

The Old Meeting House (Ditchling) Trust

Minutes of the AGM held in The Old Meeting House

Saturday 4th March 2023 – 2:00pm

Trustees Present: Martin Roberts (Chairman), Nikki Chapman (Hon. Secretary), Peter Leach (Hon. Treasurer), Duncan Voice, Philip Eckstein, Francis Clark-Lowes, Gareth Evans, Jill Clutterbuck, Melissa Mathur, David Eaton

Apologies: Nigel Porter, Delia Forester

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<p><u>Chairman's Report</u></p> <p>I am writing this report with considerable sadness in that I shall be stepping down as your Chairman after fifteen very interesting years and yet it seems that I may be leaving you with nearly as many problems as I inherited when I took over from Leslie Davidson in 2008. The difficulties in those early years were mainly associated with what had, over the course of time, become a hostile relationship between the trustees and several members of the congregation who were very strongly committed to the Unitarian Church and wished it be a self-governing body totally independent of the Old Meeting House Trust. Thankfully, after a few very tense years and a lot of hard work, the relationship between the two organisations improved considerably such that we now coexist in almost complete harmony! In the course of my time as Chairman there has been a complete and very sensitive renovation of both our seventeenth-century cottage and our eighteenth-century chapel such that we can confidently claim that they are in far better condition than they have ever been. We are also fortunate to have an excellent tenant in the cottage who seems to be committed to remaining there for the foreseeable future.</p> <p>Thankfully, our current difficulties are not associated with difficult relationships or the lack of any shared ethos but by other factors over which I have far less control. Until quite recently, I had viewed my retirement without any apprehension in the knowledge that we had trustees who would be willing and able to take over my role. It was at this embryonic stage of my succession planning that things began to go drastically wrong and several of you indicated you might be unavailable for selection. Gareth Evans, my first possibility, has recently moved to Hampshire and whilst I was delighted that he is continuing as a trustee, I presumed that taking over as chairman might be too difficult at that distance. Similarly, Philip Eckstein indicated that he would be spending much of his time in North Wales which would not be ideal for a leadership role. However, not all was lost until I spoke to Melissa Mathur last week and she told me that she felt unable to be our chairman at the present time because of the many other pressures in her life. She remains committed to the OMH Trust and hopes to be able to play a more active role in the future.</p> <p>Finding a chairman has recently posed a difficulty for both the Ditchling Society and the Ditchling Museum Friends' Association such that both organisations have recently agreed that the role should be shared between two people.</p> <p>At this stage of my deliberations Philip arrived for a pre-arranged chat about the future of the OMH Trust. When I mentioned the leadership solution adopted by other local organisations, he was immediately interested and stated his wish to become involved in a similar way. On enquiry as to who might be his co-chairman, his immediate response was Gareth. He said he would ring him and let me know his reaction as soon as possible. It was, therefore, very gratifying when Gareth responded positively and left me with what I hope will be the simple task of gaining the support of our fellow trustees for this joint appointment. My prediction is that everyone will be delighted to see the leadership placed in the capable hands of two very competent and greatly respected colleagues.</p>	

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<p>We are extremely fortunate to have Nikki Chapman as our very efficient Hon. Secretary and Peter Leach as our similarly capable Hon. Treasurer and, thankfully, neither of them has expressed any desire to stand down! Another great stalwart in recent times has been the Rev. Duncan Voice who, in the difficult circumstances of Covid and, following the extremely distressing death of Brian Clutterbuck, has worked extremely hard and effectively to maintain the profile of the Unitarian Congregation.</p> <p>You will doubtless be aware that the minutes of our meetings are kept as an accurate record of the people and events associated with the Old Meeting House Trust. Brian Clutterbuck was such a significant person to all of us that I would like the eulogy written for his memorial service to be included in my final report to the Trustees. I have, of course, discussed the matter with Jill and she was happy to give her consent.</p> <p>Looking back on my forty-six years in Ditchling I cannot think of any local person who, in his or her various roles, has made such a significant contribution to the welfare of this village and its residents.</p> <p>When I was appointed as Chairman of the Old Meeting House Trustees in 2008, Brian had already been the Hon. Treasurer for several years. His wisdom and support were always of great comfort to me, especially in those early days, when we worked together to improve the rather tenuous relationship that had long existed between the Trustees and the Unitarian Congregation. In 2014, Brian became the Chairman of the Congregation, and he flourished in this role for the next eight years, while also continuing as Hon. Treasurer of the OMH Trustees. These were happy and relatively stress-free times for us both!</p> <p>It has been quite difficult to write this celebration of Brian's life without it becoming a long and, possibly, quite tedious list of his many achievements. However, I will continue and, may even surprise a few of you who might otherwise have remained unaware of some of his good deeds!</p> <p>He had two major responsibilities which were at the centre of village life, one as Chairman of the Ditchling Association and the other when he was, for many years, the Chairman of the Parish Council. It was under his watch that the Ditchling Association introduced their very popular coffee mornings in the village hall on the third Tuesday of each month and another of his innovations was the annual Christmas Dinner for senior citizens which is also held in the Village Hall. Somehow, he also found time to be a Governor at the village school and, at one time, many years ago he helped at Ditchling Museum by completing the documentation to reclaim the tax on Gift Aid donations.</p> <p>More recently he was actively involved with Tom Dufty and several others in the commissioning of a memorial plaque that was mounted in West Street to celebrate Ditchling's inclusion in the South Downs National Park.</p> <p>In each of his different roles he would have been well-served by his professional training and experience in banking, his calm personality, a bright intellect and the tact and discretion required to deal with contentious issues.</p> <p>His contribution to our village has been immense and I very much hope that our memories of him will live on for many years to come.</p> <p>I will retire from the trustees of the Old Meeting House encouraged by the recent developments and in the knowledge that there is a strong group of colleagues who will remain committed to the cause of both the OMH Trust and the Unitarian Congregation.</p> <p>Martin Roberts</p>	

