The 120th Annual General Meeting of the Royal Pigeon Racing Association was held at the Coventry Hill Hotel, Coventry, on Friday, 26th February, 2016 at 9am. The meeting was opened by RPRA President Mr L. Blacklock, who thanked everyone for attending and welcomed Councillors, Reserve Delegates, the General Manager, the Editor of the BHW, ladies from the Reddings and members.

Mr Blacklock went on to welcome new Councillors for 2016: Mr H. Akerman, North West Region replacing Mr B. Tattersall; Mrs M. Murray, London Region replacing Mr T. Wilkes (deceased); Mr J. Serplus, Irish Region replacing Mr S. Thompson and Mr G. Daykin, East Midlands Region replacing Mr R. Carlton.

Apologies were received from Mr G. Daykin, who was unable to attend, Mr G. Cardall, East Midlands Region reserve delegate deputising and Mr R. Wilton, South West Region reserve delegate, Mr B. Burton deputising.

Before the commencement of the Annual General Meeting, Mr Les Blacklock asked Council to observe a minute’s silence in respect of Mr Roy Ryals, who served two terms as President of the RPRA, and Mr Terry Wilkes, London Region Secretary and Councillor, who both passed away during 2015.

The minutes of the last Annual General Meeting were passed as a true record.

The General Manager then delivered his annual report for 2015.

GENERAL MANAGER’S ANNUAL REPORT FOR YEAR 2015

1. REFLECTION ON 2015.

Sadly we have lost too many stalwarts of our sport this year, including a past President, Roy Ryals, and a Regional Secretary, Terry Wilkes. The Association, Regions and clubs will really miss such people who have given so much to our sport; our thoughts will continue to be with their families.

To all those who have experienced or who are currently experiencing ill-health may I wish you all a speedy recovery.

Can I offer my thanks to the very many members who, on so many occasions when called upon have helped with last-minute TV and press work, manning the MDU, visiting schools, delivering pigeon talks, collecting strays, or helping resolve a range of local issues where other fanciers or the public need help. Without your time and assistance we would really struggle and the sport would be that much poorer – thank you!

To the staff at The Reddings and Welshpool, along with Julie and Jeremy at the One-Loft, please keep up the good work you all do, it really is appreciated.

2. 2015 AGM

The AGM in February 2015 saw Les Blacklock elected to the office of President of the Association. This is a rare honour indeed, bestowed upon very few, and follows his three-year term as President from 2008 through to 2010.

After the ‘annus horribilis’ of 2014 the Association needed a knowledgeable and experienced President. The Association appointed wisely and Les once again has successfully proven to be just ‘the right man for the job’.

I have seen first-hand the nature of some of the totally unwarranted comment and criticism levelled at Les over the past 18 months, firstly in the period when he was voted to step into the breach as acting Chairman and more recently since being voted into the position of as President. Anyone who actually knows or has worked with or has talked to Les will have to acknowledge that he always has the best interest of the RPRA at heart. To suggest otherwise can only be judged as being either extremely poor judgement or politically-motivated actions by people who really do not want the RPRA to move forward.

The RPRA continues to benefit enormously from members who are prepared to act as unpaid officials at all levels to ensure the proper administration of the sport. Holding senior office within the RPRA should be something aspirational that all members seek to achieve; we do risk positions such as President and Vice President becoming roles that no-one wants to hold due to the negativity that continually raises its head. It’s not a recent occurrence, its been going on for decades, however a small group of people really need to examine their individual motives and ask why they want the RPRA to fail?

It’s demoralising to see the same small group of people offer absolutely no positive comment or suggestions whilst criticising the efforts of others. Negativity has been taken to whole new levels by a few who simply can’t stand change or that someone else may actually be successful and might just change things for the good. Some of the things I have seen first-hand, written, or have been told are simply beyond belief. They can only be summed up as ‘not letting any of the facts get in the way of some good story’. I would urge everyone to find out the facts as so many stories seem to be told irrespective of how much nonsense they actually are.

I’d go as far as to say ‘nothing positive to
offer then clear off and let others, who are willing to make suggestions and work to progress the sport, have a go!’

Elected for their first years as Vice Presidents were Messrs Bridges, Ewart and Gordon all of whom have provided ideas, help, support and advice when called upon. All three have now experienced first hand the many challenges that come with holding office in the RPRA, hopefully they will continue to see that as progress is made the positive experiences will slowly start to outweigh the negative ones.

After 2014, the year of stagnation and reversal, we have regained some positive momentum – crucially returning to a state where we are able to get on and do our jobs knowing, that in trying to improve the Association you are actually being supported – it really does work wonders! Witness the accounts!

3. FCI OLYMPIAD

My comment regarding the FCI Olympiad saga will be very short.

To the shame of the RPRA this was something that became a politically motivated campaign from the outset; the President and VPs managed the situation as best they could, despite the actions of others.

The reputation of the RPRA has undoubtedly been damaged, mistakes have undoubtedly been made, individuals have been called to answer for their actions in the proper manner; lessons have undoubtedly been made, individuals have been damaged, mistakes have even returned a loss.

It was noted that the project work in both the RPRA and BHW is delivering real savings with more projects having been identified to be undertaken during 2016. Mr Harris commented that the Association income, in real terms, has dropped by 23% over the past 13 years (re-based for inflation) and that staff salary costs, albeit in real terms, has dropped by 27% over the same period. The continual need to redress the cost base was clearly highlighted given the declining membership numbers; potential new income and revenue streams should be actively encouraged. The rate of return being achieved on the Association’s cash balances and deposits was commended; the financial performance of the Association’s One-Loft race was also highlighted. The bank balance and reserves remain very strong.

