

# **Minutes of the Winter (Zoom) Gathering of the Scythe Association of Britain and Ireland**

held via Zoom

on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> January 2021 at 2pm

Present

John (Letts), Beth (Tilston), Peter (Blackwell), Steve (Tomlin), Andi (Rickard), Ida (Fabrizio), Ruth (Pullan), Raffi (Martin), Richard (Brown), Mary (Ellis), Chris (Riley), Fi (Pollack), Phil (Batten) and Michelle (Laine), Colin (Close), Adrian (Thomas) and Mark (Allery)

## **1) Introduction and welcome from Chair(s)**

Mary facilitating – welcome and house-keeping for zoom meetings . Thanks to Richard for instigating, Chris for setting up and Michelle for hosting.

Richard – welcome to our 10<sup>th</sup> meeting, 10 years ago we first met with the intention of forming a scythe association at John Letts house in Oxford. It was a great weekend, though at the time it was far from clear that such a disparate bunch of individuals would be able to form and maintain a scythe association. We're still here so it must have been a success. This time the aim is to have a meeting as we haven't been able to hold one physically under the current restrictions and also just to allow us to get together.

## **2) Note of apologies and non-zoomers**

Charlotte, Simon (Damant), Nicole (Prater), Jez (Hastings) sent apologies

Jim (McVittie), Simon (Fairlie), and Gill (Barron) are not on zoom and sent inputs to the meeting separately

## **3) 'Go-around' update from each zoom participant**

Each zoom participant gave a brief personal update in turn on their activities in the past year.

Hi from Ida, Raffi and Ruth on a farm in Worcestershire at the moment, Peter in Yorkshire, Andi in Somerset, Chris in Wiltshire, Phil and Michelle in Cymru, Steve in Manchester, Mark in West Sussex, special welcome to John on the farm in Oxfordshire, Richard in Norfolk, Adrian in North Devon, Colin in South Devon, Mary now in Kent and Fi currently back in Guernsey.

Everyone's circumstances differ but a common theme was the cancelling of all the usual events which usually allow us to get together as well as most courses. Those selling scythes noticed a continued high demand for scythe kits despite or perhaps due to the lack of courses.

John's barley crop – John has a large amount of heritage barley under cultivation through the Heritage Grain Trust and suggests a Barley scything event – an opportunity to scythe cereals

without needing to tie up the crop to be held at John's farm – subject to restrictions allowing– and with the aim of making a scyther's beer from the heritage barley. Harvest will be around the end of July.

Turkish blade – Adrian has contacted the Turkish manufacturer and has received two demo blades from Turkey – once we are able to meet up hopefully people who would like to try them will be able to before, the only issue is the tang angle which needs a big wedge as currently set.

#### **4) Treasurers summary**

Chris sent around the annual financial report to the committee google group prior to the meeting.

Summary: The accounts show a deficit this year for the first time of around £400. Income was similar, the expenditure has been on appropriate items and the balance is still around £3000. With a suggested minimum of £500 – still leaves around £2500 to be spend on worthy causes.

Colin asked whether any sources of income had been lost. Chris said no, a slight reduction in income together with slightly larger expenditure on things like banners previously agreed made the difference.

#### **5) Membership Update**

After a quick change of hats Chris reported on membership. Heartening that membership subscriptions remained almost the same level despite the lack of festivals and events that typically introduce new membership.

Mary has agreed to take on the membership secretary role – Chris will tidy up and handover in February.

**6) Review of key SABI objectives for 2021** – in view of the time available for the meeting, the current lockdown and lack of information on likely restrictions through the rest of the year – the objectives for 2021 are covered in the remaining agenda items.

#### **7) Events**

**Festivals** (including Green scythe fair) - Sadly the Green Scythe Fair has once again had to be cancelled for 2021. Unlikely that events of this size and popularity will be allowed by June. The same is likely for any large gatherings in the near future – though smaller, more local and 'wilder' events may be able to proceed later in the season. How best to proceed in the absence of most of the usual events and festivals?

**Promoting smaller local events** – Small, local events that can be organised quickly and run by a single person at short notice aka a 'pop-up event' may become possible – particularly outdoors and for small numbers of people later in the summer – as restrictions are eased.

SABI would not run or take responsibility for such events but where an individual wants to run one and can do so within the prevailing restrictions then SABI is keen to help promote and support such a pop-up event. This could be through promotion, facilitation, advice or through the provision of some funding to support infrastructure.

Jim has produced a short document to help with inviting proposals for small events that SABI could support and offered to help administer the application process. Mary suggested that the process

should be open to events involving the public as well as members (restrictions allowing). The proposal should make it clear whether the event is aimed just at members or at members and public.

In principle it was agreed to proceed with the promotion of and/or funding of small events – Expressions of interest will be invited. (**Action Jim**)

Somerset Event – One proposal is to organise a small scythe only event on the Thorney Lakes site. Details are tbd – it is recognised that the cost of the site might be an issue.