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<p><u>Treasurer's Report</u></p> <p>Headline figures</p> <p>We closed our finance year on December 31st 2022 with a bank balance of £36, 938. The balance at the same time last year on 31st December 2021 was £25,454 – an increase of £11,485.</p> <p>Total income for 2022 was £26,872 against expenditure of £15,387.</p> <p>The year 2022 year saw things beginning to get back to some normality and business as usual.</p> <p>The bulk of the costs of refurbishment of the cottage were settled in 2021, although there was still some further work carried out to complete the process with associated expenses amounting to approximately £11,000.</p> <p>However, with the lion's share of refurbishment costs behind us, we were able to grow our bank balance in 2022. This was largely down to a regular rental income from the cottage, £1400 a month (totalling £ 16,800 per annum), and from donations totalling £4,450 and Gift Aid of £3,502.</p> <p>It will obviously take some time for us to build up our reserves again after the heavy expenditure of 2021, when we cashed in our investments to cover the costs of the work on the cottage.</p> <p>Hopefully, in the next few years, assuming no surprise costs come our way, we will be able to continue to grow our funds. Whilst we are guaranteed the rental income from the cottage, it would be beneficial to generate further income from donations.</p> <p>Lorna Hemsley has very kindly given her time to examine our books for 2022.</p> <p>I have provided you with a copy of our Finance Statement for 2022 and Lorna's report. These will be forwarded to the HMRC Charity Commission in due course.</p> <p>Peter Leach</p> <p>Melissa proposed adopting the financial report, Francis seconded.</p> <p>Melissa suggested giving Lorna a bunch of flowers as a thank you, this was agreed and Peter will arrange.</p>	<p>PL</p>
<p><u>Unitarian Report</u></p> <p>Ditchling Unitarians now gather twice a month for worship at The Old Meeting House. This change from weekly meetings is because of a shortage of Ministers and service leaders. Currently I lead at least one Service a month, and the remainder are covered by visiting service leaders. Attendance at Services has returned to around what it was, prior to the pandemic. Sadly, we lost our chairman Brian Clutterbuck last October. He served the congregation, and the Old Meeting House Trust, for many years and is of course greatly missed. Philip Eckstein has been acting as chairman in the meantime, and we are very grateful to him for his efforts. A new chairperson is being sought.</p>	

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<p>We continue to engage with the wider community in a variety of ways. The meeting house is used by community groups, and we have been supporting the foodbank in Burgess Hill through donations and fund raising. We have been represented at the village newcomers' event and the summer fair. We also hosted a charity concert called Folk in the Fall featuring local musicians and our friend Stuart Coupe from Billingshurst, which was a lovely occasion. Our annual summertime "Butterfly Service" returned in 2022 and was a great success. The Service is a celebration of the Old Meeting House, its congregation and its long history. We were pleased to be able to welcome friends from other congregations, and enjoyed tea in the church gardens on a glorious summer's day. How lucky we were!</p> <p>Our monthly meditation group continues to meet and we are also pleased that our Monday Meeting will be starting again in April this year. The meeting caters for older members of the community and involves a talk followed by a hot drink and some cake. It was popular before the pandemic and we hope it will be so again.</p> <p>We are grateful to our District, and Paul Taylor, for helping us to develop a new website. We think it looks good and that the information people need is now easier to find. We hope that it may lead to more bookings and more events such as weddings. Currently, we have one wedding booked in July.</p> <p>We aspire to return to weekly Services once again, but don't anticipate this will happen in the near future. However, we will continue trying to do some good in the world, whilst creating inclusive, free-thinking, caring, spiritual community here in Ditchling. At our congregational AGM we look forward to welcoming two new members. We hope that this will be the beginning of new period of growth for the congregation.</p> <p>Rev. Duncan Voice</p>	
<p><u>Building Report & Quinquennial Review</u></p> <p>This is something for discussion at the next meeting.</p> <p>David Grey performed the review last time, with the benefit that he and Pam know the buildings well. However, having completed the building work on the cottage, Melissa suggested that perhaps an independent person should be selected. The review may be a necessary requirement for the insurance.</p> <p>Martin suggested that a list of recommended tradespeople should be compiled.</p>	
<p><u>Trustee Tenure and Intentions</u></p> <p><u>Election of Officers</u></p> <p>Chairman – Phillip and Gareth were nominated by Jill and seconded by Nikki</p> <p>The two new chairmen both have signatory rights.</p> <p>Hon. Treasurer – Peter was nominated by Gareth, Melissa seconded.</p> <p>Hon. Secretary – Nikki was nominated by Martin, Duncan seconded.</p>	

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<p><u>Any Other Business</u></p> <p>Melissa has met with Liz, the gardener, regarding ongoing garden work. They are working on a plan to make the garden look good all year around.</p> <p>Problem areas identified</p> <p>A self-seeded field maple to the lefthand side of the building is starting to push over the gravestones. It was agreed that the field maple should be removed. Martin suggested getting in touch with Robert Symes from East Chilton, as he has carried out previous tree surgery.</p> <p>The yew trees at the entrance are causing ongoing damage to the wall and gate and it has been suggested that they be reduced in height to 6 or 8ft. Two new yews could then be planted further back from the gate, with the front trees eventually being removed. Melissa is to make enquiries about the feasibility of this.</p> <p>The climbing roses may need a terrace and Liz has noticed that masonry bees have made several holes, which may necessitate repointing the cottage at some stage. It has been suggested that a separate habitat be created for the bees.</p> <p>At the back of the Brown plot opposite the OMH, the bay tree has grown quite large despite being cut back and the stability of the wall may need to be checked. It may be necessary to completely remove the bay tree. There is also a self-seeded bay on the other side, which should be removed. David has offered to help Liz with this.</p> <p>Liz would like to paint the shed a flint grey so that it blends in more. Liz has offered to purchase some samples for the trustees to review and paint patches on the back of the shed.</p> <p>Other suggestions</p> <p>Many of the shrubs in the garden have become rather large and are therefore difficult to maintain. It has suggested taking them down to 4 or 5ft in height to make them more manageable.</p> <p>The garden of remembrance needs some work and empty pots need to be removed.</p> <p>An annual budget of £60 has been approved by the trustees for plant purchases.</p> <p>Melissa will supervise the gardening with David assisting Liz when possible.</p> <p>Peter to pay the Monday Meeting Group £200 as approved at the last AGM.</p> <p>Philip needs a second signatory when making payments on CAF and Melissa volunteered. Philip to set this up and will send Melissa all the details.</p>	<p>MM</p> <p>DE</p> <p>PL</p> <p>PE</p>
<p><u>Provisional Date of Next Meeting</u></p> <p>7th October 2pm next meeting provisional date.</p> <p>The meeting closed at 2:56pm</p>	

Signed:

Date:

Old Meeting House Cottage and

Statement of Income & Expenditure

Year Ending 31 De

<u>Income</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>2021</u>
Rent	16800.00	4200.00
Interest CAF ac	128.98	5.11
Congregation Contribution	1500.00	1500.00
Sale of Investments	0.00	55751.44
Donations	4450.00	14025.00
Interment/Plot Charges	415.21	0.00
GoR	3578.37	0.00
 Total Receipts	<hr/> 26872.56	<hr/> 75481.55
 (Deficit)/Surplus for Year		

26872.56	75481.55
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Closing Balances

Bank CAF ac	1.00
Bank CAF Gold ac	36,937.73

36,938.73

Chapel

December 2022

<u>Expenditure</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>2021</u>
Insurance	1425.27	1267.30
Repairs/Maintenance Cottage	1404.40	0.00
Gardener	985.00	1360.00
Fire Protection	220.80	0.00
OMH/Cottage Valuation	0.00	240.00
Bank Charges	81.00	96.00
Architect Fees	2070.00	4800.00
Cottage Refurb	8954.98	79632.33
Sundry Expenses	245.92	0.00
Council Tax	0.00	761.71
Total Expenditure	<u>15,387.37</u>	<u>88,157.34</u>
	11,485.19	-12,675.79

26,872.56	75,481.55
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Opening Balances

Bank CAF ac	1.00
Bank CAF Gold ac	25,453.54
Surplus/(deficit) for year	11,485.19

36,939.73

The Old Meeting House (Ditchling) Trust
Independent Examiner's Report to the Trustees of the Old Meeting House (Ditchling) Trust
Charity Number 1127536

I report to the trustees on my examination of the accounts of the Old Meeting House (Ditchling) Trust ("the Trust") for the year ended 31st December, 2022.

Responsibilities and basis of report

As the charity trustees of the Trust, you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ("the Act").

I report in respect of my examination of the Trust's accounts carried out under section 145 of the Act and in carrying out my examination I have followed all the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

Independent examiner's statement

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination giving me cause to believe that in any material respect:

1. accounting records were not kept in respect of the Trust as required by section 130 of the Act; or
2. the accounts do not accord with those records

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Signed

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Date:

L. A. Hemsley
Aspin, Farm Lane