



**Alliance of Literary Societies**  
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[www.allianceofliterarysocieties.org.uk](http://www.allianceofliterarysocieties.org.uk)

**Newsletter: Spring/Summer 2018**

**Not Only, But ALSo...**

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## **1. The ALS AGM and 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Weekend.**

By this time hopefully you're well aware of the AGM (18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> May) in Birmingham. It's the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the society and we look forward to welcoming as many of you as possible. As usual, there will be a weekend full of events. On the Friday evening, there will be a Chinese buffet. Saturday centres round activity in the Ibis Hotel. Registration is at 10am. The AGM is sandwiched between talks and the AGM until 5pm; the annual dinner (with readings) from 7pm. On Sunday, from 10.30 am to 11.15 am, there is A Pre-Raphaelite guided tour at the Museum and Art Gallery. Most activities must be pre-booked so please check out the full programme and booking form at the end of this newsletter. You can also download the information from the website [HERE](#)

## **2. Moving with the Times – editorial**

I recently read through the article [A SHORT HISTORY OF ALS](#) (which I can recommend to any and all) and found some solace in the fact that change is a constant. In our relentless quest to get (and stay) better connected with our member societies, we are embracing what some may still call 'new technology', others may call 'digital interface' and yet others 'the way things are'. The Spring and Autumn Newsletter has been in digital format for some time, and now will be delivered as a link within an e-news mailout in March and September. This should do away with the problem of large file size/attachments which have presented problems in the past.

All you have to do is click the link and download the file. You can also do this direct from the website. When you have read it, please share the PDF file among the members of your society or give them the website link which is:

<https://allianceofliterarysocieties.wordpress.com/publications/>

Whilst we appreciate that not all member societies are fully conversant with digital technology, it is really valuable for each society to have one person with an email address with whom we can communicate. And it is each individual society's responsibility to keep us supplied with an up to date address. Otherwise we cannot guarantee to keep you informed. If you are not receiving emails please first check your spam settings (it's amazing what you find lurking in the spam box) and make sure we have your up to date email address.

We are also putting more resources on the website so that it becomes the 'go to' place for information on forthcoming events, society activity as well as for relevant guides on a host of practical issues. These used to be sent out as printed 'handbooks' but I think we are all aware not just of the prohibitive cost of print and postage for such items but also perhaps that the lives of trees should be spared where possible! We are working to get updated versions online, so please do visit the website Resources page regularly.

### 3. Library/Museum Services in Peril

The cuts to library/museum services around the country are a constant source of concern. Private Eye has a regular column on 'Library News'; and there are various protest sites on the internet, including [www.publiclibrariesnews.com](http://www.publiclibrariesnews.com); in addition to general media coverage.

The focus here will be on two particular aspects of these cuts: library/museum closures/cuts, and the subsequent impact on literary collections. So, firstly, let us look at two recent examples.

#### *Northamptonshire*

At the end of 2017, Northamptonshire County Council launched a public consultation with reference to its proposals to create more funding for social and other critical services across the County. Libraries are often seen as soft targets for savings, and this was certainly the case with NCC.

The two main proposals were to close 21 small libraries, retaining 15 medium/large ones. The targeted libraries were not only reading centres but also provided much needed local community facilities in the form of children's centres. County-wide, library services staffing was to be cut, including in those libraries not set for closure. This had a potentially detrimental knock-on effect for its literary collections (in particular, John Clare and H E Bates) – in terms of care, maintenance and access.

An ALS email went out to the designated representatives of all our member societies, urging them to back the protest against the cuts. The response was tremendous, and the Council was bombarded by emails and letters. A letter also went to *The Guardian*, signed by a number of eminent academics and writers. This then sparked discussion on *The World At One* and *The Today Programme*.

On 9 January, the BBC reported that the Government were setting up an independent investigation into alleged financial and government failings at NCC. Subsequently, NCC announced that they were on the verge of bankruptcy, issuing a section 114 notice imposing financial controls and banning expenditure on all services except for its statutory obligations to safeguard vulnerable people.

The result of all this was that, on 1 March, *The Guardian* published a piece proclaiming that NCC would retain the 21 libraries, but only open them one day per week. NCC were saying that they had been forced to do this because, under section 114, they could not fund the staffing otherwise needed. A cynic might forecast that, if they measure footfall and it is much reduced because the community groups cannot all meet on the same day, this gives them grounds to eventually close them completely.

The Library and Information Association, CILIP, is now calling for the cuts to be halted, pending an urgent national enquiry into the situation at NCC, and arguing that the

proposed reduced level of service does not conform to that required by the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act.

### *Walsall*

The Jerome K Jerome Society is currently fighting a battle to rescue the collection of JKJ memorabilia which was housed in the Central Museum until its closure in 2017. The collection was then moved for a short time to the Library, where it was put on display. Subsequently, it was decided that, with no one to curate them, they would be packed up into boxes and moved to a warehouse in Darlaston – where there is no heating and no public access. There is also some JKJ material in the Walsall Local History Centre and that is due to close in 2018, with the material to be transferred to the Library – where, hopefully, it will remain!

The Society is in discussion with a local university who have indicated an interest in displaying the collection in a more suitable environment, but the Council say that the university is not an accredited institution (and, even if it were, they do not have the staff to sort out and transfer it). This is because the collection was originally given (by JKJ's daughter) to the Museum, and museums can only transfer collections to other museums. The situation appears to have reached an impasse.

