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## **Annual Report of the Dunedin Burns Club 21 April 2016**

Since the last AGM on 15 April 2015, the Club has continued with its aims of celebrating annually the birth of the Scottish Poet, Robert Burns, studying his poetry and in other ways perpetuating his memory, and fostering the love of Scottish song and story.

The 2015 AGM meeting was preceded by a Scottish musical concert provided by Arnold Bachop, Sarah Oliver, Frances Brodie and Raymond Goodfellow, including a sing-a-long and piping medley. The concert was attended by approximately 65 persons. It was part of the regular Octagon Club concert programme from 1.45 pm to 2.45 pm on the third Wednesday of the month with afternoon tea following at 2.45 pm. Betty Booth, the Octagon Club president said the concert was very well received and invited us back this year.

The accounts for the 2014 Scottish Festival, Sunday 31 August 2014 to Wednesday 3 September 2014, were finalised on 13 November 2015 and an excess of income (\$5,740.00) over expenditure (\$5,739.04) was recorded of \$0.96. Letters of thanks were written to the sponsors for their support: Otago Community Trust (\$1,500.00), Dunedin City Council (\$1,500.00) and the Scottish Heritage Council (\$800.00).

The Club maintained its membership of the Robert Burns World Federation and at a meeting of the committee of the Dunedin Burns Club on 14 December the Club agreed to sponsor, for £50, the digitisation of a volume of the Burns Chronicle. In the 1961 Burns Chronicle the Dunedin Burns Club, No 69, is listed on the Roll of the Burns Federation as being instituted in 1861 and joined the Federation in 1894. We requested that consideration might be given to choosing a date for the issue our Club sponsors which is the closest date available after 1894 and were pleased to be able to sponsor the 1896 chronicle. The 1896 issue will be introduced with the wording:

The Dunedin Burns Club, New Zealand, No 69 on the Roll of The Burns Federation, has sponsored the digitisation of the 1896 Burns Chronicle. The Club joined The Burns Federation in 1894 after being first instituted in 1861 with the help of the poet-settler John Barr of South Craigilee, Otago, and was reconstituted in 1891 with Mr Arthur Burns, grandnephew of Robert Burns, as the President.

The address of John Barr uses the spelling in his 1861 book *Poems and Songs: descriptive and satirical* rather than that given by Olssen in *A History of Otago* in 1984:

The Club also maintained its membership of the Robert Burns Association of the Pacific Rim, of which Royden Somerville is the Junior Vice-President and Ann Barsby and Bruce Spittle are Directors (committee members). The future of the Association was discussed at a Special General Meeting in Melbourne on 4 April 2016 and it was noted:

The Chairman, Alister Macleod, requested members discuss the future of the Association given that the groups are falling away with no replacements.

The following points and questions were made during the discussion that followed:

- The Association was originally formed to promote the works of Robert Burns with Clubs in the Pacific area.
- Original member clubs were New Zealand (several clubs), Fiji, Fremantle, South Australia, Canberra, Bendigo and Melbourne.
- Current members clubs are Melbourne, Bendigo, Fremantle, Dunedin. (South Australia are attempting to regroup).
- Club reports are no longer being presented.
- Distance is a big problem.
- The President's 2 year term expires at the 2016 AGM.
- Which Groups are likely to attend the 2016 AGM (8-9 October in Melbourne)?
- The health of Melbourne Club members is of concern.
- Schools need to be targeted for younger members (Bendigo has had success with country Schools participating in the International essay writing competition). This may be the future for the Pacific Rim.
- Could the AGM be incorporated into the Camperdown Burns Festival?

As a formal Agenda had not been forwarded to all members 21 days prior to this meeting a decision on the future of the Association could not be taken. It was resolved that consideration of winding up the Association be presented as an Agenda item as Special Business at the 2016 Annual General Meeting.

Action Items: Amended Constitution to be submitted to Consumer Affairs [Secretary]

Present a review of what is involved in the Schools Essay Writing Program [Jim Millar]

Next Meeting: AGM 8-9th October 2016, Venue TBA.

The Robert Burns song section in the Otago Performing Arts Competitions Society Senior Vocal Competition, held on 17 September 2015 at the Mayfair Theatre, was won by Sophie Sparrow accompanied on guitar by Marcus Turner. The Club sponsored the prizes to the value of \$250.

The Club again supported the Dunedin Robbie Rocks competition by sponsoring the People's Choice prize of \$250. The competition entrants performed in the Octagon at 2 pm on Sunday 24 January 2016, and the section winners performed again at the Burns Supper the following evening.

The Robert Burns Poetry competition attracted entries of high quality and the support of the Dunedin Public Libraries, The Dunedin City Council, The University of Otago, and The Otago Daily Times in organizing this event was much appreciated. The poems were judged by Dunedin poet Helen Williford-Lower and the 2015 University of Otago Burns Fellow Louise Wallace. The winning poems were published in the *Otago Daily Times* on Thursday 21 January 2016. The report in the *Otago Daily Times* on 21 January 2016 by Rebecca Fox and available from; <http://www.odt.co.nz/entertainment/arts/370396/quality-entries-impresses-judges> noted: "A poetry competition marking poet Robert Burns' birthday has shown his legacy is still alive and well, writes Rebecca Fox.

"It appears many poetry writers have been reading one of Robert Burns most famous poems, Tam o' Shanter, if entries in the poetry competition held in his honour are anything to go by.

The annual Robert Burns Poetry Competition attracted a range of entries from New Zealand and overseas the judges, writer Helen Williford-Lower and Burns Fellow Louise Wallace, said. "We noticed a lot of emphasis on Tam o'Shanter in different ways.

A lot of people must have been reading Tam o'Shanter," Ms Williford-Lower said.

