

THE SOCIETY FOR OLD TESTAMENT STUDY

Minutes of the Business Meeting held on 23rd July 2019 at Worcester College, Oxford under the presidency of Prof Susan Gillingham

1. Welcome and Apologies

The President welcomed Members to the Business Meeting of the Society and particularly those attending the meeting for the first time. The Secretary noted that apologies had been received from the following: Jennifer Andruska, Teófilo Correa, Juan Cruz, Eryl Davies, Kristin De Troyer, Cheryl Exum, Anthony Gelston, Alec Gilmore, Alison Gray, Anselm Hagedorn, Elizabeth Harper, Robert Hayward, John Job, Jessica Keady, Andy Lie, Rex Mason, Gordon McConville, Brittany Melton, Alan Millard, Jonathan Stökl, Nancy Tan, Michael Thompson, Chris Thomson, Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, Nicolas Wyatt.

2. Minutes and Matters Arising

The Minutes of the previous Business Meeting, which had been displayed and posted online, were approved by the meeting and signed by the President.

There were no matters arising that would not appear on the agenda.

3. Notification of Any Other Business

There was no notification of any other business.

4. Reports from Officers

(a) The President, Prof Susan Gillingham reported as follows:

As previous Presidents have said in their reports, it is a privilege and pleasure to serve as President of this society, although the real work is done by David Shepherd as secretary, James Patrick as hospitality secretary, and Alistair Hunter as treasurer. Two areas of concern, one internal and one external, arose from our last meeting and future Presidents and committee meetings will have to continue to address these. The first is the nature of the programme, especially the importance of hearing more papers from younger members, as well as creating opportunities for all members to be academically challenged, whilst also having the space to spend time with colleagues. Issues such as how often and when to meet and how to integrate the different needs of different members are ongoing challenges. The second area concerns the recent British Academy review of TRS which shows just how perilous a position our discipline is in, especially at the tertiary level, with a vast drop in undergraduate applications over the last seven years, closures of familiar theological

institutions, and the ongoing gender imbalance at the graduate and academic staff level.¹ I am most grateful for Charlotte Hempel's lead here, but we still need to reflect on how as a society we might respond to this. As the fourth female President in over a hundred years, I have sought to invite more women to speak, from all stages of their careers, as well as trying to create a supportive atmosphere where anyone reading a paper for the first time feels welcome. My presidential address focussed on the importance of a 'critical imagination' in all our Old Testament /Hebrew Bible studies, and I have sought to apply this in both the January and July programmes: a visit to Trinity College to view Illuminated Psalters was part of our Cambridge meeting (for which we owe a good deal to the new librarian at Trinity, Dr. Nicolas Bell) and a themed concert on psalmody comes at the end of our July meeting. We can never please everyone: but it is important that as a society we respect our differences and move forward into the 2020s with a generous spirit willing to embrace both continuity and change.

(b) The Treasurer, Dr Alastair Hunter reported on the financial affairs of the Society as follows:

BANK & INVESTMENT ACCOUNT BALANCES at 21st July 2019

Barclays Current A/C	£20,620.82
Barclays IAS (Business Premium) A/C	£69,412.21
TOTAL	£90,033.03

Total income to the Bursary Fund is £2115 to date. Gift aid will add around £850, giving an anticipated total of just over £2950 –marginally below the figure budgeted for. It should be noted that £1506 of the bursary fund came from the continued voluntary payments made by life members, for which the Society is most grateful.

Gift Aid:

A recent email publicising the Gift Aid scheme succeeded in adding about a dozen new members – in effect adding about £100 to the amount we recover from HMRC.

Budget for 2019-20:

A copy of the proposed budget for 2019-20 was posted on the notice board, together with comparative figures from previous years. I have amended the layout in order to separate the meetings budget from general expenditure. Under meetings, I want to highlight a change of practice. In principle we advise members that payment for meetings in the event of non-attendance is not normally refundable. The committee has agreed that in future we should enforce this principle as a rule, given the tight margins for the funding of meetings. Accordingly I have set the budget figure for refunds in 2019-20 at £0.

