

ROSS LIBRARY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

Minutes of Annual General Meeting held on Wednesday 30th June 2021

7pm by zoom

1. **Welcome** The Chair, Clare West, welcomed those present, and thanked the Ross Community Development Trust for providing the zoom booking. Twelve people attended.
2. **Approval of Minutes** of AGM held 18th June 2019 (available on the website <http://www.rldg.org.uk>)

The chair noted it was a lot to ask approval of minutes of an event held just over two years ago, but the minutes were approved by the meeting.

The chair also read some sections of the minutes as a reminder of life before Covid, raising several themes later addressed in her report.

3. **Treasurer's Report** (Accounts available at <http://www.rldg.org.uk>) The Treasurer, Barbara Isle, gave her Report, noting that it had necessarily been a very quiet year. There had been a technical loss as our only income had been some membership fees paid by Standing Order, and, as we paid £100 for an event the previous year, £24 for our annual website hosting fee and we had supported the Library Service with a grant of £2000 to obtain *Pressreader* the online service providing access to news and periodicals. She noted that membership fees were now arriving for 2021/2. Barbara was thanked by the chair for her work, and her patience in dealing with the bank. Virginia Morgan suggested an account which offers online banking to community groups, and promised to send details.

4. Chair's Report

First of the chance to say thank you.

Thanks to each of you for being here this evening. Thanks to the committee for keeping us alert and on the right path. Thanks to Steve and the rest of the library team for all they are doing to keep us informed and to get our library service back on track.

Looking back

A report on two years of the group's activities would generally be quite a task - but this period has been a bit different. Autumn 2019 started very well with an extraordinary evening in September with Sasha Norris - Zoologist, Broadcaster and founder of Siren - and some of her furry, spiny

and feathered friends. And 2019 finished in real style with Richard Gregory and his amazing record collection - a musical Christmas treat - accompanied, as has become traditional, with refreshments provided by the committee.

Then came 2020. The first meeting of the year, in February was cancelled because of the floods, and then we found ourselves cancelling or hopefully postponing, a whole set of excellent events we had set up. It was heartbreaking.

At the same time, behind the scenes, we were involved with CreateRoss and the decision to postpone the Ross Festival Reinvented and with the Wye Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the shelving of the Gilpin 2020 Wye Tour events. Our work with the Community Garden, the library and The Gateway Cinema to put together a Children's book Festival got postponed twice. And of course, we had to give up the various plans to sponsor library activities like the return of the magical company who brought us the Planetarium and the preparation for writing workshops for teenagers.

Meanwhile the library team worked hard to increase the online offering, including the introduction of the excellent Pressreader which we sponsored, our only major expenditure in the financial year. They also worked to get the library Covid-safe and ready to re-open, but just as all was ready, along came the October lockdown.

Gradually things have eased - helped by the brilliant rollout of the vaccination programme by our local NHS professionals - and the library is now open four and a half days a week for browsing and borrowing, but still here we are, meeting on zoom. We really do look forward to the day when we can meet and chat and enjoy a glass of wine together in the library ... so what does the future hold?

Time to Look ahead

And let's look at the Big Picture first. I expect many of you will have heard that Hereford City has been awarded £22.4 m from the Government's Stronger Towns Fund. The chair noted that this was a trivial amount compared to over £300 m the County has lost through reduced Government funding but nonetheless can be put to good use. The award is a little below the amount bid for, and so a further process will take place over the summer to prioritise the projects and agree a spending plan with the Treasury. And of course, as always, matched funding will be needed.

But one major part of the plan - which we all pray will go ahead - is that the historic building currently housing the Hereford Library is to have a major overhaul to create a proper museum and art gallery, and a new central library will be created in the Maylord Orchard shopping precinct, which now belongs to the council. It is intended to include a “rural media hub” and some sort of presence from the new University.

Although the major impact is on Hereford, it is to be hoped that, with a state-of-the-art library at its heart, Herefordshire Library Services will be able to offer more throughout the county. It is hoped that the consultation process will also lead to the formation of a new user group in the city - it has been a frustration in recent years that Joint Action for Herefordshire Libraries, which aims to represent all eleven libraries in the county, no longer has any representatives from Hereford itself.

Covid recovery

A county-wide Covid recovery plan is also being developed focussed on economic recovery and health and wellbeing. There is likely to be some money attached to this, though quite where from was not clear. Libraries will play a part in the elements of the plan which need a venue. I am also constantly reminding the Ross Community Development Trust that the library needs to be a part of their future plans.

Meanwhile there are some new developments in the library service

- A new IT module is being developed for the library management system - which can be used remotely from library buildings, and be operational even during a power outage.
- That in turn will allow there to be “pop-up” libraries at non-library-based events, where new members can be signed up, and a selection of books can be offered, for issue on loan.
- The Summer Reading Challenge will be run this year with an environmental theme of Wild World Heroes. A very welcome return.
- Click and collect is proving really popular, and there are plans to make it a permanent feature of the service. Sceptics might say you could always reserve online and pick up books at the library but perhaps we are missing something?
- Provision in care homes is to be improved with a greater selection of books available - which has to be good news.

- A “mobile library” is to be offered to schools as an optional extra.
- New guidance is coming on quarantining books and, last but not least, **a new risk assessment process for meetings in libraries is being developed.** There is hope.

Meanwhile we, through Joint Action for Herefordshire Libraries, will re-open discussions with Herefordshire Council and keep alert to all changes, developments and threats.

So that is the big picture – but what about Ross and RLDG?

I did try to get us a “real” meeting in July but it seems very unlikely. However, by the time we get to September we hope to have a real programme in place – including some of the speakers we had to postpone all those months ago. Marsha O’Mahony will certainly be back – and anyone who attended her last library event will be very keen to be there. We also have a local film-maker Ian Lewis whose “parcel of time” looks through the eyes of local residents at the life past and present of Hope Mansell. A glimpse into the realities of rural life. This quiet film is getting accolades at international festivals and we look forward to a viewing at the library followed by a Q & A.

Aware that many people are still anxious about being out and about the committee has plans to consider events which could be live and streamed – it will just depend on the technology.

Whatever the winter brings I think we do hope for better times to come and we are looking for exciting and enticing ideas for Spring and Summer 2022 – a period which will hopefully include the twice postponed children’s book festival and the Ross Festival Reinvented.

The chair opened the meeting to the floor and asked for thoughts and suggestions for future actions and events. One bold suggestion was an online event targeted at library groups across the county. It was also noted that online events may be the necessary outcome of this period, and we should be putting together a programme of events which could be run either way, depending on circumstances. Specific suggestions included a return visit from Matthew Hall and a series of craft workshops which provide both practical and social benefits.

5. **Election of Officers and Committee:** The committee members have all said they are happy to continue. The chair expressed her gratitude and noted that most have faced some real challenges during the last 15 months but have continued to offer support and ideas and cheerfulness. All much

appreciated. The meeting approved their continuance in role. No nominations had been received and none were forthcoming from the meeting. The chair urged the meeting to think about individuals who might be willing to consider joining.

6. **Any Other Business** – nothing further was raised

Business closed. The chair thanked everyone for attending. She pointed out that we could not get up and chat to old friends and new and share a glass of wine as we usually would in the library – but suggested the participants take a few minutes to stretch their legs, pour a glass or make a cuppa and return shortly after eight to join in celebrating RLDG's tenth birthday. She promised that when we meet up in person for the first time there would be cake, but offered a birthday treat- the chance to spend a little time in the excellent presence of one our local favourites who has adorned quite a few library events ... Ben Ray.

Ben joined the group shortly after eight and we enjoyed a short, but, as always, dramatic, thought provoking and entertaining poetry reading and extracted a promise from him for a future “real” library event.

CLW 1/7/21