

Minutes of the 26th (111th) Annual General Meeting of the St Beghian Society
held in the Whitelaw Building on Saturday, 28th September 2019 at 11.00am.

There were 35 people present, including Peter Lever (President), Pam Rumney (Secretary) and David Lord (Treasurer).

- 1) **Welcome** – Peter Lever, the President, welcomed Members to the 111th Annual General Meeting of the St Beghian Society and thanked everyone for their attendance.
Following Agenda Item No.2, Peter continued by explaining that there had been several developments at the school over the last twelve months. The new Headmaster, Mr Roger Sinnett, who worked for the Full Circle group, was now in charge and there were about thirteen pupils, mainly in Years 7 and 8, but also three in Years 9 and 12. Peter reported that Speech Day had been a very happy and vibrant day, with a feeling that the heart was returning to the school. However, he did indicate that there had been some financial problems over the last year, which were currently being negotiated. Also he stated that a new lease with Full Circle was being drawn up.
Peter praised the excellent St Beghian Society dinners that he had attended in Cumbria, the NE and London, plus the great Wasps Rugby Event that had taken place in March. In particular he thanked the Crossley-Smith family for their continued support at the various functions across the country – Tim for organising the London events, his father Steve for his contributions to the Yorkshire Branch, and for three generations of the family attending the rugby day! However, Peter did raise concerns over the increasingly difficult task of encouraging OSBs to attend these get-togethers and acknowledged that the Committee had discussed possible ways forward for the future.
The special Remembrance Service at the Priory in November 2018 had been a very moving occasion. Passing the crosses lining the path on the way in, which identified the 184 OSBs who had died in the First World War, Peter felt was a very sobering moment in itself. This, alongside the reading of a poem during the service, had been a significant moment for him and a highlight of his year as President. He considered it a huge privilege to have been invited and to have represented the Society at this event.
- 2) **Brief Silence in memory of departed OSBs** – Pam Rumney read out a list of names of OSBs who, the Society had been advised, had passed away since the last AGM in September 2018.
The President confirmed that a Memorial Service for Mrs Charm Robson would be taking place the following day, Sunday 29th September, at 2pm in the Priory followed by afternoon tea in the Memorial Hall, to which there was an open invitation.
- 3) **Minutes of the 110th A.G.M. held on Saturday 29th September, 2018 (published in the January 2019 Bulletin)** – The Minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a true and accurate record. They were proposed by Dacre Watson and seconded by George Robson.
- 4) **Matters Arising** – There were no matters arising from the minutes.

It was agreed to take Agenda Item No.6 prior to Agenda Item No.5.

5) Election of Officers:

- a) **President Elect - vacant.** Peter Lever explained that a year ago he had reported that he was looking for a successor and that he would be standing down as President as from September 2019. Over the last year both he and Dacre Watson had been searching for a suitable person to take over the role and had identified Howard Graham (FS 80-87). Peter was pleased to advise that Howard was willing to take on the position of President but that it had been agreed he would take up the role in September 2020, in order to allow Peter to see various current matters resolved.
George Robson expressed his thanks to Peter, stating that he was “ineffable!” He proposed a round of appreciative applause, which was duly fulfilled by the Members present.
- b) **Committee – retiring this year were John Dunn, Richard Hall and Mark Roberts.** All Committee Members had expressed their willingness to stand for re-election apart from Mark Roberts, whom it had not been possible to contact; nevertheless, it was thought that he would be happy to continue.

- c) **Treasurer** – David Lord was happy to continue for the time being.
- d) **Secretary** – Pam Rumney agreed to continue.
- e) **Golfing Secretary** – Tom Wright was willing to continue as Golfing Secretary.
- f) **Accounts Checker** – Jason Spires was also willing to continue as Accounts Checker.

A proposal to re-elect all the officers as above was made and unanimously agreed. Proposed by Dacre Watson and seconded by Duncan Merrin.

6) **The Current School – Mark George (Chair of School Trustees).**

Mark George (Chair of the School Trustees) reflected on the decision three years ago when the School Trustees had agreed to seek an arrangement with the Full Circle Group. He confirmed that a key component that had attracted the Trustees had been the Global Education concept and the aspirations for growth that Full Circle had presented. Mark believed that the recent announcement of the opening of two new St Bees Schools in China in 2020 was testament to this vision. He confirmed that a primary school would be opening in Shijiazhuang in the Hebei Province and a high school in Dongguan in the Guangdong Province. He emphasised that St Bees School in Cumbria was regarded as ‘the mother school’ of all these new creations. Mark cited the fly-wheel analogy to describe the past few years at school. He suggested that the period from Sep 2016-2018 was like the first turn of the fly-wheel, which is always deemed to be the hardest as there is no momentum and thereby describes a time of least reward for the most effort. Mark considered September 2018 to be “the end of the beginning”. The second turn of the wheel he attributed to the first year of operation (Sep 2018-2019), whereby it is thought that the job is done, but in reality there is still a long way to go. He confirmed that a lot had happened at school over the last twelve months, including the appointment of a new Headmaster. Mark reported that the pupils and their parents appeared to be extremely happy and that they were receiving a good education, despite the school’s underlying tough time financially. Mark suggested that they were now entering the third turn of the fly-wheel and hoped that the momentum created by a Senior Management Team would carry them through the next year. He acknowledged that there were still many risks involved, several of which were out of their control, such as Brexit, but confirmed that they would continue to deal with any barriers they met. Mark concluded by saying that Roger Sinnett was leading the school well, Danny Wang had a clear vision for the future, and that as School Trustees, they were the Trustees of Edmund Grindal’s vision to lead education in West Cumbria and would therefore do all they could to see this happen.

