

Minutes of ERHS 83rd Annual General Meeting of the East Reading Horticultural Society held at St Peter's Church Hall on Tuesday 4th March 2025 at 7.30 pm

Present: Jeff Gardner (President) John Peacock (Chairman), Margaret Thomas (Secretary), Malcolm Iosson, Neal Stockwell, Mike Fewtrell, Torkill Fozard and Jackie Leslie

Apologies: Mary Brooke, Brenda Hayes, Yvonne Hailstone and Eileen Fulbrook.

Opening by Chairman John Peacock

John opened the meeting in the temporary absence of Jeff Gardner with a welcome to everyone. He thanked the committee for all their hard work and support over the last year. On arrival Jeff continued with the welcome stating we are in a healthy state of affairs financially and thanked Brenda, who has now stepped down, for her work as treasurer. Jeff noted he had been connected with the society for 75 years and wished the annual sub of £3 to remain for 25/26.

Minutes of the 82nd AGM held on Tuesday 20th February 2024

These were approved by all members present and signed by John Peacock

Matters arising

After an excellent talk by the First Responders, we have sent a donation to their charity of £75 for which we have had confirmation, but we are waiting for confirmation of the sum of £200, the fee for our auditor Ian Hayward, who kindly wished to donate it to the First Responders.

Chairman's report

John thanked everyone for attending and supporting the work of ERHS and stated that in every Chairman's report the AGM is to review, assess and look forward to the life and work of the Society. There will be some changes and it is his responsibility to report these to the meeting.

The sudden illness and death of Gwen Barton, not long after the AGM last year, was a shock to us all.

Gwen gave her time, enthusiasm and energy to the Society and for John, she characterised the strength of ERHS. In two weeks' time Gwen's last booked speaker will give her talk 'Lakeside Gardens in Northern Italy'. John hopes that in a tribute to Gwen this will be well attended.

At this point John wished to welcome Jackie Leslie who has kindly offered to take on the role of Talks Organiser. Jackie has already planned and organised 5 speakers for our 25/26 programme. A very warm welcome to Jackie and thank you!

Brenda Hayes, our treasurer since 2022 has stepped down and we are indebted to her for bringing the card machine into use and for her meticulous maintenance of our affairs. As she was unable to attend the AGM John will deliver a gift to her home.

John is delighted to welcome Colin Green to the committee of ERHS as he has offered to take on the role of Treasurer. A very warm welcome Colin and thank you!

John is still concerned about the future of the Society as we all age and perhaps cannot continue physically with the tasks we cope with at the moment.

Recently, 70 of us were treated to Tom Way's wildlife photography presentation and we paid him £85. Most of our speakers charge a similar amount and John advised the members that the committee will be discussing this year whether we should increase the annual subscription to £5 for 2026/2027.

John also discussed whether our society had run its course having started in 1941 as a call for 'dig for victory' and now most members were aged 70 plus and younger people wanted instant gardens rather than nurturing and planting seeds etc.

He said he still had the greatest pleasure to say a big thank you to all the committee members and Carole the Show secretary for the excellent work they had carried out over the last year.

Neal for editing the newsletter, Malcolm organising the membership cards and newsletter, Mike for the Shed rotas, Torkill for delivering the newsletters, Margaret for the minutes, and Trevor for Shed steward duties and trading.

Voluntary organisations like ours rely on goodwill, energy, enthusiasm and commitment to survive and we have new generous friends in Julia and Richard Tredgett from the Huntley and Palmers trading Shed near us.

I would like to thank them for their offers of help, transportation of manure and general kindness and thoughtfulness towards ERHS.

Another recent pleasure was the nomination and acceptance of Malcolm Iosson to become a vice president of ERHS; this was proposed by John Peacock and seconded by Neal Stockwell. Malcolm said he was honoured and delighted to accept.

John pointed out that the Trading Shed is the heartbeat of the society and wished to thank Trevor for all the amount of time he gives plus the opening up of a Monday morning coffee/tea bar. Also, a big thank you to all the team of lorry unloaders who get up early to unload compost and manure.

