

Rhododendron Species Conservation Group

NEWSLETTER NO. 25 Spring 2021



In this issue: *Work at Baravalla*
Planting at Gargunock East Glen

Above Picture: *Rhododendron asterocnoum* with a snow covering on 6th April by John Roy

Editorial

It has been a long cold winter and spring. Finally when the first rhododendrons came into flower they were hammered by frost. This felt like a double blow when we were not able to see friends and family in the ordinary way because of COVID-19 restrictions. A lot of the flower buds that had not opened were aborted, so what promised to be a very floriferous spring has not happened.

Now, however, we can see a way ahead. Shops have reopened and a lot of adults have been fully vaccinated. The Autumn and Spring Conference planning is going ahead. (See Secretary's Notes). The later flowering rhododendrons are doing their best.

Baravalla work has started again albeit without an overnight stay. Read about what has been happening. Now that we are able to meet more people indoors we can think about a weekend renting one of the nearby chalets.

Willie Campbell was able to come to the Rhododendron Nursery area and take away a number of plants that had outgrown their positions. These have now been planted at Gargunock East Glen. Willie has written a few words about what he has been doing.

This Newsletter is obviously smaller than usual because there is not so much to report. However it is important to keep you, the Membership, up to date with what is going on and what is planned for the future.



John Roy

A fine form of *Rhododendron calophytum* flowering at Brecklet before the frosts

Photo by John Roy

Secretary's Notes

John M. Hammond

I woke around 6.30hrs on Wednesday 6th May, and again on Thursday 7th May, and looking out the window everything was white with a very hard frost. This was in some ways a 'book-end' after a month of frosty or near frosty, nights that have 'zapped' the open buds, flowers and new growth on most ornamentals in the garden. Telephone calls and emails from members in many parts of the UK have indicated they have also experienced similar conditions. What has been difficult to cope with this season, particularly in the greenhouse, has been the very cold nights that have been followed by a quick transition to hot sunny days that have necessitated the manually operated greenhouse window and door to be opened by 09.30hrs in a morning, as the automatic window opener did not provide sufficient ventilation. Over the past two days I have walked around the gardens removing some of the damaged new growth and flower-buds with the aim of minimising the distorted new growth where practicable, but nothing can be done regarding the taller plants, as well as the large-leaved species where the flowers were completely 'zapped' by an early-frost in mid-March. We will just have to live with these. As one member from the south-east remarked, '*There's always another year!*'.

The 14th Annual General Meeting held by 'Zoom' on Saturday 20th March 2021 went ahead as planned and the business conducted at the meeting confirmed that the main activities of the Group were generally on-hold until the Covid-19 restrictions were eased, and dates could be set for Garden Surveys, 'Out-based Plantings' could be sent further batches of species material, and Conference dates could be re-arranged with some confidence.

Future Events: *It was inevitable that the re-introduction of lockdown Covid-19 restrictions imposed last Summer as a result of the 'second wave' of new positive cases, would once again significantly impact on our Programme of Future Events. Nothing is completely certain at the time of writing in early-May, as whilst we are currently hoping for a gradual easing in the restrictions in the UK as a result of the successful vaccination programme, there are some concerns as to the wider effect of the major outbreak in India, together with pandemic problems in other parts of the world for which accurate details are scant. Despite these uncertain times we are still endeavouring to plan well ahead, and all our events are subject to change. Please read the following notes carefully as it has taken a significant amount of time to rearrange these events:*

**Rhododendron Species Conservation Group & Scottish Rhododendron Society
2020 Joint Autumn Conference: Royal Botanic Garden, 20A Inverleith Row,
Edinburgh EH35LR**

Saturday 2nd & Sunday 3rd October 2021

Theme: ‘*Conservation of Gardens is Key to Conservation of Plants*’

This Conference has been re-arranged to take place in the Autumn of 2021 at the same venue, for which a booking has recently been confirmed, and the new dates are as close as is practicable to those for 2020. Following discussion with the Speakers the Conference Programme remains unchanged. At the time of writing the Covid-19 restrictions are still preventing the finalisation of catering arrangements at the RBGE as the new contract caterers are still off-site, and they will make contact as soon as they return to the Herbarium Building. We will circulate a Registration Pack for this event as soon as we are able to do so.

Planning and organisation by the RSCG for this event has made good progress in liaison with the RBGE. A wide-ranging and interesting group of speakers has been arranged for the lectures on Saturday, Dr. David Chamberlain will address some of the issues relating to conservation of species in the wild, whilst Jens Nielsen, who probably knows more than anyone about new Chinese species in the wild, will discuss what has been found recently, some of which is in locations that are threatened by development. To deal with a few formal items, after Lunch the deferred 15th Annual General Meeting of the RSCG will take place. A new post at the Botanic Garden has recently been filled by Dr. Alan Elliott, whose role is to take forward the establishment of a Global Conservation Consortium for Rhododendrons, on an International basis. Alan is keen to work with organisations and will explain how this project will be rolled out, what the objectives are, and how it will involve gardens and collections in the UK. Our final speaker is Mike Thornley who has recently been putting together a detailed presentation that outlines his experiences with garden restoration and rhododendron conservation over many years, as they do not always sit well together, which can raise problems in a Scottish environment that need to be addressed. On the Sunday there will be a conducted tour of part of the rhododendron collection at the RBGE and a visit to Saughton Park for a conducted tour of the major conservation project being taken forward by the Royal Caledonian Horticultural Society. Conservation of gardens goes hand-in-hand with plant conservation, they are reliant on each other for a successful outcome. An A4 declaration of interest pro-forma was included as an insert to the last Newsletter, which provides further details. Margaret Hammond, Conference Registrar

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Rhododendron Species Conservation Group

2022 Spring Conference: Stonefield Castle Hotel, Tarbert, Argyll

Monday 4th & Tuesday 5th April 2022

Theme: ‘Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Founding of Baravalla Garden’

This Conference has been re-arranged a second time and now will take place next Spring at the same venue, the line-up of Speakers remains unchanged, and the new dates have been agreed with the Hotel Manager, who is currently furloughed and off-site. The dates are as close as is practicable to those for 2020 & 2021. The hotel is honouring our original Conference booking for use of the hotel facilities, together with honouring the accommodation arrangements made for delegates. An updated copy of the Conference Programme is being prepared and will be mailed to all Conference Registrants this Summer, after the Hotel reopens for business and we can begin to finalise the arrangements. We are planning to hold the 16th A.G.M. during the morning of the lecture day. In due course we will also need the delegates with accommodation bookings at the hotel to confirm they will be attending the Conference so we can generate an up-to-date Rooming List for the hotel to work with.

This is a great opportunity for members to participate in a Springtime Conference being held in the midst of an historic rhododendron collection on the shores of Loch Fyne. We will look at the background history of Baravalla Secret Garden, its development by ‘The Two Peters’, the collections of rhododendrons and other genera, the changes that have taken place recently in liaison with the RSCG to secure the future of the garden, and members of the Baravalla Working Party will explain how these are being taken forward in practice. We have invited Robert Mitchell, Past-Curator at St. Andrew’s B.G. to give a new talk, specially put together for our Conference, which will encompass some of the wider aspects resulting from the 1981 SBEC Expedition. Garden tours are arranged to see the Stonefield Castle collection, to Baravalla Garden, and a visit to Gartnagrenach House near the village of Whitehouse, en-route to Tayinloan. For further information contact:

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Rhododendron Species Conservation Group & Scottish Rhododendron Society

2022 Joint Autumn Conference: Venue TBA

Saturday 1st & Sunday 2nd October 2022 (TBC)

Theme: TBA

Planning and organisation of this Joint event will be taken forward by the SRS and details will be available in late-2021.

**Rhododendron Species Conservation Group
2023 Spring Conference: Crown & Mitre Hotel, Carlisle (TBC)
Saturday 2nd & Sunday 3rd April 2023 (TBC)
Theme, TBA**

We have had no alternative but to postpone this Conference until the Spring of 2023, as we need to be sure that the proposed venue, run by the Peel Group, is fully back in operation following the period of Covid-19 restrictions.

In October 2009 the Group held its first Conference at the Crown & Mitre Hotel in Carlisle, which was well supported, so behind the scenes we are planning to make a return visit to The Border City and this will provide an opportunity for members in the South to attend. More details will be available in due course in early 2022, as we are now beginning to take forward the planning of garden visits and speakers.

