

Chairman's Report - 2020 IAGM

The twelve months since the excellent Lyndhurst IAGM have seen many highs for TARS. The final three months, however, have seen us in lock-down and the cancellation or postponement of all TARS events including the May IAGM at Lechlade. Despite this, many Tars have shown their pluck and ingenuity by organising virtual meet-ups, devising quizzes or cartoons, circulating recipes and generally keeping everyone's spirits up.

In reflecting upon the past year, I would like to start by thanking all the editors of (and contributors to) our excellent magazines. *Signals*, *The Outlaw*, *Mixed Moss*, *Furthest South* and *Signals from TARSUS and North Pole News* are surely some of the very best journals produced by any literary society. I never cease to be amazed at the enthusiasm, skill and commitment given by so many people to their professional production and appearance. We are so fortunate to have such volunteers, no praise is too high for them.

Since 2016, Simon Horn, who lives in Montreal, Canada, has edited 14 editions of *Signals from TARSUS and North Pole News*. In recognition of this and his boundless commitment, dedication and enthusiasm, I am pleased to announce that he is the very worthy winner of the 2019 AusTARS Cup. In addition to holding the cup, he also receives a lasting memento in the form of a "Slater Bob" coaster. During the year, the Australian Committee suggested that in future it might be easier to align the award of the AusTARS Cup to the year in which it is presented and the Board agreed with this. As such, the 2021 winner will receive the award at the 2021 IAGM. This means, however, we are now out of kilter regarding the 2020 winner. It has therefore been decided to announce and make the 2020 award in October or November this year.

One of the undoubted highs of the year was another very successful Literary Weekend, held at the Royal Agricultural University, Cirencester. With nine speakers, a full and varied programme was enjoyed by all and the venue proved a popular choice. My thanks go to all who helped organise and contribute to the weekend.

The other undoubted high has been the very successful redesign and launch of our website. This has been done as part of a wider campaign to help promote the society and encourage new members to join. The website has been designed to appeal to juniors and families without losing the important literary side of our activities or the promotion of AR and his works. Early indications, with new memberships coming in, suggest it is doing its job well. My thanks go to Diana Wright and her team for all their hard work. It's also wholly right that we recognise the major contribution of Ted Evans for his stewardship over many years of the old website - it served us really well, our grateful thanks go to you Ted.

With recruitment also in mind, plans are in hand to target publicity at specific groups who have affinity with us, such as sailing clubs and camping organisations. To assist this and our general promotion the TARS publicity leaflet is being updated and reprinted.

I am pleased to report that both the Publications and the Literary & Resources Committees have met during the year, discussing and undertaking important business. The former has moved *Outlaw* and *Signals* to an on-line digital printer, consolidated all mailing through one distribution company and aligned *Mixed Moss* distribution alongside *Signals*. These three measures have resulted in significant savings for the Society. Further economies have been made through the introduction of electronic distribution of our magazines, with nearly 10 % of the membership choosing this green option, which is a superb response.

The L&R Committee continues to provide support and guidance to The TARS Library, Stall, Archives, Junior Adventure Fund and Literary Weekend as well as overseeing the Red Slipper grants. With regard to the latter, one grant has been confirmed this year, to Catherine Lamont in Australia. Our thanks are due to all members of both these Committees, not least as much of their valuable work is largely done unseen, yet keeps the society in good shape.

Given some of the measures outlined above and with good stewardship and advice from Susan, our treasurer, I am pleased to report TARS is on a much better financial footing than it was a year ago, which is extremely pleasing. Much of the work of the Board is aimed at ensuring TARS is run as efficiently as possible and planning positively for the future. Examples of work for 2020/21 include reviewing and tightening-up our data protection policy and also reviewing our insurance policy.

Sadly, as the years tick by, we are losing far too many of the early members of the society, many of them real stalwarts of regional committees, IAGMs and literary weekends. There are too many to name here but you have read obituaries of some of them in *Signals*. We remember them with fondness and gratitude for all that they contributed to the society they loved.

Two final things. First, may I encourage you all to vote positively for the motions being put forward before you today. It will be good to welcome new trustees on to the Board, accept the accounts and make minor changes to update *Leading Lights*. A modest restructuring of the membership categories, effectively simplifying and clarifying membership, has been explained in *Signals*. I know from correspondence I have received that both the proposed expansion of the family/group category to include couples or grandparents and their grandchildren and dropping the senior, in favour of one adult category, are being welcomed and supported by many.

Finally, TARS cannot operate without the support and commitment of its volunteers. I would, therefore, on behalf of the whole membership, like to thank Ann Farr, Chris Birt, Stephen Benham and Veronica Priest who are stepping down from the Board having served their maximum 6 years, and also to thank the other trustees for all their hard work. Our thanks too go to all those who volunteer or sit on overseas committees or regional committees, it really is amazing what you all achieve. Let's hope that once the Coronavirus is under firm control, we can all get back to our regular meetings again and enjoying a varied programme of activities in the best *Swallows and Amazons* tradition.

Peter Wright - Chairman