

West of Scotland
Dry Stone Walling Association
Scottish Charity No SCO 39439

Annual General Meeting
Waitrose Community Room, Milngavie
Sunday 29th October 2023 14:00

Meeting

Sederunt: John New, Dave Barber, Danny McNaughton, Ronnie Reid, Jeff Hattie, Alistair McGeoch, Crawford Andrew, Russ Liddell, Dan Marshall, Colin Nicholson, Brenda Nicholson, Dave Mackie, Alistair Eadie, Jim Martin, Gordon Gray, Derek Winter, Anne Winter, Dave Lutwyche, Daniel Beaman

Apologies: Alan Patrick, Ailison Patrick, Dougie and Margaret Neilson

Agenda Item 1 – Minutes for previous Years

Minutes of the AGM 2021.

The minutes of the 2022 AGM held on 27th November 2022 were proposed by Alistair McGeoch, seconded by Jeff Hattie/Alistair Eadie, and passed as a true record of the proceedings.

Agenda Item 2 – Chairperson’s Statement

This was given by the chairman as per the Annual Submission to the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) for the period 1st September 2022 to 31st August 2023.

2023 has been another busy year. We have had three courses at our new venue, Auchenfoyle farm, in April, July, and August, with about 55 attendees in total. We got excellent feedback from the attendees and also some new members from the courses, which is encouraging, considering that the stone is rather challenging.

In May we did the Kilmacolm show again and finally got the lower part of the wall completed. We also got nice feedback from the public on our work. We also started our own Galloway dyke at Kilsyth in order to train ourselves and display this interesting wall style. At this member's weekend we also did some basic walling and a general tidy of the site which benefited everyone.

In July several members journeyed to Threave castle for another joint project building a circular Galloway dyke, and it's always nice to meet other branch members from around the UK. Once again, the fare and chat were excellent. It's one event I

would encourage more to attend as it's good to gain experience to get out of our comfort zone and meet with other wallers and with other wall types.

We had an August gap which we filled with a steep wall rebuild at Glenarn gardens, which turned out to be a lovely build despite the weather making it a slippery site. Once again the fare from our hosts was excellent and well received, and we all left with a jar of the famous Glenarn honey.

We cancelled the test weekend this year as there weren't enough candidates to make it a viable event, but instead we had another member weekend where Jeff built a first class cheekend and others rebuilt two of the Initial stints, with more stone tidying in the background.

I would encourage all members to aim for Intermediate level within the branch, as it helps their confidence and instructional skills when we are running our Courses. To this end I think more instructional weekends at Kilsyth in next year's programme will go a long way to achieving this.

We need to look at another stone type, maybe level bedded red sandstone in order to build a new retaining wall for Advanced level, and also for features such as step style, lunkies, pillars etc.

Obituaries

We sadly lost three members this year. Alan Fox, who died suddenly, and has been a long-standing member who travelled from Peebles to attend our branch events. We also lost our chief storyteller John Hendry, a founder member committee member, and stalwart of the branch, both will be sadly missed. And latterly we lost Norman Muir, our past chairman, which again was sudden and a great loss. A lot of the good work we've done in the past was done under Norman's stewardship. He was a great leader, did really lovely work and we owe him a lot for that.

Hopefully we won't have too many next year as it was a hard year for losing members and hopefully with the courses and generally chat, we'll encourage more members to come in.

Agenda Item 3 – Finance Report

Chairman John New submitted the annual accounts as per the Annual Submission to OSCR for the period 1st September 2022 to 31st August 2023.

The main page we want to look at is Page 5 with the Income and expenses. Receipts are £5474 which is very good. Training courses are the main source of income with over £5000 in the past year. We did put the price up to £95, which is still relatively cheap in Britain. There are day courses at £200-300 and weekend courses for £400-500. So compared to what we used to charge, it may seem to be a bit more but it's an excellent price and it keeps us with a good supply of funds.

The main expenses are the van, insurance, admin costs of keeping up the website, governance is basically the auditor (Chalmers accounts £360) which at the moment stays the same every year.

And that gives us a surplus of £2598. We're in a nice healthy position with funds standing at £8322, so we have a healthy bank balance, compared to last year of £5724.

There are a few refunds of course fees, we had to buy a couple of wheelbarrows which are incredibly expensive £120 for two. The cost of most things has gone up unfortunately.

John then asked for any questions:

Alastair Eadie asked about the health of the van. John replied:

It is now going great. We had a lot of work done on it last year to get an MOT – about £1000 including a new battery. The advisories last year included some rot/rust underneath, and Transits are notorious for that. One of the things to have done this winter is to have it cleaned and undersealed which will keep it going another couple of years. The cost of any decant second-hand van is between £15000-2000. Since COVID, everything has rocketed, and we don't have that kind of money so we'll have to keep this one going for the next couple of years and build up the funds. In other branches people have to use their personal estate cars to lug things around. We need a van to carry everything around and we have some expensive stone cutting tools that need to stay under cover. The local garage isn't the cheapest, but they do a good job keeping it going.

Alastair asked we have a storage unit for keeping the tools.

We have an open area in the shed at the stables in Kilbarchan where we keep bulky things like frames and formers but it's not secure. John Hendry was very good at doing the inventory every year up there, but the van is our security area. The van is taken out from John's every winter because the problems were coming from non-use over the winter.

So, we lose an old hammer now and again but generally there's very little that goes missing. Since John painted them all red it has made a difference. We have enough tools for each course. If we need anything specialised, we use Allan Carruth, the Blacksmith at Kilbarchan. We should also look at doing another wall for him and we haven't been there for a couple of years – it's a nice wee venue.

Recommendation of the balance sheet as a true record of the accounts was proposed by Derek Winter, seconded by Alistair Eadie and passed unanimously.

Agenda Item 4 – Election of Office Bearers

At this point the officers and committee demitted office and the election for 2023/24 office bearers took place. Alan Patrick resigned as Deputy Chairperson and Trustee because of health problems. We wish him all the best.

No one stood for the Deputy Chair position so that will be empty for a year.

The Treasurer position continues to be empty, and the previous treasurer John New is still acting Treasurer, however there is nothing to be done as Treasurer any more as almost all transactions are taking place on-line (payments, refunds, donations, membership etc), and there are very few cheques written any more. As we don't have an association credit card, the cheques are mainly reimbursement cheques for expenses made on behalf of the association i.e., van petrol and website expenses. The accountant has a good view of the bank transactions with breakdowns from the Stripe card processor, so the audit trail is good.

All other existing officers and committee members, (had agreed previously or) agreed to stand for re-election.

Chairperson, Treasurer, Secretary and Committee were re-elected after being proposed by Alistair Eadie, seconded by Alistair McGeoch and approved unanimously by the meeting.

Chairperson: John New

Treasurer: Chairman John New was re-appointed acting treasurer

Secretary: Dave Barber

Agenda Item 5 – 2023 Courses and IT

Dave Barber gave a quick update on the 2022 courses and IT.

This year has been pretty much the same as last year as the web system has bedded in nicely.

We decided to set the course dates early this year so we can have some dates for selling gift vouchers before the Christmas period – we have already sold one voucher this week. It took 15 minutes to set up the courses for the 2024 year – including new photos.

The course dates are the weekends are 6 April (Auchenfoyle), 6 July (Auchenfoyle) and 17 August (Kilsyth or Auchenfoyle). *(EDIT: This was originally in the draft as Kilsyth only. If we have the stone, then it will be in Kilsyth, otherwise Auchenfoyle. Decision in July).* The site at Auchenfoyle was commenced this year and has been a great success. We lost Cardross as a site because the farm was sold, so we moved that course to Auchenfoyle. And we moved Kilsyth to Auchenfoyle as well – but Kilsyth is *(EDIT: potentially if we can get the stone,)* back on the calendar for this year.

We haven't allowed bookings yet – they will go live on 1 Nov, and we'll send an email to the people on the waitlist the day before that. We've had 10 people add themselves to the waitlist this week.

The 2024 programme will be put up on the website later today.

We will keep the maximum number of attendees at 20, as we usually get a couple cancelling/moving for each course.

Dave Mackie asked about a possible fourth course if we have the numbers. John replied that we have a short program of 14 weeks, but we could possibly add a small course at the end of the year if there were enough people. Alistair McGeoch suggested we could do a small course to clean up any people who wanted a course.

John reminded us that even though we had a large waitlist in 2023, many people on the waitlist had already committed their upcoming weekends and couldn't come in at short notice. So, we would have to plan an extra course with a longer lead time.

Dave also mentioned that this year we added a Donations and a Membership Fees to the website – which was great last year when we couldn't take cash payments when we had to move the AGM to Zoom.

Dave also told the meeting of learnings from the new booking system and 24-hour on-line payments.

Over the holiday period on the 5th July (over a 12 minute period) our website was used by someone to (presumably) test a list of stolen Credit Cards. They attempted to donate £5 to us on 64 cards and 6 were successful (58 failed). We investigated these transactions very recently as we were getting the reports ready for the accounts. The donations of two cards were challenged by the owners and refunded (each with a £20 dispute fee). The four remaining £5 donations will be refunded on Nov 1.

Unfortunately, this is one of the 'new frontier' issues that are inherent in the on-line transaction world. We weren't exposed to any fraud ourselves, but we were used to see if cards could be used for charges. We have a "reCAPTCHA" box (where you have to click on pictures of motorbikes, mountains or fire hydrants) on the Donation and Membership screens to try and prevent 'Internet Bots' from using our website in this way, but humans can still use the page. In the future we will be watching for this type of transaction and refund the donations if we find them.

Agenda Item 6 – 2023 programme

John reported on the 2024 plans. As well as the three beginners' courses and the tests, we have two interesting projects we are working on. Alistair Eadie mentioned that he comes along for the pleasure of walling – rather than the courses.

One project is working with a consultant geologist/archaeologist around the Sterling area. He's looking to build a round, stone smelter to see whether iron can be extracted from ore. He wants to create this project to see if/how iron-age smelting techniques worked.

Perhaps we can source some stone (perhaps sandstone) from Tradstocks. Apparently, the geologist worked with Irwin Campbell on the broch some years ago.

Another interesting project is with a Community Garden to create seats or other features in an interest setting – something right up our street.

So that's a couple of interesting community style builds for 2024.

The Kilmacolm show has been added to the 2024 calendar. We didn't get our long-standing site last year – in fact they had missed us off completely, so we were allocated a piece of land on the day, which ended up not too bad as it was closer to the cheek-end of the wall that needed rebuilding. John will ensure we get an allocation in 2024.

John said that as far as the tests are concerned, we want to encourage everyone to take the tests. New members can take Level 1 (the old Initial) or Level 2 (the old Intermediate) exams. Both Dans were looking at taking the exams.

Alistair McGeoch reiterated that we'd have to look at the stone we have for the Advanced exams – the amount, quality and type of stone which would try and take some of the problems out of a build – you need good stone for a good build. John said we have some funds, and we could investigate getting some more stone.

Alistair suggested some days to do in-house training on cheek-ends – for the Level 2 exams. You need experience/mentoring on cheek-ends – you can't just jump in and do them. He suggested earlier in-house training for this – so there is plenty of time for training after the mentoring.

John concurred that training/practise was essential before the tests. It's a case of getting people well trained up so they feel confident on the day and can sail through the test.

John also thanked Dan B for clearing up the training site in Kilsyth.

The last event on the program is the AGM and Dave asked how people felt about having the AGM in Milngavie this year. Most people through the Waitrose Community Room was a nice venue and travel-wise was it easier for most people. Balforn is only £20 for the hire of the hall but the Community Room is free. We don't get our Tea/Coffee like at Balforn (Café service at Waitrose is very nice and personable – but very slow).

Agenda Item 7 – SLG (Scottish Liaison Group)

The SLG meeting was on this morning (the day of the AGM) and John sent his apologies. Last year we had the Threave branch build. In 2024 they may have another event at Threave building a circle Galloway dyke on an opposite hill – perhaps in August. It's a good get-together with people you see on Facebook and other stone forums – and enjoyable as we chat to people who are also promoting the craft.

Dave mentioned that we occasionally get contacted by people who would like a private course. Invariably, they are in areas allocated to other DSWA branches, so we always put them in touch with those branch representatives.

Agenda Item 8 – Greenock Ocean Terminal

Greenock was possibility but John received a text saying they had to create new railways and cranes through that area, so they had to clear the feature.

John has replied asking if the stone stored anywhere so we could sort through it and do a rebuild, but he hasn't come back to John. Alistair McGeoch asked if we could go in and have a look at/for it. John replied that we'll have to wait for an answer before going in. Hopefully the Moongate (which was in a different position) is still there. Adrian Whitaker has recently reminded us that there was a jar with the builders' names etched onto it hidden in the build, so we hope that has been recovered. So, at the moment we are leaving messages on the answering machine and waiting for a reply.

Alistair Eadie remembered that the project was originally started as a community Project with Ian Coultie and the Rotary. John said that the Rotary were getting around £1500 per year from the money that people were throwing in, so they'll be losing that. If it's still available, we could retrieve the copes and rebuild it.

Agenda Item 9 – Any other business

John mentioned the membership is still sitting around 45 members. The extended members are paying their £10 subs through the website. We're getting good numbers through the courses and a steady stream of members are coming in. We are a good healthy branch.

There was a short discussion about stone at the Kilsyth site. Maybe going for a red or different type of sandstone. Alistair McGeoch said there was plenty of stone there, but we needed to look at good stone if we want to do the advanced retaining wall and advanced features – it needs to fit better and lie better.

Dan found that the Alston was good – the more times you used it the better it was. However, more was needed as there was only enough of you built it the same way – Dan built it a different way and there wasn't enough.

Both Alistair McGeoch and John said rebuilding/reworking always consumed a percentage of the stone and new stone was always required.

Derek Winter suggested Locharbriggs quarry (Dumfries), but it may have closed. John said that red stone could be worked but also could be hard. Gordon Gray said that so long as you could work it in advance it could work. Alistair McGeoch said that the timed part of the Advanced qualification needed good stone. Dan said the more the stone was used/rebuilt, the more universal the stone became – better for the timed test. Gordon said you wanted experienced, capable people doing the work (preparing the stone) before your advanced test.

Alistair Eadie raised the problems of Covid and the lack of community projects. After people do their courses, they need better opportunities to encourage them back by going on community projects. John agreed with Alistair – and said we are responding to any queries that come through. Alistair also said that projects with greater area coverage was needed so there was plenty of room for each person to build. He also suggested that the more experience members could step back a bit and mentor the newer members. John said the new Community Gardens build showed promise of a larger build. John also mentioned that the Guides location was available but there wasn't a lot of extra stone available there.

John mentioned that the programme will be spread around with the training courses, 2 community builds and the test/practise weekends, but we could extend the program into October.

Chairman John New thanked members for the good turnout and the meeting closed at 3.25pm.

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