

Cotswold Flyfishers Ltd

Minutes of the 2023 Annual General Meeting

Held on 7-30pm on Monday 13th November 2023 at Witney Lakes

Present

Directors

Richard Knowles - Chairman, Paul Coomber - Treasurer, Paul Madden – Secretary.

Management Committee

David Reinger (vice-President), Andy Killingbeck (Fisheries Officer), Mark Purvis (River Secretary), Trevor Cramphorn, Dave Whittles (Web Officer), Andrew Wingfield-Digby, Tony Bostock, Graham Rutson, Vaughan Lewis

Apologies were received from Adrian Delnevo

Members

Guy Jordan, Duncan Young, Deborah Guy, Joanna Knight, David Shepherd-Cross, Paul Barnett, Robin Couling, Jonathan Pearce, Martin Cooper, Jim Biles, Terry Stacey, Barrie Hoban, Roger Chitty, Stephen Ackroyd, Ray Barlow, Tony Singleton, Richard Maybery, Robert Hawes, Mark Tickner, Peter Doble, Paul Bickell, Nigel Wearden, Joshua Wingfield-Digby, Andrew Wingfield-Digby, John West, Dudley Brewer, John Pratt, Tim Clark, Nick Hindley, Peter Bartrip, Graham James, Jeremy Salmon, John Dean, Charle Monroe, Simon Wilmott, Jan Phillips.

Apologies received from: James Bennett, Jason Yarrow, Rick Lilley, Chris Warne, Stephen Jacques, Alan Smith, Chris Milford, Jeremy Bennett, Doug Yarrow, Michael Scott, Jerome Braud, David McRobert, David Cranston, Philip Janaway, Andrew Harvey, William Smith, Nicholas Bell, Mark Phillips, Paolo Tamaro, Mark Chatterton, Simon Fowler, Harri Harrison, Clive Sawbridge, Dennis Boreham.

1. Minutes of the 2022 AGM and Matters Arising.

There were no matters arising. The minutes were agreed by a show of hands.

2. Chairman's Report

The Chairman's report had been circulated in the papers for the meeting.

3. Treasurer's Report:

The Treasurer's report had been circulated in the papers for the meeting, together with a summary of the accounts which had now been audited and approved by Whitley Stimpson.

The Treasurer surveyed the recent history of the Club's income and expenditure. He drew attention to the fact that the membership had grown during the covid period and this had enable the Club to significantly expand its portfolio of waters – in particular the Chalkstream Fisheries. However, the number of paying members had fallen by 14 between 2022 and 2023 and, given the ongoing squeeze on family incomes, it would be unwise to expect it to grow back in the coming year though every effort should be made to achieve this. In view of this, he recommended that the Club's fees should remain unchanged in 2024, whilst the existing portfolio of waters is retained. The Land Rover replacement was a looming commitment, but the reserves of over £200K should provide a sufficient buffer.

4. Secretary's Report

A breakdown of the current membership into the various categories had been provided in the papers for the meeting. In short, the Waiting-List (as of November 8th) for membership in 2024 has 50 names, including 17 Dormant members; even if all were to take up membership, this would not cover the number of resignations we had from 2022 to 2023. Efforts were being made to attract new members and to uncover the reasons why members are leaving to see if there are changes in what the Club offers to help retention.

The Rural Crime Unit of the Gloucestershire Police was being expanded and improved communications with it had been established in the hope of seeing a more responsive approach to report of fishing-related crime. It was commented that the fundamental crime was theft of the right to fish, as well as fish theft itself.

A call to the members to put themselves forward for membership of the Committee had elicited a good response and led to the proposal to expand the Committee as detailed below.

5. River Secretary's Report

Mark Purvis' paper for the meeting had described the progress of the season on our waters. The season had started slowly, due to high rivers and poor weather, but the mayfly hatch had been sustained well into June and good fishing had been had into July and August. There had been an improvement in the appearance of many of the rivers during the summer months, due to the high rainfall, but he cautioned that the level of pollution remained high.