In conclusion Mr Harris commented that the result represented a significant turnaround in the Association’s finances, the first achieved in recent history without following a substantial subscriptions increase. The move to pro-active, anticipative actions over the past 12 months has in part enabled the transformation of the Association’s financial result.

The challenge next year, and for years to come will however remain the same. We will have a reducing number of members which in turn equals fewer subscriptions and fewer sales of the BHW. We have to cut our cloth accordingly, modernise and change just to stand still.

BHW Finances – The cover price of the BHW will have been raised over 60% during the past five years. Without the activity, change and decisions made at the BHW over the past 12 months, it might have even returned a loss.

The cover price increase from 95p to £1.05 in January 2016 along with the new contract with the publishers (delivering printing cost efficiencies) and the realisation of some reduced costs at the BHW should result in the 2016 result being another positive contribution.

The ‘low hanging fruit’ of savings at the BHW is beginning to disappear and the Editor and team at the BHW will need to redouble their efforts and challenge even more accepted practices to maintain this position in years ahead – a task I’m sure they will grasp. Automation is being looked at by the Editor, this should result in the reduction or removal of repetitive mundane tasks that can better be done by

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposition</th>
<th>For</th>
<th>Against</th>
<th>Abstentions</th>
<th>Result</th>
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LATER DELETED BY COUNCIL AFTER RULES COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION – NOT ACCEPTABLE OR WORKABLE IN PRESENT FORM

4. ASSOCIATION FINANCES

The turnaround in the Associations financial result achieved this year was described by our Auditors ‘as extremely good’ – their words not mine!

4.1 PRESENTATION OF 2014/15 AUDITED ACCOUNTS – Mr A Harris (Hazlewoods LLC – RPRA Auditors).

Mr Harris noted that this was the ninth time he had presented the Association’s accounts to the F&GP committee and complimented the Association on the sustained level of accuracy and consistency in its record keeping and accounts. He commented that to find such levels of accuracy in a set of accounts is extremely rare and commended the work of Mrs Zhang (RPRA Finance Manager) and her team.

He then took the committee through each page of the Association’s Consolidated Accounts explaining any appropriate points or variances noted when comparing on a year-on-year basis. The committee members then asked a series of questions which Mr Harris answered in turn.

It was noted that the project work in both the RPRA and BHW is delivering real savings with more projects having been identified to be undertaken during 2016. Mr Harris commented that the Association income, in real terms, has dropped by 23% over the past 13 years (re-based for inflation) and that staff salary costs, albeit in real terms, have dropped, in real terms, by 27% over the same period. The continual need to redress the cost base was clearly highlighted given the declining membership numbers; potential new income and revenue streams should be actively encouraged. The rate of return being achieved on the Association’s cash balances and deposits was commended; the financial performance of the Association’s One-Loft race was also highlighted. The bank balance and reserves remain very strong.

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<tr>
<td>7/26</td>
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<td>APPENDIX – ARE NOT DEALT WITH AT AN AGM</td>
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<td>DEALT WITH AT OCTOBER 2015 MEETING</td>
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</table>
increasing part in the improvement of both the year and will continue to be of the savings already being seen in 2015.

Contracts and pricing have been renegotiated with many suppliers to reduce costs even further. One example is the introduction of some new technology which has led to a significant reduction in our postal charges, following good work by Derren Brown; another is a renegotiation of our copier contract led by Julia Field – these two projects will save some £7,000 per annum in our costs in 2016 with some of the savings already being seen in 2015.

Many other costs have been tackled in the year and will continue to be challenged. Technology will play an ever increasing part in the improvement of both service, speed and cost reduction. We need to look at such items as automation of transfers and many other member services; we should look at expanding the range of items the RPRA offer for sale.

With the growth of content and the ongoing development of the RPRA website the opportunity to marketing the sale of advertising space will be increased during 2016.

The next big opportunity to cut our costs will be when we relocate from The Reddings; an update regarding this will follow later in this report.

4.3 Future of Sport Finances - ONE-LOFT RACE.

The financial contribution from the One-Loft race season in 2015 can only be described as superb.

This financial result is currently forecast to be repeated in 2016 as one-loft racing is one of the few areas of growth in our sport. The RPRA has developed a good reputation, witness the entry list being full each year; this is testament to the amount of care and attention Jeremy & Julie put into looking after other people’s pigeons. One-loft racing will continue to grow as it represents a real growth opportunity, along with encouraging European and eventually worldwide participation. We need to get much better at marketing and promoting our one-loft race as it’s a real RPRA success story.

If only we had plans for another one loft race or two. It appears, however, others have realised the opportunity and have grasped it!

5/ PROPERTY

The proposed sale of The Reddings property, minus the rear paddock, is progressing, and we should be at contract stage, with the RPRA Council hopefully approving the draft legal document at this February meeting. The front of the site including both The Reddings and Selby House will be sold subject to planning permission being granted. The rear paddock will be retained in RPRA ownership and an access way from the Reddings road to the rear paddock is a condition of sale.

This will then move the project onto the next stage. For this we await the outcome of planning deliberations; this is the only real issue that could stop the sale progressing. As per my, and previous G M s,m numerous comments regarding moving into more appropriate office facilities, it can’t come soon enough.

Once we are in a new facility, we are actively looking within a 15-mile radius, we should also also be able to improve our staff effectiveness and efficiency by working together as a larger single team and not separate groups spread around a number of small offices.

Staff working conditions and facilities should be transformed; no more sitting on uneven floors or blocking leaky windows with towels to keep the rain out; no more having to reposition the WC as it moves around the floor whilst you are sitting on it, or watching the vanity unit fall to pieces in front of your eyes; no more midnight call outs and having to explain to the police that the alarm system activates due to the plaster falling off the walls; no more damp or mouldy walls; no more having to shoulder the doors open; no more having a meeting room where the threadbare carpet had been cut to fit around long departed storage racks; no more having electric floor heaters in every office, and so on.

