

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Association of the Robert Owen Memorial Museum, held on Friday July 1st 4 pm online.

Present: Rex Shayler (Chair), Colin Laker, Norman Davies, Dewi Hughes, Sarah Sandford, Andy Newham, Ann Evans, David Smith, Penelope Harris.

Apologies: Janet Lewis, Tracy Childs-Leaver, John Boyle

The **Minutes** of the previous AGM held on 21st May 2021 were agreed as a true record.

There were no **matters arising** from those minutes.

Election of Council of Management: nominations had been received from Rex Shayler, David Smith, Dewi Hughes, Ann Evans and Norman Davies. **All these nominations were accepted by the meeting.**

Confirmation of Officers: The following officers were offered for confirmation by the meeting:

Chair (and temporary Promotions Officer): Rex Shayler; Curator: Colin Laker; Librarian: Dewi Hughes; Secretary: Sarah Sandford; Assistant Secretary: Tracy Childs-Leaver; Treasurer: Norman Davies.

Sarah explained that there would be a transition period where she and Tracy filled the current offices and then exchanged offices, with Sarah providing support to Tracy until the transition was complete; at that point Sarah would become an Officer without Portfolio.

The nominations were confirmed by the meeting, proposed by Dewi Hughes and seconded from the Chair.

Chair's Report: Rex highlighted that COVID was still an ongoing issue and that vigilance still needed to be maintained, but that visitor numbers and donations had increased.

Norman remained Treasurer, but Rex was exploring possible replacements.

The Birthday Celebrations were successful. Newtown Boy Scouts had adopted the name of Robert Owen and two or three of the leaders had attended the Celebration. Rex expressed the thanks of the Museum to the children who were dancers, who added significantly to what was a lovely day.

Annual Accounts & Treasurer's Report: Norman noted that the accounts were to the year end of 31st October 2021; these had been audited, circulated and approved by the COM prior to the meeting, and were available publicly on both the Museum website and the that of the Charities Commission. He had also produced and circulated a more simplified Income & expenditure breakdown, which showed the importance of grants from the Welsh Government COVID Fund and the Co-operative Heritage Trust. Income from donations/tours etc, he emphasised, doesn't cover the basic budget, so it was important to maintain the link with the Town Council in terms of staffing and expenses, especially through the Sarah Briscoe House transformation project. A change of premises or the withdrawal of the Town Council from the existing building would therefore significantly jeopardise the viability of the Museum. Visitor numbers and donations were building up and were now more or less in a par with pre-pandemic levels. Interest rates were also likely to increase, which could only help us in terms of returns of long term money. The Robert Owen 250 Project had brought us £5,000 worth of outreach activity and £10,000 for the Museum display (for a £5,000 contribution). Norman had attended the unveiling of the art work near the Skate Park, which was also part of the RO250 Project, as was a Virtual Trail of Newtown.

David thanked Norman for all his hard work over the year and asked about interest-bearing accounts.

Norman was considering there and would forward suggestions to the COM in due course; he fully accepted, as Dewi emphasised, the need for ethical and co-operative investments.

Dewi proposed a vote of thanks to Ann for organising the History Hub event on May 14th to which the Museum had been invited and had taken a stall.

Curator's Report: Colin provided the following report:

The past year has been significantly concerned with the RO250 Project, through which the Museum was provided with funds to refurbish and fully translate our displays to be bilingual in both Welsh and English. The existing text has been reviewed, amended or rewritten and additional text has been created for two new display boards by the Curator and the Librarian. The designer we have employed, JPDS Creative in Wrexham, has now got all the text in English and associated images, as well as the majority of the text in Welsh: Dewi is currently working on the translations of the remaining boards. JPDS Creative has supplied some initial ideas for design, and work on the remaining boards is underway. The funding from Welsh Government for the project also includes manufacture of the boards and professional installation into the Museum, so once the design phase is completed, we can move on to complete the refurbishment. The Museum has also been involved with providing advice for one of the other aspects of the RO250 project, the Virtual Trail of Newtown. The third aspect of the Project was a sculpture, which was unveiled in the park in the centre of Newtown on May 14th. Norman has been our representative on the management board for the project and many thanks are due to him for his time and diplomacy, both of which I know have been tested!

In terms of the Museum collection, we have been fortunate to gain two modern portraits of Robert Owen, one donated by the artist Brian Jones, who lives locally; the other on loan from Central England Co-op, which was commissioned for the 250th anniversary. The latter was on display for the first time as part of the Birthday celebrations on May 14th, along with booklets and badges commemorating the 250th, also supplied by Central England Co-op. All the children who took part in the dancing for Owen's birthday were presented with one of the badges and a Museum pencil. We are also fortunate to have gained on loan from David Smith, one of our trustees, a packing label from New Lanark for cotton exported to Russia; as you will be aware if you've seen it on display in the Museum, it's in Russian, in Cyrillic script. We also received an interesting donation of a *card visite* manufactured in Russia, which was purported to be a photograph of Robert Owen, but after further research turned out to be one of the founders of the Natural History Museum, **Richard Owen**; you can read more about that in the article on the Museum website. Also, last month, we received a consignment of books which were a part of the legacy of the noted Owen scholar and historian of Scotland, Professor Iain Donnachie; Rex and I will be catalogued those a couple of weeks ago and they are now available on the Museum Library shelves.

In December 2019 we received a donation of a display case from the Co-operative movement and we have finally been able to arrange the display for it. This consists of documents, photos and speeches relating to the opening of the Museum in 1928. This also meant, after suitable security arrangements by Rex, that we were finally able to display the ceremonial gold key, used by Reginald McKenna to officially open the Museum (then on its original site across the road from its present one, as part of the Midland Bank). The key itself has an interesting and still somewhat mysterious history, and you can read about that in another article on the website, as well as in the display at the Museum.

Finally, we have also been making progress towards renewal of our recognition as an Accredited Museum. With the support of our Museum Mentor, Elizabeth Neathey, we have reviewed a number of our policies in the Officers' Group and forwarded them to the Council of Management for their approval, with the remainder being considered on an agreed timetable. It's not clear when the accreditation process will begin with the Arts Council appointed assessors, as there is something like a two-year backlog due to the pandemic (so 2024 at the earliest), however, we will be fully prepared in good time by the middle of next year.

Norman re-emphasised the importance of providing the bilingual display, which had been the main basis of our successful bid for RO250 funds.

Dewi said that he had done first drafts of the translations for the remaining boards and should be forwarding them very soon.

Any Other Business:

David reported on the 14th May event by Co-ops & Mutuals Wales, which was available both on that website and on the People's Collection Wales. The event tomorrow had been postponed due to speaker illness. Co-ops & Mutuals Wales had also been involved in education projects with some schools in Wales and an international project with a conference in Mexico in September 2022. He ended with a plea for greater co-operation between the various bodies associated with Owen * & the Co-operative movement.

Ann noted that there had been some vandalism around St Mary's Church, though not of the Owen grave itself. There was a current programme of review of both works needed around the Church site and CCTV provision in the town, which Rex was involved with.

Dewi reported on the Association of Educational Psychologists' involvement in the campaign to outlaw physical punishment in England and N. Ireland; he had referenced Owen as a pioneer in this area in a speech he had recently given in the House of Lords as part of the campaign.

The **date of the next AGM** would be in March or April 2023

The date of the **next meeting of the Committee of Management** was to be confirmed.

Meeting closed at 5.05 pm.