

**The John Hewitt Society**  
**Report of the Trustees**  
**For the Year Ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023**

The Trustees are pleased to present their annual report together with independently examined financial statements of the charity for the year ending 31 March 2023, meeting the requirements for a directors' report and accounts in line with Companies Act 2006. The financial statements comply with all relevant legislation and with current recommended accounting practice.

**Structure, Governance & Management:**

The John Hewitt Society was formally incorporated in August 2001, as a not-for-profit limited liability company with charitable status, registered in N. Ireland at the company address. It is a long standing client of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

Established in 1987, the Society has run its core event the John Hewitt International Summer School (JHISS) for over thirty years, initially in Garron Tower School, Co Antrim, and since 2021 at The Market Place Theatre & Arts Centre Armagh. The JHISS is a literature, politics and arts festival which takes place annually on the last week in July. Each year it programmes approximately 55/60 events involving up to 70 artists, contributors and performers from Verbal, Visual and Performing Arts, politics and well-known local and international speakers. Under an annual theme, the festival is planned and coordinated by a voluntary Artistic programming committee of 16 members, who each bring with them a strong background expertise, experience and knowledge in their field, and project managed by the Company Director. Through the JHISS, the Society has proven its ability to deliver a large-scale event of national and international reputation, with relevant local interest as well as the ability to attract visitors and tourists from well beyond our borders.

Highly regarded as a celebrated high quality Literary and Arts festival of Local, National and International esteem, it is recognised by Armagh City, Banbridge, and Craigavon Borough Council as one of their flagship events receiving financial support from their International Tourism Event Fund (£15k), and since 2020, through a Service Level Agreement (£10k) for provision of cultural services within the borough.

In addition to sustaining and increasing the quality and popularity of the John Hewitt International Summer School, the Society provide a wide variety of activities through literary arts programme and creative writing workshops throughout the year, helping participants to explore issues of difference, identity and tolerance through literature and creative writing, and platforms for debate and discussion on those key political and cultural issues of the day.

The Society actively promotes cross community, intercultural and cross border links in collaboration with local Councils, schools, writing groups, community, cultural heritage and other arts organisations. February 2022 saw the launch of the debut Look North! North Belfast Festival, organised through a partnership network of 12 people, and individuals, from 8 organisations who reside, work or are associated with North Belfast, including Ulster University, and chaired by the Society's Tony Kennedy.

The Society is a registered arts charity with Charities Commission NI & Companies House, with professional membership of NICVA, Arts & Business NI and the Fundraising Regulator all of whom support the committee & board with information and training in best practice within financial controls, audience development and effective governance procedures

A number of best-practice policies are in place and reviewed every three years, including, Financial Controls & Expenses; Children, Young People & Vulnerable Adults; Health & Safety; Environmental; Equal Opportunities and a Risk Policy and Register which is reviewed annually. An Event Management plan and Risk Assessment matrix are implemented for all large-scale projects. While the JHS Friends scheme helps raise much appreciated additional funds, everyone who registers or books a ticket for an event online through Eventbrite are also invited to donate through a donation web portal.

The Society continues to build strong relationships with elected members and local Government Officers throughout Northern Ireland, as well as with a wide range of community & voluntary organisations within local Council areas, and through cross-community and cross-border organisations. To date, the Society has developed several longstanding

relationships with an increasing number of funders and sponsors, with some spanning up to a decade or more, indicating that sponsors and stakeholders have confidence in the Society's ability to plan, execute and deliver high-quality literature arts events.

## **Board of Trustees**

Chairperson: Anthony Kennedy, OBE  
Deputy chair: Ryan Cornett  
Treasurer: Ryan Cornett  
Secretary: Naomi Leitch  
Dr Myrtle Hill, Dr Frank Ferguson (appointed November 2022)  
Dr Paul Maddern, Paul McAvinchey  
Paul Sweeney, Aoife Walsh

## **Programme Committee:**

Alex Catherwood (resigned November 2022), Ryan Cornett, Cahal Dallat, Frank Ferguson, Anne-Marie Fyfe, Byddi Lee (appointed November 2022), Myrtle Hill, Bill Jeffrey, Tony Kennedy, Naomi Leitch, Paul Maddern, Tess Maginness, Paul McAvinchey, Raquel McKee, Paul Sweeney, Aoife Walsh

## **Staffing:**

Patricia Morris, Director.

