



# THE WAGNER SOCIETY

[www.wagnersociety.org](http://www.wagnersociety.org)

President: Dame Gwyneth Jones DBE Kammersängerin

Vice president: Sir John Tomlinson CBE

Registered Charity No:266383 Founded 1953

## MINUTES OF THE 61<sup>st</sup> ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE WAGNER SOCIETY

12 MAY 2015 7:30pm

St Botolph's Church Hall, London EC2M 3TL

1. The Chairman opened the meeting, declaring it quorate with 34 members present and welcomed the President and the attendees. He noted the highly successful masterclass given by the President that had taken place the evening before at the Royal Over-Seas League, and expressed his enthusiasm for this to be repeated.
2. **Agenda Item 1 - Apologies for absence** - The Secretary read out the names of those who had sent apologies for absence, namely Eric and Wendy Adler, Elaine Fairless, Eric Beck, Nick and Rosie Stiven, Ian Strange, Peter Jennings, Joan Clinch, Paul-Henri Forestier, Leila Marzagao Peter Jennings, Katie Barnes, John and Angela Crowther and Paul Young. The President added apologies from Adrian Mueller.
3. **Agenda Item 2 – Approval of the Minutes of the 2014 AGM** - Malcolm Rivers enquired whether there had been any further discussion regarding the 7-year term for honorary members that had been queried by Gary Kahn at the last AGM. He reminded the meeting that granting of honorary membership was something the Committee should discuss from time to time, when an appropriate candidate was identified. He gave a proposal to the Secretary for such a candidate, to be discussed at the next Committee meeting.
4. Adoption of the 2014 AGM Minutes was proposed by Paul Dawson-Bowling and seconded by Michael Bousfield. The minutes were duly adopted without opposition.
5. **Agenda Item 3 – Chairman's Report** - the Chairman noted that the report had been circulated in advance and he did not therefore intend to repeat himself. He welcomed Henry Kennedy, present at the meeting, as the new Webmaster and Social Media Manager.
6. Ray Godson enquired about the declining membership and asked what the Committee were doing about this. The Chairman responded that new members



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were joining in steady numbers, largely via the website and it was hoped that the numbers of new joiners would increase with time. The Committee would initiate a membership drive in the coming year. Peter W Howard asked why people left and it was responded that this was due to a variety of reasons, including the aging profile of members, economic factors and members who lived outside of London and could not attend events feeling that they were not getting sufficient value for their membership. Ryma Howard asked how many members were currently registered, to which the answer from the Membership Secretary was 832 (counting joint members as 2). Of these however, 122 were currently unpaid or underpaid for the current year.

7. Paul Dawson-Bowling stated that, as in his own case, people simply forgot to renew and should be reminded. It was noted that several reminders had been sent out by the Membership Secretary. Mavis Robinson asked why we did not initiate direct debit as a way of paying for memberships. The Treasurer responded that this would be too expensive for a small organisation such as ours, while Standing Orders were free. He explained the bank requirement for the Society to post bonds to guarantee direct debits.
8. The President suggested that a reminder be put in Wagner News for members who had not yet paid their subscriptions.
9. Members could currently pay by means of cheques, standing orders, and credit cards lodged on the website.
10. Gary Kahn enquired how the Committee proposed to deal with members who had underpaid. The Treasurer responded that, following several reminders, it had been agreed that, from April 2015 those who had underpaid were no longer considered to be members. The sums paid would be treated as donations, although they would be refunded upon request. He emphasised that as much as possible was being done to inform members of this initiative and to remind them to pay the correct subscriptions in a timely fashion.
11. Ray Godson enquired about the costs of printing and posting Wagner News and whether these costs could be reduced in some way. Irene Richards noted that she belonged to an organisation with similar issues with their newsletter and that neither the Wagner Society nor her other organisation were large enough to qualify for bulk postage discounts. The Treasurer noted the postage cost band weight limit of 100 grammes for Wagner News, that was adhered to strictly in order to keep postage costs to a minimum.



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12. Robert Mansell asked how other Wagner Societies were faring over the issue of reducing membership. The Secretary, who had many international Wagner Society connections due to her position on the Board of the RWVI, responded that we were doing considerably better and losing far fewer members than other Wagner Societies, largely due to our superior website and our communications in general.
13. Robert Mansell then enquired about the number of members who lived outside London and why we were so focused on London, e.g. for our events.
14. Barbara Cumbers asked why we did not hold events in other locations in the UK. The Chair responded that events should not lose money and that the risk of this would increase for events outside London. The Secretary noted the difficulties of organising events outside London, as the Committee nearly all lived in London with many of them working full-time and it would therefore be too difficult to do this.
15. Gary Kahn suggested that leaflets for the Wagner Society could be distributed at key Wagner events outside London, e.g. the Opera North Ring Cycle in 2016.
16. David Edwards noted that there was a small Wagner Society in Manchester. The Secretary added that the Chair of this Society was a member of our Society and she was in regular contact with her.
17. The Chair asked Michael Bousfield about the demographics of his MCL members, to which he responded that 90% of his members lived in London. Membership of MCL had remained fairly consistent.
18. The President suggested that the Committee survey members to find out what they wanted in terms of events.
19. Paul Dawson-Bowling pointed out that a small attendance at the AGM indicated a contented membership.
20. The President further suggested that the Wagner Society hold purely social events for members to meet one another. In this context, she recalled the highly successful Aldeburgh weekend a few years ago. The Secretary responded that, in fact the Committee were planning just such a social event to take place in December, which the Treasurer had kindly offered to organise. Michael Bousfield commented that MCL was a far more social organisation than the WS.



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21. Katharine Turton suggested that the WS hold a short event after the AGM, as an incentive to attend. It was noted that this used to be the case and that we could go back to this practice. Malcolm Rivers reminded members that in the past, the winner of the Singing Competition used to perform after the AGM.
22. Paul Dawson-Bowling observed that owing to force of changed circumstances the society could not offer all the things that it once did, e.g. a generous availability of tickets at Bayreuth, reduced prices at Covent Garden members, and *Wagner*, the Society's erstwhile flagship publication, and offered his congratulations that membership had held up so well under these circumstances. It was agreed that the WS could consider other possibilities in this regard.
23. Mavis Robinson suggested that local Wagner Societies could be established in places such as Birmingham and Leeds, around the Opera North Ring and that local people could be encouraged to set up new societies. The Committee stressed that it would always be willing to offer support and advice to anyone considering setting up a new regional Wagner Society.
24. In response to a question about what the WS were doing about attracting younger people e.g. via Facebook, it was confirmed that we did have a Facebook page and that Henry Kennedy was currently boosting its profile.
25. **Agenda Item 4 – Treasurer's Report** – The Treasurer began by noting that the monthly management accounts were available for members to view on the website. A budget had been produced for the financial year and variances against budget were noted in the monthly accounts.
26. He then referred to the Statement of Financial Activities in his report, which had been circulated in advance of the meeting. 2014 had ended satisfactorily, with a surplus generated largely by claiming of Gift Aid.
27. Noting that events had made a small surplus in 2014 Gary Kahn asked whether the Committee could restore the provision of cubes of cheese and crackers to augment the nuts and snacks currently provided for meetings especially given that in his opinion the cost to the Society per meeting would be an additional £20. He repeatedly voiced the strength of his feelings about this matter. The Treasurer explained that, while some events returned a surplus, others lost money and it was sensible therefore to keep catering costs low and to continue to exercise prudence over costs generally. The fact that refreshments were included in the ticket price already created value. It was noted that the costs for the AGM, which had been in the region of £1500 in 2014, were now a more



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- sensible £300, due to the fact that the papers were now emailed out and lodged on the website, rather than being printed and posted.
28. Barbara Cumbers asked why the cost of postage had reduced. The Treasurer explained that this was due to an accounting issue and proceeded to explain.
29. The Treasurer noted the successful claiming of Gift Aid in 2014 and thanked Margaret Murphy (Membership Secretary) and Mike Morgan (the former Treasurer) for all their efforts in this regard. Some of this money had been invested in Charifund as this would give a better return than any deposit account. Auditing fees had risen somewhat last year.
30. The Treasurer referred again to the strict budget that was in place.
31. He further noted that the annual donation to Mastersingers/The Goodall Scholars had been a total of £7k in 2014, of which £5k was a donation to the Mastersingers, and £2k supported the Goodall Scholars. He outlined the various activities that the Mastersingers provided in return for their donation, for example, putting on successful events (such as the recent Bayreuth or Bust evening), assistance with the Singing Competition (running the auditions) and the Rehearsal Orchestra event. In 2015 there would be a single donation of £5k. The Memorandum of Understanding between the Wagner Society and the Mastersingers would be renewable annually, and the donation would be agreed according to the funding available from the Wagner Society.
32. In conclusion to his report, the Treasurer informed the meeting that the membership subscriptions had been simplified to only three categories: individual membership, joint membership and student membership. All other types (i.e. Overseas, European, Premium) would cease to exist. He reiterated that all those who had not paid their subscriptions or who had underpaid the correct amount would no longer be considered as members.
33. David Edwards enquired whether the WS was still investing in its website. The Treasurer responded that this was indeed the case and stated that the budget for 2015 was £5k..
34. Peter E Howard enquired about the three levels of membership, including premium and the Treasurer confirmed the information published in the April edition of Wagner News that these had now ceased to exist. The WS would be happy to take donations from members in future, should they wish to contribute. It was noted that the recent funding drive to assist with young artists had raised



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- £1300 and this money was being accounted for separately from the main WS accounts.
35. Ray Godson expressed his thanks for the successful claiming of Gift Aid and a vote of thanks was expressed to Margaret Murphy and Mike Morgan. This was proposed by Robert Mansell and seconded by Peter W Howard.
36. **Agenda Item 5 – Adoption of the Annual Accounts** – these were adopted unopposed.
37. **Agenda Item 6 – Election to the Committee** – One new member – Gillian Wyn-Thomas was proposed, and three existing Committee members were standing for re-election for a three-year term: Margaret Murphy, Geoffrey Griffiths and Andrea Buchanan. All four candidates were elected unopposed en bloc.
38. **Agenda Item 7 – Election of the Auditors** – the Treasurer proposed that the WS re-elect Cannon Moorcroft to serve as independent examiners. Canon Moorcroft were elected unopposed.
39. **Agenda Item 8 – Any other business** – Barbara Cumbers asked for clarification of the difference between auditors and independent examiners. The Treasurer confirmed that Cannon Moorcroft were in fact acting as independent examiners rather than auditors, as the WS accounts were too small to merit a full audit. The nomenclature would be amended for future AGMs.
40. Peter W Howard suggested that the officers of the Wagner Society use first names in order to appear more friendly.
41. Paul Dawson-Bowling expressed enthusiasm that the WS should be giving money to support young singers but suggested that more could be done to educate young people about Wagner. This was one of the objectives of the Society stated in the Constitution. The Chair agreed with this statement and pointed out that the talk recently given by Iain Paterson had afforded a wonderful opportunity for younger people to engage with a Wagner singer first hand and had been very educational. He suggested that we look at engaging younger speakers for some of our events, and he noted that Dr. Harriet Boyd-Bennett, who had given a highly informative and interesting talk on Stravinsky earlier this year was just such a young speaker. Gilly Wyn-Thomas, the new Events Manager invited members to send suggestions for educational events to her. The idea of doing a questionnaire for members regarding events was mooted





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again. The Chair suggested offering free entry to selected events to younger people.

42. Robert Mansell gave an update on his forthcoming play about Cosima Wagner and encouraged members to attend this event. Some significant names in the acting world had now signed up.
43. The meeting ended at 21:45 and members were invited to stay for drinks with the President and the Committee.