



Minutes of 66th Annual General Meeting

at the Summer Meeting 2010, held at Heriot Watt University, Edinburgh
Sunday 4th July 2010 – 7.15pm
Minutes by Lois Macdonald

AGM Chairman: Dr Dave Roberts, President 2009-2010

Sufficient numbers were present for a quorum (29)

Apologies for absence: Nigel Young, Roger Wilkins, John Slater, Mark Rutter, Elaine Jewkes, Rosie Carne, Steve Peel, George Fisher, Sarah Byford and Sara Gregson.

1. **Minutes of the Sixty-fifth Annual General Meeting** - Held at Greenmount Campus, Belfast on 29th June 2009, the minutes were proposed by John Marshall, agreed by all and signed by Dave Roberts. (Minutes available on the website www.britishgrassland.com or via the BGS office).
2. **Matters arising** – None.
3. **Report from the Trustees** - (Contained within the summary of the financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2009, available on the website www.britishgrassland.com or via the BGS office). Clarification of the 2009 surplus was asked as deemed not clear in the figures and a request made that the Trustees Report could be clearer and easier to understand for members, especially non-trustees. The surplus figure was £34,270 and details would be given under item 4. The approval of the report was proposed by Helen Mathieu and seconded by John Plummer.
4. **Financial Report** – given by Jessica Buss.

Our accounts show BGS has, as last year, produced a significant surplus, despite investment in new projects. We would like to point out that this was above our budget and expectation and arises, as last year, from our royalty from Grass and Forage Science, which totalled £78,000, compared with the £50,000 anticipated that goes towards supporting our running costs.

So we are able to report good management of the general finances and a bonus that results from the excellent management and marketing of the journal by Wiley-Blackwell, that we had no idea of until late spring. While this income is great news for us, it is largely beyond our control and the extra amount arises from two years of sales of digital issues, and we have been warned this will now start to fall, so we feel we should not become too dependent on royalty income at current levels.

However, this and some recovery in the stock market sees BGS with a healthy balance sheet and surplus reserve compared with the Trustees policy, and we therefore have the potential to invest in growth and be confident about a secure future for the society. I will explain more about our plans after the President's Report.

5. **Subscription rates** – No rise was proposed. Dave Roberts said it was important that the society should continue to keep the quality of service high.
6. **Constitution** – No amendments were proposed by council.
7. **Presidents' report** – The report which Dave Roberts gave at the meeting is available on the version of these minutes located on the BGS website www.britishgrassland.com or available from the BGS office.
8. **Directors' report on ongoing development of the society** – By Jess Buss

I had expected to come to this AGM with an update on our success so far with the two new projects we announced last year and modest continuing plans for them. Both of these, Grazing Partners and Nutrient Wise Demos are going well. But with the extra income received this spring, Council and I have been challenged to think about where next already. Council feels there is a real opportunity for

BGS to accelerate its growth, with the financial cushion from GFS received in the last two years, but this should be development that has the potential to be sustainable in the long term.

We feel our success with special interest days, including the Reseeding Day, is something to build on. We would like to run more special interest days on a range of topics over the coming years and can see funding opportunities to keep delegates fees low. We also want to see the Grazing Partners project expand and be able to support its management and administration as required. The Nutrient Wise Demos project, which we are hopeful of soon receiving contracts for 3 years of funding for in the south west, needs to be well run and we hope to spread this initiative into other areas, and can see potential funding streams for this. We also want to be able to offer more help to local societies, some of which are struggling with their admin support.

To achieve these aims and to continue to ensure we deliver high quality summer meetings, research conferences and current farm walks, a high quality magazine and regularly updated website, a bursary award scheme, national grassland management competition and to run the society professionally, we have to review our staffing levels.

Council has already agreed in principle to invest in a third member of staff, subject to agreeing a job description, in order to increase activity as just outlined, and that BGS is in a financial position to do so, with a two years to build activity and finance it to continue for the long term. A draft job description is with the Trustees for their consideration and will hopefully be finalised at the August council meeting and advertised in the autumn. We hope you agree that this is an exciting time in BGS's development.

I would like to finish by thanking Council and particularly Dave Roberts for all their volunteer input over the last year. Their time and guidance is a valuable asset to the society and to me personally.

9. Election of officers and Members of Council – Trustees positions

*President Elect – Council nominated John Downes, which was seconded by David Lee

*Honorary Treasurer – Council nominated Mark Rutter (who was not in attendance, but had agreed to be nominated for the position prior to meeting)

*Honorary Secretary – Council nominated Lois Phillips (who was not in attendance, but had agreed to be nominated prior to meeting)

*National Member - Presidential team nominated Piers Badnell (who was not in attendance, but had agreed to be nominated prior to meeting)

None of the above nominations was opposed, therefore all were duly elected.

10. Election of Regional Representative-Elects – Non-trustee advisers to council who spend one year as Rep-Elect before a two year term on council.

