

## Blake Society AGM 7.30 pm Wednesday January 25th, 2023

### Agenda

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of the 2022 AGM
3. Chair's report
4. Treasurer's report
5. Secretary's report
6. Election of Honorary Officers
7. AOB

**The Chair** opened the AGM and the Agenda was displayed on-screen.

**The Chair** introduced the **Secretary**.

**Secretary:** We are a registered charity and we run our AGM according to our Constitution which is published on the Society page of our website. This meeting is only open to Members to speak and vote: all others may only observe. We are recording this event and it will be posted on YouTube: please DO NOT make unauthorised recordings or transcripts of this AGM. Thank you.

The Agenda is as follows:

#### **Item 1: Apologies**

I have received no apologies, and unless there are any in the room, let's move to **Item 2**.

#### **Item 2: Minutes of the 2022 AGM**

A copy can be found at the foot of The Society page on the Website. It is difficult to remember any event from a year ago, so unless there are any particular matters arising from these published Minutes let's move swiftly onto **Item 3**.

#### **Item 3: Chair's report**

##### **Chair's Report**

The Annual General Meeting of the Blake Society is an opportunity to celebrate Blake in unexpected ways that are only open to us once each year. As Blake wrote 'Administration is Divine' - well, he almost wrote it; perhaps the quote might yet be found in the teasingly lost work *The Bible of Hell*.

For the AGM we follow a formal agenda, the same agenda each year; 7 points of order that suggest the discipline of an early poem by Blake. At the beginning of each calendar year, we return to this poem and every year it takes on a different meaning; more subtle, more complex, more infinite.

By convention, the report of the Chair is a report on the activities of the Society during the year just ended. So, in our contrary tradition, let me break this rule and instead report on

the future. The Society was founded 111 years ago in 1912 and after falling silent in the Second World War was re-formed in 1985. So let me report retrospectively on the next century of achievements.

I am happy to record that the grave of Catherine Blake in Bunhill Fields was successfully marked with a stone and people are now visiting the resting place of one of the unsung visionaries of the Romantic period – a woman who signed the marriage registry with an X and went on to become a master printer, colourist and lover of William Blake.

The Cottage was opened in 2027 and has become an international centre for the dissenting imagination – a place of refuge for creative artists and a site of pilgrimage for those who are inspired by Orc.

After many trials and tribulations, the house in South Molton Street was secured for the nation – a home in the centre of Mayfair, a place of obscene wealth, yet situated in a peaceful pedestrian street within the hustle and bustle of a capital city. Number 17 has become a doorstep where visitors may pause for a moment before asking: Where shall we take our stand to view the infinite & unbounded?

The Society itself flourished. From a membership of 375 in 2022 it has overtaken the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and now has over a million members. Yet the Society remains an intimate companion that walks beside you through a journey of a life, raising troubling questions at each stasis of happiness. Not a respectable companion, but one of dubious integrity.

For those who were present at the talk given by Brian Catling, an artist who began his career as a pickpocket, a performance artist who puts things *into* people's pockets rather than taking from those pockets, then the Society acts in the same spirit. One day you reach into your trousers and find something unbeknown – a gift of shamanic significance, creating time, creating space according to the wonders divine of the human imagination.

The Journal VALA went from strength to strength, spawning a sibling publication the Blake Magazine, evidencing the popular approach of a confident society. Its first issue was entitled 'How to Fake a Blake' - because if you truly understand Blake then you are liberated from the shackles of historicism to create unimagined worlds.

There is only one great fake in the world of Blake, the Rummer, a glass for drinking spirits that first appeared in auction and was bought by the Cornell Museum of Glass in America. Into the lip of the glass are cut the words: 'Blake in anguish, Felpham Aug 1803'. Cutting into glass is plausible, a foray of an engraver into a new medium; and that the words should make you smile through his despair is persuasive.

There have been 3 Nobel laureates who have written novels inspired by Blake – from Poland, Turkey and Japan. Each one has so honoured WB in their loyalty to the imagination that it is difficult to identify any specific influence of Blake within their story – he escapes into the

anonymity of imagination. The laureates' imperative is to say things that have never been said before; and their responsibility is to awe.