¹ (see <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/news/theology-and-religious-studies-risk-disappearing-our-universities-says-british-academy>).

The budget for general expenditure anticipates a modest surplus, in line with experience in recent years. However, it is a matter of some concern that my prediction for subscription income is down by £250. While this is not a large amount, if the trend continues action may be required.

My thanks as usual to both the Membership Secretary and the Hospitality Secretary without whom my mistakes would be even greater!

The Business Meeting agreed the budget for the coming year.

c) The Secretary, Dr David Shepherd reported as follows:

While many others do much of the heavy lifting in keeping the Society running, as Secretary I have the privilege of extending the official welcome to new members, but also offering condolences when we have to say farewell. Since last summer we have lost at the age of 99, Rev'd John Earp who served as Vice-Principal of Ridley Hall, Cambridge, Assistant Chaplain at Eton College and eventually Vicar of Hartley Wintney, Hampshire. We also said farewell to Rev'd Prof Stanley McIvor, Professor of Hebrew at Union Theological College in Belfast from 1978 until his retirement in 1994 and last but not least, we also said goodbye to Rev'd John Snaith who was Lecturer in Hebrew and Aramaic in the Faculty of Oriental Studies at the University of Cambridge before his retirement in 2001. Finally, I continue to appreciate the support and cooperation of the officers and other committee members in maintaining the work of the Society.

(d) The Secretary for Honorary Members, Prof Lester Grabbe reported as follows:

The following information has been provided by Honorary Members:

Sara Japhet notes that two new books of hers appeared this year:

Ezra-Nehemiah: Introduction and Commentary, in the series Mikra le-Israel (Tel Aviv 2019, in Hebrew, 520+xvi pp.).

The Way of Lovers, together with B.D. Walfish (Jerusalem, 2019, in Hebrew, 228+viii pp.). The English edition by Brill appeared in 2017.

Reinhard Kratz reports that the Septuaginta Unternehmen, which ended officially in 2015, received new funding. The application for a critical edition of the Psalter, another long-term-project of the Academy over 20 years (2020–2040), was recently approved. The edition of the other books which are not edited yet, of course, will continue. With regard to the Qumran lexicon, the second volume (*gimel* to *zain*) is out, and the third volume is in preparation for 2020, when the funding of this project, unfortunately, will end. Another application is being

prepared, with plans to continue and complete it as an online lexicon; it is hoped to get new funding for this in 2021.

Bernhard Lang gives information about two recent publications. The first of these books is an annotated German translation and study of Philo of Alexandria's *De Iosepho*, a philosophical retelling of the biblical story of Joseph in Egypt. The second constitutes what may well be the first theological guide to world literature from Gilgamesh and the Bible to modern novels, recently declared indispensable for school libraries by official educational authorities in Germany, and nominated for a non-fiction book award.:

Philo von Alexandria: Das Leben des Politikers oder Über Josef. Eine philosophische Erzählung (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2017; pp. 107).

Religion und Literatur in drei Jahrtausenden: Hundert Bücher (Paderborn: Schöningh 2019; pp. xi, 764).

Carol Newsom is happy to announce that she has retired, after teaching at Emory University for almost 40 years. She has also just published a set of collected essays, *Rhetoric and Hermeneutics: Approaches to Text, Tradition and Social Construction in Biblical and Second Temple Literature* (FAT 130; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019). She is sorry that she is not able to attend the SOTS conference this summer, but hopes to see some of the members at IOSOT.

Kirsten Nielsen sends her greetings to the meeting.

(e) The Membership Secretary, Dr Janet Tollington, reported as follows:

The total membership now stands at 509, which is a decrease of 9 since December 2018

Although we welcomed 6 new **Ordinary members** in January (4M/2F) there have been 2 **deaths** recorded (both male) and 3 **resignations** (2M/1F). 10 members (8M/2F) were removed from the roll for failure to pay their annual subscriptions. 6 members have been elevated to the status of **Life Member** having been subscribing members for 30 years.

