

Minutes of the 25th Annual General Meeting Longhirst Hall, Morpeth 11am 15th May, 2010

Michael Alder, Chairman, welcomed everyone.

1. Message from the new Plant Heritage President

The work Plant Heritage does safeguards some of our most beautiful garden plants for future generations, and that seems to me to be just as important as cherishing our naturally occurring species. Man is often accused of spoiling the planet and desecrating the landscape. At Plant Heritage we have a chance to make a positive difference by showing that we can also enhance the beauty of our surroundings and it is a mistake to undervalue this opportunity to conserve the work of previous generations of gardeners - the only truly interactive naturalists.

Preserving our floral heritage is every bit as important as preserving da Vinci's Mona Lisa and Constable's Haywain. What's more, we can all enjoy it without having to travel to a museum. Inexpensive they may be, but that should not devalue garden plants and flowers. They are every bit as much a part of our heritage as more widely praised works of art, and it is up to us to ensure their survival.

Alan Titchmarsh MBE VMH DL

2. Apologies for Absence

<u>Group</u>	<u>Member</u>	<u>Nominated Proxy</u>
Devon	John Turner	Mike Squires
Grampian & Tayside	Sue Hewer	Katrina Clow
Ayrshire & Arran	Pat Gibbs	Etain Hagart Alexander
Kent	Jean Talboys	Jude Lawton
Shropshire	Elizabeth Bacon	Lloyd Kenyon
South East Scotland	Harriet Gash	Ross Kerby
Dorset	Anne Jonathan	
Herefordshire	Stuart Donachie	
Cheshire	Jack Swan	
North West	Catherine Penny	Alison Duff

3. The minutes of the Twenty-fourth General Meeting held on Sat 6th June 2009 at the Ramada Jarvis Hotel, Hatfield 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 2010 Annual General Meeting of Plant Heritage. Last year I announced that we were to adopt Plant Heritage as our new working title. A year later I am delighted that this title seems to be accepted by everyone and appears most appropriate for our organisation.

Before I proceed with my report, I would like to start with a note of sadness. As you are all aware, at the end of 2009 our President, Robin Compton passed on, after a long and positive life in which he gave a tremendous contribution to Horticulture and particularly to Plant Heritage. Robin Compton was our first Chairman and saw what was then the NCCPG through its early years. He then became a very supportive President. I think everyone here would acknowledge the tremendous contribution he made to our organisation. I am delighted that his son, Dr Jamie Compton, has accepted an offer to become one of our Vice Presidents. As you are aware, we had to then search for a new President. The Board of Trustees set up a Search Committee and recommended to the Board one name in particular. This received overwhelming support and so I approached Alan Titchmarsh, who I am delighted to say graciously accepted our invitation and is now the President of Plant Heritage. Our aim was to appoint someone well-known in Horticultural circles but who would also appeal to a wider audience. This I believe we have achieved.

Last year in my report I pointed out that I had only been involved with Plant Heritage for a few months and, therefore, could not expect to have achieved a great deal. I was able to pass on some observations as to what was required in Plant Heritage and to put forward some early conclusions as to what had to be done. I said that our first job was to look at our Mission and Purpose and, from that, to define our key policy drivers. Over the last 18 months we have refreshed our Strategy and Mission and we have also updated our Constitution. We are quite clear that our Mission is to concentrate on cultivated plants and especially the rare ones. To this end, our Threatened Plant Project has progressed well. I am sorry that our first employee left us, but we now have in post an excellent replacement. We are also looking critically at the quality of what we do. It is one thing to state that we have over 650 collections, it is another to say with confidence that they are all of the highest standards. By 2015 we will be ensuring that every collection meets the quality standards we would expect. I am sure you will appreciate we have some collections from our early days of existence that are of an extremely high standard, but perhaps that does not apply to all. I hope I can promise that through the work of the Plant Conservation Committee excellence will be a hallmark of all National Collections in the future.

Last year as this, I must say something about finance. Last year I said that I did not want finance to dominate our agenda, but the organisation could not exist without a sound financial base. I referred to the fact that Plant Heritage did have good reserves, but it could not continue to run these down at the rate that was happening. Last year we had to report a considerable deficit. I am delighted that this year's accounts show a marked improvement and, if we continued in this way then our existence would be guaranteed for many years to come. However, complacency is something that we cannot allow and as a result, we will continue our fund-raising efforts with great vigour. I must congratulate our Fund-raising Officer, Joanna Jones, and all at Head Office for their hard work in respect of fund-raising and, of course, the success this has generated. I trust everyone here will support fund-raising through all means possible, including legacies which give a great bonus to the organisation.

Finally in my report I would like to say some words of thanks. First to all the many volunteers we have and particularly to my fellow Trustees. Trustees have the responsibility in Charity Law for the overall strategy and financial security of the organisation. They do all the work for no financial reward and are extremely supportive. Likewise the Council, which is a much larger group, whose members come from all over the country to give advice and assist us. Whilst it is wonderful that we have so many volunteers, I have to say that the organisation would not work without the full-time staff at Head Office. As you know, our Executive Officer, Genevieve Melbourne-Webb, has been on maternity leave and we look forward to her return. However, over the last 6 months I have been extremely grateful that our Plant Conservation Officer, Mercy Morris, has stepped into the gap and done a magnificent job at Head Office together with all her fellow employees.

Finally to you our members – thank you for your support and encouragement. Members of the Board of Trustees have tried to attend AGMs and meetings of the various groups wherever possible. Membership is something that we do need to address. We have been in steady decline for a number of years and whilst our central objectives have become clearer and are being delivered better, and whilst our finances have also improved, our membership is something that still gives cause for concern. Please, all do your best to try and improve this.

My final thanks must go to Northumberland and the Plant Heritage Committee here, and all those who have particularly worked in ensuring this successful AGM. I believe the future of Plant Heritage is in good hands and we have a positive way forward. With the support of you, Trustees, employees and our new President, I believe our valued work in the conservation of cultivated plants will continue and grow over future years.

6. Plant Conservation Officer's Report

The year since the last AGM has been somewhat mixed. There have been many useful achievements:

- the very beginning of a network of international collaboration
- the continuation of the Growing Heritage Action Plan, a good example of collaboration at a national level
- agreeing the trial of dispersed collections
- getting the Threatened Plant Project off the ground

There have also been some excellent and most enjoyable events: collection holder workshops, coordinator training, talks, visits, collection holder meetings.

There are also a lot of good developments to look forward to, our new President, having a dedicated PR officer and the collections review in 2015. I am sure that all of these will be of great benefit to us, and the respect that the Plant Heritage name commands.

So far though, I have found 2010 particularly difficult, balancing the needs of the Executive Officer role and my own. Out of necessity the EO role has to come first, which means that some other things have not been done, or have been done in a hurry. It is important to remember that while we celebrate the reduction in expenditure, we must also swallow the reduction in efficiency that comes with it. Sometimes leaner means less.

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

Nicholas Stephens gave a brief overview of the results for last year. The increase in membership revenue was a result of the increase in subscription coinciding with the commencement of our financial year. The increase in Gift Aid had also made a significant contribution. While the large sums attributable to the efforts of the Fundraising Officer were fantastic, the only long term solution was to increase the number of members. He also thanked the groups for their generous donations.

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

8. Appointment of Auditors

Warner Wilde Limited, 4 Marigold Drive, Bisley, Surrey, GU24 9SF were confirmed by all present as the new auditors.

9. Close of Meeting

Michael Alder closed the meeting. An Open Forum and discussion took place.

A small presentation was then made to the AGM organising committee in recognition of their work.

The meeting was ended; next AGM: 28th May, 2011
Chatsworth Hotel, Worthing, West Sussex