



## **Alliance of Literary Societies**

President: Claire Harman

[www.allianceofliterarysocieties.org.uk](http://www.allianceofliterarysocieties.org.uk)

### **Newsletter: Autumn/Winter 2018**

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## 1. Hold the Press – we’re going digital

As summer changes to autumn, and, in the farming calendar at least, September offers a ‘new’ year, so we look at the changes happening organically at ALS. As the world changes around us, so our biannual newsletter is transforming. It is now just one part of our ‘offering’ to members and it seemed like this edition was a good opportunity to highlight the direction of travel for the future. While we will continue to offer you this newsletter twice a year, it is something of a staging post along a spectrum, which now includes our website and social media activity, regular snappy e-news updates and the annual journal.

The website is now the ‘go to’ place for up-to-date information. To find out what is happening this autumn, just visit the events calendar online. You can link directly [HERE](#) but if you read on, I hope to show you how easy and beneficial it is.

With so many active member societies, there are always lots of events. Historically, it has been difficult to highlight and promote these to our membership, but with the website we can keep you up to date like never before. You have two choices of how to view events:

As a monthly planner (above) or a scrolling list (next page)



You simply click on the highlighted event to find out full information. Whichever view you prefer, we encourage all member societies to visit the events calendar regularly to see what's going on. The calendar gets a lot of viewings – so, it's a really good way to publicise your events.

And it's simple to add your event to the calendar. Please send the information to [allianceoflitsocs@gmail.com](mailto:allianceoflitsocs@gmail.com) . Or use the contacts to direct your information to the correct person (<https://allianceofliterarysocieties.wordpress.com/contact-us/>) should you want to engage with social media and/or contribute something to future newsletters, including the e-news updates. There is also a list of contacts at the end of this newsletter.

The transition is a learning curve for all, so here's a test for you, to show how easy it is:

For a report on the 2018 AGM, you can click [HERE](#) to go directly to the website page and read the article which you might previously have expected to find in this newsletter.

The full link is <https://allianceofliterarysocieties.wordpress.com/2018-birmingham/>

The article stays on the site long after you would have binned a paper newsletter. And you can direct your own members to it, or other interesting articles/resources. All with a couple of clicks of a mouse (or swipe of a finger). And you can re-read past glories from years gone by!

The ALS journal transitioned from print to digital a few years ago and to download it directly you can simply click [HERE](#). Again, the full link is: <https://allianceofliterarysocieties.files.wordpress.com/2018/07/alsjournal2018.pdf>

While some people may mourn the loss of a primarily print-based interaction, the savings in time and money and the instant efficiency of digital, web-based technology is, we feel, essential; especially with an organisation like ALS which relies wholly on volunteers. It offers you, and your society members, much more immediate and personal access to information. Please do interact – try out the new systems and, of course, please give us feedback.

***Cally Phillips***  
***Newsletter editor***

## 2. ALS AGM 2020

On behalf of the Walmsley Society, I am delighted to confirm that ALS officers have invited us to host the 2020 ALS AGM and conference over the weekend of Friday, 12 June to Sunday, 14 June 2020 in the beautiful north Yorkshire coastal village of Robin Hood's Bay.

The provisional plans and programme for the event are well underway, subject of course to final approval by the ALS committee in late 2019.

The twin purposes of writing this brief article are to share with members of the ALS a little more information about the Walmsley Society – the society we are proud to represent – and also to stress the importance of booking accommodation in and around Robin Hood's Bay as soon as possible. It is worth noting that Robin Hood's Bay is a small, but thriving, coastal resort and in June will be a very popular venue for tourists and walkers, as well as, we hope, ALS members!

I shall attach below a couple of links to the RHB Tourism and Hello Yorkshire websites which I hope you will find useful in choosing your preferred accommodation.

The Walmsley Society was formed way back in 1985 and has clearly stated aims to: 'Promote and encourage an appreciation of the artistic and literary heritage left by J. Ulric and Leo Walmsley' – father and son respectively.

Leo Walmsley is best known for his tales of treacherous tides, stormy seas and ferocious feuds between Yorkshire fisherfolk in the early years of the 20th century. His so-called 'Bramblewick Trilogy', consisting of *Three Fevers*, *Phantom Lobster* and *Sally Lunn*, all fit the above description very well and the first became a motion picture in 1935, titled *A Turn of the Tide* – the first motion picture ever produced by the famous J. Arthur Rank. Leo Walmsley (1892–1966) served his country with distinction in the First World War as an officer in the Royal Flying Corps, serving in the East African campaign and receiving the Military Cross for his bravery in action. He wrote well over 20 books, as well as more than 200 short stories and articles. After living in Robin Hood's Bay in his early life, in the 1930s he settled in Cornwall.

In addition to his literary works Leo was an accomplished fisherman, naturalist and geologist; he invented a revolutionary new lobster pot; and his documentary work took him as far afield as the oilfields of South America.

He received much critical acclaim in his lifetime from such respected writers as Daphne du Maurier, T.E. Lawrence, J.B. Priestley and Rebecca West among others.

I would urge ALS members to visit our website at [www.walmsleysoc.org](http://www.walmsleysoc.org) and take a look at Leo's literary works and Ulric's art. Many of Leo's most popular books have been reprinted by the Walmsley Society in recent years and are available for purchase at modest cost on the website.

I return now to the issue of booking accommodation in Robin Hood's Bay for 2020. I know it seems an age away, but please believe me, early booking is essential in order to ensure you will be able to find suitable accommodation to meet your needs in Robin Hood's Bay ahead of all the future holidaymakers and keen walkers.

Links to the RHB Tourist Information are [HERE](#) and accommodation [HERE](#).

Finally, if there is anything I can do personally to assist any ALS member in any way relating to this event, please do not hesitate to contact me: email: [andrewmdavison@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:andrewmdavison@hotmail.co.uk); mobile/text : 07778 962129; home phone: 0114 246 9571.

It will give the Walmsley Society and me as interim Chairman the greatest pleasure to welcome you all to Robin Hood's Bay and to our society in 2020!

**Andrew Davison**  
**Chairman, Walmsley Society**



***Beautiful Robin Hood's Bay.***

*[In 2019, the ALS Weekend will be hosted by the George Eliot Fellowship in Nuneaton, 17 – 19 May. Visit the website [HERE](#) to keep up to date with information. Ed]*

### **3. ALS Quick Guides & Resources on the Website**

In 2011, my predecessor as secretary, Anita Fernandez-Young, wrote a series of excellent Quick Guides to aspects of setting up and running a literary society. These have been made available to members of the ALS, in electronic or hard copy form, ever since. Our new website enables us to post these documents there, for everyone's convenience, and we agreed that, in some cases, they needed updating. Now available on the website are:

[\*Forming a Literary Society\*](#)

[\*Finance & Accounting for Literary Societies\*](#)

[\*Publishing for Literary Societies\*](#)

[\*Organising Events & Festivals for Literary Societies\*](#)

[\*Our Literary Heritage\*](#)

And soon to come:

*Marketing Your Literary Society*

We hope in future to provide a *Quick Guide to Editing for Literary Societies* and would welcome ideas for other guides. Indeed, while editing these, I realised that members of our societies will certainly have more expertise in some of these areas than we do (certainly than I do!). So, we have added the following rider to all of them:

**The benefit of an umbrella organisation like the ALS is the expertise of its members. If you have corrections to this Quick Guide, or additional information which you feel should be included, please contact us via the website.**

If you have an idea for an additional guide, or feel that an existing guide needs amendment, please let us know.

Under the Publications tab on the website, in addition to the Quick Guides, you will find a Resources section which currently contains:

*Our Literary Heritage: A Brief History of the ALS*, by Anita Fernandez-Young (written on the occasion of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ALS and updated this year, our 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary, by Linda Curry)

Guidance on [Public Liability Insurance](#), by Linda Curry

Guidance on [Registered Charitable Status](#) by Linda Curry

And soon to come: an updated *Guidance on Data Protection*.

Again, if you would like to see more guidance documents or other resources on the website, please let us know. Two suggestions we have received so far are a speakers' list and a list of venues.

**Marty Ross**  
**Secretary**

*(Note that if you click the blue highlights you can go directly from this newsletter to the appropriate website guide)*

## **4. Walking with Authors**

### **The 2018 Inaugural Willow Walk for the Lichfield Johnson Society**

*David Titley worked at the Johnson Birthplace Museum in Lichfield for many years. His idea to have an annual Willow Walk to a favourite spot of Johnson's on Stowe Pool was received by the Johnson Society with enthusiasm, and this year's inaugural walk, led by David, which featured as part of the Lichfield Festival, was attended by about 60 people. He has written this report.*

The Willow Walk has been a chance to make Johnson known in his home city. The theme was 'Friendship & Refreshment'. We strolled around Stowe Pool in unrelenting sunshine, touching on his friends and his thoughts. We began with his statue on the Cathedral, walked a little, toasted the Willow and Johnson's memory, admired the views and noted the places yet remaining which he would have seen. At St Chad's Church, we talked about his friends, the

Aston sisters. Elizabeth, the eldest, never married, but built the two mansions still standing nearby. Here Johnson would come to see her and her sister Mrs Gastrell – widow of the Revd Gastrell who destroyed Shakespeare’s mulberry tree at Stratford. Elizabeth bought the land from her sister Magdelene, widow of Johnson’s early patron Gilbert Walmsley. Mary was the youngest of the sisters, something of a charmer. Johnson recalled one unforgettable evening with her: *not mere happiness...but rapture which sweetened all the year.*

These were women close to his heart. But none of them held as deep a place in his affections as Catherine Chambers, a friend since adolescence, who worked at Michael Johnson’s bookshop, organised his funeral and carried on the business until her death in 1767. She worked with Johnson’s mother and with Lucy Porter, Johnson’s stepdaughter. The house was a poor but happy home for the three women for 30 years. It was so happy that Lucy – who became a very wealthy woman on the death of her brothers – asked to be buried next to Catherine in St Chad’s Church. Catherine’s death hit Johnson hard:

*Yesterday, at about ten in the morning, I took my leave forever of my dear old friend Catherine Chambers. She is now fifty-eight years old. I desired all to withdraw, then told her that we were to part forever; that as Christians, we should part with prayer, and that I would, if she was willing, say a short prayer beside her. She expressed great desire to hear me; and held up her poor hands, as she lay in bed, with great fervour while I prayed, kneeling by her. I then kissed her. She told me that to part was the greatest pain that she had ever felt, and that she hoped we should meet again in a better place. I expressed, with swelled eyes and great emotion of tenderness, the same hopes. We kissed and parted; I humbly hope to meet again and to part no more.*

Nowhere else does Johnson write with such tenderness and vulnerability.

We basked in the sun and admired the glorious views of the Cathedral. We listened to a rough translation of a Latin poem written in 1784 by Johnson, which recalled his father teaching him to swim in what had been Stowe Mill pond.

*...Where oft young limbs I’d splash  
In boyhood’s lasting days;  
To no avail my clumsy arms I’d thrash  
As Father’s low voice taught better ways  
To swim beneath the branches’ hiding place  
In the secret daylight darkness  
Of the overhanging trees...*

Lastly, as we stood in the street where he made his home after Johnson’s death, we remembered Francis Barber; the slave born in Jamaica who served Dr Johnson faithfully as a free man, friend and servant for more than 30 years.

The pool has changed greatly since the 1700s – in 1856 it was converted from a foul pool half-full of rubbish into a reservoir providing clean water for both Lichfield and the Black Country – but the memories and sights remain to be enjoyed and relished. The Walk is to be an annual event in the calendar of the Johnson Society. Come and join us in 2019, to take a little exercise, enjoy the beauty of Lichfield and recall the greatest Lichfieldian – Dr Samuel Johnson.

## **If you find yourself in Lichfield and want to take this walk yourself, here are the directions:**

Leave Lichfield Cathedral by the south gate, turn immediately left and you will find yourself on an ancient pathway that skirts Stowe pool. About halfway along that path toward St Chad's Church there is a famous, but currently unremarkable, tree known to local people as Johnson's Willow. They may know nothing else about Dr Samuel Johnson but they know this tree. It has been part of the city for almost 300 years. Not this particular tree. This is the fourth on the site, planted in 1959 and now near the end of its life. The first of the estimable willows was huge; over a hundred feet high in its prime. When felled by a storm in 1829, cuttings were taken from it and soon after planted on the site of the original tree. Some say Johnson used to sit in its shade, some that he would kiss the tree as he passed it on the way to visit friends beyond the church at Stowe. These are perhaps legends. He was nonetheless impressed by the willow. Johnson loved trees. Mrs Thrale records he was fond of listening to the sound of the rain in woods. When he went with her to Brighton he lamented: 'The place is truly desolate and if one had a mind to hang oneself for desperation at being obliged to live there, it would be difficult to find a tree on which to fasten a rope.'

**David Titley**  
**Johnson Society (Lichfield)**

## **5. We Will Remember Them**

This autumn/winter sees the end of the four-year commemoration of the Great War. Several of our member societies have strong First World War connections and so we are pleased to feature some of their recent and forthcoming activity.

### **Brenchley Centenary Weekend 14-16 July 2018**

The Kent villages of Matfield and Brenchley are so close together that it is difficult to say which of them was home to Siegfried Sassoon. Weirleigh, where he was born, is on the edge of Matfield, but it was at Brenchley that Sassoon played most of his youthful cricket, immortalising its sloping pitch in his 1928 masterpiece, *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*.

Brenchley has not had its own XI for some years, so it was at Matfield Green that the annual cricket match, jointly organised by Matfield CC and the Siegfried Sassoon Fellowship, was first played in 2006, and has been ever since – until this year, when Brenchley incorporated it into the village's First World War Centenary Weekend.

The Brenchley Memorial Hall and grounds, opened shortly after the war, are a thriving centre of village life, and on Saturday, 14 July, a new entrance was officially unveiled by the Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Kent. This lovely new structure consists of two wooden plinths topped with metal plaques, one depicting a cricketer and the other a First World War 'Tommy'. On the following day, during the cricket match, Enid Wells, a long-standing member of the SSF and a former resident of Sassoon's birthplace, unveiled another memorial, a carving by local craftsman Will Barsley of lines from Sassoon's poem 'Aftermath'.

After a long hot afternoon's play, the match ended, as so often happens, in a draw. Afterwards, the traditional lavish tea was laid on, and the awards ceremony, jointly led by Matfield's

captain Peter Danby and the captain of 'George Sherston's XI', Jeremy Lawson (a great-great-nephew of Sassoon), took place. Andrew Chapman, another SSF member, received the 'Spirit of the Game' award in recognition of his repeated willingness to make a 500-mile round trip from Shropshire, year after year, in order to participate in this special match. The SSF Man of the Match Award, named for Jeremy's late mother Lorna Sassoon, was presented to Ewan Shotton in recognition of his unbeaten 89 for Matfield CC.

An unexpected literary treat was also laid on by the Brenchley community when actor Lance Pierson read a passage from A.G. Macdonell's *England, Their England*, which may well have been inspired by Sassoon's memoirs.

**Deb Fisher**  
**SSF**

### **Friends of the Dymock Poets ([www.dymockpoets.org.uk](http://www.dymockpoets.org.uk))**

As well as the centenary of the end of the Great War, this year marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Friends of the Dymock Poets. On 6 October at Dymock Village Hall there will be the Annual FDP meeting with a day of events to include an international speaker, news of the archives, poetry, readings and a 25th birthday tea! This will be followed by a celebration of the writing of the six Dymock poets and friends – readings of poetry and prose in Dymock Church.

All are welcome. Lunch is available to order. And there is a birthday tea and cake for all! