

Friends of the Flitch Way and Associated Woodlands

Notes from Annual General Meeting

Venue: Discovery Centre, Great Notley Country Park

Date: Friday, 2nd May 2014

Attendees: See footnote.

Guest Speaker: Charlie Pitcher

Chairman began the meeting by welcoming everybody to the tenth AGM of the Friends and confirming that all had a copy of the agenda and the accounts.

A welcome was also offered to Charlie Pitcher, the speaker for the evening, who proceeded to give a talk and slide show on his epic and amazing single handed rows across the Atlantic, breaking the record for such journeys on each occasion. The presentation was enjoyed by all. Charlie thanked everyone for the donation and collection which raised over £80 on behalf of his chosen charity, C Group, which supports Royal Marines in need.

A short break for refreshments was taken which gave the opportunity for Charlie to speak to members. Following the break, Stan referred to the agenda and the purpose of the meeting.

1. To accept the minutes of the 2013 Annual General Meeting.

Stan confirmed that everybody had received a copy of the minutes. No proposed changes or comments were put forward. Acceptance of the minutes was proposed by Carl Blamire and seconded by Malcolm Allard. Members voted in favour of the proposal.

2. Chairman's report.

Stan introduced current officers and committee members.

Before getting the meeting proper underway, Stan mentioned that apologies for non-attendance had been received from Jim Cloke who was one of the Friends' original volunteers and he had been the prime mover in the project to bring back the railway heritage of the Flitch Way. Jim was unwell and the meeting joined with the Chairman in wishing him a speedy recovery.

Stan said that there were many people to thank on behalf of himself and the committee and although self praise wasn't always a recommendation, a bit of deserved recognition from time to time did no harm at all. 2014 was the group's tenth year of volunteering and many of those who had been involved at the start were still going strong and that was something worthy of praise. Everybody who volunteered in whatever capacity and was a part of our Friends group deserved recognition and were thanked accordingly.

2014 had been an exciting and sometimes stressful year, dominated by the acquisition and delivery of the railway carriage and more would be said on that subject later in the meeting.

Other things had also been happening during the year. A number of talks and slide shows on the Flitch Way and the Friends had been given to a variety of groups such as U3A, Women's Institute and Braintree Outdoor Pursuits Club. The talks raised awareness of what we did and also raised funds for the charity's work. Stan asked members to let him know if they knew of any groups or organizations who would be interested in hearing the talk. After talking about it for almost as long as the Friends has existed, we finally got around to issuing a bi-monthly newsletter to keep members informed of what was happening within the group and it was hoped that it was being found informative and useful. The second newsletter had been sent out in the previous two weeks and although some IT problems had arisen, it was hoped that everybody had received it. Hard copies were available for anyone who had not. Suggestions for what people would like to see in the newsletter would be welcomed, the meeting was told.

Stan said that we continued to seek funding from outside agencies to cover the costs of what we were doing, mainly involving the carriage at the moment. Chairman and Treasurer had recently

attended a ceremony to receive a cheque and award for £2,000 from Essex Millenium Fund, one of several charitable funds at Essex County Council, managed by Essex Community Foundation. The award certificate will be added to our collection and displayed in the carriage in due course. Stan added that, contrary to an article in the Dunmow Broadcast, the cheque was for £2,000 and not £3,000 as reported.

A report on what was happening with the carriage would be given at agenda item 6, Stan said, but he gave members some background to the project. Sufficient Grant funding having been obtained, a suitable carriage was visited in Hampshire and deemed suitable and planning approval was given by Braintree District Council. The carriage was paid for and a specialist haulage company engaged to deliver and install it at Rayne Station. Much preparatory work needed to be done at the Station before the carriage arrived, not least our having to lend tools and offer technical advice to the haulage company's experts on installing the track. The strenuous work done by all the volunteers to get the site ready was much appreciated, Stan said, as was the essential work done by Tom and Duncan during that work. Tom's advice and support before and during delivery played a big part in the success of the whole process. Several hiccups with delivery cancellations cropped up but the great day arrived and it was a relief to everyone when the carriage was eventually offloaded and winched into place. Although Pete Lane was unable to be at the AGM, he was thanked for his input into the project in arranging for power to be laid on. Pete continues to handle the legal side of agreeing the lease with ECC Legal Services and which has yet to be finalised. A temporary lease is currently in place, the meeting was informed.