## **8) Communication and promotion**

**Website** - Richard is maintaining the website. It does what it does – and like Windrow depends upon content. Contributions are welcome and contributors can always be made editors so they can put up their own articles.

Colin – suggests a header article for small events – so that details of individual events can be added at short notice.

**Windrow** – providing content for Colin

Colin – as always – needs content otherwise there won't be a windrow. Please – anyone – provide content. Suggestions:

- In the form of a Covid Diary – what's happened and what hasn't scythe-wise a way to record the year for posterity.
- An 'How I started' article – which could be in the form of a short note and appear in a 'letters' page of the windrow
- There may also be room for a 'Dear Colin' problem page – if people send in the content

- Otherwise if not enough content is sent in Colin will have to write yet another article on the Russian Peening Jig – so please remember to help him out!

**Action:** All – write just one piece for Colin, John – offered to write an article on grain.

**Facebook page** is still going well – and largely looks after itself in that people are posting. Approvals are automated which helps people get on quicker.

**Google groups** It was agreed that the committee group be widened to include those at the Zoom meeting who are not currently on the committee. **Action: Chris**

**Regional coordinators** – to be changed to contacts. Chris suggests moving to 'local contacts' primarily for areas that have an active group.

For example Rob Brodie – who is based in Scotland should be on the list.

Richard suggests that contacts should simply be listed with where they are based and define where people are rather than defining areas.

Michelle suggested - rather than putting more pieces of paper in scythe supplies that people could be directed towards appropriate lists on the website.

Mary proposed that a single list is used for contacts with symbols or similar to indicate the services or activities that the contact is willing to provide. Mark noted that the Bodgers use a similar approach on their website which seems to work.

**Action:** Mary will take this on with her role as Membership Secretary

**Flyers** – would become quite short and simple – mainly pointing people to the website.

**Colour of Badges** – suggestion that green badges are easily lost in green grass fields – in discussion those present felt that green should remain and a quick survey revealed that no one at the meeting had yet lost theirs in a field

**Action:** inform Gill (Chris – completed already)

**Recruiting Members** – Colin asked about how and whether to contact local meadow and rewilding groups to help raise awareness of the Scythe Association.

Steve – asked about the meadows initiative and meadow maintenance training which will apparently be funded under future grant schemes. Richard noted that at the moment there are plenty of discussions and good intentions but few details on the implementation and funding of future schemes. Richard has set up meetings in February with his local Norfolk Wildlife Trust (Helen B – a scyther and an old friend of Simon F) and others to try and find out more. **Action-** Richard to monitor and feedback any news to SABI via website etc. when he knows more. Others to feedback also (either directly or via Richard)

## 9) Future meetings

### Zoom follow ups

Richard – suggests trying further zoom meetings which may encourage wider membership to ‘drop’ in. Circulate to the googlegroup which is about 300 in membership. Chris agreed. Mary suggested seeding the meeting with a topic and perhaps a video – to give something for the event to start. Colin suggested a ‘scythers question time’ panel approach.

**Action:** Mary, Colin and Richard will coordinate to create the first event. Perhaps try a first event in a months time to get something happening.

The **AGM** will be on-line via Zoom on the weekend of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> June (tbc) when the GSF would have happened.

## 10) AOB

Schroekenfux new D-ring clamp (Steve). This changes how the blade is hafted. Christiana has posted a short video to show how to do it. Phil and Michelle have a video on you-tube to show how to mount the blade with the new D-ring. A second video shows how to fix the D-ring if it becomes stuck on the snathe.

[Scythe Cymru - Fix a Stuck D-ring via Youtube](#)

This involves hammering – Phil has been hammering rings before shipping. Steve will be updating his book to reflect the change. Use the link to view or search for Scythe Cymru video’s on line.

Virtual Scythe competition (Peter) – Colin is sorting out the how to post the video but still maintain privacy on the google group. There are about 7 entries. Colin expects to post this in a week or two.

Simon (supplied in advance) – Still awaiting large delivery from Europe which is unable to ship at the moment. New Fux Jigs are good and has been advising customers that the cheaper Easter European jigs may prove a false economy.

Scythes in the future Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) – John asks whether the proposed ELMS (which will replace the EU scheme) recognises the role that scythes can play in environmental management. Peter is involved in an ELM trial and has heard scythes mentioned but seen no outcomes. Mark noted that current proposals are about policy and tools such as scythes are typically decided at lower level. Also that ELMS will include a wide range of participants, farmers, land managers, wildlife trusts, conservation groups on site as diverse as farmland, nature reserves, SSSI's, national parks and rewilding schemes. Scythes will likely appeal more to environmental management projects than agribusiness scale projects.

## **11) DONM**

The next formal meeting will be the 10<sup>th</sup> SABI agm – to be held via Zoom on the – the weekend of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> June (tbc) the date that the green scythe fair would have been held.

The meeting closed – with thanks to Michelle for hosting, Mary, Chris and Richard for setting up, running and facilitating – and everyone for taking part.

M.Allery - 4<sup>th</sup> Feb 2021