

# The John Clare Society

MINUTES of the 38<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting of the John Clare Society held on Saturday 14 July 2019 at St Botolph's Church, Helpston.

- 1. Welcome by the Chair.** The Chair, Valerie Pedlar, welcomed the President and members to Helpston and to the Society's AGM and Festival. She asked for a minute's silence to remember Eric Robinson and Edward Storey who had died during the past year.
- 2. Apologies for absence.** Apologies were received from Dorothy Rose, Erin Lafford and Gillian Davis.
- 3. Minutes of the last meeting.** The Minutes of the last meeting were signed as a correct record by the Chair.
- 4. Matters arising.** There were no matters arising.
- 5. Chair's Report.** Before her report, the Chair read out a short piece by Dorothy Rose in remembrance of Peter Moyse. She also welcomed Malcolm Garner, great grandson 5 times removed, of John Clare.

The Society has been actively considering the Society's archives held at Northampton Record Office over the past year. Peter Moyse donated his many photographs to the Society together with £1000.00 legacy towards maintaining the archives, and work is ongoing on how best to organise the photos and slides before sending them to the Record Office. Greg Crossan, who died recently, had much material from his work on Clare and his son has kindly donated this to the Society. The archive has been taken to Northampton Record Office. The collection of Clare material in Northampton Library has also been of concern because of the financial difficulties that Northampton Council is facing. Simon Kövesi is keeping an eye on what is going on there, and at present the collection is still available for viewing.

On 21 September a joint day with the Edward Thomas Society is being held in Helpston. There may also be a joint Byron/Clare day with the Byron Society in due course. 1820 was a significant year for Clare and so 2020 will be commemorated in various ways.

Simon Kövesi has organised a large literary project using Clare as a focal point and the Society has agreed to donate £2000 towards this.

Thanks were given to Margaret Chirico who addressed the children and presented the poetry prizes at the Midsummer Cushion ceremony on Friday. The head teacher had commented on how popular the Poetry Competition was and how much it stimulated the children.

Sadly today's keynote speaker Mina Gorji had to withdraw due to ill health and gratitude was expressed to Richard Astle of the Langdyke Trust who has taken her place.

Sue Holgate resigned as Festival Co-ordinator at last year's event and Simon Byshe and Keeley Mills took over as Chair and Vice-Chair respectively of the Festival Committee and set up plans for a more ambitious event. Unfortunately they both had to resign at the beginning of the year but most arrangements were in place and they were thanked for the work they

had done. Sue Holgate agreed to take over and was thanked. Thanks also were expressed to Clair Wordsworth who has produced this year's lovely programme.

Finally the Chair thanked the Committee for their hard work and support throughout the year.

- 6. Treasurer's Report.** Linda Curry presented the independently examined end of year accounts with explanatory notes. Some figures (for instance, membership subs and festival expenditure and income) straggle two years 2018/2019. There is £31,880 in the bank this year compared with £27,000 last year. Linda thanked John Davis for his independent examination of the accounts. There was a question from the floor about possibly moving the Financial Year to the beginning of the calendar year so that it doesn't fall so near the Festival. But this would need a change in the constitution in consultation with the Charity Commission. Also, many members pay by Standing Order at this time of year. However it was agreed we should consider the matter further at the next Committee Meeting. Linda would also consider producing an abbreviated form of the accounts for the AGM on the understanding that the full accounts would be available for those who wished to see them. A question was also asked about how we should spend some money as our balance is quite healthy. The chair made the point that we are lacking manpower to organise many events but are considering a publication to mark 2020. However again this depends on how a new publication would sell. Adoption of the accounts was proposed by Ron Ingamells and seconded by Chris Hunt. All were in favour of adoption as indicated by a show of hands. Valerie thanked Linda for all her hard work in presenting such clear accounts.
- 7. Membership Secretary's Report.** Robert Heyes reported that membership was stable which in itself is quite an achievement! He stressed that many members pay their Standing Orders for membership on 1<sup>st</sup> July and so he thinks it would be better if we keep the present system. He again commended Gift Aid and asked those who were not sure if they had signed up for Gift Aid to check with him.
- 8. Publicity Officer's Report.** Ann Marshall gave her report and stressed how important face to face contact was in widening the scope of the Society. She has attended Poetry Societies to publicise Clare and posts on Facebook pages. She has also been busy publicising the Festival locally to encourage those who know little about Clare to come along.
- 9. Sales Officer's Report.** As Mavis Leverington resigned as Sales Officer last year, she was thanked by the Chair for her and Peter's many years work promoting Clare through Sales and was presented with a gift.

David Smith was co-opted as our new Sales Officer during the year and presented a clear and accurate report on how sales stand at present. Sales were down on last year probably because October and February Newsletters did not contain a sales form. He would like to slightly widen the range of items and books relevant to Clare-lovers, in order to offer variety to visitors and members. The Chair thanked him for taking over this role from Mavis.

## 10. Election of Officers and Committee Members for 2019/2020

- Valerie Pedlar was re-elected as Chair for a further year. Proposed by Simon Kövesi and seconded by Peter Cox. Agreed by a show of hands.
- Simon Kövesi was re-elected as Vice-Chair. Proposed by Valerie Pedlar and seconded by Bridget Somekh. Agreed by a show of hands.
- Sue Holgate was re-elected as Secretary. Proposed by Ann Marshall and seconded by Kelsey Thornton. Agreed by a show of hands
- Linda Curry was re-elected as Treasurer. Proposed by Sue Holgate and seconded by Mike Mecham. Agreed by a show of hands.
- Other Officers to be re-elected :
  - Robert Heyes – Membership Secretary. Proposed by Simon Kövesi, seconded by Peter Cox. Agreed by show of hands
  - Ann Marshall – Publicity Officer. Proposed by Bridget Somekh, seconded by David Smith. Agreed by show of hands
  - Simon Kövesi – Journal Editor. Proposed by Peter Cox, seconded by Chris Hunt. Agreed by show of hands
  - Stephen Sullivan – Newsletter Editor. Proposed by Ron Ingamells, seconded by Peter Leverington. Agreed by show of hands
  - Sam Ward- Archivist. Proposed by David Smith and seconded by Peter Cox. Agreed by a show of hands
  - Other Committee members to be re-elected *en bloc*: Anna Kinnaird, Mavis Leverington, Mike Mecham, Noel Crack, Erin Lafford, Proposed by Kelsey Thornton and seconded by Simon Kövesi. Agreed by a show of hands
- New Committee Member to be elected separately: Mavis Leverington proposed David Smith as Sales Officer. Seconded by Valerie Pedlar. Agreed by a show of hands
- The Chair explained that Norman Lee and Hazel Carlin have resigned from the Committee and that David Dykes has been made an ex-officio member.

## 11. Announcement of a new Vice-President.

The Chair announced with pleasure the appointment of Peter Cox as a Vice President of the Society. She enumerated his work for the Society over many years – vice-chair, chair, editor of the newsletter, sales officer, conference organiser, lead judge of the children’s poetry competition, lecturer, running the poetry readings on festival day, editor of a recording for the bicentenary in 1993 – over thirty years of devotion to the JCS.

**12. Any other business.** Simon Kövesi explained about his new project which is aimed at people who don’t usually come to literary events. Workshops are being run in local libraries and other venues throughout the country to encourage people to get involved in poetry and in particular to know about John Clare. New poems will be commissioned and eventually set to music and performed at a venue in London in 2020.

**13. Date of next meeting.** The next meeting will be held in St Botolph’s Church, Helpston on Saturday 11 July 2020 at 10.15 a.m.