We have a one-off opportunity to modernise and should grasp it. Technology will continue to play a large part as we move forward and within the move we should specify modern telephony systems and IT infrastructure, which will further reduce annual running costs. The modernisation of the Association must surely include digital archiving to avoid the rooms full of documents we currently have stored, it’s not necessary to keep paper copies of any documents other than for genuinely historical reasons.

Our HQ should not be something we are
embarrassed about. It will not be a gilded lily or ivory tower, however it should be modern, functional and appropriate for a professional association. Crucially it should help serve the needs of our members better and provide a more cost effectively, whilst having enough flexibility to meet the Association's medium-term needs. We are looking at both new-build and resale properties for purchase.

Choice is currently very limited as speculative office building has almost ceased and owners retain building ownership due to rental incomes being considerably higher than interest rates. We are taking appropriate financial advice at each stage to ensure maximum benefit to the Association. It may be that we have to rent for a short period until a suitable property becomes available; we do have a three-year tax window should it be required.

Crucially we need to move to the right place for the future. In the medium term the Association will have to consider and start planning for the merging of both The Reddings and Welshpool into a single facility; this should not be as draconian as it initially sounds given suitable planning and investment in technology.

The way we work will certainly change with elements of the activities at both Welshpool and the Reddings being able to be completed via home-working; consideration of changes such as this will require much more detailed planning and consultation with our staff at all stages. What is for certain is that both the RPRA and BHW will need to change and adapt to survive.

6. PRESS & PUBLICITY

Press and Publicity activities try and keep the sport in the public eye. We must remain a key priority and during 2015 we certainly pushed above our weight, albeit with some significant help and assistance from the Raptor Alliance press team and of course the jewel in the our publicity crown, the annual Blackpool Show. The 2015 Show saw a large media presence, one that we repeated at the 2016 Show.

The efforts of the past volunteers and previous GMs have been good but we are moving into an age when modern communications are instant and suitably quick responses are required otherwise the opportunity is lost, something we can ill afford.

The Association needs to address how it manages press and publicity activity going forward. We can do so much more but that will require funding of appropriately trained professional resource, regardless of whether it’s internally or externally sourced. In coming years we need to make sure that we put forward press representatives who are appropriately knowledgeable, briefed and suitably trained.

The MDU had a reduced season in 2015 and in 2016 will only attend free-of-charge educational or historic celebratory events.

One really fun part of the GM job is delivering school talks at both primary and secondary schools and historical societies. Hopefully you will have seen a few of the photos either in the BHW or online. Over the year I have kept a record of the number of people/children who learnt something about pigeons; this year the total number was 4,160, from having completed school or historical society talks. Due to the curriculum activities regarding WW1 and WW2 I rarely end up presenting the PIW talk to single classes, invariably they are given to whole year groups and on several occasions become whole day and whole school events. The most was four sessions each of three classes totalling over 360 children.

In addition to school talks I also give a large number of pigeon talks to a wide range of groups, ranging from historical societies through to local Probus groups, the local WI and, increasingly, disabled groups. Most of these talks are delivered in the evenings or at weekends, however they have resulted in quite a few good additions to the PIW archive being donated, along with several school talk invitations. The highlight of this year’s historical society talks was at the Bewdley Arts Festival, for which, unknown to me, I had to pass an ‘audition’ at a prior talk I delivered. My talk was delivered to a packed audience of some 300 people.

The pigeons used at the talks come from various sources, especially if we are holding a small liberation when we try and use pigeons from a local fancier. The majority however come from my Dad and we have a small team that now appears to have become very used to being handled in front of large audiences along with the children’s noise. One pretty white hen I use is so calm she will readily sit in a child’s hands in the classroom.

Without doubt the pigeons are always the highlight and real stars of every single talk given.

A special mention must be given to the activity of Oswaldtwistle Homing Society and a gentleman by the name of Mr Peter Hargreaves. You may have seen various articles in the BHW regarding the club. It is growing rapidly, has new members joining and is a shining example of what can be done if members get off their backseats, stop whinging and actually do something to make a difference. Oswaldtwistle HS success proves that people can be attracted to the sport, they just need the proper help, guidance and enthusiastic support; after all pigeon racing should be a fun social sport.

8. RAPTOR ALLIANCE

We are coming to the end of the project that was the Raptor Alliance, hopefully the draft bill will make its progress through Parliament and finally into law during 2016; then at least we will have some protection in law for the first time. Whilst this is almost nine months behind the revised schedule we were given some two years ago, at least we are nearly there now, a small matter of a General Election got in the way!

The delay in the schedule will mean that the Alliance will request funding for 2016. A budget and activity plan is being placed in front of all constituent unions to request the necessary financial support.

We need to make sure during 2016 that everyone continues to do their bit in support of the Law Commission’s draft bill. You can do this by lobbying your local MPs. We have about 50 MPs who have been seen by members of various unions up and down the country, many have been very supportive, but this is not enough, we need every MP to be seen.

Once the bill is enacted the next stage will start with specimen licence applications being made to Natural England requesting the granting of the first individual licence.

Political will’ within DEFRA and Natural England will be important and have a great influence upon the speed of progress and eventual granting of the first licence.

