

REPORT TO AGM, 2PM SUNDAY 30 MAY 2021
BY ZOOM
BY CARMEL SHUTE, SECRETARY

Thank you Moraig.

It's been a long year since our last AGM – 19 months, in fact – though for us in Victoria it seems like an eternity. Since then – October 2019 – we had an outstanding 26th Scarlet Stiletto Awards presented by Gerry Hakewill, star of Ms Fishers MODern Murder Mysteries, where nearly everyone turned up in sixties' garb in honour of the series which is set in 1964.

Then, in early 2020, we held a fabulous night on mysteries with history and a short time later, an outing (this time in twenties' costumes) to a special screening of *Miss Fisher and the Crypt of Tears* at Melbourne's Sun Theatre on 1 March. After that, Sisters in Crime, like much of Australia, went into lockdown.

And, like all of Australia, we have grieved for all of the lives lost or incapacitated, for all of the jobs lost, and for all of the futures truncated. But the pandemic did have a silver lining. It meant that Sisters in Crime had to go online for most of its activities and could reach a national – and in fact – an international audience.

All of the monthly events in Melbourne plus some of the events from the new NSW Chapter went online. Last year's Law Week event has attracted 511 views. It may not compare to audiences for cat videos but it's pretty good, we reckon.

We created a new program, Murder Mondays, shortish one-on-one author interviews. With most launches, events and festivals cancelled, this provided a wonderful opportunity for authors to discuss their craft.

Last year, we presented 27 Murder Mondays on our new YouTube channel. These included many fabulous Australian crime writers plus international stars, **Sara Paretsky**, the founder of Sisters in Crime, **Val McDermid**, Tartan Noir Queen, **Ann Cleeves**, creator of the Shetland and Vera series, and **Kathy Reichs**, author of the series featuring the forensic anthropologist Temperance Brennan (and the inspiration for the TV series, *Bones*.) Last week, Murder Mondays started again, featuring the New Zealand crime queen, **Vanda Symon**. They'll now be monthly.

It also meant that we didn't have to spend any money to ensure **Val McDermid** kept her promise to present our 20th Davitt Awards. Val presented the Davitts from Scotland after a talk about her life in crime with our ambassador, **Sue Turnbull**, in Wollongong. All the winners were able to participate thanks to miracles of Zoom – and reveal their trophies (a new style to mark the 20th anniversary) to the world. The event was tarted up with music, frames and other graphics, thanks to the wonderful work of **Kathryn Lamont**, then a student at Swinburne University of Technology, our major supporter. Thanks to convenor **Kelly Gardiner**, we were able to watch together through a Watch Party on Facebook.

We took a similar approach with the Scarlet Stiletto Awards which were presented by actor **Nadine Garner** after an amusing interrogation by author, entertainer and member, **Jane Clifton**. It was a huge undertaking logistically as it involved all 25 shortlisted authors but it worked and people from across Australia, New Zealand, the US, the UK, Canada, Germany, Italy, Indonesia and France could view it.

The pandemic meant we also put more of an effort into social media – Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Two big achievements have been the establishment of a new chapter in NSW, under the leadership of **Catherine du Peloux-Menagé** (who is also the director of **BAD Sydney Crime Festival**) and a new chapter in South Australia under the leadership of **Samantha Battams**. These chapters have been able to hold live events though the NSW Chapter also hosted online events which you can still look at on our YouTube channel. The Queensland Chapter, under the leadership of **Paula Duggan**, has continued to meet monthly face-to-face and on Zoom.

Under the newly structured national committee, the Vice-President will convene a sub-committee of representatives of all states and territories with functioning chapters.

Though opportunities have necessarily been limited, members have been able to participate in festivals such as the International **BAD Sydney Crime Festival** (which is very good), the **Clunes Booktown Literary Festival**, the **Williamstown Literary Festival** and some library events.

Screen adaptations are offering new opportunities. The world has loved the two series of *Big Little Lies*, based on **Liane Moriarty's** book of the same name. The film of **Jane Harper's** debut novel, *The Dry*, which won two Davitt Awards in 2017 and has since sold over a million copies world-wide, has grossed more than \$20.5m at the Australian box office since its New Year's Day release.

Soon we can look forward to *Tropo*, a TV series based on **Candice Fox's** bestselling novel set in FNQ, *Crimson Lake*.

Due to the latest lockdown, we've had to reschedule the launch of the 28th Scarlet Stiletto Awards but hopefully we'll be able to have live events everywhere in Australia. In Victoria, we're hoping to video events so they'll be available on our YouTube channel.

We have a lot to look forward over the next year – terrific events across Australia, the 21st Davitt Awards which have an amazing 127 books in contention, and the 28th Scarlet Stiletto Awards which offer a record amount of prize money – \$11,910. After the award ceremony in November, we plan to throw a party to celebrate Sisters in Crime's 30th anniversary.

And don't forget this year's **BAD Sydney Crime Festival**, 10-12 September and **Terror Australis Readers and Writers Festival**, 5-7 November in Tasmania.

