



## FRIENDS OF MOUNT ATHOS

**Minutes of the Thirty-Fourth Annual General Meeting held at  
St Anne's College, Oxford, on 7 June 2025**

*Present:* Graham Speake (Chair), Christopher Thomas (Vice-Chair), Peter Lea (Membership Secretary), Elizabeth Chesney-Evans (Hon. Secretary), Dimitri Conomos, Nicholas Harff, Hugo Grimwood, and 33 members and guests.

### 1. Apologies

Fr Stephen Platt, Peter Stevenson, Dr Aphrodite Papayianni, Revd. Wellington, Revd. Canon John Williams, Robin Price.

### 2. Approval of the minutes of the 2024 AGM

*Copies of these minutes were available at the meeting.* Approval was proposed by the Chairman, GS, and carried nem con.

### 3. Chairman's report

GS thanked the committee for their support over the past year, in particular the Treasurer Peter Stevenson, who despite various health issues had given unstintingly of his time and expertise over many years, and Dimitri Conomos who had organized all the society's pilgrimages for the past 23 years. He wished them both a long and well-deserved retirement.

GS reminded members that following the resignation of his predecessor in late 2023, he had agreed to resume the chair from last year's AGM for a maximum of two years until 2026. No successor has yet emerged, therefore while nominally remaining chairman, for the rest of his term of office GS will delegate to others without any commitment, starting with the Vice-Chair, Christopher Thomas.

### 4. Secretary's report

BCE said that the current membership stands at 837, of whom 291 are life members. This represents an overall increase of more than 50 new members. Three deaths of members have been reported over the past year.

The 2024 Summer Conference was held at St Anne's College, Oxford, on 8 June. Talks were given by Dr Vanessa de Obaldia on cataloguing, digitising and translating the entire Ottoman archive of Simonopetra Monastery, and by Professor Stavros Mamaloukos on the architecture of Mount Athos buildings. John Jones gave an illustrated talk about the 2023 pilgrimage to Bulgaria.

A group of 14 people went on last September's pilgrimage to the Republic of North Macedonia, and the annual footpath clearing project continues to attract significant numbers of volunteers.

The biennial Madingley Conference was held in Cambridge from 11-13 October 2024 on the theme of 'Holy Mountains, Holy Men: The Spirituality of Mount Athos'. The next Madingley conference will take place from 16-18 October 2026.

Our autumn meeting was held on 12 November 2024 at St Bride's Institute in London, where more than 40 people listened to a lecture by His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos, the Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London on 'Monasticism: A Continuing Pillar of the Coptic Orthodox Church'.

The highlight of this year has been the very well-attended inaugural lecture in memory of Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, which was held on 16 January at the Greek Orthodox Cathedral in London. The lecture, entitled 'Mount Athos: Tourism or Pilgrimage?' was given by His Eminence Archbishop Nikitas of Thyateira and Great Britain. This was followed by the annual Vasilopitta party to mark the New Year, attended by more than 80 members and friends. Since this very successful event, Archbishop Nikitas has agreed to become a Patron of FoMA.

Our support for the restoration work being carried out at the Axion Estin cell on Mount Athos continues. An emergency grant of almost £4,000 for immediate repairs was provided in November following a series of earthquakes and floods in the region and our Christmas appeal raised more than £10,000. Our sister organisation, the Mount Athos Foundation of America, raised US\$166,900 over the past year and has distributed US\$142,600 to various causes.

Looking forward, we have a visit to the monastery of St John the Baptist in Essex later in the summer (details will appear on the website) and our autumn meeting will take place on 13 November in London. Beginning in July we are also planning to introduce a quarterly newsletter.

There have been a number of changes on the Committee. In September 2024, Peter Lea resigned as Honorary Secretary and was replaced by myself. Peter is now Membership Secretary. Our Treasurer, Peter Stevenson, will step down once a replacement is appointed. BCE praised both men's commitment to FoMA over many years and thanked them on behalf of the membership. Christopher Thomas and Hugo Grimwood have now completed their two-year terms of office and are standing for re-election, as is Peter Stevenson who will remain as a committee member and Treasurer until replaced. BCE thanked everyone who has contributed so much to the running of the Society over the past year.

#### 5. Footpath clearing project report

CT reported that 34 people travelled to Mount Athos from 4-18 May this year for the usual two-week path-clearing pilgrimage. Despite some poor weather, the trip was again a great success. There is already a double figure waiting list for next year's path clearing pilgrimage.

#### 6. Treasurer's report

BCE presented the report in Peter Stevenson's absence. 2024 was a satisfactory year; in particular the Madingley Conference covered its costs thanks to sponsorship. Subscription income was down, principally in the US, but expenditure was well controlled. As a result, there was a modest loss on Unrestricted Funds of £855 (2023: £635). Once again, the carried forward balance of £26,709 remains comfortably above the charity's £25,000 desirable minimum level. During the year, the Executive Committee agreed a second grant instalment of £1,000 from unrestricted funds towards the Simonopetra archiving project, and a £500 bursary donation. £10,000 was raised via the Christmas Appeal for the Axion Estin cell and in total, £13,960 was sent to Pantokrator. In addition, £5,612 was sent to aid Greeks affected by the floods in September.

Our new independent examiner, Simon Jennings, has qualified his financial report, due to incomplete details being available for the 2024 pilgrimage to North Macedonia. The Trustees consider this activity to be arranged mutually by a Trustee and participants and therefore not part of FoMA's core charitable activities. Accordingly, the receipts and payments relating to this pilgrimage have not been included in the accounts.

Copies of the official Trustees' Report and Accounts were available for inspection.

A motion to accept the annual accounts, proposed by Peter Lea and seconded by Nicholas Harff, was carried unanimously.

7. Elections

Christopher Thomas, Hugo Grimwood and Peter Stevenson were re-elected and Elizabeth Chesney-Evans elected en-bloc, proposed by Natalie Doran, seconded by Faiysal Alikan.

8. Any other business

None.

GS closed the meeting at 1.55 pm.

**Elizabeth Chesney-Evans**

**Honorary Secretary**

**8 June 2025**

