

OXTALK'S ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING REPORT for 16th OCTOBER 2021

Another AGM by Zoom!!

Sadly, none of Oxtalk listeners, other than their Trustee Representative, Margaret, have accepted the invitation to attend, which I suppose is not unexpected and in anticipation of this it was decided that this meeting will be recorded. This recording will be copied and posted out to the listeners along with next week's Oxtalk talking newspaper.

But all is not negative because more volunteers and guests have accepted the invitation than we have had at any previous in-person meetings. Many of Oxtalk's volunteers do live in Oxford and the local suburbs but many live a few miles away from Oxford in Bicester, Abingdon, Witney or Banbury and some of the villages in between. So this Zoom format is very attractive and I thank everyone who has joined this afternoon's AGM and Guy for hosting this meeting

As many of you know there is a downside – there will be no in-person home made afternoon tea for anyone to enjoy at the end of the meeting. So to the listeners who are listening you are not missing out on the jam tarts or the lemon drizzle cake!! There is nothing - maybe next year it will be different?

I am very pleased to be able to see today volunteers and guests I have not seen for 19 months, some I have not met before, it is almost as good as in-person.

I have heard all of you and so have the listeners – you are the 3Ts – the volunteers for The Tuesday Teams! These volunteers with an Iphone or Smartphone are from 5 Technical Officers; 5 News Editors; just 17 readers plus the TOs when I ask them to read a notice and since November 2020 1 Copier.

The return date to Oxtalk's recording base at Oxfordshire Association for the Blind is currently unknown but to help future planning a questionnaire was sent out to all volunteers in order to find out how many of the 54 pre-COVID volunteers would be post-COVID volunteers? Based on the information at the time, which was approximately 6 weeks ago, many volunteers indicated they did not wish to return to the previous recording format – 4 people sitting fairly close to each other reading out aloud into mics, obviously not wearing a mask. A number of the volunteers in the intervening 19 months said they were no longer driving after dark. Some volunteers indicated they would prefer the current format of recording from home to continue. So there is still a large

unknown. What is known is that 1 of those volunteers not continuing is Anne. Anne was 1 of the founder members of Oxtalk back in 1979. This leaves us with just 1 founder member still involved - Ray - Happy Birthday.

As we are living in times that seem to vary almost from day to day, I am very sorry volunteers but I think I will be coming back to you yet again with another short questionnaire!! The Oxtalk volunteer numbers dropped from 54 to 38 at the time of the 1st questionnaire and depending on what is decided in the future this number will very probably change again. We will be having to have an awareness campaign to recruit new volunteers. But being the optimist perhaps this might not be too difficult a challenge, as 4 new volunteers joined us during this pandemic, all as Readers with 1 now being a TO as well and we have 2 new volunteers in waiting, for when we return to OAB.

I think February/March 2022 will be the earliest we can consider returning to in-person recording at OAB but I do not have a glass ball and I cannot give you a definitive date. Plus OAB have to decide when they are allowing community groups back into Bradbury Lodge.

What I am very definite about is that Oxtalk has had and still has, a very committed group of volunteers – home recording started on 15 April last year and other than the usual Xmas/New Year breaks, because of interrupted postal services, the Oxtalk talking newspaper has been produce every week non-stop since. This is an amazing achievement and one that is second to none. Thank you very much to each and every volunteer who was able to be involved.

Mind you it hasn't always been a smooth ride, we have had our moments!! – the posted news items taking 9 days to go from News Editor to Reader, a journey of approximately 10 miles, so we had to scabble about finding news items from just about anywhere, making sure we could find enough material for the hour's recording; some recordings, thankfully very few, needed extra TO time when, because of the quality of the recordings, items had to be cleaned or re-recorded; I am so grateful to the TO's wife who stepped in for the Reader who forgot to record!! We can see the funny side now but at the time – NO WAY!

As Pete has shown in the annual accounts Oxtalk was very fortunate to be the recipient of a £3000 donation from The Cumber Family Charitable Trust with which we bought 50 Sonic Audio Players so that the County Council Visual Impairment Team's Social Workers can give an audio player to new listeners

who are unable to afford to buy an audio player. We retained a small portion of the donation so we can help any current listener whose player stops working, by giving them a contribution to a new player. The Sonic Audio Players cost £65 each, so not cheap. A new Duplicator has been purchased recently and this should speed up the copying time.

Oxtalk received a £500 donation from Iffley Parish Council, in large part, if not because of, Patrick proposing Oxtalk to the grant making committee. Thank you Patrick, all charities need supporters like you.

Trustees contribute to the stability of Oxtalk in their various roles and for this I am very grateful because without this experienced group of people whom I can contact, life could at times have been somewhat rocky. Trustee Meetings have taken place as per usual throughout the year and we too have met by Zoom, again thanks to Guy and his Zoom Licence, which Oxtalk does make a contribution to. Mandy T liaises with the VIT on behalf of the listeners. Pete as Treasurer has maintained the Oxtalk accounts and has steered us through a banking change. Extra work for both Mandy and Pete. Lesley makes sure we have clear records and minutes of all the meetings; Hilary maintains the website and Michelle moved all the copying equipment from OAB into a spare bedroom at home last November! Is that not commitment? It was Di's selected news items that took a long wasteful postal route to a Reader and when Mandy was in NZ she sent us reports of her extended holiday thanks to COVID which we were able to share with listeners.

On Tuesday, of this week, I joined the other Chairs for the quarterly meeting for the 6 County Talking Newspapers. Not all have been operating during the 19 months. Wallingford reported re-starting in July of this year and now have only 17 listeners. Banbury will continue to record every 2 weeks, as they have lost 6 volunteers and their listener numbers are down by 10 to 68; DAWN's listener numbers are reduced by a quarter, they are offering a very limited service and hope to re-start as a talking newspaper in December; for Henley there is no change as there has been no loss of volunteers and no loss of listeners; Witney listener numbers are down from 90 to 60 and volunteer numbers are down from 50 to 39. Mandy Till be reporting on Oxtalk's listener numbers.

Oxtalk volunteers have continued to record the audio version of the OAB Newsletter and there were discussions with Neil Stockton, Chair of Radio Cherwell, the Oxford Hospitals Radio Station about Oxtalk being included in the

Radio Cherwell's weekly hospital programme. But for various reasons this has been put on hold.

There have been some new additions to the weekly recordings such as music pieces composed and played by Oxtalk volunteers; short stories selected and read by volunteer thespians and poems selected and read by many of the volunteer Readers. Because every volunteer has helped in the production of their weekly recording, each recording is an unknown until I listen to it, usually on a Wednesday morning. I have been delighted with the differences and the freshness of each recording and there is a discussion to be had, as to how Oxtalk develops once we are back at OAB. What will the format be in the future? Will it be the weekly individuality of the last 19 months or a similar set format of the pre-Covid Oxtalk? There is a discussion to be had about this.

Once we know how the future is mapping out I shall be back in contact with all the volunteers but in the meantime thank you to all Oxtalk volunteers for your continuing support whether as a TO, as News Editor, a Reader or as **the** Copier.

We will have a big 'thank you' celebration as soon as we are able to.

It has been a pleasure to see you all this afternoon and I hope it has been so for you because we have now linked voices to faces.

Thank you.

Margaret A Simpson

Chair of Oxtalk.

14th October 2021.