

## Blake Society AGM 7.30 pm Wednesday January 17th, 2024

Trustees present: Sibylle Erle (Chair), Stephen Pritchard (Secretary), Jason Whittaker (Treasurer), Annise Rogers (Membership Secretary), John Riordan, Tamsin Rosewell, Camila Oliveira Querino. Apologies: None

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.

### **Agenda** (Displayed for Members)

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of the 2023 AGM
3. Chair's report
4. Treasurer's report
5. Secretary's report
6. Election of Honorary Officers
7. AOB

The Chair opens the AGM, and the Agenda is displayed on-screen.

The Chair introduces the Secretary.

Secretary: We are a registered charity and we run our AGM according to our Constitution, which is published on a page linked from the Society page of our website. This meeting is only open to Members to speak and also to vote, if required: all others may only observe.

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 2023 AGM**

A copy can be found on a link at the foot of The Society page of 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**

Welcome to the Annual General Meeting of The Blake Society at St. James's.

My name is Sibylle Erle, and I am the Chair of The Blake Society.

Present -- today -- are members as well as non-members, and the Honorary Officers and Trustees of the Executive Committee:

Camila Oliveira

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Stephen Pritchard

John Riordan

Annise Rogers

Tamsin Rosewell

Jason Whittaker

Let's begin – with some House Keeping.

In the chat you can see the formal agenda we follow each year.

- 1. Apologies**
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The AGM is a formal meeting of the serving Honorary Officers and Trustees of The Blake Society. Those attending have their cameras switched off. The chat, however, is open. During the meeting, there will be opportunities to ask questions. We invite questions from members after the reports. You can put your question into the chat at any point; or – ask, when invited, with your camera on.

After the AGM and for the second part of the evening, our Secretary, Stephen Pritchard, will hand over to John Riordan who will host the talk with David Mullin. To mark the transition, we will show you a short video.

So: I am delighted to introduce our Secretary, Stephen Pritchard, who will chair today's meeting.

Over to you, Stephen.

**Stephen:** Thank you, Sibylle. I'd like to thank Sibylle for doing a wonderful job as Chair of the Society, having taken over the role at short notice and acting with great wisdom, insight and kindness. Over to you, Sibylle for:

### **Chair's Report**

**Sibylle:** By tradition, early each year we – the Executive Committee of The Blake Society - hold the AGM to reflect on outcomes and developments of the preceding year and report the accounts of the Charity. After the Chair's report comes the Treasurer's report, followed by the Secretary's report. At the end, the Honorary Officers will be elected. Only then can the Society's business officially commence.

I, the Chair, will reflect on our achievements and vision. The treasurer will report on the finances and the Secretary will report on the events hosted, created and organised by the Society during the past year.

As you will know, during the past year, we rewrote some of the texts on our website, to clarify our connections and allegiances, and to identify our partners and collaborators as well as our intentions.

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We decided, for example, on the following three intentions:

- **We want to work towards the bi-centenary of Blake's death in 1827 – #Blake200 – to prove that Blake is more relevant than ever.**
- **We want to prioritise collaboration, be bold, and engage with the public, including young people who will encounter Blake for the first time.**
- **We want to think creatively as equal partners, so that we can collectively imagine the role that Blake can play.**

2023 has been an important year in the history of The Blake Society. In some ways and in my opinion, past, present and future collided. It's been a year of transition, shifts and changes, but more significantly it has been a year of new strands and directions -- and -- progress: I am happy to report that the City of London Corporation has – in principle agreed – to engage with and act on the plan to create a memorial for Catherine Blake, who Tim Heath, our former Chair, called “one of the unsung visionaries of the Romantic period”.

The plan is to symbolically connect the final resting places of William and Catherine Blake. For this progress, bringing the presentation of the graves in Bunhill Fields up to date, we are grateful to Tamsin Rosewell, who leads on the Catherine Blake Memorial Project, as well as Matthew Bell, a member who has been a great friend and supporter of the Society, and Stephen Pritchard, and Joan Digby, who has donated a substantial sum.

Thank you.

In 2023, The Blake Society published the fourth number of its journal VALA (thank you – Jason Whittaker and John Riordan), we also published many Emanations on our website (thank you, thank you – John Riordan) and we send out a revamped Newsletter (thank you – Tamsin Rosewell), which shares and showcases Blake-related news items.

The Society continues to grow: we are grateful to Annise Rogers, our new Membership Secretary who many of you will have met on email as well as during her talk on Blake and Tolkien last October.

The Society has more patrons – Mike and Kate Westbrook – and we have Camila Olivera to thank for this.

We all 'do' things and in a moment, Stephen Pritchard, our Secretary, will tell you – all -- how to give us some feedback and how to make your voice heard:

- What can we do better?
- And what can we do more of?

You will hear about last year's events, their scope and richness from Stephen. Thank you, Stephen, for coordinating and putting together such an exciting and marvellous programme. Through the range of these events, we have explored and celebrated Blake in 2023.

In the final part of my report, I will announce the names of two new Honorary Members of The Blake Society, reveal the theme of the next issue of VALA and thank the Committee.

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In my role as Chair and speaking for the Executive Committee, I am delighted to announce that two members of the Society – for their extraordinary services - have been voted on to The Blake Society's Honours List of 2024:

- Ian Frampton
- Carl Gopalkrishnan

Thank you both for what you have done and contributed to the Society.

Ian is the person in the background. No. Ian is the person who has our backs. He is taking care of the technology and ensures that all runs smoothly during events. Ian has been the knots and bolts of every single event. Thank you, Ian.

Carl did a wonderful picture-lecture last January and Carl has given much of his time and inspiration and genius to VALA #4. Thank you, Carl.

The theme of VALA #5 is going to be "God". Look out for our next Newsletter – it will include the call for papers with the deadline for expressions of interest.

I pledge that we will grow the emerging momentum for Blake200.

I am a firm believer in Blake's relevance and significance of his works for other cultures.

I will dedicate time to fundraising for Blake200 and work on a diversity policy so that we can update The Blake Society and truly think about how we can realize and embrace our international ambitions for the Society as well as for the Blakes.

I end thanking all Trustees for their time, love and dedication to the Society, its members and for keeping the Blakes' legacy alive. THANK YOU.

**Stephen:** Thank you Sibylle. Are there any questions? None.

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

**Accounts 2022-23** (spreadsheets are displayed on screen)

**Jason:** This was a busy year for the Blake Society and, as a result, we spent a considerable amount of money. This had been budgeted for in the previous AGM, with £17,466 set aside for expenses. By the end of our financial year, which runs from 1 November to 31 October, we had spent £16,167. This amount included three key items: two issues rather than one of VALA (which was not printed the previous year), a grant to the Blake Cottage Trust, and some equipment for Ian Frampton who has very generously used his own equipment to run the Blake Society meetings during COVID and after (and which we felt it completely right to support him). In addition, because of some complexities, maps which had served as one source of revenue have been donated via a member of the Blake Society to raise potential funds for the Blake Cottage Trust.

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### Budget 2024

While under budget, last year's expenditure ate into Blake Society reserves. As such, while planning for this year's expenditure the aim is to at least break even and, if possible, move towards a small surplus.

Important elements of expenditure include fees for the Blake Society website, Zoom accounts and miscellaneous electronic services such as Mailchimp so that we can continue our business (and the value of such services is increasingly recognised by the companies that provide them and thus charge for them). In addition, coming out of the pandemic, Trustees are increasingly involved in face-to-face meetings and while no Trustee is paid out of Blake Society funds, it is important to support them with regard to travelling expenses.

The single biggest figure for this year will be printing copies of *VALA*: this is a significant material benefit for Blake Society members and so it is important that we publish a copy for those members (which also adds to miscellaneous expenditure under P&P). It is my aim as Treasurer to explore further income opportunities this year to build up a surplus towards the William and Catherine Blake Prize at some point in the near future, as well as funds towards Blake200 events to mark the 200th anniversary of the death of William Blake.

**Stephen:** Thank you, Jason. Are there any questions? None.

Before my report on last year's events, I would like to send our love and best wishes to Mike and Kate Westbrook, who are such excellent Honorary Patrons. They would have joined us tonight, but Mike has been convalescing after a spell in hospital. They have spent 50 years working with Blake through their wonderful music and we salute them.

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. Publicity for events was very much enhanced by the development of the new Blake Society website, for which John must have much of the credit; Tamsin's brilliant Newsletters; and her and John's comprehensive posts on Social Media. If I may list the Events this year:

January: AGM and a wonderful talk from artist Carl Gopalkrishnan on his painting *Australia a Prophecy*.

February: A fascinating conversation with Patrick Harpur on the subject of *Imagination and Vision; Blake and Tradition*.

April: An unmissable conversation between Camila Oliveira and Blake Society Patrons Mike and Kate Westbrook about the relevance of William Blake in contemporary culture and the challenges of setting Blake to music, blending classical and popular music traditions.

May: *Hercules Road – Blake's Old Haunt*

Members of the Blake Society were involved in the 'finale' event of an exhibition of artworks, inspired by William and Catherine's years living in Hercules Road. The venue 'Hercules Road' is located inside a flat, next to the William Blake Estate, the site of the Blakes' former home from 1790-1800.

AND

*Auguries of Innocence: First Experiences with Letterpress*

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With our partners at Swedenborg House, London: The Blake Society presented an exclusive book launch, with the Cambridge School of Art and accompanying talks and an exhibition.

June: Blake at Bradford Literature Festival

We're delighted that The Blake Society was a cultural partner with last year's Bradford Literature Festival, where our trustees, Jason Whittaker and Camila Querino and friends were involved in three Blakean events.

August: Meeting at Blake's Grave at Bunhill Fields Burial Ground

The Blake Society and friends gathered at Blake's graveside on the date of his death to celebrate his life and share our love of his work. A Capella singing from Adie of his own Blake-inspired compositions entertained us all!

September: Blake Talk at St Bartholomew the Great; in this illustrated talk, Stephen Pritchard introduced the poetry, prose and art of William Blake and explored his complex relationship with London through his life and work.

October: The Edge of Human Experience: Blake and Tolkien's Art, an excellent talk by Annise Rogers.

William Blake has been an immensely important figure in the history of visual art. J.R.R. Tolkien is commonly regarded as one of the forefathers of contemporary fantasy fiction. But what connects these two artists, and how are they visually connected?

November: Fragments of Experience: an animated film, three years in the making.

AND

Vala 4 Launch- this time taking the theme of War and Peace, another beautiful issue of the Blake Society's publication.

December: A Glimpse Behind the Scenes with the Folio Society

In a rare scoop, Tamsin Rosewell talked to The Folio Society about the making of their new edition of William Blake's Songs of Innocence and of Experience.

I'd like to tell you about our forthcoming event on Wednesday February 7th: Blake's Illustrations for the Book of Job: A Healing Journey. Author and psychotherapist Jason Wright will lead an exploration of Blake's work in the context of psychic and spiritual wholeness and healing, and the sense of community this work offers at a time of change. Jason's recent book is, I think, one of the most important books on Blake I've ever read.

**Stephen:** Are there any questions?

### **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 four 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

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Tamsin Rosewell  
Annise Rogers (Membership Secretary)

**Stephen:** Annise was co-opted to the Committee last year and has made a great success of the demanding role of Membership Secretary. Would you like to introduce yourself to those members who may not have met you yet Annise?

**Annise:** Thank you, Stephen. I'm Annise; I'm the Membership Secretary. I have something here that I have written about myself, as Stephen told me, very kindly, that I was going to do this in advance. I'm Annise Rogers: I'm an Early Career Researcher and I've been working on Blake for about four years. My primary focus has been on the Four Zoas; but it's not my favourite, that's the Book of Urizen. I also look at Tolkien and I really love sci-fi and fantasy. I've been the Membership Secretary since June and I love it! I love being the Membership Secretary, because there's such a wide range of people that are members of the Blake Society. We're not all the same. I get the pleasure of communicating with everybody. My long-term goal with Blake is to make him accessible to everybody, to see him as human and for him not to be seen as that dead, white, poet that wrote about tigers and Jerusalem. Thank you, Stephen. I will just- because you asked me- tell you about the membership numbers. At the previous AGM on the 25th of January 2023, we had 378 members. We now have, after the 10th of this month, 527 members, so we have 149 new members. Thank you, Stephen.

**Stephen:** Thank you, Annise. That's incredible! Annise has had a lot of previous experience as Membership Secretary for the Tennyson Society.

**Item 7: AOB**

**Stephen:** Is there any other business?

Are there any suggestions for what Members would like the Society to do?  
What could we do better? Please email me your thoughts, questions and suggestions and I guarantee that we will discuss and consider every single one of them.  
The AGM is concluded.

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Stephen Pritchard  
Secretary