisations, given that they seek information free of charge on social media. The Institute of Horticulture mentioned linking in with the Young Horticulturist of the Year competition.

The Education Committee were asked to look at other ideas including a student representative as a Trustee and a student conference

- More plant stories were required in order to sell the relevance of the charity to the public.
- Somerset were taking a small stand at garden centres to further people's awareness of the charity. Linda Eggins explained how the Gloucestershire, Worcestershire and Herefordshire Group produced their 3 counties specialist nurseries leaflet.

The North West Committee then gave a presentation about plans for the 2012 AGM.

A small presentation was then made to the AGM organising committee in recognition of their work. There was also a presentation to the Plant Exchange organising team – Jen McGrady and Peter Allatt - from the North East Group for their final year as organisers. The Shropshire Group, under Lloyd Kenyon, would take over the 2012 Plant Exchange.

The meeting was ended.

The next AGM will be 12 May, 2012 at the Lancaster House Hotel, Lancaster, organised by the North West Group.