

The Linen Hall Library

Minutes of the 230th Annual General Meeting on Thursday 16 May 2019 at 1pm

Members in attendance: Ms Brigitte Anton, Mr S N Bridge, Ms Helen Broderick, Mr Sam Burnside, Mr Hugh Campbell, Ms Fionnuala Carson Williams, Mrs Alice Chapman OBE, Mr John Cross, Ms Dorothy Dunlop, Mr Ian J Forsythe, Dr R M Galloway, Mr John Gray, C T Hogg, Dr Eamonn Hughes, Mr W J Hunter, Mr John Johnston, Mr Gordon Lucy, Ms Lisa Maltman, Ms Noelle McCavana, Mr Christopher McCleane, Mr Rory McConnell (McConnell Chartered Surveyors Ltd), Mr Cliff Radcliffe, Mr John Roberts, Ms Nini Rodgers, Mr Oscar Ross, Mr Maolcholaim Scott, Ms Mary Ussher, Mr Barry Valentine

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Ms Karen Blair, Mr Peter Cavan, Judge Patrick Clyne, Prof James Stevens Curl; Mrs Anne Davies, Prof Simon Davies, Mrs Bernie Finan-Morgan, Mr Jack Johnston, Mr Wesley McCann, Mr Irvine McKay, Mr Eugene McKendry, Mr Jonathan Stewart

2. Minutes of the 229th Annual General Meeting (AGM) held on 17 May 2018

The 2018 AGM minutes were proposed by Mr Simon Bridge and seconded by Dr Eamonn Hughes

2.1 Matters arising

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

3. Reports from the Library

3.1 President's Address

Mrs Alice Chapman OBE, President of the Board of Governors, opened the AGM and looked back at the Library's 230th year:

- She said that she had been honoured to serve the Linen Hall as President during a year which had seen many successes as well as challenges.
- She congratulated the staff on the 2018 launch of the Divided Society digitisation project and looked forward to the new "Seen & Heard" digitisation project which was currently in its development phase.
- She reminded those present of the necessity of projects such as these in promoting the economic viability of the Linen Hall Library and hence its long-term sustainability.
- She thanked the Library's staff and her fellow Governors for their hard work throughout the year, and the Members for their continued support.

3.2 Director's Report

Mrs Alice Chapman delivered a report by Ms Julie Andrews, Director, in her absence. The Director thanked members for attending the AGM and apologised for her absence due to recent surgery. She gave an outline of activities in the Library in 2018:

“In 2018 an early highlight was the launch of the ‘Divided Society’ project. This was the culmination of 18 months’ hard work and it was a special privilege to have Kate Adie launching it. Thanks are due to Rachel Wetherall for her help on this very exciting and stressful day and the press coverage she achieved. The project provided us with an opportunity to digitise records and information from the NI Political Collection, but also to do some of the back-office work necessary to preserve our Collections for the future. In addition to this we had considerable community engagement throughout the project. Thank you to the team who worked very hard to bring this project to fruition. It was during a conversation with Rachel Brady regarding the outcomes of the education and outreach project that an idea for a new project ‘Seen and Heard’ was born. This is another major digitisation project which crosses literature, the Theatre and Performing Arts Archive and the NI Political Collection. It focuses on the developing roles of women since 1965. I am pleased to inform you that we received a first stage pass from Heritage Lottery Northern Ireland in the Autumn of 2018 and this was followed by match funding from the Peace and Reconciliation Fund at the Department of Foreign Affairs. These projects are necessary to provide us with core funding to help conserve these Collections. I look forward to reporting on this further at our next AGM.

In 2018 we started a new project regarding the Linen Industry. Funding was provided for this by Heritage Lottery NI, Department for Communities and Tourism NI. This will involve an exhibition and the training of tour guides to lead tours on the linen industry with a special focus on the linen buildings of the city centre. The project is being led by Rachel Brady. We were also delighted to start a new project: ‘Making the Future’. This project is being led by the Nerve Centre under SEUPB European funding and we are delighted to partner with them, PRONI and National Museums in its delivery. One of the early outcomes is the exhibition currently being displayed in the Library – ‘Anonymous is a Woman’. We are delighted to welcome Jason Burke to the team to deliver this project. Unfortunately, we did not receive programme funding from the Arts Council in 2018. However, we feel that the arts and cultural programming makes a valuable contribution to the life and footfall of the Library, and it is necessary to continue this. I would like to thank Deborah Douglas for her dedication to programming in the face of very difficult circumstances in 2018. Despite these difficulties you will see a broad variety of arts and cultural programming detailed in the Annual Report. This included exhibitions such as an exhibition on the 50th Anniversary of the Civil Rights Movement, ‘Laughter in the Dark’ (political cartoons) and a celebration of Chinese New Year. We were delighted to mark the 50th anniversary of the ‘Room to Rhyme’ Tour and to take part in the Gradam Ceoil music festival. These are only a sample of the activities that took place during the year, but they demonstrate the breadth of activities in the Library..

I was delighted to attend the Stone Mountain Highland Games, at no cost to the Library, and make valuable connections for the Linen Hall. I attended meetings at Emory, Georgia State University and Agnes Scott College. A particularly good relationship has been developed with Agnes Scott College. I was also privileged to speak about the Library and our wonderful Collections at the Irish Consulate in Atlanta and form wonderful links with the Atlanta Burns Club.

I would like to thank the Members for their patience and support during 2018. Unfortunately, we had to close the Library on Saturdays towards the end of the year due to core funding cuts across the board. By this stage you will be aware we have started

'Members Only' Saturdays in 2019, on the first Saturday of every month. This is to give you some exclusive benefits when we cannot open more widely.

At the end of 2018 we also launched a new Endowment Appeal to help conserve and preserve our Collections for the future. I am delighted to report that we have received tremendous support from our members.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Board of Governors, Managers, Staff and Volunteers for their support throughout the year. I would particularly like to thank Karen and Samantha for their support during my absence.

If there are any particular questions you would like me to answer, a member of staff will take the details and your contact information, and I will respond to you on my return to work. These questions and answers can then be appended to the minutes of this year's AGM."

3.3 Librarian's Report

Ms Samantha McCombe, Librarian, reported on library services:

In 2018 we continued to work towards the strategic objectives of safeguarding, managing and developing the collections; sustaining and developing the Library's role as a preeminent centre for Irish and local studies; aligning our General collection with the core strengths of the Library; utilising digitisation as a preservation and accessibility tool; while putting our Members at the heart of the collections; and much was achieved.

There were many enhancements to the collections during a busy and productive year.

As a membership Library the Linen Hall has an extensive general lending collection for the benefit of our members, and in 2018 we continued to rebalance spend between the collections for preservation and the collections for use. It has been pleasing to refine the general lending collection and focus on acquisitions in literary fiction, history, politics, and arts and culture to align with the core strengths of the Linen Hall.

Uniquely placed thanks to our history and heritage, our expansive Irish & Local Studies collection has been added to through acquisition and a comprehensive programme of retrospective cataloguing; and space created within the shelving has allowed material to be more immediately accessible.

Our Irish language collection, whose profile continues to be high thanks to the Irish language classes sponsored by the Ultach Trust, reading group and events held at the Linen Hall, benefited from key acquisitions and retrospective cataloguing.

The launch of the Divided Society project saw the culmination of extensive work with the Northern Ireland Political Collection - one of the most significant national and international political and social archives. The project saw a significant section of the Northern Ireland Political Collection digitised, concentrating on posters and periodicals from the 1990s. Over 500 journals comprising thousands of individual issues were digitised along with around 800 posters. All are available from the Divided Society website. A team of cataloguers added metadata information for each digitised image ensuring every article in every issue can be found and retrieved by users. The cataloguing and digitisation of unique materials ensures not only their preservation and longevity, but their accessibility; stretching the physical boundaries of the library. Not only is the Linen Hall taking care of

items entrusted to us and built up over decades, we are ensuring the NIPC is a living collection through acquisition and creating and curating content.

One of the highlights of the Divided Society project was the outreach work which included intergenerational reminiscence, school workshops, educational toolkits, oral histories, and two exhibitions. Engaging with the next generation of members of the Linen Hall and getting them enthused about the collections is essential. To this end, the project developed links with the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment to reflect the curriculum topic of 'Northern Ireland during the 1990s'. The creation of a resource tailored for use in learning, teaching and research makes the collections at the Linen Hall all the more relevant to current and future members and users. In 2018, the exhibitions created as part of the Divided Society project went out on tour, including to the Council of Europe building in Strasbourg, and promotional material for the resource featured as an integral part of a Good Friday Agreement anniversary event in Washington.

The continued academic reach and relevance of the collections is illustrated by 4,500 collection enquiries, and visiting students from 16 countries, including Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Switzerland and the United States, with 99 institutional affiliations recorded. We have also shared materials to support exhibitions, broadcasts – including the BBC's Great Railway Journeys - and numerous publications. Examples include items from the Burns collection being lent to the Braid and Museum at the Mill for the 'Hand to the Plough' exhibition, in addition to the Connecting Civil Rights exhibition at the Linen Hall, items from the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association archive were lent to the Tower Museum, Derry; Belfast Printed books supported an exhibition at Down County Museum; and extensive use of the theatre archives was made by the Lyric 50 project- in addition to raising the profile of this archive, an additional benefit for the Library was securing digital copies of the materials used. Monica and I have also given collection talks at Ulster University, Queen's, Titanic Belfast, PRONI, several family history societies, and at the prestigious John Hewitt Society Summer School.

Our unique and rich historical, literary and theatre and performing arts archives have benefitted greatly from improved organisation and listings - highlights of 2018 included the detailed listing of the Joy manuscripts, and the archives of Derek Bell of the Chieftains, James Ellis, Cathal O'Byrne, the Belfast Literary Society, Louis MacNeice, Word of Mouth, Ann Zell, Stewart Parker, and Michael McLaverty – some items from the McLaverty archive are on display in the cabinets at the back of the room; while work continued to strengthen the preservation and longevity of our museum accredited collections, and this work will continue.

The rolling programme of care and conservation of the collections continued with the creation of surrogate copies of unique NIPC materials. Collection enhancement funding under the Divided Society project also allowed for archival packaging and storage. And the Library's continued partnership project with the Ulster-Scots Agency facilitated another tranche of the Gibson collection being conserved. And it is very heartening that thanks to the generosity of our members, the endowment fund will supply funds for conservation of the collections.

My personal highlight of the year was securing the final close control unit which meant all our archive rooms now have state of the art temperature and relative humidity control, and our rare, unique and fragile items are now being stored in the absolute optimum conditions. We also made excellent progress towards our key objective of rationalising and reorganising the off-site store. The financial outlay for the store requires we ensure this space works for the Library, and work undertaken in 2018 has taken us closer to having an organised and usable reserve store which supports the workings of the Library. I am grateful to Monica for driving this challenging project, and to her, Marie, Andrew and Dicky for their 'hands on' hard work and positive approach.

However it is donations which I would like to draw particular focus to this year. Throughout our history, donations by members and supporters have been crucial in making the Linen Hall Library the unique resource it is, and I was overwhelmed by the number of donations in 2018. I feel the scale of donations reflect the high regard in which the Library is held, and the generosity of our membership and friends in this regard has been exceptional. Special mention to the late Mr Fred Heatley, whose collection of books came to us in 2017, with the donation being marked with a plaque in 2018, and to Mr Tom Hartley for his ongoing donations of material of significance to current and future researchers.

The Linen Hall is, and will continue to be, intrinsic to the story of Belfast, and we are trusted as the repository for our shared history and literary heritage. As well as donations of archives of Irish sheet music, the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, the Gerry Rogan Initiative Trust, the Belfast Interface Project, Word of Mouth, and the late Ann Zell, and James Ellis, and world-renowned children's author Martin Waddell, we received countless books, including rare Belfast and Provincial printed books. From numerous family histories, postcards, pamphlets, periodicals, posters, programmes, and other ephemera to a bust of Henry Joy McCracken, the collections have been greatly enriched by donations in 2018, and I am grateful.

The collection enhancement in 2018 is testament to the endeavours of the team, under the management of Monica, and supervision of Melissa, who, through their hard work and example, have motivated and supported the team to achieve so much. The team have shared their knowledge, skills and experience generously with each other. The feedback I receive most often is of how kind, patient and helpful the collection team is – they are truly a key asset to the Library, none more so than Heather Arrell who retired during 2018 after 39 years of service. Gratitude is also extended to our fantastic volunteers who support the workings of the Library by giving generously of their time. I would particularly like to mention Gerry Devaney who is an exceptional ambassador for the Linen Hall.

4. Annual Report and Accounts for 2018

4.1 Finance Report

The Finance Manager, Mrs Karen Law, had distributed a summary of financial results, highlighting the main trends in the Library's financial performance over the last four years, and described the 2018 results in more detail:

The Library held its own financially in 2018, in spite of a substantial fall from the high level of grants for special projects and the legacies that were received in 2017. The year-end

actuarial valuation of the pension scheme also made a significant difference to the reported movement in funds, however, you will notice that the balance on the bank overdraft, which is a better reflection of our normal operating activity, was only £31,000 higher at the end of 2018 than it had been at 2017 year-end, closing at £115,000, which is well within our £150,000 overdraft limit.

Looking at the income side first, and comparing 2018 to 2017, total income fell from £1.17m to £947k, which is a decrease of 19%. Page 2 of your financial summary compares the breakdown of income in 2018 to the breakdown in 2017, and you will notice that the biggest differences between the two years are in Grants for Special Projects, Donations & Legacies, and Rental Income. Rental Income in the previous year, 2017, had been unusually low at £83,000 because of the changeover of commercial tenants in our larger shop unit from the Co-operative Bank to Hotel Chocolat; they moved in in April 2017 under the same terms as the Bank, but with a rent-free period, which is normal in commercial lease arrangements. So, in 2018, total rental income returned to normal at £145,000. On the other hand, donations in 2017 had been unusually high, boosted by two very generous legacies of £100,000 each, with just the balance of one of these falling into the 2018 financial year. However, November 2018 also saw the launch of the new Linen Hall Library Endowment Fund, the income from which will be dedicated to conserving the Library's collections for future generations. £9,000 had been donated by the end of December and the total raised now stands at £24,000. I know that quite a few people in the room today gave generously to the new fund, and we thank you sincerely for that.

Page 1 of your summary shows that grant income of all kinds fell from £629,000 in 2017 to £449,000 in 2018, but the detail shows that funding for special projects saw the largest fall, and this was mainly because of the completion in January 2018 of the major Heritage Lottery-funded Divided Society project; the delivery phase of that project had been running for 20 months from June 2016. As has already been mentioned, we did not receive Arts Council funding for our arts and cultural programming year starting in July 2018, so only the first half of 2018 was funded in this way, to the value of £12,500. We have just applied again to the Arts Council for a contribution to our programme of events starting in July this year. Two other large projects started in 2018 – Making the Future and Linenopolis – then, in November 2018, Heritage Lottery provided funding for the development stage of “Seen & Heard”, another major digitisation project, this time focusing on the developing roles of women in our society since 1965. Match funding for this project was also granted by the Peace and Reconciliation Fund at the Department of Foreign Affairs. Most of the funded project work that we undertake includes an element of core costs such as staff salaries and overheads. In this way, projects provide much-needed extra income when we are faced with reducing core grant funding, as well as enhancing the Library's relevance and influence, and furthering its wider mission. Further details of project income and expenditure can be found in Note 20 of the full financial statements.

Turning to core grant funding, our main public sector funder, the Department for Communities, reduced its grant to the Library from £256,000 to £246,000 for the 2018/19 financial year, whilst Belfast City Council core funding stayed the same at £35,000, under the terms of their letter of offer covering four years until March 2020. The Department for Communities also granted the Library funding for a capital project in 2018: £20,000 to

replace the air conditioning unit in an archive room and to provide a new and upgraded Linen Hall Library website.

Income from membership subscriptions, which also help to fund core running costs, increased slightly from £136,000 to £138,000 in 2018.

All of the Library's sources of core income taken together are unfortunately not sufficient to meet its running costs in full, so the trading income that we derive from tapping into the earning potential of the Library's unique assets is crucial. For example:

- The Divided Society project has provided a new income stream by enabling us to charge fees for access to the digitised archive from outside the UK and Ireland. The first sale, to Boston College, took place in 2017, and sales totalled £18.5k in 2018.
- We are still running our rent-free charity bookshop and we have occupied our current premises at the Fountain Centre in College Street since June 2017, while the owner looks for permanent commercial tenants. The charity shop venture produced a surplus of £17,000 towards the Library's core costs in 2018, and is continuing to do well this year.
- The commercial use of the Library's meeting spaces, catering facilities and collections provided £25,000 of income in 2018.
- We constantly refresh our new range of literary gift items for sale, and these have proved popular and doubled gift shop turnover and profits.
- The in-house café continues to contribute a profit share to the Library under the management of the Boyles Group, who began operating with us in June 2015.

On the cost side, again comparing 2018 to 2017, total costs (other than those flowing from the pension scheme) were reduced by £231,000, and the charts on Page 3 of your summary show that this decrease related mostly to the reduction in income and spending on special projects last year. Core staff costs remained similar to 2017, in spite of a 2% inflation pay-rise and fewer core staff hours being employed on special projects. Other operating costs suffered minimal increases overall. The Library operates a defined benefit pension scheme through NILGOSC, the Northern Ireland local government scheme, and the Library's section of the NILGOSC scheme was in deficit by £188,000 at the end of 2018, which was a substantial increase over the £58,000 deficit at the end of 2017, but this was due to actuarial movements which are outside of the Library's control. As regards running costs such as insurance, gas, electricity, fire alarms and lift maintenance, suppliers and contracts are reviewed each and every time they come up for renewal, to ensure that the Library is still receiving the best possible value for money.

