

**President's Report to the Annual General Meeting on 27 April 2016**  
**regarding the 2015 Year**

Board Operations in 2015

The board has two roles in my view – to manage a complex small business operation and keep the Society solvent, and to produce high quality productions within the broad context of perpetuating the works of Gilbert & Sullivan. As I can claim to be an experienced manager I think I know and understand our work in this area, but I am no performer, and I just marvel at the commitment to, and effort required, to produce the shows we perform. It is important in my view that we have a board that is balanced between those with administrative skills and those with performance skills and knowledge. We have had that in 2015.

I mention the issue of board member portfolios as an idea raised by John Hochwald very soon after he took the position of secretary. His view was that we should attach a work and responsibility portfolio to each Board position. I liked the concept, but it was not pursued diligently last year, nor do I wish to this year on the basis that with such a small membership, we may well call a position with a detailed description attached to it to find no-one in the room prepared to take it on, therefore an election would be a fruitless process. Whilst we need people to take on roles as I will describe in a moment, I don't think we can tightly restrict 'eligibility' for board positions.

We presently have costumes management covered by Helen Snoswell; publicity/marketing/properties by Liz Olsson; and productions a joint effort of several people coordinated by Anne Doherty. Property management is vacant with the loss of John Greene, and we are extremely eager to find a knowledgeable Production Manager.

You should notice a significant improvement in the tidiness and cleanliness of these premises. Over several recent weeks, board members and other supporters have spent countless hours down here filling skip after skip with the results of a thorough clean-up and de-clutter. One of my early concerns following my election in 2014 was the clutter throughout the building. I considered it a huge health and welfare risk, not to mention a fire risk. Earlier this year we had a keyless entry and alarm system installed together with smoke detectors throughout linked to a monitored alarm system.

It has been a more stable year for the board, but attendance has not always been high. We brought Liz Olsson onto the board as an ex officio member because of her skills in publicity in particular, but her wide general knowledge of the society as well. Keeping the society going is time consuming and there are financial concerns (we are not alone) which make the decisions for the future serious ones with potentially serious consequences for making the wrong ones. The board needs a combination of historical knowledge and youthful energy – and it has both.

## Productions 2015/16

Whilst this is a report on 2015, it would be silly to neglect to comment on progress to date in 2016. But firstly with respect to 2015, *G&S Fest* was a professional, entertaining yet different approach to the performance of G&S within the context that while we must perform G&S, we can only do so if the society remains solvent. Unfortunately *G&S Fest* did not return a dividend to the society and fell sort of covering its production costs. *Guys and Dolls* was performed amidst great confidence on my part that it would be an artistic and financial success, but the latter was again not the case. Takings fell somewhat short of costs and thus the production did not contribute to the society's finances, despite being a highly enjoyable evening's entertainment. Overall then, our productions were a drain on the society's bank balance in 2015. And when you consider that we receive no government support of any type, performance profits are the only way we can maintain the society. I came back into Society management with the objective of returning the Society to a more sound financial footing but I'm afraid to say I have not yet succeeded.

For 2016 we fell victim to the erratics of theatre hire bookings and were only able to procure the Arts Theatre for one week in May. The relationship with Co-Opera to produce *The Mikado*, which was intended to be a third production in our program (and probably around mid-year) became the stand-in for our May production. Sales of the Adelaide part of the *Mikado* season (following a very successful eastern states tour in March/April) are progressing slowly so anything you can do to enhance bookings will be very much appreciated. Even given that comment, it is likely that there will be a positive financial return to each party on the basis of a 50:50 profit share. I acknowledge that there are pros and cons to such productions. There are limited opportunities for our performing members to take part given the small scale of the cast and the extended travel season, but it has filled a gap in our program that otherwise may well have remained empty with definitely no financial return to the Society.

