

NSFT 2017 ANNUAL REPORT

Modest but steady progress

This has been a year of modest but steady progress. The Trust held its regular four meetings to review major projects and monitor operational matters. Following the death of Peter Croeser in October 2016, the number of trustees stood at six and average meeting attendance was four. The task of Administrator was redefined in terms of book stock management and filled by Phila Msimang. He resigned at the end of the year to take up a lecturing post at Stellenbosch and it was decided that this work would need to be outsourced from January 2018 given lack of capacity among the trustees.

They had taken on distribution of *Natalia 46* (2006), edited by Adrian Koopman and Elwyn Jenkins. A new editorial committee headed by Debbie Whelan took over in March 2017, but it appeared that publication of *Natalia 47* would be delayed until 2018. There was a small degree of overlap between the old and new committees. One book was published during the year: volume two of Bill Guest's *Stella Aurorae*, the history of the University of Natal covering the years 1947 to 1976 was published in late March after a major printing glitch. Lack of organisational resources ruled out the planned Book Day but SA2 was launched on the Pietermaritzburg campus on 10 June.

There had been no further communication with the KwaZulu-Natal Museum since posthumous publication of Peter Croeser's *The Freedom Struggle*, which had been produced with practical and financial assistance from the Trust. It had received thirteen copies and the book was available on its website.

Publication of SA2 signalled a major change in approach to book publication and sales. First, it was decided to curtail print runs drastically to avoid long-term storage costs. Second, authors would need to be involved in sales (based, if necessary, on an honour system). Third, softcover binding (except for *Stella Aurorae 3*) would be used to reduce costs. All of these measures were mindful of the fact that all the Trust's publications are available gratis online.

Work continued steadily on two future publications, both scheduled to appear in 2018: Bill Guest's SA3; and Julie Parle and Vanessa Noble's *The People's Hospital*. The latter is notable for the involved interest of the McCord-Nixon Trust, which is due to take on a portion of the printing costs and also host and fund a launch in Durban. Three other titles remained in the background in varying stages of preparation. No further offers of manuscripts had been made since mid-2016 when it was decided to call a halt until existing commitments had been fulfilled.

Statistics showed that the website was accessed consistently by an international audience and that most visits were meaningful.

Relations with the Alan Paton Centre remained cordial and the usual annual donation was made for the hosting of the Trust's book collections. The Trust was confident that these were safe and secure. The issue of scholarships was revisited, but put on hold pending a decision on the future direction of Trust activities.

The Trust's financial position remained strong. Its Investec holdings maintained a healthy recovery process during the year from a December 2016 low point. A decision was taken to remove funds from the trading account for operational purposes and this put the publication programme for 2018 on a sound footing. All FICA requirements were met and Letters of Authority were finally updated by the office of the Master of the Supreme Court on 19 September in terms of the Trust Property Control Act of 1988.

I would like to thank warmly all trustees for their various efforts to keep the Trust functional and wish Phila, who will remain a trustee, the very best for the future. As always the Trust owes a great deal to Pauline Hazelden at Hay & Scott for her efficient administrative support, especially regarding financial matters.

Christopher Merrett, Chairperson