

NOTES FROM FORUM, SUNDAY 19TH FEBRUARY 2017

The Chairman, Mrs McGuire, welcomed the WPCS trustees: Mr John Kirk, Chairman of Council, Mr Elgan Evans Chairman of Judging & Showing Committee and Mr Ed Gummery Chairman of Education & Welfare Committee. Approximately 20 SWA members attended and a thorough, wide-ranging and frank discussion took place over two hours covering the following subjects.

1. **Silver Medals**

Having interpreted the present rules for Silver Medals in the 2016 Judging & Showing Handbook the SWA considered they could have Silver Medals for the Annual Medal Show in June. However we had recently been informed that this was not so and that Associations could only apply to have silver medals when they reached a notable anniversary or had a significant event – however this is not included in the rules. The trustees explained that they wished to make silver medals 'special' particularly as bronze medals were now so readily available. Most of those present agreed that the bronze rosettes were very acceptable especially as they were available on the day and medals were only received the following year as they were engraved in batches. The SWA was now in the embarrassing position of having advertised the show as a silver medal show. It was agreed that the SWA should now apply for silver medals making out a case and emphasising that there were only two other shows in the South West who had silver medals and the large area covered. This would then be considered at the meeting on 31st March. It was confirmed that the whole question of medals is to be reviewed.

2. **Judging Assessment**

The trustees agreed with comments from the audience who had attended recent judges assessment that the present system was unacceptable. It was suggested that questions should be set for the assessors to ask every contestant so they were consistent. Mr Evans said he goes in on the Monday morning after the assessment to check all the papers but it was pointed out that some candidates knew they had passed even before they got home!

Asked why those who had 'passed' the recent assessment now had to probation at 2, 4 or 6 or 9 shows which seemed illogical, the trustees said that this had been a mistake and promulgated by the office before it had been approved. As it had been published it had to go ahead but in future any probationing would be done before the assessment. It was also felt that there should be some way of assessing the assessors and making the whole system much fairer. The trustees confirmed the present process was unsatisfactory and confirmed it is to be reviewed and revised.

Regarding **breed descriptions** it was agreed that the 4 Sections should each have a more accurate breed description particularly the B and D. People with other breeds picked up on this and said you have 4 breeds and each should its own description. This was noted for further consideration.

Some members felt and indeed the trustees largely personally agreed, that if you could judge one Section you should be able to judge all 4 and should be on the Panel for all 4 Sections.

It was essential to get more judges on to the Panel as it was a difficult task to find judges for various reasons, many seemed to regard the South West as a far off land, too far for them to travel to!

The date of next **Judges Conference is 23rd September 2017** and it will be held at the Royal Welsh showground.

3. Journal/Membership

Mr Gummery said that membership had reduced by approximately 140 (someone else thought 180), registrations were down and adverts for the Journal were down to 40 so therefore the Society was facing a significant drop in income which had to be addressed. There was no doubt that Facebook had had an impact on the Journal. A couple of members said Facebook was a good way to sell ponies. At present the Society was of most benefit to breeders and some way had to be found to increase membership. Some other UK and overseas societies had a showing membership at a lower fee and it was suggested that some way should be found to encourage people who perhaps only owned one cob or pony and showed them in ridden classes, could be offered a lower membership – with or without the Journal. The trustees said that family membership had again been considered as more than one Journal was often not wanted in one household where there were individual members but it had been found too complicated. One suggestion was that a phone call was often more effective than a letter in getting Journal adverts in and perhaps the Associations could help with this. The 2017 Journal was in the post and the trustees had worked hard to improve the quality and had allowed more photographs and general content. Mr Gummery said that the Society were presently advertising for a Marketing Assistant who would cover these aspects amongst others and try and reach a wider public to advertise the breed which was sorely needed.

The stand at the Westpoint Equine Fair was mentioned and how well the display had gone down last year. The trustees were thanked for agreeing to financially support the SWA for 2017 as well.

It had been decided to discontinue the magazine as it was taking away from the Journal and was too costly.

The trustees said they knew the website was out of date but this was being addressed.

4. Insurance

The trustees were asked why the Society could not offer **insurance** to members at an increased subscription as other societies do which are also charities such as the BHS and NPS. They said they would look into this.

5. DNA testing

Mr Gummery explained that the DNA taken from the first pure bred foal (which will have to be supplied to be registered) from a mare was profile stored but not tested by the Animal Health

Trust. They have the facilities to store it and do a free parentage test but this is only done if there is a query. All stallions are DNA'd.

6. Brightwells Sales

It was pointed out that the new dates would mean that HOYS would have already taken place so an animal entered in the Fayre Oaks sale would not be able to say it was qualified. Generally agreed that the High Flyer sale had lost its magic and that having the dinner on the level above the sale was not satisfactory. Mr Franklin said that now Fayre Oaks sale was being held in the Glamorgan Building (same building as the cob sale which takes place two weeks later) they were proposing to put dinner tables round the ring in the evening for the Fayre Oaks dinner. This was felt to be most unsatisfactory and unhelpful to the sale.

It was suggested that perhaps Brightwells could operate a 'wild card' entry system as was done at sales at Cheltenham and Ascot and the trustees agreed to put this to Brightwells.

7. Educational visits

In the past the SWA had supported very successful visits to Bridgwater College and Kingston Maurward College by providing ridden ponies and cobs of all 4 Sections, small and large part breds. The students at Bridgwater were on an agricultural course and this was part of their equine section and there was a different set of students each year but the students at KM were on a two year equine course. These visits had been highly valued. Mr Gummery said that this was another area under review and part of the job of the new Marketing Assistant.

8. Welfare

Mr Gummery said that he had initially run a pilot scheme to have welfare representatives in different areas of the country but there had been very few volunteers (3 had applied from the south west) so this had been abandoned and he was now the only welfare officer. Initial reports came into the CEO who passed them on to Mr Gummery or people could contact him directly and even Council did not know the identity of the people involved, confidentiality was key. He worked closely with World Horse Welfare, the RSPCA and Trading Standards. Asked why Trading Standards he said they had greater legal right of access to premises than the RSPCA and he had found them very useful. He currently had 3 cases he was dealing with.

He and the Veterinary Officer, Rowland Mitchell, agreed that the greatest welfare problem at the moment was obesity and once damage had been caused by obesity it was irreversible and amounted to cruelty.

A member of the audience asked about using chains on bits like a curb chain in youngsters (this was a 2 year old Section B filly) at shows was felt to be too severe and unacceptable. It was agreed that there were circumstances where a chain should be used but it was how it was used that was important, it could after all ruin a mouth for the ridden job. This was difficult to police at a show bit it was believed the show itself had a responsibility.

9. Outside Assistance

Outside assistance in the form of banging, shouting, rattling tins etc was against the WPCS' code of conduct for exhibitors and it was generally agreed that it was up to a judge to enforce it and to tell the exhibitor concerned that he would ask him/her to remove their animal from the ring if it did not stop. Judges needed to take control of their ring. Mr Kirk said that the Society had tried to discipline one member but had lost the case and it had cost the Society £5K.

10. Clipping of foals

The Society's rules were quite clear and a diagram included in the Judging & Showing Handbook to show what was permissible. However it was acknowledged that excessive clipping still took place but a judge should ask that the animal be removed from the ring.

11. Larger riders on small ponies

The trustees confirmed that the Society had no view on this and it was pointed out that traditionally all Sections had been ridden by adults.

Mr Kirk thanked members for the evening and said how useful it had been as it was only by attending these forums and talking to members that trustees could be made aware of ongoing concerns and suggestions. It had been an extremely useful evening. Mrs McGuire thanked the trustees for coming.

Sue Hardy