



**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Society of Authors in Scotland held at The Bonham Hotel, Edinburgh, on 21st August 2018**

*Sederunt:* Alison Belsham, Angela Blacklock-Brown, Damian Boyd-Otley, Jerry (James) Brannigan, Ann Burnett, Lucinda Byatt, Patricia Cleghorn, Mary Craig, Catherine Czerkawska, Bill Daly, Fran Drummond Moray, Myra Duffy, Caroline Dunford, David Ferguson, Joan Fleming, Margaret Forrester, Jim Fraser, Tim Gallagher, Rosemary Gemmell, Merryn Glover, Sheila Grant, Allan Guthrie, Richard Hallelwell, Jenny Harper, Wendy Jones, Angus Konstam, Ian Kunkler, Liam Leddy, Mac Logan, Chris Longmuir, Marie Macpherson, Elisabeth Mason, Hazel McHaffie, Moira McPartlin, David McVey, Donald Murray, Louise Robertson, Margaret Skea, Anne Stenhouse, Barbara Stevenson, Linda Strachan, Joan Sumner, Dawn Thom, Anne-Mary Wharton, Angus Whitson, Olga Wojtas (46)

1. The chair, Linda Strachan, welcomed all those present, including Tim Gallagher from the London office. There were official apologies from Vin Arthey, Anne Brown and Ruary Mackenzie Dodds.

2. The minutes of the 2017 AGM were proposed by Margaret Skea and seconded by Caroline Dunford. Those present approved the minutes and no comments were made regarding any matters arising from last year.

### **3. Chair's report**

The chair, Linda Strachan, started her annual report by saying what a privilege it has been to serve as chair for the past three years. At times it has also been a steep learning curve. As chair she attends the Management Committee in London where she has endeavoured to make the Scottish voice heard. The chair of the Scottish committee has no vote on the Management Committee, but nonetheless represents Scottish writers not only as a regional group but also as belonging to a country with a distinct culture and its own cultural bodies. Three places become vacant on the Management Committee each year and Linda urged Scottish members to consider putting themselves forward as candidates.

Linda also expressed thanks to her Scottish committee for all their hard work, in particular for the conference in 2017.

The writing retreat at Moniack Mhor was again very successful this year and there are plans to make this an annual event. Christmas lunches were held last year in Edinburgh and Inverness. There was also a Borders event in June organised by Margaret Skea. The incoming committee will continue with a programme of events and members are encouraged to put forward ideas. The Business of Writing, held on Saturday 11 August as part of the Edinburgh International Book Festival, was very successful and included readings from a children's author, a translator, a debut novelist, a poet and an established author, as well as a short session with an illustrator.

Next year there are plans to appoint a part-time SOA representative in Scotland to support the voluntary committee and to maintain contacts with the various cultural bodies, including Creative Scotland and Publishing Scotland. Part of Linda's approach has also been to ensure closer relations with other writing groups, such as SCWBI and the Writers Guild in Scotland. Scottish Pen now offers SOA members a discount on their first year membership.

#### **4. Treasurer's Report**

A copy of the accounts was provided to all members present and Merryn Glover provided a breakdown of the income and expenditure relating to the conference in September last year, as well as the ordinary affairs of the Scottish group. She noted that the grant from Creative Scotland had not been paid in full until well after the final report and evaluation had been made and this had led to the need for a bridging loan from London, which has now been repaid. The Society had pointed out the potential difficulties resulting from this long interval.

#### **5. Secretary's report**

Lucinda Byatt mentioned that Naomi Tarrant and Cathy MacPhail are not at all well and that the committee has sent cards wishing them well. The committee also sadly heard that Ann Swinfen passed away earlier this month.

