

The Society of Scribes and Illuminators Open Day and Annual General Meeting 2026

The Society of Scribes and Illuminators Open Day and Annual General Meeting 2026 was held in the lovely Art Workers' Guild in London on Saturday 13 June.

I was there earlier than usual having travelled up the day before and was able to help with the setting up and the meeting and greeting of some of the approximately 90 members, Fellows and visitors expected.

The new Sum-up machine worked and proved to be easier than at first thought, name badges at the ready and clear instructions from Elaine Gillingham and Gwyneth Hibbett made everything run smoothly.

Tables were laid out, display stands erected, deliveries arrived, chairs in the hall counted and a select group of Fellows disappeared upstairs to deliberate in private.

Work by Lay Members was displayed in the ground floor front room under the titles of The Elements: Earth, Air, Fire, Water or Own choice. The range of style, design, medium and ability was impressive and the three pieces voted as 'Member's choice' by those present were by Liz Barrow, Tessie Cooling and Alma Valikonienė.

The room gradually filled as people arrived.

In the same room was a selection of books from the SSI library and a bargain basement of back catalogues from the last two SSI exhibitions. There was a selection of examples of work from the late Estonian calligrapher Villu Toots, entrusted to one of our members following his last visit to the UK in 1991 and this was available for people to look at. This body of work is to be included in the SSI Library in future.

Tea and coffee appeared along with much needed refreshing cold drinks.

A wonderful array of work produced by participants on the Creative Development Course (ATS) – final year students was exhibited in the main hall, including that of our Heritage Crafts Bursary recipient Lesley Romano, one of which was a large and stunning work in black which I know drew lots of enquiries as to how it was done and with what materials. A chance for us all to see a range of work through its various stages of development, where generally we only see the finished item... it was all fascinating and inspiring.

A selection of pieces of calligraphy from the archive of the Crafts Study Centre, Farnham were displayed upstairs, most of them being by fellows of the SSI. They were much admired but as the room was a little crowded, I went up several times during the day in order to see it all.

The Fellows emerged from their meeting and we learned with much joy that Anthea Power had been elected as our newest FSSI. Many congratulations on a well-deserved achievement Anthea. There was quite a buzz of excitement with a steady queue up the stairs to admire her submission work. It was simply stunningly beautiful and so accomplished.

Just as tea and coffee had appeared as if by magic so too did a buffet lunch, ample savoury and sweet courses, all delicious and enough for second helpings! After which we took our seats for the formal business of the day.

The business of the AGM was conducted efficiently and following her report Cathy Stables FSSI was thanked for her efforts as Chair for the last three years and Juliet Bankes FSSI was welcomed as Acting Chair. Anthea Power was given her official Fellowship award to much applaud and others were in their turn thanked for contributions made to the day and the Society.

Then Tim Noad MBE, FSSI Calligrapher, Heraldic Artist & Designer, took the rostrum to enlighten and entertain us on the subject 'Calligraphy, A Living Tradition'.

Calligraphy and illumination have been used to enrich official documents and commemorative books in an unbroken tradition, beginning in the early Middle Ages and still continuing today. Several SSI Craft Members/Fellows are important figures in the evolution of this practice in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Tim discussed how his own work fits into this legacy and through anecdote and copious images illustrated some of the inspirations, challenges and highlights of his career, including some of the work completed for the Coronation of King Charles 111.

Spell binding and amusing the ever self-effacing and modest man that Tim is royally entertained us while also informing, inspiring and educating the assembled company.

What a wonderful day of all things calligraphic.

Jo Turner