This will have to be a co-ordinated data driven and properly-evidenced project, ideally managed, co-ordinated and funded

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**APPENDIX ‘B’**

**MEMBERSHIP 2015**

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<tr>
<th>REGION</th>
<th>TOTAL MEMBERSHIP</th>
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<td>1,002</td>
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<td>DERBYSHIRE &amp; SOUTH YORKSHIRE</td>
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<td>1,706</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEVON &amp; CORNWALL</td>
<td>551</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAST MIDLAND</td>
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<td>WEST MIDLAND</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>23,802</strong></td>
<td><strong>22,556</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,046</strong></td>
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- **Date:** 1st November 2014 to 31st October 2015
- **Page 611 593 18**
- **WE LS H**
- **S O U THE R N 1,534 1,443 91**
- **S O U T H W E S T 1,380 1,323 57**
- **S O U THE R N 1,534 1,443 91**
- **S O U THE R N 1,534 1,443 91**
via the Confederation. I would suggest that a team, much along the lines of the Raptor Alliance, is drawn together to do this work. The lessons learned at each stage of the licence’s application process and identified best practice will need to be shared with all unions.

Thankfully the recent victory in the high court achieved by the National Gamekeepers Organisation (NGO) means that the previous ‘bias’, against issuing licenses where raptors were concerned, has been shown to be against the law. For information this single legal case cost the NGO over £80,000 in legal fees and they won! Had they lost they were staring at a NGO over £80,000 in legal fees and they information this single legal case cost the Raptor Alliance work into some sort of context.

Finally I would like to thank all the members of the Raptor Alliance for their hard work this year. As always the show goes on. It is a fantastic day out, making sure you have been covered by P.I.W talk donations.

9. SHOW OF THE YEAR

The Blackpool Show lost an “ever present” again this year with the sad loss of Arthur Goacher, but as always the “show goes on”. Once again the Blackpool Show was another success attended by over 10,000 visitors.

10. BLETCHLEY PARK

Bletchley Park continues to develop and go from strength to strength with its target of 250,000 attendees in 2015. It does such a great job looking after the pigeons and ensures it remains there. Thanks must go to Mr Colin Hill, a local RPRA member, who does such a great job looking after the pigeons in War exhibit. The only costs incurred having this is simple display maintenance cost for light bulbs, visitors’ book, batteries etc and even these costs have been covered by PIW talk donations.

Can I urge members to visit the park as it is a fantastic day out, making sure you visit the Pigeons in War exhibit of course.

11. ANIMAL ACTIVISTS

We have not seen or heard the last of PETA. They still seem intent on pursuing pigeon racing as one of their targets they have set their sights on.

During the year we had several meetings and discussions with the RSPCA which had been contacted by PETA. The RSPCA commended us and the other racing unions on the professional and well organised manner in which we manage the sport. In summary they have told PETA pigeon racing has no case to answer. This response from the RSPCA reiterates the responses given to PETA by the Gambling Commission and Veterinary Associations in 2014.

Can I advise all members to be very wary? Given previous PETA activity we know they will use underhand techniques, including enticement coupled with the odd piece of selective editing of comments, to achieve the results they are seeking.

12. DATABASE & WEBSITE

The database continues its development with a new digital communication email facility utilising the comprehensive RPRA database records being trialled. It continues being ‘debugged’ as we speak and should go live during 2016.

Can I urge members to visit the park as

The database continues its development with a new digital communication email facility utilising the comprehensive RPRA database records being trialled. It continues being ‘debugged’ as we speak and should go live during 2016, this will involve our Regional Secretaries. Please ensure that if you have an email address you inform the RPRA so our records can be updated.

Various other database upgrades and improvements have been completed and more will follow during 2016 as we continue its development.

The website content continues to grow and its use demonstrates its increasing importance. Would you believe it’s now four years since the “new” website was launched and I still remember the old website, with its picture of our patron in a straw boater, and it taking two weeks to get an item added as we had no control over content.

Hopefully, and with Council’s approval, I think its time we consider updating and refreshing the website; its good website practice with renowned websites updating and refreshing every 18 months to two years, so I think our update is now well overdue. The difference now is that we can conduct much of the change ourselves as

Les Blacklock presenting an RPRA Certificate of Merit, Medallion and cheque on behalf of the RPRA to retiring Councillor Mr Sammy Thompson of the Irish Region in recognition of his 27 years service as a Councillor.
we specified this four years ago as part of the original tendering process. Only a minimum of external assistance is required to help with a few major "architectural" website changes so it should be achieved at a low cost. We hope to present a proposal at the October Council meeting.

13. DEFRA / NE (Natural England) / APHA / DVSA / CAA.

DEFRA was in contact during the latter end of the racing season, primarily requesting help and assistance in contacting and notifying members who may have been affected by the exclusion zones declared following the avian influenza outbreak in the Preston area. We assisted them as far as practically possible and DEFRA thanked us for all the help and assistance we gave during this period.

There has been an issue raised regarding the potential requirement to notify local DEFRA/APHA offices of bird gatherings beyond the historic scope we have in the past. We are trying to meet with DEFRA and APHA officials so that we are clear about the requirements and agree a managed way forward – updates will follow once a plan and actions are agreed.

We also had considerable contact with the wild bird team within DEFRA and Natural England following up the Law Commission’s report on wildlife law. We work hard to maintain this network of contacts within both organisations and some of their feedback has been extremely useful and encouraging.

APHA (the Government’s Veterinary agency) has been in contact several times during the year and most recently with regard to the publication of some information regarding two items namely “antibiotic awareness” and “accredited internet retailer scheme”. We are working with APHA and hope to have both articles ready and published before the season starts.

DVSA (Formally VOSA) – We published the driver CPC guidance we received from the DVSA in March and until recently we were hoping for another quiet year. We have been advised that several vehicles have been stopped and found with infringements. This is not good news as the DVSA may well escalate the frequency of checks of pigeon transporters – we have been warned. Please refer to the guidance notes published on the RPRA website and in the BHW regarding – make sure your conveyors have a copy and have read it.

C AA – Bird Strike Committee. There was no formal meeting of the committee this year with an international conference being held in North America. There should be one held in the UK this year.