In the UK, literary manuscripts and memorabilia are usually held either in the care of local authorities (museums, record offices, libraries), in private collections or in university libraries/special collections units. Sometimes they have been bequeathed (with or without preservation clauses), and sometimes they have been purchased. In the case of the last two locations, there is often restricted access, making it difficult for the non-academic researcher.

Given the current economic climate for local authorities, it would seem that literary collections would be safer if kept on university campuses, but how this is achieved is a problem:

- If the collection was bequeathed, there may be clauses restricting its transfer.
- If the collection was purchased, the local authority may not want to sell it – or may ask a prohibitive amount for it.
- The university may be willing to take the collection on board but require funding to catalogue and display it.
- A museum collection can only be transferred to a location with museum status.

In addition to all this, as has already been stated, there is the potential problem of access for the general public. However, it very much depends on what the alternative is.

For societies teaming up with libraries or museums/records offices in search of funding for the purchase of manuscripts/rare books, or for the conservation/digitisation of collections, it would be worth visiting the websites of the Friends of the National Libraries

([www.friendsofnationallibraries.org.uk/](http://www.friendsofnationallibraries.org.uk/)) and the National Manuscripts Conservation Trust ([www.nmct.co.uk](http://www.nmct.co.uk)).

### *Conclusion*

As libraries and museums are part of local authority budgets, it is difficult to campaign across the board against cuts. It seems that each case has to be tackled separately. As we have seen with Northamptonshire, any amount of high level publicity can be raised but, at the end of the day, if the local authority invokes section 114, then the result can still be a damp squib.

However, that is not to say that we should give up. The more that these incidents hit the media, the better. They serve to highlight the financial problems (and perhaps inefficiencies) that local authorities undergo – with a growing drain on critical services.

So, we need to carry on fighting for our literary heritage – and if you can get your collections into the (hopefully) safekeeping of universities (accepting the limitations then imposed on them) maybe that would be better. It is worth thinking about.

If you do hear of threats to literary collections (and, of course, properties), please do contact the ALS. We can certainly add our voice to the cause!

*Linda J Curry*

## **4. Walking with Authors**

*We had a good response to our request for societies to tell us about their walks. If your society has a walk to share, please get in touch and we will try to include it in the autumn newsletter.*

### **Walking in Nicholson's Footsteps.**

The Cumbrian poet and writer Norman Nicholson (1914-1987) may not be known as much of a fell walker – the TB which almost killed him as a teenager put paid to any ambitions he cherished in that respect – but he certainly did walk. In his autobiography [Wednesday Early Closing](#) (1975) he describes the cycling and fell-walking he did before his illness, while after returning home to Millom from the private sanatorium in Hampshire where he was treated for tuberculosis, he kept to a strict regime of reading, writing, bed rest and short walks. Gradually, as Norman's health improved, the walks became longer, until he knew perfectly all the landscape surrounding Millom. That landscape included dunes, seashore, farmland, marshland, becks, [sykes](#) and rivers, quarries, copses and slag heaps and, in Norman's earlier years, ironworks and iron ore mines, all against the backdrop of the fells he had once explored. This is the landscape that suffuses Nicholson's poetry, giving him the home base from which he perceived the whole of Lakeland and Greater Lakeland, the subject of the topographical works that helped him earn his living.

An appreciation of Nicholson's works – his poetry, prose and drama – is deepened by walking – slowly – through his landscape; through an interaction with the many different species of plants that grow in the various habitats close to Nicholson's home town; through

listening to the present-day soundscape, or imagining the soundscape of the past; and most of all by appreciating the grit, grime, pebbles and rock from which Millom – and Cumbria – are made.

Millom itself is not a pretty town, although it does have some interesting buildings, and it was in the past a lively place: the community spirit it encouraged is still vital and thriving. And the landscape in which it is set is astonishing: the post-industrial moonscape of the former ironworks site looms above the town and is encircled by sea, fells and mountains, while the lagoon created by the collapse and flooding of the iron ore mines after their closure in 1968 is the largest stretch of coastal water in north-west England, and an important [RSPB Nature Reserve](#). It is an area rich in industrial archaeology and working class heritage, bird life, rare plant species, geology, and important traces of much earlier settlement, pre-historic, Roman, Viking, Norman and Medieval.

Our walks as a Society generally take place in the summer and have included many of the elements mentioned above. Walks through the dunes at Haverigg, for example, have focused on the plant and animal life specific to this environment, and there are always apposite lines from Nicholson's poetry to spur us into looking more closely at what lies beneath our feet: "skewers of marram / Peg down the ground-sheet sand", or, my favourite dune image: "The spiked marram's springy knitting-needles / Purl and entangle what concrete cannot conquer". The depth of ecological understanding in that vivid, homely image is both exact and breath-taking.

Our plans for Society events this year (2018) include more walking trips: our AGM will take place on **April 14<sup>th</sup>** at the [Millom Cricket Club](#), giving us the opportunity to go on a boundary walk that will draw on Nicholson's lively and comical descriptions in his book *Provincial Pleasures* (1959) in which he almost creates the sounds of a radio cricket commentary ("the crowd sucks in its breath like a vacuum cleaner"); and on the **7<sup>th</sup> July** our event will be focused on the closure of Millom Ironworks in 1968, with a walk on the [old Ironworks site](#), now a local Nature Reserve. Some of Nicholson's most powerful later poems reflect on this closure – poems that continue to be relevant in post-industrial Britain, where so many towns and communities have been hit by a similar fate:

The proud battery of chimneys, the hell-mouth roar of the furnace,  
The midnight sunsets ladled across a cloudy sky –  
Are archaeological data...