The high take-up of the bookable fisheries was noted and the continued improvement in the online booking system for the Coln had greatly reduced the effort involved in arrangement of fishing on those waters. All in all, 450 visits to the River Coln were booked by 169 members. David Reinger and Richard Knowles were thanked for their hard work administering the bookings on the Kennet and Test. There was further discussion of booking systems in the Open Forum.

Every effort was being made to secure all the same beats for next year. The only change agreed so far is to resume exclusive access to Barton Court for 6 rods on Thursdays.

Mark drew attention to the continued successes of the fisheries team in maintaining the waters (also highlighted later in the meeting) and, in particular, to the efforts of Andy Killingbeck for organizing the team's work and for his behind the scenes work to maintain the equipment. The meeting thanked Andy with a spontaneous round of applause.

A member asked if something could be done to improve the habitat on the North Cerney stretch of the Churn, where the banks are open and unfenced allowing access of cattle to the water and the attendant problems. Mark said that the Bathurst Estate had been contacted on numerous occasions about this and they had promised to see it remedied. However, progress would depend on convincing the grazier on the water about his legal responsibilities.

6. Catch Returns

Tony Bostock presented interim Catch Returns. Returns had so far been received from 191 members, which is disappointing from a total membership of nearly 280. A further effort would be needed to get a more complete picture prior to the completion of the final report, which would be circulated in due course. It was noticeable that the number of returns for the bookable fisheries and Salford was substantially lower than number of days booked, and this would be followed up.

Tony commented that it isn't hard to see the decline in numbers of grayling on our waters, mirroring the widespread decline in the S of England. On the Kennet 1 was grayling was caught at Axford, 1 at Barton Court and only 6 at Denford. On the Coln 2 were caught at Dudgrove, 0 at Whelford, 0 at Williamstrip, 1 on Williamstrip Broadwater and only 5 at Bibury Court, 6 at the Bull, 11 at ECT. A more cheery 43 were caught at Broadlands (though decline on parts of the Test is also evident), **but 23 were caught in the Windrush at Sherborne** the only site where 2023 numbers were as good as 2022. Now while we can never draw firm conclusions from 1 year's catch returns this interesting result must be set alongside the decline to zilch in grayling numbers at Newbridge (upstream of Sherborne) once upon a time the best site for grayling along the whole river. I therefore dare to suggest that results at Sherborne are not unrelated to the stocking of small grayling in the Sherborne

Brook a few years ago which was part of the Cotswold Rivers Trust/CFF grayling project.

The importance of Cornbury Lakes to members is clear from the large numbers fishing there– especially during the early months of the season when the rivers can be slow. There was further discussion on stocking in the Open Forum.

Tony was thanked with a warm round of applause for the considerable effort he puts in to consolidate the report and to present it in such an informative way.

7. Resolutions: it was agreed on shows of hands that:

- (a) Whitley Stimpson be appointed as auditors for 2024 (proposed by Jonathan Pearce and seconded by Mark Purvis).
- (b) The Constitution be changed to allow for 20 members of the Management Committee, rather than 17 (proposed by David Reinger, seconded by John Pratt).
- (c) The dates of the membership year in the Constitution be changed to 1st March to last day of February (proposed by Dave Whittles, seconded by Trevor Cramphorn).
- (d) The subscription for the 2024 season be set at £660 for full membership, £440 for senior membership, £495 for cadet 1 membership and £330 for cadet 2 membership, £550 for overseas membership and £165 for dormant membership. The Registration Fee should be £187. *Proposed by the Treasurer and seconded by the Secretary.*
- (e) The following be appointed as Directors of Cotswold Flyfishers Ltd.
Chairman – Richard Knowles; Treasurer – Paul Coomber; Secretary – Paul Madden (proposed by Graham Rutson and seconded by David Reinger).
- (f) That the Club Officers be appointed as follows and receive free membership and the appropriate honoraria as specified in the papers for the meeting:
Chair – Richard Knowles
Vice-Chair and Returns Officer– Tony Bostock
Secretary – Paul Madden
Treasurer – Paul Coomber
River Secretary – Mark Purvis
Web Officer – Dave Whittles
AFOs - David Reinger, Graham Rutson, Tony Bostock, Mark Purvis.
Fishery Officer and Safety Officer– Andy Killingbeck
Maintenance Officer – Robin Miller
Environmental Consultant - Vaughan Lewis

