



AGM 2021 Presidents Report

A few days ago, a CBI poll of nearly 300 leading industrial UK companies recorded the sharpest rise in optimism since 1973, amid growing demand as Covid lockdown measures are relaxed. Manufacturers also plan to hire staff in the next three months at the fastest rate since 1974.

Clearly, falling cases and rapid progress with the vaccine has raised hopes for a speedy return to relative normality later this year. And I am sure I also speak for you when I say that we are all desperate for a large glass of normality and a pint or two of optimism!

It is with that sense of rising optimism that I would like to report on our achievements over 8 months since our last AGM in September.

That was our first ever virtual event and we were delighted that 43 members worked out the technology, and joined the Zoom event armed with their Prosecco and Roast Beef & Spitfire Ale Crisps! If you go onto the Old Friends website and look at the 2020 AGM page in the Previous Events section, you can't help but smile at the obvious pleasure of being "together"!

Then we held the Christmas Clachan with a difference – and the difference was the magnificent Jon Culshaw. With it being a Zoom event and Christmas time, your Committee decided to make it an open event - a sort of Guest night if you will – and as a result, we ended up with around 150 attendees, made up of members, family and friends.

What a brilliant night. Jon was only scheduled to do 20-25 minutes, but after 45 minutes, he was still going strong. There is always a moment of fear when you ask for "input" – a fear that you are going to be met by a "tumbleweed silence" - but you absolutely did not disappoint!

It was **your** participation that made the evening such a stunning success and the most fun was had when Jon was chatting and responding to your questions and impression requests!

Doing Ozzy Osbourne for Langers, David Attenborough for Kelly, Frances and Sean and, of course, Frank Bruno for Tina. His impression of "The Donald" was great, he did countless Bonds, Football managers, Boris Johnson, Michael McIntyre and, of course, the inimitable Terry Wogan.

Mike James put it beautifully when he said that "Jon had the amazing skills that allowed you to think it was personal."

But the wonderful Steve Cafferty raised the biggest smile, with his feedback when he said "Best Zoom experience I have had so far!

I even had a bit of a hangover this morning... just like a "real" Clachan!"



After that success, we decided to try something totally different and organised the Magical Spring Clachan with the excellent Lee Smith, which was also an open guest event.

Again we ended up with over 100 attendees on the call, although I'm not sure whether any of us knew quite what to expect. We were treated to a remarkably microscopic scrutiny of the trickery and slight-of-hand of a masterful magician.

Lee's talent only became truly apparent when we all had a go at the two tricks that Lee taught us, with the "special" playing cards and the elastic bands – the elastic bands weren't actually necessary, but we just wanted to do our bit for the elastic band sales within the Office Products industry!

And talking about our industry, that, of course, brings us to tonight, where we have 54 members in attendance hopefully enjoying this lovely Spring weather and the Spring Lamb and Rosemary crisps and little bottle of Bubbles.

As we look forward, and without wanting to jinx things, hopefully we will be returning to physical events soon and your committee is actively looking at organising actual face-to-face events, starting with a Summer event and we will send out a members' update shortly with more information on what we are trying to plan.

In the meantime, one thing that is absolutely clear from the last 8 months, is that, in spite of the fact that many of us have probably been feeling a bit Zoomed out, your fantastic support of our events has shown that there is a huge desire to keep Old Friends getting together and to share fellowship and laughter, even if it has to be online.

As we return to physical events, the popularity of these virtual events will be something that the committee will bear in mind and will constantly look for ways of appealing to those who have found this format inclusive, enjoyable and accessible!

I would also like to say, as I have on a number of occasions, that none of these virtual gatherings would have been possible without the phenomenal support of Janet Bell, Steve Hilleard and all our friends at OPI who been helping us to put on these events – plus I'd also like to say a huge thank you to Sammy, for capturing all the fun in the notes and photos that are on the website for everyone to enjoy!

In summary, whilst none of us would have chosen to live entirely in a virtual world for most of the last year, it is my belief that as a Society, we have tried to make the best of this challenging time and, thanks to **your** support I am extremely optimistic that this exciting and thriving Society of Old Friends remains in great health!

Steve Robinson
President
April 2021