From 'On the Dismantling of Millom Ironworks', Norman Nicholson *Collected Poems*, p. 360

Most of our events are open to the public, so why don't you consider joining us on one of our walks, if you happen to be in Cumbria at the right time? Warm welcomes, healthy but not strenuous tramping, and a different perspective on Lakeland are promised. Our [Events Page](#) publishes information about our plans. Contact Antoinette Fawcett, Membership Secretary The Norman Nicholson Society, for further information: [antoinettefawcett@gmail.com](mailto:antoinettefawcett@gmail.com).

*Antoinette Fawcett*

## Walking in the Footsteps of John Clare.

John Clare (1793 – 1864) was born in the village of Helpston, near Peterborough, and his memorial there refers to him as ‘The Northamptonshire Peasant Poet’. His family were part of the agricultural labouring community and, after leaving school at the age of 12, he took whatever work was around: potboy at the local pub, gardener at Burghley House, lime burning at Pickworth, etc.

He was primarily a poet, although he did write essays and a journal. Over a thousand manuscripts survive him. Helpston and the surrounding countryside was his world, and his poems document rural life, the changing seasons, local fauna and flora and also rebel against the injustices done to the rural poor (primarily, The Enclosure Act). Like all the poor, he walked everywhere. As he walked, he observed; and, as he observed, he wrote.

His first book of poems, published in 1820 (*Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery*), was successfully received. However, the book-buying public who had originally seen his work as somewhat of a novelty started to lose interest as his following three volumes increasingly struggled to find an audience outside his small loyal following.

In the 1830s, he started to show signs of mental health issues and, in 1837 committed himself to Dr Allen’s private asylum at High Beach in Epping Forest. By 1841, he was missing home and made the long walk back home, where he stayed for a few months before being finally sent to Northampton General Lunatic Asylum, where he stayed until his death. He continued to write throughout his time in the asylums.

Each year, the John Clare Society holds its festival, in Helpston, on the weekend closest to Clare’s birthday (13 July). The Saturday events include a guided walk around the village, talking about Clare and the places associated with him. Of course, the John Clare Cottage (his birthplace) is also open.

However, if you cannot make it to the festival, there are a number of walking routes you can follow, in Clare’s footsteps:

- At <http://www.clarecottage.org/pages/the-routes>, you can follow the 74 mile route we think Clare would have taken from High Beach to Helpston. Don’t worry – it’s broken down into a 3-day trip! It took Clare longer than that as he had to live rough and didn’t have the benefit of a map. You can read an extract from Clare’s journal, covering his walk [here](#)
- You can take the shorter, village walk, starting from the Cottage. Details [here](#)
- At <http://www.clarecottage.org/pages/clare-country>, you will find some more walks around Clare country, including the nature reserve at Swaddywell.

Of course, if you are thinking of doing a Clare walk, you ought to take some of his poetry with you. Easy introductions are the two books sold by the John Clare Society: *This Happy Spirit* and *The Wood is Sweet*.

Both are available via the Society site at [www.johnclaresociety.wordpress.com](http://www.johnclaresociety.wordpress.com).

Linda J Curry.

## **The John Moore Society: Literary Walks round Tewkesbury.**

*The John Moore Society likes to give their members three for the price of one. A walk, a talk and an AGM. The following is edited from the John Moore Journal and tells of the society walk round Tewkesbury held in August 2017.*

It was definitely a day for sun-hats as 18 of us met at the North Gate of Tewkesbury Abbey. Our guide, Cheltenham writer David Elder, was to lead us on a leisurely stroll to visit many of the sites with literary connections featured in his book 'Literary Tewkesbury', and our member John Dixon, resplendent in high-viz jacket was our Health and Safety 'whipper-in' to keep a check on stragglers.

Our first stop, behind the Abbey, was at John Moore's grave, which is now a disappointing sight; the stone is almost illegible owing to the ravages of the weather and the surrounding herbage and flora frequently encroach. Slightly more readable is the inscription on the memorial, close to the Gloucester Road frontage, of John Hart (a descendent of Shakespeare's sister) which is mentioned in JM's works. We also noted, in much better condition, the handsome memorial to Barbara Cartland's Father and two brothers, lost during the Great War and WW2 respectively, and her mother.

With John Dixon poised to hold up traffic we crossed the road to view 'The Bell' (where a previous AGM had been held) and the former Abbey Mill which were portrayed respectively as Abel Fletcher's house and tannery in 'John Halifax Gentleman' by Mrs Craik. (There is a handsome plaque in her memory inside the Abbey, an honour not accorded to John.) Turning into St Mary's Lane we passed the restored stocking weavers' cottages and the black-and-white house which was originally used by George Fox, the founder of the Quakers, for his 'Great Meeting' in 1855.

Back in Church Street we turned left, passed the John Moore Countryside Museum (closed as it was Sunday) and headed to the Royal Hop Pole Hotel, immortalised in the 'Pickwick Papers', from which David briefly quoted. Side-stepping some determined walkers coming in the opposite direction, and retrieving two of our number who had 'rioted' in search of ice-creams, we passed the handsome restored 17th Century Building, now housing the Tewkesbury Heritage Centre ('Out of the Hat'), before bearing left into High Street to the site of the former Swan Inn (immortalised in the Bresham books) which now houses a 'Superdrug' and 'Store 21'. (The Colonel would have had apoplexy.)

Passing the end of the road where, David told us, once lived one of the three sailors who helped to bear Admiral Nelson's body to the cockpit of HMS Victory at the Battle of Trafalgar, we came to the Tudor House Hotel, John's childhood home, of which he wrote so much, and which was also referred to by Mrs Craik. (Members who go inside for the first time should not be unduly surprised that some of the staff, not being immediately local, have not heard of JM - despite the plaque on the outside wall.)

John D. ensured our safe passage across High Street to Sun Street where we passed that busy and popular venue the Roses Theatre. It was here that Eric Morecambe suffered his fatal heart attack, and the Committee Room now bears his name in tribute. Turning right along Oldbury Road, David pointed out the Ambulance station, formerly the site of the original Tewkesbury Theatre, which had closed down in 1922. In 1830, he said, there had been a serious disturbance when it was the venue for a lecture on the topic of poverty by the controversial political journalist William Cobbett, who proposed to charge a fee for the privilege of listening. After being burned down in 1931 the building had been turned into... a Fire Station.

Turning into Barton Street for the 'homeward leg' we passed the 'Mustard House'. ("Has anyone tried Tewkesbury mustard?" "Yes, it's hot.") This condiment, probably produced originally as a 'cottage industry' became a simile, in the works of Shakespeare and others, for a sour or sharp disposition. Our penultimate stop was at the end of Lilley's Alley, the view from which, over to the Vineyards, is claimed to have inspired Cecilia Cooper, a minor Romantic Poet and writer, to write about the Battle of Tewkesbury as if she had seen it.

What we could see, at this point, across Swilgate Road, is the Cricket Ground, so lovingly described by JM and where, having joined the 'Elmbury' Cricket Club, he discovered that his rightful place in the batting order was last. Having ended our 'innings' and with thanks to our Guide, David, for his company and information, we made our way to our various cars for the short drive to Tredington and the next highlight of the day.

*Valerie Haworth.*

### **The Edward Thomas Fellowship Birthday Walk.**

The Edward Thomas Fellowship hoped to stage a commemorative Birthday Walk around Steep, Hampshire on the anniversary of the poet's birth (3<sup>rd</sup> March). Unfortunately, it had to be postponed this year due to the weather but here is an outline of the walks which will be rescheduled.

The morning walk (a fairly strenuous 4½ miler) includes a visit to the memorial stone on the Shoulder of Mutton Hill. The afternoon walk, a more leisurely stroll of 2 ½ miles, usually includes a visit to one of the Thomas houses in Steep village. We pause at intervals during the walks for members to read appropriate poems and prose. The day ends at Steep Church for afternoon tea, followed by the Birthday Tribute (a series of readings and reflections). In 2017, we marked the centenary of the poet's death in Arras and the theme for the day was: 'Edward Thomas in France - in the trenches and on the front line'. This year, we will mark the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the unveiling of the memorial stone and pay tribute to the life and work of Edward Thomas through poetry written by his friends and admirers.

The walks have been postponed until April (probably 21<sup>st</sup>/22<sup>nd</sup>) so you may still be able to take part when you receive this newsletter. Get in touch via the [ETF website](#). Non-members are most welcome.

### **The Galloway Raiders get out and about.**

Nature and the countryside are very important to the work of S. R. Crockett, and the Galloway Raiders have enjoyed many walks (as well as cycles and car trips) since their establishment in 2014. We tend to do Galloway walks in April/May and September/October. In our trips, we try to visit (and sometimes just find) Crockett 'places'. We've even invented a name for it 'Crocketteering.' We have yet to get across to Hestan Island (fictionalised by Crockett in several works as 'Rathan Island') because the tides are treacherous, but be it on foot, or a combination of two or four wheels, exploring the Galloway countryside is an important aspect of our society.

Crockett wrote about places and people he knew well, but changes names of both people and places (and it is true at times he conflates both topography and character) which can make ‘finding’ his locations difficult. He admits he intentionally ‘*mixes those babies up.*’ For us, this is all part of our adventure. When you do find ‘the place’ under whatever name – the descriptions are incredibly accurate. An example is *The Backhill o’ the Bush*. The novel *Rose of the Wilderness* opens with Rose Gordon looking out of the window of a bothy which might well be the *Backhill*.

*‘They tell you that nobody is really alive to the beauty of their birthplace. Well, perhaps not for some time after. But in the long run, it depends on the person. For me, Rose Gordon of the Dungeon in the uplands of Galloway, from my earliest years I was glad of the large freshness of every breath I drew.’*

Once described as the most remote part of Scotland, *Backhill o’ the Bush* is still very remote and unless you have a good pair of walking legs, a mountain bike or a 4x4 it is quite inaccessible. I believe it is the place where the concept of the Scottish Mountain Bothy Association was born in the 1960s. Unfortunately, as an open bothy it is subject at times to vandalism by humans and infestation by rats. But it is still a place which sparks the imagination. Overlooking The Dungeon Range of hills, a key Crockett location can be seen. ‘*The Nick o’ the Dungeon*’ is a steep hill pass which features in *The Raiders* as a perilous night climb. Between the bothy and the hills is the boggy Cooran Lane, only passable to those with serious local knowledge unafraid of getting wet feet.

Crockett is a wonderful guide to anyone wanting to walk in Galloway. With more than thirty books set in the Galloway countryside, the walker is spoiled for choice in what is still well described as a ‘*remote fastness.*’ In my ‘*Discovering Crockett’s Galloway*’ series of books Crockett’s places and people are linked so you can explore the history, adventure and romance of Galloway – and these are walks which can be undertaken on foot or virtually, from the comfort of your own armchair.

*Cally Phillips*

## **The Brontë Society takes to the hills.**

The Society has a long history of walks around Haworth. There doesn’t appear to be a dedicated members’ walk this year (Emily’s bicentenary) but every day during the Easter holidays, visitors will have the opportunity to be guided on a short walk discovering Penistone Hill, a part of the Brontës’ beloved moorland landscape and just ten minutes’ walk from the Parsonage. As well as admiring the amazing views, walk guides will take a look at the natural and industrial history of this environment and share insights into its inspirational role in the Brontës’ writing.

Please note: sturdy shoes required. This is not a long walk (approx. 90 minutes) and there are plenty of stops along the way, but it is probably a little strenuous for most children under six years old. For more information about walks past and Bronte 200 activities for 2018 go to the [Bronte Society website](#).

## 5. News from Societies.

**David Jones:** Call for papers for the Inaugural Research Seminar of the David Jones Research Center on 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> June 2018. Papers of no more than 2,000 words are sought on a range of subjects – see the website for more information. The deadline on this one is fast approaching –April 7<sup>th</sup> - so if you are interested please head straight over to the website <http://wauhonorscollege.org/honors-conference/> for more information and email your proposal to [honorscollege@wau.edu](mailto:honorscollege@wau.edu).

**Ted Hughes Festival** The Ted Hughes Society are organising a Ted Hughes Festival again this year (19<sup>th</sup> - 21<sup>st</sup> October 2018) which will commemorate the twentieth anniversary of Ted's death. The full programme for the Festival is yet to be confirmed but it will feature readings by our patron Simon Armitage and by Frieda Hughes.

**J.M. Barrie one year on.** The newly formed society will be celebrating Barrie's birthday again at the Kirrie Pavilion on Wednesday May 9<sup>th</sup> at 3pm. We have recently recruited David Barrie (CBE) as Patron, and Dr Andrew Nash as Honorary President. The Society will be launching the 'Echoes of the War' resource pack at this event as well as the first society Journal.

**Maria Edgeworth Literary Festival** (11<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> May 2018) features a Poetry Workshop with Vona Groarke a Short Story Workshop with Brian Leyden on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> May 2018 11.00 a.m.-1.00 p.m at The Old Schoolhouse Ballymahon Road Edgeworthstown Co. Longford The Fee for each workshop is €20. Booking Essential. Find out more information and book online at [www.edgeworthstown.net/festival](http://www.edgeworthstown.net/festival) or email: [edgelocdev@eircom.net](mailto:edgelocdev@eircom.net)

## 6.New Publications.

### **John Buchan: Runagates Club**

Kate MacDonald's Handheld Books has recently republished Buchan's *The Runagates Club*, Buchan's 1928 collection of short stories, with a critical introduction by Kate herself. The book can be purchased direct from the publisher [www.handheldpress.co.uk](http://www.handheldpress.co.uk) or from Amazon.

### **J.M.Barrie: New Journal Publication**

**Anon: Volume 1** is the first edition of the J.M.Barrie Literary Society. Featuring articles by academics and enthusiasts as well as lesser known and hard to find Barrie short plays and articles, it is available free to J.M.B members and for £5 (including UK postage) to anyone else. You can find it alongside the Society's new editions of Barrie's writing 'beyond Peter Pan' at the J.M.Barrie Collection in the Unco Store [here](#)

**David Jones:** A 1965 interview with Saunders Lewis is available on [YouTube](#). Watch it [here](#). A review of Tom Dilworth's biography *David Jones: Engraver, Soldier, Painter, Poet* (Jonathan Cape, 2016) is available to read [here](#)

**The unco bookstore** (which features the collections of S.R.Crockett and J.M.Barrie as well as other Scottish authors) is running a 2018 Calendar featuring 'unco'\* Scots authors. Find out more about authors as diverse as James Hogg, Andrew Lang, John Muir and Muriel Spark by opening the calendar [here](#).

*\*for the uninitiated, unco is a Scots word meaning 'unusual, extraordinary.'*

## Book Review

*The Brontë Sisters: Life, Loss and Literature* published by Pen and Sword under the Trailblazing Women category is written by Catherine Rayner, life member of the Brontë Society and Trustee on the Council of the Brontë Society. As such, she is well placed to access resources and research material. This book contains eight pages of coloured photographs, many familiar but welcome all the same. Rayner has studied and researched the life of the Brontë family for over forty years and her commitment and knowledge are indisputable.

I have also been a Brontë ‘fan’ for over forty years. Indeed, my own first foray into dramatic writing was an adaptation of the Brontë juvenilia entitled *We Wove A Web in Childhood*, in the late 1980s. As I worked my way through their writings and letters I ‘found’ and developed a dramatic journey which sought to show how the childhood experiences impacted upon the adult relationships – something that Rayner’s book also addresses.