A central plank in my aim of making productions profitable is the work of the publicity group led by Liz Olsson. There has been a steady decline in the number of groups booking G&S productions in recent years and I believe if we can reverse this trend it will make a considerable difference to audience numbers and thus income, and hopefully our profitability. Indications are that many of the retirement complexes and service groups so far approached have completed their social plans for 2016, so it may not be until 2017 that we can make headway with this initiative.

## Manik Meah

Many of you would remember Manik Meah, board member until the last AGM. He was married recently and sought our agreement to request no presents from his guests, but that they make a donation to the G&S Society. We readily agreed and I am delighted to say that we received in excess of \$3,000. The board determined that the money should be used on things providing a lasting benefit to the Society and thus in the vicinity of half the money has been spent on the purchase of new chairs. I am particularly grateful for such generous thinking by Manik and his wife, and such generosity by his guests!

### Peter Hopkins elected HLM

The election of Peter Hopkins to Honorary Life Member status came at an abnormal time of the year when compared with recent history. Announcements have historically been unveiled at the AGM, but there is no requirement to do so. Instead consideration was given mid last year to the issue and we were very delighted to then announce Peter's elevation to Honorary Life Member during the *Guys and Dolls* season.

### Planning 2017 and 2018

One of my constant concerns has been the lateness with which we determine future shows. It's not an easy task, but other companies seem often to have the jump on us. We are almost in a position to release the two seasons (conventional 2 week seasons) for 2017 – and will certainly have advertising material available before the *Thoroughly Modern Millie* season commences, and a decision is also pending on 2018. I make mention also that 2017 will be the 80th year of the Society. There will be a fitting celebration announced later this year.

### Constitutional Change

It has become evident that it is time for a review of the Rules of Association. One issue that we will look at is the requirement in this electronic age, of posting General Meeting notices to members. With the current low membership number this is not too costly, but if membership were to improve the cost will rise markedly - \$1 per member. We will seek your agreement next year to electronic delivery where appropriate.

I am sure that a thorough review will find more issues that could be tidied.

### Death of Russell Ellis

I record with regret the recent death of former performer and president, Russell Ellis at age 84. Helen and Russell moved quite some years ago to Queensland but Helen in particular was a regular visitor home, and her visits have coincided on occasions with G&S performances which she has attended. Russell took ill a couple of years ago and succumbed the last fortnight. We extend our sympathy to Helen and family. Their daughter Linda you might recall from *Guys and Dolls*. They have been a very true G&S family for many decades.

### Change of Secretary

During 2015 John Hochwald provided notice of his resignation from the position of secretary. John was an amazingly efficient secretary but I think it fair to say he had some difficulty with the slow movement in society management caused at times by low board attendance but more specifically on the difference between his extensive experience of big business management and that of a voluntary theatre group that struggles to capture time in members' busy private lives. We were fortunate to have appointed a minute secretary in support of John in Sue Franks, and Sue stepped into the secretarial role on his departure. Sue is a highly organised worker who I am thankful to say will renominate for the position of secretary shortly.

### Retiring Board members

In rounding out this report I pay tribute to the work of the board in 2015. The efforts of those who contributed to the clean-up and to the lead up processes going on now for *Thoroughly Modern Millie* have been a credit to this Society. There is much more to do on many fronts and the continued support of those remaining on the Board, and those elected tonight, will continue to be appreciated. I say thank you particularly to Anne Doherty and Marsha Seebohm who complete their terms, to Louise Gillan who resigned due to relocation and study earlier this year, and to ex officio member John Greene who relocated to support his ill brother in New South Wales quite suddenly in mid- 2015. This means that there will be an election for three 2-year Board positions shortly. The other two ex officio members concluding their 12 month appointments, and to whom I also offer sincere thanks, are Paula Pamment and Elizabeth Olsson.

To conclude, I thank the board and you all for supporting me this last year. I am here because I love this Society and the Gilbert & Sullivan story it has been built on, but I am disappointed in myself, as I have said, that I have not been able to oversee the improvement in our financial position that I believe is necessary. I am prepared to stand for president for a further year, but would understand if you were to choose an alternative. Thank you.

Brian McLauchlan