



SOCIETY FOR THE HISTORY OF NATURAL HISTORY
Registered Charity No. 210355

Minutes from Special and Annual General Meetings, held 29 June 2021
by video-conferencing

1. Welcome by the President

Attendees were welcomed by the President.

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Ann Datta, Jan Freedman, David Maberley and Herman Reichenbach. There were 44 members in attendance.

3. A Word from the President

The President reflected on the last three years, taking the opportunity to thank Council and individuals who have supported him in the role. It had been an honour and a privilege to be the Society's President. His 'President's Messages' appeared in the *Newsletter* from July 2018, and in that first issue he mentioned beginning a strategic review. Following discussions at Council a draft *Strategic Plan 2018-2021* was published in the January 2019 *Newsletter*. Looking back at the stated aims listed there, we have delivered on many of them – reviewing our awards, thanks to Helen Cowie; utilising social media to reach the membership and interested individuals; and creating guidelines for our International Representatives for example, thanks to Malgosia Nowak-Kemp. We have made considerable progress, but much remains to be done. The backdrop to our strategic discussions changed dramatically in 2020 as we were faced by the Covid pandemic; this meant we had to take action to ensure we continued to fully engage with our membership. Our Council meetings transferred online, as did our 2020 AGM, and has this AGM; *Archives of Natural History* and the *Newsletter* took on special significance as a key way of informing members, and the President expressed his gratitude to Elaine Shaughnessy and Charles Nelson for their work here. Currently the Society remains online for most of our functions, but is determined to return to meeting in person as soon as possible.

During 2020, society in general began to seriously consider, and react to major issues of diversity, equality and social injustice. Museums and heritage institutions in the UK began to re-consider the colonial histories of their collections, archives and exhibitions. With these concerns in mind, Council agreed that our mission statement must reflect social and cultural interests, and that we should make a firm statement about diversity in the draft Byelaws. We also created a new award – the President's Award – to honour those individuals making us think about diversity and equality issues and exposing hidden histories. Council have been creative and hugely supportive as we have considered these significant changes. He thanked some individuals in particular - Gina Douglas for her hospitality and guidance; Geoff Hancock and Ann Sylph have been supremely efficient Secretaries; Elaine Shaughnessy's guidance through our strategic discussions. Our Treasurer, Bill Noblett, has been a steady and supportive influence throughout. We have benefitted from the energy and technical skills of Jo Hatton, Elle Larsson and Ann Sylph in the online world. When working on the revision of the Byelaws two individuals stand out: Felicity Roberts was a firm advocate for our social and cultural roles, and Jack Ashby's insights and careful reading of the documents were invaluable. The draft version of the Byelaws was created following sound advice from Arthur Lucas. The President noted he was indebted to all of them, and indeed all of Council.

The President gave a personal thank you to Miranda Lowe, who has been or Membership Secretary for several years but is stepping down at this AGM. Not only has she acted in this capacity but she has been an important link into the Natural History Museum (NHM), the place where our Society began. This Society-NHM link is vital to us, and one we need to develop and strengthen in the future.

Following this SGM the Society will have a new mission statement and new Byelaws. Thanks to the membership survey (and Elle Larsson's work in particular) we know much more about our members, their interests and concerns. Following today's AGM we should have a smaller, but very talented and efficient Council, the profile of which (being predominately female and younger) is very different from that of the membership as a whole. We may also elect our first female President and our first female Editor. In our 85th year the Society has overcome major difficulties and responded to a changing world. It is very adaptable and is in very good shape. The President expressed his confidence that we can move on to reach other important milestones and he will look forward to celebrating those with you all.

The Zoom polling function was tested with a 'fun' vote. The dodo was voted as the extinct animal most people would like to see brought back to life. The meeting moved on to the SGM.

4. Special General Meeting

4.a. Minutes of SGM, 23 March 2021

There were no comments or corrections on the minutes of the meeting. Their acceptance was proposed by Arthur Lucas and seconded by Charles Nelson. Using the Zoom polling function, the minutes were approved with 43 of those present voting unanimously to accept them as an accurate record of the meeting.

4.b. Vote to adopt the Byelaws

The Byelaws accepted at the SGM of 23 March had been agreed by the Charity Commission on 1 June so we can now move to vote to formally accept and adopt them. Arthur Lucas commented at the previous SGM that overall he was happy with them but he would revise some of the wording. He now provided some revised wording to be incorporated in any future revision of the Byelaws. The wording will apply to clause 9.f. to explain the term 'non-prejudicial' as "any reason associated with the performance of their duties or breach of the principles embedded in these byelaws". There was no dissent from this interpretation. That the Byelaws be adopted by the Society was proposed by Felicity Roberts and seconded by Bob Peck. 40 of those present voted, unanimously voting to accept and adopt the Byelaws, they were hence formally adopted by the Society. The President thanked everyone present for their support for the change.

5. Annual General Meeting

Minutes of 2020 AGM held via videoconferencing, 26 June 2020

There were no comments or corrections and so after being proposed by Bill Noblett and seconded by Geraldine Reid, 39 members present voted, unanimously approving the minutes as an accurate record of the meeting.

6. Report of Council for 2020

The President pointed out that this would be the last separate reports for Council and Trustees. Now that the new Byelaws have been adopted, all members of Council will be Trustees and so in the future the Trustees report only will be produced.

There were no queries. The Council Report as circulated was accepted after being proposed by Charles Nelson and seconded by Arthur Lucas. 39 members present voted unanimously to accept the Report.

7. Trustees Annual Report including the financial statement for 2020

Arthur Lucas queried the expenditure on a domain name. Elaine Shaughnessy explained this was a one-off payment to purchase the domain name outright to protect the Society's digital assets and prevent

reputational risk. The President thanked Elaine for identifying that the domain name was for sale and arranging the purchase.

The Trustees Report as circulated was accepted unanimously after being proposed by Malgosia Nowak-Kemp and seconded by Pat Morris. 39 members present voted unanimously to accept the Report.

8. Election to the Portfolios of Council

Three members of Council (Jan Freedman, Stanislav Strekopytov and Geraldine Reid) were elected as ordinary members of Council in 2019, they have one year remaining to serve and are re-elected automatically

The following nominations had been received for the Portfolios of Council listed below, all being a three-year term:

President Gina Douglas has been nominated by Bill Noblett and seconded by Peter Davis.

Secretary: Ann Sylph has been nominated by Peter Davis and seconded by Gina Douglas.

Treasurer: Bill Noblett has been nominated by Peter Davis and seconded by Geraldine Reid.

Editor Anne Secord has been nominated by Charles Nelson and seconded by Peter Davis.

Book Reviews Editor: Maggie Reilly has been nominated by Malgosia Novak-Kemp and second by Jeanne Robinson.

Newsletter Editor/ Website Secretary: Elaine Shaughnessy has been nominated by Gina Douglas, seconded by Peter Davis.

Awards and Grants Secretary: Helen Cowie has been nominated for election by Peter Davis, seconded by Ann Sylph.

International Representatives Secretary: Malgosia Novak-Kemp has been nominated for election by Margarita Hernández-Laille and seconded by Carlo Violani.

Social Media, Communications and Promotions Secretary: Elle Larsson has been nominated by Peter Davis and seconded by Elaine Shaughnessy.

Meetings Secretary: Joanne Hatton has been nominated by Clem Fisher and seconded by Malgosia Novak-Kemp

Membership Secretary: Jeanne Robinson has been nominated by Gina Douglas and seconded by Geoff Hancock

The posts were not contested, there were no additional nominations, so the President proposed that this composition of Council was elected *en bloc*. Arthur Lucas advised that as there were no additional nominations there was no need for a vote and all were elected to Council.