We had several reported near misses at Stansted and an actual bird strike at Heathrow which closed all activities on one runway for 13 minutes while the damage and debris was assessed. We coordinated activities promptly, identified the origin (NEHU liberation some 90 minutes earlier from the coast) and the NEHU supplied a report within three days. The airport thanked all involved for the very quick responses and professional manner it was dealt with.

14. VACCINATION

Paramyxovirus is one of the two biggest risks facing our sport (Avian influenza being the other) that could see racing being severely curtailed or even stopped.

Paramyxovirus vaccination is not optional- it’s a LEGAL requirement if you want to race!

The reckless action of a very small minority, who may decide not to vaccinate, does risk punitive sanctions being imposed upon the whole of the sport. If paramyxovirus breaks out and tests indicate no evidence of vaccination is present then we will be told what to do – you have been warned.

There is more than enough vaccine available – getting together as a group will mean you can get a better price; if you vaccinate together you then know that everyone is doing it!

15. SPORT MAINTENANCE – or "things for you all to do!"

These can simply be summed up as -
1. Wing stamping/address marking – please do it!
2. Transfers – please do them! Too often people are not keeping proper records and not ensuring that they hold the documentation relating to any transferred pigeons.
3. Strays – please report them and more importantly help repatriate pigeons to owners. Our thanks go to all those fanciers who do help out!
4. If you move house – let us know and please make sure you can take your pigeons with you! Check your lease, deeds or tenancy agreement first!
5. If you have an email address or mobile phone number (or change them) – please update our HQ staff so we can maintain our records.
6. Medications, potions and powders – performance-enhancing drugs – please make sure you understand what you are giving your pigeons, its contents and its effects and how it should be administered. If you are not sure – don’t use it.

7/. A new one – Pigeon Racing – try and enjoy it, occasionally – after all it’s meant to be competitive fun!

16. THE FUTURE

A year of progress has seen the organisation regain lost ground and start to move forward again. There is also a realisation, and crucially, an understanding within the Council of the RPRA that the challenge is growing and the rate of change needs to gain pace.

I have been asked to update the draft business plans previously presented to Council for consideration at this February’s Council meeting. This has been done, it will once again outline many of the challenges we face and options we have, much of what was presented back in 2011 remains the same today.

Whilst a plan can never be totally complete or exhaustive we can start agreeing the basic framework of a plan for the future of the RPRA, including the BHW, not just for the next year but the next 5 to 10 years. People will need to contribute and support the decisions...
eventually made; even when they have to put aside their own personal views. Only through doing this will we ensure that we move forward and develop the organisation for the future and begin to sort and tackle out some of the underlying fundamental issues that face us.

The result will mean our sport will be and look very different. Some of the change that is required will be difficult and require hard choices along with unpopular decisions. We will need everyone to support its delivery and progress. To do difficult things and implement change is always a challenge and will inevitably mean a few errors, omissions and mistakes along the way.

One thing is evidently clear – we cannot continue to do as we have always done as we will get what we always got!

The need for the RPRA, the other Unions and the sport to change must be beyond doubt to every one of its members and officials.

It doesn’t need to be like this – the solutions are in front of us.

Stewart Wardrop  
General Manager

The General Manager Mr Stewart Wardrop’s report was accepted with a vote of thanks.

The next item on the agenda was the accounts for 2015.

There were no questions or queries concerning the Balance Sheet so the accounts were passed by a majority decision of 23 votes for accepting the balance sheet, with 2 abstentions.

Before vacating the chair for the election of officers for 2016, President, Mr L. Blacklock made a presentation of an RPRA Certificate of Merit, a medallion and a cheque on behalf of the RPRA to retiring Mr L. Blacklock. Following then took place on the propositions on the Agenda for 2016.

At the AGM the President and Vice-Presidents as below were elected:

President  
Mr L. Blacklock  
(2nd Year)  
Cumbria Region

Vice-Presidents

Mr A. Ewart  
(2nd Year)  
East Midland Region

Mr C. Gordon  
(2nd Year)  
North East Region

Mr D. Bridges  
(2nd Year)  
Derbyshire & S. Yorkshire Region

Following the AGM the various sub-committees of the RPRA met and then at 3pm full Council reconvened, with the President, Mr L. Blacklock taking the chair and welcoming all present.

Apologies were received as per the AGM. After a minor amendment the minutes were passed. Matters arising: FCI World Championship Race would be held in Belgium. There will be 25 places available with a further 15 places for young fanciers, full details will be advertised in the BHW shortly. South West Region apology to the General Manager. A proposition was received that a formal written apology be sent to the General Manager within 28 days was accepted by 21 votes for, 1 against with 2 abstentions. South West Region, summons to Council. After an explanation was given by the South West Region acting secretary, Mr R. Shirley a proposition to accept the explanation was received. Voting then took place and was 10 votes for, 13 against with 1 abstention. It was therefore decided that the South West regional officials for 2015 be summoned to attend the next meeting of Council under Rule 70.

REPORT ON COMMITTEE MEETINGS

REDDINGS HOUSE

The General Manager delivered the report for the above committee meeting held on 25th February. Matters arising: Selby House audit has been completed satisfactorily. Reddings House site development and tax implications of sale. The General Manager advised the latest tax advice and rollover periods had been obtained and he is to clarify the tax position regarding Selby House, it being part of the original site purchase. Access road, the GM is to ask Cotswold Homes the implications of the access road through the estate leading to the paddock, as shown on the draft scheme. What guarantees are in place that the RPRA can access at all times. Indicative costs for purchase and rental properties. The GM clarified that the contract of sale (circulated to all Councillors) is subject to planning permission being granted and until such time as permission no commitment can be made to purchase or lease any new facility. Contract signatories will be the RPRA President at the time plus one other member of the Reddings House committee. Mr R. Shirley letter reference use of drawings, the committee endorse the General Manager’s letter of response to Mr R. Shirley dated 20th November 2015.

