

Scottish Poetry Library

MINUTE OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE SCOTTISH POETRY LIBRARY

Saturday, 23rd November 2019 from 12 noon

IN ATTENDANCE

Angela Blacklock-Brown, John Brindle, Patrick Corbett, Diana Hendry, Hamish Whyte, Tom Pow, Joy Hendry, Chris Boyland, John Brindle, Ken Cockburn, Stewart Conn, Anne Connolly, Christine De Luca, Colin Donati, Peter France, Frank Glynn, George Gwilt, James Harding, Diana Hendry, Joy Hendry, Malcolm Hughes, Julie Johnstone, Marcas Mac an Tuairneir, Ann Matheson, Drew McNaughton, Stuart Paterson, Tom Pow, James Ripley, Eileen Ritson, Charlie Roy, Nuala Watt, Hamish Whyte, Colin Will.

Co-Chairs: Gordon Munro; Jane Ryder

1. Welcome by the co-Chairs

2. Apologies: Martyn Wade, Ian Wall, Mary Robinson

3. Minute of 2018 AGM

3.1 Matters arising: Diana Hendry questioned the rise in legal and accountancy costs since last year. Co-chair Jane Ryder explained that the HR investigation, putting Law at Work on a retainer and library review had all been one off costs, but that modernising the governance of the SPL was a necessary expense that the board had approved. Costs will likely to be less next year but will always be a necessary expenditure to ensure compliance and that governance is fit for purpose.

3.2 The minute was APPROVED by the AGM.

4. Annual Accounts: The Director presented the Annual Accounts for year ending 31st March 2019. There were no questions from the floor.

5. Statement: Board member Fiona Forbes read a statement by the outgoing Head Librarian, Maria Carnegie (see appendix)

7. Chair's Report: Presented by Co-Chair Jane Ryder

A major strand of the Board work was to review its approach to governance. This involved:

- Increasing the number of Board meetings to ensure adequate time for consideration of all aspects of the organisation and trustees' responsibilities. Staff were invited to present at Board meetings
- Adopting the Scottish Governance Code for the Third Sector
- Approving a Scheme of Delegation clarifying the matters reserved to the Board and those delegated to the Director
- Approving and publishing an Operational Plan for 2019/ 20, covering all aspects of the organisations activity and allows us to better demonstrate the scope – and the challenges – of our plans
- Recognising that risk management was an area requiring greater attention

A significant Board initiative was the adoption of a comprehensive Development Plan identifying areas for improvement of relevance to staff, which included an all Board and staff

Away Day in March 2019 at which we heard presentations from staff and discussed the Development Plan, and two all day workshops with Board members and staff to discuss the equalities plan

A People Strategy was formally approved at the October Board. The three aims of the strategy are:

1. A resilient, agile, and adaptable organisation
2. A thriving working environment with a collaborative culture that fosters mutual respect
3. An empowered, healthy, diverse, and capable workforce and Board

The strategy follows the workforce journey through

- Recruitment and succession planning
- Induction and performance management
- Reward – not just remuneration but opportunities too and linked with encouraging individual professional development Finally a healthy overall environment including work-life balance, health and wellbeing

In December 2018, the Board received an independent review of the Library function. It informed the appointment of our Head Librarian and Assistant Librarian. The review also informed detailed ongoing discussion that there was a need for:

- More focus on the library collection
- Further user engagement with the library
- Partnership development across the library sector

The announcement by Creative Scotland that they propose to roll forward the funding agreement into a 4th year is particularly welcome. This gives the new Board a two-year window in which to fully explore options for a potentially more viable business model which might involve different funding and operating relationships.

There was an independent investigation in the New Year. From the Board's perspective this informed effort to engage with staff, particularly the development of the People Strategy. The SPL has seen a marked change internally, with very positive feedback from staff, including the outgoing Head Librarian.

At its meeting in October, the Board noted its appreciation of the Honorary Presidents for their exceptional contribution to poetry in Scotland, and the hope that they will come to see those internal improvements in practice

Given what has been reported in the press, whether accurately or otherwise, after the resignations of the Honorary Presidents, the Board did not propose to comment on allegations or questions relating to any individuals, including commenting at this AGM. The Board's view was that personal views are personal views. Collectively, the Board had carefully considered the situation and had unanimously agreed the following positions:

- *We unequivocally deplore racism, direct or indirect, and wherever it occurs*
- *We recognise that the assumptions, interpretations, and perceptions of individuals will differ according to their own circumstances and across different issues*

- *We regret personalised comments and public criticism of individuals in all aspects of this debate and we regret any hurt that may have been caused to individuals throughout recently reported events*
- *We continue to work with our staff, stakeholders, funders, and audiences to ensure that there is no place for racism in the SPL.*

Over the next two years there will still be considerable demands on the Board and specifically the Chair, the principle of co-Chairing was to be welcomed.

Jane Ryder announced her intention to retire from the Board after the AGM and handed over the rest of the AGM to Gordon Munro.

Board Member Marcas Mac an Tuairneir presented on the collaborative working between the Board and staff to produce an Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Plan

7. Director's Report

The Scottish Poetry Library continued to develop its creative work around our unique collection and the expertise of our staff and delivery partners. Emerging themes included increasing demand for online resources and the use of poetry to support health and well-being, particularly emotional intelligence, and resilience. Our new engagement role resulted in our work reaching new and more diverse audiences through workshops and events in the Library and targeted outreach.

The SPL launched its new website in November 2018. New digital content included the translation of key web pages and new content in Scottish Gaelic by Robbie MacLeod, a doctoral placement supported by the Scottish Graduate School of Art and Humanities. We partnered with University of Dundee's Centre of Poetic Innovation to develop new ways of digitising our concrete poetry collection through hosting a post-doctoral placement with Nell Widger. The Library hosted a feminist Wikipedia editathon with volunteer researchers adding biographies of overlooked women poets. Our audio-interview podcasts included a feature on Edinburgh Makar Alan Spence's St Andrews Square Poetry Garden.

The SPL programmed a season of Tony Harrison film poems in collaboration with Filmhouse Edinburgh supported by a donation from Lady Elliot. We supported the Edinburgh Art Festival's exhibition, *'Shilpa Gupta: For, in your tongue I cannot hide: 100 Jailed Poets'* at Edinburgh College of Art. The SPL represented Scotland on the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport's selection panel for choosing the UK Poet Laureate, with Simon Armitage being appointed at the end of the process. We supported Enterprise Scotland's 'National Chamber Music Day' with children's activity at the library. We programmed and hosted activity for Scotland's inaugural 'St Andrew's Fair Day' celebrating community and third sector engagement with the arts. We partnered with Crisis Scotland on creative writing workshops for people who have experienced homelessness. This resulted in a printed anthology of their work. 'Poet Explorers' activity engaged children at Dynamic Earth for the Edinburgh International Science Festival. We supported the Edwin Morgan Poetry Award, Saltire Literary Awards, Wigtown Poetry Competition and the Scottish Book Trust's New Writers Awards.

The SPL supported the Scottish Government Dublin Hub's cultural programme for Burns Day and St Patrick's Festival. In return we hosted an evening with Irish poets Stephen James Smith,

Felispeaks and Diajogo Hart. We programmed and hosted an evening of Latvian poetry as part of Latvia's national centenary celebrations.

The SPL hosted and programmed a season of poetry events as an official Edinburgh Festival Fringe venue to new, diverse, and younger audiences. Poets who read at the Library in the year included John Burnside, Caroline Bird, Vahni Capildeo, Jen Hadfield, Willie Hershaw, MacGillivray and Alan Spence. We celebrated the centenary of WS Graham, paid tribute to the late Tom Leonard and welcomed The Heretics. The Library also hosted monthly events for Vespers and the God Damn Debut Slam. We hosted the '*Body Slam: Kiss of Tongues*' event with Brazilian deaf artists. In support of Book Week Scotland, we partnered with Edinburgh Caribbean Association to present a special evening with musician Akala and an invited audience of young adults. We also hosted Neu! Reekie! & 404 Ink's event with American poet Jason Reynolds and Kayus Bankole of the band Young Fathers.

The SPL produced a '*Traveling Death Café*' and creative writing workshop as part of the '*Not Dead Yet*' project for the Glasgow International Festival. We organised with poet Ken Cockburn a teachers' CLDP workshop focusing on the Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert. We hosted writing workshops for children in care in partnership with Moniack Mhor. After a series of successful taster sessions with the Healthy Living Centre's Women's Group and Gate 55's Young Mums and Everyday English Group, the SPL was invited back to deliver tailored sessions with a monthly group at Wester Hailes Library.

James Naughtie guest edited our 'Best of the Best Scottish Poems' online anthology and chaired a special event at Aye Write festival in Glasgow. For National Poetry Day we partnered with Glasgow Life to display Colin Herd's '*Meadowbank Changing Manifesto*' in the city's leisure centres. With the expert support of former staff member Lizzie MacGregor, we led on a national poll to select a poem for display on a new Scottish War Poets Memorial in Edinburgh's Makar's Court.

The SPL launched a new anthology '*To Learn the Future: Tools of the Trade for Teachers*' at the Edinburgh International Book Festival. We hosted a poetry pamphlet fair at the library presenting work by many of Scotland's leading specialist publishers.

Following investment in our new website, we witnessed a 30 per cent uplift in our online visitor numbers. Our total number of individual website users was 1.1M.

8. Board election

To receive the Annual Report: 24 in favour (incl. postal votes)

To authorise the Board to select an auditor: 24 in favour (incl. postal votes)

To elect Patrick Corbett: 17 for, 2 against

To elect Charlie Roy: 24 for, 1 against

To elect David Forbes Rutherford: 24 for, 1 against

8. Open questions from the floor

Stuart Conn described a recent experience whilst recording a podcast at the SPL. There was no suitable place to record to "broadcast quality" within the building, as background noise was a

problem in most areas. AK said that the SPL had applied to a funder for support with the costs of creating such an area, but that the application was unsuccessful. The SPL was aware it was a problem and would continue to try to find a solution. Costs were a problem.

Tom Pow commended the SPL for its programme and noted that things were going in the right direction. He had signed the letters of concern about the SPL and noted that improvements had happened, perhaps because of the letters. He refuted any inference of racism. This was the 3rd AGM in a row where concerns had been noted but he commended the work the SPL has done to make all people feel welcome.

Malcolm Hughes was delighted to have met with the new director but was astonished at the critical letters of him in the press, particularly as the timing was on National Poetry Day, when he himself was looking for positive stories about poetry. It was, he felt, a vitriolic attack on the director and the national press was not the place to discuss such concerns. He was outraged at what he called parochial and vicious attacks.

Diana Hendry noted that only the Board had seen the final report of the HR investigation in a closed session. She also noted that the Co-Chair had referred to racial discrimination, which, in her opinion, was legally questionable and that her view was that the Board did not appear to separate the personal from the professional. The positive changes were to be welcomed but the Honorary Presidents resigning would impact on the SPL's reputation.

Nula Watt (SPL Board member) said that it is often not appreciated how hard it can be to be a Board member and that their considerable contribution had made a difference.

Co-Chair Jane Ryder added that the staff and board have been magnificent.

Christine De Luca expressed concern about staff retention. She recognised that the Board had worked hard, and that better communication might have helped.

Co-Chair Gordon Munro accepted the point. The Board had met with the Poets Advisory Group and the Honorary Presidents. The Board had modernised the governance of the SPL. The new policies were also evidence of the organisation moving forward. He noted that Friends have a passion for the SPL and that there was a collective spirit of endeavour.

Joy Hendry said that she had worked with Tessa Ransford in a similar situation to the one the SPL's was presently facing. Joy had witnessed tensions between the founding-Director and the Board in moving the organisation forward. She noted that Tessa objected to her suggestion that computers be installed at the SPL but acquiesced when it became part of a three-year funding plan submitted to the then Scottish Arts Council. Joy decided to leave the Board at that point as people need to know when to move on and allow organisations to modernise.

Ann Matheson welcomed staff being included in Board meetings. She asked what the plan was to replace Maria Carnegie and Matthew Fellion (outgoing library team members). Would permanent contracts be offered? The library is the heart of the SPL.

The Director replied that Maria would be part of the interview panel for her successor. Contract length is, in part, dictated by the period covered by regular funding from Creative Scotland. However, the Board and senior management team were aware of turnover and had reviewed and improved remuneration for some staff in the most recent restructure. Co-Chair Gordon Munro also noted that board member James Ripley was a librarian.

Ann Matheson said the board needed to be aware of the importance of the library posts. Co-Chair Gordon Munro agreed, citing the library review.

Hamish Whyte seconded Ann Matheson's sentiments. He noted that poetry itself was bigger than all of this. Co-Chair Gordon Munro agreed and noted that there were still areas that the SPL needed to improve on, for example with emerging trends in the performance-poetry genre.

--MEETING CLOSED AT 13:30--

Appendix:

Letter from Maria Carnegie, Head Librarian, to the AGM:

Good afternoon,

Firstly, my apologies I can't be here in person, but my thanks to Fiona for reading this out for me.

I thought the AGM would be an opportunity to introduce myself to you, but it turns out it is where I say goodbye! I will be leaving the Scottish Poetry Library at the end of this year to take up the post of Head of Customer Services at Durham University Library & Collections. I joined the Scottish Poetry Library on a temporary contract, and that suited me very well – so I always knew this would not be long-term. But working for the SPL has very much exceeded my expectations of how much I would enjoy it. I have always felt supported here, listened to by Asif and the Board, able to voice an opinion as well as influence direction and activity.

It has also been a delight to meet the many visitors, students, Friends, users and poets who come into the Scottish Poetry Library, a varied, interesting and often vocal (!) group of people.

Special mention should go to the senior management team and all the staff at SPL; a co-operative, enthusiastic, talented, creative and knowledgeable team who have been able to teach me more about the world of poetry. I started with a strong group of colleagues and I like to think I leave having made new friends. I'd also like to thank the Board for engaging with my proposals.

Of course working in the arts and charity sector comes with its challenges, but, oh my goodness, it also comes with other rewards! I feel particularly lucky in having had the opportunity to represent SPL and present at the UNESCO Cities of Literature, oversee several exhibitions, host a talk at the EIBF and judge a poetry commission. Engaging with my profession through CILIP Scotland has been rewarding and offered a strong networking community. SPL achieves so much, with relatively little resource, and within its walls holds many delights and treasures.

Buying books and other items for the collection is always one of the pleasures of being a Librarian. My assistant librarian will no doubt smile if I mention the 'tractor book' – I love it; Toni maybe less so. But that's ok, we all have different preferences. The role of the professional Librarian is to look beyond our own personal likes and dislikes and remember that we're developing the collection and services for others. We have a wide variety of customers and need to be inclusive to all. We have to balance a great many needs, opinions and preferences. We're here to encourage new users and continue to excite existing users. We need to ensure services move forwards and reflect modern practices; always with an eye to the future. Librarians can be, and are, managers, strategists, educators, advocates, and policy makers – all skills important to the SPL.

While most of my tenure has been outwith the 2018/19 year, I hope you'll permit me a little reflection over the last nine months. I believe I have made a good contribution to the SPL while I've been here, including writing of several policies, especially creating a Collections Management Policy.

I've developed external links to promote our collections. We now have reciprocal weblinks to information and collections on poets with Edinburgh University and have recently contributed our catalogue records to a global database that provides access to collections across UK research libraries. I'm proud of my immediate team and what we achieve together – I've worked with Toni, Assistant Librarian, to update cataloguing processes and search terms to reflect current practice, terminology and, most importantly, to make our catalogue more user-friendly. Rod, Library Officer, is completing a project that will enable us to make more use of the pictures and prints in our collection. Ross, who looks after the shop, has refreshed the stock, improved the layout and introduced some beautiful new ranges of cards and pamphlets. Drawing on the skills of the wider team I've worked on the current exhibition with Hannah; celebrated National Poetry Day with Sam; Colin has helped me introduce new services to our website and I couldn't have done launch events without Beth. If I ask Aly for something, he finds a way to make it happen. I did say this is an awesome team didn't I?

I'd like to thank Asif and Jane for giving me the opportunity to work for SPL, – I have thoroughly enjoyed it and feel I have gained much from the experience. I am truly sorry it's come to a close. I leave as a positive advocate for the SPL. I shall indeed be sad to say goodbye to the Library and to the team, and hope to stay in touch.

I wish the Board, the staff team, volunteers, friends and users the very best for the future.

Maria Carnegie

Head Librarian
Scottish Poetry Library

22 November 2019