



## Chairperson's report for the 2023 AGM

4 February, 2024

2023 was the first year in a good while that we were able to organise and carry out events without the looming fear of COVID-19 forcing us to reschedule. If 2022 felt like getting to our feet after a couple of years of uncertainty and separation, I like to think that we were able to get up to an optimistic jog in 2023. I can see running in our future.

2023 was a quiet year for guest speakers at our members' nights compared to pre-COVID times. Jim McIntyre spoke in March about his experience struggling to publish an award-winning novel, and Karen Turner came in June to talk memoirs, in addition to the workshop she presented on How to Write a Novel in October. We also had a memoir workshop from Peter Quarry in February and a short story workshop with Graeme Simson in September, which tied in with the Southern Cross Short Story Competition. We've received feedback that we'd like more guest speakers at members' nights, so that will likely be a priority for the committee of 2024.

Write Club and our critique groups are still going strong, with an additional critique group likely to start up soon. What's more, the write ins that we hosted in November as part of National Novel Writing Month were surprisingly popular and attracted some new members. It's clear that these events are important to our community, and it's great that we can facilitate them. We also participated in the Seniors' Festival and Springfest, the latter of which was a platform from which we sold members' books. We got a few new members at each of these too, but the greater value was in getting the Ballarat Writers name back in the community.

This year, we invested in some new and rather fabulous merch, which we've used to entice new members, add value to our workshops and to facilitate our sales at Springfest. The merch was our greatest expense apart from professional fees, but it'll last us a good while and everyone has loved it. This expense, as well as the loss we ran on the Southern Cross Short Story Competition, means that overall we ended 2023 with less money than we started. Still, the bank accounts are looking healthy and as a committee we decided that it's better to offer value to our membership than hold onto our funds. Ideally, of course, we will do both! But the value will hopefully inspire more participation, which in turn will lead to more financial success in the future.

In 2023, Phil Green returned as a general committee member, Rebecca Fletcher as competitions officer (which she stepped back from halfway through the year), Darren Rout as treasurer/membership officer and Pam Swanborough as publicity officer. Michael Amhaz joined as secretary/public officer and later in the year Lizz Sayers joined as a general committee member. For the blink of an eye, we had Brock Perks as a general committee member. I would like to thank the committee for their wonderful work in 2023. It's been a pleasure working with you all. I would especially like to acknowledge Rebecca, who for over six years has worked with tireless and efficient enthusiasm to better this organisation. It was very sad to see her go, and a relief that she hasn't gone far.

I would also like to thank our membership, whose participation and feedback fuel everything we do. There have been a lot of new faces this year, which is truly heartening to see, and it's also lovely to see our existing members be so welcoming.

This year was my first year as chairperson, and my sixth on committee. The work this year has been both challenging and rewarding, and I've truly given it my all. It is with the comforting knowledge that I've done my best over the last six years that I'm choosing to step down. I've loved my time on

this committee and especially my year as chair, and if I won the lottery this weekend I'd never give it up. I'm looking forward to seeing what the future holds for Ballarat Writers and hope the committee of 2024 (and broader membership for that matter) knows that I'm always in BWI's corner.

With love,

Laura Wilson, outgoing chairperson of Ballarat Writers