9. Welcome to the Incoming President

The President welcomed Gina Douglas as the new President of the Society, the first female President in the Society's 85 year history. He looked forward to seeing how the Society develops under her capable leadership. Gina commented on how honoured she is to accept the role and thanked Peter Davis for his amazing achievements in moving the Society forward over the previous three years.

10. Any Other Business

There was none there was a short break before resuming and opening up the meeting to non-members for the Society's Awards.

11. Presentation of Awards

This part of the meeting was opened up to non-members to allow the attendance of friends and supporters of the award winners. 74 people attended.

Peter Davis welcomed back members and guests. He then introduced Helen Cowie, newly elected as Awards and Grants Secretary.

A. Introduction to the Society's Awards

Helen introduced the Society's Awards and reflected on changes made during the strategic review, making the process more streamlined and the awards more accessible to a more diverse audience.

The awards are:

Stearn Essay Prize for post-graduates: the 2020 winner was Amelia Urry for her essay *Hearsay, Gossip, Misapprehension: Alfred Newton's secondhand histories of extinction* [This will be published in the next issue of *Archives of Natural History*]. The closing date for the 2021 award is the end of July.

Thackray Best Book Award: this was not awarded in 2020 and the closing date for nominations this year is the end of July.

Founders' Medal: which we are to award today.

President's Award, a new award for 2021, also to be awarded today.

B. Presentation of the Founders' Medal

Founders' Medals are awarded to persons eminent in the fields of the history and/or bibliography of natural history; the award recognises the following achievements:

- A sustained record of high-quality publications in the field of the history of natural history.
- A sustained contribution to dissemination of the history of natural history through practice or curation.

The Judging Panel decided to award two medals, recognising that none were awarded last year, that the two outstanding candidates both more than fulfilled the required achievements and that awarding two medals coincided with the 85th anniversary of the SHNH.

Gina Douglas, read the citation for the first, Robert McCracken Peck (Bob Peck). This was followed by a short recorded talk by Bob Peck.

The second was presented to E. Geoffrey (Geoff) Hancock. Jack Ashby read a citation for Geoff and this was followed by a short recorded talk by Geoff.

C. Presentation of the President's Award

Peter Davis gave an introduction to the President's Award, its origin in the strategic review and how this new award attracted a great deal of interest, with seven individuals putting forward nominations for consideration. The Judging Panel took particular note of the stated criteria for the President's Award, in particular the emphasis on diversity, inclusion, engagement and impact. The Panel recognised that there was merit in all the nominations, but that two projects were outstanding in terms of their impact and hence two awards were presented.

Malgosia Nowak-Kemp read a citation to the first team of winners - Felix Driver (Royal Holloway), Lowri Jones (University of Oxford) and Vandana Patel (Museum of London) for their work together to develop the theme *Hidden Histories of Exploration*, the focus of this project being to reveal the lives of indigenous peoples who aided the travels, activities and aims of well-known explorers. This was followed by a short live talk by Felix Driver expanding on the work of the project.

Jo Hatton read the citation for the next recipients, Subhadra Das and Miranda Lowe, for their landmark paper *Nature Read in Black and White*, (*Journal of Natural Science Collections*, 6, 4-14) which explored the theory and practice of de-colonising museums; they have both provided leadership and an inspirational foundation for future work. This was followed by two short live talks by Subhadra and then Miranda reflecting on and about their more recent and current work.

Gina Douglas thanked the speakers; the outgoing members of Council – Jack Ashby, Miranda Lowe and Felicity Roberts. She also thanked the outgoing President, Peter Davis.

Peter Davis congratulated all the award winners and thanked the speakers. He will be continuing his involvement with the Society as a member and with an editorial role for *Archives of Natural History*. Many of the speakers emphasised the Society's role in facilitating networks, with this in mind there will be an 85th anniversary meeting in September.