If there is one principal achievement of the Blake Society during the last century then it is as an exemplar of governance – how a set of antinomian people, individuals who owe no allegiance to any conscience other than their own – can hold together to create something far greater than themselves.

I would like to thank all the Trustees who have served and all those who have yet to serve. The Society is in safe hands with Sibylle, a person who brings so many gifts to the role of Chair. She is a difficult act to precede !

**Secretary:** Are there any questions? None.

#### **Item 4: Treasurer's report**

Tim steps down at a very good moment for the Blake Society in terms of its financial stability. We weathered the pandemic, and whilst a small Society financially, we have not been affected by the winds that have rocked other organisations. The role of Treasurer is a relatively simple one, but as I've taken it over so recently there is still a degree of transition taking place. The Blake Society itself has no possessions, it owns no property, it employs no staff- and as such it's an organisation that can work much more closely with its members, and one thing I'm very keen to do as Treasurer when going through accounts, is to draw attention to how we can build in benefits, both for members and for the Blake Society.

And now with reference to the accounts, [accounts are shown on screen], membership is the principal source of income for the Society and with approximately 400 members we have a basic income of £7,500- £8000 pounds. Last year there were also a number of direct donations to the Society and also donations made for gifts through the website, which also supplemented the income for the last year. Against this, there were a number of elements for which we had some expenses but, in comparison with earlier years, it was a fairly lean year for the Blake Society in terms of its expenditure. Elements for postage and support of the website development and technical requirements, the essentials these days for keeping a Society with an online presence running. There was also some support for the performance of Stephen's play, *Albion, Awake!*, to help seed that production. Having been at the performance at Swedenborg House in May I think it's really important- tying in with what Tim referred to earlier- as an example of the patronage that the Blake Society can engage with, bringing something Blakean into the world. Another important creative activity that the Blake society engages with is *Vala*, the magazine. This, for the past two years, has only been available as an online version, but we do want to move this, in response to requests from members, to printed versions. Whilst I have been involved for a long time in digital productions with Blake there is always something about the tangible presence of the felt physical object.

This year in terms of expenditure was a modest year, this has helped to build up a healthy surplus. We have funds in a number of bank accounts, some of these are restricted. There were also donations made; one generous donation in particular with the aim of facilitating the marking of Catherine Blake's grave in Bunhill Fields. Once some of the civic and political hindrances to that project have been removed, it will be incumbent on the Blake Society to

raise further funds to make that come true. Another aim already referred to is the production of printed copies of Vala. It has been a great pleasure this year to work with a group of people-the Trustees- who are so wholeheartedly committed to Blake.

**Secretary:** Are there any questions? None.

#### **Item 5: Secretary's report**

There has been a wealth of brilliant Events this year, both live and online, thanks to the excellent work of all of my fellow Trustees and very much enhanced by the development of the new Blake Society website. If I may list them:

- The development of the new website was completed
- Lecture: *Inoculation in the time of Blake*, by Vice-President of the Blake Society, Keri Davies
- *Blake or Blade Runner*- Andy Wilson
- *Blake's Tyger and the Lion of Dharma* with Steven Taylor- Allen Ginsberg's friend and guitarist.
- *Till we have built Jerusalem*: Billy Bragg on Blake
- *Albion, Awake! Live on stage!* at Swedenborg House
- *Visions of Albion in Felpham*: lecture and online book launch by Jason Whittaker
- *Dinner with Joseph Johnson* with author Daisy Hay
- *Another Room*- celebration commemorating Blake's death at Bunhill Fields in August
- *Tyger: Award winning author SF Said's book*. SF Said and Tamsin Rosewell
- *Launch of Vala 3*: editorial team Sibylle Erle, John Riordan and Jason Whittaker
- Two live events at Blake's baptismal church, St. James's Church: *Susheela Rahman and Sam Mills, featuring Jason Whittaker*.
- Mike and Kate Westbrook's band performing *The Westbrook Blake*. The Westbrooks have also graciously accepted our invitation to be honorary Patrons.

**Secretary:** Are there any questions? None.

#### **Item 6: Election of Honorary Officers**

We have received one nomination for each of the Honorary Officers and as no other nominations have been received, Jason Whittaker is duly elected as **Treasurer**, to serve for a period of one year, ending at the next AGM.

Stephen Pritchard is duly elected as **Secretary**, to serve for a period of one year, ending at the next AGM.

Sibylle Erle is duly elected as **Chair**, to serve for a period of one year, ending at the next AGM.

We have three nominations for the election of the Executive Committee of Trustees and as places exceed nominations, (we may have up to 7), they are duly elected to serve for a period of one year, ending at the next AGM:

John Riordan

Camila Oliveira Querino

Tamsin Rosewell

**Tamsin:** I am a bookseller, illustrator and speechwriter in the City. As somebody involved in the British book industry, I am keen to ensure that the Blake Society is talked about among authors, illustrators and publishers. I consider Blake to be one of the greatest illustrators:

someone who was bringing word and image into an entirely complementary relationship, as I aspire to do. I am an evangelist for William Blake in the book industry and actively working to recruit new members for the Society. I am passionately interested in Catherine Blake and very, very keen to do everything she can to ensure that her new memorial stone is completed. I am also committed to raising awareness of Catherine's essential contribution to the Blakes' work. This applies to furthering the academic research on Catherine Blake as well contributing to and expanding public knowledge.

**Secretary:** Thank you Tamsin. Thanks to Trustees who are stepping down this year: Philomenè Verlaan; Peter Dodd; Jonathan Mullard; Tim Heath.

Philomène is an oceanographer and now she is sailing away across the ocean. She has brought a great deal of wisdom and like the ocean, depth, to the Blake Society in many, many ways. We shall miss her and hope that she stays in touch.

Peter is our former Treasurer, a man of strong and distinctive character. Peter will now, no doubt, be devoting more time so the buying and selling of antiquarian books, prints and antiques of every kind. Peter has been instrumental in husbanding the treasury funds and has pioneered the 'gift' section of the Blake Society's offer to Members. We shall miss him.

Jonathan is now devoting his time to the Blake Cottage Trust. He is the former Secretary, a role that he fulfilled brilliantly, and the work of the Trust is now proceeding really well with Jonathan's help- and that of his fellow Trustees.

Lastly, we come to Tim Heath. This could occupy me until Eternity; in fact, I have long suspected that Tim is one of the Eternals and has made himself manifest amongst us. Tim has specifically requested that I keep this eulogy short. So let me briefly count the ways in which Tim has contributed so much to the Society. I would really like to talk about Tim's personal qualities. For 30 years he's guided the Society forward through thick and thin, through all the difficulties that societies are confronted with; all the particular challenges of the times and the successive personnel. Tim has always brought to the Blake Society a visionary sense of calm, compassion, good judgement, and firmness as well as an extraordinary level of playfulness and a way of seeing things in a visionary fashion. Seeing sometimes what others might not see and bringing it to them- bringing it to all of us, as Trustees. It's been an enormous pleasure and an honour- and I'm sure I speak for all of us- to work with Tim.

**Jason:**

Tim has been an incredible influence on a number of us working for the Blake Society. I would like to present you, Tim, with a hand-printed version of *Holy Thursday* by the Ukrainian printmaker Paul Peter Piech [1920- to 1996], who set up the Taurus Press in 1959. In the 1970s he produced a small run of 220 copies of this book. I would like to present you with this personal gift on behalf of the Trustees as a small token of the esteem in which you are held.

**Item 7: AOB**

**Secretary:** There have been some 'teething' problems with the new Society website: these are being addressed and many have already been resolved . Is there any other business?

Are there any suggestions for what Members would like the Society to do?

What could we do better? [No responses were made].

The AGM was concluded

Blake Society AGM 7.30 pm Wednesday January 25th, 2023

Stephen Pritchard

Secretary