

September 11, 2009
Annual General Meeting
International Byron Society
35th International Byron Conference
Messolonghi, Greece

Minutes

The annual general meeting of the International Byron Society (hereafter IBS) was called to order at 3:45 pm at the hall of the agricultural college outside Messolonghi. Sixty-three conferees were in attendance, representing sixteen countries. All three IBS presidents, Byron Raizis, John Lytton, and John Clubbe, were present. Professor Clubbe chaired the meeting.

Attendees were invited to suggest corrections, additions, or revisions to the minutes before the next AGM of the IBS in Boston, Massachusetts, in July 2010.

1. Welcome

The chair asked if everyone had a copy of the agenda, of the current IBS financial report for the year to 30 June prepared by Eric Wishart, and of John Lytton's "Paper on Future Development."

Given the number of new faces before him, the chair thought it wise to explain briefly how the IBS came about and a few of its procedures. The IBS considers itself an international society. The three presidents represent, not particular national constituencies, but the entire membership. Traditionally there has been a British, an American, and a president from elsewhere. The idea behind this troika presidency was that no single nation or national society would dominate the IBS or its proceedings.

IBS conferences began in 1974, but only in 1986 was a formal structure set up, with officials appointed. They have been elected (or reelected) annually. All members of national committees or corresponding members are automatically members of the IBS.

The other individuals who shared the podium with the chair were John Lytton, our British president; Byron Raizis, our third president, who represents not just Greece but the rest of the world; Eric Wishart, our treasurer; and Joan Blythe, our recording secretary.

The chair thanked the attendees for coming. He felt he spoke for all when he expressed his gratitude for the events and good fellowship during the past week. The events included a visit to Athens, a storied city where Byron spent a year of exploration and creativity. It included the awarding of an honorary degree to

Professor Jerome McGann for his magisterial contributions to Byron scholarship and the world of letters. This was followed by an abundant buffet reception where the falling rain did not dampen our great pleasure in the event. On Monday Rosa Florou had arranged a special private visit for our group to visit and admire the Parthenon sculptures in the new Acropolis Museum. During the past few days conferees have come to know in depth Messolonghi, where Byron spent his last months and died. The most important place now where Byron's memory is celebrated is the Byron Centre which Rosa established in 1997 and which has been continually augmented with books, prints, manuscripts, and other memorabilia. Conferees were astonished when they visited this collection and experienced firsthand the richness and beauty of the holdings and the artful manner of their display. This meeting comes near the conclusion of a spectacular conference on the subject of "Byron and History," in which we have explored not only that fascinating subject but also numerous other aspects of Byron's life, work, and genius.

The chair mentioned, as a formal matter, that if there is a motion put before the group, each individual society--that is a society up-to-date in paying its annual dues--is entitled to one vote. That vote is usually given to the highest ranking member of that Society but it can go to another person who is an officer of that Society.

The chair said that for the pleasure and privilege of attending this conference, there were many people to thank. He said that while those present today no doubt had already expressed their gratitude to those in charge, the chair wished to recognize formally two individuals for their especially outstanding work to make this conference so splendidly successful.

First recognized was the conference organizer Rosa Florou whose efforts over the past decades on behalf of Byron and the city of Messolonghi have been long greatly valued by Byronists all over the world. At a tremendous cost of time and labor, and a huge expenditure of energy, Rosa has virtually single-handedly put together the logistics of this conference.

This is not the first International Byron Conference in Greece that Rosa has directed. She was also in charge of the 1999 conference. The chair repeated what he said then, that Byron Raizis who was our host for three previous conferences had found a worthy successor. For her extraordinary efforts, and--as testimony to the gratitude of all present at the conference -- Rosa was given a cross made by a expert Navajo craftsman working with silver and precious stones. The Navajos are the largest Indian tribe in America, and this work represents them at their best.

A group of conference attendees also presented Rosa with a bouquet, appropriately enough, of roses.

The other chief person responsible for this conference was Peter Graham, known to all for his impressive scholarship on Byron, his directing the Messolonghi Student conference on Byron since its inception, and now for his heroic efforts in shaping of the academic program for "Byron and History."

As a small token of IBS appreciation, Peter was given a pair of cufflinks. On them is the New Mexico state bird, the Roadrunner. A bird only found in the American Southwest, the Roadrunner moves toward its goal with great vigor and speed and is afraid of nothing. This is exactly what Peter did in organizing and running this conference.

Peter in response thanked the conference committee members for their huge share in making the conference such a success. These included Maria Schoina and Andrew Stauffer and, not least, the local committee members who were ready to help at all times.

2. Apologies for absence.

Apologies received include:

Christiane Vigouroux
Itsuyo Higashinaka
Brigitte Lohmar

The chair said that Brigitte, as she gently reminded him five years ago at Moncton, had never missed a conference since the first in 1974 at Trinity College, Cambridge. For several complex reasons she could not attend the Messolonghi part of our conference but she was with us for our days in Athens. Brigitte asked to convey warm good wishes to all present in Messolonghi.

The chair asked if there were others who wished to be included in the apologies for absence. Names put forward of those not present who also asked that their best wishes be conveyed were

Richard Cardwell
Geoffrey Bond
Bernard Beatty

Roy Greenglass said that the most regretted absence was that of Maureen Crisp whom he wished to recognize.

The chair also wished to pay tribute to Maureen Crisp who though absent physically was with us in spirit. Maureen made a supreme effort to attend the St. Andrews IBS conference last year. That tragically was her last conference. Her vigorous work and passionate enthusiasm for Byron-related activities at Newstead and Hucknall as well as within the IBS were unique and inimitable. She will be greatly missed. In honor of her memory, the chair asked

for a minute's silence for Maureen. This was done.

3. Minutes of the meeting held in St. Andrews in July 2008.

The minutes for last year's conference were prepared by Brigitte Lohmar. The chair said he did not know if they had been sent out to officers and secretaries of the national societies in printed form, but they have been for some weeks posted on the IBS website. He hoped that at least some present had had a chance to see them.

4. Discussion of minutes.

The chair asked for any comments or corrections to last year's minutes. The chair said that last year due to a deteriorated meniscus which kept him from walking more than very short distances he was not able to attend the St. Andrews conference in Scotland. He said he had been told that one matter not included in the minutes was a recommendation by J. B. Yount, and seconded by Allan Gregory, that the IBS make a contribution of 500 L to the ongoing restoration of Hucknall Church.

The chair asked if anyone could recall this specifically No one could, but the contribution has since been made.

5. Joint Treasurers' Report

The Joint Treasurers are Ken Purslow and Eric Wishart.

The chair asked Eric to present the Treasurer's report

Eric addressed issues regarding the importance of moral responsibility, of stewardship, and of taking into consideration intellectual capital as part of our future ways and means.

Our IBS account balances to date of 2009 AGM total L 24,567 pounds sterling (Euros 27,952, US dollars 39,926). Unexpectedly, this is much more substantial than it has been for a long time. This allows the possibility of expanding services, a matter to be discussed later in this meeting.

6. Election of Officers

The chair said that Maureen's departure had left a huge gap in the functioning of the IBS. Therefore the IBS is undergoing necessary changes, changes that by no means have been completed. It is anticipated that new staff will be added and that several current officers and board members may be moving into new positions.

Officers of the Society are reelected each year at this time. The chair said he would name our current officers who were up for reelection and those newly proposed for election. He would then

ask for comments. Following discussion, he would ask for a motion, followed by a second to the motion, that the officers proposed be elected or reelected for the coming year.

For presidents: The Earl of Lytton, Byron Raizis, and John Clubbe. There is no change there.

Treasurer: Eric Wishart. Eric has served as one of our treasurers for many years and has served us well.

Our second treasurer has been Ken Purslow, also longstanding. But without a replacement for Maureen in the Newstead Society, Ken has been overwhelmed with work there, as well as with his new involvement with the London Society. Therefore Ken has now resigned as joint treasurer. The executive committee proposes to set up a new position for Ken, that of Webmaster. Ken has been doing this unofficially for years, and this ratifies a long-standing reality. The IBS will need to appoint a second treasurer-auditor to verify the Treasurer's report. This appointment will be made by the three presidents. [David McClay was appointed in October, 2009].

For Recording Secretary: Joan Blythe

The chair said that Joan has also served the IBS for many years. She has given him invaluable help, particularly with the fairly extensive correspondence he must maintain with our far-flung members. But there is much other work that she does not have time to do. Thus we propose an additional candidate for a secretarial position. This individual would serve as Managing Secretary.

For managing Secretary, the chair proposed Jonathan Gross. Jonathan has been a regular participant at IBS conferences during the past decade. Jonathan would undertake much of the work that formerly fell to Maureen. He is in charge of the Humanities Institute at DePaul University, has a distinguished record as a Byron and Romantic scholar, and has expressed a willingness, even an eagerness, to help us out.

The chair also proposed two other positions: Director of Public Relations and European Secretary.

For Director of Public Relations, the chair proposed Rosa Florou. Rosa has fantastic organizational abilities and unbelievable energy. Greece occupies a special place in the Byronic universe, for reasons that all present well know. The chair said that the IBS owes our Greek hosts today much for the success of this conference as well as for past conferences dating from the 1970s. Rosa has fully demonstrated her abilities to generate support for Byron and Byron activities within Greece and beyond. The chair expressed the opinion that she would be ideal as Director of Public Relations.

For European Secretary, the chair proposed Brigitte Lohmar. Brigitte has been involved with the IBS from its relatively simple beginnings some thirty-five years ago. She long served as IBS recording secretary and wishes to continue to help in other ways. She has expressed a particular interest in developing our European network of societies. The chair expressed the opinion that those present should support her in this endeavor by giving her a formal position within the IBS.

The chair then asked for questions and comments.

In response, Ken Purslow proposed Alan Rawes for managing secretary. The chair said that according to the IBS constitution the names of prospective nominees needed to be submitted a month before the meeting.

Extensive discussion of the current IBS situation followed.

John Lytton sought to bring the discussion to conclusion by motioning that only the presidents, the treasurer, and the recording secretary be voted in. This motion failed. William St. Clair moved that the current officers be reappointed for a period of six months with a mandate to send out questionnaires to officers of the IBS national committees asking their opinion regarding nominees and future policies. The motion was seconded by Brian Knox_Peebles and passed. [The questionnaires have since been sent out and the results are to be put on the IBS website.] John Lytton reminded the group that after the six month period the presidents, following the IBS constitution, would appoint people to serve in the officer positions until new nominees could be voted in during the next AGM.

7. Report on future international conferences.

The chair said that in contrast to the modus operandi of the past, the IBS in recent years has actively planned ahead for future conferences. Therefore he was able to announce the next three conference venues.

a) 2010: Boston, USA. Representing the Byron Society of America, Andrew Stauffer, at the request of Marsha Manns, the BSA chair made a brief presentation:

The conference theme is "Byron and the Book," liberally interpreted. It will be held in Boston and Cambridge, Massachusetts, from July 26 to July 30th. Peter Accardo will curate a Byron exhibition at the Houghton Library, Harvard. Excursions will be made to well-known nearby literary sites, such as Concord and Salem. A call for papers will be placed in October on the Byron Society of America website and on the IBS website. Paper proposals will be due in the spring.

The chair pointed out that this conference had been approved by the IBS at the 2007 conference in Venice. Andrew then answered questions.

