

Scythe Association of Britain and Ireland

Minutes of the Second Meeting (Open meeting)

Date: 10th June 2011

Venue: West Country Scythe Festival, Thorney Lakes, Somerset

Present: Simon Fairlie (acting chair), Mark Allery (minutes), Chris Riley (minutes) and assembled attendees (about 30 people) of the scythe festival.

1. Minutes of the last meeting

CR read out a précis of the minutes of the inaugural meeting of SABI, on 15th January 2011. An agenda was then formulated based on progress since and on questions from those assembled.

2. Web site progress

Steve Tomlin reported that Derek Wells did a lot of work on the web site as well as web based spreadsheets as a potential membership database. It was eventually decided to use a Wordpress site as basis for the SABI site as it enabled a fully functional and acceptable looking site to be launched and content to be generated as well as articles posted with little effort (and the initial site is free)..

The address is <http://scytheassociation.wordpress.com>

John Letts has bought the appropriate domain names, and Paul Kingsnorth has set up a twitter account, which will in particular be useful with running courses. Mark Allery has setup the Wordpress site. MA offered to put his email address on the site for contacts (NB: this has been overcome by events as the contact email address was subsequently directed to Beth Tilston).

Live content of the static informative pages is now required. The Windrow (SABI newsletter) can be put on the site, as can minutes of meetings. It is important to have information on courses. Those assembled were asked if they would use the SABI website regularly, and about two thirds said that they would. It was also important to have a web presence for anyone searching for information. The web site should be publicised only when it has attained a high standard. Beth Tilston offered to compose the static pages, according to titles previously decided.

Action: Beth Tilston

Mark Allery to allow access to the site to do this.

Action: Mark Allery

3. How can people get involved?

Steve Tomlin asked if those present thought that the association was a good idea, and who would be willing to put some energy into it to contribute to its running. Most said that yes it was a good idea, and quite a few would contribute.

The SABI AGM was scheduled for January 2012, and someone was required to host the meeting. SF suggested Monkton Wyld as a possible venue, but it was not at all central nationally. Braziers Park in Oxfordshire was suggested as a more central site, Clive Leeke offered to look into this. College Halls were other possibilities. Once a venue was arranged the agenda would be circulated by email.

Action: Clive Leeke

CR asked who else would particularly like to be involved. As well as Clive Leeke and Beth Tilston,

Gill Baron would be able to manage subscriptions, and Jez Hastings offered to be regional rep for Scotland.

4. Local networking

Andy Coleman suggested that regional activities would be a way of getting more involved. He offered to represent his area. Local groups would be able to practice mowing together, socialise and look into local history. Steve Tomlin gave the example of the current group in Cumbria. Get-togethers were organised by email. The web site should contain details of groups which were active. Jim McVitie said that there might be insurance implications of this. The following volunteered to represent the stated regions:

Andy Coleman – Somerset or the South West

Jez Hastings – Scotland

Clive Leeke – South of England

Beth Tilston – Brighton

Steve Tomlin – North West

Richard Brown – East of England

Phil Batten – Wales

5. Insurance

BT said that some organisations offer their members insurance cover. Would or could SABI do the same?

Experience of other organisations is that group insurance generally does not cover teaching. As a comparison, horse loggers insurance can cover teaching but will be ten times the normal cover. The cost for SABI may depend on how many people would take it up. JH suggested that insurers might look for proof of qualifications. A comparison was made with BTCV in that a similar type of activity is concerned. It was suggested that an alternative to insurance was having a disclaimer, but this is not protection in law. Some currently practising had their own insurance anyway eg for ST it cost only £75 pa.

MA suggested that SABI should investigate this issue later, when the organisation is better established. SF also said that this was not a sufficient need currently to pursue it. A disadvantage of group insurance is that if one person had an accident then the premium for the whole group may be affected.

6. Teaching

SF said there should not be any accreditation of scythe teaching, as differing camps may develop. CL made a comparison with hedge laying in which this had happened. A comparison was also made with permaculture. This was different again in that the word Permaculture was trademarked, it was said.

RB said that there were different styles of teaching, and also different kinds of use to which the scythe was put. These differences should be recognised, and we should not be too prescriptive as to how courses are delivered. David Oxford pointed out that there was a risk of elevating prices if there was a requirement for accreditation, which then opened up the possibility of undercutting by others.

7. Funding

Expenses incurred in running the association will result in a requirement for a certain level of income. It was asked when would that funding be starting to come in. Subscriptions would be the first income, starting in 2012. SF also said that funding from the Scythe Shop would be forthcoming. A 50p addition to the cost of a scythe was suggested.

If grants are applied for then only discrete projects can be funded, not maintenance and day to day running. Regional fund raising events could be organised to raise funds. However the expenses are

anticipated to be minimal for SABI. Richard Brown said that the original idea was to keep costs very low, so that subscriptions would pay for everything. The level of subscription was suggested at being about £10. For this members would get the Windrow. A subscription would reveal the number of active members.

Dave Oxford said that one way to arrange the benefits of membership would be to issue a password to part of the website for an additional sum, say £4. Some might prefer a magazine, but that will incur printing and postage costs.

The association does not have to be registered charity to benefit from Gift Aid, but does require a registered address to obtain a tax code.

8. Events and competitions

SF said that the Somerset Festival could be run by SABI. This would take over from himself, having run it for the seven years of its existence, virtually on his own. There are eight or nine people on the committee for the Green Scythe Fair, but SF is the only one anything to do with the scything.

Perhaps the regional group could be involved. A comparison was made with the Eastern Counties event at Wimpole Hall. Here Simon Damant organises the event, but with the back up of National Trust staff based at the site.

9. Publications & promotion

Rather than incur printing costs, publications can be made available via the web site as pdf files. Either way, it was suggested that a general leaflet about the association may be desirable. Leaflets on other subjects might include one on safety. Paper leaflets could be distributed via regional groups. The web site will be the preserve of subjects such as historical articles and oral testimony.

To assist those teaching courses, a template form could be provided, and other resources, such as a risk assessment form. Such benefits should only be available to members.

Promotion of the scythe and its use is the most important function of the association, and SF said that we should be investigating all possible ways of doing this.

10. Date of next meeting

The third Saturday in January 2012. This will be the AGM. Venue to be confirmed.