

THE SOCIETY FOR OLD TESTAMENT STUDY

Minutes of the Business Meeting held on 8th Jan 2020

at Newark Hall, Jubilee Campus, University of Nottingham

under the presidency of Dr Walter Houston

1. Welcome and Apologies

The President invited new members attending for the first time to introduce themselves and welcomed them and the rest of the membership to the Business Meeting of the Society. The Secretary noted that apologies had been received from the following: John Barton, Ron Clements, Juan Cruz, Siobhan Dowling-Long, Anthony Gelston, Lester Grabbe, Elizabeth Harper, Samuel Hildebrandt, Hedy Hung, John Job, Anja Klein, Gordon McConville, Mary Mills, Walter Moberly, Holly Morse, Judith Shiel, Katherine Southwood, Simon Stocks, Jenni Williams, Karen Yuan.

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 Dr Walter Houston. There were no matters arising which did not appear on the agenda.

3. Notification of Any Other Business

Irene Jones noted that she had a query regarding the transparency of SOTS election processes.

4. Reports from Officers

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

It was a pleasure to host the July meeting at Worcester College, Oxford, and to have the full use of the Sultan Nazrin Shah Conference Centre. Many will remember the award-winning architecture and the way the hot summer sun played on the shade and shadows both inside and out: some of the most memorable photos have been posted on the website (see <https://www.sots.ac.uk/photos-from-the-summer-meeting-2019-worcester-college-oxford/>).

We heard a wide variety of engaging papers especially from invited speakers, new members and younger scholars. It was good to have access to the BAJIS conference in Oxford at the same time, and we were grateful for an invitation to a shared reception. The President's river cruise down the Thames with cream tea on board was enjoyed by nearly a hundred members, despite the baking heat. The final concert, on Book Four of the Psalms as a Jewish and Christian performance in four parts, undertaken by SOTS members and members of Worcester College, received a standing ovation. The subsidised gala dinner in the Dining Hall was appreciated by many. None of these extras would have been possible without the extraordinary generosity of Sultan Nazrin Shah, an Honorary Fellow of Worcester College, reaching out to further Muslim/Jewish/Christian relations. The smooth running of events was due to the hard work of James

Patrick as hospitality secretary, David Shepherd as secretary, and Alastair Hunter as treasurer. The summer meeting created a genuine sense of community, reflected in the way that the various committee meetings were all held in a positive and constructive way. One consequence was the appointment of a Strategy Review Committee, chaired by the outgoing President, alongside David Shepherd, Charlotte Hempel, and four other members, each representing the various interest groups of the Society. Its brief is to discuss how the Society might better serve all of its members; it will report its findings over the next two years. I have thoroughly enjoyed this spell as President. There is much to learn and much to be done. One last thought is that a two-year Presidency might better serve the Society than a one year spell, because one begins to feel a bit more useful just as it is time to hand over the baton.

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

BANK & INVESTMENT ACCOUNT BALANCES at 24th December 2019

		(Dec 2018)
Barclays Current A/C	£ 2,087	£14,750
Barclays IAS (Business Premium) A/C	£64,477	£72,342
TOTAL	£66,564	£87,092

The sharp decrease in the current account balance arises from the payment in advance (at the request of Nottingham University) of the invoice for the Winter Meeting (£15,325). The decrease in the Premium account results from (a) a temporary cashflow advance of £2000 which will be repaid in January, and (b) transfers earlier in the financial year arising from historic overspend on meetings.

AUDITED ACCOUNTS

The audited accounts are ready and have been posted on the notice board. The auditors did not identify any significant issues.

SUMMARY OF MEETINGS 2019

The most striking aspect is an overall deficit of ca £5000 for the two meetings in 2019 (held in Cambridge and Oxford). It was agreed by the Committee that the treasurer should have some consultative input to the costing of meetings when this is being decided by the Hospitality Secretary.

SUBSCRIPTION SITUATION

Despite repeated reminders to those who have not yet paid their subscriptions, I have made little progress in persuading them to do so. It is likely, therefore, that we will lose some at the end of the year. The online payment system continues to function well, and in the most part unproblematically. I note an increase in the proportion of those using this method.

