

President's Blog March 2016

I have really enjoyed my term as your President, and now that it is nearing an end I've been thinking about how things look for RBANA and for the Burns movement in general.

It's become so clear to me over the past two years that the electronic age has had a profound and ever increasing influence on both.

First the negative side. As I go to Burns events and organize our own, the graying of the membership of societies like ours seems irreversible. One reason is that in this era of Facebook, while the thirst for knowledge remains unabated, it is instant gratification via the Internet that is needed, especially by the younger generation. There is no interest in the monthly face-to-face meetings and seminars that have been our normal practice. We are fortunate that interest in and attendance at Burns Suppers remains so strong. Here in Houston we see an increasing number of less formal lower cost events being held in pubs and restaurants without too much of an impact on the older larger Suppers. This gives us a sufficient base to hang in there, and we can still get a decent turnout for our Annual Meeting.

On the positive side, it clear that interest in Burns is stronger than ever and growing. In January this year I participated in a project run by www.scotland.net to submit "Burnsies", i.e. a selfie taken next to a local Burns monument or other feature. As you can see I used our own H&T "Burns Oscar". This was one of thousands of submissions which were then built into a collage which formed a portrait of our hero. Amazing! Take a look. Then beginning on January 25 I took a MOOCS, which I learn is a large scale online course, on Burns put on by Glasgow University. Both my predecessor Tony Grogan and I graduated from Glasgow decades ago, and it is gratifying to see a highly traditional university transforming itself to keep up with the times. The course itself was led by Gerry Carruthers, who has addressed the last two RBANA Conferences and leads the major Burns research effort at Glasgow. The interactive course was very well-designed and was attended by several thousand. It lasted for three weeks with an hour or two per week required. I learned a lot, as did most of the participants judging from the comments. Well done GU! On a broader front, the availability of Burns resources on the Web has to be a good thing, and our own RBANA website seeks to build on this. We need it for our future.

It is most appropriate for me to be able to round out my term as RBANA President by hosting the 36th Annual AGM & Conference here in Texas. We have a decent attendance in spite of the impact of the weaker C\$ on costs for those from north of the border. We are looking forward to seeing you all there.

Yours Aye

Robert Boyd

President.

