

# **Friends of Sonning Common Library AGM**

**held at 7.00 p.m. on Monday 16<sup>th</sup> November 2020 via Zoom**

## **1. Welcome**

Jill Hutchinson (Chair of FoSCL) opened the meeting by welcoming everyone. This was attended online by the FoSCL Committee (Jill Hutchison, Jenny Jones, Helen Fort, Rosemary Dunstan (Library Manager), Chrissie Godfrey, Trish Rockell, Gordon Haigh, June Duckworth and Clare Keen) as well as Friends, Volunteers and members of the local community: Ruth Whitaker, Alison Smith, Fiona Cummins, Carol Townhill, Keith Atkinson, Sandra Atkinson, Jane Starkey, Robin John, Helen Lewis, Val Harris, Rosemary James, Chris Bickerton, Pauline Whitehead, Annabel Irwin, Teresa Jones, David Jones, Barbara Crawshaw, Lesley Davis, Bev White and Francesca Evans-Clarke.

## **2. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Carole Stafford, Jim Harvey, Nicki Robinson, Robbie Foster, Sue Litchfield, Lucille Perkins, Barbara Pilbrow, Jeni Wood, Stuart Watterton, Michael Cotton, Emma Durham, Stan Rust, Rosemary Geake, Pat Fraser, Pauline Jones, Marlene Barter, Ildiko Toth, Non Odell, Helen White and Lyn Smurthwaite.

## **3. Minutes of the 2019 AGM**

As the minutes had been previously distributed, Jill asked for any matters arising. There were no matters arising that would not be covered in The Chairman's Report, so the minutes were duly approved.

## **4. Chairman's Report**

Jill welcomed everyone, thanked them for attending and delivered the following report.

'I think to say this has been an unusual year is something of an understatement. We started the year with such confidence and ideas to celebrate our 20 years in the school building, but regrettably, these have all been cancelled.

One successful event, held in February, was the Murder Mystery evening organised in conjunction with the Chiltern Players. The audience readily got into the swing of things and the bar and fish and chip supper added to the overall enjoyment of the evening. We managed to raise a substantial amount, and thanks to the generosity of the Players, who gave their share of the profits to the Friends of Sonning Common Library, our bank balance is in a much healthier position than it might otherwise have been. Thank you to all those who were involved in the organising and running of the evening.

Sadly, within a few weeks of this, the Library was closed because of the Covid 19 pandemic. The summer months were spent with a frustrating interchange of letters and emails between the Friends, the Library Service and the County, to try and establish a re-opening date. This was finally agreed to be September 28<sup>th</sup>, but with reduced opening hours. A situation, which although supposedly temporary, is causing us renewed angst that

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the Library may not survive. We have let the County know that we are very unhappy about this and are monitoring the situation closely.

An online literary quiz hopefully kept some of you entertained through the summer months. During the summer, the committee also decided to allow all the Friends a period of Free Membership. Renewals have always been a complicated system to administer, at different times of the year, and we have decided that in future it will be much easier to consolidate the system with one renewal date in January; we trust this is acceptable to you all. Helen will clarify the arrangement in her report. Reminders will be sent out in the New Year. Regretfully, we have not been able to donate any further monies to the County this year for the purchase of new books, as they are struggling to keep up with their own orders. As long as they are listed on the County catalogue, we are hoping to purchase directly from a retailer to compensate for this.

Before the library re-opened in September, we managed to recover two noticeboards and some of the end boards of the junior fiction and non-fiction shelves with some new hessian. These are small improvements, but certainly make the place look smarter.

After an appeal for more volunteers, we have had a very positive response with 7 enquiries. The county has agreed a training date and we welcome our new volunteers. Thank you. We are looking forward to next year, when hopefully things will be more positive. And maybe as we didn't manage to celebrate our 20th year in the building, we could celebrate the Key of the Door with our 21<sup>st</sup>?

Jill also thanked the library staff, the Committee, Volunteers and Friends whose work and help had enabled the library to re-open.

Robin John asked about the position of other libraries across the county. Jill explained that 14 of the main libraries had opened initially followed by a gradual opening of some, but not all, of the community libraries. It was felt that the reason Sonning Common was able to open as early as it did after the first lockdown was because we had made such a fuss in the summer about re-opening that we were quite high on the list. Jill suggested that four libraries remained closed, but Jenny was able to confirm that, in fact, the number was eight. Benson had not been able to re-open because they were due to have a new roof; similarly, Hook Norton had needed repairs inside before they could re-open. It was hoped that the remaining six would be able to re-open following the current lockdown, but many had not been able to due to insufficient volunteers. Every library had been subject to a reduction in hours but the proviso for re-opening that there should be a volunteer to monitor Covid safety measures with a single member of staff had been impossible for some and Jenny reiterated just how lucky Sonning Common is in their volunteers. Jill explained that this was why it had been necessary for volunteers to fill in the Health and Safety forms.

June asked if the library would re-open on 2<sup>nd</sup> December. Jill explained that it was not possible to say definitively at this time as we don't know what tier we will be in when we come out of this lockdown. Should we go into Tier 1 or 2 as they were before, the library might well be able to re-open but should we be in Tier 3, it might not be possible. However, Rosemary explained that one of the problems when coming out of the last lockdown was that the building was empty for so long so she has been going in virtually every day so that, for example, the water has been running sometimes.

## 5. Treasurer's Report

Helen presented the audited accounts for 2019-2020 and explained the Income and Expenditure.

'Accounts 2019/2020 (last year in brackets)

Income:

Membership: 330 (840)  
Donations: 282 (707)  
Cakes: 120.27 (206.80)  
Events: 1510.05 (1391.37)  
Giftpaid: 294.99 (392.78)  
Sponsorship: 277 (0.00)  
Total Income: 2814.31 (3537.95)

Expenditure:

Books: 0.00 (973.24)  
Craft: 7.50 (187.92)  
Events: 787.43 (746.77)  
Admin: 43.48 (298.40)  
Cap Improv': 50 (1625.88)  
Total Expenditure: 888.51 (3832.21)

To FoSCL funds: 1925.80 (-294.26)  
Plus Reserve br/fwd: 2808.14 (3701.70)  
Plus Reserve int: 3.89 (6.44)  
Plus Current br/fwd: 1567.04 (961.30)  
Plus petty: 50 (50)  
Total FoSCL Funds: 6354.87 (4425.18)

We end the year with considerably more money than we started it. With the library closed for six months, we decided to give everyone a fees holiday, so membership income was down by about two thirds. However, with a few renewals before the pandemic struck, the kind payments of those who ignored the fees amnesty and a few new members we made a respectable £612 (two thirds of the normal amount) from fees and donations. Our one big event of the year, the murder mystery evening was not only highly enjoyable but also profitable – making more than £700. The main expense was the fish and chips. Chiltern Players had few expenses and very generously gave us all the profits, so a big thank you to them.

We have spent nothing on books (last year we gave OCC £973). A heater was bought for the library but there were no other capital improvements (last year we spent £1600 on furniture and other items) and we obviously couldn't hold any workshops in the library, which in the past we have subsidized. We also benefited from the Waitrose token scheme, which is listed under sponsorship. Thus, we end the year in a very healthy position, with more than £6000 in the bank.

A note on renewals: for administrative reasons we have been thinking for some time of bringing everybody's renewal date together at the start of the year. The pandemic has given us the opportunity to do this, so we will not be asking anybody to renew until the end of January next year. Any new members who join after June 30 will have to pay only £5 in their first year. The few Friends who have already set up a standing order, won't be asked to change it.'

Helen asked for ideas to spend the money on explaining that it was quite difficult for Rosemary to spend more than about £900 on books due to the constraints of cataloguing etc. Chrissie suggested that Rhymetime would benefit from some new things to go in the box to which Trish added the suggestion of a bigger box. Alison Smith asked about a heater for the foyer, which Jenny explained had indeed been purchased but the point was made that it was not sufficiently clear that this was available, which would be rectified. Jill explained that County had said that it might be possible to close the door of the foyer so long as it was opened intermittently to let fresh air in. Chrissie thought that the door opening and closing when people came in might be sufficient but she also made the point that having the door open was quite welcoming and reassuring for some people who felt unsure what to do. Thermal underwear and blankets were also suggested!

The accounts had already been audited and signed off. There being no further questions the accounts were duly accepted.

## **6. Secretary's Report**

'During the last few difficult months we have tried to ensure that the local community was informed about the current situation of the library. As Jill has stated, we have also been in close contact with Oxfordshire Library Service to make them aware of our wish to reopen the library as soon as possible and that we were able to help to adhere to all the Covid 19 risk factors and that we had sufficient willing and able volunteers to allow the library to open safely. In March 2020 the library closed. Volunteering stopped but not interest in the library. At that time we had 31 volunteers. Once we knew the library would be allowed to open, we canvassed our volunteers to ascertain their ability to help during the difficult time ahead. We were left with a reduced team but luckily managed to recruit several additional willing volunteers. All of these wonderful 25 volunteers were risk-assessed by the library service. The sessions at the library are very different now: the entire length of time the library is open requires a volunteer to welcome our library users at the door. We are so grateful to you all for continuing to help, as without you the library could not open. Other community libraries are either not opening or opening with very restricted hours due to a lack of volunteers. We now have several more offers of help and will soon be starting volunteer training.'

Jenny added that 14<sup>th</sup> December was the hopeful date for the eight new volunteers' training.

## **7. Library Manager's Report**

Rosemary explained that her report had been written before the second lockdown.

