

Minutes of the Blake Society Annual General Meeting 8:00 pm on Wednesday, 19th January 2022 on Zoom

Trustees present: Tim Heath (Chair), Jonathan Mullard (Secretary), John Riordan, Peter Dodd (Treasurer), Stephen Pritchard (Acting Secretary) Sibylle Erle, Philomene Verlaan. There were 37 people in total in attendance.

The Attendees were welcomed by the Chair, who explained the following:

The Blake Society is a registered charity and under our constitution as an Unincorporated Association we hold an AGM in January of each calendar year. The Secretary then announced the items on the agenda, as follows:

- 1) Apologies for Absence: none.
- 2) Minutes for the last AGM had been published on the website and in newsletters: Minutes approved and no matters arising.
- 3) Annual Report of the Chair, Tim Heath:

During 2021 we held 12 events, one every month of the year.

We began with a ceramic artist Diane Eagles talking about her figurine *The Lamb at the Gate* made from the clay of Blake's grave and from the garden of the Cottage in Felpham. And we ended the year with another artist Brian Catling speaking about Blake's influence on his work – a practice that ranges through poetry, fine art, novels, performance art, filmmaking and pickpocketing!

There were three writers who were given a platform by the Society in 2021. Iain Sinclair spoke of the early influence of *The Mental Traveller* on his life in writing. Two biographers, John Higgs and Jason Whittaker, whose works on Blake were published during the year, expanded on their approach, one populist and the other subtle.

We enjoyed a discussion led by two academics from Poland and Brazil on the challenge of translating Blake's *Jerusalem*. And we heard from a Jungian Analytic Psychotherapist on how Blake enriches her practice.

For the first time we focused the combined intellect of the Blake community on a graphic enigma in Blake - the frontispiece and his subversion of this tradition in the printed book. And in a separate lecture we looked at the frontispiece to *Milton*, the illuminated book, and the importance of the Cottage at Felpham not only to *Milton* but to the life and legacy of William Blake.

For most of the year we were surrounded by fears of the pandemic and held our events on Zoom. However, in August we gathered in person at Bunhill Fields to mark Blake's

deathday - if you are going to dance with death then what better place than a graveyard?

On Blake's birthday in November, we launched the second issue of the Society's magazine VALA and during the year we posted a printed copy of VALA 1 to all those who elected to receive a recycled tree. VALA 3 will be on the theme of *Blake and Nature*.

Finally, to mark the 700th anniversary of the death of Dante we hosted a talk by Luisa Calè on Blake's illustrations to the *Divine Comedy*.

As trustees, one of our duties is to plan for the future and so we are looking ahead to the two hundredth anniversary of Blake's death in 2027. But we also have in mind the seven hundredth anniversary in the year 2527. By that time, we hope Blake's Cottage will be a place of international pilgrimage, the House in South Molton Street to be a home to the dissenting imagination and the legacy of William Blake as a universal visionary to be embedded in the world. *Eternity is in love with the productions of time*.

Our thanks to all the Trustees who gave their time and creativity to the administration of the Society during 2021. And a special word of thanks to Ian Frampton who brought his professional expertise to the presentation of our Zoom meetings.

4) Treasurer's Report (Please see spreadsheet for exact figures)

a. Receipts

There was a 27% increase in subscriptions from prior year; donations from ties/maps totalled £1759; in the prior year £696, + £1000 approximately since accounts completed to 31/10/2021; i.e., circa £3450 from the initial investment of £1389, and approximately 55 ties and a large quantity of maps remain.

b. Payments

c £8,000 approximately: major outgoings: £5,000 grant to Blake Cottage Trust; £2,000 to website development; £1,000 for *Vala*.

c. Other payments - in line with prior year.

d. The commercial approach taken to try to augment funds has greatly assisted and will continue to so do if efforts are made via newsletters etc. to sell ties and maps.

The Blake Society is in a healthy state and membership has grown substantially.

5) Secretary's Report

During the year the Secretary also became Secretary of the Blake Cottage Trust and thus much of his time was taken up with efforts concerning the Trust in its negotiations with Historic England and other bodies. Applications for substantial grants have been made and one already received from the Architectural Heritage Fund which will facilitate plans going forward.

6) Election of Honorary Officers for 2022-3

Three nominations were made:

Secretary: Stephen Pritchard

Treasurer: Peter Dodd

Chair: Tim Heath

As the nominations did not exceed the number of vacancies under the constitution of the Society they were duly elected.

This also applies to the nomination and election of the members of the Executive Committee:

Jonathan Mullard

John Riordan

Sibylle Erle

Philomene Verlaan

Jason Whittaker

Camila Oliveira Querino

Katharina Hagen

No objections were made to the above elections of nominees.

The Chair gave a vote of thanks to the Trustees for 2020-21 for their selfless work, energy and enthusiasm.

7) AOB

Katharina Hagen asked why are the costs for the webpage so high?

John Riordan explained that it was a relatively modest cost for an agency to build a new website.

Kate Kelly Tanguay felt excluded by the video cameras being off at the beginning of the meeting. The Secretary noted the comment and explained that it was simply intended to facilitate the AGM, and no sleight was intended.

The Chair explained that if attendees switched to Gallery view and the Spotlight was taken off we would be able to see each other more easily for the remainder of the meeting.

Susan Blake from the West Coast of Canada express delight and amazement, as a new member, for the Blake Society's work and hopes to come to meet us all. She has never felt so included by a group of intellectuals. She asked how to participate actively in *Vala* and would like to know more about the Cottage.

Sybille Erle responded with an offer of email contact.

Jonathan Mullard said he would be very happy to talk about Blake's Cottage.

Peter Dodd raised the idea of contacting the Grosvenor Estate concerning South Molton Street and the possibility of creating a more prominent memorial to the Blakes. Noel Chevalier, another Canadian attendee, praised the inclusiveness that Zoom had facilitated for Blake Society events and applauded the idea of a truly international Society and of 'blended' events, (both live and streamed), in future.

This was widely endorsed and the Chair made it clear that suggestions for topics for future events would be welcomed from members and noted that we had two newly elected trustees from other continents.

Kate Kelly Tanguay explained she has long had dealings with the Grosvenor Estate and that they work through a charity, which has a younger, enthusiastic group within it that may be more amenable to suggestions. More recognition of the Blakes' presence would be welcomed by her.

Philomene Verlaan, Trustee, spoke from Honolulu asking if the committee could take on the issue of the Grosvenor estate and Blake commemoration as an agenda item for a future meeting.

Sam Ross a new member and a poet and illustrator, said that he sang a song from the Pickering Manuscript through the door of Blake's cottage! A YouTube link to the event was placed in the chat.

John Riordan said that he should get in touch with both him and Sibylle regarding possible contributions to *Vala*.

The meeting was then concluded prior to a five-minute break followed by a talk by the Vice-President of the Blake Society, Keri Davies.

Stephen Pritchard (Secretary)