

THE JOHN HAMPDEN SOCIETY

Minutes of the 18th Annual General Meeting of the John Hampden Society held at the Barns Centre, Thame, on Saturday, 25th April 2009.

Present: Mr Sam Hearn (*Vice-Chairman & Acting Treasurer*), Mrs Anthea Coles (*Hon. Secretary*), Roger Paynter (*Membership Secretary*), Mr Maurice Kirtland, Mr Derek Lester, Mr Roy Bailey, 14 members of the Society and Mrs Sue Hearn.

1. Apologies for absence: The Earl of Buckinghamshire, (*Patron to the Society*), Lady Buckinghamshire, Lord Hollenden (*Chairman*), Mrs Sarah Barrington, Mrs Joan Portsmouth, Mr Jonathan Morgan, Mrs Marianne Wierszycki, Mr Michael Morris, Mr Richard Pushman, Mrs Valerie Pushman, Mr Eric Throssell, Mr Jim Rodda, Mr Charles Harvey, Mr Colin Mills.

2. The Minutes of the previous AGM had been distributed and further copies were available at the meeting. They were agreed to be true record of the meeting with the exception of the omission to mention the suggestion that a lunch should be arranged at The Chiltern Brewery during the coming year. It was agreed that this was a serious omission!

3. Matters Arising:

There were no matters arising.

4. Reports from Officers:

Sam Hearn, as Vice-Chairman, opened the meeting by welcoming all present to a return visit to the Barns Centre, commenting that it was 10 years since the Society had visited this venue, and that occasion was his first attendance at a meeting of the Society. He thanked Maurice Kirtland for organising the venue for the Society.

Sam gave the Chairman's report in the absence of Lord Hollenden, as follows:

"Ian has a lot of pressures on his time and the Society has always been very grateful when he has managed to attend committee meetings, but he has now let us know that he will not be standing again as Chairman. I wish to place on record in the Minutes, our thanks for his support on the Committee and as Chairman over the years. He has done more than his fair share on behalf of the Society, but we are hoping to see him at future meetings and events.

You will have seen, in *The Patriot*, the report on the death of Frank Hansford-Miller, a founder member of the Society who was of great importance to us in the earlier years. I would like to ask that we take a minute's silence to reflect on Frank. One of his great qualities was his tremendous energy and intellectual vitality and willingness to take on board new ideas and I feel that he is with us in spirit at this meeting.

I hope that as many as possible will remain after the AGM to take part in the workshop, which I hope will be a lot of fun, having set my wife up as the entertainment for the day! We were fortunate, last year, in booking Lucy Worsley to speak at the AGM. She was hugely impressed by the Society and I hope that we will, at some stage, get her back to give another talk.

Looking back over 2008, the year flew by but we managed to pack in a lot. I feel that we kept our end up with *The Patriot*, managing to produce the requisite four editions despite slight hiccups with the printer. I feel that the newsletter is getting better and better but would invite ideas and contributions. Derek and Gill Lester gave a guided walk across the Battlefield in May, for members of the Society and the Battlefields Trust. It was a very hot day and my glasses fell off with sweat, hit the only stone in sight and smashed. Apart from this incident it was a very entertaining walk and as a result of the involvement of the Battlefields Trust, Derek and Gill have now been appointed as carers of the Battlefield and our association with the Trust looks set to become much deeper. Derek has worked very hard to put the record straight as regards the Battlefield and I am sure that Derek and Gill will do further walks in the future.

The Society had a stand at Speen Fete last July, where some books were sold and a lot of questions answered. The Regiment was also in attendance, forming the theme for the day, and gave several interesting displays, which were especially well received by the younger members of the audience.

I have lost track of how many talks we have given this year, probably about 6 - close to a record for the Society, and on each occasion the talk was given to a good sized audience and was well received. I was invited to the Bucks Family History Society in Aylesbury in January, which was a huge gathering and it went very well and, with the help of that Society, I have pushed my genealogy back two more generations, so it was a fruitful event.

For existing members there are some additions to the website. We now have a members' page on the website, accessed via a password, which Roy will change with every issue of *The Patriot*, so that members can access minutes of meetings, accounts, etc. enabling us to keep certain items private to membership but which saves hanging on to pieces of paper. Quite a lot of new stuff has also gone on to the Archive section, so this is worth a look. We have been talking about putting an FAQ section on the website. This seems to have received a lot of support from members and we will be looking at setting it up fairly shortly. The idea is that people visiting our website, who are not very knowledgeable about John Hampden, will be able to look at the questions and access replies and more detail. This will be an improvement of the website, for which we already receive a lot of praise.

Another big deal for us, as a small Society, was commissioning a further supply of Hampden badges this year, which was quite an expense, but we have managed to sell all the original badges. The original company had gone out of business, but we managed to find a firm who have produced something very similar, and the birth date on the badge has now been corrected.

The Committee meetings have been fascinating. We have been wandering around, having become homeless because of changes at The Spread Eagle Hotel, and have been visiting other hostelrys and sampling different beers, which we think has been very stimulating. There is a good chance we will be going back to The Spread Eagle as the new owners seem to be looking at us in a positive way and we have again booked the annual dinner there as we thought it only fair to give them a chance to show us what they can do as we have had associations with the Hotel since the start of the Society.

Finally, the Trustees of the Executive Committee have been looking for quite while at the issue of membership, with the numbers gradually dropping over the years, and we believe that a larger membership base would be desirable and enable us to achieve a lot more. We will talk more about this later on”.

Hon. Treasurer’s Report:

Sam reported that there was an error on the circulated accounts where a balance sheet total which should have read £3,021 was shown as £3,051, for which he apologised. It has been another successful year and we ended up spending less than we had received, with a surplus of £453 in the year. It was arguable that we should be spending more on furthering the aims of the Society, but as Treasurer, Sam liked to know that the funds were being managed properly. Membership subscriptions have held up very well and behind that is quite a story. We have to be very grateful to Roger Paynter who has worked at this task and enabled us to face up to the truth about some of our members who are not paying subscriptions, and Sam thanked Roger for taking on the role and clearing the decks in this way. The subscription rates have not changed for six years and have only been revised once since the organisation was established in 1992. The Trustees have reviewed the subscription rate again and decided not to increase the rate from 2010 as had previously been agreed. In making this decision the relatively healthy state of the Society’s finances and the general economic situation had been taken into account. The last time we implemented an increase a few members decided that they could not afford the increase and it is felt that the same thing might happen this time. Therefore as we do not actually need to increase the rates at present, we will look at this again in 2011.

Sam had been badgered by some members for a long time to open a high interest bearing account. His feeling had always been that the Society had so little money that any interest earned would have been negligible. However, as the funds had grown he had opened a high interest bearing account at Lloyds, where the account began earning a sensible amount of interest. Then the credit crunch arrived and knocked that one on the head for the time being.

The Society has opened a PayPal account to facilitate paying for purchases and subscriptions, and we have now had four customers purchasing books from the website by this means. We have also had people visiting the site, seeing the PayPal facility and ringing us up to ask whether, if they order direct, they can save on the postage and packaging.

The Society has a current cash balance of £3,484 and Sam had just received cheques and cash from selling books at talks, etc, which will increase the amount held. A healthy position, which can be borne in mind when taking part in the session scheduled to follow the AGM.

Sam then answered questions on the accounts.

Membership Secretary’s Report:

Roger Paynter started by saying that he had reminded those present in 2008 of the Society’s connection with Grampound and he wished to add a little to his comments. Thanks to a most generous grant of around £100,000 it has been possible for Grampound to carry out restoration work to the medieval Town Hall building and this now houses a new archive section, which includes a section regarding The Patriot, John Hampden. The display consists of a specially made film about Grampound, and various information bulletins. This will be available for public viewing, but on a restricted basis. If any Society members are in the locality at any time and would like to view the display, Roger will be happy to arrange access.

Roger then reported that the Society has 14 Life Members and 2 Honorary Members. The joint membership section has increased over the last year and now amounts to 36 with 5 family members and a further 71 people comprising the adult member category. Sadly last year he had to report a rather high number of non-renewals, when total membership amounted to 117. He was happy to report now that the total membership this year had risen to 128. He was looking forward to the recruitment session following the AGM, when ideas would be put forward for increasing membership. He also commented that in 2008 he had expressed enthusiasm regarding the benefits to the Society and members of paying subscriptions by standing order rather than by cheque, and he was returning to that subject. Before becoming Membership Secretary he had paid his subscription by cheque, when he remembered, usually around April! From personal experience he knows well how easy it is to forget payment dates. Standing order payments arrive in the Society account within a very few days of the 1st January. During the two years that Roger has held this position in excess of 60 members have forgotten to send in their cheques on time, so perhaps the option given to members to pay by cheque or by standing order was not in their best interest or that of the Society. Payment of subscriptions by standing order only is worth consideration by the Committee.

5. Election of officers and committee members:

The following officers and committee members were individually voted onto the committee by a show of hands:

- Chairman:** Sam Hearn, proposed by Roy Bailey, seconded by Anthea Coles.
Vice Chairman: Roy Bailey, proposed by Lord Hollenden, seconded by Sam Hearn.
Treasurer: Derek Lester, proposed by Sam Hearn, seconded by Maurice Kirtland.
Hon. Secretary: Anthea Coles, proposed by Valerie Horne, seconded by Sam Hearn.
Membership Secretary: Roger Paynter, proposed by Mike Portsmouth, seconded by Valerie Horne.

Committee Members: **Lord Hollenden**, proposed by Anthea Coles, seconded by Maurice Kirtland.
Maurice Kirtland, proposed by Sam Hearn, seconded by Anthea Coles.
John Gabbitas, proposed by Anthea Coles, seconded by Mike Portsmouth.

Sam commented that it was a good, strong committee. He mentioned that one Society member had volunteered to join the Committee and returned a nomination form, but had no proposer or seconder shown thereon. An e-mail was therefore sent, asking whether he would be attending the meeting, if not could he provide a proposer and seconder, as the Committee had not met him and needed confirmation that at least two Society members felt he would be a good and suitable committee member. Unfortunately the e-mail bounced, so a copy was sent off by post, but no response had been received at the time of the meeting. It had been pointed out that all Society members are welcome to attend any meeting of the Executive committee and, in the event that he was not appointed to the committee on this occasion, he might like to do this to enable the Committee to get to know him and for him to see what would be entailed. He could then re-apply the following year, and it may be that this is what he had decided to do.

6. Fund Raising & Forthcoming Events:

Sam stated that we had indicated that we would like to have someone on the committee who would take on the more social side of the Society and fund-raising generally, but we still do not have anyone specifically taking on that role. However we do have a reasonable agenda of events this year which he went through as follows:

Various talks which, by and large, can be attended by members of the Society. Roy was booked for 13th May at The Probus Club at Beaconsfield and another in September at Great Kingshill Ladies Club. Sam is giving a talk on 20th October, about Sybil Penn, nee Hampden, to the Stone Local History Group at Stone Methodist Church, via the Bucks Local History Fair, at which he hopes to sell the Society as well as talking about Sybil Penn.

He then mentioned the forthcoming visit to Broughton Castle at the beginning of June, which so far had received 10 bookings, leaving space for more bookings and spare copies of the booking form were available. It was pointed out that no times had been mentioned on the booking form and Sam agreed to let everyone know the relevant times. He mentioned that the castle would not be open to the general public whilst we were there and Lord Saye & Sele would be present. He also pointed out that Lord Saye & Sele is one of our latest appointed Vice Presidents.

The Society's Annual Dinner is booked for 20th June at The Spread Eagle and spare booking forms were available for this event. No speaker had been booked and some people have expressed a view that it would be nice to just have a social evening and talk to each other. If we do not manage to book a speaker this year, we will certainly have one in 2010. It was pointed out that the restaurant at The Spread Eagle does not lend itself to socialising due to lack of space, and the Committee were urged to do their best to book a speaker. It was also pointed out that the speaker should be given a time limit. Last year the speaker gave her talk at the beginning of the evening rather than the end and that had worked very well.

Sam mentioned that a visit to Oxford is being arranged by Maurice Kirtland, to look at Magdalen College, where Hampden had studied. Tentatively approaches had been made to Mansfield College which had agreed to provide us with a meal at a reasonable price. This is one of the relatively newer colleges but in its secular chapel it has a stained glass window of John Hampden, which we would be able to view and it was felt that this would be an interesting place to visit. Further information as to dates, times, etc. will be notified in due course.

John Gabbitas has worked very hard to further the idea suggested at the last AGM of holding a Church Service at Great Hampden Church, commemorating John Hampden. He reported that it has been a pleasure working with those concerned at Great Hampden and this event is now taking shape. The date has been booked for 25th October at 11.15. Lord Hollenden has been invited to lay a wreath on the day. Other ideas, still to be discussed, to try to make the service more attractive for people coming from afar, would be to provide some sort of meal and coffee and biscuits. Further thought will be given to this by the Committee, and full details will be circulated before the event. Valerie Horne, offered to talk to the Brass Band, of which she is a member, to find out whether they would be able to play for the service if this was appropriate.

7. A.O.B:

Roy Bailey reported that he had received a communication from Hugh & Trixie Muldrew, members of the Society who live in New Zealand. They came to England in 1993 and by chanced turned up in Thame when the Society was holding the ceremony by the Town Hall for the re-enactment of the arrival of John Hampden from Chalgrove. In 1994, at the suggestion of Lord Buckinghamshire, Roy had written to all the towns and villages of Hampden around the world and received a positive response, including one from Maine in the USA and one from New Zealand from Hugh Muldrew who was in effect, the chairman of the Community Council of Hampden, NZ. They came back to this country at a later date after becoming members of the Society, and were entertained in Thame, when they were shown round the Church, taken to Chequers, Chiltern Brewery and Chalgrove to see the Memorial, all of which they enjoyed. In 2002, Annabel and Roy were in New Zealand and had the pleasure of staying with the Muldreus twice. On the second occasion Roy gave an illustrated talk to the assembled people of Hampden and had a better turn out there than at any of the historical societies over here that he had spoken to so far! That morning he had received a letter from them, containing a copy of their local paper showing that they have recently celebrated 60 years of marriage. There was a covering letter from Trixie, in which she said that Hugh is not able to write any more so everything is left to her. They will keep in contact but as for the John Hampden Society, they have a lady in Hampden who would like to carry on their part in it. Hugh

will sort out the details they have there to help her on her way. Her name is Margaret Johnson and she is a JP. Her son lives, they thought, in our district. Roy is happy that there will be continued contact there and mentioned that, when we were campaigning to get the Battlefield at Chalgrove on to the Battlefields register, Hugh was very helpful in writing a letter to English Heritage and persuaded an elderly lady, a school teacher, to do so as well, so we have had a fair amount of input from them. It occurred to Roy that it might be that, once this other lady is signed up and we have a proper contact with her, we could offer the Muldrews honorary membership. This was unanimously agreed by all present. Roy will write to them on behalf of the Society and congratulate them on their diamond wedding.

Sam reported that Lord Buckinghamshire had given a speech at Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia. This is the last of the all-male colleges left in America, and the College will become an associate member of the Society. Miles' speech will be reproduced in *The Patriot*.

Valerie Horne suggested that the cost of membership should be increased to £12.50 or £10 if members paid for four years in advance. John Gabbitas thought this would be a good idea. It was pointed out that our subscriptions are currently middle of the road when compared with other societies and it is felt that sometimes people think that a Society is not worth joining if the subscription is low. Valerie also wondered whether there would be any merit in reducing the number of newsletters to three a year but making each edition larger in order to save printing and postage costs. Roy pointed out to her that the cost of printing would work out roughly the same, but there would be a saving in postage.

Valerie also felt that the Society should try to persuade the education system to include a small study of John Hampden in the curriculum, as she considered him to be one of the most important people in history and he does not even get a mention. She thought that this might be achieved by enrolling the assistance of the Press and campaigning for this subject to be included in the school curriculum. Jean Gabbitas thought an approach should be made to the County Directors of Education to try and get John Hampden onto the school curriculum. The education authority has a bulletin which is sent to schools and she wondered if we could approach the education authority and offer material or speakers. She also suggested that it might be a good idea to have a stall at Lacey Green Fete with an interactive sheet for children to complete, to promote interest in the subject. Jean wondered, on the question of subscriptions, whether the Society should consider keeping existing members at the present rate, but increase the subscription for new members. This might prevent members from leaving due to the increase in subscription.

Sam mentioned that we should not just put up subscriptions by the minimum amount needed to cover costs; we need to factor in inflation, so that it will not be necessary for a further increase in the near future. These matters will be discussed at future meetings. Roy pointed out that, under the Constitution, we are now not able to increase subscriptions until January 2011, as the decision can only be taken at next year's AGM unless the society hold an Emergency General Meeting in the interim. Sam suggested that someone might like to make a proposal that the Executive Committee be empowered to make a decision about increasing the rates during the year. He pointed out that we had carried out a straw poll of other history societies and some charge considerably less than we do and some charged more. We were roughly in the middle. As we are not in desperate financial straits this matter will be discussed again at the next AGM.

John Goodall suggested a further campaign to get the name of Downing Street changed to Hampden Street. Sam felt that it was a good opportunity for members to contact their local MPs and put the idea to them that now would be a good time to change the name of Downing Street, to reflect the very strong Hampden connection. He gave a brief resume of George Downing's character to illustrate how unsuitable a character he was to have the street named after him. The Prime Minister is the First Lord of the Treasury and Downing revolutionised the finances of the country at the Restoration, having brought a number of Dutch public finance ideas to the country, without which we would have gone bankrupt. Downing hated the Dutch but had read their books on the matter. For this reason there are people who would defend the Downing name. One suggestion was that the Society should produce printed postcards making the suggestion, which people could sign and send to their MP. Roy pointed out that there is a No. 10 website where anyone can initiate a petition for people to sign on-line, which would attack right at the heart. Sam felt we should take this seriously and discuss it at a later meeting. Roy said we had no chance of success but it would produce some welcome publicity though Sam felt very strongly that Downing is the wrong man to commemorate and was only interested in pursuing the matter if it were likely that the Society would be successful.

Sam closed the meeting at 3.30 by introducing his wife, Sue, who was to facilitate the brainstorming session to discuss ways of increasing membership.