Margaret Hammond, Conference Registrar

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Rhododendron Species Conservation Group: Notice of the 15th Annual General Meeting:

The 15th Annual General Meeting will be held at Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, 20A Inverleith Row, EH3 5LR on Saturday, 2nd October 2021 commencing at 13.15hrs.

Rhododendron Species Conservation Group: Notice of the 16th Annual General Meeting:

The 16th Annual General Meeting will be held at Stonefield Castle Hotel, Tarbert, Argyll PA29 6YJ on Monday 4th April 2022 commencing at 10.15hrs.

Baravalla

Matt Heasman

During the lockdown and the winter of 2020/21 it seemed to drag on forever. I was fed up with not being able to visit Baravalla but more to the point I was worried about any gale damage that may have occurred. The locals who keep an eye out at least hadn't reported any major issues so that was some good news. In March, Bryony White (new Head gardener at Achamore on Gigha) very kindly made a local visit with her apprentice during the lockdown to check the fence in early April. She reported all was well except for one tree leaning on the fence at the far gate in the garden.

Mon 19th April: This was my first visit to the garden this year. The first job was to remove the tree that was leaning on the fence. Then I went to the next area to make a start, at the back of the top of the main lawn, behind the *Pinus radiata*. This area seems to be fairly well protected as the bluebells and other forest floor plants were



progressing well with even a few bluebells just starting to bloom. I also planted the two larger plants that Chip Lima had given us, *Rhododendron kendrickii* and a *R. fansipanense*, a rhododendron in subsect *Arborea* from Northern Vietnam. I hope they thrive there in the protected area. I noticed a sizable *Northofagus* that was on the loch side of the Triflora Glade had been blown over and was leaning on some of the Trifloras. On leaving the garden in the evening I took a walk around to see how much the frost had damaged. There was quite a bit, but I did notice that all along the very top of the garden in the

Tree leaning on fence

Photo by Matt Heasman

main all the buds and shoots had no frost damage at all. This is the place to plant all the tender species. I plan to move a number of the worst affected plants there.

Thur 22nd April: I was joined by my young nephew Charlie. We worked away continuing to clear this new area just above the Main lawn (behind the *Pinus radiata*). John Roy then joined us and cleared the top branches of the *Northofagus* that was leaning on the Trifloras. Once cleared of the Trifloras we will get back to clearing the rest later in the year. John continued to clear and tidy up logs we had left from last year for his firewood. Willie and Katrina also joined us later in the morning. They were air layering the *Rhododendron subansiriense* at the top of the garden as this has been identified as a priority for propagation. Working in partnership with Alan Elliot at the RBGE we are now working on a propagation plan to try and increase the material available to grow in the few ex-situ locations that we are managing. Charlie and I continued clearing the area we were working in until late afternoon. It was a warm day and by that time I was ready for my fish and chips.

Many days and weekends are planned during the year to work at Baravalla, if you would like to help please get in touch with me at matthew.heasman@virgin.net.

Baravalla Mapping April 2021

Willie Campbell

Once again, we the maintenance team made our way to Baravalla our partner Garden on the West Coast of Scotland. It's a good 3 hour drive from Central Scotland to the garden and as it was a day visit, we would not be able to stay too long.

Katrina Clow and I are the mapping team, and for those who know Baravalla a small burn runs down the West Side of the garden. We choose to check and label maps 24 and 25 over the south bridge across the burn.

As always, we make out all the labels on the "Two Peters" maps before we arrive on site. Map 24 starts with some good plants in fortunea sub section easily labelled and finished with a *Rhododendron leishanicum* TH2783 which was described as rare in cultivation; however, Ken Cox has indicated he has the same collection at Glendoick and confirms its *R. oligocarpum* which is still worth propagating. So that's one new label to be made out for the next trip and take some cuttings around July or August time.

Other notable new addition on the map of interest was a *Rehderodendron indochinensis* WWJ11983 collected in Vietnam by Peter Wharton and Bleddyn Wynn-Jones of Crûg Farm. This plant is believed to be one of its kind in Scotland.

Map 25 going northward was again fairly straight forward with quite a few more tender plants missing from the map, everything we found was labelled.

After labelling, we turned our attention to some long term propagation with air layering a Red Listed plant: *Rhododendron subansiriense* in Subsection Thomsonia CH418. This was collected from the Subansiri district in Arunachal Pradesh.

We completed three layers with the normal method of mixing sphagnum moss and composted bark in equal quantities in an old cut down compost bag and one of the newer ball types that clicks together that has been advertised recently. We will report on any success in the future.



Willie Campbell air layering *Rhododendron subansiriense*

Photo by Matt Heasman

Gargunock East Glen Conservation Site

Willie Campbell

The East Glen at Gargunock is in Central Scotland just a few miles from Stirling with good road links to all of Scotland. The RSCG and Gargunock Estate Charitable Trust have a partnership agreement to plant and maintain this ex-situ rhododendron conservation area. It is important that the RSCG have sites in different areas to ensure that species rhododendrons are conserved in different circumstances.

The East Glen was cleared of *Rhododendron ponticum* around 2005 and some plantings of rhododendrons, shrubs and specialist trees had taken place around 2007, now these plants are quite mature and add structure to the RSCG new plantings that were started before lockdown last year.

Plants come from our nursery at Glencoe. Our RSCG Treasurer and Editor John Roy not only looks after the accounts and publications, but also the nursery which has been inspected and passed by the Plant Health Officials from the Scottish Government.



The plants planted were good mature *Rhododendron calophytum*, species azaleas and some large leaved plants. We always like to plant in threes but here we did not have enough plants.

These new plantings have had limited success as we all remember after the Covid lockdown we had 10 weeks of blazing sunshine, where we were unable to inspect or water the plants. We also had

Willie planting at the East Glen

Photo by Fiona Campbell

some deer damage where plants were lifted out of the ground, this is particularly bad when the roe buck's antlers are in velvet.

After travel rules relaxed a visit to the nursery was possible. Some 15 plants were uplifted, brought down to Doune where they were immersed in water. We decided to plant 3 plants at a time as we were also taking composted bark and water to the planting site at the East Glen.

Holes were dug as usual with a mattock; a spade is only used when planting potted plants. Care was taken to remove bracken and saplings prior to planting. Plants were watered in this time and a good layer of composted bark mulch placed around the plants. Finally, we erected a tripod of bamboo canes round the plants to attempt to hinder deer intrusion or damage. Metal name tags were then attached, the database updated, job done.

May we ask any of our RSCG members if they have any spare plants of Subsections Fortunea, Camplyocarpa, Maculifera, Grandia or Falconera. Any plants must be from HP seed, cuttings or grafts. Plant must come with collection numbers, details where collected, etc.

The group thanks the Gargunnoch Estate Charitable Trust for their help and assistance in the overall maintenance on this important rhododendron conservation area in Central Scotland.

Lastly we are looking for help to plant and maintain the collection at the East Glen, Gargunnoch. Help may be just checking plants, clearing weeds or saplings, pruning or labelling the plants. Please contact Willie Campbell.

william.campbellwj@btinternet.com

The RSCG “Cox and Hutchison” Exploration Fund

Willie Campbell

A proposal is being put forward to the AGM from your committee to start up an exploration fund to help meet our charitable status.

The Exploration fund will be open to all horticulturalists with an interest in the Sino-Himalayan region. The applicant will have an interest in Rhododendrons and companion plants from that region. They will also be interested in plant conservation particularly rhododendrons.

Many other charities support similar funding schemes for applicants to secure funding or part funding for exploration. The applicant need not be a member of the RSCG.

Your committee has already ring fenced a sum of £500 and will review its own funding annually before making more contributions.

Your Committee hopes that you will support this fund with generous donations, gifts, fund raising like garden open days (say you open for SGS or the NTS garden opening, part of those monies raised could go to the fund) or plant sales. Maybe you feel you would like to leave something in your will.

Please support the fund by sending a cheque or bank transfer to our current treasurer John Roy – Details on the back page of this publication.

It is unlikely that we will receive applications under the present circumstances, but we hope with your generous donations we can build up the Fund to a reasonable amount.

Finally, we would like to thank the Cox and Hutchison Families for allowing us to use the “Two Peters” names in the fund heading.

Rhododendron Species Conservation Group

Minutes of the 14th Annual General Meeting

Held by 'Zoom' by prior arrangement on Saturday 20th March 2021

All the Reports required for the Meeting, together with the arrangements for joining the Meeting had been mailed to the membership four weeks prior to the date of the Meeting.

Introduction: The President, Ian W.J. Sinclair, was in the Chair and welcomed the members present to the 14th Annual General Meeting of the Rhododendron Species Conservation Group.

Apologies for absence: Sir James Stirling, Peter Cox, Ian Douglas, David & Gloria Starck, Marion & Roger Kinns, David & Marlene Storah, Mike & Sue Thornley, David & Pamela Coombes, Jim Jermyn, Samuel Henderson and Cara Thomson represented Gillian Mackie-Campbell.

Minutes of Meeting: The Minutes of the 13th Annual General Meeting held at the Ballachulish Hotel, Ballachulish, Argyll on Saturday, 8th June 2019 were proposed as an accurate record by Matthew Heasman, seconded by Katrina Clow, and unanimously agreed.

President's Report: 2020 was indeed a strange year for everyone. Well done to all who have managed to keep a tag on the ex-situ collections and John Roy with our holdings at his croft at Ballachulish. The Baravalla team in particular have done sterling work, Willie Campbell has greatly extended the plant collection listings on Excel, the editor keeping the publications going and the secretary proceeding with the administration.

A sensational new contact for the group is Al Elliott (Dr Alan Elliott) of the Global Conservation Consortium for Rhododendron (GCCR). Al is based at the RBGE, where he is working on Vireya conservation as well as the temperate species. This will be such a boost to the RSCG and of some help to the GCCR. Hopefully, at some time in 2021, we will be able to resume with much more active field work, enjoy traveling to our various ex situ sites and progress the listings of the more threatened species. Good cheer for 2021.

Secretary's Report: The restrictions put in place by the Prime Minister on 16th March 2020, to counter the projected impact of the CoviD-19 pandemic, were a cause for concern, as it was uncertain what overall impact the restrictions would have on the RSCG activities.

David Chamberlain has noted that there were continuing seed restrictions that affected the work of Botanical Institutions, but there had been no further developments in connection with the Nagoya Protocol. Matt Heasman has confirmed there were no further matters requiring attention by the Group regarding the General Data Protection Regulation (G.D.P.R.).

The Secretary had received an e.mail from Alan Elliott, the newly appointed R.B.G.E. Project Manager for 'The Global Conservation Consortium for Rhododendrons', introducing himself. Alan was looking to contact the Group, given his role covered similar objectives as the Group. It had been agreed that Alan should be invited to the next Committee Meeting of the Group to enable a two-way exchange of background details and objectives to be discussed. The Secretary thanked the Committee for their help and support during the year and all other items were on the A.G.M. Agenda.

Treasurer's Report: John Roy reported that the Balance at the Bank at 5th April 2020 was £25,547.86 and subscriptions would remain the same for the coming year. This figure

included £15,838.00 that was ring-fenced for the Baravalla Fund.

The main items in the Receipts total of £18,607. 00 were Donations of £5575.00 to the Baravalla Fund, Gift Aid of £2992.00 and Conference/Tours income of £8890.00. The main items in the Payments total of £27,321.00 were Conference/Tours expenses of £9121. 00, Baravalla Maintenance/Insurance of £2916.00 and Purchase of Kawasaki Mule for Baravalla at £13,500.00, resulting in a Surplus/Deficit of £ (8,714.00).

In response to a query from the floor regarding items relating to Baravalla being included in the Accounts, the Treasurer confirmed that the RSCG was responsible for the financial activities associated with the Baravalla Fund. William Campbell proposed the accounts be accepted, this was seconded by Ian W.J. Sinclair, and unanimously agreed. **Nomination of Officers and Committee Members:** The Secretary advised the meeting that all the Officers and Committee Members have completed their final year of a three-year term and all are willing to stand for a further three year term, apart for William Campbell who had resigned from the Committee since the mailing documents were circulated. In the absence of any new nominations, it was proposed to re-elect en-block. David Sillar proposed that the Officers and Committee be re-elected en-block, this was seconded by Bryony White, and unanimously agreed. The Secretary would write to David Purvis regarding his non-attendance at Committee Meetings.

The President thanked William Campbell, on behalf of the Group, for the many years he had served on the Committee, he had held several posts during that time, and he will be greatly missed.

Committee Vacancies and Seconded Members: The President reminded the meeting there were unfilled vacancies on the Committee for an Out-based Plantings Co-ordinator, Garden Surveys Co-ordinator, and Publicity & Communications Director, and that anybody who was interested taking part in the organisational activities of the Group would be made very welcome and should speak with a member of the Committee.

Membership Secretary's Report: Anne Davidson reported that the renewal of subscriptions for 2020 had gone smoothly and there were five renewals outstanding, and she had recently contacted the members concerned. Despite the onset of CoviD-19 Anne was hopeful that all renewals would come to hand during the Spring and the membership total was currently 90. Four Head Gardeners and other Horticulturalists had taken up the offer of free membership of the Group for a year and this approach was still being actively pursued. Anne noted she had not received any Gift Aid declarations recently and ask John Roy to check if any had been sent directly to him. John agreed to do this.

Programme of Activities: John Hammond drew attention to the details in the Report that had been circulated prior to the meeting and noted that the 2019 Spring Conference held at the Ballachulish Hotel, with the theme '*The Corroul Rhododendron Collection*' and had included a visit to the Corroul Estate. The event was well received and John Sutherland was thanked for his talk and for arranging access to the Estate for the Group whilst the plantings were in bloom. The 2019 Joint RSCG/SRS Autumn Conference based at the Pitlochry Hydro Hotel, with the theme '*Scottish Botanical Explorers in the Modern Era*' with talks given by speakers who had been on plant hunting expeditions. The Sunday included visits to 'Craigowan', Ian & Christine Jones garden, which included a Plant Auction, then on to the Explorers Garden' at Pitlochry together with a visit to the Pavilion to see the photography exhibition of 'Plant Explorers in the Modern Era' sponsored by the SRS and SRGC. Comments on the

day and subsequent feedback confirmed the event was enjoyed by all and well received. The arrangements for the 2020 Spring Conference to be held at Stonefield Castle Hotel from 6th – 7th April with the theme ‘*The 50th Anniversary of the Founding of Baravalla Garden*’ were finalised and the Speakers and garden visits were all arranged. Unfortunately, the CoviD19 pandemic overtook the events programmed for 2020 and the Spring Conference centred on the Stonefield Castle Hotel was subsequently postponed until 28th – 30th March 2021. The 2020 Joint RSCG & SRS Autumn Conference is to be held at the RBG, Edinburgh from 3rd - 4th October 2020. The venue had been booked, the Speakers are confirmed, the garden visits are arranged, and the catering remains to be organised with the new contract caterers.

Garden Survey Programme, Data Collection and Data Input: In September 2019 Matt Heasman had circulated and updated Appendix E spreadsheet, which itemised the current position with the 29 garden surveys that had been carried out, together with any amendments that were required. The garden surveys are on-hold until the Group is able resume after the CoviD-19 restrictions have been lifted.

Baravalla Garden: Matt Heasman reported that the Maintenance Plan was now in place and was organised to cover the whole of the garden on a five-year cycle. With the programme of work that has taken place to date there are now new areas to be planted. Whilst there had been three working weekends at the garden in 2019, as a result of CovD-19, the programme of work was put on-hold in March 2020 when the lockdown began, and the activities will resume as soon as the travel restrictions and lockdown requirement are eased. The winds had not been excessive in the past year and no reports of problems had come to hand, however, Bryony White will arrange a visit to check the trees and the fence.

R.S.C.G. Plant Collections: There had been no new plant acquisitions in the year to April 2020. A batch of Sub-section Taliensia had been planted at Corroul in November 2019, and a group of *R. calophytum* and North American deciduous Azaleas were planted out in the East Glen at Gargunnock. Plants from the Falconera and Grandia Sub-sections were yet to be sourced to be planted at Glenbranter Glen, where the collections were 85% complete.

Publications & Website: John Roy reported that two *Newsletters* had been published containing good articles and he thanked the contributors for the copy. Matt Heasman noted he was maintaining the software of the website.

Any Other Business: There was no other business discussed at the meeting.

Date of next meeting: The date of the 15th A.G.M. was deferred until a future date but would probably be held as a virtual meeting during the Spring by Zoom due to CoviD-19 restrictions.

There was no further business and the President thanked those present for attending and closed the meeting at 14 .55hrs.

Ian W.J. Sinclair
President

John M. Hammond
Hon. Secretary

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