NEW TREASURER

As will appear elsewhere on our agenda, a possible successor to myself as Treasurer has been identified.

THANKS

My personal thanks to all who help to facilitate my duties as treasurer – in particular David Shepherd, James Patrick, and Janet Tollington.

The Business Meeting approved the audited accounts and reappointed the current auditors.

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

I am sorry to report the passing of two of our members, Tim Bulkeley and Terence Mitchell, formerly Keeper of the Department of Western Asiatic Antiquities at the British Museum. On a happier note, as many of you will be well aware and as has already been reported in the Society's Bulletin, the British Academy's Burkitt Medal was awarded to one of our members, Professor Christopher Rowland, 'for his services to Biblical Studies' (2018). I continue to appreciate very much the support and cooperation of the other committee members, and particularly the officers, in maintaining the work of the Society.

(d) The Secretary for Honorary Members, Prof Lester Grabbe, sent his apologies for absence and indicated that he would ask the Membership Secretary to circulate his usual report to Members.

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

The total membership now stands at 509, which is an increase of 1 since my report to the Summer Meeting (*but a decrease of 8 since the beginning of the year*).

New Ordinary members in 2019: 13 (10M/3F)

Resignations in 2019: 6 (2M/4F) and **lapsed** 10 (8M/2F) for non payment of subscriptions.

Deaths in 2019: 5 (all male) [*although 1 actually occurred in June 2018*]

Male/female ratio: 355M /154F, being 69.74%M/ 30.26%F. (*If Honorary members are disregarded the percentage of women is 30.35%. The figure for membership in the UK & Ireland is 33.04% female*). The recruitment rate of women was only 23.08% this year.

Members by country of residence:

UK & Ireland	342 (67.19%)
Rest of the world	167 (32.81%)

Promoted to Life Membership in 2019: 6

Membership by type:

Ordinary members: 336 (66.01%)

Life members: 155

Honorary members: 18 (13M/5F)

Members may be interested to know that we still have 24 former Presidents of the Society in membership – all but one are Life Members.

Book list mailing: 447 were eventually sent out in the July mailing and a further 24 in the autumn mailing. Unfortunately the decision by Sage to move the distribution process to India means that this mailing has been delayed until mid-December; but I hope they will soon be received.

Postal receivers of mailings: Most members receive by email but now 79 paper copies are sent out to officers of the Society and those who have requested, as agreed. (This represents 15.5%) It is apparent that a desire to have a hard copy of the Membership List underlies most requests to remain on the 'Postal List' in the case of members who also receive electronically.

A reminder to members of the need to 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.

Heather McKay asked how many Life Members continued to pay their subscriptions. The Treasurer replied that approximately half of them do so.

(f) The Hospitality Secretary, Dr James Patrick, apologized for the microphone problems this year and drew members attention to the availability of the second hand book table, noting that any books not taken by others must be reclaimed. In preparing for the conclusion of his tenure, he acknowledged his debt to his predecessor, Elizabeth Harper, who is in his thoughts and prayers due to her health struggles. During his tenure, he was pleased to see improvements to the lanyards, the innovation of the bell, the use of Nottingham as a venue and the reviving of publishers' participation in the meetings. Also particularly pleasing were the large and important centennial meetings. He noted his delight in training up his successor, Janet Fyffe, who will officially take office for the coming meetings, planning for which continues apace. He concluded by noting that he had thoroughly enjoyed his tenure as Hospitality Secretary.

The President thanked James on behalf of Members for his outstanding service as Hospitality Secretary.

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

The 2020 edition of the *Book List* is now taking shape, and I am grateful to all members who have reviewed books so far, as well as those who have taken up books available here at the Winter Meeting for prompt review. Sharp-eyed members will have noticed that the 2019 edition as printed and distributed by Sage Publications had a serious omission on the title page inside the front cover, and you may also have noticed a number of minor errors in other places within the volume. I will not list the minor errors (not least because some of you may enjoy the challenge of discovering them), but the serious omission is that the Assistant to the Editor was not credited. The Assistant was Jelle Verburg, as was the case also in 2018, and the disappearance of the accreditation ‘with the assistance of Jelle Verburg’ from the 2019 publication is deeply regrettable. I can assure members that the manuscript sent to Sage certainly included that important crediting of my assistant, but yet those words did not appear in print, and at the same time the various minor errors that I had had the opportunity to correct at the proofs stage of the manuscript were mysteriously continued into the printed version. No explanation for this incompetence by the publisher has been forthcoming from Sage, but they have at least agreed to publish a corrigendum in the 2020 edition apologising for the major error on the part of the publisher concerning the lack of accreditation for the Assistant to the Editor. At least on this occasion the publisher distributed the 2019 edition in a timely manner, unlike the previous year. Unfortunately, though, the second distribution (to new members and late payers and certain other recipients), which is meant to take place in November, was delayed, apparently on account of a change of personnel at Sage. We can only hope that everything will function more smoothly for the printing and distribution of the 2020 edition.

Meanwhile let me note here that a handover has occurred in the graduate-student Assistant to the Editor role, with the aforementioned Jelle Verburg having now reached the last phase of his doctoral studies at Oxford. I am very grateful to him for his labours on *Book List* matters over the past two years, even if Sage only credited him for one of those years (at least until the promised corrigendum in the next edition). The current Assistant is another postgraduate student at Oxford, Moritz Adam, who was in fact elected to membership of the Society at the last Meeting, the Summer Meeting 2019. As it happens, Moritz will be moving on later this year to further postgraduate study at the University of Zurich and so will only be available to assist the *Book List* Editor for this year’s edition alone, but it is a pleasure to note his good work in this role at this halfway stage of present-edition activities. In my capacity as Convener of the Publications Sub-Committee I am pleased to report the forthcoming publication in 2020 of several volumes under the Society’s auspices: in the Study Guides to the Old Testament series, Tchavdar Hadjiev’s *Joel, Obadiah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*; in the SOTS Monograph Series, Dan’el Kahn’s *Sennacherib’s Campaign against Judah: A Source Analysis of Isaiah 36–37*; and in the Oudtestamentische Studiën series, Cat Quine’s *Casting Down the Host of Heaven: The Rhetoric of Ritual Failure in the Polemic against the Host of Heaven*. I can also report that progress is being made on another matter that the Publications Sub-Committee has been expediting on the Society’s behalf. The SOTS Wiki should soon be operating once again, now under the domain of the SOTS website. The Society’s former Information Officer Jim Aitken has secured the agreement of a programmer to design and install the Wiki within our

website at a cost of £1400–2100 (depending on the amount of work that turns out to be involved), an expenditure that has been approved by the General Committee. There will be no additional hosting costs; the only cost will be the initial set-up and design. It is difficult to predict the schedule for this, but the programming is not complex and should not take long; therefore, once the work gets underway, it should be relatively quick to complete. The Society owes considerable thanks to Jim for his efforts on this important front.

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

Since my last report, I have been updating the website with the information required for the running of the activities of the Society, such as the information about the meeting, the minutes of the last business meeting, etc. Some members of the Society have pointed out errors and other elements that could be improved, and I am grateful for such notices and welcome them. The Treasurer has taken it upon himself to update the details on the online membership database with the information held by him. I would like to encourage members to have a look at the information held in the database, to update it, and, importantly, let the following officers know about any changes that you have made or would like to be made (ideally the former to reduce our workload): the Treasurer, the Membership Secretary and the Information Officer. I would like to thank Alastair as Treasurer and James as Hospitality Secretary who have shown how officers who would like to use the website to facilitate the Society's activities can do so with little or no training. Together with Jim Aitken, I have also been involved in discussions to revive the SOTS wiki, which became dormant when Google decided to withdraw the wikispaces service. This should have taken place as I write this, and the SOTS wiki should find a home on our website in the near future, and then be available to be used again. I am now starting my 7th year as information officer and my 12th year on the committee. After such long service I look forward to handing my portfolio to someone with a new and fresh perspective—and a modicum of IT skills. If you feel that this describes you, please get in touch with the Secretary and / or myself as soon as possible. As ever, if any of you have any suggestions for improvements or spot an error on the website or anything related to the website, please let me know, and I will endeavour to assist and / or improve the website within my limited capabilities.

The President invited Members to join him in thanking the Information Officer for his excellent service.

(i) The Archivist, Professor Eryl Davies, who was present earlier in the meeting, sent his apologies and noted that he had nothing to report at present.

5. Proposals for New Members

The Business meeting elected the following into membership: Ms Elizabeth Hare, Dr Arthur Keefer, Ms Susannah Rees, Prof Naomi Steinberg, Mrs Eleanor Vivian.

6. Nominations

The Business meeting elected Jo Henderson-Merrygold to assume the office of Treasurer in July 2021 and approved the exceptional extension of the current Treasurer's tenure until that time.

7. Proposals and Matters of Interest

a) Social Media Policy

In response to the President's request for approval of the policy, Robert Brown asked for the context out of which this emerged. It was noted that having such a policy was considered good practice by most institutions (Heather McKay) and indeed other Societies like ours (Charlotte Hempel). The President noted that the policy applies only to the Society's official social media channels. The policy was approved by the Business meeting subject to a minor correction offered by Heather McKay and noted by the Information Officer.

b) REF Update

Paul Joyce updated members 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, 1st February 2019. (ii) Members currently working in relevant institutions in the UK 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 own *institutional* REF contact, as appropriate. University REF contact details may be found at: www.ref.ac.uk/contact. (iii) A useful REF 2021 document 'What the REF means for me' was circulated to members by Janet Tollington by email straight after the Summer Meeting (28th July 2019). (iv) There was a meeting of TRS-UK on 6th December 2019. Almost all university departments were represented. A short portion of the afternoon was devoted to REF matters. The sub-panel Chair Gordon Lynch spoke and responded briefly to questions, primarily with regard to issues about overall submissions by institutions. v) The REF sub-panel for Theology and Religious Studies will be having its first regular meeting on 20th January 2020. The main purpose is to review the information submitted by institutions in response to the questionnaire they recently received about 'intention to submit'. The REF sub-panel will be looking for any areas in which additional assessors might be needed. In the light of this review, there will be another round of nominations for sub-panel assessors in certain areas of TRS in Spring 2020.

Heather McKay asked whether SOTS should be considering the Teaching Excellence Framework. Paul Joyce noted that this may be something worth pursuing in relation to TRS UK, in which teachers are well-represented, but acknowledged the possible value of exploring how SOTS might relate to TEF.

c) Strategic Review Group Update

The Chair of the group, Prof Susan Gillingham reported as follows:

We have now a strategy group of seven members, representing as much as possible different constituencies in the Society – retired, mid career, early career, University lecturers and independent scholars, international and British; some of us represent more than one interest group and some groups are not fully represented. For this reason we intend to send out a survey within the next month or so, eliciting views of the entire Society, which will then give us a more comprehensive basis to work from, recognising that it is likely that we'll be receiving views which are diametrically opposed. Our brief is to be as inclusive as possible, and our aim is to manage expectations in a realistic way. Thus far we have identified two key issues around which many other issues seem to revolve. One is the Programme – the number and length of the sessions, the variety of participants, the number of times we meet in a year, and so on. The other concerns Membership: our openness to new (perhaps Associate) members, including teachers, but especially a greater sense of democracy and transparency in what we do and how we do it. There is much more that can be said but we are very keen to move slowly and carefully, and before we assume these really are two key issues (and there are of course several others) we need to find out from the Society at large whether this is in fact the case. So the first thing you will notice is the offer to participate in a survey, which we will make available both on the website and through email. The group hopes to meet once by Skype before the next meeting and I intend to report on some progress at the next Business Meeting. But we don't expect to come up with any specific and practical proposals – which I would hope we could communicate in place of a programme paper – for another year.

8. AOB

Irene Jones raised the question of whether elections to the Society's offices and committees should be more transparent. Details of the current process were clarified for the meeting by Heather McKay, the Membership Secretary and the Secretary, the latter of whom noted that the Strategy Review Group would be considering these processes.

9. Future Meetings

The next Summer meeting will be held from the 20th to the 23rd of July 2020 at Hulme Hall,

Manchester and the following Winter meeting will be held from the 5th to the 7th January 2021, in Durham.

There being no further business, the President thanked all the members present and especially the speakers for their contribution and Susan Gillingham for chairing certain papers in his stead.

Signed: Date: