

Friends' School Saffron Walden, Old Scholars' Association

146th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, held on 9th May 2015 at the School

Nigel McTear presiding and 19 members present.

1. The President, Bidy Vousden, welcomed those present and a short silence was observed.
2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were received from Clare Thompson, John Jossaume, Andrew McTear, Richard Haw and Stephen Welch.
3. MINUTES: The meeting agreed that the minutes of the previous meeting on 10th May 2014 were a true and accurate record.
4. MATTERS ARISING: None
5. OBITUARIES: The Chair read the names of those whose deaths have been reported since the last AGM in May 2013 and a short silence was observed: Imogen Sykes (née Moody), Mary Forward (née Bond), Dilawar Chetsingh, Kaye Whiteman, Ruth Wrigley (née Comber), Owen John Morice, Lynda Sharpe, David Hadley, John Seaman, Susan Taylor (née Goldschmidt), Margaret West (née Stubbs), Ben Vidler, David Gray, Peter Cudbird, Brian Abbs, John Coffin, Brian J.Hosking, Anne Marriage.
6. REPORTS:

a) Chair

(Nigel McTear): Nigel reported that the Old Scholars Association is in a hybrid state at present. For reasons discussed at the last AGM, there are no plans for a Foundation Office and as a consequence the OSA is continuing as a part autonomous organisation run by a committee and assisted by the School.

However, the 2 main functions of the OSA which it is still fulfilling are a) to encourage fellowship amongst past pupils and teachers and b) to help the School.

One of the things that has become customary is to hold the Reunion Dinner on the same day as Friends and Families Day and although open to all Old Scholars, this year it was extended to include those turning 40 and 70, in addition to those turning 50 and 60.

One of the results of this is that we have identified key people in those year groups coming up to "milestone birthdays" who have acted as co-ordinators to encourage their old friends back for the reunion dinner and hence the role of President has now become less important. Therefore, this year is the first year that we will not be handing over to a new President.

In terms of finances, Nigel explained that for those who have not been at the AGM for a few years, that everyone is now automatically a member of the Old Scholars' Association and there is no longer a membership fee, although the Association is very much dependent upon

voluntary donations. Although it has been a steady year in terms of activity, membership and finances, one of the biggest costs to the organisation is the database maintenance fee.

For those members who still have a subscription this is now classed as a donation and he would like to encourage everyone where possible to increase the amount and gift aid it.

Questions:

Joan Pearce advised Nigel that a few years ago members who had a subscription were encouraged to cancel their standing orders so she would like to know what to do now. Nigel replied that the mood has now changed and he would be grateful if all Old Scholars in a similar situation could reinstate this as a donation to the School and if possible to convert it to Gift Aid.

Trevor Hurrell wanted to know if there was a reason why the Association was not a charity but Tony Watson informed him that we cannot be as we are an Association for our own benefit rather than for the benefit of the public.

Carey Dickinson asked about the possibility of a mailing about Gift Aid but all details can be found on the website (www.oldscholars.com)

b) Treasurer

(Andrew McTear, read by Nigel McTear)

TREASURER'S REPORT FOR FINANCIAL YEAR ENDING 31ST AUGUST 2014

Andrew McTear- 9th May 2015

"I would like to thank Nigel for presenting this report on my behalf. This is my 27th report as Treasurer for the financial year ended 31 August 2014.

Last year I reported that the Association had made a surplus of £3,928 as it had benefited from roughly two years income but only one year's gift to the School. Well things have now caught up and this year is the reverse with one year of income and 2 years of donation resulting in a deficit of £5,620. Taking the two years together we made a deficit of £1,692. In the long run the intention is that whilst the School covers the cost of "running" the Association we will roughly match income with donations such that the deficit/surplus will be nil.

Our investments again did well rising 7%.

This year and last year's accounts were audited in November 2014 and in accordance with the Constitution Christopher Hickling reviewed the audit process for the last 5 years. I would like to thank all 3 auditors for their work.

I also attach an unaudited summary of Friends' Foundation income and expenditure which combines the School's Foundation and General OSA activity and shows that over 3 and a half years the School has benefited to the tune of £8,122."

Additional points raised by Nigel McTear:

- The biggest expense is that of the database but the advantage of this is that the website is now interactive and so we will be able to reach more Old Scholars as they log on and update their details. This also means that we can cut back on surface mailings which are very expensive and move to email which costs nothing.
- The last OS magazine cost around £5,000 so this year there will be a whole school magazine with an OS section which will be mainly emailed out. We recognise that not everyone will be happy with this decision so if you would particularly like a hard copy than please email oldscholars@friends.org.uk
- Overall we are in balance but we need to be mindful that the OSA subscription base is not being added to and this will in fact deplete as Old Scholars die.

Questions:

Clive Eiles: “What purpose do the Life Fund and the Accumulated Fund have?”

Nigel explained that the Life Fund was set up in the 1980s where members were given the option to pay a lump sum for long term membership. This option has not been offered for more than 10 years and the members who took this option up are invariably older and dying at which point we can decide if we want to use their share of the fund.

The Accumulated Fund is made up of long term surpluses which have been invested. This is our buffer and when this has gone all we will be left with is the income from subscriptions which is depleting.

Carey Dickinson: “What is the money that is going to the School being spent on?”

Most of the money is going towards the cost of the database and software support which provides the interactive link to the website. The Committee is looking into an alternative that is less expensive.

Details of the accounts ended 31st August 2014 were circulated at the meeting and have been uploaded to the Old Scholars’ website.

c) Old Scholar School Governor/Head’s Report for 2014/5

(Douglas Kent/Anna Chaudhri)

It was decided that as the Governor’s report and the Head’s report overlapped considerably last year and the two also work closely together on the Board, that there would only be one report this year. Anna Chaudhri spoke first to give her report:

Anna Chaudhri

This will follow.

Douglas Kent

Douglas Kent began by describing how he had been in School that week for inspection work as he is responsible for the boarding areas. He had a very positive impression of boarding

and described how, following refurbishment, the boarding houses were now more like a home/hotel.

Costs – over the past 2 years the School has been working hard to bring costs under control and Anna Chaudhri and the Senior Management Team have made great progress in this area. The priority now is to look at the income side of the finances and marketing.

New Governors – the School is always looking for candidates for new governors who have a balance of skills so if anyone knows someone who is interested please could they let Celia James know via the Head as she manages the skills matrix.

On a general note it was stressed that there needs to be more fundraising as the OSA needs to recreate a steady supply of income.

Questions:

Carey Dickinson: “Does the School have any development plans for the future?”

Anna Chaudhri said that there is a programme of refurbishment underway. Croydon House is going to be opened and refurbished for Senior Boys’ boarding and the changing rooms are also going to be refurbished with a contribution from the PTA.

There is a proposal being put forward for work to the biology lab and there is also a lot of cosmetic and short-term refurbishment taking place.

Long term projects include replacement of the windows and repair to the roof, all of which will take place within the financial constraints.

As the roof is such a large project the School would be very grateful for any advice regarding grants etc .

Joan Pearce: “How far afield does the marketing go?”

Anna Chaudhri replied that this year the school went to the Independent Schools Fair in Battersea, London. Although this was mainly targeted at London schools it was beneficial to have a presence there as there are still some boarders who come from the London area. Realistically the target area should extend to Cambridge, locally and the London market.

There is stiff competition for boarding in this area and a lot of schools are targeting the overseas market, however the School is trying to keep this to around 10% of the students as well as maintaining diversity as it is an unreliable & quite volatile market.

Anna stressed that we have always been, and want to continue to be, a school in Saffron Walden to which overseas students will always come.

7. PROPOSED REVISION OF THE OSA CONSTITUTION AND RULES:

The main reason behind the proposed revision of the constitution was to reduce unnecessary legalities but it also:

- Reflects the new relationship between the OSA and the School, following review of the 2010 agreement.

- Reflects the current structure of the General Committee.
- Reflects the greater use that is being made of the website and email to communicate with members.
- Separates the fundamental parts of the Constitution that can only be changed at a General Meeting from the Rules which dictate the day to day running of the committee and the association and which can be changed by the General Committee.

Malcolm Pim asked if the Association had ever had to call an Extraordinary General Meeting and it was confirmed that this had happened once, 27 years ago, however the Constitution still allows for this.

Martin Hugall proposed that we adopt the new revised Constitution, this was seconded by Malcolm Pim and passed.

8. ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS; APPOINTMENT OF AUDITORS AND TRUSTEES:

In the revised Constitution only 3 Officers need to be appointed at the AGM: Chair, Treasurer and Secretary. These are currently Nigel McTear, Andrew McTear and Stefanie Godfrey. As all Officers were happy to continue in their roles, Martin Hugall proposed to re-appoint the existing officers en masse. This was agreed and seconded by Bidy Vousden and unanimously agreed.

The Auditors Christopher Hickling, Graeme Johnston and Charles Mills were also approved for the following year.

Mark Bertram had asked to step down as a Trustee and the Committee proposed that Martin Hugall should replace him. This was proposed by Tessa Brown and seconded by David Tulk.

9. AOB: None

10. OUTGOING PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS: As there will no longer be a President, Bidy Vousden gave an address which spoke of her time at the school:

Bidy Vousden

I was here for only the first three years of my secondary schooling, from 1965 to 1968, but they were formative years that marked my life deeply. I have worked here now for nearly 17 years and my son went right through the senior school.

Thinking back, I came up with my first experience of school: standing by my bed waiting for clothes check – 2 pleated green skirts, 2 green Braemar pullovers, 3 green Viyella blouses, 2 Sunday dresses, those dark brown tights some of us used to wear... The bedstead was iron, rows of black iron bedsteads, and all the beds had those regulation red blankets.

My Mother introduced me to the girl standing by the next bed: 'Hello, this is Bidy. What's your name?'

P and I remained best friends for the rest of that year and well into the next. She was a sweet, good-natured girl, who just sometimes cried a lot at night. Like many children there

her home background was not straightforward. In her case, she came from a foster-home. I only found this out when she came to stay with me in the holidays and someone from Social Services came to check out my home and family before her stay. She never talked about it, but rumour had it that her parents had died in an accident; I know she had a twin brother at a different school.

Young children don't share confidences like older teenagers do. They talk about their everyday lives and share what's happening now. What happens in school is intense and all-absorbing for most of the time.

But the teaching – and the teachers – are only a small part of it. We think we have a huge influence on our students but as a teacher I'm often painfully aware of how insignificant I am compared to their peers.

If I don't make my lessons interesting, my students won't even listen, let alone learn. Luckily, as they get older and begin to specialise in subjects they enjoy, lessons automatically become more relevant and significant and they tune in, turn on and get good results.

But at least as important as what they learn in lessons is the hidden curriculum – everything else they learn in school. It's not only exam results that they take away from school, it's everything else that has contributed to their school experience. The Friends' School experience is a large part of what has made us Old Scholars the people we are.

A quick scan of my memories includes British Bulldog on roller skates, the ice slides made on the lower boys' asphalt, climbing down the stairs on the outside of the banisters – dangerous things - and a lot of things that went on under the radar of any adults: getting up early in the morning to go down to the fairground in town before anyone was up; going up into the attics through a trapdoor outside the girls' bedrooms; running away to Norfolk with my best friend, turning up at the home of her boyfriend's parents', people she had never met and I vaguely knew because he was my brother's best friend at school (obviously at that point it did come to the attention of the school authorities).

Some things have changed. I don't think students are restricted to two Sunday dresses any more, and they do wear jeans, but I don't mind betting that much of the hidden curriculum still goes on under the adult radar, despite Health and Safety restrictions.

When my son was in the 6th form he had to give a talk on the 6th form open evening to potential students and their parents about his experience of the 6th form at Friends'. He said that if he had gone to a school with a large 6th form he would have made friends with the students who were most like him. Here, he was friends with everyone, and, paradoxically, it exposed him to a much wider range of personalities and views, helping him towards a much greater tolerance and understanding of others.

I thought it was a good point. He's still in touch with those people; what they have in common, despite very different lives and being very different people, is their shared school experience.

My friend P, sadly, is no longer with us, but my year group, the 1972ers, still get together every few years. We started it in our 50th birthday year and when we got together then, 30 - 40 of us, we were all struck by how easy it was to be together, There was a complete lack of pretension, no one felt they had to put up a front, and we learned more about each other and how it was for us back then. We heard how unhappy it had been for some people, being sent off to boarding school. People get sent away from home for all sorts of reasons. We hadn't all chosen to go, as I had, following in the footsteps of my brother. But what brought us together, and continues to bring us together, was each other.

Friends' School continues to turn out thoughtful, well-rounded students who are good communicators, tolerant and caring individuals, brushed with Quaker values and full of the confidence that being part of a small school makes possible. All our students get the chance to participate in sports teams, choir, drama productions and debating teams, not only a select few. Whether it's our size or our Quaker ethos, or the lingering echoes of past generations embedded in these historic buildings, the hidden curriculum is something that holds Old Scholars together.

As a teacher, I commend it to you. I hope you will come back in the future, and encourage your own children and grandchildren to take an active interest in the Old Scholars and in the School and spread the word to others – family, friends - about the unique and special place where you did most of your growing up.

Biddy Vousden, President of the Old Scholars' Association 2014-15

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING: The School is likely to hold its Friends and Families Day later in the Summer term once the exams have finished. For this reason the date and time of the next AGM will be at 4pm on Saturday 25th June 2016 at the School.