Will members please keep me informed of any changes to their postal addresses and e-mails. Several people no longer receive the round robin e-mails because messages sent to the e-mail address on the database have bounced back, so I have deleted them from the circulation lists.

Male/female ratio: 354M/155F, being 69.55% M and 30.45% F. The % of women is marginally up but only because we are losing males at a faster rate than female members.

Members by country of residence: As was agreed at the 2017 Summer Meeting I am now only showing these figures in terms of the United Kingdom & Ireland (reflecting the Society's origins and historical associations) and the rest of the world grouped together.

UK & Ireland	343 (67.39%)
Rest of the world	166 (32.61%)

If I disregard the Honorary members (who are *de facto* from RoW) these statistics become UK&I 69.86% and RoW 30.14%

Membership by type:

Ordinary members: 332

Life members: 159

Honorary members: 18

Book list mailing: 445 were sent out to Members in the June mailing but Ordinary members should note that anyone whose subscription has not been paid at the correct, updated, annual amount will not be receiving the 2019 Book List until arrears have been paid to the Treasurer. Such people will be included in the second Book List mailing, which goes to new members, towards the end of 2019. *At the time of writing there are still 33 members in complete default and 22 in arrears.*

In response to a query regarding how the gender balance in the Society's whole membership compares to that applicable to members in the UK and Ireland, the Membership Secretary confessed she did not currently know. Subsequent to the meeting she has discovered that 33.43% (114) of the 341 UK/Ireland members are female, which is significantly better than the figures for the rest of the world.

(f) The Hospitality Secretary, Dr James Patrick, reported as follows:

He expressed his thanks to the President for all the effort she had gone to in organising and seeking funding for both meetings and for the outing. He noted that website payments for meeting attendance are increasing which means that he can send receipts promptly, and he encouraged members to avail themselves of this payment option. He explained that due to cheques from the last meeting having been lost by Royal Mail, cheques for this meeting are being handed personally to the Treasurer during the meeting and will thus be banked shortly. He followed up the Treasurer's report, informing that refunds can no longer be presumed for late cancellations of bookings, by noting that he does try to recoup such losses by assigning the cancelled accommodation or catering to any who request attendance last-minute, allowing for partial refunds for some people. Even so, members would be advised to take out travel insurance in case of inability to attend. He reminded members to leave the badges and lanyards before departing the meeting, and to return (by post if necessary) those which may have been taken accidentally, particularly mentioning those from previous meetings also. He urged members who discover badges and lanyards even from years earlier to overcome any

embarrassment in returning them, as he will be glad to receive them back with no questions asked. He was pleased to observe that more publishers are exhibiting at this meeting than were at the Winter Meeting, and encouraged members to purchase books at the meeting to ensure publishers' ongoing participation. In this connection, he noted that Alban Books has now gone into administration, and it remains to be seen when/if another party will step in to distribute North American and other publishers' books here (such as Eerdmans); if anyone hears of new distribution arrangements, they are encouraged to pass on the information to him. He noted that he will be working with his successor (once elected) to ensure a smooth transition. Finally he expressed his thanks to his helpers, to the officers, and to all the delegates for their contribution to the smooth running and positive feel of the meeting.

(g) The Book List Editor, Dr John Jarick, reported as follows:

It is pleasing to note that this year's edition of the *Book List* has been distributed by Sage Publications on time — and even before issue 4 of the *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* had been distributed, despite the *Book List* in its *JSOT* guise constituting issue 5 of the journal. This is a very welcome improvement on last year's considerable delay in distribution. In this edition 384 books have been reviewed by 126 reviewers, slightly down on last year's full-capacity edition but once again a tribute to the active involvement in the Society's operations of a wide range of members. On the Society's behalf I would like to thank each and every reviewer, and everyone who in sundry ways assists in the smooth operations of the *Book List*.