'The year started so well, with all the book fund being spent on time, giving a wonderful selection of new books specially chosen for Sonning Common Library. Plans were in place

for items of expenditure in the new financial year, and fundraising was going well, with a particularly successful Murder Mystery evening at the end of February. Then on Saturday March 21st I received the call that was to change everything: I was instructed to close the library at the usual time, then put up a notice on the front door saying 'Closed until further notice'.....Lockdown had begun.

The library re-opened 6 months later, on Monday 28th September, under 'Covidsecure' conditions, and with reduced opening hours. It is difficult to know when, if ever, things will get 'back to normal'. With social distancing rules, only 7 people are allowed in the library at one time – that's 1 member of staff and 6 members of the public. No 'extra-curricular' activities are allowed – no Rhymetimes, Storytimes, craft sessions, Digital Helper sessions or cake sales... all the things which made the library more relevant to local people and attractive to families. But we are open – and I am extremely grateful to all the volunteers who sit at the door in the cold for up to 2 hours, keeping people informed about the current situation, and the rules regarding their visit to the library. I am very well aware that without volunteers, we would not be able to open. (Opening hours of other libraries have been reduced more than ours because of the lack of volunteers to support them).

I do not know what next year will bring – but I hope that we will all still be here, possibly meeting in person, not on Zoom, to discuss the 2020-21 year and all the progress we have made. I also hope we'll be able to celebrate 21 years of the library residing in its current building!

Annabel Irwin reiterated that the library really, really couldn't have opened without the volunteers and thanked them again. Rosemary related that Woodcote Library was only able to open for six hours a week because they only had eight volunteers and wondered how on earth Sonning Common had so many. Chrissie said that it was a serious worry that the reduction in hours might be used to close libraries. Jill explained that another concern was the fact that, with the library closing on a Thursday and the school needing extra space, the school were able to use the library on that day, which might establish a precedent. Jill also thanked Rosemary and Annabel for all their work in making the library Covid-secure post lockdown.

Jenny mentioned Rosemary's idea of using the Home Library Service to deliver books to those who might be shielding and asked that people spread the word about this service which is open to anyone who might benefit from having books delivered to their door. Rosemary explained that any requests would have to come from Sonning Common library stock. It was suggested again that anyone who knew of someone who might benefit from this service should encourage them to ring the library; all they would have to do would be give some idea of the kind of books they liked to read. Ruth Whitaker reported that the system had worked extremely well; she rang on the previous Friday morning and Rosemary had delivered the books later that day. Rosemary had received two calls concerning the Home Library Service and the offer of a volunteer to deliver books.

## **7. Election of the Committee**

Jill informed the meeting that the FoSCL constitution stated that the committee should stand for re-election every year and should serve a maximum period of five years. The following Committee members are willing to stand again but Jill reiterated that she, Jenny and Helen would be standing down in 2021.

<b>Chair</b>	<b>Jill Hutchinson</b>	<b>2016</b>
<b>Treasurer</b>	<b>Helen Fort</b>	<b>2016</b>
<b>Secretary</b>	<b>Jenny Jones</b>	<b>2016</b>
<b>Minutes Secretary</b>	<b>Clare Keen</b>	<b>2017</b>
	<b>Trish Rockell</b>	<b>2017</b>
	<b>June Duckworth</b>	<b>2018</b>
	<b>Chrissie Godfrey</b>	<b>2019</b>
	<b>Gordon Haigh</b>	<b>2019</b>

The re-election of the existing committee was unopposed, and the committee agreed to continue for a further year. Alison Smith and Bev White had agreed to join the committee. Their nominations were proposed by Trish (Alison) and Jenny (Bev), seconded by Jill and carried unanimously.

Jill said that the next committee meeting would probably also be held via Zoom in the New Year.

## **9. AOB**

Jill said that if anyone has any suggestions or requests for new book purchases, so long as they are on the County catalogue, Rosemary would try to order them from other suppliers such as Amazon since it is not currently possible to order through County. Alison Smith suggested The Works as a possibility for purchasing books at a good price, but Rosemary suspected that they might not stock the same editions as are on the County catalogue.

Rosemary reported that she had received some donations which had been welcome but not possible to use in the library due to their not being on the above-mentioned catalogue. She had therefore sold some of these books and was able to use the money to purchase books that were on said catalogue. Helen reiterated that there was money available for book purchases whenever Rosemary needed it.

Alison Smith asked whether further donations would be welcome; Rosemary said that they would be when the library re-opened and preferably in relatively small numbers rather than boxes and boxes.

Jenny said how lovely it was to see the four new volunteers: Alison Smith, Fiona Cummins, Helen Lewis and Rosemary James, at the meeting.

## **10. Date of Next Meeting**

The next AGM would be in November 2021, the date to be arranged nearer the time.

There being no other business, Jill thanked everyone for attending and the meeting closed at 7.41 p.m.