

**Minutes of the**  
**First Annual General Meeting of the**  
**Scythe Association of Britain and Ireland**

Date: 14<sup>th</sup> /15<sup>th</sup> January 2012

Venue: Monkton Wyld Court, Dorset

Attendees: Richard Brown (Chair), Chris Riley(minutes), Mark Allery (online notes), Beth Tilston, Gill Barron, John Bannister, Andrea Rickard, Simon Fairlie, Simon Dawson, Phil Batten, Milos Stankovic , Steve Tomlin, Jez Hastings.

Apologies: Charlotte Oliver, Claire White, Ian Pettman, Andy Coleman, Alistair Inglis, John Letts, Paul Kingsnorth, Tinks Hastings, Chris Hayes

The Agenda previously circulated by Richard Brown was adopted.

**SESSION ONE – SABI Aims and Objectives (Saturday pm)**

**1. Individual Testaments**

Chairman's welcome - Richard suggested opening the meeting with a round table to capture principle thoughts of participants.

Richard – Particularly interested in the website as a vehicle for the association.

Beth – SABI should be a focal point for scything and scythers

Gill – Promote scything as a practical and sensible thing to do

John B – The Association is a way of spreading the word and providing training

Andrea – as a central contact point and expanding network centre of the spiders web

Simon F. – Most interested in the promotion of the use of the scythe, regional contacts and influence of other organisations. What were the benefits of membership going to be?

Simon Dawson – scything as an integral part of land & conservation management

Chris Riley – Network of enthusiasts and effective means of communications. Be careful not to try and do too much at first.

Mark A – Cut our cloth to suit our resources and people.

Phil – promotion/publicity is a core function

Milos – careful not to commit too much time resource on any one person, better as a distributed network than a central point.

Steve Tomlin– focal point for people to contact, particularly for Government and NGO's (and film companies) to contact (they need formal contacts).It was noted that the film Anna Karenina opens 7<sup>th</sup> Sept in the UK which may raise the profile and interest in scything, and enhance demand for scythes and training.

Jez – agreed with others comments.

**2. SABI Mission Statement**

Having a short mission statement was suggested to help broadcast the aims of the association.

**Action – Develop Mission Statement - Beth**

### **3. Minutes of Previous Meetings**

The minutes circulated were those from the inaugural meeting (15<sup>th</sup> January 2011, Oxford) since this dwelt upon the formation of the association, the main business of this first AGM. The minutes of the last meeting (10<sup>th</sup> June 2011, West Country Scythe Festival) had been made available on the SABI web site. The minutes were accepted.

### **4. Matters arising from the minutes**

Steve Tomlin added further useful information on the way in which the Austrian Scythe Association is run and how this differs from the current position for SABI. The Austrian association is run operationally by a single person. A third of all training proceeds are taken by the association, and this levy is not limited to courses in Austria. In the last year there were 220 members, 19 courses and 14 other events. 7 trainers taught. Association also gets a percentage of sales from shop run by a third party.

## **SESSION 2 Setting Priorities**

Discussion of the core functions of SABI, outlined in the agenda (circulated by Richard on the Google group).

### **5. Website**

Beth gave an update on current progress. The website is populated, except for the 'history' page, and up and running but not maintained effectively because there is no clear process for this. For example the courses page cannot be easily maintained if the course calendars are not available. There was a discussion on how best to do this. Regional contacts were important to this. It was decided that there should be a coordinator for courses to update the website and format the entry for each course. This role would involve sending out a request for course information. A subsequent blog post could describe the event.

### **Action – create role of training co-ordinator for website – Steve.**

The SABI web site is built on a Wordpress blog site. There can be up to 35 'editors' and 2 'administrators'. The latter are currently Beth T. and Mark A. Steve T. related his experience with Scytherspace, also a Wordpress site. Acting as an editor is a whole load of additional work.

There are different kinds of contributions. Andrea and Milos agreed that we should be using the facebook page for ad hoc contributions. This is open to everyone to see and contribute to. The Google group can also be used for short mentions, discussions and notices. The web site blog page should be used for non-authoritative articles, whilst the static pages should be more authoritative. There might be links between any of these. Beth said that the web co-ordinator could add to the website from useful Google group posts. We do need to ensure that the web site does not become a burden, and so need to allocate tasks and roles to run it.

Milos observed that the current website could be migrated to another platform which prompted a discussion of the rationale for using Wordpress. The conclusion was that the Wordpress platform can probably provide everything that Milos thought would be needed and is easy to use as well as a free site. The biggest issue will be with developing content and getting the site linked.

## **6. Social Media Promotion**

Milos emphasised that social media were now an effective method of promotion. The formula for effective social media promotion is 1 good quality blog per week and 5 good posts per week. The rest is then done by the followers. A link needs to be made between the web site blog page and facebook.

### **Action – link blog to the facebook page - Beth?**

Show of hands revealed that most of the people present have a facebook page, but at the moment there is no use of the association facebook account. Milos said that the demographic was changing, and there were more 50-60 year old users now, and less teenagers. There is also an easy way of submitting posts that anyone can do, by sending an email to a certain address. Facebook is search engine optimised. Milos currently is the 'owner' of the SABU facebook account, as well as a YouTube account.

### **Action – to visit the association facebook page and link to it - ALL**

## **7. Leaflet**

John Bannister asked about the role of printed promotional material. A flyer or leaflet can be accessed on the web and printed by people who do demonstrations or attend events. Simon F commented that 5% of his customers are not on email but worth making contact with them.

### **Action – Leaflet/Flyer to be drafted - Gill B.**

## **8. Newsletter**

Simon F. will continue with the Windrow newsletter whilst it is of use. It is currently distributed as a PDF attachment to around 1000 email addresses. The circulation list includes press contacts such as the Western Daily Press. Simon reminded everyone that the Windrow relies upon contributions from members etc – please send copy to him.

Windrow goes out three times a year. 2012 dates for contributions to reach Simon are 15th March, one in 7<sup>th</sup> May, one at 1<sup>st</sup> October.

## **9. Membership**

It was agreed that membership should be open to anyone who agrees with the aims of the association.

Administering membership may be a big job, depending upon the number of members? What is being offered to members? What are the benefits and what will members expect? Will paying the membership fee bring benefits, or will that just be a contribution to the work of the association? Membership should not entail exclusive access to the web site, but may allow access to the Google group.

Gill suggested that a desirable badge will attract members. Simon D said that there are some members that give courses, and some that want to be taught, but most people have done a course and are looking to network with people face to face ie sharing experiences. Richard added that regional events particularly will provide an opportunity to turn up and scythe. As with RSPB groups, these could be free to members, but non members pay a charge (or need to join SABU).

Simon F agreed that the charge for membership should give access to the Google group, also a

badge and perhaps the Windrow should be only for members?

The discussion resulted in a view that the access to the Google Group should be a benefit of membership whereas windrow as currently produced by Simon F usefully promotes scything beyond the membership.

A membership secretary might prove to be the one role that needs to be a paid job. The scale of the fee will also need to be decided.

### **10. Competitions**

In view of the limited time available discussion was limited to that of charging a fee for entry to competitions. Steve T said it will exclude some people. At the Somerset festival for example a charge of £1-2.50 was suggested at the heat stage, which might recompense the organisation of the event.

Responsibility should be locally decided, in future, as at the moment SABI is not involved in the organisation of the festivals.

### **11. Teaching**

Promotion of courses would be a benefit of membership for those members who offer them. SABI and its website can help provide resources to inform areas of training though this will take time to develop.

### **12. Health and Safety, Risk Assessment, and Insurance**

Richard commented how this was a popular subject on the Google group. Milos has investigated the official position and discovered that there is no existing information in the UK. Scythes fall under hand tools but Milos feels that this does not cover scythe specific risks, which are not obvious to beginners. There would be benefit in providing a consensus approach now, rather than this being forced upon us.

Milos is preparing an information leaflet on safe use of the scythe. He has taken photos (of Jez) from which Gill is preparing line drawings to illustrate this document.

Beth has provided a starting point with risk assessment, and Milos outlined the HSE approach, weighing up the likelihood of a hazard against its severity. Steve proposed that the use of kevlar gloves for sharpening is adopted for the tutors training courses. SABI's role should be to promote good practice, without being prescriptive. Steve proposed that demonstration insurance could form a members benefit.

**Action – to act as coordinator for Scything Safety and Risk Assessment and develop appropriate resources for the website and Google group - Milos**

### **13. SABI meetings**

Simon D re-iterated that meetings are important for members face to face networking. Further discussion was deferred until later. [See item 17 below.]

Meeting agreed to move to Session 3 (constitution) and return to the remaining roles and priorities later if time allowed.

## **SESSSION 3 -Constitution and Election of Officers**

### **14. Rules of the Association**

The proposed rules of the association ('the constitution') drafted by Mark following the Oxford meeting were circulated for detailed discussion. Mark reminded the meeting that the rules are based upon those currently used by the Association of Polelathe Turners and Greenwood Workers, a UK organisation of circa 750 members with worldwide participation and run (currently) by a voluntary committee. The APT&GW has used the rules for 21 years and tends towards a similar lack of fondness for bureaucracy and formality as do many SABI members.

After a detailed review a number of amendments were agreed (the rules were then updated during the evening to reflect these amendments).

(para)9 That members who cannot attend the AGM could vote prior to the event by email and that these votes would be taken into account at the AGM should the number of nominations exceed the number of places and result in a vote taking place.

(para)7 Reduce the number of committee meetings per year to a minimum of two.

(para)11 Reference to auditors being appointed is not needed at this stage. Replace with the Treasurer will present the accounts at the AGM to be accepted by the members.

(para)13 Number of members to request an EGM – At least 20 members or half the members whichever is the smaller.

(para)9 receipt of nominations by email is acceptable.

(para)16 Updated to include email as mechanism for circulating the agenda, generally post will not be used due to the associated time and cost.

These rules 'as amended' were then formally adopted by the meeting – which officially brought the association into existence allowing the officers and committee members to be nominated and elected.

[Note: as described below in minute 18 the membership year was later changed to 1<sup>st</sup> February to 31<sup>st</sup> January.]

### **15. Officers and Committee Members**

Note that Clive Leeke volunteered in advance of the meeting to be the Publicity Officer.

A minimum of 3 and a maximum of 12 ordinary committee members need to be elected.

#### Officer nominations

Richard nominated Jez (Treasurer)

Steve nominated Beth (Secretary)

Mark nominated Richard (Chair)

Beth also volunteered to continue in the role of Web site Co-ordinator.

### Executive Committee nominations

Gill Barron (Membership Secretary)

Chris Riley

Andrea Rickard

Milos Stankovic(Scythe Safety)

Steve (Training Coordinator)

Phil Batten

Mark Allery

(in absentia – Gemma Suggitt)

(in absentia – Chris Hayes)

(in absentia – Gill Hardstone)

(in absentia – John Letts)

(Clive Leeke – Publicity Officer nominated in advance)

Since the number of nominated officers and ordinary members did not exceed the places available the nominations were to be voted for *en bloc*, by the meeting with a show of hands. Four ordinary members were nominated in their absence and are free to decline the offer if they so wish.

The meeting adjourned for the evening.

## **SESSION 4 – Matters arising from previous session (Sunday am)**

### **16. Membership and Rules of Association**

Membership is assumed to extend to those present, and current members of the Google Group (25-30 people). Members not present at the meeting to be sent a copy of the rules adopted by the meeting so that they can confirm their membership.

The amended Rules of Association were now available. Mark A read out the changes made following yesterday's discussion (see item 14. above) and the amended rules were adopted by the meeting. The adoption will be confirmed by circulation to the Google group.

All members now need to renew their membership. The membership year is stated in the Rules of Association as running from January to December, and if anyone has failed to renew by 31<sup>st</sup> January they will cease to be a member. [The membership year was changed later in the meeting to February to January, with membership ceasing on 28<sup>th</sup> February – see minute 18.] The method of payment was agreed to be by cheque. Direct Debit, which is useful for renewals, is to be looked at for next year.

For the membership fee, a consensus was reached on a figure of £10 per annum, proposed by Beth and Seconded by Chris. Carried unanimously by those members present. There will be no other category of membership than individual, but it will be 'family friendly'.

### **Action - Create a membership application form - Richard/Gill**

Simon requested clarification of members benefits. The meeting agreed that the windrow would continue to go out to everyone on Simon's list but the Google Group will be available only to members. Chris suggested that joining the group would be optional on members request which was agreed.

## **17. Election of Officers and Executive Committee**

The nominations previously received (item 15 above) were confirmed. The three officers (Chair, Treasurer and Secretary) were elected *en bloc*. The twelve Executive Committee members were elected *en bloc*. A quorum for Executive Committee meetings needs to be decided at the first meeting.

Designated roles in the association were confirmed:

Membership Secretary – Gill B

Publicity – Clive Leeke

Web site Co-ordinator – Beth T

Training Co-ordinator – Steve T. This will involve collation of course information and advertising, in the Windrow and on the web site, as well as consideration of standards in training.

Scythe Safety – Milos S. An accident book is to be maintain, containing reports submitted to Milos. This is to be kept within the Google group. Risk assessment and legal issues will be further considerations. SABI may obtain insurance for demonstrations (but not teaching) which some would find useful. The need for this should be gauged by a survey of members.

Social Media & Branding – Milos S

**Action – look into the feasibility of providing group insurance – Beth T**

## **18. Format of future meetings**

The AGM can be a brief report to the members coupled with re-election of the committee and this could be in the middle of the year at a location where a large number of members will be present. This allows the largest possible attendance at the AGM which is effectively a short 'reporting' meeting for the committee to update the membership and to elect the new committee. The 'business' meeting (*ie* more discussion) will be the winter meeting.

The timing of the winter meeting was discussed. If it was later in the spring it would be possible to camp. However it would be necessary to discuss matters relating to membership, in time to implement them. Mid-January was felt to be the best time. To ensure that the winter meeting is held before the renewal forms go out the membership year was changed at this point in the meeting, to run from 1<sup>st</sup> February each year (instead of 1<sup>st</sup> January as stated in minute 16) with one month grace period (*ie* if not renewed membership ceases on 28<sup>th</sup> February). The rules were updated to reflect this.

**Date of next meeting - the next AGM will be on Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> June 2012 at 7pm.**

Because of the change in the membership year this will be another AGM.

The next winter meeting was scheduled for the second weekend of January 2013. In principle the winter venue should move around the regions. John Letts has offered a potential venue for January 2013. Those present were asked to consider where the next winter meeting should be held especially in view of reducing the difficulties with travelling.

## 19. Summary and review of actions (other than association roles)

The meeting reprised and confirmed the main actions arising from the previous sessions.

<i>Minute</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Person(s)</i>
2	Develop mission statement.	Beth T
7	Leaflet/flyer to be drafted.	Gill B Simon F Jez H
16	Create a membership application form.	Richard B Gill B
17	Look into the feasibility of providing group insurance.	Beth T
New	Logo – five or six alternatives to be drawn	Gill B

## 20. Any Other Business

a) Scythe Festival – Simon F. asked for people interested in helping out and taking part in the organisation. Also whether members were interested in extending activities to Saturday. Jez and Gill will assist Simon by participating at the green fair planning meetings. Chris and Mark offered to help with the planning of the week.

There was discussion of possibilities for organising the Saturday activities in particular the workshops for improvers wanting to develop specific skills. Steve asked about how to incentivise people to give workshops. There was discussion about charging for courses and participation in workshops, both to attract trainers and help keep the festival financially viable. Full beginners and improvers courses could run as normal, but members will be offered the opportunity to participate in Saturday short workshops for a smaller fee. For example £20 for members and £30 for non-members (they may as well join!).

### **Action – Saturday at the Scythe Festival to become a 'SABI' members day - Festival 'committee'**

The possibility exists for mowing larger areas on Saturday (subject to an arrangement for clearing the grass – perhaps by tractor). There will be an improved plan for mowing on the Friday and Saturday so the Green Fair will know how the grass will be managed and reduce the risk of the grass not being mowed in time for early Sunday Morning.

### b) Local group activities

Simon Dawson asked how SABI can help members interested in improving. Steve suggested that a local group activity is a great way to start local networking and mowing events. The meeting generally endorsed the development of the local groups to promote scything via local events and meetings in each region.

## 21. Confirmation of date of next meeting

**The next AGM will be on Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> June 2012 at 7pm, at the Somerset Scythe Festival**

Meeting closed at 12:20 and thanked Simon, Gill and Jez for the hospitality and great welcome at Monkton Wyld.