3. Treasurer's report.

Margaret referred to the copy accounts which had been distributed before the meeting and which showed an end of year credit balance of £6,171.67. Although our income was overspent by £15,800 during the year, that was offset by the grants received in the previous year and carried forward. Margaret said that she had more detailed information available if anybody wished to see it. It had been a good year for donations which were £500 up on 2012-13 and membership subscriptions also showed an increase. £48 was received through Gift Aid and Margaret asked anybody who qualified but had not completed a Gift Aid form to see her after the meeting. Members were advised that because heating and lighting were now available in the carriage, a monthly direct debit had been set up with the provider to cover electricity costs. As a Charity, we are exempt from VAT on the cost of electricity.

Stan said that in any organization, the work done behind the scenes helps keep the organization going. He thanked Margaret for all the work she had done during the year which has been busier than usual due to the number of transactions connected to the carriage. There were no questions of the Treasurer and the accounts were accepted as a true record accordingly, the proposal being made by Andrew Adair and seconded by Val Blamire.

4. Secretary's report.

Wendy said that 75 Flitch Way work parties had taken place during the year which equated to 706 volunteer days. Secretary listed the numerous sites where work had taken place, including several visits to Danbury Country Park. A number of new volunteers had joined during the year and Wendy thanked everybody for the hard work which had been put in. Tom and all the Rangers were also thanked for their support and guidance. Members were referred to the 'Hall of Fame' which she had prepared and which showed the names of 139 people who had volunteered since we began in 2004. 58 of the people listed either still regularly volunteer or have retained their membership of the Friends charity.

Stan said that he had already mentioned the work done behind the scenes and those comments applied to nobody more than Wendy who does a tremendous amount of work on behalf of the Friends, keeping us organized and on the straight and narrow. The Friends were very fortunate to have such a capable person as our secretary.

There were no questions of the secretary.

5. Report on the Parish Paths Partnership (P3)

Stan said that although Pete and Ann were unable to attend the AGM, Pete had left him with a

report on the year's activities. The list which had been provided showed 47 work parties to have taken place at 15 different sites involving a variety of tasks. Stan proceeded to read Pete's report, as follows:

We have had another good year with plenty of work across the County. We have a new overseer at County, Rob Venables, who liaises with the Public Rights of Way Team to find work for us to do. We still get requests from Adam etc but it all has to go through Rob. There were a few rocky moments at the start when work seemed to be drying up and materials not getting delivered but that has now been sorted out. Apart from budget restraints at the end of the financial year, we now seem to be back to normal.

We have had several major tasks to carry out, one being a long footpath at Heronsgate, Brentwood which had become totally blocked with the usual blackthorn, bramble and trees. Our dedicated team tackled the task with loppers, saws, hedge trimmers and brush cutters. We made many visits there and managed to open up the path and install a 3 plank bridge over a fast flowing stream.

Another interesting job was near Leez Priory where Adam had found a footpath which had been blocked and people were walking off the definitive line. Adam had many meetings with the landowner who was none too happy with the path being put back on the correct line. Again, the path was totally blocked by bramble and blackthorn but after several visits, the path was re-opened, the unofficial one blocked off and signage put in to show the correct line to follow.

We also had a selection of jobs to do on the Fennes Estate at Bocking including clearing footpaths, way marking, putting in steps and a handrail and installing a 4.5 metre bridge to replace a dangerous one. After our work there, we were sent a donation of £100 by the owners of the estate to thank us for the work we had done which was a lovely gesture.

Our latest task has been to cut back overhanging vegetation along a byway at High Roding. This had been highlighted by the Essex Bridleway Association and we were asked whether we wanted to do the work. Although it seemed like a fairly minor job, there was more to clear than we thought and we have had several visits with a bonfire on each occasion to dispose of the cleared vegetation.

Several days have been spent at Ashdon near Saffron Walden carrying out clearance, way marking and bridge installation.

We were asked to consider a job behind the travellers' site at Felsted and I made a site visit with the PROW officer. The required job was to replace handrails on a bridge but it was decided that the job would be done by contractors which showed that we don't always get the work proposed. Our next big task is at Good Easter with 9 bridges to install, 15 way marker posts, 3 steps and, as always, clearance of vegetation.

Generally our team consists of 6-10 people. Many of the tasks which the P3 team get involved with only require a small number of volunteers but some do require a much larger group of people. We are always on the lookout for new volunteers for the Wednesday P3 work parties and were lucky in getting a new volunteer, Alan, to join us this year.

Thanks to the team for their hard work and tolerance of some of the tricky jobs we have had. Thanks also to Rob for ensuring we get the work and the necessary materials.

Stan echoed Pete's thanks and invited Rob Venables to say a few words which he did, thanking Pete and all the P3 volunteers for the work which had been done during the year. Stan said that Pete's report showed the work to entail a lot of planning and organization on the part of he and Ann and the committee's thanks were given for that and for enhancing the reputation of the Friends. Stan encouraged anybody who would like to get involved with P3 work parties to contact Pete.

6. Update on the carriage project.

Stan thought that most of the members present would know Gordon Cameron who joined the Friends at the time the carriage arrived. Stan said that he was very pleased when Gordon agreed to take on the role of project co-ordinator for the refurbishment of the carriage, to which he has brought a wealth of experience and expertise. He invited Gordon, therefore, to update members with what was happening currently.

Gordon said that most of what had been happening had been described in the recent newsletter

but he thanked those people who had been helping so far, including John West and Bryan Render. All the paint for the interior and exterior has now been purchased and the installation of fittings inside the museum area was proceeding at a good pace. Making good the exterior bodywork was the next big task followed by painting the interior and exterior, including the roof. Potential health and safety issues in undertaking the work had been identified and were referred to by Gordon. Carriage windows were also in need of cleaning to remove years of dirt accumulated while it was in service.

The response to a recent request for volunteer assistance on cleaning the inside had been disappointing, Gordon said, and he added that it was essential that people stepped forward to help with the big jobs to come. Carl Blamire suggested that people were more likely to respond if they knew what jobs they were expected to do and when they needed to be done. Members, and Gordon, agreed and he will liaise with Wendy and Pam to get something out to the volunteers detailing that information. Gordon added that he was usually at the carriage on Tuesday and Thursday but he was flexible as to volunteers' preferred days if others were suggested. Stan repeated that our group was very fortunate to have Gordon on our side and suggested that we would have been a long way behind the current position without his drive and enthusiasm.

7. Rangers' report.

On behalf of Steve Bunn, himself and the other Rangers, Tom gave thanks to the Friends for all the work that had been done during the year and he recalled his first day as a Ranger in August 2004 to have co-incided with the start of the Friends.

With regard to a work programme, Tom said that there would be one work party a week until the end of the summer which would be mainly light cutting back of overgrown vegetation along the track. Some work at Great Notley was also likely to be needed, as would work around Rayne Station where he was proposing to spray weeds. Tom had previously said that the diverted footpath alongside the carriage would be finished off and materials provided to make a hard edging.

Tom commented that much good work had been done since the Friends first started, mentioning the sourcing of funds which had enabled a variety of projects to be undertaken. These included the purchase of the wood processor and chipper, the re-instatement of the Halts and, of course, the purchase and refurbishment of the carriage. Of the benches bought and put in place along the track, Tom said that only two remained.

In answer to a question from Carl, Tom confirmed that areas previously cleared on work parties would be flailed to slow down re-growth of blackthorn and the like.

John asked what plans there were to install the new signs along the track which he understood had been agreed. Tom said that Richard would shortly be constructing the frames etc for the signs at Weald. He agreed the suggestion that installation was a job the Friends would be able to do during the summer.

