



Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Society of Authors in Scotland, held online on 12 September 2020 from 1-2pm

Sederunt: Wendy H. Jones (Acting Chair/Secretary), Al Guthrie (Treasurer), Patricia Cleghorn (Committee member), Mary Craig (Committee member), Mac Logan (Committee member), Jane MacKenzie (Committee member), Lucinda Byatt, Maggie Craig, Nigel Kirkham, Julie Maclure, Peter Sheal, Jim Fraser, Anne Pettigrew, Timothy Noble, Merryn Glover, Sylvia Hehir, Miller Caldwell, Chris Longmuir, Angela Blacklock-Brown, Barbara Stevenson, Linda Hooper, Gillian Beattie-Smith, Stephanie Haxton, Ioulia Kolovou, Sara Broadley, Catherine Czerkawska, Nicola Mills, Olga Wojtas, Anne Stenhouse, Anne-Mary Wharton, Ceitidh Hutton, Marsali Taylor and Margaret Skea.

Associate members: Elizabeth Mason.

In attendance: Joanne Harris (Chair of the Management Committee), Anna Ganley (Minutes), Jo McCrum (Head of Groups) and Catherine Fuller (Translators Association Secretary).

Voting via proxy: Ian Giles.

A. Chair's Report

The Acting Chair, Wendy H. Jones, welcomed all present including Joanne Harris, the Chair of the SoA Management Committee. Apologies were received from Vin Arthey, Beth Junor, Louise Robertson and Linda Strachan.

This year, Wendy H. Jones gave the report as both Acting Chair and Secretary. After giving the decision much thought, Caroline Dunford had recently stepped down as Chair. Caroline has worked tirelessly over the years, not just as Chair but, over a decade of service to the Society of Authors in Scotland and to the Scottish writing community. The Committee is aware of her reasons and fully supports her decision. The Committee wishes her well for the future - she will be missed. Wendy will fulfill the role of Acting Chair until a new chair is elected at the next Committee meeting.

Wendy reported that it has been an interesting year for the SoAiS but also, more importantly, for authors worldwide. Usually this report would be full of events that the SoAiS had run and the many times members had met and talked about our books and authorship. Wendy also commented that she would usually be giving this report having chatted to many members beforehand. This year, with the ongoing health pandemic, this can only happen virtually, but for that at least, she is grateful, and for every one of our members who have been able to connect in in this way. While members haven't been able to meet in the physical world, we have been celebrating member successes online. As there is no sign of the health pandemic coming to an end soon, the Committee is looking at different ways to support members.

Despite the current situation, SoAiS membership continues to grow. There are currently 810 members, which represents a growth of 4.5% on last year's total of 775 members. The SoAiS comprises 7% of the overall membership of the Society of Authors.

This year, Wendy represented the voice of Scottish writers and the SoAiS at the launch of the joint CILIP/Big Issue Campaign in Support of Libraries, which took place at the House of Lords. She reported that whilst those in Scotland may feel the situation for libraries in Scotland may, in some cases, be considered shaky, she felt that Scotland is in much better shape than England. It was acknowledged at the launch that Scotland is a beacon of light on the literature landscape. However, Wendy was heartened to see the passion and drive that English libraries have in promoting reading, literacy and libraries and the ways in which they are working to ensure the continuation and growth of the service.

Wendy noted the following members who died over the last 12 months:

- Alasdair Gray
- Margery Palmer McCulloch
- Colin Patterson

On behalf of the SoAiS, Wendy noted our condolences to their families and all who knew them - they will be sorely missed as Scottish writers.

Wendy concluded that, as always, it has been an honour and a privilege to be SoAiS Secretary. She is looking forward to her final year in the role. She will work hard on behalf of members, and as Acting Chair, until the role is filled.

B. Treasurer's Report

Society of Authors in Scotland Accounts 2019-2020 (from 29.08.2019 - 31.08.2020)

Summary	2019-2020	2018-2019
A. Opening balance carried over	1522.59	1736.72
B. Income	5810.00	5233.00
C. Total (A+B)	7332.59	6969.72
D. Expenditure	6684.61	5447.13
E. Income minus expenditure (B-D)	-874.61	-214.13
F. Closing balance on 31.08.20 (A + E)	647.98	1522.59

Income

Moniack Mhor deposits	3259.00
Abbotsford deposits	1880.00
Highland Christmas Lunch	171.00
SoA Top-Up	500.00
Total	5810.00

Expenditure

Payments for Moniack Mhor	3259.00
Abbotsford fees	2698.90
Committee Expenses	726.71
Total	6684.61

See also the attached SoAiS 2020 Accounts Breakdown.

Allan Guthrie, Retiring Treasurer, 6th September 2020

The Committee and all present wished to express their thanks to Al for his ‘power of work’ under difficult circumstances. He helped Mac Logan and Margaret Skea with the Abbotsford and Moniack Mhor deposits respectively and made a complicated situation easy for those involved. Al is stepping down as Treasurer, which can be a thankless task at times - the Committee is very grateful for all the work he has done. Jane MacKenzie has agreed to replace Al as Treasurer.