In my capacity as Convener of the Publications Sub-Committee, I need to report on the continuing difficulty that our Wiki Working Party has found in seeking a suitable Wiki provider now that the former host server is no longer available. The logistics of moving over to a Content Management System (CMS) are now being explored, together with the feasibility of hosting our Wiki on the SOTS website, and the Working Party could benefit from the advice of persons with experience of CMS and web hosting services. If there are any SOTS members with such experience (or with colleagues who have such experience), it would be good to hear from them: they can get in touch with the Wiki Editor or with the *Book List* Editor. The Working Party is mindful of the need to progress this matter with ever greater urgency, and is hopeful that the SOTS Wiki can go live again soon.

Meanwhile it is a pleasure to note that John Barton has accepted the sub-committee's invitation for him to edit a volume of essays by members of the Society on the current state of Old Testament studies. As members will know, SOTS has published a series of such books, appearing every twenty years or so since 1925, the most recent being *Text in Context*, edited by Andrew Mayes and published by OUP in 2000. John is now inviting all members of the Society to get in touch with him if they have any advice about the best title for the volume, the topics they think ought to be covered, and suggestions for members (including themselves) who might be asked to contribute. This will help him to build up a picture of what the Society would like the volume to offer readers.

(h) The Information Officer, Dr Jonathan Stökl, reported via the President as follows:

There is relatively little to report from me. I continue to post events by members, update information as requested by other officers and support other officers in their duties, as well as pointing members to the information. Should anybody find a mistake or have a good suggestion for something that should and could be included, I look forward to hearing from you—the website gets well over 1,000 hits a month, which for a small organisation like ours is good. Together with a number of members I have drafted a new social media policy on which the Committee has offered its feedback and which will now be revised accordingly.

(i) The Archivist, Prof Eryl Davies, reported via the Secretary as follows:

Since the Winter SOTS meeting I have had detailed discussions with the archivist at Bangor University and, while it was made clear to me that space in the archive itself is severely limited, the archivist has agreed to catalogue all the volumes which are published under the auspices of the Society and house them in the Special Archive Collection Room in the library. Thus, all the SOTS books should be safely located in a specific place should the archive at some point in the future move to another location. While we have never been charged for archive space, it was agreed that the Treasurer would send a donation of £100 to the archive and the archivist has written to express their appreciation.

5. Further Items of Interest

a) Regarding REF 2020, Prof Paul Joyce, reported as follows:

(i) The final Guidance on Submissions and Panel Criteria for REF 2021 was published on 31st January 2019 and circulated to members by Janet Tollington by email the next day.

Relating to discussion at the Winter Meeting of January 2019, the ‘Panel Criteria and Working Methods’ document, at p. 41, para 212, features the words ‘It is also anticipated that commentaries will be submitted, if they embody research as defined for the purposes of REF ... Commentaries often include research that encompasses work with original manuscripts, textual criticism, the historical, political, social and cultural context of a text, its history of reception and influence, and issues in its contemporary interpretation’.

(ii) Members are encouraged to get to know the Guidance on the REF 2021 website: www.ref.ac.uk/guidance.

This is a transparent process, wherein reviewers as well as others consult the public documents for direction on practice and process. In the unlikely event of an individual

member's circumstances not being covered by the Guidance, enquiries should be directed in the first instance to the member's *institutional* REF contact or technical contact, as appropriate. University REF contact details may be found at: www.ref.ac.uk/contact.

(iii) Eight short answers to frequently asked questions were presented. A useful REF 2021 document 'What the REF means for me', summarizing these with further information, was circulated to members by Janet Tollington by email straight after the Summer Meeting (28th July 2019).

(iv) It was reported that it is hoped to hold another national meeting about REF 2021 and TRS later in 2019 (as in the previous year). This was likely to be aligned with a meeting of TRS-UK.

- b) Regarding TRS UK, Prof Charlotte Hempel, as SOTS representative on the TRS UK Committee, reported as follows on the new Strategic Priorities:

She stressed the collaborative and energetic work of TRS UK under the leadership of its current President Prof John Barclay (Durham) and an expanded committee with representation from a breadth of learned societies.

