

# **The Blake Society: Annual General Meeting**

## **20 January 2017**

Waterstones Bookshop, 203/206 Piccadilly, London W1J 9HD  
7.00pm

### **Members present:**

Michael Bundy, Adriana Diaz-Enciso, Peter Dodd, Henry Eliot, Debbie Elliott, George Fort, Carol Garrido, Luis Garrido, Tim Heath, Catherine Kelly, Judith Peacock, S F Said, Gareth Sturdy, Dominic Rainsford, Tamsin Rosewell, Antony Vinall.

### **1. Chairman's Report**

Tim Heath reported that the Committee once again organised a programme of events covering 12 consecutive calendar months making us one of the most active literary societies in the country.

We hosted talks on Blake's position within the esoteric tradition, the influence of the Bhagavad Gita on his art & philosophy, and an annual lecture attended by 300 people in St James's Church and given by Iain McGilchrist.

The year of 2016 was the centenary of Hubert Parry's setting of Jerusalem and so music featured prominently in our programme. An event was held at Burgh House in Hampstead seeking to rediscover Blake's lost melodies. There was a summer evening of Jazz & Poetry at Waterstones and this year's AGM ends with the folk musician Chris Wood performing his own setting of 'And Did Those Feet'.

Members were blessed with 4 excursions: a visit to the Cottage at Felpham, our annual gathering at the burial ground in Bunhill Fields, a pilgrimage through Blake's City of Golgonooza, and an opportunity to draw the effigies in Westminster Abbey that so occupied Blake's apprenticeship & adolescence.

Our project to mark Blake's final resting place with a ledger stone has advanced through a generous pledge of funds while our monthly adventures in new media now reach over 5,000 people, and for the first time in our history we promoted a close reading group on The Songs.

Finally our Annual Tithing Grant received entries from Australia, South Korea, America, Germany, Ireland and Britain. The theme of the Grant was the Bounding Line, an idea that informed Blake's understanding of true art, yet also delineates those who would join a Society from those who remain outside in joyless abnegation – the antinomian challenge to any Blake Society.

### **2. Treasurer's Report**

Luis Garrido invited Gareth Sturdy to report on his examination of the accounts for the 12 months ending 31 October 2016. Mr Sturdy's full statement is at Annex A. He concluded

that the accounts appeared a credible and consistent record of the Society's finances over the period in question, and recommended their approval.

Luis Garrido then gave a detailed presentation, the main points of which were:

Subscription income of £4,693 was at a healthy level for funding the programme of events and activities. In addition, the sale of tickets for the Annual Lecture in March brought in £3,589, giving total unrestricted income of £8,927. Expenditure on running costs and the events programme (venue hire, speakers' fees etc) totalled £6,373, resulting in unrestricted cash funds (ie excluding reserves and the fund for the project to mark Blake's grave) of £5,477 at the year end.

Restricted funds totalled £6,307 at the year end, a small increase on the previous year. Income to these funds came under two headings: donations to the grave fund of £398, plus £2,020 in donations to the Blake Cottage Trust via the Society's Just Giving website. All the donations for the Cottage had been rapidly passed on to the Trust.

The accounts were approved unanimously.

### **3. Secretary's report**

Antony Vinall reported that following a thorough review of the membership database and the records of subscriptions received during the calendar year, the number of paid-up members on 18 January 2017 was 213. In addition there were 48 complimentary members, giving a total of 261.

Of this total, 48 members were based overseas: 21 in the USA, 5 in Australia, 3 in Canada, 2 in France and 1 in each of Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, Russia, South Africa and Spain.

The number of paid-up members was smaller than recorded in the the previous year (291, including complimentaries). The review had shown that a number of former members were still shown as paid-up even though their subscriptions had ceased in earlier years. This was because the Secretary is not notified when subscriptions paid by cheque or standing order lapse. The review had removed these names. The database now includes a record of the date on which subscriptions fall due, making it possible to issue reminders and monitor changes in total numbers.

Without accurate information on the date on which subscriptions had lapsed, there is no precise data on the net increase in membership over the year. 41 new subscriptions were recorded, while 30 Paypal subscriptions were cancelled, though around half of these had been immediately renewed by members updating their payment arrangements. This suggested a net increase of around 5, with a churn rate of about 45 (20 members leaving, 25 new members joining).

Tim Heath added that he would shortly be publishing a cluster map on the Society's website showing the geographical distribution of members across Britain and the world.

#### **4. Apologies for absence**

Nick Duncan, Richard Lines, Josie McQuail, Paige Morgan, Philomene Verlaan, Christina Vinall.

#### **5. Minutes of previous year's AGM**

Adriana Diaz-Enciso said that the minutes of the AGM held on 12 January were untruthful on a number of points, in particular Item 9 (Election of the Executive Committee for 2016). She claimed that there had been no election because no vote had been held, despite her objection to one of the candidates. There had therefore been no lawfully elected Executive Committee during the year.

The Chair and Secretary repeated the point made at the previous AGM: paragraph 16(5) of the Society's constitution requires a ballot only when the number of candidates exceeds the number of vacancies on the Committee, which had not been the case.

The Chair formally moved the adoption of the minutes. With the exception of Ms Diaz-Enciso, who then left the meeting, members voted in favour of the motion.

#### **6. Matters arising from the minutes**

There were no matters arising.

#### **7. Election of the Honorary Officers for 2017**

The meeting voted unanimously to re-appoint the honorary officers:

Tim Heath, Chairman  
Luis Garrido, Treasurer  
Antony Vinall, Secretary

#### **8 & 9. Introduction and Election of the Executive Committee Members for 2017**

The Secretary noted that Nick Duncan, Henry Eliot and George Fort were not standing for re-election. All had made an enormous contribution by their dynamism, enthusiasm and creativity, and the Society was deeply grateful for all they had achieved.

The following members had notified their intention to seek re-election:

Catherine Kelly  
Josephine McQuail (USA)  
Paige Morgan (USA)  
Christina Vinall

In addition, Gareth Sturdy was standing as a candidate for the first time. Mr Sturdy introduced himself briefly, referring to his long-standing interest in Blake and the Society, and his experience in organising events.

All the candidates were elected unanimously.

#### **10. Any Other Business**

Michael Bundy commented that recent Tithe Grants - for aphorisms and postcard-sized drawings - had been too narrowly focussed. The concert of settings of "I give you the end of a golden string" offered a better model. Tim Heath responded that a grant of 10% of annual income is no more than a few hundred pounds, and it is necessary to match the scale of each year's entries to the resources available. The concert, while highly successful as a musical experience, had proved very costly to organise because there had been no limit on the forces required.

APV  
23.i.2017

STATEMENT BY GARETH STURDY ON THE ANNUAL ACCOUNTS

I reviewed the Society's accounts as a sympathetic but independent observer without formal financial qualifications. I carried out the scrutiny between 11<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> January 2017. The accounts I reviewed cover the period 1<sup>st</sup> Nov 2015 to 31<sup>st</sup> Oct 2016.

I confirm that I found the accounts to have been set out in a clear and logical format. They represent a coherent and rational body of information, transparent to a non-specialist. The Society's claims as to the funds it holds are consistent with the amounts recorded in the bank statements. The amounts brought forward from last year are also congruent with this year's funds.

Expenses incurred have been pertinent to the goals of the Society and have been claimed and reimbursed within appropriate time periods. They have been supported by explanatory documentation and mostly validated by receipts, and are also consistent with the bank statements.

On the basis of the information that has been presented to me, to the educated but inexperienced eye the accounts appear a credible and consistent record of the Society's finances over the period in question. I am happy to recommend them for acceptance by members.