The Director answers to the Board of Trustees.

The Chair of the Board line manages the Director.

## **Independent Examiner:**

Janet Jensen, ACMA, CGMA  
Ekstra Accounting Solutions Ltd  
2 Beechill Park South  
Belfast  
Co Antrim  
BT8 6PB

## **Public Benefit Statement:**

### **Mission of The John Hewitt Society**

*to promote literature, arts, and culture inspired by the ideals and ideas of the poet John Hewitt.*

### **Strategic aims**

- To fortify The John Hewitt Society as one of Northern Ireland's main literary organisations, with an artistic reach across Northern Ireland.
- To strengthen the John Hewitt International Summer School as Northern Ireland's main literary event with an increased international programme.
- To develop new audiences, including developing a cohesive outreach and community development scheme to build a more diverse audience, reflective of society.
- To develop organisational capacity in order to sustain & develop our aims, focussing on staffing capacity, finance, membership and governance

### **Objectives**

- Provide a high-quality Literary Arts programme which explores and celebrates the artistic and social power of poetry and prose, and an appreciation of our rich literary arts heritage.
- Increase new attendees at the Summer School by an additional 3% by promoting the bursary sponsorship scheme to the local community through cross-promotion of author readings to community outreach participants and other events and festivals across NI.
- Enhance the development of the literary arts through innovative partnerships and collaborations and encourage new attendees/bursary sponsorship applications from collaborative relationships developed throughout year-round programme of activities outside of the annual Summer School period.
- Re-establish the international output of the Summer School through staff utilising international funding opportunities for artist exchanges and travel bursaries.
- Further develop regional partnerships and cross-border opportunities by exploring new avenues of income e.g., trusts & foundations grant funding and sponsorship from local Councils, traders, businesses and individuals.
- Develop cultural tourism links through tourism contacts such as Tourism NI, Australian's Abroad and others.
- Attract, develop and retain a diverse cross-cultural demographic, local and global audience through our annual in person and online programme, digital and social networking platforms.
- Encourage the exploration of diversity, cultural and social identity by encouraging discussion and debate through the medium of the literary arts and creative writing.

### **Develop new audiences**

- Engage with tourism opportunities, partnering with hospitality and/or accommodation providers to further develop links to promote cultural festivals as key attractions in attractive locations.
- Engage upwards of 100 new participants annually, across socially disadvantaged areas in the continuation of the Once Alien Here creative writing project as part of our community outreach programme.
- Programme ambitious and high-profile international poets/authors/speakers at the JHISS and at other literary events throughout the year to attract new audiences.
- Maintain and develop partnerships with established Literary organisations to maximise artistic potential of our programme, such as with Poetry Ireland and Belfast International Arts Festival

## **Achievements & Performance**

The year saw the Society returning to its full range of activities, following the disruption of previous years due to the covid pandemic. We were delighted that our audiences slowly returned and built up again as people's confidence returned.

### **Activities:**

- **Cushendun Big Arts Weekend**

30 April 2022: The Old Church Centre

Local musician Glenn Simpson joined Tony Kennedy to share Songs and Poetry of the area.

- **The 35th John Hewitt International Summer School**

Monday 25 - Saturday 30 July 2022: Market Place Theatre & Arts Centre Armagh.

The Society was thrilled to be able to return as normal to our festival home for a full week of culture, entertainment, discussion and collective celebration of the literature arts under the theme,

### **Finding the nation: redefining home and country for a shared future**

*This is my home and country. Later on  
perhaps I'll find this nation is my own...  
John Hewitt, "Conacre", 1943.*

The theme addressed issues of diversity, exploring how much "home", "country", "identity" and "nation" matter, or should matter in a shared future, and considering the experience of those who feel excluded from existing political structures.

Well known contributors drawn from Ireland and elsewhere included Val McDermid, Ardal O'Hanlon and David Park in a promising return to live events.