The strategic aims which were developed in consultation with the TRS UK AGM on 7 December 2018 are threefold:

- (i) To increase the pool of applicants to TRS at University
- (ii) To work more collaboratively with RE teachers
- (iii) To help increase the public understanding of religion in the UK

Five work streams sit within the three strategic aims:

1. Graduate Videos: TRS UK have identified an excellent film-maker and are gathering a suitably diverse range of graduates to interview in their workplace, hoping to have these finished and available for Depts and schools by summer 2020.
2. Collaboration with RE Teachers: we are developing a questionnaire to learn from teachers what would be the most useful forms of collaboration.
3. Social Media: we have a Twitter account (@UK_TRS) and are starting to use it, but we need a team of dedicated tweeters. We also want to recruit a new website manager to develop our website so it can support Twitter and other initiatives that promote TRS on a national scale.
4. Market Research: we are developing plans for a full-scale piece of market research on why school leavers do or do not choose to study TRS at University. If we can get the funding this could be a project for one of your colleagues to take on as part of their research.

5. Media Advice: we have gathered an excellent media advice group, and are exploring what we could do on a national level that could help TRS scholars become more active and engaged in public communication of our subject. We would love to know your ideas on this. E.g. should we arrange media training, and would you use it (and help pay for it)?

Any members who may be able to offer advice or support on the work streams are invited to get in touch with Prof Hempel.

In respect of the British Academy report which illustrated the recent decline in UG students in TRS in the UK, Prof Hugh Williamson noted that humanities subjects in general had been hit hard by the introduction of higher tuition fees, but that TRS had not since recovered their numbers, where other disciplines generally had. He also noted that the research was a desk exercise which may mean that the data reported may not provide a perfect picture of the real numbers. He observed that alternative providers (including theological colleges) had grown their numbers and that the Society's membership included significant numbers of those teaching in this sector.

Prof Hempel acknowledged the importance of the Report by the British Academy and reminded members that the President had circulated the Report alongside a Press Release by TRS UK to the Society via the Membership secretary on 11th of June. TRS UK expressed their thanks for the Report to the British Academy but also stressed the need for all stake holders to be proactive in tackling the challenges highlighted in the Report. Prof Hempel emphasised that for our discipline to thrive in the future we depend on the health of all institutional contexts represented by the Society. She also stressed that Prof John Barclay is calling for a collective response to the challenges with a robust and concerted effort to tackle them.

- c) SOTS Strategic Review, Prof Susan Gillingham, reported as follows:

The Committee had received suggestions from a group of members regarding the need to consider changes relating to the Society's meetings and governance. At its meeting yesterday, the Committee noted that considerable time had passed since a review had been undertaken and agreed that a review of the Society's activities, operations and governance should be facilitated by a working group consisting of Susan Gillingham, Charlotte Hempel, David Shepherd and four others drawn from the wider membership. She emphasized that this group would ensure that the wider membership has a voice in shaping the future. Possible ideas for reaching this end might include a survey sent to all members, whether or not they attended particular meetings, which could be brought for discussion to the Committee and/or a longer session (perhaps an hour) at the Business Meeting when those attending could voice their own views about the shape of the future. In any case, recommendations will be

brought first to the Committee and then to the Business Meeting as necessary and appropriate.

6. Nominations

The following were proposed and elected: Prof Hugh Pyper as President for 2021, Dr Janet Fyffe as Hospitality Secretary, Dr Katherine Southwood as an Ordinary Member of the Committee, Dr Andrew Mein as a Member of the Publications Sub-Committee and Dr Nathan McDonald as a Member of the Programme Sub-Committee.

The President noted that the term of the current Treasurer would shortly be concluding and invited Members to express an interest in this role if they feel suited to it.

7. Proposals for New Members

The following were proposed and elected into membership of the Society: Mr Moritz Adam, Mr Peter Atkins, Mr Robert Brown, Mrs Ellena Lyell, Dr Andrew Perrin, Dr Stefano Salemi.

8. Future Meetings

The President confirmed that the forthcoming Winter Meeting will be held from the 6th to the 8th January 2020, at the Jubilee Campus, University of Nottingham and the Summer Meeting from the 20th to the 23rd July 2020 at Hulme Hall, Manchester.

There being no further business, the President declared the Business Meeting closed.

Signed: Date: