

West Chiltington Dramatic Society

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at the Village Hall, West Chiltington on Monday 25 February 2019

The Chairman welcomed 26 Members and Patrons to the 69th AGM of the Society.

1. **Apologies:** An attendance list was circulated and 24 apologies were noted.
2. **Minutes of last AGM:** The Minutes of the last AGM were agreed, accepted and signed by the Chairman.
3. **Matters Arising:** There were no matters arising.
4. **Chairman's Report:**

It has been a pleasure to act as Chairman of the Society and I would first of all like to thank all the members of the Society who have given me support and advice in this my first year as Chairman. Generally the Society is in good health and we have spent this year in not only putting on our usual two productions but also in successfully addressing some of the other issues such as an aging membership. Some of our attention has of course been directed towards the Horsham District Year of Culture 2019 and our Drama Festival event in July this year.

We started the year off with an interesting talk at our February Members Evening by Ian Gledhill entitled 'Art and Illusion' followed by the traditional fish and chip supper and raffle. The May production was A Sense of Achievement written and directed by our own Jean Trew and the title is very apposite as Jean should have a considerable sense of achievement in successfully completing a very difficult task. This was Jean's first full length play as both an author and director; it was a real baptism of fire reconciling the passion of an author against the needs of a director in moulding the actor's interpretation of the script into a coherent production. Well done Jean!

Our November production welcomed back, after 25 years, Ralph Wigg as a director for the Society. The play chosen by Ralph was, of course, House Guest by Francis Durbridge and this was the first thriller we have undertaken for a few years. Judging by the audience feedback, we will be including more thrillers in our future programme of plays. This production was not only very well directed, acted and staged technically but was also resoundingly successful in financial terms. It brought a smile to the Treasurer's face.

Our two major productions were not the only theatrical activities we undertook. For the visit of the Rude Mechanicals this year a number of us took the opportunity to get into costume to support their prequel to A Midsummer Night's Dream. The purpose was to draw our activities to the audience attending with a membership table and display board. The costumes were again in use for our stands at both the West Chiltington Village Show and the Pulborough Harvest Fair. I am pleased to say that our attendance at these events has had an impact both in terms of the Society's profile in the community but also in attracting new members. The formation of the Members and Activities Group (MAG), ably lead by Janet, has given us a focus resulting in 10 new members during the year including two juniors, both of whom have been already appeared on stage.

The August Member's Evening saw a continuation of the intrigues and plotting of the Elizabethan Court in the time of Elizabeth I. This short play written and directed by Rosemary Lawrence (aka our Honorary President) gave us an insight into the scheming between Catholics and Protestants of that era.

The December Member's Evening gave us our first taste of a Play in a Day in the form of The Thwarting of Baron Bolligrew. The enthusiasm, team work and good humour exhibited throughout the day was magnificent. Everyone involved in getting this production onto the stage is to be congratulated. It was good to be served Turkey Pie at the end of the evening rather than a Dragon Stew.

The change of venue for our Play Reading for Fun to the Five Bells Inn seems to be proving popular with a significantly increased attendance. I have little doubt that this is due in part to the availability of excellent liquid refreshment from the bar. The pressure of organising the Festival means that we will not be holding another reading evening until after that event has closed.

I don't intend to go into BAFTA or Oscar mode and list all the people who have been a terrific support to me in this my first year as Chairman, as I am notorious for missing someone or something out. There is one person I will mention and that is Justin Curtis. As you most of you will know, Justin has been designing, and organising our programmes, flyers and posters for several years, however, he now feels that it is time for him to step down. To date our attempts to find a replacement have not been successful so I must renew the appeal for someone to take on this important role.

The November production saw our first attempt at selling tickets on line and I am pleased to say that approximately 60 were sold through this route and we will continue advertising this approach. I know that Rob Pearson has some ideas on how we can improve the service including self-printing of the tickets purchased. The on-line ticket sales are not meant to replace the sterling work done by our traditional box offices Nisa, the Post Office and Storrington Card Shop but to give us a greater catchment area from which to draw audience. However, we must accept the fact that audiences will only come if we continue to maintain the high standard of our productions.

Despite the pressures exerted by other entertainment media, I believe we have a good future ahead of us but we must continue our efforts to draw in more members in the lower age ranges and I would like to see at least two more juniors join this year.

I hope you will continue to enjoy your membership of the Society whether that be on-stage, back stage, front of house or audience. 2019 is going to be an exciting year!

5. Treasurer's Report:

Firstly I would like to record my, and the Society's, thanks to Mike Nicholson who is our new Honorary Auditor and has survived his first ordeal in auditing last year's accounts, and hopefully not his last!

The major event of 2018 was the transfer of our account from NatWest to Lloyds. I had been increasingly unhappy with the quality of service from NatWest for several reasons and it was planned to move anyway. The event was accelerated by the closure of the Storrington NatWest branch. The transfer has gone as well as can be expected for such a venture, with a few hiccups on the way, but is now well settled and working well. In the process we lost the very small interest that NatWest paid on Society accounts and have reverted to a single account without a reserve account.

Nearly all our payments out are now made on-line making my work-load much easier and we are getting an increasing number of in-payments through BACS as well. A reminder once again to anyone wishing to claim back expenditure that we are now quite draconian and no repayments will be made without a completed expenses form – these are to help me and our noble auditor - the forms can be downloaded from our website or obtained from me.

We are pleased to have been able to make two donations to charities, St Barnabas and the Alzheimers Society.

Overall income and expenditure is very much in line with 2017. One new item has appeared, namely 'HDYoC' – which relates to this year's 'Horsham District Year of Culture' of which you are all aware and reflects an increasing involvement through the accounts as we participate this year with our 'Drama Festival'. We have a small grant from Horsham District Council to help us defray the costs of participation. MAG (Member's and Activities Group) expenditure has increased as the group continues its excellent work in promoting the society and recruiting welcome new members.

The perhaps 'high' expenditure figure of £880 under 'miscellaneous' reflects mainly several floats drawn for various events and is balanced by the income figure of £880 as the floats were returned – and, yes, that accounts column should also have been called 'miscellaneous' too – my mistake!

The accounts were available for anyone who wished to see them.

6. Technical Report

The Technical report, compiled by Robert Pearson, was read by Amanda Hislop in his absence.

Technical Team: *we are pleased to report that our technical team now numbers four: David Goddard, Jon McNamara, Rob Pearson and Mike Phillips. More help however would always be welcomed.*

Video Monitoring: *the somewhat aged video monitoring system for Stage Manager and cast was modernised by the technical team. One new High Definition Monitor was purchased and another kindly donated by David Goddard. Digital converters were installed to enable the High Definition signal to be passed along the standard co-axial cable installed in the hall; the connections for the monitoring sound were also updated. Especial thanks go to David Goddard for his technical expertise with this project.*

Stage Speakers: *an upgrade to the Village Hall's own sound system with the addition of new speakers each side of the proscenium arch caused a small issue for the society: sound effects for our productions when fed to these speakers clearly emanated from them and compromised the illusion of phone bells, doorbells etc coming from the stage set. The technical team addressed this in House Guest by hanging borrowed speakers from bars above the stage. The society possesses two powered speakers intended for onstage sounds, but these are large and hard to conceal. The Committee has approved the sale of these and the purchase of a system capable of being hung. We will also need to procure different microphones that can be placed away from the hanging speakers to feed sound reinforcement and the hearing loop.*

Lighting Bar: *the Committee has approved expenditure of some £1500 on a fourth lighting bar to be sited at the rear of the stage. This we trust will be installed in time for the May play. The new bar will*

solve the perennial problem of hanging lights at the rear of the stage to simulate light in corridors or 'outside'.

(Geofrey Steward reported this would happen within the week.)

Mobile Phone Breakthrough: the hall's sound system is prone to occasional interference from the audience's mobile phones 'hunting', although we do ask that they be turned off during performances. The technical team will be experimenting shortly with Radio Frequency filters to try and minimise or cure this problem.

HDYoC Drama Festival: the technical team is engaged in writing a technical pamphlet explaining the hall's technical facilities for the benefit of visiting societies. There will be a heavy commitment required in July to assist with the drama festival.

Staging: Miq Kelland has continued his expert work as our set design, staging and construction guru. It is also good to note that we now get lots of helpers on set build day. We could however do with a few more for the set-striking Sundays.

7. Membership Report

The Membership report, compiled by Christine Pearson, was read by Amanda Hislop in her absence.

At 31 March 2018 the Society had 121 members. As of 18 February this year the recorded membership stands at 147 which represents a healthy increase over the year. This figure, however, includes 45 members who have yet to renew, some of whom may lapse. Further reminders to renew will be sent out shortly.

Current membership breaks down as:

Patrons = 30

Members = 103

Honorary = 12

Junior = 2

There is a membership issue in the distinction between 'Members' who are expected to take an active role in the Society's activities, and 'Patrons' who pay more but are not asked to participate actively, although some do. There has been a small trend over the year of people renewing as 'Members' rather than continuing as 'Patrons'. It was decided in Committee that we should honour our Patrons with a 'thank-you' board to be displayed at our events. A framed list was displayed at the 16 February Members Evening.

I would like the AGM to acknowledge the huge amount of work done for the society by loyal members Janet Methley and John Rimmer.

Comments were made regarding Patrons, and Geofrey Steward explained that the Committee were considering a single tier system of membership and disposing of the Patron system.

8. Appointment of Auditor:

The Chairman thanked Mike Nicholson for auditing the year's accounts and agreeing to continue into 2019.

9. Election of Officers and Committee:

The present Committee was re-elected, as follows, with no objections

Officers:	Chairman:	Geoffrey Steward
	Vice Chairman:	Angela Sloan
	Treasurer:	Mike Phillips
	Secretary:	Amanda Hislop

Committee: Christine Pearson
Hermin Daley
Rob Pearson

Geoffrey Steward commented that with present numbers on the Committee, the Society was in contravention of the required number laid out in the Statutes, and invited anyone to stand for the Committee or to be co-opted onto the Committee. Ewan Dunlop volunteered to stand.

10. Review of Membership Fees:

Geoffrey Steward explained the Committee's proposal to increase current fees with effect from January 2020. Although the accounts are, at present, in a healthy state, there is likely to be considerable outlay in the future due to new EU legislation that demands new LED lighting in all theatre environments. As WCDS is one of the main users of the Hall, the Society would be expected to make a substantial contribution.

Geoffrey proposed an increase of £10 for members and £15 for Patrons.

A discussion followed and it was agreed to implement this increase from January 2020, with a review of the status of members and Patrons from January 2021.

This was passed by all members present, with no objections.

There being no other business, the formal meeting closed at 8.15pm.

There followed an open forum with discussion on promoting new directors, stage managers, technical team and new actors and also someone to replace Justin Curtis. It was suggested that more experienced members in this field could 'mentor' newcomers, and also maybe use the Members' Evenings to try out their new skills.

This was followed by refreshments and a time to socialise.