



OPENING MINDS

LIBRARY, ARCHIVE & MUSEUM

The Linen Hall

Minutes of the 232nd Annual General Meeting on Thursday 30 June 2022 at 1pm in the Linen Hall Library

Members in attendance: Mr S N Bridge, Mr Hugh Campbell, Mr Tom Clyde, Mrs Anne Davies, Mr George Dorrian, Dr Eamonn Hughes, Mr Niall Lamont (Davison Lamont), Ms Olwyn Lanigan, Mr Gordon Lucy, Mr Jim McCartney, Mr Chris McClean, Mr Sid McDowell, Mr Patrick McGarry, Mr Gabriel McGovern, Mr Irvine McKay, Mr Seamus McKee, Ms Lisa Maltman, Mr Richard Molyneaux, Mr John Roberts, Professor Brian Walker, Mr Robert Wallace, Mr Tristan Wallace

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr Mark Adair, Ms Karen Blair, Ms Fionnuala Carson Williams, Mr Peter Cavan, Judge Patrick Clyde, Professor Simon Davies, Ms Mary Delargy, Ms Irene Kingston, Ms Sinead McCartan, Dr Philip McGarry, Mr William McStay, Mr Joe McVey, Mr H Montgomery, Professor Míchéal Ó Mainnín, Ms Maggie Pernot-Deschamps, Professor Olwen Purdue

2. Minutes of the 231st Annual General Meeting (AGM) held on 24 May 2021

The 2019 AGM minutes were proposed by Mr Simon Bridge and seconded by Mrs Anne Davies

2.1 Matters arising

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

3. Reports from the Library

3.1 President's Address

The President welcomed members and said it was a pleasure to be back in the Library itself and to be able to have this meeting in person after the events of the last couple of years. The year 2021 can be said to have been a period of adjustment. We had become practised in 2020 in working and providing events online, and in 2021 we made the further adjustment to working and providing events in a blended fashion, meaning that people could attend events in person or virtually. Highlights of the year included the launch of the website for our extraORDINARYwomen project. Equally successful was Ireland Divided: A Linen Hall Perspective, our programme marking the centenary of Partition and Northern Ireland with a variety of events considering the cultural and social as well as the political and historical



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aspects of the centenary. The President reminded members that many of our events, whether part of a programme or stand alone, are available on the Library's YouTube channel. It was good to be able to hold the Michael McLaverty Short Story award in December and to introduce a new competition for writing in Ulster-Scots.

The most obvious change to the Library (apart from Covid-19 safety measures) is the new café, run by the Writers Cafe Group, which has been a success, not least in its appearances on social media. Our museum accreditation, ratified in 2021, and our Tourism NI status as a visitor attraction enables the Library to extend the range of possible activities and interactions with other organisations. Some of the emergency funding for Arts, Culture and Heritage from the Department for Communities which the Library received was dedicated to evidence-based reports on audiences and websites which will direct activity designed to make the Library more sustainable. One visible, and cheerful, sign of changes to come is the expansion of the children and Young Adult collections.

The President said that we are grateful to the various bodies which have provided funding for our activities including the Department for Communities, National Lottery Heritage Fund, Department for Foreign Affairs, Shared History Fund, Belfast City Council, Tourism NI, Foras na Gaelige, the Ulster-Scots Agency and ACNI. We are also grateful for corporate sponsorship from John Roberts of BAC, Gallaghers Insurance, and McConnell Property. Such funding is by no means automatic; applications for funding require hard work by the staff, in particular the Director, Finance Manager and Librarian, and the success of those applications rests on the solid foundation of work by the whole staff which is responsible for the Library's continuing and growing reputation. One successful application is worth particular note: funding from the Dormant Funds Account will enable us to develop a new website for the Library. As we face into the future the President stressed that previous success in attracting (non-core) funding is no predictor of future success; and core funding remains in the hands largely of DfC and is subject to its priorities.

The President concluded with three notes that should strictly speaking be part of next year's AGM:

- There was a version of the NIPSA Annual Report for 2021 in Section C7.7 of which there an account of ongoing work regarding the staff employed by the previous café proprietor. This report unfortunately named the Library several times, giving the

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impression that we were at fault in some way. We wrote to NIPSA to make a formal complaint about this, and Carmel Gates, the General Secretary, immediately responded to say that the offending section has been deleted from the online version of their Annual Report and that all branches (which may have had hard copies of the report) had been sent an email ‘making it 100% clear that the staff referred to are not LHL employees and that the Library had no control or influence over Boyles in this matter.’ The President was impressed by the speed, thoroughness and courtesy of their response, and can therefore set members’ minds at rest about this issue.

- He informed members that Mr John Moore Crossey, whose honorary membership was reported at the last AGM, has sadly died.
- He also mentioned the sad death, about which many of you will have heard, of our former Librarian John Killen; the Director will have more to say on how the Library will commemorate John.

The President said it had been a year of change and “I am grateful to the staff, volunteers, members and Governors who have kept the Library going, and, while respecting its traditions, helped to develop it for the future. It is an honour and pleasure to serve such a vital and well-loved institution as President”.

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 2021. She reminded members that the Library was closed until May 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During that time, some staff remained on furlough. Others worked at home to conduct business as usual duties and to access funding. We were successful in accessing funding for emergency and recovery purposes from Heritage Fund, which was administering funds on behalf of the Department for Communities. Sustainability and resilience were considered, as well as immediate needs. Examples of items applied for included:- scoping study for digital platform; BS76005 in Diversity and Inclusion; Cyber security audit; training fees; archive assessment; preservation assessment; audience development plan and social impact study. The Digital platform scoping study was used as evidence when making an application to the Dormant Funds

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account in 2021. In November 2021 we were told that our application for £100,000 to build the digital platform had been successful.

In July 2021, the Library was assessed for BS76005 in Diversity and Inclusion – the Linen Hall became the first library/museum and tourist destination to be awarded this standard.

The extraORDINARYwomen project continued during 2021 and resulted in two exhibitions and a website with extensive resources; www.extraordinarywomenni.com was launched in November 2021 by Dr Lindsay Broadbent, a virologist from Queen’s University, Belfast. The Director particularly thanked Monica Cash for her contribution as she was seconded into the post of Project Manager at the end of the project and ensured it was delivered on time and budget. The media relations strategy was highly successful and on the night of the launch statistics showed 437 participants viewed online, with 60 in attendance. Numbers were restricted in-person due to covid-19 restrictions.

During 2021 the Linen Hall did receive funding from the Department for Communities; Belfast City Council; National Lottery Heritage Fund; Arts Council for NI; Ulster Scots Agency and Foras na Gaeilge. During 2021 the Linen Hall was successful in achieving funding from the Shared History Fund which considered partition and the centenary of Northern Ireland. ‘Ireland Divided’ was launched in September 2021 and an events programme followed, allowing high quality debate and discussion. Notable events included a lecture by Guy Beiner, and a panel discussion by the NI Centenary historical panel.

Restrictions were still in place for most of 2021 but the online events programme was successful in attracting new audiences. Of the evaluation responses, 37% stated that they were resident outside of Northern Ireland, with the most remote attendee from Melbourne, Australia.

Highlights of the Arts and Cultural programme included collaborations with the Imagine Belfast Festival; the Mary Ann McCracken 250 events with Clifton House and the LGBT history club. In August 2021 exhibitions returned to the Linen Hall with John Minihan’s exhibition about Padraic Fiacc. Monic McWilliams’ book launch in November was a highlight with large numbers attending.

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We continued to invest in our language collections with funding from the Ulster Scots Agency and Foras na Gaeilge. The Ulster Scots Agency funded an inaugural Ulster Scots writing competition and winners were announced during Ulster Scots language week. The Director said she would like to replicate this in future and to hold an Irish language writing competition.

In May 2021 a new coffee shop concession opened. This is a collaboration with the Writers Café group and has been tremendously successful. Molton Brown left their unit, and it is now occupied by Austen & Blake jewellers.

The Director said that it would be remiss of her not to mention John Killen. Although John passed away in early January 2022, it would not be appropriate to wait until the 2022 AGM to pay tribute. She worked with John from April 2013 until January 2015 when John retired. John joined the Linen Hall as Irish and Reference Librarian in 1977; in 1978 was appointed Deputy Librarian and in 2010 became Librarian. Even in retirement, John was a regular visitor and could be seen doing research in the Library. The Director said she would be liaising with John's family so that a suitable memorial lecture could be held.

One of the Linen Hall's major donors, Mr John Moore Crossey, passed away in 2021 and the Director said that she paid tribute to him and knew that the Librarian would have more to say in her report.

The Director concluded by thanking the Board of Governors, staff, and volunteers for their support during 2021 and said she was immensely proud to work with all of them.

3.3 Librarian's Report

Ms Samantha McCombe, Librarian, reported on library services.

The year began with the continuation of remote services and brought into sharp focus the value of the cataloguing and digitisation of our collections, ensuring not only their preservation and longevity, but their accessibility by stretching the physical boundaries of the Library.

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The collection-based extraORDINARYwomen project 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.

extraORDINARYwomen gave us the opportunity to reach out and to reengage with existing donors and to build relationships with new donors, which facilitated a great spectrum of donations from political parties; organisations; activists; academics; and writers. The project is a great example of building on our continuing contemporary collecting. We engaged with groups such as the Acorn group at NIACRO; the University of Atypical; Headway; the Amplify group in Dungannon; and numerous women's groups across Northern Ireland. And the oral histories captured elucidate the lived experience of those women. A particular highlight of the project was its academic reach through internships and placements with Queen's University and Ulster University students from the Seamus Heaney Centre; public history, education, and museum studies courses gaining experience and skills. A legacy of extraORDINARYwomen is the project allowed us to procure 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 forthcoming digital platform, with the potential to open up the discoverability and navigation of these materials.

The retention of our full museum accreditation was a significant achievement which involved a tremendous amount of work and industry to ensure our practices and procedures, documentation, disaster preparedness and emergency procedures all met the strict standards required. And while achieving reaccreditation was gratifying, the underlying and ongoing work will enhance the longevity of the collections by ensuring they are cared for and

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preserved in the optimum manner. The Librarian thanked Northern Ireland Museum Council for their support, and on display is a portrait of the Peace People's Mairead Corrigan Maguire by artist Amanda Dunsmore which we were able to acquire thanks to NIMC funding.

In addition, in 2021 we focused on maximising the opportunity of support for the collections facilitated by funding designed to enhance the sustainability of our rare and unique collections for now and the future. As such we were able to undertake several evidence-based works, including a preservation assessment survey, which provided an overview of the conservation needs of the collections. An in-depth condition check by a specialist paper and art conservator of all the political posters identified prioritised conservation needs.

Members will also be reassured by our having undertaken the cyclical valuation of heritage assets in 2021. A team from De Burca's rare books spent significant time with the collections and reported a very favourable valuation.

Generous funding from Foras na Gaeilge supported our Irish language collection. It is an expansive collection which is added to through acquisition and donation, and the funding facilitated much needed remedial and preventative conservation of books and periodicals – some of which are in the cabinet at the back of the room. A treasure of the collection is the Robert McAdam comparative lexicon – from circa 1885, extant handwritten volumes of comparisons of Irish headwords with 28 other languages. Representing a major contribution to the canon of Irish scholarship, the funding allowed for interventions by an expert paper conservator which prepared the lexicon for scanning to create digital surrogate copies of this unique gem.

Continued support from the Ulster-Scots Agency allowed us to shine a light on the conservation of the Gibson Collection of Robert Burns with digital and promotional curation and interpretation of this important collection – variously described in our written history as 'unequaled,' and 'without exception the most complete embodiment of the widespread influence of Burns.' In 2021 we were able to conserve some of the beautiful Burns song books.

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In 2021 we again focused on the archive of Michael McLaverty through the biennial short story award given in his name. The winning stories were written by Niall Bourke; Sabdh Moriarty; and Dawn Watson.

She mentioned some donations of note. Continued gratitude to Tom Hartley, Robina Ellis, and Dr Fionnuala Carson Williams. Sincere thanks to all the donors to extraORDINARYwomen, and for the generous donations from the libraries of Colán William Porter MacArthur; Russell McKay; and Sir George Quigley. Renowned poet Gerald Dawe gifted us a portrait by Peter Fitzgerald, while we received significant collections of original cartoons to the Northern Ireland Political Collection by John Kennedy and Rowel Friers.

While I did not have the pleasure of working with John Killen, the baton of Librarian was passed with grace and humility, and I appreciated his quiet support, encouragement, and professional respect. I am grateful for the last phone call we had in which we discussed our mutual ambitions for the Linen Hall, and I am tremendously sad that the new year coffee we arranged could not happen, and that Mr Killen did not get to enjoy more of his retirement with his beloved family.

It is also with equal parts sadness and gratitude that I acknowledge the passing of our Honorary member Mr John Moore Crossey. Those of you who attended our 2020 AGM will have heard Mr Crossey was Deputy Librarian of the Linen Hall from 1956-1959 before emigrating to the United States, and since his retirement from Yale University, Mr Crossey's tremendous generosity had allowed us to add thousands of Irish and local studies books to our collections. Mr Crossey's affiliation and loyalty to the Linen Hall endured, and generations of users of the Library will benefit from his generosity.

4. Annual Report and Accounts for 2021

4.1 Finance Report

The Finance Manager, Mrs Karen Law, had prepared a summary of financial results. This was delivered by the Director as the Finance Manager was absent due to bereavement.

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After experiencing quite a challenging year in financial terms in 2020, the Library continued to face the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic well into 2021, with our doors closed to members, visitors and some staff until late May, with no opportunity for some of our normal trading activities, such as room hire, tours, ticket sales, the café and the gift shop. Visitor-facing staff and others whose jobs were not suitable for working from home remained on furlough during this further period of closure.

The priority was to make the financial case for additional emergency funding - 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. As a management team, we were successful in securing emergency funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the Ulster-Scots Agency, as well as availing of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and the Department of Finance Localised Restrictions Support Scheme.