Fisheries Team Members (to be confirmed in January): Andrew Fullerton, David Furness, Dave Whittles, Peter Doble, Mark Phillips and Duncan Young.

Additional Committee Members: Trevor Cramphorn, Andrew Wingfield-Digby, Adrian Delnevo, Jonathan Pearce, Simon Fowler, Jan Phillips, Tim Clark, Angus Griffiths, Paul King.

The following Honorary Members receive a free subscription in 2024: Trevor Cramphorn, Hugh Ellis-Rees, Reg Keen, John Marks (President), David Reinger (*vice-President*), Stephen Payne, R Williams, Dennis Boreham.

7. Open Forum

What might be done to halt a potential decline in the membership resulted in a good deal of discussion. It was questioned if common factors could be identified for those members choosing to leave. A significant proportion of those doing so were either new members or recently joined members whose addresses showed that they lived at some distance from our fisheries – in London or the Birmingham area, for example. It was suggested that the Club could consider a form of country membership to encourage the latter to stay involved as their opportunities to fish might be more limited than they had envisaged for geographical reasons. There was a good deal of support for the idea that the Club could be more welcoming to new members and it was commented that, amongst other things, finding the waters on the first occasion was often difficult. Greater emphasis would be placed on the opportunities presented by the Riverwalks for new members in the initial correspondence and more use would be placed on what3words to locate access points in the handbook. Although the Club has a comprehensive set of maps on the webpages, they exhibit a wide range of styles and quality. A consistent set of maps could be created using the on-line information now available. It was agreed that the expansion of the Committee, which has brought in members with new skills, was an opportunity to address these issues.

In answer to a question about how to encourage more interest from young anglers it was clarified that rod-sharing with a guest is allowed during the Mayfly period on waters where a guest is allowed.

Whether the on-line booking system could be further extended to embrace the Kennet and Test was raised. Mark Purvis responded that these waters were very heavily sought after during the early part of the season so that some hands-on shuffling of booking requests is necessary to enable a broad range of the membership to get access to them. This remains true throughout the season at Axford and Broadlands but, at Denford and Barton Court it was possible that a two-tier booking system could be introduced so that in the second part of the season an on-line booking system could be used to enable maximum use of the fishing opportunities. Similarly, on the Coln, some of the restrictions on repeat booking could be relaxed in the second part of the season. Such changes were under review.

Whether the Club should continue to stock its waters was raised as an issue for discussion. It was noted that the bulk of the Club's expenditure on stocking was at

Cornbury where it is necessary for any sport to be had. Stocking numbers are reported on the title lines of the Catch Return and show that the level of stocking of the rivers has been considerably reduced over the years. Only on the lower Windrush waters are the numbers of fish stocked significantly larger than the number of sizeable fish caught. The number of fish killed on a water can be deduced from the difference between the total number of fish caught and the number appearing in the rightmost column – headed “returned” and in pink – showing that the vast majority of sizeable trout caught are returned on the rivers. In answer to a question about the value for money of certain fisheries it was noted that we pay effectively no rent for Worsham and do not stock it and that there, Widford and Asthall the success rates are as high as Broadlands, Barton Court and Denford!

8. Presentation

Mark Purvis gave an illustrated talk about the nature of the work carried out by the Fisheries Team in the last two years at Bibury Court. Great improvements in the fish-holding habitat had been made. The Team was thanked and congratulated on what had been achieved there and on other waters.

The meeting closed at 9:50pm

Paul Madden (November 2023)