

Friends' School Saffron Walden, Old Scholars' Association

149th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, held at 2.30pm on 25th May 2019 at the Friends' Meeting House, Saffron Walden

Nigel McTear presiding and 17 members present.

1. Nigel McTear welcomed those present and a short silence was observed.
2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were received from Mary Ward, Tom Dickinson, Andrew McTear, Glen Abrey and Janet Claxton.
3. MINUTES: The meeting agreed that the minutes of the previous meeting on 19th May 2018 were a true and accurate record. The minutes can be found in the members' section of the Old Scholars' website.
4. MATTERS ARISING: None
5. OBITUARIES: The Chair read the names of those whose deaths have been reported since the last AGM/SGM in May 2018 and a short silence was observed: Roger Browning, Peter Reader, Dr. Peter Le Mare, John Plank, Jess Burton, Chris Hayes, Michael Rossmann, Rachel Ashton, David Wood. Paul Price-Smith also informed us that his brother Iain Price-Smith had sadly died.
6. REPORTS:

a) Chair

(Nigel McTear): The objectives of the Old Scholars' Association have hitherto been to foster fellowship between Old Scholars and to support Friends' School Saffron Walden. The latter no longer exists and members will hear later about the developments of the former site of the school.

As far as encouraging fellowship is concerned: year groups are coming together and organising reunions. Although the Old Scholars' Association is not involved in the details of organisation, it is keen to support this. In order to do this, the database of Old Scholars is maintained as accurately as possible and funds are also available to support these reunions. In May alone, four different events have been organised for different year groups. Significant anniversaries on the horizon will further encourage reunions.

Although the school has gone, the Old Scholars have not. The Old Scholars' Association website has now been separated from school's website and this marks the beginning of a new era for the association. There will be no more Old Scholars from the school, which means that there will also not be a consistent stream of future members. This necessitates a realignment of goals. The committee has met two times across the year and the following goals have been delineated: maintaining the Old Scholars' Association as a contact point; maintaining the database; encouraging meet-ups and making the association future-proof.

b) Treasurer

(Andrew McTear, read by Nigel McTear):

Nigel explained that Andrew is in Germany for a wedding and that he sends his apologies for absence.

Full audited accounts for the last 2 financial years will follow and be posted on the website when they have been completed. There is just under £12,000 in the association's current account. Income and expenditure are described as "steady". The annual income from donations (i.e. former subscriptions) is approximately £5,000 per annum. There is one significant cost per year, which is outlay for the database equal to approximately £1,800. The committee is looking at more cost-effective ways to run and manage the database. The other significant cost is the employment of the secretary.

In the past the association donated surpluses to support the school. Given that this is no longer the case, the bank balance is slowly increasing. The bank balance of £12,000 compares to £5,000-6,000 previously, though this is partially due to the sale of some of the association's shares in the previous year.

The association has further assets with a worth of around £70,000. This means the association currently owns approximately £82,000 cash-on-hand and in assets. The association has enough money to do what it would like to do, including supporting Year Group meet-ups. The financials are in a steady state.

c) Membership – Tony Watson as an honorary member

(Martin Hugall): The association has invited Tony Watson to be an honorary member of the Old Scholars' Association. Martin quoted the following from the constitution of the Old Scholars' Association (*Honorary Membership of the Association may be conferred by the General Committee as a mark of esteem for outstanding service, merit or achievement in connection with the Association or the School*) and invited Tony Watson to speak.

(Tony Watson): January marked the 75th Anniversary of Tony's association with the school. There hasn't been a year since in which Tony hasn't been involved with the school in some capacity, until 2017 when disaster struck and the school closed. Tony explains how close the school is to his heart. Indeed, it is the school that brought Tony and his wife Margaret together. It was once said that one is a "friend for life", but unfortunately, Tony lamented that he has outlived the school. Tony was originally recruited to the Old Scholars' Association in the 1960s by the then by the then President of the Old Scholars Association, Basil Burton. He thanks everyone for the kind appointment.

Comments:

Nigel McTear: "Tony was a Governor and also Clerk of Governors. He has ticked every box with his many years of service."

Stef Godfrey: "Some further information on membership. Contact is maintained with approximately 1200 members. The main means of communication is email through the database and then also via the Facebook Group. On social media our Facebook Group has 654 members."

Biddy Vousden: "This number also includes old staff members."

Martin Hugall: "Old pupils are automatically Old Scholars, whilst former teachers need to request inclusion as members."

Nigel McTear: "There was once a paid subscription to be a member. However, membership became free when an internal decision was made by the school's management to pursue donations from Old Scholars separately. However, when membership became free, many members mercifully maintained standing orders as donations."

Martin Hugall: "The association is very grateful for those who maintain subscription because if they did not, the association would be in deficit."

7. FUTURE OF THE SCHOOL SITE

(Douglas Kent): This is a copy of Douglas Kent's report:

Old Scholars are naturally keen to hear news of what's happening with the former Walden School site. It's now nearly two years since the school closed but we still have only a partial understanding of what the property speculator who acquired the land and buildings – Chase New Homes - plans to do with them. I will update you briefly on a few developments that I am aware of since our Special General Meeting (SGM) in May 2018.

Last October, Chase unveiled its initial plans for the site at a meeting of Saffron Walden Town Council attended by Martin Hugall and me. The proposals outlined in their short presentation were to develop about two-thirds of the playing field for new housing (a total of 150 houses was given but later increased to 170). The remainder of the playing field would be retained for sport, including use by community groups. Chase's plans for several areas of the site were not covered by the presentation, notably what they intend to do with the ex-main school building and Junior School.

Town councillors stressed to Chase that in order to receive the council's backing the plans needed to go much further to compensate the local community for the major loss of open space entailed in making way for the housing. This would mean speaking to bodies other than just sports groups.

Representatives from the Gibson House School group were present at the meeting. I mentioned last May that this group still planned to establish a new Quaker-inspired school in the local area and this remains the case. The group spoke to the developer after the meeting and stated that although other potential sites were being considered for the new school the possibility of occupying part of the former Walden School premises under the right conditions was also worthy of discussion.

Despite some initial apparent enthusiasm from Chase, nothing significant has been heard from them since. Surely, though, the inclusion of a new school within Chase's scheme would go a long way towards them overcoming the strong local objections that currently exist to their plans?

You may recall that both the town and district councils had applied to Historic England – the government's expert adviser on England's heritage – to have at least the former main Walden School building listed as being of special architectural and historic interest. The outcome was always going to be finely balanced. While recognising the special qualities of a number of the former school buildings, Historic England came out against listing any of them. This decision was upheld despite an appeal by the town council. The relevant Historic England documents can be found via links on the Old Scholars' website and make interesting reading.

Even though buildings on the former Walden School site will continue to be unlisted, there are a range of other statutory restrictions that will affect the developers plans. I will quickly outline these.

I reported at last May's SGM that Uttlesford District Council had extended the Saffron Walden Conservation Area in early 2018 to embrace the whole of the former school grounds (not, as previously, just the front part along Mount Pleasant Road). The Conservation Area status means that the developer has to obtain planning permission for a change of use or alterations that affect the external appearance, including demolition of any substantial building or structure or the felling of trees with a stem diameter exceeding 75 mm as measured 1.5 m above ground. Planning permission would also now be required to move the Croydon Gate. Any application for planning permission for new housing within the former Walden School grounds will now need to be judged, too, in terms of its impact on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

Furthermore, Uttlesford District Council locally listed the school in October 2018 (along with, incidentally, the Quaker Meeting House where we are now). Locally listed status is a material consideration when determining planning applications and the desirability of preserving the special interest of the heritage should be taken into account.

Additional protection to the former school site is also afforded by most of it being designated as 'Protected Open Space for Playing Fields'; and some of it along Mount Pleasant Road and in the south-east corner being 'Protected Open Space of Environmental Value'. The playing field cannot be built over unless the sports pitches that are lost are replaced somewhere else locally with new facilities of the same (or improved) quantity or quality in a suitable location. Moreover, the housing development would in itself generate new residents, who have requirements for sports and recreation facilities, and Chase would have to mitigate against these by way of contribution towards facilities and green space, just the same as they would be if the development were on an agricultural field.

Chase has yet to hold pre-application discussions with the district council, only isolated talks so far with a few local sports organisations. The site itself stays boarded up, though the City of London Police have used the premises for police dog training. The left-over contents of the buildings continue to be dispersed: former Walden School books have been added to a new Quaker collection in the town library (recently renamed the Gibson Library) and other books to the lending stock at the

county library branch in Saffron Walden; sports equipment, musical instruments, classroom furniture and other items have gone to local schools; and kitchen equipment has ended up in a new sourdough bakery that opened last Saturday in the town.

This is as much as I can report to you at present.

Questions/Comments:

Nigel McTear: “£7.5 million was paid by Chase to buy the school site. This cleared the school’s various debts and liabilities, including administrators, debts and staff liabilities. Chase bought the site but have not been clear on their plans for the site.

Martin Hugall: “They [Chase] have a board outside the school with a website address, where their plans are detailed. Part of the school site is missing in their plans. It is unclear what will happen to the former Gibson House site. However, the council says they have sufficient primary schooling.”

Tony Watson: “I was at a meeting for the council’s local neighbourhood plan: the school playing fields are designated as an area which is to be kept as an open playing-field site.”

Nigel McTear: “The school buildings itself is in need of repair, which will cost a lot. Currently this is deteriorating. This means that there might be damp in the buildings”

Biddy Vousden: “There is a care taker still on site. And within his section there must still be heating, so the entire site is not completely stagnating.”

Martin Hugall: “I spoke to an old staff member who went to the school recently and reported that it looks almost like it has been frozen in time. A lot of what was there is still left out and not everything has been removed.”

Douglas Kent: “I spoke to someone who had recently been on site and they said the grounds are looking very overgrown.”

Nigel McTear: “Neither a clear nor pretty picture.”

8. FUTURE OF THE OSA, INCLUDING REUNIONS, FUNDING, ARCHIVES AND QUESTIONNAIRE

a) Reunions

(Nigel McTear): Nigel restated that the sole objective of the association is now fellowship. This will come about organically through reunions. It is for the committee to decide how best to support this.

Martin Hugall: “Old Scholars at the school between 1984 and 1988 met on 11th May 2019 in the Eight Bells and Douglas Kent will report to us on this reunion.”

(Douglas Kent): This is a copy of Douglas Kent’s report on the 1984-88 Reunion:

The first big reunion that I've attended since leaving school took place a fortnight ago, on the evening of Saturday 11th May, when Old Scholars who left between 1984 and 1988 met at the Eight Bells in Saffron Walden.

This well-attended event was organised via Facebook by two of my year, James Tuckwell and Phil Gibbs. Some of us had not seen each other since at least the Fifth Form. We had a very enjoyable evening, with lots of catching up – former PE teacher Chris Smith even gave an impromptu speech! We ended the evening resolved not to leave it another 35 years before coming together again!

Douglas Kent added that there were about 30 in attendance.

(Nigel McTear): Nigel continued by commenting that if anyone was thinking of organising other reunions then the association can share contact details. Nigel's own Year Group (1980) is also meeting up soon.

(Tony Watson): Tony Watson delivered a report on the 1940-58 Wrinkley Lunch Meeting. The Wrinkley group was started by Wilf Hayler. The group had met two years previously at Denby's Wine and had 19-20 in attendance. For this meeting 24 had signed up, but only 19 were fit enough to come. In attendance the earliest member to have left the school had left in 1949, whilst the youngest did so in 1955. Tony said they would continue to meet, but have been encouraged to look at somewhere in London, as there are many members from the North who want to come but need somewhere accessible from the train. Friends' House was touted as a possibility. Tony continued by saying that in the future, he will look for someone perhaps a bit younger to take over the job of organising!

(Nigel McTear): Nigel commented that is the model to follow.

Questions/Comments

Carey Dickinson: "My 1979 Year Group are meeting this evening at 6pm in Saffron Walden."

b) Funding

(Nigel McTear): Funding was mainly covered in finance section. In reality there is a surplus. This surplus is dependent on the continued donations of Old Scholars. If there is a cheaper way to run the database, the committee will look into implementing it.

Questions/Comments:

Martin Hugall: "One of the reasons the balance is £12,000 is that the association sold about £6,000 of its shares to give to the school but did not, in the end, hand this over when they knew that that school was closing."

Carey Dickinson: "Is there any way we can support the new school group: the Gibson House Initiative?"

Douglas Kent: "Further down the line, once the plans of the group are solidified, this might be an option."

Nigel McTear: "The OSA has been involved with what has become the Gibson House Initiative. Before Chase Homes bought the school, this group put in a bid to buy the site. This did not go through. However now, much like then, we are supportive of any initiative that will set up a school with a Quaker ethos. We would wish to continue to be supportive in the future. This is something the committee can look at in the future."

Tony Watson: "Old Scholars may have legacies in their wills which might go to the school. If the school no longer exists it might be worth letting Old Scholars know that these might need to be changed."

Martin Hugall: "The school presumably still exists as a legal entity – a charity and a limited company – to take these donations, as it is still in administration. However, it is worth making members aware of the situation."

c) Archives

(Martin Hugall): Martin gave a report on the archives. A number of those associated with the school helped to save the archives of the school. The communication between the school and the Old Scholars' Association was bad in the final months of the school's existence. In March 2018, the school having closed previous July, the Old Scholars were given access to the site to collect items for an archive. Previously, Governors had removed confidential information which is stored securely in the local vicinity. On this day, luckily a parent of a former pupil offered storage space in Shire Hill. So, a palette-load of mainly photographs and documents and school and OS magazines, which those present considered most important, was taken to this storage facility.

The Essex Record Office already has a full school archive up to 1936. The association had previously been led to believe that the Essex Record Office was not interested in any more items for the archive from the school. However, it transpired that the Essex Record Office had also received bad communication from the school and administrators and that they *were* interested. Thus, they gained access to the site and took a lot of what was left in the school for the Essex Record Office. The Record Office fortuitously had an extra member of staff on a 6-month contract to sort through the archives. They then sent 5 bags of duplicates to Martin Hugall, which are now in his garage. The items from Shire Hill have now also been taken by the Essex Record Office. Some duplicates will come back next year. A decision will need to be made on what to do with the duplicates. The town library is not really interested in photos, but rather books. The association wants to keep a full set of school and OSA magazines.

Martin went on to say that the Essex Record Office's online archive service only allows you to see which documents are there, rather than the content of the archived items. One has to go there to see the content of the archives. Martin then asked Douglas Kent to comment on the Essex Record Office as he has been there.

Questions/Comments:

Douglas Kent: “The Essex Record Office is a state-of-the-art facility. The archive is indexed along a Seax index (after the sword on Essex coat of arms). However, as Martin explained, you don’t know what you are getting from the Online Record, and have to see what there is when you are there.”

Martin Hugall: “In addition to this: the architect’s impression of the school which was in the library has been taken by the Essex Records Office in Chelmsford as well.”

Tony Watson: “The gong in the dining hall and some historical clothing has been donated to the Saffron Walden Museum. This includes an old blazer Martin and I discovered and cleaned up. Gibson Library has a complete set of magazines.”

Martin Hugall: “The museum is interested in the kicking stone, which was situated at the end of the avenue. However, someone bought it from the school after it had closed. As well as this, the painted triptychs from Library have been hung in the Quaker Meeting House.”

John Searle-Barnes: “The two triptychs have gone to the Quaker Meeting House, one of which is hung in the Long Room whilst the other is due to be hung at the bottom of the stairwell with a plaque, explaining its prominence and the relationship of the meeting with Friends’ School. Both triptychs were painted by an ex-Governor. One was painted for when ex-headmaster John Woods retired. Old Scholars may also like to know that there are a lot of copies of the tercentenary book “School on the Hill”, which are surplus and Old Scholars are welcome to have.”

Question from member: “Was the dining room clock archived?”

Martin Hugall: “Anything of value was auctioned off as part of the school assets. Grant Thornton gave no information about the auctions before they happened, so there was not an opportunity for Old Scholars or interested townsfolk to go.”

d) Questionnaire:

(Sarah Westerhuis): Sarah said that she and Tom Dickinson had been tasked with preparing a questionnaire for members to answer, so as to ascertain what members want from the Old Scholars’ Association. Specifically, the committee has noted that younger members of the community are out of touch with Old Scholars’ Association. The committee feels it would be a good idea to try to tap into the communication networks of the younger generations. The idea is to do a very short online questionnaire on various social media. Tom Dickinson and Sarah are looking to do this before the next committee meeting.

9. ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS; APPOINTMENT OF AUDITORS AND TRUSTEES:
(Nigel McTear): Nigel let members know that Stefanie Godfrey, the Secretary to the Old Scholars’ Association, would be moving on. Stefanie was secretary for 6 years and over this period she has been completely central to keeping the database as accurate as it is, and has overseen the smooth running of the association during the difficult transition into a new era after the closure of the school – she has been involved in doing something for the Old Scholars’ Association almost every day. The committee thanks her for her service.

Roly Fischer-Vousden is taking over as secretary – he will bring a knowledge and understanding of a younger generation. He was in the 2010 Year Group, was a member of the Quartet and comes with good recommendations.

Roly thanks the association, officers and committee members for appointing him and says he hopes he does as good a job as Stef has done.

All the proposed officers, committee members, auditors and trustees were reappointed:

Officers: Chair – Nigel McTear, Treasurer – Andrew McTear, Secretary – Roly Fischer-Vousden,
Other Committee members: Martin Hugall, Sarah Westerhuis, Biddy Vousden, Douglas Kent, John Searle-Barnes, Tom Dickinson, Mary Ward

Trustees: Andrew McTear, Tony Watson and Martin Hugall

Auditors: Chris Hicking, Graeme Johnston and Charles Mills

The above appointments were proposed by Paul Price-Smith and seconded by Graham Wedd. Paul also thanked current officers, committee members, auditors and trustees for carrying on.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(Martin Hugall): Martin brought up the issue of Pupil Records, which are currently in secure storage. Some students have asked for records and references on changing schools, especially several international students. The problem is that the Old Scholars' Association has not been able to secure access to them or find their current location, despite contacting Governors and the administrators.

Carey Dickinson: "The Governors of the school may be liable, and have to be responsible for the children, of whose records they are in charge.

Sarah Westerhuis: "The responsibility for safeguarding continues until the former students are at least 21, and so this may be a question for the Department of Education."

Carey Dickinson: "This should also be reported to the Charity Commission."

Sarah Westerhuis: "It is not inappropriate for the Old Scholars' Association to aid Old Scholars in pursuing their records."

It was agreed that this would be considered at the next committee meeting. Stef Godfrey also let members know that there will be a memorial meeting at the Meeting House on the 22nd June 2:00-4:00pm for David Wood, who was bursar and died in December 2018.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: The proposed date of the next AGM is at 2:30pm on Saturday 9th May 2020 at the Friends' Meeting House in Saffron Walden.

The meeting closed with a period of silence.

Nigel McTear Chairperson