

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Monmouthshire Antiquarian Association

Held at St Julian's Church Hall, Newport on Saturday May 25th 2024

Presided over the President Jeremy Knight

1. **Apologies for absence** were received from: Christina Evans, Jack Hanbury, Peter Nash, David Lerman, Jean and Roger Hancock, Tony Hopkins, Marjorie Evans, Angela Old, Rod & Phillipa Hough, David Lerman, Doug and La Bessa Warren, Maddie Gray, Neil Maylan, S C Rutherford & A A Schafer-Rutherford, John E Evans, Sue Miles, Dr Mark Lewis, Joyce Compton, Keith Underwood, Alan Aberg.
2. **Remembrance of Members** who have passed away in 2023/2024: Mrs Dina Kennedy 3rd October 2023, Dr David Orville Jones 3rd February 2024, Dr John Kenyon 9th February 2024, Mr Desmond Hale 25th February 2024, Professor Chris Williams 5th April 2024. Members stood in a minute's remembrance.
3. **Minutes of the last Meeting:** these had been circulated in advance. They were proposed as a true record by Arthur Edwards, seconded by Christopher Hill. Agreed without dissent.
4. **Matters arising:** None.
5. **Words from the President, Jeremy Knight** who compared the last twelve months to the reminiscences of the late Queen when she referred to it as an 'Annus Horribilis', in that so many events had had a depressing effect from the rising cost of living to the wars occurring in several countries. However, he was happy to report the Association had continued to flourish with opportunities to visit archaeological sites, attend talks and other activities, and an excellent journal. He was looking forward to the next issue of the Journal under a new Editor, Arthur Edwards. Jeremy also congratulated Arthur on his election to the Society of Antiquaries.

6 & 7. **Chairman's report/ Secretary's report:** The chairman, Ray Howell, observed that many of the items within these reports would be duplicated and it made more sense to have a joint report, which was read by the secretary:

MAA report 2023 to 2024 Ray Howell, Jan Bailey:

This has been a roller coaster of a year. We mourn the loss of our Patron, Professor Chris Williams. We will not dwell on this here as others will have more to say on this later in the meeting. There have been some challenges to face, and we may possibly face some more over the coming months. Like the weather, nothing is as settled as we would like it to be, but we are equipped with a broly and intend to carry on regardless.

It seems a very short time ago that we were writing the reports for the AGM at Caerwent in June 2023. Since then, we have held 3 committee meetings and many subcommittee meetings. The main thrust of the sub committees has been to plan the programme for

the present and coming year and work to update the Association website and provide digital access to The Monmouthshire Antiquary. It has been good to welcome Simon Tee as treasurer. I am sure he did not realise just how much he was taking on when he volunteered for the role last year. Committee meetings are an opportunity to take stock and received the reports of the subcommittees. We also have reports of projects we have supported through grants, all of which are thriving. We have probably made more use than previously of hybrid meetings where some of us meet in person and other committee members join using technology. This has not been without problems, but we have for the most part ironed out the wrinkles now. Thank you to Dai and Mark at Amgueddfa Cymru and to Simon for the use of their board rooms.

Last autumn a questionnaire was circulated to members to find out a little more about demographic and what might appeal in the programme. The responses were interesting and have allowed us to better tailor the programme to the needs and expectations of you, the members. Sadly, the total number of responses was too small to be statistically significant, but it did confirm that most valued receiving a paper copy of the journal, and that those who responded thought that the membership fees were good value for money. We will continue to hold around 10 events a year and try to provide some opportunities to meet in person as well as a remote lecture programme in the winter months. More frequently these days we join with other groups to ensure viable numbers for walks and study days. In the last year we have joined in excavations with Chepstow Archaeological Society and helped with geophysical survey at the Buckholt Woods Hillfort project and the Living Levels Project at Goldcliff. These opportunities are few and far between and it is a pleasure to be able to offer the opportunity for participation to MAA members. We have also tried to disseminate information from other groups with similar interests through the quarterly newsletters and email updates.

Another recent addition to the committee, Sian King, has been leading a working group on improving the website and digital access to the journal. It is agreed that the website is a good tool for attracting new members to the Association. Work is in progress to secure a grant to fund the remaining digitisation work and to appoint web design and hosting professionals to bring us in line with similar organisations.

You will be hearing more from the editors later in the meeting, so I will leave it to them to tell you about progress on the appointment of new printers after the retirement of 4word, who ably served us in recent years.

Regarding future plans, in June we will once again be joining with the Cambrian Archaeological Association in a walk around the Levels at Redwick and Goldcliff. This is part of a wider programme that CAA offers to their members. It is good to welcome people from all over Wales to our corner of the Principality. In July we will be extending a welcome to over 70 delegates to Tintern at our study day, which this year is focused on Cadw's conservation work at the Abbey. The list of speakers is truly stellar. (I had to go

back and add FSA to the names of each of the speakers!) Many of you may have already heard snippets of this, but hopefully the day long programme will allow time to explore in greater depth the discoveries that have been made so far in this project.

Overall membership numbers are increasing slowly. Like other societies and local history groups we are hoping to attract younger members. This is essential to ensure the survival of the Association into the next generation. One of the main assets we have is the journal, which has led to enquiries from researchers who have subsequently joined us. We need to be mindful that we should extend our appeal to people outside of the academic community as well as to those who have significant local research interests. This will be the focus of committee work in the next years, along with reviewing and updating our policies. This work was started in 2022 with the review of the Constitution.

Earlier this year we were all disappointed to find out that the main stays of Culture and Heritage in Wales were to be subjected to draconian funding cuts by Welsh Government. Whilst MAA is not a political organisation, we did alert members to ways in which you could make your views know. We have spoken privately with representatives of Cadw, The Royal Commission and Amgueddfa Cymru to ascertain the current situation, and to offer our support. This has been appreciated. We corresponded with other societies and groups who added their weight to the campaign. We also lent our support to the Council for British Archaeology who wrote to the relevant ministers in the strongest terms. We are pleased to report that whilst cuts have been made, the extent of them has been significantly reduced. We believe that Welsh Government is in no doubt now that ordinary people in Wales value their Past and are willing to challenge the government when key institutions are threatened in this way. Thank you to all of you who added your voice to the various campaigns.

Ray and I am greatly indebted to every one of the committee members who bring their ideas and experience to the table. We would also like to thank them for the many practical ways they support us, helping out at events, doing the washing up and keeping us on our toes. In an organisation such as this there is much to know – and not everything is written down – so having those informal chats are as valuable as a file full of minutes. My thanks also to Ray for his steady hand on the tiller as we navigate our way through the coming year. There is more work to do, and ever more ways to do it.

Finally, we would like to thank you the members for your continued support. Without you there would not be a Monmouthshire Antiquarian Association. As always, your input is appreciated; if you have wisdom to share, we look forward to hearing from you in the coming year.

8. Treasurer's Report: Simon Tee. The treasurer drew attention to the new way of setting out the accounts. They are not audited but subject to independent external examination. He also commented on the financial loss over the last two years which

must be addressed by increasing our income and recruiting new members, as they are the main source of income. The proposal to increase the current subscription would bring the MAA more in line with the other similar organisations and provide a possible opportunity to claim gift aid.

There were no queries.

The Accounts were Proposed to be accepted by Gill Wakley Seconded Chris Sullivan. There was no dissent, and the Accounts were accepted. They are appended to the Minutes.

9. Editorial Report: During the autumn of last year Tony Hopkins stepped down as editor to be succeeded by Arthur Edwards. Since then, there has been a handover period and the production of this brief report is by way of a double act.

The Monmouthshire Antiquary for 2023, vol 38, was published in December last year. I'm very grateful to members of the Editorial Committee for their help with the proofs. It is poignant to note that this issue of our journal included an article by the late Chris Williams, presumably one of the last papers to be published by him. It is a shining example of his customary scholarship.

During the closing stages of production, we were surprised to learn of the retirement of John Roost, Director of 4Word our printer and the resultant closing down of the company. John and 4Word are to be thanked for their sterling service to the Association over many years. Since receiving this news, the editorial committee have been assessing alternative printers. We have whittled the options down to three or four from whom we will seek quotes for the next volume. Our secretary, Jan Bailey, has been particularly helpful with this.

Submissions for Volume 39 have been slow to come in, but in recent weeks have picked up and we are hopeful the next volume will be published before the end of the year.

Since the last journal there has been some focus on the guidelines for the contributors which are available on our website. Two aspects in particular have exercised the editorial committee: copyright and key words. Clauses have been inserted into the guidelines to the effect that authors attach permissions to use copyrighted material to their submission and at the same time include a set of key words which best describe their article. Credit is due to Sian King for her work on this. *Tony Hopkins, Arthur Edwards.*

10. Library & Archives report. Anne Dunton. Frank Olding's book donation is now on the shelves. The University of Wales dissertations are labelled for easy access. Both of these have been added to the Library catalogue on the MAA website. As digitisation progresses and more key-words are added to the details of our past journals it's becoming easier for researchers to find information on-line, rather than requesting

access to the Library. Christabel and I express our thanks to Dr Mark Lewis for invaluable help and enabling us to access the library.

11. Election of Officers. No committee members have retired. No new proposals for committee members had been received. It was proposed that all existing committee members should be re-elected en bloc. This was agreed by the meeting with all voting in favour.

12. Proposal to increase annual membership subscriptions: To maintain our ability to fulfil our aims as laid out in the constitution, we must have sufficient income and reserves to publish the Journal and provide funding to promote archaeological and historical research. The Monmouthshire Antiquarian Association (MAA) accounts show a loss of around £7,000 in 2022 and 2023. Your committee is endeavouring to reduce costs as far as possible, but an increase in subscription has become necessary to prevent further erosion of the reserves. Investigation shows that the current subscription is less than most comparable societies.

It is proposed that the subscription shall be £20 for a single membership and £25 for a joint membership (at the same address where only one journal is supplied). This represents a donation to MAA (which could be subjected to Gift Aid) and the provision of a journal as a benefit of membership.

Proposed Dr G Wakley Seconded Adrian Smith. This proposal was supported unanimously by the committee. The proposal was put forward to the meeting.

Simon Tee was able to answer a query about Gift Aid stating that it was the *value* of the Journal, i.e. what it might be sold for, rather than the *cost* of its production, which was taken into consideration for Gift Aid, and if this value was low, it might be disregarded.

The proposal to increase the subscription was passed unanimously.

13. There was no other business.

The meeting was closed with a reading of the Obituary to Professor Chris Williams which will appear in the next edition of the Antiquary.

The meeting was followed by a Tribute lecture to Chris Williams given by Jeremy Knight on the subject 'From Cardiff to Cork and Beyond: Contacts along the Western Seaways in Early Medieval Europe.