C. Election of New Committee Members

There were two Committee vacancies at this AGM. The following members were elected to join the Committee:

- Donald Murray (Gaelic speaker from Shetland, writes mostly in English) – Proposed by Mac Logan, seconded by Mary Craig and elected all in favour.
- Sarah Tooze (novelist, playwright and poet) – Proposed by Miller Caldwell, seconded by Jane MacKenzie and elected all in favour.

Another position has recently become available as Louise Robertson has stood down from the Committee. We thank her for her service on the Committee. The Committee is keen to hear from members with fresh voices and fresh ideas to join the Committee and is especially keen to hear from younger members.

D. Resolutions

Resolution 1: proposed by the SoAiS Committee: that the minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2019 be approved. The 2019 minutes were proposed as accurate by Anne-Mary Wharton, seconded by Margaret Skea and passed with four abstentions.

1. Question from Merryn Glover: about the resolutions, Merryn asked if the wording is similar to the other Groups of the Society of Authors. Wendy confirmed that they are.
2. Lucinda Byatt asked if the resolutions had been circulated to the whole membership. Wendy confirmed that the membership has been notified of the resolutions by email and all attendees had received them by email as well.

Resolution 2: proposed by the SoAiS Committee: that the SoAiS Constitution be amended with the following addition:

The objects of the Group are to protect the rights and further the interests of authors in Scotland.

Subject to the approval of the Management Committee of the Society of Authors, the Group may do anything in furtherance of or ancillary to its objects including:

1. *representing members of the Group in an official capacity in all matters affecting their interests and protecting and furthering those interests throughout the World including negotiating rates and conditions on behalf of members of the Group.*
2. *maintaining and raising the status of Scottish authors including the promotion of relevant legislation.*
3. *seeking to improve conditions of payment and the status of Scottish authors.*
4. *holding meetings, conferences and other events to discuss matters of interest to members of the Group and to give them an opportunity to meet.*
5. *furnishing advice and information, through the Society of Authors (“SoA”), to members on all questions affecting them in their capacity as authors.*
6. *improving contact among Scottish authors throughout the world.*
7. *preserving and fostering good relations with industry organisations and counterparts.*
8. *if the Group’s members constitute 5% or more of the total number of Members of the SoA the Chair shall attend and speak at meetings of the Management Committee of the SoA but shall not have the right to vote at them.*

This was proposed by Merryn Glover, seconded by Steph Haxton and passed all in favour.

Resolution 3: proposed by the SoAiS Committee: that the SoAiS Constitution be amended with the following addition:

That the SoAiS Committee may resolve to enable persons entitled to attend and participate in a meeting of Members to do so by simultaneous attendance and participation by means of electronic facility or facilities, and may determine the means, or all different means, of attendance and participation used in relation to the Members' meeting. The Members present in person or by proxy by means of an electronic facility or facilities (as so determined by the SoAiS Committee) shall be counted in the quorum for, and be entitled to participate in, the meeting in question. That meeting shall be duly constituted and its proceedings valid if the SoAiS Committee is satisfied that adequate facilities are available throughout the meeting to ensure that members attending the meeting by all means (including the means of an electronic facility or facilities) are able to: (a) participate in the business for which the meeting has been convened; (b) hear all persons who speak at the meeting; and (c) be heard by all other persons attending and participating in the meeting.

This resolution was proposed by Lucinda Byatt, seconded by Jane MacKenzie and passed all in favour.

1. Merryn Glover requested that the updated version of the Constitution is emailed to the whole membership.
2. Mac Logan raised the point that with online AGMs how can we verify that the person is who they say they are. Anna Ganley replied to say that all attendees have to register in advance, they are named on their video feed and we can check all registrations with our database records.

E. The Chair of the SoA's Management Committee reported on SoA activities over the last 12 months

Joanne Harris thanked the Society of Authors in Scotland for inviting her to the AGM. During her term as Chair, Joanne would like to have more to do with the SoAiS and with members in Scotland as there is not always representation on the Management Committee itself.

Joanne noted that, as we have all experienced, it has been a very tough year for authors everywhere. It has been difficult coping with the circumstances such as books being cancelled or postponed, events and school visits lost, and we have all been going through our diaries crossing things out.

The SoA has been very aware of these difficulties and has been raising money to give out via the Emergency Fund, and so far we have given away close to one million pounds to various authors who had lost all their income as a result of Covid. The SoA put the Summer Challenge on hold and replaced it with a Fundraising Campaign to cope with the ongoing demand.

All of this has taken up a great deal of SoA staff resources whilst staff continue to work from home. This is a different experience for staff, which has meant they have been working more hours rather than less, and have been going above and beyond for members, especially around the Emergency Fund, when every case matters. It has been a lot to cope with and they deserve a round of applause. Joanne noted that it has been a personally distressing situation for the staff involved to deal with these applications on a daily basis.