"His spirit has been well-represented."

There was also a lot of humour in the entries overall, which was nice, she said.

"It is amazing how much he still gets people to be passionate, to laugh and to really enjoy life."

The number of youth entries had also increased, which was one of the goals of this year's competition.

This year's winner in the published section is chartered accountant and mother Nicola Thorstensen (49), of Dunedin. Her piece *Blood Be Thicker than Liquor* was entered in both English and Scots. "We really like to see that." It also had the edge over the second placegetter because it was a poem that could be read in a few decades and still be enjoyed, she said.

Ms Thorstensen started writing poetry in 2012 and has had some work published in the *Takahe* magazine and was third in the unpublished section of the Robert Burns competition in 2013.

The winner of the unpublished section is Christina Hulbe (49), a University of Otago professor and dean of the National School of Surveying.

When she arrived in Dunedin, she embarked on a project to "re-envision" Robert Burns' songs in New Zealand contexts. "The song lyrics Burns wrote down were mainly his own versions of traditional tunes so my project seems in line with what he was doing, though I depart a lot from the originals."

Her winning entry *The Collier's Shadow* was written like that, she said. "Robert Burns' version of the *Collier Laddie* is a jolly little tune about a lassie who would not trade her simple life with her collier laddie for all the riches a local squire might offer. "The song isn't romantic about the collier. It's romantic about a simple life lived day to day without worry for money or much else. I don't think you could write that way about coal miners' lives in New Zealand today."

The judges liked the fact the poem was set to a known song which was "very Burnsian", Ms Williford-Lower said. "I'd love to hear it sung. It's a haunting poem in that romantic style."

Youth section winner Jolyon Bishop's entry *the Bard of Ayrshire* was a clever biography of Burns and a review of his poetic form, she said. The 11-year-old, who was an avid reader and keen writer, moved to New Zealand with his family only five weeks ago and was settling in to a new life in Wellington."

Results:

Published poet: Nicola Thorstensen, 1 (William Brown and Charles Turner Medal); C.J. O'Brien, 2; David Fountain, 3.

Unpublished poet Christina Hulbe, 1 (Alan Millar Trophy and Medal); Stewart Webster, 2; Alex Familton, 3.

Young poet: Jolyon Bishop, 1 (Stan Forbes Medal); E. Wen Wong, 2; Chloe Robertson, 3.

The winning poems from 2012 to 2016 are available on the Dunedin Public Libraries website at [www.dunedinlibraries.govt.nz](http://www.dunedinlibraries.govt.nz). Open the search engine on the site for web rather than catalogue and type in "What if I win" to reach links to the winning poems.

The Burns Night Dinner was hosted jointly with Toitu Otago Settlers Museum, at Toitu OSM with approximately 110 persons attending. Ray Goodfellow, Official Piper, piped in the official party and, at the end of the evening played a pipe medley before all joined for *Auld Lang Syne*. Frances Brodie, accompanied singer Sarah Oliver. The winners of the Published and Unpublished sections of the Robert Burns Poetry Competition, Nicola Thorstensen, and Christina Hulbe, read their poems. The winners of the Schools and Open sections of the Dunedin Robbie Rocks competition, performed their songs. The Mayor Dave Cull delivered the Selkirk Grace and the haggis was addressed by Murdo Ross. A video from the Lord Provost of Edinburgh was screened. Professor Mark Henaghan gave the Immortal Memory Address on *Burns and the law*. Anne Stevens, Dunedin Barrister, gave the Toast to the Lassies. Members of the Otago Polish community attended again. The evening was seen to have been most successful. The Club sponsored the tickets for Anne Stevens, the piper, the accompanist, the singer and the first place winners of the published and unpublished poets sections of the poetry competition.

The second annual public Robert Burns Lecture, *Reweti Kohere and Ropata Puruna*, was supported by the Club, with a \$200 donation, and was given by Dr Nikki Hessell, Victoria University, Wellington, and Tai Ahu on 30 November 2015 at the Dunedin City Library.

A Scottish Concert, in the style of the traditional Dunedin Burns Club concerts, was held at St Peter's Church Hall, Caversham on 11 October 2015 with the artists being Arnold Bachop, Sarah Oliver, Nicola Steel, Helen Scott, Frances Brodie, Mike Crowl, Yvonne Darling's pupils, Helen and Philip Williford-Lower, and Raymond Goodfellow. It was well received and thanks were expressed to Daphne and Ann for their assistance with the afternoon tea.

The Club offered support for the continuation of the Queen of the Heather competition which the Dunedin Edinburgh Sister City Society, are willing to organize each year.

Some Club members participated in a Kirkin' o' the tartans service at Knox Church, Dunedin, on Sunday 29 November 2015. Several persons wore tartan and some clan banners were paraded.

A mention was made in the 2016 Burns Chronicle of the Club's association with Toitu Otago Settlers Museum in helping sponsor the Dunedin Robbie Rocks competition.

The Club is grateful for the work done over the past year by all the officers and committee members. A growing interest has been reported in Scotland in the Scottish diaspora and it is anticipated that Scottish persons will continue to visit Dunedin to see where their forebears settled. The continuation of the Dunedin Burns Club provides a link to Dunedin's past Scottish heritage with the values the pioneer settlers brought with them. Many of these values are still relevant in Dunedin today and the Club looks forward to continuing partnerships with other Scottish groups and all those with an interest in heritage and in keeping alive the pioneering spirit, the importance of community and thinking for ones self, and the striving for excellence in learning.



Charles Turner and Mrs Dagger prior to cutting the 1891–1991 Dunedin Burns Club centenary cake.  
From a photo album gifted to the Club in 2016 by Julie Campbell

Bruce Spittle, Secretary