OLYMPIAD

The General Manager delivered the report for the above committee held on 25th February. Judges’ training, it was agreed that the RPRA submit a request to repeat the FCI judges’ training completed at the 2016 Blackpool Show again (Session 2) at the 2017 Blackpool Show. Olympiad 2017, it was again agreed that the RPRA enter a team into the 2017 Olympiad in Brussels. Sporting Class information provided to the FCI at the end of December (required by the end of November). Standard Class information required by end of November, however selection will take place at the Blackpool Show 2017 (date and time to be agreed).

Should Council decide a team to be sent a team manager should be appointed by Council. If no Councillor volunteers, then the position should be advertised in the BHW. No fee will be payable, but reasonable expenses will be paid.

PERFORMANCE ENHANCING DRUGS

The General Manager delivered the report for the above committee held on 25th February. Matters arising, Mr Cowley confirmed he was still trying to source an alternative container for evaluation. Agenda items: The PED Committee propose that Appeal No. 1 (Mr Murtagh v RPRA) is heard by the PED committee, as allowed under Appendix G. Council then voted by 18 votes for with 6 against that this would be heard by full Council. Draft PED Notice – committee agreed it is to be published with one amendment in removing the words ‘free of charge’ at the end of paragraph one. Appendix G is to be printed minus the E&R note. It was agreed
that Rule 199 is amended and delete the wording ‘for a minimum period of three years or expulsion’. New PED drug test instructions, the committee approved the new instructions and offered a vote of thanks to the authorized personnel taking the test. A proforma letter is required to be added to the new test instructions – becoming page one of the instructions. This is to ensure that the name of the organization is stated, signed by the appropriate officials and states the names of the authorized personnel taking the test. This page, along with personal identification (driving licence for example) needs to be show prior to the test taking place.

**FUTURE OF THE SPORT**

The General Manager then delivered the report on the Future of the Sport meeting held on 25th February. Matters arising: FCI World Championship Race (Belgium) August 2016. It was agreed that the RPRA advertise urgently in the British Homing World as the RPRA is looking at entering two teams in the above event. 25 pigeons for the FCI World Championship and 15 pigeons for the FCI Youth World Championship (Under 18s). An entry fee of £25 for up to two pigeons will be charged (young fanciers entries will be free) to assist with transport costs. The final race is currently scheduled to take place on August 15th 2016 with a race distance of +/- 450km. Open to all RPRA members, pigeons must be rung with an FCI approved ring (RPRA rings meet this criteria). As pigeons must be received at the loft in Nevele by 1st April 2016; pigeons must be delivered to The Reddings, Cheltenham by 12 noon on Wednesday, 30th March.

One-Loft Update: The loft has 1,376 entries to date. No Continental entries have been received due to the loft not being on the FCI race circuit. One-Loft convoying would be done by Mr J. Davies with Mr D. Cook convoying for the last two races. ETS system at the One-Loft. It was agreed that an invitation be extended to ETS equipment suppliers to submit tenders to supply ETS One-Loft systems for the 2017 season. Companies may be invited to present their systems at a future FOS committee meeting. MDU schedule 2016 is agreed as published. Leaflets, the GM was approved to obtain reprints at his discretion, due to the impending change of address. 2016 One-Loft Rules, the committee discussed the opportunity of holding an event to coincide with the ending of WW2. The committee agreed to consider any proposals at the October 2016 meeting. 2014/15 accounts were discussed and approved with the 2015/16 accounts updated and circulated by Mrs Zhang. MNFC request for additional £5,000 funding. Secret Messages programme. The committee agreed to authorise this funding expenditure. The balance (approx. £4,000) of the previously £10,000 granted by Council, the MNFC will need to provide a full cost breakdown prior to any further request being considered. Scilly Isles strays, Devon & Cornwall Region to advise who will coordinate stray repatriation from the Scilly Isles and advise the GM. North West Region letter reference electronic games, the committee advised that the letter is noted. Oswaltdistle HS request for funding, it was agreed that a sum of £1,600 be granted to them. Birmingham University project, the GM is to write to the West Midlands Region to enquire as to whether they can identify any fanciers who can assist with this project. Liberated Company offering, it was agreed that all system suppliers are invited to present their systems to Council at the October meeting.

**FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE**

The General Manager delivered the report for the above committee held on 18th December 2015. Presentation of 2014/15 audited accounts – Mr A. Harris of Hazlewoods Accountants. Mr Harris noted that this was the ninth time he had presented the Association accounts to the F&G committee and complimented the Association on the sustained level of audit and consistency in its record keeping and accounts. He commented that to find such levels of accuracy in a set of accounts is extremely rare and commended the work of Mrs Zhang and her team. Sale of Redding House, Mr Harris updated the committee as to the advice provided to the GM to date regarding the potential tax implications of the sale. The GM will continue to liaise with Hazlewoods to obtain the necessary advice thus ensuring the maximum financial benefit (lowest tax position) with regard to the sale of The Reddings property. Regional database (emails to clubs and members), trials ongoing. RPRA key measures of activity, staff appraisals and training. The GM will obtain costings for the delivery of staff appraisal training and present the summary at the February 2016 meeting. Staff cost of living increase, the award of a 2% increase effective from the 1st November 2015 has been completed. Risk and Reserve policy, the GM presented the Association’s risk and reserves policies. Association Business Plan, the GM was requested to update the business plan and submit to the RPRA Council in 2011 and represent it to Council at the February 2016 meeting.