Marsha, chair of the American Society, gave a brief report about the state of that Society. As many present had been aware, the BSA has undergone much upheaval during the past few years. Marsha calmed the waters and dispelled whatever worries members may have had about how the Society was doing. She spoke of the forthcoming move of the Byron Collection to Drew University, which is in New Jersey, a 40-minute train journey from New York City. She said the president of Drew was interested in Romanticism. She gave thanks for a recent gift from the Lucy Edwards Fund for further cataloguing of the Society's Collection. She also reported that Michael Rees, now Brother Teilo who donated so generously to the Byron Collection, is happy with the proposed move and prays for its success.

b) 2011: Valladolid, Spain. Valladolid is about 100 kilometers northwest of Madrid. This conference was tentatively but not officially approved at the 2008 conference in St Andrews. Richard Cardwell, a distinguished scholar of Spanish literature at the University of Nottingham, would be in charge. One problem facing this conference venue is that though there is Spanish interest in Byron, there is currently no Spanish Byron Society. Richard has generated much goodwill for us to come to Valladolid. Unfortunately, he was not able to come to Messolonghi. He had reported that arrangements with the university in Valladolid were working out well and that a range of accommodations were being explored as well as excursions. The chair then read a passage from Richard's email:

We're very excited about Spain, for it is also one of the few countries in Europe in which we have never held a conference. And Byron was there!--and there is much to say regarding Spanish influence upon his life and poetry.

Richard will handle the academic program, but without a supporting Spanish Byron Society, the chair said the IBS would need to think of ways to help out.

c) 2012: London. Kenneth Robbie, head of the London Byron Society, could not be here to address us regarding his hopes for 2012. It appears that a four-day conference is intended, with dinners and excursions as well as academic papers.

In the discussion that followed Tim Webb pointed out that the Olympics being in London that summer could cause problems of accommodations and transport.

David McClay suggested that if the IBS could become part of

the planned Cultural Olympics it might help with funding.

Geoffrey Bray suggested holding the conference in September after the Olympians had departed.

Brian Peebles opined that London would make an excellent venue.

The chair asked if there were any further questions about either of these two proposals.

The chair made a motion that the conference in Spain be approved. It was seconded, the motion passed, and the conference in Spain was formally approved.

It was moved, and Peter Cochran seconded, that the London conference be approved. This passed with the condition that the London committee be informed that the impact of the Olympics on London, including among other aspects, lodging and travel in the summer should be assessed and arrangements made appropriately. Alan Rawes agreed to inform Kenneth Robbie of this conditional approval.

8. The Elma Dangerfield Prize for 2009 to honor the best recent book or books in Byron studies.

This prize was set up in the mid-1980s to honor the best recent book or books in Byron studies within that year or in the several years previous. The prize is awarded annually and the judges are the three IBS presidents. Deciding who gets the prize is always a difficult decision. One problem has been the difficulty of choosing among a number of excellent studies, a problem aggravated by the increasing flood of fine books on Byron published each year. The chair commented that he had twelve to read this past year, and that in recent weeks he had learned of several others. They will be considered next year.

As has happened in recent years, the choice came down to two books. They are both on the subject of Byron's celebrity, one of the hottest topics in Byron research during the past decade. In a sense, many recent studies of Byron have been about his celebrity-Elfenbein's study of his literary afterlife, Byron's iconological impact discussed in studies of his portraits, the full-length biographies by Grosskurth, Eisler, and McCarthy, even Edna O'Brien's recent Byron in Love, just to mention a few. All in one way or another are about Byronmania.

Both the books being awarded this year have been worked on for years, have developed out of much research and from articles published earlier, and offer fresh insights into the enormously complex and involved subject of Byron's impact on the world as it has evolved in the nearly two centuries since his death. The chair recommended that all present read these books.

This year's joint winners:

Tom Mole, for Byron's Romantic Celebrity. Industrial Culture and the Hermeneutic of Intimacy, published by Palgrave in 2007. A mouthful of a title, but a fascinating book. Tom was not present,, but the assembled attendees expressed their warmest congratulations regarding his achievement.

The other winner is Ghislaine McDayter, for her study Byronmania and the Birth of Celebrity Culture, published by the State University of New York Press earlier this year. Ghislaine was not present either at this conference, but her achievement also received a heartfelt round of applause.

The chair then announced the very cheering news that thanks to a very generous donation from the Lucy Edwards Fund the Elma Dangerfield prize now comes with a considerably larger stipend than was available in past years. We heartily thank the Byron Society of London, which administers the Lucy Edwards Fund and has funded the prize. It appears that this support will be annual.

