

President's Report

It is my pleasure to present the Annual Report for the Friends of the Randell Cottage for the 2023/2024 year.

We had an immensely busy and productive year and I would like to open by thanking my hard working Committee for all their support and efforts.

Our efforts continue to be focused on both fund raising and supporting the Trust's role.

Major undertakings were Open Day, a fund raising film evening, and support for the Trust's National Library event. The 2023 Writing Fellow was Rachel O'Neill and she gave a lovely performance at this event. She was a wonderful Fellow who gave much to the Cottage. We were also very happy to engage with French writers Caroline Laurent and Sedef Ecer. We acknowledge our continuing happy relationship with the French Embassy and its personnel. We warmly welcome Julien Blanc-Gras, our current French writer, to this gathering and look forward to hearing him in conversation with Sian Robyns, a former chair of this organisation.

Open Day is provided, first and foremost to satisfy the requirements for sponsorship by WCC. We are required to open the Cottage for one day a year. With the successful visit of Her Worship the Mayor Tory Whanau, this was accomplished in late October. It is also a fund raising day and in order to offer this successfully we need to present an attractive and appealing appearance. The garden looked great, afternoon teas were provided by Robyn Skrzynski and her team; readings were led by Francis Cooke from The Trust. We had a number of generous donations for raffles and these sold well. The provision of an eftpos machine helped greatly with selling tickets (thanks to Christine Hurley, chair of RCWT). We were very grateful to Rotary who again provided the gazebo in the garden. The Friends worked closely with Christine and the RCWT board members to achieve an excellent result. Christine represents the Trust on our Committee.

The fund raising film night organised by Robyn, featured the film *Napoleon*, shown at Lighthouse Cuba Cinema. We had two full cinemas, with 108 people in attendance. Funds raised went towards providing new white ware for the Cottage. We were able to purchase a dishwasher, fridge and stove.

We now make an annual donation to the RCWT, which will be a minimum of \$3000 each year over five years towards Cottage maintenance. The first donation has been made.

A new partnership, initiated by the Friends, and negotiated by the Trust, has been agreed with the Alexander Turnbull Library for ongoing sponsorship of the videos of the writers featured on the RCWT website.

I owe many thanks to Tim Gruar for upgrading the newsletters to members. Tim is something of a recording angel, taking notes and photographs at every event.

New initiatives are planned for this year. Robyn is administering a project with the painter Alfred Memelink to produce a painting of the Cottage which will be used as the basis for cards to sell. The project has been generously underwritten by the Price family, Beverley and Susan. Robyn also hopes to oversee another fund- raising film night.

I am overseeing a Live Letters programme to be held on 15 July at the National Library. Well- known New Zealanders and distinguished writers will take part in a concert, reading letters from various literary sources. I am pleased to announce that a donation has already been made on behalf of this project by Sir Peter Jackson and Dame Fran Walsh, for \$10,000, towards Cottage maintenance.

So just to round off, again, I cannot give thanks enough to my team. We were sad to say goodbye to Redmer Yska earlier this year but wish him well in all his writing endeavours. Tim, thanks again for your tireless media work, Pip Murdoch and Susan Stevens for being there at events, providing food and support, and Pip for welcoming us to yours and Simon's home for a welcome gathering for Julien. Jie Fang, you have been a superb treasurer and we are very pleased you are staying on as a committee member. We welcome back Tracey Schuyt to take up the treasurer's role again.

And Robyn, thanks are never enough, I could not fulfil the role of President without your support and friendship. As for me, the plan is that I will step back after three months more as Acting President. I had agreed to do a year when I took this role on, so I am hoping that we will find my replacement over the next few months.

We all wish a speedy recovery to Christine who has recently met with an accident that has lamed her for the moment. I believe a warm bond has been established with the Trust and we look forward to maintaining that throughout the coming year.

Fiona Kidman

29 April 2024