If you haven't already liked us on Facebook please do. We post a lot of items – partly because our members feature in the media a lot! 3311 people currently follow us. Please also follow us on Twitter and Instagram

I'll close with some thank yous, firstly to the convenors who have served over the past 19 months:

- Out-going President **Lindy Cameron** who has done her best to chair the often raucous convenor meetings. Lindy has also played a major contribution in programming, Murder Mondays, and library events, as well as being a valued trouble-shooter. We know she will continue to make an outstanding contribution to Sisters, as she has done for nearly three decades. Her enthusiasm is contagious.
- Vice-President **Robyn Walton** resigned earlier in the year. She is renowned for her regular, perceptive Q&As with authors and top-rate reviews as well as compering events.
- Our treasured Treasurer **Lesley Gillis** who keeps our finances in order and has done a terrific job in arranging new bank accounts and taking out association insurance. We love a woman who knows numbers.

- **Caz Brown**, who has done such a great job in designing our event notices, trophy plaques, t-shirts, tote bags, convenors badges, and medallions to go on the shortlisted and winning Davitt books. Her output during the pandemic has been prodigious. She designed all the frames for our online events and all the graphics used for the website and social media. She didn't stand again but we're hoping she will continue her involvement on the design front. She has played a pivotal role in creating Sisters in Crime's 'look'.
- **Kelly Gardiner**, who was elected in 2019, and played an outstanding role in our pandemic response. She handled the Zoom for 27 Murder Mondays and all the Melbourne online events. She thought she was signing up for four meetings but the pandemic had another agenda. Kelly resigned earlier in the year from New Zealand where she was in quarantine for a time. Kelly is also an excellent compere and we were thrilled when, earlier this year, her 2014 historical novel *Goddess* (HarperCollins) was optioned for the screen by Deux Dames Entertainment and Black Magic for TV as a limited series. And, did I mention that Kelly is also an ace event compere? And that she served as a judge for the 2020 Davitts?
- **Sara Hood**, a newish convenor, has brought a wealth of experience from her professional life (and her passion for writing). Thanks to Sara, we have modernised our association rules (which you'll shortly be voting on), revamped the structure of the committee, taken out association insurance, and registered with ASIC. She has also had charge of revamping the Sisters in Crime website which will be launched very soon. It will be bigger and better and you'll be able to join or re-join easily – and there will be members only sections. She also looks after Twitter. Managing all this change can be a challenge but Sara has been full of wise advice to assist in the transition.
- **Karina Kilmore** is also a newish convenor and she has done an outstanding job in hosting 28 Murder Mondays interviews, as well as providing a major input into programming events. Karina is a former book editor for the *Herald Sun*, and author and also a superlative live-event compere. She also looks after Instagram. Last year Karina was a Davitt judge but this year her debut novel is in contention so that wasn't possible.
- **Moraig Kisler** who has the taxing job of review editor and has really boosted the number of reviews going on our website. She is also a Davitt judge (last year she stepped in as judges' wrangler) and is desperate to find enough time to finish her crime novel. We are thrilled she is our President elect.
- **Tara Mitchell** has done such a fantastic job with coordinating events, especially our big events, like the Davitts and the Scarlet Stiletto Awards. Tara has had carriage of our monthly e-newsletter, *A Stab in the Dark*, which now goes to nearly 4000 across Australia and the globe. She has proved a whizz at Eventbrite and our occasional email blasts via Mailchimp. She is also a Davitt judge this year.
- **Pauline Meaney** who has served as a Davitt judge – a very big job, even with some division of labour – and helped run events in Melbourne. Pauline did not stand this year.

I do admin, programming, event coordination, sponsorship, PR, publisher liaison and maintain the database.

Finally, many thanks are also due to:

- Australian publishers who generously support both the Davitt and Scarlet Stiletto Awards, donate books for our raffles and approach us re authors to speak at our events and help get them here.
- **Deb Force** and the energetic team at the Sun Bookshop, our official bookseller at events, who now offer an online service. Deb has an encyclopaedic knowledge of crime writing and is a great source of top advice on what's worth reading.
- Former convenor **Michele Cooper** who administers the Scarlet Stiletto Awards, a huge job.

- **David Ryding** at the City of Literature team which have hosted scores of our Zoom hook-ups, at no cost.
- **Sue Westwood** and the team at the **Melbourne Athenaeum Library** for their event partnership.
- The indefatigable **Dr Carolyn Beasley** from **Swinburne University of Technology** which supports the Davitts and the first prize for the Scarlet Stiletto Awards.
- **Professor Kathy Laster** from the **Sir Zelman Cowen Centre** at **Victoria University**, the co-host for our annual Law Week event.
- **Mal and Tanya Wakefield** and the wonderful team at the Rising Sun. We are looking forward to going back.
- **Mark Barry** from BS Sound who does a terrific job setting up the PA system for dummies at our events when we can have them live.

And most especially thanks to all of you, our members, for sticking with us over tough times.

Thank you.