



The Scottish Society for Psychical Research

Annual General Meeting

21/01/21

From 19.30 hrs to 21.00 hrs.

Online Meeting held on Software Platform Zoom

MINUTES

Chair: Innes Smith

Secretary: Marysia Lessnau

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Members Present: Innes Smith (Trustee), Mishka Lessnau (Trustee), Dr Stephen Bostock (Trustee), Dennis Davidson, Wilma Davidson, Dorothy Hamilton, Jean McDougall (Trustee), Alice Montgomery, Becky Monroe, Chirsty Hamilton, Davey Watt, Derek Doran (Trustee), Doug Brown, Irene Loudon (Trustee), Janine Neil, Lorraine Cruickshank, Mark Anderson, Mary Laverty, Bill Darroch, Michael McCann (Trustee), Nick Kyle, Peter Broughan, Ryan Kincaid, Sinclair Smith, Joel Conn

Visitor: Tricia Robertson

Apologies: Penny Sharp (Trustee)

1. Introductory Remarks by Chair, Welcome and Apologies.

Chair Welcomed all for attending and asked members for their patience during this online meeting. To ensure the attendees didn't miss anything, Chair forewarned that he would go slowly and surely and ensure that information was shared onscreen and all votes were counted. The one non-member was reminded not to vote.

Members were previously emailed copies of the most recent signed off accounts (Year Ending NOV 2019), the Constitution of the Society and also the Minutes of the previous AGM (Jan 2020). This information was also archived and available on the society website.

2. Approval of Previous Minute AGM 2020

Members were given the opportunity to read, reflect upon and suggest any amendments to the Minutes. No amendments were suggested and a vote was taken to approve the Minute.

Proposed by Marysia Lessnau. Seconded by Mary Laverty. For 13 (*those who could vouch for the accuracy due to being present at last year's AGM*). Against 0. Abstentions 12 (*those members not present at last year's AGM*).



3. Re-election and election of Council Members.

Chair explained that the Constitution required a third of all current trustees to stand down – and if willing – be available for re-election.

Dr Stephen Bostock stood down and was available for re-election

Proposed by Derek Doran, Seconded by Irene Loudon.

25 Votes in Favour. 0 Against. 0 Abstentions. Unanimous.

Penny Sharp stood down and was available for re-election

Proposed by Marysia Lessnau, Seconded by Mary Laverty.

25 Votes in Favour. 0 Against. 0 Abstentions. Unanimous.

4. Proposals

No proposals were forwarded by the Council nor the Membership. None were forthcoming at the meeting.

Chair updated the Membership on the Proposal *passed last year* regarding the status of the charity: that OSCR gave *no advice* regarding recommendation on what form of incorporation a Charitable Organisation should take. Due to the circumstances of that year (pandemic & personal circumstances) progress was slow on making the change but Chair hoped the charity would change status before the next AGM.

5. Secretary's Report for the last Year

Marysia Lessnau began by recounting the EGM the Society held on September of 2017. At that meeting, the trustees stated that if the Society could have at least 40 Members, each paying a £20 Membership Subscription Fee then the Society '*then in its thirtieth year, may be able to continue*'. The Secretary remarked that for the past year, despite being unable to meet in person, we currently had 58 Members, and a further 134 past visitors and past members who wished to still be informed, making an emailing list of 192.

The Society also had a presence on Facebook and combined with our Website, it made it possible for Members and Visitors to be informed. Marysia thanked the Chair, Innes Smith for keeping Facebook and the website up to date – and also all the other trustees on Council.

Marysia also mentioned that one our founding members had passed away during the past year: Carolyn Smith. On behalf of the Society, Marysia expressed her condolences to her two sons, Chair Innes Smith and Member Sinclair Smith.



6. Treasurer's Report

Chair provided an overview of the last scrutinised accounts (YE Nov 30 2019), (in the absence of the Society's Treasurer). Chair invited questions and expressed approval that the Society's balance sheet had stabilised at making an annual surplus. If there were no further unexpected costs then the Society would endeavour to reward members for their support in either dropping the £1 door fee or booking well-known speakers, which might incur substantial travel expenses. Chair stated that we didn't just accrue a surplus for no reason: members should be direct beneficiaries of the Society's healthy finances.

Proposal to Approve the Accounts YE 2019

Proposed by Michael McCann. Seconded by Derek Doran.

24 Votes in Favour. 0 Against. 1 Abstention.

Chair also read out the up-to-date bank balance of the society.

The Balance (on 21/01/21) stood at: £8239.33

Chair invited the Membership to join him thanking the Treasurer Penny Sharp for all her hard work over the past year.

7. Presidential Address

Chair began thanking the members for continuing to support the Society during a difficult year. He also thanked Council Members for all their hard work and expressed special gratitude to the office bearers: Secretary and Vice President Marysia Lessnau and Treasurer Penny Sharp.

Chair also remarked that the previous presidential address was somewhat prescient, flagging up loneliness as a factor in anomalous experience; and that the internet could be a possible means to ameliorate isolation. In the past year, 2020, social isolation had become a matter of public health – but so too had the subsequent dangers of only getting your information from the internet. Chair commented that conspiracy thinking, a drift away from reality and paranoia had led to a violent insurrection in the United States of America at the beginning of January, 2021. Chair continued:

In 2021 there will be a necessary push-back against such conspiracy theories and conspiracy thinking. Critical Thinking will not just be a useful skill to teach students, but a matter of civil defence. Truth matters. Facts mean something. And we must be able to tell the difference.

And all of this is true. I am sure that critical thinking and reason will be a matter of important public debate and I do not doubt that psychical research or the paranormal will also be lumped in with shape-changing space lizards and anti-vaxxers.



In the SSPR we hold no corporate view on the paranormal, other than it must be investigated in a scientific manner. I expect in 2021 we will have to defend the former with the latter: there is no realm of human experience unworthy of serious investigation, as long as we can tell the difference between evidence and nonsense. Critical Thinking is central to the SSPR, as is being open minded and compassionate. But more than usual, caution:

In Alice in Wonderland:

"There's no use trying," she said: "one can't believe impossible things." "I daresay you haven't had much practice," said the Queen. "When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."

We all believe in something impossible. Or have experienced something impossible. Or at least considered impossible by others... There is still some worth in evaluating our own impossible beliefs – and being warier still – of new impossible things.

8. Cases

Since the last update at our SSPR AGM in Jan 2020 (4 Cases) the Society had received 17 new contacts (16 via our website and 1 via Facebook). One on-going case was referred to Dr Ian Tierney (with the client's informed consent). Of the 17 new contacts, 5 were *about investigation* (exploring research methods, conducting specific experiments, or doing talks in school about what the society did - this invitation to speak at a school did not, unsurprisingly, progress). Of the remaining contacts, which were *requiring an investigation*, 3 did not respond to further requests for information. This meant the remaining contacts, involving correspondence, telephone calls or Zoom interviews, numbered 9. 9 Cases – up from last year.

9. A.O.B

Members were invited to discuss any other matter but no member wished to discuss anything.

The AGM was brought to a close – all members and trustees were thanked again for their attendance and support – and the informal part of the meeting began: a far more in-depth explanation of the Cases the society had taken on (led by IS and ML, which featured the examination and discussion of some video footage received. This expanded upon an earlier point raised by the Chair regarding interpreting evidence – and what one could *reasonably* regard as evidential).