The General Manager then delivered the report for the above committee held on 26th February 2016. Matters arising: Website advertising and Regional Database (emails to clubs and members), trials still ongoing. RPRA key measures of activity, staff appraisals and training was agreed. RPRA auction website, it was agreed that the RPRA look at hosting an auction website on the RPRA website. GM to revisit old information regarding this and circulate to Council. The GM noted that with cost and revenue estimates, urgently.

AGM implications: Rule 24 – in force from 2017, club fees to £10; Rule 42 in force from 2017, regions only; Rule 78, implications for a database alteration cost (GM to action and proceed). 10 year rules assessment, it was agreed that the Rules committee form a sub-committee to conduct this rules’ assessment.

Accounts: presented by the Finance Manager Mrs Zhang. Ring registration fee, it was agreed to put a proposition to Council that the RPRA charge a ring registration fee, as advertised in the price list, from 1st January 2017 for all non-RPRA rings (excluding foreign rings). All non-RPRA rings must be registered with the RPRA in order to compete in any RPRA competition. The ring registration fee from 2017 is to be £0.50p. Council then agreed to the proposition by 19 votes for, 4 against with 1 abstention. Price List 2017, the GM and the Finance Manager are authorised to amend the price list to reflect postal charge increases and therefore margins have been eroded by increased purchasing prices or exchange rates. They were also asked to look at purchasing goods from South Africa given the changing UK/USD exchange rates and try to obtain the benefit for the balance payment on rubber ring orders. Regional balance sheets, all had been received with the exception of one Region, which was due to extenuating circumstances. 10 year Council Award, it was agreed that Messrs Carlton and Walsh are provide with their 10 year certificates, medallions and cash gift. It was also agreed that the RPRA 10 year service award of certification, medallion and cash gift are provided to each councillor on completion of 10 years service on Council. President’s Allowance, it was agreed that the RPRA President’s Allowance be increased to £2,000, this to go forward to the 2017 AGM. Raptor Alliance funding of a further £1 per member from the FOS fund was agreed by 23 votes for with 2 against. £43k on the 5 year 3% contractual increase. Correspondence: East Midland’s letter regarding a breakdown of car expenses, the committee endorsed the GM’s letter in response and the breakdown supplied. Addendum items, the Rules Committee look at the 21-days rule for correspondence was agreed.

**CLOCK, RING, WEATHER FORECAST AND LIBERATION SITE COMMITTEE**

Mr Chris Gordon delivered the report for the above committee held on 26th
February. Matters arising: 4a Bricon software update, Bricon confirm the update has been completed. Committee Chairman to test all updates prior to the 2016 racing season. 4b Taurus software update. Committee Chairman to test all updates prior to the 2016 racing season. 4c CRW15/30 ‘No future correspondence will be accepted by this committee unless submitted through the Region’. This should read: CRW15/30 ‘No future correspondence from RPRA members or organisations will be accepted by the Committee unless submitted through the relevant Region’.

Implications of propositions passed at AGM. Rule 238 as printed in 7/23 no implication; 7/26 Joint liberations in France, committee found and Council agreed by 23 votes for with 2 against that the proposal is not workable and is therefore not added to Appendix C. Ring quotes 2017, it was agreed that the 2017 rings be purchased from Savic/Haspeslagh with the GM writing to Savic/Haspeslagh for a 3-year deal at a reduced £ rate if possible.

Correspondence: West Midlands’ letter re convoying/DVS, at this moment in time the GM is in contact with the DVSA regarding any updates to the DVSA (VOSA) information we already hold. Western Region’s letter re Unikon battery replacement. Mr G. Blackhall is approved as a clock repairer subject to him meeting the O ctober meeting. Biggleswade new -reduced £ rate if possible.

S avic/Haspeslagh with the G M  writing to Savic/Haspeslagh with some clarifications from 2017, it was agreed that the 2017 calendar, Wall Planner and site location information currently appropriate. Continental sites, postcodes and site location information currently being updated. Request for the RPRA HQ to open at weekends was not practical.

EMERGENCY & RULES COMMITTEE

Mr David Bridges delivered the report for the above committee held on 26th February. Matters arising: 4a Ring Defaulter rule 98 – E&R15/18 refers. GM proposed notice to staff, 1st March 2016. Rule 98. Association rings will only be issued by the General Manager to members who must produce their membership card for the same year as the rings they wish to purchase and to organisations which have paid the previous year’s club or group fees. Any newly-formed organisation must furnish to the General Manager proof of acceptance by the relevant local Region committee. In clarification of the above, Council has deemed by 20 votes for with 5 against that Rule 98 is sufficient and that 2017 rings are only to be issued by the GM to those who are in possession of 2017 (ie having paid their 2017 subscription fees). 2017 rings can be supplied to organisations that have paid their 2016 fees. 4b, Rule 129, GM notice. Item noted. 4c, referred from October 2015 E&R meeting, Dr Richmond letter, it was by majority decision that following on from the 2015 AGM, the Council decided to draw a line under all legal matters regarding the removal of officers at the 2014 October meeting through a vote of ‘no confidence in the officials’. 4d Ring sales timing, referred from CRW&L meeting in October 2015, item noted.

Implications of the propositions passed at the AGM. Rule 17 go forward as printed in 7/1; Rule 24 go forward as printed in 7/2; Rule 27 go forward as printed in 7/4; Rule 51 go forward as printed in 7/9; Rule 70 (a) not acceptable or workable in present word form 7/12; Rule 78 not acceptable or workable in present word form 7/13; Rule 117 go forward as printed in 7/16; Rule 127 go forward as printed in 7/17; Rule 238 go forward as printed in 7/23; New Rule as printed in 7/24 not acceptable or workable in present word form and conflicts with Rule 83, Council agreed by 17 votes for with 8 against; New Rule as printed in 7/25 go forward as printed and inserted in 143; Dissolution of Partnership, amended form was approved.

