

## Annual Meeting report

### **Annual General Meeting for 2025, on 7 March 2026, at the Union Jack Club, Waterloo, London**

There was a promising attendance of eight at the meeting, which was designed to coincide directly with the launch of the new website and the digital QC. The reaction was unanimously positive, and happily echoed by a long list of apologies for absence from 19 members who regretted that they could not attend but sent messages of goodwill and enthusiasm for the new arrangements.

Those attending: Daid Ogden (Chairman), Mike Murphy (Secretary / Editor), Neil Hitchens (Webmaster / Librarian), Sami Sadek (Treasurer / Auctioneer), Jon Aitchison (Committee), John Clarke, Atef Sarian, David Sutton, Maya Campbell (guest).

Attending his first meeting for a year, the Secretary expressed profound gratitude to David Ogden for having held the Circle together during his absence, and presented him with a first edition of TE Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* given to the Circle by Mrs Pat Sears from the library of our former President, John Sears.

Chairman: David Ogden welcomed those present and congratulated Jon Aitchison on his invitation to sign the Roll of Distinguished Philatelists, stamp-collecting's highest accolade. He also congratulated Neil Hitchens and Mike Murphy for setting aside demanding domestic and health issues and turning their strenuous labours to ensuring that the transition to a digital society took place largely as planned.

Election of Officers: The meeting was delighted to confirm the addition of Dr Ahmed Abouesh of California (ESC 761) to the Committee as Membership Secretary and thanked him enormously for volunteering to act in any role that might be suggested. He will find dealing with two categories of member easier than the ten necessitated pre-transition, and will undoubtedly breathe new life into the experience of newcomers to the Circle.

Minutes of the last AGM: (10 May 2025, QC 293, pages 217-222) and matters arising were approved.

Webmaster: Neil Hitchens reported on a year's hard work and lamented the sad lack of support he had encountered during that period. As a result, the new website was virtually completely his own work, with suggestions bouncing back and forth with only one other committee member. The result, however, is astonishingly efficient, fast, intuitive, easy on the eye, with excellent Search and capable of being updated within seconds. For the moment the password is a sticking point, but that means only that all website pages are temporarily open rather than in some cases restricted to full members. Future changes will be advised.

Librarian: Neil reported that there were plans to rehouse the massive Circle Library in his home, and as soon as that is complete members will be encouraged to borrow books much more regularly. Plans to deal with postage problems, in the UK at least, are under active consideration.

Secretary: Mike Murphy reported a very busy year, which he is confident can be relieved by the welcome addition of Ahmed Abouesh, and appealed to members anywhere in the world - now we are digital it is so much easier to communicate - to join the conversation. He confirmed, however, his notice to the meeting of two years ago that ill health will not allow him to continue at the same level. He will step down either as Secretary or Editor at the next AGM; and in the meantime will work only two days a week on Circle affairs. To do more would be to risk serious injury to health.

A couple of areas of bureaucracy need to be updated to confirm the status quo – the application form should no longer require two Circle “sponsors”; and the Circle Rules will need to be amended to take account of a less time-consuming procedure for accepting membership applications. Both of these are in hand, with the meeting agreeing (proposed Mike Murphy, seconded Sami Sadek) that Secretary and Membership Secretary (rather than full Committee), should confirm a new member once the subscription

was paid. Overall during the year we lost eight members and gained ten; we now stand at 169. Sadly, we decided it was time to end the connection with Charles Hass, our excellent and knowledgeable friend whose subscription we have maintained ever since he disappeared without word some 8-10 years ago.

QC. Now no longer printed on paper but digital, a seemingly popular decision, with grateful thanks for the design capabilities of Jos Strengholt; we hope to see more of his layouts. The connection and transfer of material between magazine and website is still being worked on, but we are confident that it will please all members once settled. The meeting expressed its profound gratitude to Michael Ryan (ESC 722) and Ali Abdelmehgeid (ESAC 746) for volunteering to take on the thankless task of QC delivery over the past few paper issues. We owe both an enormous debt of gratitude in terms of both efficiency and money. Meanwhile, the perennial call - please **please** PLEASE write something interesting and entertaining!

MacArthur Award: Voting was again desultory, so much so that the Secretary has extended the voting date to June 1 in the hope of new ballots. What should we do to encourage members to support their writing colleagues: add a cash incentive to the award winner? Would that encourage votes? No? Then what will?

Meetings: David Ogden spoke of the difficulties of finding speakers and appealed to any member with adequate technological experience to come forward and help us with zoom meetings. It is an area which could become popular if only members were not so shy about presenting their material. He mentioned the major world exhibition in Boston, USA, in May at which Jon Aitchison will sign his RDP invitation. Members from UK seem unwilling or unable to make the trip -we have had wonderful well-filled rooms at the past two ten-year events in 2006 and 2016 – and there has been interest from members around the world. But at present we are still waiting to confirm a venue for our meeting at the event.

Treasurer: Sami Sadek made clear from the accounts so impeccably produced (*see below*) by Andy Gould – to whom very many thanks! – that the Circle's financial fortunes are closely tied to those of the auction... and holding two auctions a year is very much of a burden. Auction 70 in 2025 realised a commission for the Circle of £1,734, but accounts for a second auction often run on past the end of our financial year, causing further complications. Again, this is a period of settling down. Reducing the subscription fee from £20 to £15 will have a knock-on effect, and so - in the opposite direction - will cutting QC printing and postage costs. Income for the year 2025 was £2,955, mainly from subscriptions, with expenditure at £4,297, mainly costs involved with the QC, which have now ceased. They left an overall deficit of £1,342 however, which we are confident will balance out in a year of two auction and no QCs. The Circle remains financially sound, with net reserves of £28,462 in the bank.

Philatelic Society of Egypt HQ in Cairo. There has been no further news of the PSE's seeking our support with a cash donation to part-fund their suggested move to a new headquarters, and the meeting agreed that no decision could be considered until we had a document from Cairo setting out all the detail and pointing up any potential legal hurdles.

There was no other business, and the date and venue for the 2027 annual meeting will be decided later.

## Seven honoured with ESC

### Life Membership

Traditionally those who have served long and well are honoured with life membership of the Circle on retirement... Well, we have no retirees at the moment, but the meeting greeted with acclaim the Committee's suggestion that **Paul Green** (ESC 128, UK), **Peter Grech** (ESC 266, UK), **Trent Ruebush** (ESC 179, USA), **Lucien Toutounji** (ESC 264, Egypt/France), **Antoine Winter** (ESC 149, France) and **Vahe Varjabedian** (ESC 390, Egypt) should be so recognised for their long and invaluable service. During the discussion came a voice from the floor suggesting that **Mike Murphy** (ESC 240, UK) might be added to the list. He is honoured to accept.