The opening address was given by Professor Olivette Otele, the UK's first black female Professor of History, distinguished research professor at SOAS London and previously Professor of the History of Slavery at Bristol University. Sponsored by the Commission for Victims and Survivors NI, Professor Otele in her talk explored the links between history, collective memory and geopolitics and how questions of citizenship, race and identity are addressed. During the week other talks featured Andy Pollak, sponsored by The Irish Association, addressing what the Republic needs to do to become more appealing to Unionists, Martin Collins, Co-Director of Pavee Point Traveller & Roma Centre and Traveller Rights activist for over 30 years, Professor Katy Hayward considering the impact of Brexit on North/ South and Ireland/ UK relationships, and Tara McEvoy delivered the annual John Hewitt lecture.

Belfast born Gareth Reid, Sky Arts Portrait Artist of the Year 2017, presented the Arts Lecture and launched an exhibition of his work in the Market Place Gallery, the first in Northern Ireland in a decade. A further exhibition on the foyer walls featured the work of Geraldine Hamoonga Michelo, born in Zambia and now resident in Northern Ireland.

Poetry was strongly represented with readings from the recently published *Queering the Green Anthology*, and from poets Richard Scott, Victoria Kennefick (sponsored by Poetry Ireland), Nandi Joli and Jessica Traynor. The Gallery Press event (sponsored by The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon) featured their published poets Alibhe Ní Ghearbhuigh, Molly Twomey and John McAuliffe. In a special online poetry event, Jamaican poets Dr Mervyn Morris and Dr Edward Baugh joined us live from the University of the West Indies (UWI) Jamaica, hosted in the UWI by JHS Committee member Raquel McKee. This event was sponsored by UWI, The High Commission of Jamaica in London and Poetry Ireland.

The Fiction events featured Jan Carson in discussion with Andrew Cunning, David Park speaking with Malachi O'Doherty, Louise Kennedy and Una Mannion with Michael Hughes, Bernie McGill and Wendy Erskine celebrating the short story with Paul McVeigh, and Audrey Magee in conversation with Emma Warnock. Suad Aldarra and Kerri Ní Dochartaigh talked to Maureen Boyle about their recent memoirs, while emerging authors Kathleen Murray, Olivia Fitzsimmons, and Kevin Doherty were in discussion with Jan Carson. The Crime Fiction Special featured the much celebrated and bestselling crime writing authors Val McDermid and Mark Billingham in conversation with local crime writer Stuart Neville. Later in

the week BBC broadcaster William Crawley interviewed Irish comedian, actor, and author Ardal O'Hanlon about his latest book in the theatre.

There were two panel sessions - The Slugger O'Toole panel, chaired by Alan Meban, with Alex Kane, Lilian Seenoi-Barr and Sorcha Eastwood based on the theme, and another panel discussion on Reporting The Troubles, from the new book of the same name, with journalists Gordon Adair, Deric Henderson, Ivan Little, Eric Villers, and David Lynas.

Evening performances included a Gala Concert Special performed by The West Ocean String Quartet, led by founder, composer, and musician Neil Martin. "Before," a new one man play by Pat Kinnevene directed by Fishamble Theatre Company Dublin. The Mary Anne McCracken story in music and song with Jane Cassidy and Maurice Leyden, culminating in an evening of Musical Theatre with Misses Liffey from Dublin.

Once again the creative writing workshops offered support to existing and new writers, some of whom had the opportunity to read their work at the annual Creative Writing showcase at the end of the week. Three of the workshops were supported by Open University Ireland.

No Alibis Belfast, the festival bookstore, provided their annual pop-up book stall in the foyer, with numerous book signings by visiting authors. Two receptions were sponsored by the North South Ministerial Council and by the Mayor of Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, Councillor Paul Greenfield.

As in previous years, the Society was able to offer sponsored bursaries, residential and daily, to enable a wide range of people throughout the island of Ireland to experience, appreciate, and immerse themselves in the wide range of literature, politics and Arts events in the programme. This year our bursary awards were supported by the Community Relations Council NI, The Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Local Authorities, the Reconciliation Department: Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Investec and from several individuals/organisations who sponsor a bursary annually. In addition, Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council provided awards for a small number of Council residents.

Our Festival celebration of Literature, politics, the arts, culture and debate was made possible through the partnership and financial support of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, The Commission for Victims and Survivors, The North South Ministerial Council, The Irish Association, Slugger O'Toole Blog, The Open University, No Alibis Bookstore, our many sponsors and advertisers. All of this support is much appreciated in these challenging times.

- **UK National Poetry Day**

6 October 2022: Robinson Library Armagh

To celebrate NPD 2022, poets Mel McMahon and Gráinne Tobin read from their work. In association with Armagh City Chapter Libraries NI Network and Poetry Ireland.

- **John Hewitt's Birthday Reading**

2 November 2022: John Hewitt Bar Belfast.

On the 60th Anniversary of Belfast International Arts Festival, we were thrilled to be able to return once again to the iconic John Hewitt Bar Belfast for our annual Poetry Reading to mark the birth date of the celebrated Belfast poet John Hewitt after which the Society is named.

Introduced by JHS Board member Dr Frank Ferguson, poets Rachel Hegarty and Annemarie Ní Chrurraín started by reading their favourite John Hewitt poem before going on to read from their own work. In association with Poetry Ireland and The Belfast International Arts Festival.

- **BOCAS UK Literary Tour 2022**

3 November 2022: No Alibis Bookstore Belfast.

Reading by Caribbean writers Celeste Mohammed, Nicholas Laughlin and hosted by JHS Committee member Raquel McKee. In association with BOCAS Literary Arts Festival Trinidad and Tobago and Belfast International Arts Festival.

- **QUB - The John Hewitt Public Lecture**

9 November 2022: The Peter Froggatt Centre, QUB.

“*Once Alien Here’: Languages Literatures and Identities’* by Seamus Mc Kee, journalist, presenter and broadcaster. How have writers dealt with the whole question of identity - from Joyce to Liz Lochhead, from Seamus Heaney to Zadie Smith, including those writers who are new to Northern Ireland. How do our young people respond to questions on issues of language, belonging, and being 'the other'.

In association with Queen’s University Belfast Open Learning, World Literature: Global Voices Series 2022/23.

- **Selected Poems by John Hewitt Book Launch**

24 November 2022: Harrison Boutique Hotel Belfast.

New edition book launch of *The Selected Poems* by John Hewitt, with readings from the book by the editors - poets Frank Ormsby and Michael Longley. In association with Blackstaff Press and Harrison Boutique Hotel Belfast who officially opened their own newly named, John Hewitt hotel room, on the same night. John Hewitt and his wife lived in the house at a time.

- **Look North! The North Belfast Festival**

24 - 26 February 2023

For a second year, in partnership with a network of organisations, stakeholders and individuals, the jam-packed Look North! The North Belfast Festival 2023 took place throughout North Belfast on Friday – Sunday, 24 - 26 February. A new multi-arts and heritage festival weekend, Look North! brings great new opportunities for everyone to discover more about North Belfast’s rich creative and cultural arts heritage.

Opening with a talk on community action, ‘*Saving the Shankill-Then & Now,*’ by network member Jackie Redpath, the weekend included a number of walking heritage/arts tours and tours of heritage venues in North Belfast; workshops on digital skills, creative craft, and on creative writing; shared reading group discussions hosted by Libraries Ni and Duncairn Arts; and the second Look North! Short story competition awards ceremony for young people, 11 – 17 years, and adult short story writers.

North Belfast born author Bernard MacLaverty joined us online from Glasgow in conversation with Paul McVeigh; Hugh Odling-Smee hosted a Literary panel to celebrate the short story with local writers Anne Devlin and Wendy Erskine; Lucy Caldwell, Riley Johnson and Jan Carson discussed the life and times of Mary Beckett; Geraldine Connon, interviewed by Katy Radford, revealed her family connections to North Belfast in her book, *The Russian Tailor of Belfast*; while veteran author Malachi O’Doherty was in conversation with Duncan Morrow. A poetry reading event featured Nithy Kasa, Micheál McCann and Dawn Watson, and a poetry slam with a group of young emerging poets, hosted by Niamh McNally, was held in Cassidy’s Bar North Belfast.

Dr Myrtle Hill gave a talk on the Women of North Belfast; Journalists Jim McDowell, Ivan Little, Allison Morris, and Gary McDonald joined a panel discussion relating their experiences on, *The Rise and Fall of Belfast’s Fleet Street*; while politicians, and former North Belfast residents, Nuala McAllister and Philip Brett joined the Slugger O’Toole Blog political panel, chaired by David McCann.