The Library's bank overdraft stood at £115,000 at the end of 2018, an increase of £31,000 over the 2017 position, but this balance does vary significantly over the course of a year, depending on the timing of income, some of which is outside of the Library's control. We work within an overdraft limit of £150,000 and enjoy a good working relationship with Danske Bank.

The Library also has investments and cash on deposit with the Northern Ireland Central Investment Fund for Charities, with Danske Bank and with Cunningham Coates stockbrokers, relating to the Catalyst, McLaverty and New Linen Hall Endowment Funds,

which, of course, are not available for spending, and a separate current account for Heritage Lottery project funding. We moved the Catalyst Endowment Fund from Barclays Bank to the NI Central Investment Fund for Charities in March 2018, because it was earning very little bank interest, and its returns are now around 3.4%.

Turning now to the Library's reserves and longer-term financial sustainability, as you will know, the Library is a registered charity, and this brings both benefits and obligations. One of the obligations is to have a suitable reserves policy. The Library's stated policy is to hold a level of unrestricted funds equivalent to three months' expenditure on core activities. At the end of 2018, this figure would have been £233,000. However, Note 22 to the full financial statements shows that the technical measure of the Library's free reserves was actually a negative £274,000, leaving us at around half a million pounds short of a healthy reserves position. In practical terms, this means that whilst the Library holds valuable assets in its collections and its building, cash flow needs careful management and constant monitoring, and we are vulnerable to the effects of any one source of funding being unexpectedly withdrawn. It also underlines the need to keep all costs under strict control and to maximise income.

4.2 Approval of Annual Report and Accounts

Mr Christopher McCleane proposed the acceptance of the Annual Report and Accounts; this was seconded by C T Hogg and was duly adopted.

5. Election of Governors

It was agreed that Mrs Karen Hoey, Mr Gordon Lucy, Mr Christopher McCleane, Mrs Lisa Maltman and Mr John Roberts were each elected to serve as a Governor for a three-year period.

6. Election of Auditors

It was agreed that Finegan Gibson Limited should continue as auditors for the incoming year.

This was proposed by Mr Christopher McCleane and seconded by Mr Cliff Radcliffe.

7. Any Other Business

In response to Mr Gray's remarks regarding financial performance, Saturday closure and membership numbers, the President said that the current Board and management had inherited significant challenges from previous Boards and Directors, but that if the Linen Hall Library was to be sustainable into the future, actions needed to be taken which might not sit comfortably with all members. She noted that there was no evidence of falling membership due to Saturday closure and that most members understood it was sometimes necessary to tighten our belts. The Finance Manager pointed out that income from membership subscriptions had increased in 2018, but that the membership statistics had had to be corrected during the migration of data from an old database to a new CRM system, when it was found that many ex-members were still being counted as current members. Membership numbers were not actually falling and in fact, it had been noted that more young people were becoming members of the Library.

Mr Burnside asked why the core funding from the Department for Communities had been reduced. The Finance Manager replied that this funding had been reduced by £10,000 in

2018 due to ongoing pressure on public funds, and that the Library had been advised to expect larger cuts in years to come. Mr Burnside urged the Board and management to make strong representations for the Library, as it was such a cultural treasure, and Mr Radcliffe reiterated that these were lean years for public expenditure across the sector and that the management had been making strenuous efforts to sustain the Library's funding in difficult circumstances. He noted that we had been fortunate in receiving legacies which had helped to sustain the Library.

C.T. Hogg remarked that difficult times required imaginative thinking and asked if the management team had approached bodies such as the CBI or NI Chamber of Commerce about holding their AGM's in the Linen Hall. The Finance Manager replied that the Library had around 45 corporate members and that room hire had been bringing in additional revenue in 2018, after the prices charged had been brought more into line with other city centre venues.

Ms Anton asked whether more might be done to encourage more members to the AGM and Mr Valentine suggested that the notice might be emailed out. Mrs Chapman said that this would be considered.

The 230th AGM closed. Mrs Chapman thanked all those present for their attendance and participation.

Mr C Radcliffe
Honorary Secretary