



# OPENING MINDS

LIBRARY, ARCHIVE & MUSEUM

## The Linen Hall Library

### Minutes of the 233rd Annual General Meeting on Thursday 25 May 2023 at 1pm in the Linen Hall

**Members in attendance:** Mr Frank Barronwell, Mr Simon Bridge, Dr Fionnuala Carson Williams, Ms Sheila Clarke, Ms Gemma Daly, Mrs Mary Delargy, Mr Alan Esdale, Dr Frank Ferguson, Dr Eamonn Hughes, Mr John Johnston, Professor Barry Kelly, Mr Gordon Lucy, Mr Jim McCartney, Mr Chris McClean, Mr David McFarlane, Mr Patrick McGarry, Dr Philip McGarry, Ms Maria McGilly, Mr Irvine McKay, Mr Seamus McKee, Mr Anthony C.W. Merrick, Mr Harry Montgomery, Dr John McNulty, Professor Míchéal Ó Mainnín, Mr Michael Thompson.

#### 1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Judge Patrick Clyne, Mrs Anne Davies, Professor Simon Davies, Dr Dunne, Mr Jim Fitzsimons, Dr Mary Gethins, Ms Maggie Pernaut-Deschamps, Mr Robert Wallace, Mr Tristan Wallace.

#### 2. Minutes of the 232<sup>nd</sup> Annual General Meeting (AGM) held on 30 June 2022

It was noted that Mr Irvine McKay and Mr John Johnston had been left off the attendee list. This is to be amended.

The AGM minutes were proposed by Mr Simon Bridge and seconded by Mr Seamus McKee.

##### 2.1 Matters arising

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

#### 3. Reports from the Library

##### 3.1 President's Address

The President said that 2022 was a transitional year for the Linen Hall as it returned to more normal methods of operating after the pandemic. It was a pleasure to see in-person events again.

The President said that the Linen Hall was looking to the future with a sensitive re-branding by McCadden Design which linked to the development of the new website and digital platform funded by the Dormant Accounts Fund Northern Ireland.

The President mentioned the completion of specialist paper conservation of our first edition Ulysses. A related event was a remarkable film directed by Carol Moore of Molly's Soliloquy, read by 22 women. This was part of the Enlightenment Festival which celebrated and examined aspects of the ideas that founded the Library.

There were two significant losses to the Linen Hall in 2022 – John Killen, past Librarian, and John Moore Crossey, donor, and honorary member.

The President said his term of office was finishing and although he had served during an unusual time, it was a rewarding and engaging experience.

### **3.2 Director's Report**

The Director said that 2022 started on a sad note when we learnt of the death of John Killen, our previous Librarian, who worked in the Library for 37 years. John will be remembered fondly by many of our members for his good humour and knowledge of the collections.

2022 was the first 'normal' business as usual post covid year. During 2022 the Library was fortunate to receive standstill core funding from the Department for Communities of £246,000 and additional funding for a branding project, which sat alongside the development of our digital platform.

Funding was received from the Department of Foreign Affairs Reconciliation Fund for a special project looking at 'Years of Chaos and Hope – 1922, 1972 and 2022.' 1922 and 1972 were the two bloodiest years of the troubles in terms of casualties and in significant interventions by government. This led to a curated exhibition in the vertical gallery alongside an events programme. The Keynote lecture was by Dr Éamon Phoenix, who has recently passed away and will be much missed by everyone in the Library. Other events included an academic panel on the 1920s troubles, and an edition of 'Pop Goes NI' with Tim McGarry and Malachi O'Doherty. Because of the success of this project, funding was successfully applied for and received from National Lottery Heritage Fund to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement through an exhibition and series of events. An application was submitted again to the Department of Foreign Affairs Reconciliation Fund for another project looking at Borders and Boundaries. In December 2022 this was confirmed as successful. All of these projects give us an opportunity to highlight the collections and make them more accessible.

Arts Council for Northern Ireland Lottery funding was received for 'Home of Poetry.' This funding enabled focus on poetry and poetry collections in October and more events in

relation to this funding took place in 2023. This was a special project curated to celebrate the great poets of the past and present, and pushed boundaries by hosting new voices and themes. Participants included Maria McManus, Viviana Fiorentino, and Ammar Al-Najjar.

The inaugural Enlightenment Festival was held focussing on the Library's links to the Enlightenment and its radical progressive thinking, but also to the Library's collections. We plan to progress this on a bi-annual basis. This included events with Siri Husvedt and Jeanette Winterson and coffee shop conversations with Jo Egan. We would like to thank the following funders for their support:- Arts Council for NI Lottery funding; Belfast City Council; Department for Communities; Ulster-Scots Agency; Gallagher Insurance; McConnell Property and BAC Systems.

In 2022 a new website and digital platform was built to integrate our digital assets. Funding was received towards the end of 2021 and build took place during 2022. Funding for this was received from Dormant Accounts Fund NI. This is to strategically protect collections for the future, as well as to make them more accessible. This online repository already contains digitised material from the Library's archives and collections, and it will be constantly added to. At the launch, a highlight was the Linen Hall's partnership with the writer Rosemary Jenkinson. The Library will be releasing one chapter per annum of a book she has written – Extraordinary Times - which is a predictive novel about a referendum on Irish unity.

Work continues with the Ulster-Scots Agency and Foras na Gaeilge to ensure the conservation and development of our Language Collections. A second Ulster-Scots writing competition was developed in 2022 which was successful, and conservation continued on the Gibson Collection. Foras na Gaeilge funded the conservation of the McAdam Lexicon which is a hugely important treasure in our collections.

From a commercial perspective, the new café partnership – with the Writers' café group - has been tremendously successful and well supported. It generates welcome income for the Linen Hall. Room hire is starting to return as a source of income.

During 2022 the charity bookshop continued to thrive in the Fountain Centre and its income provides a significant boost to the Library's income, as well as being a welcoming ground floor space in the city centre.

The Director thanked the Board of Governors, staff and volunteers for their help and support. She commented on having an excellent staff team, who work incredibly hard to make the organisation relevant, resilient, and sustainable and stated she is immensely proud to work with all of them.

### 3.3 Librarian's Report

The culmination of extraORDINARYwomen provided an opportunity to reflect on the tremendous achievement of delivering such an insightful and collection enhancing project during the most challenging of times. The Librarian reminded members the project, focusing on the culturally and historically significant collections and archives of the Library which reflect and illustrate women's lives and experiences in Northern Ireland, added to our digitised content with unique primary materials from the world-renowned Northern Ireland Political Collection, Theatre and Performing Arts archive, and Literary archives, with an emphasis on the insightful Traveller collection and LGBTQ+ archives. And we continued to add content to the extraORDINARYwomen resource, such was the success of the project in encouraging donations.

The legacy of extraORDINARYwomen was noted as the procurement of a content management system for the archives, ephemera, and objects held at the Library, meaning they can be documented to the same high standards as our books and pamphlets. Collections Index+ is an excellent basis for maintaining high standards in the management, documentation and care of archives, objects, and digital assets. It will contribute to auditing and accountability, as well as enhancing the security of these rare and unique resources. With a wealth of cataloguing and search features, terminology and thesaurus controls, and SPECTRUM compliance, which is important in relation to our museum status, and ambition to gain archive accreditation, the system will underpin our digital platform, with the potential to open up the discoverability and navigation of these materials.

Art Unlocked allowed the team to audit, document, and take steps toward the conservation and preservation of paintings, prints and drawings. Through the project a collection of some 250 inspiring works of local and national significance from the 1700s to the present day was uncovered, by artists such as George Morrow, Mabel Annesley, the Gage sisters, John Luke, Joseph W Carey, Rowel Friers, and Eileen Ayrton. The Linen Hall art collection had not been comprehensively surveyed since 1985. As part of Art Unlocked, an audit of the 208 artworks identified in the 1985 catalogue was completed and updated location notes added. Location notes were also added to the overall art inventory. In addition to the inventory, a condition report with detailed observations of damage and deterioration and indicators of conservation priorities was completed. This report is an invaluable resource which will enable us to meet our future aspirations for care of the collection, and preparation for exhibitions and loans, through informed conservation planning and longer-term actions for preservation. All artworks were assigned unique accession codes attached to the artefacts, records, and digital photographs, so that each piece can be easily located, and its movements monitored. This lays an important foundation for improved retrieval and accessibility of the art collection. A corresponding accession register was also created which enabled us to record information including the provenance of the artworks, where possible. Many of the works in the art collection have been donated to The Linen Hall by Library Members and former Governors. It is intended that this document will function as a working record for new donations and acquisitions, so we can continue to grow our knowledge of the collection and establish the context of the works we hold. It is anticipated that the accession register will also provide useful information for future valuations of the collection. Over 600 reference photographs

recorded all the paintings, prints, and drawings. These images are a valuable first step towards the digital preservation and improved accessibility of these artworks by acting as surrogate copies, reducing over-handling, and helping facilitate viewing requests. The artworks were preserved via cleaning, packaging, labelling, and arrangement in organised storage. A new illustrated catalogue was produced introducing the art collection and the stories uncovered through the project. This full colour booklet showcases 25 of the art treasures and provides an overview of the types of diverse pieces we hold in our collection. It was published as an accessible electronic catalogue, available for download on The Linen Hall website. In addition to this, a list of artworks, generated from the art inventory, is available for consultation at the desks in the Library. Thanks to support from the Pilgrim Trust, the art collection now has comprehensive documentation in place, enabling the artworks to be enjoyed. To celebrate and launch the collection, an online exhibition of key pieces was curated, with highlights including images of the largest steam ship built in Ireland, the longest bridge in the British Empire, a miniature sketchbook from one of the foremost landscape artists in Belfast, and a painting by actress Moyna MacGill, mother of the late Dame Angela Lansbury. Workshops with students from Ulster University's BA Illustration and MA Cultural Heritage and Museum Studies courses were also undertaken. Students enjoyed a practical, direct approach to engaging with stories from the collection through drawing and a team-based 'Curate a Case' contest. The workshops were accompanied by a lecture and art display. The Librarian commended Ailie O'Hagan for her hard work, creativity, and enthusiasm for the Art Unlocked project, all of which contributed to it being such a success.

Generous funding from Foras na Gaeilge continued support for the Irish language collection. It is an expansive collection which is added to through acquisition and donation. In addition to continued conservational binding of newspapers, periodicals, and books, Foras na Gaeilge funded work on the unique Robert McAdam comparative lexicon which was showcased with the creation and accessibility of digital surrogate copies. A treasure of the collection, the extant handwritten volumes from circa 1885 of comparisons of Irish headwords with 28 other languages is a unique gem which it is our privilege to preserve for future generations.

Steadfast support from the Ulster-Scots Agency facilitated the continued comprehensive condition checking and conservation of the Gibson Collection of Robert Burns, with an emphasis on the aesthetically pleasing songbooks of Burns which illustrate the richness of this culturally significant collection.

The Librarian reported it was also fitting that in the anniversary year of its publication our first edition of Ulysses benefitted from specialist paper conservation to ensure it is in good standing for the next hundred years.

Members were also commended for supporting, through membership, the maintenance and upkeep of collections and archives, and through generous contributions to the endowment fund the continued conservational binding of the Belfast Newsletter.

The Librarian stated it was gratifying in 2022 to receive confirmation and certification of retention of full museum accreditation status; and excellent progress was made towards our key objective of rationalising and reorganising the offsite store.

The collection enhancement achieved in 2022 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.

A full list of donors was included with gratitude in the annual report, and the following were particularly mentioned - Tom Hartley, Anthony Drennan, Robina Ellis, and Dr Fionnuala Carson Williams. Sincere thanks were also extended to all the donors to extraORDINARYwomen, with special mention of the archive received from Geraldine Finucane. Other significant archives donated to the political collection in 2022 include that of Falls Community Council; Lord Peter Weir; and All Children Together from Mr John Kennedy. The Librarian reported we also received a beautiful, illuminated manuscript from the family of Joseph Lowry Stewart, the founder of the Stewart supermarket group; a painting entitled Belfast Field Naturalists' Club, Lough Erne, 1892 by and from Neill Speers, and a generous donation of fine editions from the library of the late Helen Madden.

## **4. Annual Report and Accounts for 2022**

### **4.1 Finance Report**

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

The Linen Hall was able to open as normal throughout 2022, after facing periods of closure due to Covid-19 restrictions that continued until late May in 2021. Income from fundraising trading activities such as room hire, ticket sales, the café, charity book shop and gift shop started to approach pre-pandemic levels again during 2022, and membership numbers remained buoyant.

The year 2022 also saw the delivery of projects for which grant funding had been received in 2021, such as £100k from the Dormant Funds Account to build the new Linen Hall digital platform and website, and £38k from the Department of Foreign Affairs for the Years of Chaos and Hope project, alongside successful applications for other projects carrying on into 2023.

It should be noted that the Linen Hall still had only positive cash and bank balances at 31st December 2022, although lower than at December 2021. The exceptionally high current account balance at the end of 2021 had been due in part to several grants being received near the end of the year for funded projects, and therefore expenditure, which would take place in 2022. The Linen Hall normally uses its bank overdraft facility of £150,000 to finance its day-to-day operations.

Comparing 2022 to 2021, total income fell from £1.58m to just over £1m. The biggest differences between the two years arise from the timing and value of grant funding, especially in grants for specific projects. Grant income received was just over £600k in 2022, compared to £1.1m in 2021, with funding for specific projects down by £398,000

and grants towards core operating costs down by £124,000; the main drivers of the high grant income in 2021 had been the ongoing delivery phase of the extraORDINARYwomen project, Covid-19 emergency funding, the Enlightenment Festival and the NIO Shared History Fund, as well as those grants received in advance for spending on projects in 2022.

The Department for Communities kept its core grant to the Linen Hall at £246,000 for the fifth year in a row in the 22/23 financial year, whilst Belfast City Council core funding increased from £30,000 to £32,250, under the terms of their letter of offer granting £33,000 per annum for the two financial years ending in March 2024.

Income from membership subscriptions, which go directly to help fund core running costs, showed a small increase of £5k over the previous year at £131,000, and the Governors and staff are always grateful for the loyal support of the Linen Hall by its members, which was especially evident during the pandemic.

Income from donations and legacies was £56,000 in 2022, compared to £127,000 in 2021, and all gifts and legacies are gratefully received, whether to general funds or to the Endowment Fund.

Commercial rental income from the two shop units owned by the Linen Hall fell from £123,000 in 2021 to £102,000 in 2022 as there had been a period of vacancy in one of the two shop units on the ground floor and the new tenant did not start paying rent until September 2022.

The Linen Hall also boosts its core income through trading activities that tap into the earning potential of its unique assets. Our Charity Bookshop sales, café income, sales of gift items, room hire, box office income and tours had all been impacted by periods of closure during the pandemic but began to build up steadily again as Covid restrictions were eased in mid-2021; the Linen Hall Café under its new management has continued to grow in popularity and revenue.

On the cost side, again comparing 2022 to 2021, total expenditure (other than those costs flowing from the pension scheme) was reduced by 4%, but core staff costs accounted for a greater share of the expenditure in 2022, and this is because a higher proportion of the payroll cost in 2021 had been rechargeable to funded projects. Establishment costs increased from £86k to £125k as the building was in use for the full year in 2022 and only 7 months in 2021. Administration costs were similarly affected.

The Linen Hall operates a defined benefit pension scheme through NILGOSC, the local government scheme, and the Linen Hall's section of the NILGOSC scheme was in surplus by £1.3m at the end of 2022, which was a substantial improvement on the £323k deficit at the end of 2021, but as always, this was due to actuarial measurements that are beyond the Linen Hall's control. It is reflected as an asset in our balance sheet, but it has no effect on cash flow. The charge included in our operating expenditure for pension contributions,

net operating charge and related finance in 2022 was £311,000, up from £308,000 in 2021.

The current bank account balance stood at £20,000 at the end of 2022, down from £232,000 in the previous year, and although this balance does vary significantly over the course of a year, the healthy year-end credit balance on 31st December 2021 reflected two years of additional Covid-related funding as well as grants that were received near the end of 2021 for funded projects taking place in 2022.

We work within an overdraft limit of £150,000 and enjoy a good working relationship with Danske Bank.

The Linen Hall also has investments and cash on deposit with the Northern Ireland Central Investment Fund for Charities, with Danske Bank and with Evelyn Partners stockbrokers, relating to the Catalyst, McLaverty and New Linen Hall Endowment Funds, none of which are available to spend, however the investment income from these endowments does contribute to conservation of the collections, the biennial McLaverty Short Story Competition, and to some core running costs.

The Linen Hall is a registered charity, and this brings both benefits and obligations. One of the obligations is to have a suitable reserves policy. The Linen Hall's stated policy is to hold a level of unrestricted funds equivalent to three months' expenditure on core activities. At the end of 2022, this figure would have been £305,000. However, Note 25 to the full financial statements shows that the technical measure of the Linen Hall's free reserves was a negative £275,000, leaving us £580,000 short of a healthy reserves position.

In practical terms, this means that whilst the Linen Hall 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 John Johnston proposed the acceptance of the Annual Report and Accounts; this was seconded by Dr McGarry and was duly adopted.

#### **5. Election of Governors**

The following people were validly nominated for election to the Board of Governors – Dr Frank Ferguson, Mr Jim Fitzsimons, Professor Barry Kelly, Mr Jim McCartney, Dr Philip McGarry, Mr Seamus McKee, Professor Mícheál Ó Mainnín; Ms Siobhan Stevenson.



## **6. Election of Auditors**

There was confirmation that Finegan Gibson had been re-appointed as auditors in 2022.

## **7. Any Other Business**

Mrs Mary Delargy said that she would like to congratulate staff on the work that had been conducted during the year. However, she would like to see more Irish language work and events. The Director said that the Irish classes would be re-starting as there was enthusiasm to do that but there had been difficulty in getting a tutor. The Director was also keen to have an Irish writing competition but had not received funding for that yet.

Mr Chris McCleane also expressed his gratitude to staff. He also thanked the retiring President, Dr Eamonn Hughes, for his contribution during the covid pandemic.

The 233rd AGM closed.

**Mr Simon Bridge**  
**Honorary Secretary**