

# ***Inaugural meeting of the T.S Eliot society (England) 18th November 2006***

***The Eliot room, Ferrar House, Little Gidding, 2.00 p.m.***

**Present:** Bob Miller, John Bridgen, Nick Butler, Sarah Davison, Joy Farey-Wood, Loraine Gelsthorpe, Michael Gould, Graham High, Tony and Judith Hodgson, Iman Javadi, Litsa Kyritsi, Jim McCue, John Morgenstern, Simon Owens, Dimitrios Panagiotidis, Graham Pechey, Agnes Rose, Keith and Ronald Schuchard, Megan Smedley, Patricia Sutton-Goold, David Way, Martin Warner, Jillian Wilkinson, Michael Yelton

**Welcome and Introduction:** Bob Miller, founder of the Society, gave a brief account of his introduction to Little Gidding, the place and the poem, its impact on him and his recent trip to the States studying Eliot on a Churchill Travelling Fellowship. In the States Eliot's most popular works are *The Waste Land* and the *Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, and the American TSE Society welcomes the idea of an English Society. Bob himself sees the need to re-assess the teaching of TSE in English schools. His aim is that Little Gidding should become the place to connect faith, music and literature. He hopes to gather round him those who are foremost on TSE in this country, and explained who the founder members of the Society were.

**Apologies:** Roy Burton, David and Joy Cheshire, Wendy Cole, Wendy Cope, Val de Beer, Mrs. Eliot, Lyndall Gordon, Park Honan, Paul Keegan, Michael Leahy, Reginald Massey, A. David Moody, Ruth Padel, Rosamond Richardson, Diana Walls, Audrey Whiting.

**Aims and Objectives of the Society:** Bob elaborated on those listed on the TSE application form:

1. He has asked every major academic in the US to donate relevant books to Little Gidding for the TSE Library. He asked members to search out any relevant material which could be donated to the Society. This will be catalogued and used to help LG to become the most central place in the country for TSE enthusiasts to visit. JW pointed out that as we should not have the primary sources it would be better for LG to become a place for students to come and write up their own research. Bob asked members to tell him what facilities were needed for that work. Jewel Spears Brooker thinks a clearing house for everything Eliot is needed: could we be part of that?
2. Self-explanatory.
3. He showed examples of other Societies' Newsletters.
4. There will be an annual Eliot day each year.

**T.S.Eliot Festival 19/20 May 2007:** The Rev. Simon Reynolds, Succentor of St. Paul's Cathedral, will give the TSE lecture on "Never Cease from Exploration" at 2 p.m. on Saturday, 19th. This format will be followed each year. The Committee will be asked to suggest names of appropriate speakers. It is hoped that a new 'symphonic poem' by Jonathan Cohen, using the words of the poem, will have its first performance in Steeple Gidding Church in the evening. A service of Holy Communion at 11 a.m. on 20th May will include the re-dedication of the Ferrar Window in the presence of representatives of the American TSE Society. A detailed programme will be drawn up and distributed.

**Election of Officers:** Bob Miller was elected Chairman: proposed by Martin Warner, seconded by Michael Gould and carried unanimously. The Committee will discuss the period of tenure, thought to be three or four years. There were six nominations for the Committee: John Morgenstern from NY, a D.Phil student working on Eliot's time in Paris

Megan Smedley, an English graduate, teacher at Oundle, involved in this year's TSE Festival

Nick Butler, economist, Head of Strategy at BP, on Wilton's Music Hall Committee in London.

Joy Farey-Wood, examiner for ESOL Speech and Drama and taught at Oundle Middle School. Presented paper on TSE when studying for MA in 1977

Iman Javadi, grew up in Italy, student of Eliot and Dante, now job searching

Graham High, poet and sculptor. Edits *Journal of British Haiku Society*; they have a chatty newsletter and more academic journal. He would like to edit TSE newsletter and John Morgenstern would like to help.

Diana Walls, of Creative Arts Retreat Movement, teaches creative writing, has published booklet on *Burnt Norton*, great lover of Little Gidding, had also offered to stand for Committee. All those nominated were elected to the Committee.

Nick Butler offered his London office as a committee meeting venue. Committee will be free to co-opt new members if suitable people present themselves. Urgent need for help with publicity. Loraine Gelsthorpe also offered Pembroke College, Cambridge, as a meeting place for the Committee.

**Membership Fees:** Various levels of subscription were suggested, from £5 to £20 p.a. with concessions for students and free for those under 18. Committee to discuss what they hope to achieve with subscription money, whether they should become a charity, how big they hope to be in five years' time. US TSE Society has various levels of membership.

**Website:** Bob had applied to the Old Possum's Trust for financial help in setting up a website and we had hoped to have links with the US TSE Society, other Societies in Japan and Korea, Poetry Society, Ferrar House, Little Gidding. Despite several calls he had no response to his application but had today received a refusal. Bob will contact the Trust to see whether there can be a review of the application. Next year the Poetry Book Society, founded by TSE, will award the TSE prize for development of poetry in schools. Jim McCue said Fabers are always reluctant to give permission to quote TSE, and get annoyed if one approaches them too often. Important to try to build up good will with Fabers and avoid sore points. Could be a link from Ferrar House website. It was thought important to buy the domain name straightaway: Bob will approach Paul Keegan of Fabers, a founder member of the TSE Society, and seek his guidance. Jillian Wilkinson suggested approaching Mrs. Eliot direct for money for the website; but not use TSE quotations on it. Bob is in contact with Lord Sandon re Burnt Norton and re East Coker. Jim McCue thought it important to involve Andrew Motion who is now published by Faber and who read at the Clare College fund-raising evening last November. Minutes of this meeting should be sent to Faber and Mrs. Eliot. We must be seen to be open and transparent. Finally agreed that Bob should approach Paul Keegan of Fabers, Mrs. Eliot and Old Possum's Trust.

**Any Other Business:**

**Festival Committee:** Proposed that a joint committee including members of the Friends of LG, TSE Society, locals and Oundle School be formed.

**Bust:** Graham High showed members his bronze head of TSE which was greatly admired. He will probably make 7 or 8 more, and Bob asked whether it was likely he would donate one to the TSE Society. The next in his series of poets will be WH Auden.

Martin Warner was thanked for presenting a copy of his book 'A Philosophical Study of T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*' Professor Ron Schuchard, as a representative of the American TSE Society, said how glad he was that an English Society was starting up, and rejoiced in the resurgence of interest in TSE worldwide. Invited any of those present to go to the TSE Society American meeting in St. Louis in September (September 26 is TSE's birthday; about 60 - 80 members present, Bob addressed this year's meeting). Members visited Little Gidding in 2004.

**Thanks:** Simon Owens proposed thanks to Bob for organising the meeting and wished him and the Committee God speed.

**Annual General Meeting:** Fixed for Saturday, 31st March 2007, at 2 p.m. at Little Gidding.

Michael Yelton will send Bob a draft constitution. Simon Owens explained his motivation for joining and hopes to meet others who have an interest in TSE, and feels the need for a social society as well as an academic one. Bob explained that days on TSE will have speakers with different emphases. There might be a Founders' Day just for a general get-together.

The meeting adjourned at 4 p.m. Some members had to leave, others stayed for tea and talk.