Duncairn Arts joined in with their annual family join in Super Sunday Sessions, and the 100 Club hosted Alfi and her band supported by local musicians; A concert by the North Belfast Youth Choir and the Cairde Community Choir was followed by Siobhan Brown and her band; Oh Yeah Music Centre hosted All Points live music and film performances curated by AP:N; and there was a special film screening of *Belfast 1912* by Dominic O’Neill in the American Bar.

Anaka Women’s Collective hosted a Cultural Evening upstairs in the Sunflower bar. Beyond Belfast hosted their monthly performance art workshop as part of the festival in St. Joes Sailortown. Visual artist Alice Maher gave a talk on her work before opening her exhibition at the Golden Thread Gallery.

The closing ceremony concluded with the launch of a copy of David Esler’s stained glass window to John Hewitt’s Man,

Fish and Bird in The Duncan Arts, originally commissioned for and installed at Stormont.

Over the weekend the festival delivered 42 literature, heritage and arts events in 23 venues along the North Belfast Cultural Corridor including talks, walks, panels, poetry, shared readings, film, dance and musical performances, cultural exchanges, workshops (poetry, crime fiction, craft, novel writing, creative digital skills) and launched two exhibitions.

The Look North! North Belfast festival is planned, co-ordinated and managed by a network of members from Ulster University, Clifton House, The North Belfast Heritage Cluster, Duncairn Arts, Beat Carnival, Imagine Belfast, Spectrum Centre, and other invested individuals. It is supported by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, the National Lottery Community Fund, Belfast City Council Community Festivals fund, Belfast Charitable Society, Belfast Harbour and Destination CQ Bid Fund. We are grateful for their generosity, co-operation and support at this time.

- **40th anniversary of John Hewitt being awarded the Freedom of the City of Belfast**  
2nd March 2023: Banquet Hall, Belfast City Council

Introduced by Belfast City Council's High Sheriff Dr John Kyle, who talked about the political and cultural legacy of John Hewitt in the City, it was followed by a talk by Anthony Kennedy, Chair of the John Hewitt Society, poet Niamh McNally who read her new poem on North Belfast, 'New Impressions', a rehearsed reading of Hewitt's play, 'Bloody Brae,' by a professional male actor and Claire Hanna MP, Dr Connal Parr gave a talk on Hewitt's connections with his grandfather, well known civil rights activist, writer and BCC Councillor Paddy Devlin, and told how as Lord Mayor he got this honour passed through Council at that time. The event culminated with readings by poets Michael Longley and Maureen Boyle who read from The Selected Poems by John Hewitt, edited by poets Frank Ormsby and Michael Longley.

## **Other Developments**

During the year Byddi Lee joined the Artistic programme committee in November, while long-standing Artistic Committee member Alex Catherwood stepped down.

After another action-packed and inspiring year during which we had to endure the developing cost-of-living crisis, rising costs, uncertainty with arts funding, the continuing fall out from covid and post covid social anxiety, we were delighted that so many of our loyal followers turned out to support us in such large numbers, especially in Armagh during the JHISS.

We are grateful to our funders, supporters and partners, especially our core funders The Arts Council of Northern Ireland and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council who continued to support us year on year. All of this support is much appreciated during these difficult financial times.

I would like to thank our Company Director Patricia Morris for steering us through the year, our many partners and volunteers for working with us, and of course my fellow Board and Committee members. Despite these difficult and challenging times, I am confident that with the support and the cooperation of our many friends, loyal followers and partners of the Society we will continue to build on our wide range of literary and arts activities be it on the local, regional or global stage. We look forward to another exciting, productive and successful year.

## **Plans for future periods**

In my final report as Chair of The John Hewitt Society I look back with pride at what has been achieved with comparatively few resources, and with gratitude for the contributions made by past and present Board members, Committee members, staff, and partners and supporters. All that we have achieved is due to the way in which we have worked together. I believe that we have contributed to a better life for many through stimulating thought, encouraging talent, and showing the enjoyment that can be gained by working together.

I am confident that my successor, Dr Frank Ferguson supported by Patricia Morris, our company director, and our current Board and Committee will continue to keep alive the ideas and ideals of John Hewitt and to make significant contributions to literary, culture, and intellectual life in Northern Ireland and beyond.

Approved by order of the board of trustees on 21/10/2023 and signed on its behalf by:

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tony Kennedy".

Name of Trustee

Date 21/12/2023