The chair realized at this point that he had forgotten to announce at the appropriate moment that other venues for IBS conferences have been proposed.

One is Lebanon. In fact, an IBS conference in Lebanon was approved at the IBS AGM in Moncton in 2004. The date was left undetermined. The chair, having recently spoken with representatives from Lebanon, is of the opinion that the IBS seriously consider Lebanon as its conference site in 2013.

The chair also has spoken with representatives from Georgia. Georgia had also volunteered some years back to hold an IBS conference. The local committee is active, the facilities are excellent (with a new theater capable of Shakespearean productions), and a warm welcome is promised. The chair supports a bid from Georgia.

Given the length of the meeting, there was no time for extended discussion of these possibilities. But also mentioned from the floor was the interest of the Czech Republic of holding in Prague a conference in 2015. Martin Prochaska, the host of the excellent Prague conference of 1997, spoke eloquently of the suitability of Prague for a conference.

There was also mention of a long-deferred hope to hold a conference in Istanbul. Turkey is a country in which we do not have a Society on the ground, but which Byron visited and which obviously helped shape his imagination and poetry early and late. Several IBS members have expressed interest in chairing such a conference if it could be arranged.

9. State of the Society--Prospects for the Future

At this point the chair turned over the podium to joint-president, John Lytton. The chair said that he and John Lytton had both given a great deal of thought the past year to the future of the IBS. He expressed the hope that following John's presentation of his ideas which were expressed in more detail in the circulated document "Paper on Future Development" those present would offer responses. The chair expressed gratitude on behalf of all members of the IBS for John Lytton's thoughtful and dedicated work on this document.

As part of his summary of the main points in his "Paper on Future Development" John emphasized the following;

--that his proposal, the constitution of the IBS, and a report of finances all be put on the web site;

--that the website needs more member involvement and oversight;

--that transparency needs to be implemented and sustained regarding financial accounting; there must be a clear declaration of assets. This is being done under the procedures instigated by our current treasurer, Eric Wishart;

--that to comply with UK regulations, a second treasurer must be appointed within 6 months [David McClay was appointed in October 2009];

--that the IBS must live within its financial means;

--that he hoped the good will of IBS members would carry us through the difficult transitional time;

--that secretaries should be appointed to handle different functions such as correspondence, minutes, and management of conferences;

--that an advisory committee be established;

--that the IBS should encourage the recognition of Byron's status and significance within educational institutions;

--that the standing of the IBS on the international scene must be improved;

--that there should be a statement delivered at each AGM about the state of the society

--that the IBS needs to promote scholarly online publications;

--the should consider the possibility of moving the website to a

university which would diminish or eliminate annual costs; to this Rosa Florou pointed out that Virginia Polytechnic and State University currently pays the cost of the Messolonghi Society's website. Such a move might make the IBS website more worthy of a flagship operation.

10. Other business.

The chair then asked if there were any further business.

Ken Purslow said that gratitude to the London Society for the 1000L in perpetuity should be expressed on the IBS website.

David McClay of the National Library of Scotland (NLS) informed the attendees that the Library had recently discontinued work of cataloguing and preserving the invaluable Murray Archive. Such supplementary work had been part of the agreement in the purchase of the Archive.

Peter Cochran seconded David's concerns. He reminded us that the Murray Archive was an incomparable resource for Byronists, that its present policies were worrying, and asked those concerned to write the NLS protesting them. Peter also spoke of his efforts to start a Russian Byron Society.

11. Closing remarks.

The chair closed with some good news. He mentioned that an anonymous donor has promised the equivalent of \$5000 to inaugurate a scholarship fund to be open to students of Byron in all countries. Rosa Florou observed that the Messolonghi Society also had established a fund for Greek students to pursue their research on Byron.

If attendees had other matters of interest to raise, they were advised to talk to or write the chair or to the other IBS presidents.

The chair thanked those present for enduring so long a meeting and for the many useful suggestions that had been made. There being no further business and the hour late, the meeting was adjourned at 6:00.

Respectfully submitted,

Joan Blythe
Recording Secretary