



DEVON & EXETER
INSTITUTION

THE DEVON & EXETER INSTITUTION
LIBRARY & READING ROOMS
(Founded 1813)
Registered Charity No. 1172445

The 8th Annual General Meeting of The Devon and Exeter Institution Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) held Thursday 24th October 2024 at 5:00 p.m. at the Institution (being also the 35th Annual Meeting of the Devon and Exeter Charitable Association and 211th Annual Meeting of the Institution since its formation).

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

1. Apologies were received from 20 members. 35 members were in attendance, 8 trustees were in attendance.
2. **Chair of the Board of Trustees Introductory Remarks**
 - Thanks to members for supporting the charity this year and wonderful to welcome you to the new 'Blue Room' at this exciting time in the Institution's history. We do not take your support for granted and are very grateful for all you do to keep the Institution thriving.
 - Very happy that with the new lift being commissioned this afternoon the building is accessible for the first time in 211 years.
 - Thanks to fellow Trustees, Director and staff for continuing efforts to ensure the Institution can run sustainably and meet its charitable aims of preservation and education.
 - Note that is the first year as Chair and thank outgoing trustees Richard Templeton and Shane Cormie.
 - We are also grateful to our funders including the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the University of Exeter and to those of you who have generously donation to our light on the green appeal which has resulted in this stunning conservation of the cupola (above our heads)!
 - I would like to begin proceedings by asking members to approve the minutes of our last AGM:
3. **Approval of the Minutes of the AGM held on 19th October 2023.** All members present voted to approve
4. **Matters arising** - None raised

5. Hon. Treasurer: Report and presentation of the accounts for the year ended 30 June 2024.

Noted that the financial position this year has improved due to;

- Improvements in membership
- Expenditure has been kept well under control
- Continuing support from Exeter University
- Careful use of unrestricted funds

The future looks positive due to;

- Future lettings of the rooms in 2025
- More income generated as the building opens back up

Balance sheet is positive as we have significant investment funds from a kind and generous bequest which has been well invested. Because of this our policy on reserves has been reviewed with guidance from our accountants and Charity Commission guidelines. This will free up unrestricted reserves for investment in charitable activities, not day to day operating but for example acquiring significant books for the collection.

There were no questions.

5.1 Resolution 1: That the Audit and Statement of Financial Activities for the year ended 30 June 2024 is received by members.

This was proposed by proposed by Tim Mayon-White propose and seconded by Sandra Bond and agreed by a vote of members present.

5.2 Resolution: That the Devon and Exeter Institution appoint Griffin Chartered Accountants as Independent Examiners/ Auditors of the accounts for the 2024-2025 financial year.

This was proposed by Tom Stanniford and seconded by Judith Morgane and agreed by a vote of all members present

6. Hon. Secretary: Membership report and in memoriam

We begin with remembering those members who have died this year:

John Milton
Edward Hobson
Sandra Semple
Reginald Erskine
Margaret Gyver
Jocelyn Aggett
Harold Turner
John Robert Neale

Turning to happier news, the construction phase of our project has continued for the duration of this reporting period and is now nearing its final phase. We have managed to stay open throughout, although much of the building has been inaccessible. During each phase of work, we have relocated our services and adapted our events according to the spaces available.

We anticipated a challenge in maintaining membership numbers and satisfaction levels during this construction phase, and so embarked on a communication plan which involved regular posting on social media, a refreshed newsletter and emails and in person informal meetings via our monthly Project Cafes. At the same time, we professionalised the post of Membership Officer and reviewed and streamlined our administrative systems.

In this reporting period, we have been able to expand our membership categories to include payment by installments; memberships for younger people and those on lower incomes; temporary and trial memberships. At the end of the financial year, we have seen a c10% increase in membership numbers and revenue.

In staff news

We said goodbye to:
Ceri McWilliams, Administrator

and welcomed three new members of staff:
Carrie Rys- Davies – Membership Officer
Wanshu Chen – Venue Coordinator
Fiona Schroeder – Library Assistant

The staff team gave papers at NLHF London; The Group for Education in Museums; The Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution and the University of Exeter.

7. Annual Report from the Director – Emma Dunn

“I took up the Directorship five years ago and with the help of trustees, members and colleagues, we created a ‘five year Vision’ and business plan – now in its final year . Our aims, as you may have seen around the building are that:

1. Our outstanding **heritage building and research collection is preserved** and made fit for contemporary needs
2. We are **leading as an educational charity** by inspiring and engaging with people of all ages and abilities
3. We are **financially resilient** and enterprising with a growing membership
4. We have a **strong employee and volunteer team** which is well led and collaborative
5. We offer an **authentic, special and unique** member and visitor experience

So at this AGM, I'd like to reflect on how we have worked towards these aims.

It's also important to note that we are in our 35th year as a Charity and the aims of our charity remain **to preserve and educate** and we are committed to caring for our heritage to the highest standards and encouraging and mentoring the next generation of custodians in the heritage sector.

Firstly, I'd like to report on the progress to preserve our heritage building and make it fit for contemporary needs:

Following a competitive tender process, our principal contractors Carrek Historic Buildings Ltd took over the construction site at the beginning of this reporting period (July 23).

The first phase of capital works involved demolishing the former lavatory block and boiler room and relocating the boiler and a new air source heat pump to a plant room in the former rear kitchen. Preparing the site for the extension proved extremely challenging, with many uncharted 'ghost pipes' beneath the ground. Due to the historic nature of our site, 13 piles (long steel rods) were used rather than traditional foundations and these were sunk to a level of 6 meters. A concrete slab was set over the piles to enable the build to begin. The whole process was monitored by Oakford Archaeology, and we have retrieved many interesting finds from the site, including ceramics dating from the thirteenth century and clay pipes from the sixteenth century. The timber frame for the new build was constructed off site and brought in by crane.

In the second phase, work began under the floor in the Inner library with new infrastructure including underfloor heating, rewiring and the installation of fibre data cables. Structural work was undertaken to make the floor safe, as beneath the carpet tiles it was in very poor condition and built directly onto the earth. The oak joists showed notches and marks, indicating a previous life in another structure. Once new pads had been set into the ground and the joists paired with new timbers, the new environmentally sustainable heating system and floor grilles were installed. The original Douglas Fir boards were set in and stained to their original ebony colour.

Simultaneously, work began to remove the dividing screen which had been erected in 1898 to create a 'gentleman's smoking room' and space for the new female members on the first floor. Once the room was unified to its original 1800s layout, contractors opened the cupola, allowing light to stream into the space for the first time in 125 years. While installing picture lights, contractors discovered Georgian niches within the walls, probably added by the 9th Earl of Devon when the room was used as his entertaining and music room. Following paint analysis and research on historic paint charts, heritage colours were selected and the substantial task of redecorating the Institution began. We held a celebration event for donors to the *Light on the Green Appeal* to mark this milestone.

In the third phase of the project, we reopened the Inner library, complete with new lighting scheme and restored and curated furniture. With the support of the Exeter Heritage Volunteers, we emptied the Outer library, former office and former cloakroom to enable the floors to be restored and prepared for the heating trenches.

At the end of this reporting period the lift was installed, making our upper room accessible for the first time in our history.

The overarching vision for the project is to *remove barriers to access*, so that a wider range of people can join us as members and visitors. Our project is also making the building more environmentally sustainable, due to the installation of an air source heat pump and solar panels and we aim to use sustainable sources for 60% of our energy, which will also help with the charity's fixed costs. The Institution will also be more secure financially, due to the reconfiguration of the building, including opening three new spaces for hire and creating a kitchenette on the first floor, to service the new stunning new 'Blue Room'. Throughout our Lottery funded programme of events, we have introduced 5000 new people to the Institution.

To learn from this process, our project is being evaluated by external consultants, so that we can measure changes to our building, collections and participants over time and consider how we need to move forward as an Institution.

Secondly, I'll report on Library, collections, and access

In this reporting period, despite being under construction, we have managed to retain the research service and full access to all titles and resources.

We have revealed more about our collections and have shared this widely, creating better access via our collection review, displays and significance workshops. In this reporting period, reviews were undertaken on our Early Science collections by Dr Edward Maunder and John Mather and our Natural History collections by Dr Robin Wootton. We held Significance Workshops on our Voyages and Travel collections (reviewed in the previous reporting period by Paul Auchterlonie) and invited our partners Hikmat and our partner schools to reflect on our star items, in order to gain insights from a wider range of people including from people with lived experience of colonial legacies and migration.

We have continued our popular Book of the Month blogs, created by volunteers and staff and highlights in this reporting period have included *Mary Bulteel Ponsonby, a Radical Maid of Honour to Queen Victoria*; *Captain John Cooke: 'a public character and John Bull tradesman'* and a series of Women's Travelogues.

