

Leicester Literary and Philosophical Society, Natural History Section

Minutes of meeting held in the New Walk Museum on Wednesday, 10th October, 2018 from 7.30 until 9.15pm. 25 members and 1 guest attended.

The meeting was chaired and introduced by Hazel Graves. After a welcome, she read the following.

Some of you will be aware of the issues faced by the Natural History Section. I now wish to give a brief summary of the present situation. I don't want to spend too long on this because we have an interesting programme to enjoy tonight but any comments and suggestions will be readily listened to by any members of the Committee who are here this evening, during refreshments. We have a Committee meeting on 18 October when we will be discussing various options.

First of all I want to say that this winter season 2018 /2019 is secure. We will be here in the Museum. But as our subscription year starts in January we probably will have to review 2019 subscription costs.

The new Head of Museums Service Joanna Jones, on behalf of the City Council, has instigated charges for the use of rooms by the Lit & Phil Society. The charges are as follows:

For the use of the Victoria Gallery - £120 per hour

For the use of this room, the Mayor's Parlour - £60 per hour in the evening, £30 per hour in working hours.

Plus £30 for the provision of cups, spoons and hot water (not the actual tea, coffee etc.)

The Parent Body has decided to pay for two hours ie £240 and will have to be out by 9pm. I am not sure about refreshments. They think they can break even this year at least, as many of their lectures are sponsored and I think they are looking at the possibility of more being sponsored. This does not seem a likely option for us. The only suggestion is there could be joint projects with the Museum but at the moment I have not researched how that might work out.

The reason for the charges is to pay the staff who have to be on duty to conform to the Museum's Insurance Policy.

The Previous and Current Presidents of the Parent Body met with the City Mayor, Sir Peter Soulsby, to discuss the fees, including those of the Natural History Section, but after consultations with staff he confirmed that the costs were non-negotiable.

I attended the recent Friends of the Museums Meeting where Joanna Jones gave a talk on the future of the Leicester Museums. It was really interesting, but highlighted that many of the new projects are dependent on external funding and grants of various sorts. Of course there were questions and I asked "Did she realise that the imposition of the high rate of fees inevitably meant that the Lit and Phil Natural History Section would have to leave the museum, a place where we belong, with about 150 year of presence and a place we virtually set up". Her reply was that she had no intention of driving us out but they have to balance the books. She certainly gave no indication whatsoever of a possible change of mind. It was

interesting that the Friends knew nothing about the fees. The Friends also suggested that it would be a good idea if there were occasional meetings of representatives from all the societies who meet at New Walk Museum to exchange information.

As you can calculate the evening charge for us would be, from 7pm to 9.30 pm, ie two and a half hours, plus hot water cups, saucer and spoons, a total charge of £180 per evening.

Probably our group of about 70 members, with an average attendance of about 35 people per evening would find this very difficult to support. Higher charges could mean losing members which would make the situation even more difficult.

To begin with we were told the new charges would be imposed for this season. However Jan was able to get Joanna Jones to confirm free bookings for this season, 2018/2019, as she had booked the rooms before the imposition of fees on 1 April.

So we have to come up with ideas for 2019/2020. Various suggestions have been made to deal with this problem.

We could meet in the daytime for approximately half the fee, but this would make our society unavailable to many working people, adults with families, and students, which I don't think is what we want. And parking in the surrounding streets in the daytime is difficult. Possibly Sunday daytime could be an option.

Not having refreshments would save £30 per night, and another £30 if we could be out by 9 pm. Personally I feel that the club atmosphere generated by the refreshment break helps people chat and share experiences. Alternatively we could buy our own flasks and ask a member to bring in hot water, and for everyone to bring their own mug, and have refreshments between 7 and 7.30 when the speaker is setting up.

We could hold half the number of meetings, which again would still be expensive, and disappointing.

Of course all of these options would mean an increase in subscriptions, or a door charge which is normal in many Societies.

Another option is to move elsewhere. We are unlikely to get anywhere for free so whatever we do will involve an increase in subscriptions much as the Parent Body has had to do.

To move elsewhere we have to consider access, i.e. parking, public transport, disabled access, toilets and disabled toilets. Also availability of kitchen facilities for refreshments, suitable seating, lighting arrangements for viewing of projected images, use of a projector etc and size ie suitable for at least 40 people.

I was in touch with Richard Gornall, the Director of the Botanical Gardens, who had agreed the use of the Knoll at the Botanical Gardens for 2019/2020 Season. The room charge would have been about £30 per evening and we were negotiating for the use of a projector. I know that this would not have been ideal for the many members who come from north of the City,

but we had to make provisional plans because at one stage it looked as if we would have to pay charges or move for this season. Many of us know the Knoll because we attend meetings of the Friends of the Botanical Gardens, meetings of the Leicestershire and Rutland Moth Group, or have taken our Plant Identification exams there! However to our dismay, Richard has recently informed us that the Knoll will no longer be available as, along with some other buildings at the Botanical Garden, it may be sold. It is possible that we could use the Coach House which is a lot less suitable and certainly not confirmed. Jan explored the possibility of using the facilities at the Attenborough Arboretum, but was told that it was only suitable for a maximum of 20 people.

So instead of having over a year to sort ourselves out, we now need to come to some decisions shortly so Jan can book speakers for the 2019/2020 season and we can set the subscriptions accordingly.

I have ideas for some possible venues, mostly Church Halls, information acquired by word of mouth, but these have not yet been discussed in Committee nor have we visited yet. I am not sure if any are quite what we want. This is all to do now. The going rate seems to be between £30 and £50 per evening. So some rise in subscriptions is inevitable or a small door charge per evening which is normal in many societies. We could also consider looking at availability and cost of rooms on the University Campus, which would probably mean a lecture room with tiered seating.

Current thoughts include St Anne's Community Centre, Letchworth Road, Western Park, where the Leicestershire and Rutland Ornithological Society have moved to, Great Meeting Rooms, Unitarian Chapel, East Bond Street where the Fungus Study Group meet, St Andrews Church Hall, Jarrom Street, Friend's Meeting House, the Secular Society. Not all of these have been approached yet.

If anyone has ideas e.g. a Fairy Godmother who can donate us a nice amount of money or more realistically, has ideas for suitable venues for next season, please see me at the break. Also my email address is available for contact.

Another school of thought is that, as the only proper home of the Natural History Section is New Walk Museum then we should close.

She then thanked Anne for managing the evening's refreshments.

The meeting was advised that information cards and the Newsletter are delayed until the next meeting because of problems with the printer.

The next meeting was trailed.

Notices of the next meetings of the parent body and Geological section were given.

Six presentations were given by members.

Ivan Pedley first thanked Hazel for all her background work, then showed slides and talked about some of the effects of our very hot, dry summer (including showing old instruments for measuring climate). These included the effects on the life history of the House Spider, Bracken unusually producing spores and Thrips. Then he moved on to lichen and Wall Brown preservation in the extension of Bardon Quarry, the approachability of Ravens, the use of lime

mortar when repairing stone walls at Bradgate Park, and the lichens growing on the pebbles of Orford Ness.

Jim Hayes showed slides of bird species seen on holiday in the Caribbean and butterflies and moths seen in Drome, France.

Richard Iliffe displayed some of the more unusual fungi found on the recent meeting at Beacon Hill.

Maggie Frankum spoke of a recent incident when a Badger got into her house.

Steve Woodward showed slides and spoke about a visit to the New Forest, describing how traditional grazing maintains the habitat and showing some of the unusual plant species growing there. He also exhibited the recent publication of the very long awaited 'Handbook of the Bees of the British Isles by Else and Edwards.

Jan Dawson showed exhibits of Badger skins and Raven pellets.

Photos of garden wildlife and Dragonflies were also shown.

Contributors were thanked.