

The Robert Burns Association of North America 2014 AGM & Annual Conference

The genesis of this conference arose from the suggestion, at the Williamsburg conference, by former RBANA President Mac Irvin that it might be a good idea to run the 2014 conference in association with the University of South Carolina in Columbia S.C. The Library there has the largest collection of literature about Burns and Burns' artifacts outside of Scotland, all thanks to the personal efforts and scholarship of Professor G. Ross Roy.

The Library people were enthusiastic about hosting the conference with us and the result this year was a remarkable and most exciting weekend organized by Mac Irvin and Elizabeth Sudduth of the Ernest F. Hollings Library.

Delegates were registered in the Courtyard by Marriott, which is located adjacent to the University campus and close to the University Library.

Most of the 50+ delegates arrived on Thursday afternoon and the proceedings kicked-off with the Friday morning golf tournament in idyllic weather and this time around the winner was Bill Molloy.

This year we had several guests from Scotland including Jane Brown President of the Robert Burns World Federation and Alison Tait the CEO of the Federation. We also had Bill Dawson, Editor of the Burns Chronicle, Professor Gerry Carruthers, and Willy Gibson from Grangemouth.



Most of the delegates took the opportunity to **visit the Burns collection at the Hollings Library.**

Prior to the conference the executive had been discussing what action should be taken to deal with the accumulating paraphernalia belonging to

RBANA. The bulk of possessions made transport difficult, forwarding by courier was costly and resulted in damage to the containers. While visiting the Library the subject came up and Elizabeth Sudduth the Library director offered the services of **the Library to archive the RBANA records.** This generous offer was accepted willingly at the Directors meeting in the afternoon and recommended to the AGM on Saturday.



In the early Friday evening the Hollings Library hosted a special display of Burns' artifacts and hosted a heavy hors 'd oeuvres and wine reception. On display was the **latest Library acquisition**, a version of Burns' *'Flow Gently Sweet Afton'* in Burns' own handwriting. Music during the reception was provided by one of our members, **Debra Brewin-Wilson**, on a Clàrsach {Scottish harp}.



Following greetings from Elizabeth Sudduth and Jane Brown the attendees were warmly welcomed by **Thomas McNally**, the Dean of the University of South Carolina Libraries.

The company then returned to the Courtyard Hotel where later in the evening we enjoyed a great ceilidh hosted by Ronnie O'Byrne and we again enjoyed the musical talent of Nils Brown.

The AGM on Saturday morning was held in the conference room of the Hollings Library and the new executive for 2014/2016 was installed.

The President of the Calgary Burns Club, Ian Denness, announced that the 2015 Conference would be held in Calgary on the 29th to 31st May.

Many of the delegates then took the opportunity to revisit the displays in the library.



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Following Lunch the Jim Connor Memorial Quiz was held in the Hollings Library conference room. Jim Cunningham had again set a challenging set of questions and the result depended on a tie-breaker competition between Les Strachan & David Murray, which eventually was won again by David.



Following the Quiz there was an interesting talk by **Professor Gerry Carruthers, of Glasgow University**, on the changing perceptions of Burns over the 20th century.

That was followed by a presentation by Elizabeth Sudduth and her Post Grad students on the type of research being pursued at the Hollings Library.

We then returned to the Courtyard Hotel for the formal reception and

dinner

. The speeches and greetings saw the **handover of the Presidency to Robert Boyd** of the Heather & Thistle club from Houston Texas.

President Robert then presented the trophies for the Golf and the Quiz competitions to the winners Bill Molloy & David Murray respectively.



The entertainment after dinner was highlighted with a delightful vignette by RBWF President Jane Brown, in period dress, enacting **a monologue in the character of Jean Armour**, relating her life with Robert Burns.

Some of the company enjoyed a round of the Gay Gordons ceilidh dance.

Again this year Ronnie O'Byrne performed his special rousing rendition of **"Scots Wha Hae"** and during the singing

all the men in the room again joined Jim Cunningham with the bodhrán and paraded around the floor.



The evening finished up with all the company circling the hall and singing Auld Lang Syne first with Nils Brown singing it to the original tune then we all joined in with the one we are all familiar with. On Sunday Morning we attended a short ecumenical service led by individual RBANA member Rev. Debra Brewin-Wilson, who also led the singing of the hymns, set to familiar Burns' tunes, with her Clàrsach.

We then took our leave, looking forward to the next conference in Calgary on May 29th to 30th 2015.

Credit and thanks are due for the organization and efforts by Mac Irvin and the Elizabeth Sudduth Director of the Hollings Library.

The clubs participating this year were as follows:-

- The Halton Peel Burns Club, The Robert Burns Society of Doon,
- The Robert Burns Society of Kilmarnock Ontario
- The Winnipeg Robert Burns Club, The Heather & Thistle Society of Houston
- The Niagara Falls Burns Club, The Robert Burns Society of Annapolis
- Scheihallion Scottish Heritage Society, Calgary Burns Club
- The Medicine Hat Burns Club, The Burns Club of Atlanta
- The St Andrews Society of Williamsburg
- Five Independent members, plus the 5 visitors from the UK.