George Robson congratulated Mark on the success to date and stated that the school was very close to the hearts of OSBs. He went on to ask about boarding at school and the plans for the future. Mark agreed that boarding was extremely important and reported that at present they had just one boarder but with the potential for another two to join shortly. Laurence Gribble said that they had a sleepover planned for current pupils within the following two weeks with a view to possibly encouraging some to take up the boarding option. Peter Lever informed the AGM that there had been approximately 350 students on site over the summer as part of STEAM residential summer schools. Lesley Lees asked if there were plans for the Chinese to come over to St Bees regularly. Mark confirmed that having now acquired the Tier 4 operating licence, they hoped to see Chinese students at school in the future.

Anthony Wills enquired as to whether Full Circle had taken over all of the school assets. Mark assured the meeting that all the assets were still owned by the School Trust but that they were being leased to the Full Circle Group on a 33 year lease basis, with the option to extend for a further two periods of 33 years, amounting to a 99 year lease in total. Donald Brownrigg asked if there was the option in place to review before the 33 year period was complete. Mark understood that after five years the situation would be assessed by both parties.

Donald Brownrigg stated that, in his opinion, Edmund Grindal’s vision was not being fulfilled by bringing in overseas pupils and it was his belief that the school did not have the backing of the village. Mark assured Donald that Edmund Grindal’s vision was fully in their mind and that they believed they were keeping true to Grindal’s wishes. Peter Lever stated that the only way private education could continue at St Bees would be with the addition of overseas pupils as there was no pot of money locally to fund it any other way. Anthony Fox sympathised with Donald’s point, but he strongly believed that there were not enough parents in West Cumbria that were willing to pay for education and therefore it was essential to go out of the area to enrol pupils.

John Hewitson maintained that there needed to be a concentrated effort on marketing and confirmed that he would be asking for clarification on this matter from the Headmaster during the afternoon session. Anthony Fox agreed that marketing was important but also believed that a product was needed first, which, in his opinion, was what the school was trying to achieve.

Donald Brownrigg and Frank Messenger asked about various other options with local schools that had originally been mooted in 2015, but Mark confirmed that each one had been explored in detail and found not to be viable for various reasons. Mark concluded by advising that the school would never have reopened if it hadn't been for the arrangement with Full Circle.

The President thanked Mark on behalf of the Society for his attendance and presentation.

7) Lonsdale Terrace – David Lord/Anthony Fox –

a) Richard Stout's Proposal for Discussion – Anthony Fox began by confirming that Lonsdale Terrace was owned by the Guarantee Trust Fund (GTF), which was established in 1938 when pupil numbers were decreasing and there was a danger of the school's closing. As a result, many OSBs personally helped out by funding the school through the difficult war years and beyond. Once the school was back on its feet, the GTF invested their remaining funds and utilised the monies to buy the properties on Lonsdale Terrace, as they became available, to assist with boarding and staff accommodation for the school. Anthony therefore reaffirmed that Lonsdale Terrace was owned by the GTF and not the Society, although initial funds had been provided by Society Members. Anthony advised that the current GTF Trustees were David Lord, Roy Calvin and himself. He went on to say that the primary objective of the original GTF Trust Deed had been to support St Bees School whilst it was a legal entity; however, he acknowledged that this deed would now need re-drafting in the light of the new school. A further company, OSB Nominee Limited, had also been established a few years ago to assist with the administration of the Terrace. Anthony informed the Members that when the school closed in 2015 the GTF Trustees had sought advice with regard to the future of Lonsdale Terrace. It had been recommended that the properties should be put on the market to be sold. The necessary planning permission and change of use approval were granted by Copeland Borough Council, and in April this year the required works to convert the buildings back into individual units was started. Anthony reported that the Terrace had since been put on the market by PFK Estate Agency for offers in excess of £1m, which, he felt, reflected the state of the property market in West Cumbria as well as the extent of the work needed to turn the properties back into residential homes. Anthony made it clear that, as the Trustees were personally liable for any mortgages or loans, he hoped they would be able to sell the Terrace within the next six months. He went on to say that once Lonsdale Terrace had been sold and any loans, Capital Gains Tax, Council Tax and other bills had been paid, there would be significant funds available which the GTF Trustees would need to invest.

Referring to Richard Stout's proposal that had been tabled for discussion, Anthony assured Richard that he, as a Trustee, had no intention of the funds from the sale of Lonsdale Terrace being utilised to fill "a big black hole", but he also reminded the Members present that the monies belonged to the GTF and therefore any proceeds of the sale would be paid into the GTF account and not the Society account, as Richard's proposal had suggested. However, he concluded by acknowledging that the Society had supported the GTF and vice versa over the years and it was envisaged that this would continue in the future.

Steve Lees questioned the possibility of the GTF fully redeveloping the properties themselves and asked if this was precluded because of the sums of money required. Anthony confirmed that this was the case and pointed out that, amongst other things, a project manager would probably have had to be appointed, which would then have necessitated further funding from the bank, and in his opinion he did not have confidence that this would be granted. Steve Lees inquired whether the estate agents had advised on the value of the properties if they were to be sold individually. Anthony confirmed that a figure in the region of £2.7m had been quoted, assuming the properties had been fully redeveloped. David Lord went on to say that in their present state, he understood that each property would require a minimum of £120k spent on it to bring it up to a saleable level. He concluded by affirming that the GTF did not have the funds available to redevelop the properties themselves.

David Rowlands asked for clarification that the full Terrace was on the market as a whole as opposed to individual properties being sold separately. Anthony confirmed that this was the intention currently, but added that if they were not successful, the alternative could be to sell the houses individually.

Richard Stout mentioned articles in the Whitehaven News about the sale of the houses on Lonsdale Terrace, but since the articles had not been written by the GTF or Society no-one was able to comment on their content.

Peter Lever advised that Grindal was also on the market and confirmed that an offer had been accepted by the School Trustees. He believed that completion could be within the next few weeks and suggested that a proportion of the funds from the sale of Grindal (approximately £150k) would, he hoped, be paid to the GTF as part repayment of the outstanding loan owed by the School Charitable Trust to the GTF. He went on to indicate that an actual total figure of approximately £1.6m had recently been agreed as the full amount owing to the GTF by the School Charitable Trust and this took into account the unexpired portion of the lease term and the re-instatement costs following the handing back of the Terrace to the GTF. Peter concluded by stating that should anything untoward happen to the school in the future, the GTF would be a significant creditor.

- 8) Society Accounts – 2018-2019.** David Lord summarised the Society Accounts which had been tabled. He pointed out that prior to the school’s closure in 2015, the Society and GTF had combined cash assets in excess of £200k; however, the running costs for Lonsdale, which had previously been paid by the school, along with staff costs, had reduced this figure by in excess of £150k over the four year period to £47k. David voiced his concerns and warned that if no money was received with regard to the sale of Grindal, the Society would run out of funds in mid-2020. He therefore felt it might well be necessary to go out to the Membership for financial assistance.

The St Beghian Society General Account – David indicated that if Pam Rumney’s salary was excluded, the income generated just about covered the expenditure costs incurred. He therefore stressed the importance of finding a way to fund the cost of Pam’s salary from elsewhere.

Old St Beghians’ Club Guarantee Trust Fund Account – David outlined the Council Tax payments, explaining that during 2017/18 these amounts had been paid for by the school and staff using the premises, leaving just a small figure of £89 to be found by the GTF. However, during the 2018/19 financial year these payments had become the responsibility of the GTF and the amount owed had risen to just under £8k. In addition, whilst the Terrace was in use by the school, a rent of £3,000 per month was being paid to the GTF, which had obviously now ceased.

Frank Messenger enquired about possible mining rights. It was thought that these were no longer relevant to the school, but it was understood that there is a potential for monies to be received if and when the Whitehaven coal mine starts to produce.

- 9) Branch Activities** – The President conveyed his concerns over the dwindling number of Members both within the Society and also those attending events across the country. He reported that following discussions at the earlier Committee meeting it had been agreed to concentrate efforts on perhaps fewer, but more regionally-based events. However, it was stressed that the Society would continue to do whatever it could to keep the Society alive and to maintain OSB involvement in any way possible, for as long as it was required by the Membership.

- 10) The 200 Club Draw** – A report produced by Darryl Davies had been tabled for information.

As time was short, it was agreed that the draw should take place over lunch. In the end this was not possible and the draw was postponed until the 5th November. The subsequent draw produced the following winners:

PRIZE	No.	WINNER	PRIZE	No.	WINNER
£160	33	HL (Lynne) Plummer	£40	62	DT (David) Johnston
£40	60	WJM (Bill) Heslop	£40	6	PJ (Philip) and S Etchells
£40	22	Mrs SJ (Sara) Calvin (nee Gough)			

- 11) Any Other Business** – There were no matters raised.

The President thanked members for attending and closed the meeting at 12.22pm.