

The Linen Hall Library

Minutes of the 231st Annual General Meeting on Thursday 24 June 2021 at 1pm via Zoom

Members in attendance: Mr S N Bridge, Mr Hugh Campbell, Mrs Alice Chapman OBE, Mr Tom Clyde, Mr John Moore Crossey, Mrs Anne Davies, Professor Simon Davies, Mr George Dorrian, Mr Alan Esdale, Mr Ronald Galloway, Mr Tom Gillen, Ms Roisin Graham (NIPSA), Dr Eamonn Hughes, Mrs Irene Kingston, Mr Niall Lamont (Davison Lamont), Olwyn Lanigan, Mr Gordon Lucy, Ms Sinead McCartan, Mr Jim McCartney, Mr Chris McCleane, Mr Sid McDowell, Mr Philip McGarry, Mr Gabriel McGovern, Mr Seamus McKee, Ms Lisa Maltman, Mr Richard Molyneaux, Mr John Roberts, Professor Brian Walker, Mr Robert Wallace, Mr Tristan Wallace, Ms Jane Woods

1. Housekeeping

The President introduced Jason Burke and said that he would be managing the meeting. He asked Jason to go through some housekeeping for the Zoom meeting.

Jason instructed participants as follows:

- To mute their device
- To select speaker view
- If proposing or seconding a motion, this should be done via the chat function

Members were also informed that the Zoom meeting would be recorded for the purposes of record keeping.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr Mark Adair, Ms Karen Blair, Mr Sam Burnside, Mr Patrick McGarry, Professor Míchéal Ó Mainnín, Professor Olwen Purdue, Ms Mary Ussher.

2.Minutes of the 230th Annual General Meeting (AGM) held on 16 May 2019

The 2019 AGM minutes were proposed by Mr Tom Clyde and seconded by Mr Chris McCleane.

2.1 Matters arising

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

3. Reports from the Library

3.1 President's Address

The President mentioned last year's AGM; in line with the Constitution, the intention had been to hold an in-person event for the AGM, so it was deferred due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and this decision was communicated to members in April 2020, by which time the 2019 Annual Report including audited accounts was already on the Library website. The President indicated that it had proved impossible to hold an in-person AGM safely at any point in the year, as we had explained in our later message to members. This year it was still impossible to hold an in-person AGM safely but, rather than defer once more, the AGM was being conducted via Zoom.

The year 2020 had been difficult for the Linen Hall. The President expressed his gratitude to Sir Van Morrison, who generously gave a fundraising concert at the Lyric Theatre, and acknowledged the generosity of David Torrens of No Alibis bookstore, who donated the takings from the bookstall he ran at the concert. The President thanked Mr John Moore Crossey, a former employee of the Library, who had over the past couple of years made remarkable contributions to our holdings in Irish and local studies.

The President said that the Library had been unprepared for the effects of the pandemic on its day-to-day working but it had been a particular honour for him to see the speed, efficiency and goodwill with which staff and members adapted to the strange new circumstances. He mentioned that the Library had had to lock down in mid-March, but by the end of the month the Linen Hall Library Reading Group had been online, and on April 1st the first virtual exhibition had been launched. By the end of April, "extraORDINARYwomen" had been launched, the first online lecture had been given, and the Board of Governors had met over Zoom. The President thanked and paid tribute to the Library's staff and its members for making this rapid response possible. Although the building had been closed for long stretches of the year, the work of the Library had continued thanks to the dedication of the staff; those staff who could work from home had been carrying out their normal duties, and we had been able to make use of the furlough scheme for those staff for whom working from home was not possible.

The President said that the Library was grateful to have received emergency funding from The National Lottery Community Fund, The National Lottery Heritage Fund, the Department for Communities, and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. He said that the bids for these funding schemes had been successful because of the hard work of the staff, in particular the Director and Finance Manager.

The President concluded with heartfelt thanks to the Library staff, volunteers, members, and Governors.

3.2 Director's Report

Ms Julie Andrews, Director, thanked members for attending the AGM and gave an outline of activities in the Library in 2020.

The Director remarked that it would be an understatement to say that 2020 had been exciting and challenging, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. She did stress the word 'exciting' as the Library had risen to the challenges and considered new opportunities.

The Library closed on 18th March 2020 but all core members of the team had a device to work on from home and were connected to the office network, so home working was able to start immediately. It was a great financial relief to learn about the furlough scheme and the emergency programmes that started to be announced by various funders. Unfortunately, some of the staff did have to be placed on furlough and the Director thanked them for making their contribution in this way. She made special mention of Dicky, Facilities Officer, who came regularly into the Library during lockdown, to ensure maintenance tasks continued and that the building was safe and secure.

Head of Marketing, Rachel Wetherall, and Arts and Cultural Programmer, Jason Burke, rose to the challenge of promoting the Library online. In unprecedented circumstances, an online arts and cultural programme was born. The first online event was by Dr Gavin Hughes on Anzac day. Other speakers included Professor Eunan O'Halpin, Gareth Mulvenna, Michael Boyd, and Paul Donnelly. There were regular monthly meetings of the Linen Hall Book Club and the Irish Language Reading group, and the establishment of an LGBTQ+ History Group. The quality of the online programming attracted large international audiences and kept both the Library and its Collections relevant to people when the physical doors were shut.

During 2020 the Library received funding from the Department for Communities, Belfast City Council, The National Lottery Heritage Fund; Ulster Scots Agency and Foras na Gaeilge.

By the end of 2019 it had been confirmed that the Library had been successful in two bids to the Department for Communities, for the development of the Library's Children's Collection and a second for museum engagement. The museum engagement project was completed in the early part of 2020, and acquisitions for the Irish Children's Library were made by the Librarian while working from home.

At the 2019 AGM the development phase of the 'Seen and Heard' Project had been discussed. This had been successful and culminated in an application to The National Lottery Heritage Fund at the end of 2019 for the newly titled "extraORDINARYwomen" project. Match funding was secured from the Department of Foreign Affairs (Peace and Reconciliation Fund), the Foyle Foundation and Tourism NI. Further match funding was received from the Department for Communities in 2021. The delivery phase of the project commenced in April 2020 during lockdown and, although some of the staff were furloughed at times during 2020, the project was continuing with the support of its funders. This involved the employment of seven people in a project team in the Library.

The Library was fortunate to receive emergency funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund in July, which helped support core costs alongside upgrading IT equipment. Funding was received from the COVID-19 Charities Fund distributed by the

Department for Communities and The National Lottery Community Fund. Additional funding was received from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland's Organisations Emergency Programme (OEP) in August 2020, which allowed the development of Arts and Cultural Programming for the continuation of the financial year.

Funding was received from both the Ulster Scots Agency and Foras na Gaeilge for conservation of our languages collections. Opportunities also arose towards the end of 2020 to apply for additional funding from the Ulster Scots Agency.

In Summer 2020 a tender was put out for a new café operator. This was won by the Writers Café Group in early September, after consideration of financial bids and fit with the Linen Hall. However, due to another lockdown in October 2020, the café was not able to open its doors until 2021.

Later in 2020 applications were submitted to the Shared History Fund, distributed by The National Lottery Heritage Fund on behalf of the Northern Ireland Office, and the Heritage Recovery Fund, distributed by The National Lottery Heritage Fund on behalf of the Department for Communities. Outcomes of these were received in 2021 and will be reported on at the AGM next year. This funding allowed the Library to commission evidence-based reports which will help us with future funding applications.

Our 'Making the Future' programme in partnership with the Nerve Centre, PRONI, and National Museums NI, and funded by SEUPB, continued throughout the COVID-19 restrictions. The project embraced new technologies and online communication with individuals and groups across Northern Ireland and the border counties.

In conclusion the Director thanked the Board of Governors, Managers, Staff and Volunteers for their support throughout the year.

3.3 Librarian's Report

Ms Samantha McCombe, Librarian, reported on library services.

Thanks to funding from the Department for Communities we were able to enhance our children and young adult collecting to include works by writers and illustrators from or based in Northern Ireland and Ireland; books for children and young adults in the Irish language and Ulster-Scots; and from writers across the world which celebrate inclusivity and diversity allowing voices which reflect a modern, confident and outward looking society in Northern Ireland to be collected and shared.

Thanks to the generosity of our Members, the endowment fund supplied funds for the continued conservational binding of issues of the Belfast Newsletter. Ongoing support from the Ulster-Scots Agency allowed us to build upon work undertaken to identify and mitigate against risks to the Belfast and Provincial Printed Books collections - including stabilising and conserving the rarest and most fragile items in these irreplaceable collections.

We were also able to catalogue undocumented Belfast and Provincial Printed Books identified during the review of onsite and offsite storage which greatly increases the visibility and accessibility of these volumes and enhances the knowledge and understanding around early local printing.

The Linen Hall Library has over 4,000 items in its Irish language collection dating from the 18th century. Thanks to funding from Foras na Gaeilge, in 2020 we conserved rare and unique Irish language materials including treasures of the collection such as the Robert McAdam comparative lexicon. The lexicon dates from circa 1885 and consists of handwritten volumes of comparisons of Irish headwords with 28 other languages from Scottish to Manx Gaelic to Sanskrit.

The Librarian reminded Members that the archive rooms have benefitted in recent years from having state of the art close control units installed which environmentally control the archive rooms guaranteeing optimum temperature and relative humidity. Now, in addition to fire detection, a fire suppression system has been installed in each archive room for maximum protection.

The Librarian explained that the extraORDINARYwomen project focuses on the culturally and historically significant collections and archives of the Library which reflect and illustrate women's lives and experiences in Northern Ireland since 1965. In terms of legacy, the extraORDINARYwomen project also allows for the creation and capture of heritage through contemporary collecting, and donations, and in 2020 we were overwhelmed by the additions to the collections which the project has facilitated. A motif for the extraORDINARYwomen project is a piece by renowned artist Ursula Burke which we were able to acquire under a Northern Ireland Museum Council grant.

The Librarian stated that a full list of donors to the collections is included in the annual report, but she made special mention of Mr John Moore Crossey. Mr Crossey was Sub-Librarian of the Linen Hall from 1956-1959 before emigrating to the United States of America to continue his library career in such illustrious institutions as Yale University. Mr Crossey's interest in and affection for the Linen Hall sustained. Mr Crossey's tremendous generosity has allowed us to add thousands of Irish and local studies books to our collections.

The Librarian thanked the Board of Governors, Director, Monica, Melissa and the collections team, and Members for the support received during 2020.

4. Annual Report and Accounts for 2020

4.1 Finance Report

The Finance Manager, Ms Karen Law, had prepared a summary of financial results and highlighted the following:

The Library experienced a challenging year in financial terms in 2020, with its doors closed to members, visitors and the majority of staff for 26 weeks out of 52. Of the 26 weeks that we were not in full lockdown, only the first 12 weeks of the year allowed for our normal trading activities in room hire, tours, ticket sales, the café and the gift shop, although the charity bookshop was able to open a little more often through the year than

the Library itself. Visitor-facing staff and others whose jobs were not suitable for working from home were put on furlough while some core staff and project staff continued to work, with the Facilities Officer braving the trip into the city centre to keep a regular check on the building and critical services such as the air conditioning in the archive rooms.

The Finance Manager's first priority was to make the financial case for grant assistance from various funders; grants to replace lost trading income, to cover the additional costs that came with the pandemic, and to provide the opportunity for extra projects to build up resilience and prepare the Library for enhanced performance in future. The management team was successful in securing emergency funding from National Lottery Heritage Fund, the Department for Communities, the Ulster-Scots Agency and Arts Council NI as well as availing of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and the Department of Finance Localised Restrictions Support Scheme.

The balance on the bank overdraft, which is a fair reflection of operating activity as well as some timing factors, was only £6,000 at the end of 2020, compared to £129,000 at the end of 2019. We also came through 2020 with a small operating surplus of £23,000.

Comparing 2020 to 2019, the Library's total income increased from just over £1m to £1.26m, the largest difference between the two years being in Core Grants and Grants for Special Projects, with 2020 grant income much higher in both relative and absolute terms. Grant income from all sources was £861k in 2020, compared to £483k in 2019, with funding for special projects up by £202k and grants towards core operating costs up by £176k; the main drivers of these increases were the Covid-19 emergency funding obtained and the delivery phase of the extraORDINARYwomen project which started in April 2020.

The Department for Communities maintained its core grant to the Library at £246,000 for the third year in a row in the 20/21 financial year, whilst Belfast City Council core funding was reduced from £35,000 to £30,000, under the terms of their letter of offer covering four years until March 2024.

Income from membership subscriptions, which also help to fund core running costs, decreased in 2020 from £138,000 to £127,000, with some members delaying payment of their subscriptions while the Library building was closed, but we have not seen a corresponding fall in membership numbers and a good many people chose to join the Library after enjoying the online programme of events.

Income from donations and legacies fell from £151k in 2019 to £91k in 2020, as the earlier year had benefitted from several generous legacies, but all gifts and legacies are gratefully received, whether to general funds or to the Linen Hall Library Endowment Fund.

Whilst we did retain our two commercial tenants, Hotel Chocolat and Molton Brown, throughout 2020, their trading circumstances were difficult too, and we experienced delays, uncertainty, and some reduction in our rental income as a result.

In normal times, all of the Library's sources of core income taken together are not sufficient to meet its running costs in full, and we rely on trading income derived from tapping into the earning potential of its unique assets. Our Charity Bookshop sales, café income, sales of gift items, commercial use of the Library's facilities for room hire and filming, box office income and Library tours were all heavily impacted by the periods of closure and curtailed physical activities in 2020.

On the cost side, again comparing 2020 to 2019, total expenditure (other than those costs flowing from the pension scheme) increased by £16,000, and this increase related mainly to higher spending on funded projects. Core staff costs were reduced by £51,000, establishment costs by £31,000 and administration and financial costs by £12,000. Fundraising trading costs fell by £26,000 with the curtailment of these activities during lockdown.

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 £804,000 at the end of 2020, which was a substantial increase over the £357,000 deficit at the end of 2019, but this was due to actuarial movements which are outside of the Library's control. The cost of pension contributions, net operating charge and related finance in 2020 was £255k, up from £168k in 2019.

The bank overdraft stood at £6,000 at the end of 2020, an improvement of £123,000 over the 2019 position, and although this balance does vary significantly over the course of a year, depending on the timing of income which can be outside of the Library's control, the comparatively healthy year-end position was reflective of the small trading surplus achieved in 2020. 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 to cover running costs.

Regarding the Library's reserves and longer-term financial sustainability, 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 2020, this figure would have been £238,000. However, Note 25 to the full financial statements shows that the technical measure of the Library's free reserves was actually a negative £179,000, leaving us at over £400,000 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

Professor Brian Walker proposed the acceptance of the Annual Report and Accounts; this was seconded by Ms Anne Davies and was duly adopted.

5. Election of Governors

The President explained that there were no vacancies on the Board Governors as everyone was mid first or second term.

6. Election of Auditors

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

This was proposed by Mr Simon Bridge and seconded by Mr Chris McCleane

7. Any Other Business

The President said that, due to the generosity of Mr John Moore Crossey, the Board of Governors had decided to award Honorary Membership to him.

Questions

The President said that we had asked for questions to be submitted in advance as it was an online meeting.

Mr Hugh Campbell had asked how membership was holding up. This was passed to the Finance Manager, Karen Law, to answer. The Finance Manager said that confirmed net membership numbers had reduced by only ten, but membership income received in the year had fallen by around 10% due to delays in people paying their membership subscriptions in person during the pandemic. She said that there had been twenty-two new members in the period from January to May 2021. There was also growth in associate memberships from abroad due to the successful programme of online events. Membership numbers had held up better than originally feared, in that the revised budgets for 2020 had allowed for a fall of 20% in membership income due to the pandemic.

The second question was from Mr Simon Bridge, prompted by Nassim Nicholas Taleb's book *Antifragile*. He invented that word for the opposite of 'fragile' which, he suggests, is not 'robust' because if something robust is handled roughly it is likely to be unchanged - and he wanted a word for something which, as a result, got stronger. So, in that spirit, would it be fair to ask to what extent and/or in what ways the Linen Hall Library might emerge from the pandemic stronger than it was beforehand?

The President asked the Director to answer this question. The Director said that there will be tough times ahead, but we have tried to seize opportunities. Arts and Cultural programming moved us forward unintentionally to online international audiences and changed the Library's audience demographic. Heritage Emergency fund was applied for in 2020 but the outcome and impact of this happened in 2020. The Director reported that sustainability and resilience was considered when making this application, as well as immediate needs. Examples of things that have been happening in 2021 include:

Scoping Study for Digital Platform
World Host Training for all staff
BS76005 Standard in Diversity and Inclusion
Cyber Security Audit
Assorted items of training including copyright
Opportunity to employ early career museum professionals to interpret collections
by way of virtual exhibitions and social media
Archive assessment
Conservation assessment and work
Audience Development Plan
Social Impact Study

This will help us provide independent evidence for a need for more funding in the future.

There was an opportunity to re-imagine the Café, which has been phenomenally successful to date.

The President added that, in the early days of the pandemic, he had looked back at the Library's history and considered that the Library had been founded in turbulent times and survived other epidemics and pandemics. He said that we honour the traditions and values of the Library by adapting. He said that we had been expansive and inclusive throughout our history, and that this should continue.

The President concluded by saying that he thought next year's AGM should be back in the Library.

The 231st AGM closed.

Ms Karen Blair
Honorary Secretary