

THE LONDON LIBRARY

171st Annual General Meeting

Minutes of the meeting held in the Reading Room at 6pm on
Tuesday 6 November 2012

The Chairman, Bill Emmott (presiding), welcomed all those attending. He believed the Library remained in good shape financially and its members continued to make a major contribution to the country's cultural life. 44 members had received or been shortlisted for 61 literary awards in the last year, and members continued to make active use of the Library's collections. Some 85,000 books had been loaned and 71,000 renewed during the year, and staff had dealt with some 35,000 requests to retrieve and set aside material. Membership numbers were stable, with 841 having joined in the year resulting in a small net increase, and efforts continued to be made to reduce the rate of withdrawals as well as recruiting new members. Nearly 10,000 new volumes had been added to the online catalogue during the year and a further 14,000 added retrospectively from the old printed catalogues. The Library's catalogue records had been added to the COPAC database of national, research and specialist libraries, giving the Library's holdings welcome visibility to a wider audience.

The Treasurer, Mark Storey, gave a short presentation on the Library's finances. He began with a review of the last five years, illustrating how membership numbers had recovered after the losses following the 2008 fee rise. Fee income had increased so as to reduce the operating deficit (before donations and legacies), although the loss of Gift Aid from October 2010 had been a setback. Historically the Library had relied too much on major legacies to finance core expenditure and in 2011 legacy income had totalled nearly £500,000 but in 2012 this had fallen to £50,000, while most of the voluntary income derived from the Founders' Circle. The 2013 budget did not include any major legacies, and in future these would be used for strategic initiatives rather than normal running costs. The current financial year had seen a slight net fall in membership numbers to date but recent months had been positive and the Treasurer was confident that the eventual out-turn would be near the "break-even" position assumed in the budget. The Founders' Circle was doing well and over 100 people had attended a recent event in New York.

Staff numbers and costs remained tightly controlled since the restructuring in 2010-2011, but an investment had recently been made in the fundraising team in recognition of the range and scale of their responsibilities. The pension fund deficit had risen substantially since the previous year but this was mainly the result of difficult market conditions and necessarily prudent actuarial assumptions. The Library's reserves on a strict definition remained slightly below the notional target of £6m, but on a broader definition they now exceeded it at £6.8m, and they were invested in a blend of assets that produced a solid return with relatively low volatility. The investment strategy for endowment funds was currently under review but it might involve a somewhat higher equity allocation. Lewis Golden, a highly respected former Treasurer and Chairman, had recently donated £250,000 and a further £20,000 had been received from another donor who preferred to remain anonymous. Meanwhile the Sackler Foundation had donated £1m towards Phase 3 of the building project. In summary there had been some notable successes but plenty

of challenges lay ahead, not least sustaining and developing the Founders' Circle while yields remained low and the Library's specific costs rose faster than general inflation.

The Chairman thanked the Treasurer for his presentation. He thanked also the three Trustees who would be stepping down at the end of the meeting: Jonathan Sumption, Nicholas Underhill and Kevin Murphy. Their capability and commitment had been a huge benefit to the Library. He then invited questions from the floor.

The first question came from a member disappointed that *The New Yorker* and *Private Eye* were no longer available in the Reading Room. He understood that the reason for their removal was the persistent theft of copies, but suggested the use of binders might act as a deterrent. The Librarian replied that the *Private Eye* problem in particular was a long-standing one and the theft of copies could cause breaks in the run, as they were not easy to replace. She would, however, explore the effectiveness of binders on a trial basis; meanwhile members could always ask for the magazines at the issue desk.

A life member, Michael Kendal, noted that venue hire had raised nearly £9,000 in 2011-2012 but had been unable to establish how much income derived from each day of the week. If it were affordable he favoured restoring later opening (say to 7.30pm) for one more evening per week. The Chairman replied that so far venue hire had not proved particularly successful in itself, but that the building or parts of it were often used for other fundraising events. In recent months the Library had suspended transactional venue hire while it explored possible relationships with the corporate sector which could include venue hire as part of a wider offer. The Librarian added that the membership was divided in its preferences as to late opening. Some favoured a slight extension for several days per week, while others needed the Library to stay open till 9pm in order to be able to use it at all. It was still to be established whether the Library needed the building to generate funds, but if it did then any extension to the opening hours would have an additional cost attached.

Benedict Flynn observed that according to his own admittedly unscientific assessment fewer than ten members used the Library between 8pm and 9pm, while at the same time six staff were on duty. He did not feel that this was an effective use of resources or that it contributed much to the Library's overall purposes. He was aware that corporate events would typically require a long lead time but believed that meanwhile the Library should revert to its original opening hours, subject to some occasional disruption from venue hire. He objected to what he saw as bland replies in the Suggestions Book on this matter and believed he spoke for a number of disgruntled members. Another member agreed that 5.30pm closure on four days per week was a source of frustration for him. The Chairman assured him that the Library would review all the possibilities.

Gerry Bowden, a long-standing member, had heard that changes were proposed to the Reading Room and asked for details. Another member queried plans for the Courtyard Stacks and the impact of existing rights of light. The Librarian explained that these issues would be covered during her presentation at the end of the meeting.

A new member, Nicola Jones, was disappointed at the lack of "extra-curricular" activities at the Library, as she felt these could help build a sense of community among members. She cited the *Slightly Foxed* Readers' Day as an example. The Chairman commented that events of this kind were not generally profitable and on the contrary required subsidy, which was why they were not offered by charitable organisations without sponsorship. The Librarian agreed, and added that the Library did not have the staff capacity to plan, promote and run such activities. There was also a potential conflict with the Library's

commercial offering. She understood the need to foster a sense of community but explained that the Library was now looking increasingly to social media in this regard.

Another recent joiner had been surprised to learn that the Issue Hall had been upgraded two years earlier. He felt it looked dark and cluttered, and as such poorly suited to corporate events. He recognised the need for the Library's buildings to reflect its ethos but believed this should not ignore the expectations of younger members. In response the Chairman pointed out that among new members the largest segment was those aged under 25.

One member noted that expenditure on the book collection as shown in the Annual Report looked rather low as a proportion of the total, although he realised that this was supplemented by book donations and that the pressure from other cost budgets was considerable. The Librarian noted that staff costs were the largest single element of the expenditure budget, although members were often surprised by this. Non-discretionary expenditure had been pared to the minimum so there was no slack in the core budget, but the Library was now looking for new donors to fund specific collection-related costs such as digital and online materials. The Treasurer added that book acquisitions had not been cut despite tough financial constraints, since the collection was seen as a long-term investment. He remained confident that the Library had achieved a degree of control over its finances that would enable it to increase its investments in collection and service development in the future.

Another member commented that many younger members found the sharp fee increase at age 25 off-putting and suggested a smoother escalation with age. He noted also that the winners and runners-up in the first Student Writing Prize had all been Oxbridge-educated and thought this might evidence an elitist attitude. The Chairman, who had been on the judging panel for the Student Writing Prize, explained that entries had been solicited from the widest possible range of applicants but in the end the awards had to be given on merit. He welcomed help from members in connecting with wider audiences. The Librarian added that the Library now had contacts with some 400 higher education institutions as a result of the Student Writing Prize. On the fees question, she explained that subsidised Carlyle membership became available when members reached 25, but the Library would be looking at whether 25 was the most appropriate upper age limit for Young Person's membership.

Robin Wood asked how much longer the Retrospective Cataloguing Project was expected to take, and whether more use could be made of volunteers. The Librarian explained that as part of the 2010 restructuring the current and retrospective cataloguing teams had been merged into a single Bibliographic Services department. Two full-time staff had been lost in the process and consequently less retro-cataloguing was done in 2012 than the previous year, although a substantial legacy receipt had now made it possible to recruit two extra retro-cataloguers for one year. Where possible use was also made of volunteers who were themselves professional librarians since the tasks involved required specialist expertise. The project was probably about 60% complete but the timetable would depend on the resources allocated – it would be some years at least, although the project was high on the list of priorities.

A member was concerned that the Library was losing around 10% of its members each year and asked why this was. The Chairman explained that the Library continuously monitored the reasons stated for withdrawal and the recent full membership survey had provided further information. However, a degree of turnover was normal and simply reflected people's changing needs and lifestyles. For comparison, in the magazine market a non-renewal rate of 20% per year would be seen as very good.

The Chairman drew the questions to a close in order to complete the formal business of the meeting.

The members approved the minutes of the 170th Annual General Meeting held on 1 November 2011 by a show of hands, with no dissenting votes.

The members approved the adoption of the 2011-2012 Annual Reports and Financial Statements by a show of hands, with one dissenting vote.

The members approved the appointment of Andrew Popplewell, David Reade, Peter Stewart and Elizabeth Wilson as Trustees by a show of hands, with no dissenting votes.

The members approved the reappointment of Moore Stephens LLP as the Library's auditors by a show of hands, with no dissenting votes.

The members confirmed the appointment of the Duke of Devonshire, Lady Antonia Fraser, John Julius Norwich and Kenneth Rose as Vice-Presidents by a show of hands, with no dissenting votes. The Chairman noted with pleasure that in addition HRH The Duchess of Cornwall had agreed to become the Library's Vice-Patron (HM The Queen being the Patron).

The Chairman introduced the 2013 fee proposals, noting that the 3.4% increase reflected the Library's policy of aligning increases with specific inflation (which generally exceeded RPI). The members approved the fee proposals by a show of hands, with no dissenting votes.

The Chairman declared the formal meeting closed, after which the Librarian introduced a short film about the Library's building project produced by Jeremy Riggall. This gave an overview of previous project phases and future plans and featured the Library's President Sir Tom Stoppard, the Librarian and the lead architect Graham Haworth. The film was intended to promote the project to potential donors but also provided a useful summary for other audiences. As regards the next phase, the Librarian confirmed that the Reading Room would be refurbished but not changed fundamentally, whereas the works to the adjacent North Bay would be more substantial, producing a galleried space with similar look and feel to the Art Room. In the process the whole area would be upgraded and additional reader spaces created. The subsequent plans for the Courtyard stacks would also provide ten new reader spaces as well as three extra floors for books.