*Scotland – No person nominated, vacancy to be filled by Council

*Northern Ireland - No person nominated, vacancy to be filled by Council

*Northern Region - No person nominated, vacancy to be filled by Council

*South East Region – Charles Harrison nominated by Tony Evans and elected

*South West Region – Richard Griffiths nominated by Tony Walkers and elected.

11. Handover of office to incoming president, Mr Tony Evans.

AGM meeting closed at 7.55pm

PRESIDENT'S REPORT – Dr D J Roberts

Staff and Council

I would like to thank the staff and Council members for their help and support over the last 12 months. Council decided that the BGS Office should relocate to Stoneleigh from Cirencester. This move proved to be challenging but is now working well and we are now in the same vicinity as many partner organisations. During the year Lois MacDonald has joined BGS as Projects Co-ordinator and both Jess and Lois have had a very busy year with the increased level of activities within the Society. Council members have been very supportive both with events and also in the discussions about improving the services to members as the Society goes forward. For example we have now established a regional fund help local representatives promote BGS at regional level. Unfortunately towards the end of the year Paul Munson resigned as Treasurer due to work commitments and I would like to thank Paul for his valuable support and work as treasurer and Tony Evans for taking up the Treasurers role over the last few months.

Membership and Finance

The number of individual BGS members has remained relatively stable over the year, this is particularly gratifying. We are noticing that members now tend to resign when they retire or move jobs however these resignations are balanced by new members joining. The number of corporate members has increased to 13 and we hope to add a few more, strengthening the BGS network and allowing us to keep individual members subscriptions low. Local societies are also an important part of our membership and we have many vibrant and thriving ones, but we are aware there are a few that need some help and we hope to be able to provide that in the year ahead.

The Society is in a strong financial position and the focus on keeping overheads low and ensuring that events and publications are properly budgeted and financed has allowed us to continue increasing the activity and profile of the Society.

Activities

We have a vibrant Society which is offering high quality activities and publications to its members.

Our scientific journal, Grass and Forage Science, is particularly important to the Society and I would like to thank Prof. John Milne, who retired this year after 7 years as editor of the Journal. During that time the reputation of the journal has increased with Impact Factor now standing at 1.316. The remit of the journal is firmly international and this has been reflected in the appointment of two joint editors, Hugh Dove from Australia and Alan Hopkins from the UK, who are very ably supported by a team of associate editors from around the world.

The strength of BGS is that our membership spans the whole spectrum of grassland and our magazine Grass & Forage Farmer is an important part of this. During the year we have seen bumper issues of Grass & Forage Farmer and I think it is one of the magazines which is read as soon as it arrives and is not just left in a pile to read sometime later, or not at all.

The revamped website is the best way to keep up to date with what is happening and if you are not a regular visitor to the site then I urge you to add it to your favourites and make sure you do not miss out on what is happening.

The philosophy within BGS is to undertake a wide range of activities but make sure that we maintain the highest quality. This has been achieved this year with an increased number of events.

Our activities have included the summer meeting in N Ireland, the research conference in September and special interest meetings throughout the year, including Horse Grazing and Lucerne & Red Clover, and a Reseeding Day in support of the Rec Grass and Clover Lists, which was arranged with DairyCo and EBLEX and HCC. The spring farm walks, again held in conjunction with RABDF and DairyCo, were again very well received with over 450 attending. I would particularly like to thank the host farmers. A new initiative this year was, 'The Presidents Trip' when 14 members visited Ireland including research at Moorepark, grassland based dairy farming and selection of cattle for grassland systems.

The BGS Nutrient Wise Demo plots, in Devon, have been visited by 120 people and there are plans to take this forward, which Jess will explain in a few minutes. The Grazing partners' initiative, with grassland farmers mentoring other farmers, has developed as we had hoped. I would like to thank Sara Gregson, for bringing this idea back to the UK and for her hard work in making sure that it was established under the auspices of the BGS. Sara is at the summer meeting and I would urge members to discuss this initiative with her if they are interested in becoming mentors or know of people who might need some support.

It is worth mentioning that to ensure we can build on the number and quality of events and maintain other activity, the Council have agreed to appoint an additional member of staff and it is our intention to advertise this post after the details have been approved by Council next month.

BGS has always worked with other organisations when this can be seen to have direct benefits to our members. We have during the year had preliminary discussions with a number of organisations to see if we can form a loose federation which will build on our existing links. The discussions, to date, have focussed on ways to improve the behind the scenes organisation. I think it is important that we strive to improve our efficiency and ensure that we continue to deliver high quality publications and activities for our members. I assure you that if Council decide to take this idea forward that it will not detract from the BGS brand and our own activities. We are entering these discussions from a position of strength in terms of finances, membership and activities. I do however believe that the Society can not stand still and I would welcome any comments on this.

I believe that the strength of BGS is the balance between farmers, research and commercial membership and the provision of high quality publications and events for all our members. In my year as President, I was keen to see BGS continue its development and I am pleased to report that it has not only done that but that its development continues to accelerate. I urge all members to support and promote BGS activities as the society moves forward.