Book displays in this period have included *Myths and Monsters* – an exhibition exploring the imaginative vistas which opened up around fossils and prehistoric material in the 19th Century; *Throughout the Years: Characters and Tales of the Devon and Exeter Institution* – a special exhibition looking at the people who lived, worked and studied within our walls and a display by MA Intern Isabel Moon on *Amelia B Edward's Egyptian Travelogue*.

At the end of this reporting period, we undertook a review of some of the temporary collections and a reorganisation of the southwest collections. This is officially our 'modern' collection, but as we completed a book-in-hand review, we found many

books that were published more than 100 years ago. We relocated these books to the 'S. W. Heritage' section. This means that older, rarer and more fragile books will be cared for appropriately and handled in a way that minimises damage. It is now clear to researchers that they can browse the modern southwest collection and help themselves to any book there. Full members will also now be able to borrow any book from this collection.

Thirdly, I'll report on Events, lectures and public engagement

The *Transformations and Changemakers* season began in the Autumn of 2023, with a keynote lecture from Dr Julia Neville on '*Creating Opportunities for Changing Lives in Devon in the 1920s*' and continuing with talks from Richard Dennis on '*George Gissing and Exeter: a transformative writer at a transformative time in his own life*'; Ed Selkirk Ford on '*Imagining the Future of the Victorian and Edwardian British Empire*'; Dr Richard Bradbury on '*Frederick Douglass in Exeter*' and the season concluded with our own PhD candidate, Amber Flood on '*Proposing change in the Enlightenment subscription library – a monstrous request?*'

At the beginning of this reporting period, we hosted Artist Beatrice Corsetti, and her '*We Will Survive*' exhibit of origami animal sculptures for *Art Week Exeter* and we loaned our Ingrid Pollard *Fern Triptych* to the Invasion Ecology exhibition at Southcombe Barn. These collaborations are part of our ongoing commitment to invite artists, writers, and makers of all kinds to join our community and interact with our collections.

We continued to work closely with the team from Exeter UNESCO City of Literature and in this reporting period, created a special event for the annual Book Market, hosted visits from other UNESCO designations and hosted bibliotherapy graduates for their end of term assessments. The *@Exeter.girl* Book Group held two events in the library and we hosted actress, presenter and deaf rights campaigner Rose Ayling-Ellis, her interpreters and film crew, for the BBC One series of *Who Do You Think You Are?* shown in September (and still available on iplayer).

We continue to work in partnership with the University of Exeter and our first Collaborative Doctoral Student, Amber Flood continued her research and heritage skills training in this reporting period. *Amber has recently focussed her research to the 'history of complaints!'*

In this reporting period, our members' Book Group held monthly in-person meetings and our members' Cinema Club relocated to Exeter Phoenix to enjoy a varied programme in the comfortable setting of Studio 74. We continued to offer weekly public tours and celebrated Heritage Open Week welcoming over 200 people to our events and tours on the theme of *Creativity Unwrapped*.

We worked with over 500 school pupils in our partner schools and our popular community and lifelong learning workshops continued, including the Green Shoots gardening group and Bookworms junior members club.

And finally, I'll report on our staff team and volunteers

Over the course of this project, we have developed a high calibre staff team who are a joy to work with and lead. The team have overcome multiple obstacles and challenges in this reporting period to maintain our services and operations and to come up with creative and innovative solutions as we move into our next chapter.

We also have 64 highly valued volunteers who support the functions of the Institution, including front of house, the library desk, digitisation, gardening and special projects. Volunteers range in age from 18–80, and all are offered training specific to their roles. Volunteers add capacity to our small staff team, which enables staff to work both operationally and strategically.

So to conclude, we are well on track to deliver our five year vision and we'll spend the next 6 - 9 months consulting and planning for the next five year period, and I hope some of you will give your views and opinions to help aid this process. Thank you for listening”.

8. Election of Trustees

8.1 We have two trustees coming to the end of their terms of office, Shane Cormie and Richard Templeton they were thanked for their support and expertise.

8.2 Judith Morgane is standing for re-election for a second term of 3 years

Nominated by Jenny McCracken and Seconded by John Reeves and agreed by all members present.

9. Any other business

There were no questions or comments, and the meeting closed at 5:45pm