The SoA @ Home Festival was programmed very much in response to all those who have lost work and connection because of pandemic. It has been well received by everyone. As a result, people have felt less isolated, especially those who wouldn't have been to ordinarily go to events. Having the festival online has enabled them to be included. This has been one of the few silver linings during this strange time. Going forward, a lot of events which would have normally been face-to-face, will now be hybrid, to allow those people to still take part.

Joanne reported that the SoA has seen optimistic news from bookshops re-opening and book sales holding strong throughout the pandemic. People are still buying books and they rely on creators more than ever. When people are cooped up at home it is important to establish human connection by reading – to have a shared humanity with other people. Books have been a lifeline. Joanne wanted to thank all members and every author who has contributed to this effort. Authors are providing a service, which is even more precious than it ever has been.

The SoA continues to lobby on authors' earnings – the SoA is very aware of the difficulties and the need to encourage members to talk about money, particularly through this period of social distancing when a lot of work has been done for free. This was necessary and good but moving forward, we need to remember that the SoA has spent a lot of time persuading festivals to pay contributors. They need to pay once more, especially now that they don't have the overheads they used to have with physical festivals. Members must feel that it is perfectly ok to ask to be paid a fee if they are asked to be involved.

Amazon has been doing perfectly well during this time as people have been relying on them for online purchases. However, many people are also now doing a lot to help their local and independent bookshops.

For the foreseeable future, it looks unlikely that school visits or visit online will continue. The SoA is looking for other ways to support members to diversify their income in this area.

Joanne reported that the SoA now has over 11,000 members, 7% of whom are Scottish members. Joanne wanted to note that she is based in Yorkshire – not in London – and she feels closer to Scotland than London in many ways. She is going to come to SoAiS events and Committee meetings. She also invited all the SoAiS Committee to attend Management Committee meetings now that they are online, as she would like more Scottish voices heard, especially those at the peripheries. As the SoA Chair, she encourages all members to participate, to get in touch with her direct and to ask any questions, any time, by email, on Twitter or at the AGM.

F. AOCB

The Chair invited questions from members.

1. Merryn Glover asked about the ideas the SoA is exploring for author visits. Joanne said the SoA is canvassing to see if there is an appetite for school visits, but she personally doesn't think there will be an appetite for some time. There is limited capacity in schools at the moment, teachers have a lot to do to cope with the new circumstances. There is an SoA sub-committee looking at this. We need to see how this school term goes in terms of how well teachers can cope, but it is not looking great for school visits at the moment. Some authors have managed to do things online, particularly with older students, but it is not realistic with younger children, sadly.

Merryn commented that some schools were quite keen, but the local authorities have banned local visitors coming into schools. Merryn encouraged all Scottish authors to work closely with Scottish Book Trust who are looking at specific solutions for Scotland. This is an important partnership in terms of engaging with schools as it is their *raison d'être*. It was also noted that Scottish Book Trust has been very proactive in providing funding for online author visits as they have done with physical author visits in the past.

Jo McCrum, Secretary to the Children's Writer & Illustrators Group, added that there is an online event on 19 October (as part of the Autumn/Winter Programme) to update members about school visits and how members can diversify their income. Candy Gourlay has been doing lots of work in this area. It is still very early to predict anything, but most school visits have been cancelled.

2. Jane MacKenzie commented on the enormous amount of money paid out to authors this year. She asked where this leaves the SoA finances? Joanne replied to say that this is not money from the SoA

but from generous donors – the donors are on the SoA website and Joanne urged people to look at this. The SoA is still trying to raise more as this situation isn't going to stop soon. Jane asked if staff had been seeking donors and that staff need more than a round of applause – it is heroic.

Anna Ganley replied to say that one of Nicola Solomon's top priorities when lockdown happened in March was speaking to organisations large and small about donations to the Fund. Anna also noted that the SoA is applying to Creative Scotland's new Hardship Fund, for a pot of money to distribute to Scottish authors.

The SoAiS wished to formally express their gratitude and appreciation for the way staff have survived this year and for their heroic efforts – it has been remarkable.

3. Merryn Glover asked for an update on last year's application to Creative Scotland for a development role in Scotland. Anna confirmed that the application was rejected but that staff and the Committee are re-grouping to discuss next steps.
4. Patricia Cleghorn asked if there was any news on the excellent At Home Festival. She commented that it was absolutely brilliant for authors all over the UK and beyond. Joanne and Anna confirmed that the Autumn/Winter Programme would be announced soon. It will run from October-December with the following three strands: Professional development, Afternoon teas and a new Wellbeing series of events. Online events will take place throughout the week, including coffee mornings about our prizes and awards and all the local group social meetings as well. Patricia wished to congratulate Sophia Jackson particularly for the Festival, commenting that it has been absolutely great.
5. Margaret Skea asked if the Autumn/Winter Programme sessions will also be available as catchups to watch later. Anna replied that they will be recorded where we have permission to do so.
6. Maggie Craig commented that the two At Home festival sessions with Ian Skillicorn were enormously helpful. He shared lots of great ideas and she has already seen a difference in her sales, so that has been great.

There being no other business the meeting was closed at 1.55pm.