The two big hitters of Brontë research remain Dr Juliet Barker and Dr Christine Alexander. Rayner acknowledges and draws from both but the clue on her own personal ‘take’ on the Brontë sisters is found in the ‘Trailblazing Women’ banner. She offers a view of the three sisters which is embedded in an exploration of their place in social history and of their mental and emotional states. She uses her own background knowledge of developmental psychology to interpret and suggest, while never becoming dogmatic.

Drawing on primary source material, Rayner perhaps privileges letters over the novels and poems, suggesting there is less speculation in the former. Speculation, however, is always present. Letters, after all are partisan and since there is most material in all forms from Charlotte, the danger is always that her views predominate.

As a counterbalance, Rayner gives equal weight in her study of each individual novel, contextualising both the work and the author in terms of Victorian society and its contemporary norms. This certainly works to give the reader more insight into the often-overlooked Anne’s works.

As in the famous ‘gun’ portrait, where Branwell paints himself out, I feel that he is rather a casualty in this work with its focus on the female experience. I feel there is ground to be made on a deeper examination of the psychological impacts on a lone male child in a largely female household. Rayner suggests little sympathy towards Branwell’s mental state, while pointing out a range of mental and emotional weaknesses in each of the sisters with some empathy. I can’t help but wonder how hard it must have been for Branwell to be brought up in this family.

Branwell is most often mediated through Charlotte’s eyes and there is a danger inherent in this. Rayner concurs with what I feel is a rather harsh (though common) view that Branwell was simply a talent wasted – and yet she has much more sympathy for the failings, particularly of Charlotte. It serves the purpose of this book, but I feel uncomfortable with the conclusions.

Anyone who writes about the Brontës offers their own perspective and interpretation. There is so much that can never be known. The ‘definitive’ work remains Dr Barker’s biography but Rayner certainly opens some interesting windows onto the world with her melding of the social conditions and the emotional and psychological states of her ‘subjects.’ This is not a pure feminist interpretation of the sisters, but it does speak to our time, looking into issues of gender abuse on a societal level. The Brontë sisters may have

been ahead of their time in their exploration of the role of women in society, but look today and you see many of the same issues still needing to be addressed both in fiction and in fact.

It is a good time for a new book about the Brontë sisters. The Brontë Society are in the middle of a four-year Bicentenary celebration: Charlotte 1816, Branwell 1817, Emily 1818 and Anne 1820. So, a re-evaluation of the siblings is both expected and will serve well for Brontë lovers old and new.

I had reservations about the value of another book 'exploring' the Brontës, this gave me much food for thought and made me itch to go back and read the novels again – starting with Anne – which shows that Rayner has been an effective advocate for the Brontës.

*Cally Phillips*

All ALS members can take advantage of a 25% discount off the RRP (£14.99) and free UK P&P (The code is ALSB25 which can be used on at the Pen& Sword website at the checkout stage in the voucher code box or quoted over the phone on 01226 734222) <https://www.pen-and-sword.co.uk/>

*We Wove a Web in Childhood* is also available for £5.99 (including UKp&p) from [www.unco.scot](http://www.unco.scot)

## **6. Creative opportunity knocks?**

**Writing Magazine Creative Writing Courses** offer members the chance to 'Turn your writing dreams into reality.' They suggest aspiring and published authors could benefit from their range of 10 creative writing courses.

These are individualised courses where the participant is matched up with a professional tutor, trained to bring out the best of their writing abilities and the goal is to help the participant succeed in their chosen genre. Assignments are individually designed to suit personal requirements. The tutor will build on the participants' existing knowledge and help develop their writing through valuable one-to-one feedback and advice in constructive critiques. The courses are flexible, allowing the participant up to two years to complete. They are delivered by email or post with the course pack being delivered by PDF or hard copy through the post.

Prices start from £260 and there is a 21-day money back guarantee, which can be paid up front or spread over a monthly direct debit after a small initial fee. There are free welcome gifts as well as 20% off Scrivener, the leading word-processing software designed with writers in mind.

There is also a professional feedback and critique service on offer. Prices start from £100 for 9,000 words.

For a limited time, interested ALS members can get an exclusive discount of 20% off courses and 10% off any critique service, please email [writingcourses@warnersgroup.co.uk](mailto:writingcourses@warnersgroup.co.uk) or call 01778 392 492 and quote CWC/ALS18. This offer ends on 1st September 2018.

Find out more from <https://www.writers-online.co.uk/Writing-Courses/>

## **7. Comings and goings.**

Since the last newsletter we have welcomed three new member societies: D L Sayers, Byron and the Newport & Gwent Literary Club. Two former members have re-joined: Lewis Carroll and Robert Graves.

## **8. Last but not least.**

### **Data Protection**

The rules on Data Protection are changing - from 25 May 2018. This is really important to us as all our society members will be storing member information. It needs to be made clear to your members what that information will be used for and to get their permission to store it.

To learn more about what is happening you might like to read the following online articles from the [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com) and [www.civilsociety.co.uk](http://www.civilsociety.co.uk) .

We will be reviewing and updating our own Data Protection policy in line with new guidelines.

# The Alliance of Literary Societies (ALS) AGM Weekend in Birmingham

18 – 20 May 2018

## Programme

Birmingham is a vibrant, cultural city and there is a lot to do here. You may therefore want to make a long weekend of it. If you are staying for longer than the programme, there are some suggestions at the end of this – or you can browse through the Visit Birmingham website ([www.visitbirmingham.com](http://www.visitbirmingham.com)).

### Friday, 18 May

- 7 pm There are lots of places to eat in Birmingham, but if you would like to join us for a Chinese buffet experience (within easy walking distance of the Ibis New Street Hotel), please indicate on the booking form – so that we can book a table.

### Saturday, 19 May – at the Ibis Birmingham New Street Station Hotel (21 Ladywell Walk, Birmingham, B5 4ST – a ten-minute walk from the station)

- 10 am Registration, coffee and an opportunity to browse the society stalls. Our friends from Slightly Foxed (<https://foxedquarterly.com>) will be on hand all day with a selection of books and goods, information about subscriptions and offers, and will happily chat about all things Foxed.
- 10.50 am Welcome by the Chair of the ALS.
- 11 am Claire Harman, the President of the ALS.
- 11.15 am Molly Rosenberg, the new Director of the Royal Society of Literature, 'Literature in Britain Today'.
- 12 noon Michael Hall, The Francis Brett Young Society, 'Francis Brett Young's Birmingham'.
- 12.45 pm Buffet lunch and chance to chat.
- 1.30 pm Raffle closes.
- 2 pm ALS AGM.
- 3 pm Raffle prizes.
- 3.15 pm Tony Gray, The Jerome K Jerome Society, 'Jerome K Jerome's Life and Times: Walsall and the Thames'.
- 3.45pm John Llewellyn, The Jerome K Jerome Society, 'Three Men Went to Row'.
- 4 pm Julian Hunt, The Housman Society, 'A E Housman, the Worcestershire Lad'.
- 4.30pm Maria Artamonova, 'Tolkien's Childhood in Birmingham'.
- 5 pm Talks close.
- 7 pm Dinner (at the Ibis), with readings.

### Sunday, 20 May

- 10.30 am A Pre-Raphaelite guided tour at the Museum and Art Gallery (to be booked in advance – see form).  
to 11.15 am
- See other suggestions below.

**Note that this programme might be subject to slight change. Attendance at this event is at your own risk.**

**Booking.** For those registering for this conference, the talks and three course buffet lunch at the Ibis on the Saturday are included. The Saturday evening meal is extra. The deadline for booking is **23 April 2018**, but really, the sooner the better!

**Raffle Prizes.** It is part of the ALS tradition that, if possible, societies bring items to be included as raffle prizes. This is often a good way to advertise your particular author to others! These can be left at the registration table on arrival at the Ibis on Saturday morning. Raffle tickets will be on sale from the start of the day until 1.30 pm, and the raffle will be drawn at 3 pm, straight after the AGM.

**Saturday evening dinner.** Traditionally, we have provided our own entertainment at the Saturday evening dinner. Diners bring along favourite passages (prose or poetry) to read out. If you would like to join in, please tick the box on the form and bring your reading with you. Readings should be short (e.g. one short poem or no more than three pages of text).

**Table space.** There will be limited table space to display member societies' promotional material. Please do not bring items for sale unless you have contacted Linda Curry in advance.

**Slightly Foxed.** For those of you who have not heard of them, this is what they say about themselves: 'Companionable, entertaining and elegantly produced, *Slightly Foxed* is more like a well-read friend than a literary magazine. It is a quarterly for nonconformists, for people who don't want to read only what the big publishers are hyping and the newspapers are reviewing. Each quarter, it offers 96 pages of lively personal recommendations for books that have stood the test of time and have left their mark on the people who write about them. It also brings back forgotten voices through its *Slightly Foxed Editions*, a series of beautifully-produced little pocket hardback reissues of classic memoirs, all of them absorbing and highly individual.'

**Friday and Sunday activities.** A group of us will be sampling a Chinese buffet in the China Quarter (walking distance from the hotel) on the Friday evening and if you would like to join us for that, please indicate on the form so that we have some idea of numbers.

If you are staying in Birmingham on the Saturday night and wish to take part in the Pre-Raphaelite guided tour on the Sunday morning, please indicate on the form. There is no provision to store luggage at the Museum and Art Gallery while you undertake the tour but most hotels (including the Ibis) will keep your luggage for you after check out.

**Accommodation.** As the Saturday event is centred on the Ibis Birmingham New Street hotel, you might consider staying there. We would recommend that you book direct with the hotel (although we have no special rates for this event) – on 0121 619 9000. It is in a lively area of the city and might be a little noisy at night but the rooms are reasonable. Otherwise, there are lots of hotels. Jurys Inn and Novotel on Broad Street are probably about 20 – 25 minutes' walk away. Parking in the city centre is expensive. So, if you are coming by car, check with your chosen hotel that they have a parking arrangement – or perhaps stay outside the centre (on the south side) and use local transport to get in. Edgbaston has a number of B&Bs and there are buses every few minutes along the A38.

## Things to do in Birmingham while you are here.

**Visit the Birmingham Library** The Library is in Centenary Square, on Broad Street, and is open from 11 am to 5 pm – closed on Sundays. It was built in 2013, and amongst its collections are the Boulton and Watt archives, and the Parker collection of children’s books. It also has one of the two most important Shakespeare collections in the world.

**Visit the Birmingham Back to Backs** Owned by the National Trust, the Back to Backs is a 19<sup>th</sup> c. courtyard of working people’s houses. Usually open from about 10.15 am, you do have to book in advance. A short walk from the Ibis, at 55 – 63 Hurst Street/ 50 – 54 Inge Street, B5 4TE.

**Visit the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery** A magnificent building in Chamberlain Square, B3 3DH. Open from around 10 am to 5 pm. Splendid collection of art – and, of course, some of the Staffordshire Hoard. Edwardian tea rooms. This is where we will be holding the Pre-Raphaelite tour on the Sunday.

**Take a short trip out to the Barber Institute of Fine Arts** This is a gem of a collection housed on the University of Birmingham campus, on Edgbaston Park Road, three miles from the city centre. Open 10 am – 5 pm Monday to Friday; and 11 am to 5 pm on Saturday/ Sunday. Get there by a short train ride from New Street to University – and walk across campus; or the 61/63 bus from outside New Street Station along the Bristol Road (alight at Edgbaston Park Road and walk up). Website [www.barber.org.uk](http://www.barber.org.uk).

**Visit Sarehole Mill** This is a 250-year old working watermill famous for its association with J R R Tolkien. At Cole Bank Road, Birmingham B13 OBD. Open Wednesday – Sunday 11 am to 4 pm. Number 5 bus from city centre. (See National Express West Midlands for details.)

**Take the tram to the Jewellery Quarter** The Museum of the Jewellery Quarter is at 75 – 80 Vyse Street B18 6HA. Open Tuesday to Saturday 10.30 am to 5 pm. The Royal Birmingham Society of Arts has a Gallery at 4 Brook Street, St Paul’s B3 1SA in the centre of the Quarter, open 10.30 am to 5 pm (Mon – Sat) and 1 pm – 5 pm on Sundays. The Birmingham to Wolverhampton tram runs from the back of New Street Station to the Jewellery Quarter and St Paul’s.

**Sunday morning services**  
(The timings are as at publication of this programme so you might like to check to see if there are any changes closer to the time.)

St Martin in the Bull Ring was built in 1873 and is an example of gothic Victorian architecture, designed by Alfred Chatwin. Their Communion service is usually 9.30 am on Sunday, with The Crossing Service at 11 am.

Birmingham Cathedral (St Philip’s) was built in 1715 and is an example of elegant English Baroque architecture. One of the oldest buildings in the city still used for its original purpose. It contains stained glass windows designed by Edward Burne-Jones. Holy Communion at 9 am on Sunday, with a Choral Eucharist at 11 am.

**These are just a few suggestions. There is much more. Of course, you can just chill out at a canal side bar or restaurant. We are supposed to have more canals than Venice!**

**The Alliance of Literary Societies (ALS)  
AGM Weekend in Birmingham  
18 – 20 May 2018**

**Registration Form**

<b>Title:</b>	<b>First name:</b>		<b>Surname:</b>	
<b>Address:</b>				
<b>Email:</b>				
<b>Tel No:</b>				
<b>Society name:</b>				

Please tick the relevant boxes below and enter the number of people wishing to attend each.

Yes	Number	Item	Cost per person
		I would like to attend the informal Chinese buffet on Friday evening	Pay on the night
		I shall be attending the ALS AGM only – on Saturday at 2pm.	Free
		I wish to register for the Saturday event, which includes refreshments, 3-course buffet lunch and the talks.	£25
		I would like to read at the Saturday evening dinner. Please note that readings should be short (e.g. one short poem, or no more than three pages of text)	Free
		I wish to attend the Saturday evening dinner at the Ibis (3-course set menu with tea/coffee; drinks extra). A vegetarian option will be available.	£25
		I would like to join the Pre-Raphaelite guided tour of the Museum and Art Gallery on the Sunday at 10.30 am.	£5
<b>Dietary requirements: (e.g. allergies/vegetarian)</b>			
<b>Total to pay</b>			

**Payment:** Please send a cheque (made payable to The Alliance of Literary Societies) **by 23 April 2018** to Linda Curry, Chair, ALS, 59 Bryony Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 4BY. If you have any questions about the event, email [ljc1049@gmail.com](mailto:ljc1049@gmail.com).

### **ALS Contacts**

**We welcome your feedback and information. Please contact as follows:**

**Website events:** Linda Curry - [ljc1049@gmail.com](mailto:ljc1049@gmail.com)

**Newsletter and website content:** Cally Phillips - [callyphillipsis@gmail.com](mailto:callyphillipsis@gmail.com)

**Facebook/social media:** Jodie Roberts - [geraniumcat@gmail.com](mailto:geraniumcat@gmail.com)

For other matters contact:

Secretary: Marty Ross Smith - [martyross73@gmail.com](mailto:martyross73@gmail.com)

Treasurer: Julie Shorland - [julieshorland@gmail.com](mailto:julieshorland@gmail.com)



*The views expressed in this publication are those of the individual contributors and not necessarily those of the Alliance. Please send copy for the next issue by 15<sup>th</sup> August to Cally Phillips at [callyphillipsis@gmail.com](mailto:callyphillipsis@gmail.com). We reserve the right to edit copy for space. The autumn newsletter will be published on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2018.*