The Autumn or Summer Show is a celebration to show off what we can grow, bake, arrange and create and last year was a successful occasion. Carole does, however, have all the facts and figures to show that over the years the number of entrants and number of entries has dropped. Covid and heatwaves affected some shows but Carole is hopeful that moving to a Summer Show this year might boost the number of entrants and entries. The schedule has been written by Carole, Ruth and Malcolm and is now available at the Shed.

Early December saw 35 members enjoy a good Christmas Social with fun and a sumptuous buffet.

57 Members enjoyed a day out at Wisley and the visits secretary hopes a trip this June to Mottisfont Abbey will interest enough members to fill a coach. A theatre trip proposed in January was cancelled due to lack of interest.

John wished to thank Ann Wilson for her regular provision of a tea loaf for our meeting refreshments and also Torkill who made one too. Carole for always running the refreshments, but with the help of Kay at the AGM. Thank you to Peter Scott who spent a significant amount of time with Reading Council and Wokingham Council, trying to establish the erection of an ERHS sign on Church Road directing members to the Trading Shed, which has now been installed and also with trees overhanging Emburey Way creating a problem for large delivery lorries. The doors of the Shed need to be decorated and they could be painted green again but John wondered what members thought of the idea of a competition for Maiden Erlegh and Burnershe School pupils to create designs for the 2 single doors and the 2 double doors that could be painted by the winning team in the summer holidays. A scheme for involving schoolchildren in growing potatoes as a competition had to be cancelled in 2020 due to covid, John wondered if we might try this again so that children know potatoes do not come out of plastic bags! Finally, John offered his warmest wishes and thanks for all the support and pointed out the importance to mental health and wellbeing when being involved in any type of gardening or creativity.

Appointment of Auditor to be confirmed

Treasurer's Report

Brenda was absent but the summary for 2024 results which did not make good reading was as follows:

Sales increase of £194

Gross profit down £817

Membership down £184

Overheads up £183

Stock levels were also of concern

2022 £10,644

2023 £13,082

2024 £10,982

Although stock at 2024 is down by £2,438, 86% of the stock relates to sales of only 23% of the sales in 2024.

The auditor recommends a stock provision of £3,000 in 2024, based on product sales/stock holding over the last 3 years.

This does not mean that the stock is unsaleable and does not have to be written off. It is just very slow moving and is a risk

Brenda concurs with this recommendation.

A comprehensive list of the trading figures and overheads will be filed with these minutes.

Election of Officers

President: Jeff Gardner will stand for another year.

Chairman: John Peacock will continue as Chairman.

Treasurer: Colin Green proposed by John Peacock and seconded by Don Palmer.

Secretary: Margaret Thomas proposed by John Peacock and seconded by Penny Lownes.

Committee Members: The following agreed to continue serving Mike Fewtrell, Torkill Fozzard, Malcolm Iosson, Neal Stockwell and Trevor Wilson.

All the committee to stand again proposed by John Peacock and seconded by Penny Lownes and accepted by the all members present.

AOB

Jackie Leslie would be pleased for any suggestions of speakers that members might know of and wondered if we had a certain kind of projector. Neal thought he could help with this.

She also suggested we might send out a random questionnaire when subs are collected in April, asking people if they knew of ERHS and if they were interested in joining. Also, perhaps one to members too asking their opinion on the society, if they had a computer etc.

Another suggestion was the possibility of using online speakers, cheaper than speakers attending our meetings.

This was taken up by Penny Lownes who had experienced this and thought it a good idea for people who did not like coming out at night.

Alan Waite told us that prices in the Shed needed to be sorted out, as some items had 2 prices on them.

It was suggested we might have plants and seedlings for sale, but it was pointed out that we do have them now and then, but the payment is voluntary and goes to the Air Ambulance.

Jeff Gardner told us that Caversham Society have a specific day for plant sales.

It was suggested we needed new signage in the Shed, and we might purchase a laminator to update prices looking smarter and stylish on a good sign.

We now have a few gardening books in the Shed, bought quite cheaply from the library by Ruth and it was suggested we might have a small library in the Shed, but this might change the atmosphere of the Shed.

Opening hours of the Shed were mentioned and Richard Tredgett told us that Huntley and Palmer shed opens from 10.0am to 12.30pm.

The meeting closed at 8.30pm and this was followed by cheese and wine.