Correspondence: East Midlands Region letter re Rule 12. The Region’s standing orders state that all club delegates must reside within the Region boundaries. However we have a National club, with HQs in the Region, that has submitted the names of delegates who do not reside within the Region boundary, under Rule 12C. It should not be possible for members of a Region to hold office in another Region; and it was agreed by the East Midland Region confirming that this is allowed under RPRA Rule 12 (c).

BRITISH HOMING WORLD

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

The General Manager delivered the report for the above committee meeting held on 25th February. The minutes of the last meeting were read and adopted. Any questions were replied to. It was agreed that the Finance Manager was commended on her report and her good debt control. 2016 Show of the Year feedback: Mr Cowley commented that he
wished to offer complimentary feedback regarding the activities of the Association and BHW staff and the SoY committee and steward activities at the Show. Mr Headon then raised seating provision as an issue that needed to be addressed. Mr Bridges advised that he had received two complaints from trade stand holders. 2017, 40th Year Anniversary at Blackpool. It was agreed that the Gala Night fund be increased to £7,000. To celebrate the 40th anniversary, each of the 13 Regions would be asked to select suitable deserving candidates (and partner) to represent their Region at the 2017 Blackpool Show. The President then asked the committee to consider inviting the 2021 Olympiad to be held at Blackpool. The GM is to try and determine cost, associated with the holding of the event in 1999. The committee agreed to revisit the matter at the October meeting. BHW Mrs E. Wright’s letter re our Patron Her Majesty the Queen becoming 90 years of age this year with certificates for achieving 90 new members in 2016. It was agreed that the GM write to all Regions advising that a certificate for new members who have joined in 2016 is available on request. An advert asking for members who reach the age of 90 during 2016 to be in place in the BHW, asking any member to contact their Regional Secretary; the Region to coordinate a suitable recognition certificate. Thank you letters from Mr P. Bryant and Major E. C. Camilleri were noted.

Confederation of Long Distance Racing Pigeon Unions. A report of a meeting held in Blackpool on 16th January 2016 was then given by Mr L. Blacklock. An application from NWHU to join the Confederation was received and the RPRA Council agreed subject to them defining their boundary to the RPRA’s satisfaction. Council agreed to circulate Regions for a Ypres 2018 race to be held. National Pigeon Racing Museum would be investigated further. FCF have requested information showed the original contracts not noted. An application for reinstatement Rule 77 by Mr R. Shirley, Rule 45, eligibility to serve as a Councilor. A proposition was received that Mr R. Shirley was eligible under Rule 45, to serve on Council. A secret ballot was asked for by Mr J. Gladwin, London Region and granted by the President which resulted in favour of Mr R. Shirley by 15 votes to 9 against. Mr R. Shirley was then asked to apologise to Council which he did unreservedly.

Appeals

Minutes of a meeting of the Council of the Royal Pigeon Racing Association held in the Coventry Hill Hotel, Coventry on Saturday, 27th February at 9am to hear appeals.

Present: Mr L. Blacklock (Chairman), Messrs D. Bridges; A Ewart; C Gordon; K Blount; P Mitchell; D Higgins; H Ackerman; P Murray; J Waters; A Cowley; A King; R Harris; Mrs M Murray; J Gladwin; G Cardall; R Holmes; J Serplus; S Briggs; J Hooper; D Headon; B Burton; T Lawley; R Jones; G Field. Also present – S. Wardrop.

Appeal 1: Hearing under RPRA Rule 199 (Appendix G). Mr N. Murtagh v RPRA (Petition No UK15/19) a reconsideration was carried out by the Council of the Royal Pigeon Racing Association at their meeting held in the Coventry Hill Hotel, Coventry on Saturday 27th February 2016.

It was the unanimous decision of Council of those present that the appeal be DISALLOWED on the grounds that – Mr Murtagh’s test sample returned a positive result for two banned substances. Mr Murtagh shall be expelled from the Association. Mr Murtagh can apply to the Council of the RPRA for reinstatement after 12 months.

Appeal 2: Re-hearing under RPRA Rule 83. Speirs & Campbell v NIPA. The appeal of Speirs & Campbell against the decision of Irish Region meeting held on 3rd October 2015. The above appeal was considered by the Council of the Royal Pigeon Racing Association at their meeting held in the Coventry Hill Hotel, Coventry on Saturday 27th February 2016.

It was the majority decision of Council of those present that the appeal be ALLOWED with Council finding for Speirs & Campbell on the ground that they had fulfilled their obligations under RPRA Rule 112.

Appeal 3: Appeals Notice, Appeal 3. Mr L. Fribbins v Essex Central Federation – appealing the decision of the London Region meeting held on 3rd October 2015. The above appeal was concluded and will be heard October 2016.

Appeal 4: Re-hearing under RPRA Rule 83. M. Turner v Midlands National Flying Club. The appeal of Midlands National Flying Club against the decision of East Midlands Region meeting held on 2nd January 2016. The above appeal was considered by the Council of the Royal Pigeon Racing Association at their meeting held in the Coventry Hill Hotel, Coventry on Saturday 27th February 2016.

It was the majority decision of Council of those present that the appeal be ALLOWED with Council finding for the Midlands National Flying Club on the grounds that the Midlands National Flying Club complied with their Rule 22.8. The Midlands National Flying Club is advised to provide adequate supervision at their marking stations.

Appeal 4 (a): Appeals Notice, Appeal 4 (a) Mr J. D. Fretwell v East Midlands Region appealing the decision of the East Midlands Region held 2nd January 2016 in the matter of M. Turner v Midlands National Flying Club. This appeal was withdrawn by the appellant.

STEVE RICHARDS