The Scottish membership currently stands at 753, a rise of 39 since last year. Overall, the UK membership has now risen above 10,500, also thanks to an increase among the under-35s. The Scottish committee has continued to focus on outreach, with visits and talks to universities. It would be good to encourage more members in the remoter parts of Scotland. A postcode breakdown of membership provided by the London office shows a focus on the central belt and few members in the more far-flung areas. However, we have a cluster of 9 members in Orkney and 4 in Shetland – enough for a Christmas lunch party!

Lucy ended by thanking her fellow committee members, including those who were co-opted for the conference last year, Helen Forbes and Philip Paris. It has been very rewarding to work alongside fellow office bearers, Merryn as Treasurer and Linda as Chair. All in all, it has also been inspiring to see how much a committee of volunteers can achieve when they set their minds to it!

#### **6. Election of new committee members and announcement of new office holders:**

Linda Strachan introduced the three candidates for election to the committee and asked for proposers and seconds. The following were unanimously elected: Mary Craig (proposed by Margaret Skea and seconded by Wendy Jones), Mac Logan (proposed by Joan Sumners and seconded by Chris Longmuir), Louise Robertson (proposed by Merryn Glover and seconded by Al Guthrie).

Linda then announced that the following office holders have been appointed by the committee: Wendy Jones as Secretary; Allan Guthrie as Treasurer; and as Caroline Dunford and Merryn Glover as Co-chairs.

**7. Tim Gallagher (Public Affairs Manager, Society of Authors)** then gave a brief outline of his position and mentioned some of the current SOA campaigns. He asked members to keep an eye out for the monthly email about campaigns and he is particularly keen to hear from them if they have ideas or concerns.

Tim then took questions from the floor on:

#### **Women's Weekly/TI Media contracts**

Myra Duffy who asked about the topical issue of the contracts for *Women's Weekly* which has recently been taken up by the Society. Tim advice was clearly not to accept these terms. He later added Chief Executive, Nicola Solomon, has written to the company, expressing our

opposition to the terms and asking for a meeting with a view to discussing changes to their contract terms.

### **Live streaming of events**

Patricia Cleghorn requested live streaming of more SOA events held in London. Tim later responded by email after having spoken to the Events Manager about this. He referred that “she has explained that some of events are live streamed, and it is something we would like to do more of. One problem we have is that many of our events are held in the boardroom of our current building, which has a very poor internet connection. Once we move to the new building in March 2019, we will have a new events space and we will aim to do much more live streaming of events.”

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Caroline Dunford then thanked Linda Strachan for all she has done for the Scottish writing community and for the Society culminating in the past three years as Chair of the Scottish committee. Caroline similarly thanked Chris Longmuir for the constant support she has given to the committee. Merryn Glover then also generously thanked Lucy Byatt. The retiring committee received cards and applause from everyone present.

### **8. Any other business**

- Anne-Mary Paterson (Wharton) asked whether the committee could suggest ways of becoming further involved in the University of the Highlands and Islands. Merryn Glover replied that there was already quite a close connection with Highland Literary Salon and the Ness Bookfest, but that she would make enquiries.

- Mac Logan briefly described his involvement in the Colinsburgh Galloway Library, in the East Neuk of Fife. The library concentrates on outreach and would welcome any authors who would like to present their work.

- David Ferguson introduced himself as a new member of SOAiS. He has spent the past decade in China and would be pleased to offer help and advice to any members considering China as a potential market or even visiting.

- Patricia Cleghorn asked whether it would be possible to celebrate those members who have had books published in the past year. Linda Strachan thanked her for the idea and said that the new committee might be able to consider the suggestion.

- Lastly, there was criticism of the meeting room at the Bonham because of its awkward layout which made it difficult to see and hear. Wendy Jones pointed out the difficulties of finding suitable Edinburgh venues in August at affordable prices.

Linda Strachan asked for a show of hands and a considerable majority of those present were in favour of holding the AGM at another time of year, other than August. A move outside Edinburgh was also suggested, possibly to Stirling or Perth.

The meeting ended at approximately 1 o'clock.