



Summary of the Special General Meeting.

1st December 2018 – 7.30 pm

Held at Penzance Sailing Club,

Albert Pier, Penzance TR18 2LL

Prior Notification of Meeting.

As required by the Constitution, the SGM had been convened by the MBLA Committee. All members were given over 21 days notice, being notified by Mailchimp or Secretary's letter on 31st October 2018. The business to be discussed was included – i.e. Finance and Fundraising, Committee Officers, and Qualified Skippers.

Present.

John Tellam (Treasurer) - Presentation
John van der Hoff (Committee) - Presentation
John Diston (Secretary) - Recording the Meeting

Other Committee Members – Len Newman (Chairman), David Keast (Acting Membership Secretary), Peter May, Mark Mitchell.

Other Members – Michael Barker, Patricia Beaghen, Denise Belton, Richard Belton, Diana Copperwheat, Nick Darling, Rachel Edwards, Bob Glanville, Mike Halse, Lorna Halse, Mike Hope, Karen Lawrence, Alan MacRae, Nick Phillips, David Roberts, Ken Sharp, Jim Staley, Henry Tamblin, Nick Tamblin, James Walker, Nigel Walker, George Whittaker, Elizabeth Wood.

32 Members attended. However, not everyone signed the circulated list, so 2 names were not recorded. The required quorum of 10% of members was achieved. A few left before the end of the meeting. 32 members represents 23% of the current membership of 141; an additional 23% of members live out of Cornwall.

Apologies.

Robert Fishburn, Ray Fordham, Keith Hawes, Neil Mills, Hermione Morrison, Katrina Naomi, Graham Perry, Michael Richards, David Turner, Josephine Turner, Geraldine Wallace.

Introduction.

John van der Hoff opened the meeting and explained that it had been convened to make all members aware of the current and future challenges facing the MBLA. For new members, or those not at the last AGM, the issues involved might well appear to be new. However, the practicalities of financing and running a classic wooden boat had existed since the outset; additional concerns had emerged in more recent years.

He outlined the history of Happy Return and the MBLA, much of which is documented in detail elsewhere. [See the online archive at www.mbla.co.uk].

Happy Return had been built at Porthleven in 1904, and was now 114 years old.

The original restoration, which took place from 1998 to 2004, had cost £97,000. Since 1998, £247,000 had been raised, and £231,000 spent.

FUNDS AND FUNDRAISING.

John Tellam presented and explained a spreadsheet showing Income Sources and Main Expenditure from 2013 to date; hard copies were to hand for members. [See Secretary's file copy also].

Broadly speaking (per year):-

- a). Membership Subscriptions averaged just over £2,000, but peaked at £3,010 during 2018. Additional Gift Aid was derived from all of this (approximately 20%).
- b). Donations varied from £38 to £270.
- c). Boat Contributions averaged around £3,000, but peaked at £4,675 in the 2018 season.
- d). Net Fundraising was more erratic, ranging from £401 to £2017.
- e). There were grants of £9,000 in 2013, and £5,000 in 2014, with nothing since.
- f). Special Projects were significantly expensive, ranging from about £4,000 to about £17,000. These had included keel, deck, rewiring, and fuel/engine problems.
- g). General Maintenance, Repairs, and Equipment averaged just under £5,000.

[These are only indications. Definitive figures are on the spreadsheet. Detailed accounts are presented at every AGM].

The current Bank Balance stood at £29,486, which included a £20,000 Contingency Fund. (This fund provides a "safety net" in the event of accidents or emergencies).

Based on previous history and some anticipated problems, big expensive projects were to be expected every three years. Pre-emptive action would be cheaper than solving delayed problems.

Work on the covering boards was due within the next few years. Overall, we were currently about £15,000 short for this (unless the Contingency Fund was used).

The H.B.Allen Trust, a charity which had supported us for many years, would be wound up by the end of 2018. Their phased Grants had helped to keep Happy Return in good condition for a long time. MBLA Grant Applications to that Trust had been 100% successful from 1998 to 2014. A further and final Application had been made more recently, but there was no guarantee that this would succeed. In general, other charities seemed more inclined to fund start-up projects rather than maintain those already existing.

Sales at the annual Newlyn Fish Festival had been an excellent source of income for many years. There had been no Festival in 2018, but enhanced Membership Subscriptions and Boat Contributions had roughly covered that shortfall. The Festival would be reinstated in 2019.

A successful fund-raising evening at Porthleven has raised £487.

The Trustees, who are also current Committee Members, were legally obliged to protect the organisation financially.

COMMITTEE OFFICERS.

John van der Hoff explained that some of the current Committee Members had served the MBLA for many years, and thanked them and previous elected and co-opted members for their work. In particular, Peter May and John Tellam would be standing down at the next AGM.

They would need to be replaced, with nominations received in time for consideration at the 2019 AGM (Wednesday March 13th).

In addition, a Fundraising Officer would need to be appointed to the Committee, whose main function would then be separated from that of Treasurer.

That person would not have to work alone. Some of the Committee had already met with Bill Pearce, a now-retired professional fund-raiser. He had offered numerous ideas and, although he wouldn't be able to help the MBLA unaided, would provide a useful lead.

To ensure the survival of the organisation, there would have to be greater involvement from general members. With a generally-aging demographic, younger people would be needed to future-proof the organisation. This would be particularly important in terms of expanding the use of social media for fundraising and publicity.

QUALIFIED SKIPPERS.

Age, sickness, and mobility problems had already affected some skippers' availability and, based on the current pool who were authorised, this situation was unlikely to improve. Away trips in particular required considerable physical and mental stamina, and we had reached the stage where it would be advisable to have two skippers on board for these. At least one older member was no longer acting as a Mate.

Unless these concerns were addressed, the MBLA may well have to be wound up within the next 2 or 3 years. A plea was therefore made for suitable people to come forward, and for all members to look for potential candidates.

It was appreciated that becoming qualified was time-consuming and expensive.

Three Grades of Skipper are recognised for MBLA purposes – Day, Coastal, and Yachtmaster.

DISCUSSIONS, AND MATTERS ARISING.

The floor was opened for general discussion, suggestions and questions, summarised broadly as follows :-

Funds and Fundraising.

There was a general feeling that current Membership Subscriptions and Boat Contributions were at the right level. It was important not to deter (potential) members with increased costs, or make them inclined to sail less often. Reliable long-term income might be reduced if members paid for one Life Membership rather than multiple increased Annual Memberships.

Increased fees might improve income by hundreds of pounds, but not the thousands needed for large projects.

Routine income only maintains the boat - i.e. Membership + Boat Contributions = Maintenance.

Fundraising would have to be the focus for any additional funds.

Tiered or means-related members' subscriptions were suggested. This would be difficult to administer. The Treasurer commented that some members make extra donations when renewing membership; also, because of MBLA legalities, members' contributions are technically donations, and not payments.

Chartering was suggested. However, Happy Return is effectively a private rather than a commercial boat and, as such, is not coded for this under Maritime & Coastguard Agency regulations. Our skippers are not paid or suitably qualified. Furthermore, it has been a long-standing MBLA policy not to compete directly with local commercial vessels.

There had been some successful Taster Sails in 2018. More were about to be advertised but, unfortunately, fuel/engine problems had foreclosed the season in early September.

Season Tickets and social-only evenings were suggested as new ideas.

A hog-roast and auction had raised useful funds in the past. Perhaps one person could organise a similar event with 3 days of intensive work, rather than involving more people for longer?

One long-standing member had joined having seen an MBLA leaflet at the harbour.

Committee, Membership, and Future.

In spite of some useful piecemeal developments, the broader MBLA structure which had been put forward at the 2018 AGM had not been realised. Sub-committees had not been set up. It would now be crucial to set up a fundraising team, to be coordinated by the committee Fundraiser.

A few members felt that the organisation's current structure was too centralised – the committee was too self-contained, and operated from a limited point of view. Continuing in the same vein would lead to failure, so therefore the membership should be engaged in a new way.

Modern management techniques and a brainstorming session were suggested - a less-confined venue for that might generate a broader range of ideas.

With these approaches in mind, Rachel Edwards and Jim Staley offered to design a questionnaire which would draw out members' opinions, comments, and ideas regarding the MBLA and the future. They would liaise with Len Newman to get this finalised and circulated. The findings could be used to develop useful ways forward, but practical help and involvement would need to follow.

Changing the age structure might be helped by contacting local Colleges. Their students may well be interested in lugger-related projects or involvement.

Winter and Future Maintenance.

There had been long-standing fuel and/or engine problems. Had these been resolved?

The problem was now thought to be the fuel rather than the engine; the fuel was still being investigated.

The problem with the foremast moving on its steps had been temporarily resolved.

Fresh water was "the enemy of wooden boats". As Happy Return was no longer a working boat, her superstructure was no longer protected by salt water. Global Warming could mean more rain-days.

Could the deck be salted? Could a cover be used?

John Tellam was already researching a cover – this would cost about £2,500.

Areas of white paint were now failing and flaking, largely because multiple layers had built up.

These layers would now need to be scraped back to the underlying wood, and repainting carried out.

This would need a lot of help.

Nick Darling reported that about three-quarters of the iroko coverboards were due to be replaced with oak. Some gunwales had soft spots. Rot was beginning to show in the transom, and fixing that would need to be a major project in the next 4 – 5 years.

Members were thanked for attending, and the Meeting closed at 9.10 pm.

John Diston

MBLA Secretary