Stan thanked all the Rangers, particularly Tom, for their support.

8. Members' resolutions.

Wendy said that none had been received.

9. Election of Officers and Committee members.

Stan explained that our Constitution required all officers and committee members to stand down at the end of each year and for a whole new team to be elected for the new year. The Constitution also stated that the Chairman had to stand down after serving 3 consecutive years and 2013-14 had been his third year, the meeting was told. Wendy confirmed that there had been no nominations for a new Chairman.

Stan said that members could vote to change the current 3 year tenure of the chairman if they wished to do so but while he was prepared to stand for another year, he didn't believe it right for someone to hold the post of Chairman permanently. It was proposed, therefore, that paragraph 7 be changed from 3 years to 5. A unanimous vote in favour was made by the members present. Stan said that Margaret and Wendy had agreed to continue as Treasurer and Secretary respectively and while Bob Lucas and John Moss were happy to continue serving as committee members, Andrew Bloomfield had decided to step down to give somebody else the opportunity to

get involved with the management of the Charity. Stan thanked Andrew for having served as a committee member almost since our charity was formed. Nominations had been received for Val Blamire and Gordon Cameron to come onto the Committee, members were told. There were no other nominations from the floor.

Stan asked for members' approval, therefore, for Stan as Chairman, Margaret as Treasurer, Wendy as Secretary and Bob, John, Val and Gordon as Committee members for 2014-15. A unanimous vote in favour was made.

10. Social events for the coming year.

Stan thanked Margaret for organising the river cruise and the Christmas lunch in 2013, both events having been enjoyed by all.

The venue and food having been so good, Wildens Restaurant at Bocking Village Hall had already been booked for Christmas 2014, Margaret said, the date being Tuesday 16th December. A couple of other ideas were up for consideration, Margaret said, one being a visit to the site of a Roman villa and Victorian farm in Halstead which could take place in June or July. Another was an evening trip to Romford Dogs, to include a meal, which would cost around £28 per head. Margaret will e-mail members to ask for numbers of those interested. Any other suggestions for outings would be welcomed.

11. Any other business.

John thanked members for bringing cakes for the AGM. He also thanked Lesley Gillman for bringing sweets and biscuits for the volunteers to have when on work parties.

Val commented on the Tour de France cycle race which will pass Rayne Station and the carriage on Monday July 7th. The matter will be discussed at the first Committee meeting.

Stan said that it had already been mentioned that 2004 was the Friends' tenth year. It was also worth mentioning that July 2014 would see the 50th wedding anniversary of Wendy and John and the congratulations of everybody present was offered to them.

Bringing the meeting to a close, Stan thanked everyone for coming and he looked forward to another satisfying and productive year to come. Understandably, a lot of effort is being put into getting the carriage fit for purpose and we will continue to rely on volunteers to look after it once everything is finished. Stan concluded by saying that we needed to be careful not to neglect work on the Flich Way which, after all, was the main reason the charity was formed and why we got involved in the first place.

Attendees (in alphabetical order)

Andrew Adair	Stan Davies *	Bob Lucas *
Brenda Allard	Angela Fuller	Sue Lucas
Malcolm Allard	Mike Fuller	Pam Maskell
Carl Blamire	Lesley Gillman	John Moss *
Val Blamire *	Gordon Glanfield	Wendy Moss *
Andrew Bloomfield	Tom Hamilton **	Lorraine Rayner
Alan Bridges	Keith Hind	Michael Scade
Gordon Cameron *	Dick Hughes	Rob Venables (PROW)
Betty Cottis	Pat Hughes	John West
Derek Cottis	Margaret James *	

* Committee member

** Country Park Ranger

Apologies received from

Pauline Brenner	Ann Lane	Frank Rogers
Jim Cloke	Pete Lane	Malcolm Seabrook
Sid James	Martyn Phillips	Carol Vinton
Gloria Joslin	Sandra Reynolds	