

WINCHESTER TALKING NEWSPAPER

22nd AGM – Chairman's Report

Mr Mayor, Madam Mayoress, Ladies & Gentlemen

Until this year, the chairman's report was included in the annual newsletter. This year, my report will instead be made available on our website, in both text and audio formats. In some respects, this step forward typifies what we have been concentrating on – namely, building on the foundations of technological progress laid down by our previous chairman, David Farthing. Under his leadership, Winchester Talking Newspaper joined the digital age and now all our recordings are copied onto memory sticks. Listeners have the option of playing the recordings either on the Graff Sapphire MP3 player or, if they prefer, on their computers.

During the past eleven and a bit months we have been doing all we can to iron out technical issues and to raise the quality standard of everything we do, to make listening to our recordings as pleasurable and glitch-free an experience as we can for our listeners – who are, of course, the most important group of people within the organisation.

For a while, we experienced problems with copying the recordings onto memory sticks. Some memory sticks were blank, others unclear and even some with the wrong recordings on them. We discovered that the cause was a combination of technical failure and human error. I think this important area of what we do is now as trouble-free as we can make it – for two reasons. Firstly, we bought two standalone bulk duplicators – one at the beginning of June last year (this makes seven copies from one master) and, in February this year, a second bulk duplicator, which makes eleven copies from one master. This has reduced the total copying time considerably. Secondly, our team leader of copiers, Irene Dowding, together with her teams of copiers, worked tirelessly to iron out – and eradicate – the kinks in human error.

So, having got the copying right, we set about improving the quality of our recordings in terms of sound. We were determined to have sound quality which would be on a par with the BBC, the benchmark for all radio broadcasting. Our IT consultant, Simon Applebaum – and I must say at this point that Simon is quite remarkable in his knowledge, expertise and preparedness to put up with all our demands – Simon drew our attention to a publication called "Sound On Sound", a monthly magazine which is the 'bible' for sound quality and issues within the broadcasting industry. We began a dialogue with the magazine, asking them if they would help us. One day in early February we were lucky to be visited in the studio by the Technical Editor and the Editor in Chief of the publication, who spent all morning with us, carrying out an evaluation of our sound set-up and quality.

Once they had finished their evaluation, they made suggestions (free of charge) for improvements. Some improvements they carried out for us, such as equipment tweaking; hanging duvets and foam on walls to prevent echoing and sound

bouncing. Further duvet hanging has taken place since. It has resulted in a look which one or two people consider to be a little bizarre – but it works wonderfully well and anyone is welcome to come along to the studio to have a look at it all; it's very impressive. We were advised to insert a third layer of thick material into the curtains. No sooner had this been suggested than Celia Ferguson set to and did it – also putting up a stronger curtain rail as she did so – thank you, Celia. The magazine advised us to buy two more microphones, which we did, so that each presenter/reader has her/his own. The sound quality has been greatly improved and would now, I believe, rival that of any sound studio in the land.

Other improvements to the studio have included a dedicated telephone line with answer service and the purchase of two H1 Zoom Recorders, which are perfect for conducting interviews and will enable us to feature listeners and others in our newspaper and magazine recordings. Indeed, one of these devices was used to interview The Mayor at Abbey House in mid-December. We now have a new volunteer who is currently being trained to be a 'roving reporter'; this will bring new voices into our listeners' homes, in addition to those of our regular readers.

Whilst all this work was being put into studio improvements, we were hard at work developing our website – www.winchestertalkingnews.com. This website, which is divided into the three main areas of Listeners, Volunteers and Business, has been live since the beginning of February. There is text and, by clicking the play buttons, it is possible to hear an audio version of every word. Every week our recording of extracts from the *Hampshire Chronicle* is put onto the website. This means that, in addition to the hundred or so listeners we have at the moment who listen via memory sticks, the Winchester Talking Newspaper can be heard around the globe.

The last year has not been all work and technology. We have still managed to find time to enjoy ourselves. Some of us attended a Rotary Club dinner in July, to wave the WTN flag. In the same month we held a strawberry and Pimm's party in the beautiful surroundings of the garden at Chesil House – our thanks for that go to Richard Steel & Partners. We plan to hold a similar garden party this year – and pray for better weather.

All in all, it has been a very busy, active, good and successful year. Inevitably, though, there have been some low points. On 24 July last year Martin Fayers, who had been the primary mover in launching Winchester Talking Newspaper, died at the age of 97. He had been ill for a long time. In January this year Ian Crowe died at 74. He had been a well-known and liked member of WTN for many years. Tricia Bingham, who had been a magazine copier, died on 29 January. And in April both Mary and Ken Milne died within four days of each other. Both of them had been stalwarts of the association since it started, 22 years ago.

I would like to end with a list of thanks, which always strikes me as a hazardous thing to attempt, because there's always the danger of leaving someone out and offending them.

But before I attempt the impossible, I would like to apologise to any volunteer I haven't yet met. When I started as chairman in May last year, I wrote to all 85 volunteers, saying that I would be doing my best to meet them all. I'm afraid I failed

in that. There are, in fact, ten people out of the 85 whose hand I haven't managed to shake. Of course, we are joined by new volunteers all the time, so perhaps I set myself a task which was unachievable in the first place.

So, to my thanks. I would like to register my appreciation to every member of the committee. Don't worry, I'll make it brief! Thanks to **Celia Ferguson**, vice chairman. I truly don't know what I would have done without her in the past year. To **Richard Green**, treasurer, for keeping us on the financial straight and narrow. To **Philippa Wrightson**, secretary, who has worked efficiently throughout the year but has now decided to resign as a trustee but to continue on the committee as listeners co-ordinator. To **Noel Thorpe-Tracey**, reader, magazine editor & presenter, whose love of literature has, as always, shone through. To **Anne Woodford**, listeners' representative; it astounds me where she finds the energy continually to come up with sensible views and solutions – and to find the time to have grammatical fisticuffs with me. To **Bill Argles**, editor and team leader of the editors. What I like about Bill is that he is completely reliable and you know where you are with him – if you ask him a question, he gives you an honest answer. To **Rory MacPherson**, readers' co-ordinator. Rory is a good friend of mine and I am sorry that he has resigned as trustee and committee member effective today. He is currently living in London with his lovely wife Sally, who is extremely unwell. To **Keith Vincent**, editor, presenter and team leader of presenters. Keith is what old-fashioned people like me call a brick. 100% reliable and helpful and, I can assure everyone, does so much more than he ever lets on. To **Mary Davis**, magazine editor and team leader. In spite of experiencing health problems over the last year she has, as always, led her team from the front and has made the monthly magazine what it is today. To **Nick Vernon**, distribution manager and coordinator, other recordings. Funny job titles but all you need to know is that without Nick there would be no rotas, no team lists, no compilation of address and e-mails. No-one would have a clue what to do next. And to **Irene Dowding**, editor, copier and team leader of copiers. Over the year I have been astonished at Irene's stamina at running her copier teams, finding and training new ones and generally being always willing to pitch in. I thank you all.

My thanks, too, to the 74 volunteers I haven't mentioned by name individually. There is a saying, which is that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. I can assure any of you here today that we have no weak links at all.

Finally, on behalf of all volunteers, I would like to thank our listeners. For their loyalty and for sometimes not grumbling when things don't go quite according to plan.

Absolutely finally, thanks to you all – volunteers and friends – for coming today and for your continuing support of the Winchester Talking Newspaper Association.

John Richards
9 May 2012