

Minutes of the ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
Held in The Blackburn Room at Wentworth Castle, Park Drive, Barnsley, South Yorkshire.
S75 3EN
On Tuesday 12th May 2026 at 12:00 midday.

Present: Vice Chairman Sian Thomas (Chairman Wessex Branch) Secretary Robbie Sampson.

Barbara Sampson, Ben Rushworth (from RHS Harlow Carr), Fiona Slight, Aimee Browning, Ian Hotchkiss, Katherine Hotchkiss, John Wilkinson, Ned Lomax (both a single member and a Garden lead member), Lucy Bidgood.

Present on zoom. Graham Mills, Philip Eastell, Alistair Stevenson, Nick Butler.

QUORATE We need 15 members. Yes.

The attendees were notified in the cover page of the Annual 24/25 report that the meeting was being recorded to aid minute taking.

Sian Thomas was standing in for Philip Eastell RCMG Chairman who was unable to attend this meeting. Sian welcomed everyone and opened the meeting.

There was to be voting by a show of hands at this meeting. Non Attendance Voting forms had been sent to all members. The results had been received by mail or Email and added on a spreadsheet.

1) **APOLOGIES** were received from Rod White, Sally Hayward,, David Millais, Jackie Woodhams, Barry Cooke, Polly Cooke, Jennifer Fly, Andy Fly, Miranda Gunn, Brian Long, Nick Lightfoot, Alan Robertson, John Sanders, Rosemary LeGand, Rowan Griffiths, Jim Gardiner, Charles Williams, Stephen Peters, Sarah Bray.

2) **MINUTES OF THE LAST AGM** held at Leonardslee Gardens on Saturday 31st May 2025.

The Minutes, published on the website, were unanimously agreed to be a true record of those proceedings. There were no objections. The minutes were signed as a true record by the Secretary of the meeting.

3) **MATTERS ARISING** There were no matters arising of the last AGM.

4) **ANNUAL REVIEW.** The RCMG Chairman, Philip Eastell had prepared a power Point presentation for 2024/2025 which was projected and narrated by the Vice Chairman. Philip welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked our hosts at Wentworth Castle. He then started with a special remembrance to our dear friend Seamus O'Brien who sadly passed away at the end of last year. Seamus was the Chair of our Ireland Branch, supporter of the RCMG for years, Seamus will be both missed but always remembered.

FROM THE GROUP SECRETARY

Thanks, this year must go to Pam Hayward who stood down as the Chairman of the plant committee after years of sterling service. Thanks also to the others of the Plant committee who also stood down at the last AGM. Especial thanks to Lucy Bidgood, present today, who has kindly agreed to coordinate the plant committee going forward and has attended our groups first plant propagating meeting hosted at Architectural Plants Ltd. This area of work is so important and will be a continued focus for our society.

Special thanks again to our past yearbook editor Pam Hayward and our Bulletin Editor, Peter Furneaux who together produced so many professional publications over so many years.

Sian Thomas, our Vice Chair and Chairman of Wessex branch has kindly stepped in to oversee both publications after Pam and Peter stood down at the last AGM.

In addition, Sian has produced our first monthly newsletters which are sent out on MailChimp to all members with email addresses, every month.

Our website is ably managed by Graham Mills, our last Chairman, providing access to so much information about our group. Graham has indicated that he wishes to hand over the Webmaster's role once we can find someone to take over. Our ongoing thanks to Graham for his support and help. We continue to offer Bursaries to support horticultural research projects to further study or observe our genera in situ around the world, and in the presentation the four names of the bursarians who were awarded £500 each. Thanks go to John Marston, Trustee and Chairman of our South West Branch for coordinating the bursary applications.

Our membership continues to grow, globally and thanks to Robbie Sampson who is both Group Secretary and Membership Secretary for covering both these roles.

Thanks also to everyone who give up their evenings and weekends and spare time to keep our group going. It is clear that the vast majority of the workload is carried by just a few. This is not ideal but without the dedication of those few there would be no-one to run the group.

Therefore, before closing I urge anyone who is willing and able to offer to help run the RCMG to step forward and offer. Your help, however small, would be greatly appreciated. One role that we are especially keen to fill is for a Bulletin editor.

It is unlikely, at this time, that we will be able to provide future bulletins without a bulletin editor. Please do contact Sian, Robbie or Philip with any offers of help.

Treasurer's and independent examiner's reports.

Overall our financial situation is still healthy. We have over £40,000 in our reserves and whilst as highlighted our 24/25 year's accounts are still to be audited by our examiner, there are two points that I would like to highlight. Those who have looked on the website will see that we have reduced the amount of restricted funding by approximately £11,000. This is a direct result of agreeing at a management committee meeting that the sum received by way of

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the Haworth legacy in 2023 are not to be considered as ring fenced or restricted. Hence, placing them under the restricted funding section of our balance sheet has been removed and there is a reduction in the amount of restricted funding as shown on the current balance sheet. The money has not gone anywhere just a recategorisation.

Membership. There have been new members from around the world, increasing our income. I would like to encourage all present members to attract yet more new members.

Bursary: As a Charity we support to encourage research and education. We had four Bursarians last year: Ned Lomax went to Sichuan. Laura Penn had a project looking at Tea growing in the UK. Rama Lopez had a trip to Taiwan to study two specific Rhododendron species. Martin Annan visited Nepal. When they return we only ask that they write a report and perhaps a lecture to our members

Events: Over the year there has been a good program of garden visits and face to face events put on by all the branches. Again, many thanks are extended to all the Branch Chairs for all their work in arranging the events. Some of the recordings of virtual talks are still available on our website.

Communication: All the various platforms are increasing their followers. Thanks to Laura for preparing our videos.

Plant Committee: Our group collections continue to expand. The extant data base was further developed, supported the micropropagation of rare species and hybrids. The new plant committee was formed after the 2025 AGM and we have in place our plant propagation group.

Recommended Garden Scheme: Thanks to Nick Butler who looks after this area. If you want to introduce any gardens to the Recommended Garden Scheme then please get in touch with Nick.

Yearbook and Bulletin: The 2025 yearbook was published with four commissioning editors: David Millais, Polly Cooke, Caroline Bell and Dr John Marston to whom we extend our thanks for all their hard work.

To produce any future Bulletins we will need someone to come forward to be the Editor.

Archive: The future management of the Archives material and surplus stock is under review. Kevin Pratt has stood down.

Website: Many people use the website for contact details, records of meetings and our Constitution and Rules as well as our plant database. We really appreciate the work of our webmaster, Graham Mills.

Branches: There are many branches already but we want to start a branch in the West Midlands and here in the North East. We have Branch Chairs happy to advise or make suggestions. We have had the offer from Wentworth Castle of this room, The Blackburn Room for meetings. Whilst no-one jumped up, several attendees thought that they could, as a team run the occasional meeting with support from the Hon Sec for communications and this or other host venues

Volunteers: There is plenty of room for more volunteers

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Chairman's award: This year the Chairman has chosen to award The Chairman's Award to Miranda Gunn.

Miranda's family first moved to Ramster Gardens in 1922. When the property was bought by Sir Henry and Lady Norman, Miranda's grandmother, Lady Norman was the daughter of Lord and Lady Aberconway and the granddaughter of Henry Pochin, who started the famous gardens at Bodnant in 1875. A very keen horticulturalist, like her mother and grandfather, Lady Norman greatly added to the garden at Ramster Hall, introducing many of the Rhododendrons and Azaleas for which it is famous today.

Miranda has been related to the Group since the 1970's.

John Bond, keeper of the gardens at Windsor became a trusted friend and together they organised a group collection of Hardy Hybrids at the garden.

In 1997 Miranda took over as chair of Wessex Branch from Lady Adam Gordon and has been a committee member for over 40 years, hosting many events and shows at Ramster. A hugely deserving recipient, unanimously voted for by all.

Congratulations to Miranda and thanks again for all her many years of support for the group.

Note: As shown on the Agenda, the Trustees report is available online.

5) Re-election of Trustees. I have been asked to say that Barry Cooke is no longer standing for re-election as Trustee of the RCMG as a Trustee.

6) Election of Officers to the Management Committee:

Plant sub-committee co-ordinator Lucy Bidgood. Carried.

Kevin Pratt has decided not to stand as Archivist. Pending until a review of the role has taken place.

7) Re election of management committee members who are standing for re-election 2026/27.

Chairman: Philip Eastell.

Vice Chairman: Sian Thomas.

Secretary: Robbie Sampson.

Treasurer: Philip Eastell.

Membership Secretary: Robbie Sampson.

Bulletin Editor: Vacancy.

Lead Yearbook Editor: Vacancy.

Webmaster: Graham Mills.

Communications Officer: Vacancy.

Events Co-ordinator: Alan Robertson.

Advertising Officer: Philip Eastell.

Recommended Garden scheme: Nick Butler.

The Vice Chairman asked for votes by a show of hands within the room. Those plus the votes received on "Non Attendance voting forms" amounted to re-election of all those management committee members willing to stand.

8) Re-election of Independent Examiner: Vacancy.

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- 9) Any other business of which notice has been received. None received.
- 10) Venue and date of the next AGM and Centenary Cup Competition 2027 will be confirmed at a later date.

Sian Thomas closed the meeting, Thanking the team at Wentworth Castle for their hospitality and use of the Blackburn Room.

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