It should be noticed that the Library had only positive cash and bank balances at 31st December 2021, in contrast with the position at the end of 2020, when the current bank account was in overdraft. This is because grants were received near the end of 2021 for funded projects taking place in 2022. The Library normally uses its bank overdraft facility of £150,000 to finance its day-to-day operations.

Comparing 2021 to 2020, total income increased from £1.26m to £1.58m. The biggest difference between 2020 and 2021 is in Grants for Special Projects, with 2021 income much higher in both relative and absolute terms. The Library's grant income from all sources was £1.1m in 2021, compared to £861,000 in 2020, with funding for special projects up by £289,000 and grants towards core operating costs down by £26,000; the main drivers of this overall increase were the ongoing delivery phase of the extraORDINARYwomen project which had started in April 2020, the Covid-19 emergency

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funding obtained, and £99,000 from the Dormant Funds Account to build a new Linen Hall Digital Platform.

The Department for Communities kept its core grant to the Library at £246,000 for the fourth year in a row in the 21/22 financial year, whilst Belfast City Council core funding remained at £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, was comparable to the previous year at £126,000, and the Governors and staff are grateful for the loyal support of the Linen Hall by its members during the pandemic.

Income from donations and legacies increased from £91,000 in 2020 to £127,000 in 2021, and all gifts and legacies are gratefully received, whether to general funds or to the Linen Hall Library Endowment Fund.

Commercial rental income from the two shop units owned by the Library fell from £135,000 in 2020 to £124,000 in 2021 as one of the two high quality business tenants moved out during the year and their unit was not re-let until 2022.

In normal times, the Library meets its core running costs by boosting its income through trading activities that tap 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 impacted by the period of closure in early 2021, but built up steadily again as Covid restrictions were eased; the newly refurbished Writers Café has been particularly popular with both members and visitors.

On the cost side, again comparing 2021 to 2020, total expenditure (other than those costs flowing from the pension scheme) increased by £324,000, and the charts here on Page 3 show that this increase related to higher spending on funded projects. Core staff costs

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remained the same, establishment costs increased by £13,000 with the reopening of the building in May, and administration and financial costs by £15,000. Fundraising trading costs increased by £10,000 with the return to these activities post-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 £323,000 at the end of 2021, which was a substantial improvement on the £804,000 deficit at the end of 2020, 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 2021 was £308,000, up from £255,000 in 2020.

The current bank account balance stood at £232,000 at the end of 2021, an improvement of £238,000 over the £6,000 overdrawn position on 31st December 2020, and although this balance does vary significantly over the course of a year, the healthy year-end credit balance reflected 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 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.

Turning now to the Library's reserves and longer-term financial sustainability, as you will know, 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 2021, this figure would have been £260,000. However, Note 25 to the full

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financial statements shows that the technical measure of the Library's free reserves was a negative £42,000, leaving us at over £300,000 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.

At this point Mr Irvine McKay asked the President if he could ask a question in connection with unlimited pension liabilities. He said that the actuary of the NILGOSC pension scheme calculates assets and liabilities separately for each organisation and has increased the Linen Hall liability. He said that the Linen Hall is now paying 20.3% on all employees' salaries and on top of that has a further liability which is £804,000 in 2020 and 2021. Mr McKay said he believed the situation is now critical and thought that actuaries would be recommending substantial increases in percentage contribution and thought that the liability would be well over £1million in 2022. Mr McKay recommended that the Board should consider how the Linen Hall could extract itself from the scheme.

The Director said firstly that the actuarial valuations tended to be cyclical, and we could well find that it was an asset rather than a liability in future years.

In addition, this matter had been examined a number of years ago and it was not simple to leave the scheme. Usually a large amount of money (hundreds of thousands) was required to leave the scheme, contributions would still have to be made for existing pensioners and there would be costs involved in setting up a new scheme. She said the Finance Manager had more information on this and perhaps Mr McKay could send his query to her.

The President also reminded Mr McKay that it was not the responsibility of members to set terms and conditions for staff, as this was an operational matter.

Mrs A Davies said that discussion was most helpful, and that Mr McKay had made some fair comments.

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4.2 Approval of Annual Report and Accounts

Mr Irvine McKay proposed the acceptance of the Annual Report and Accounts; this was seconded by Mr D Johnston and was duly adopted.

5. Election of Governors

The following people were validly nominated for election to the Board of Governors – Mr Simon Bridge and Mr Joe McVey.

6. Election of Auditors

The Director said that audit services would be put out to tender in 2022 to ensure good practice in procurement.

7. Any Other Business

No other matters were raised.

The 232nd AGM closed.

Ms Karen Blair
Honorary Secretary

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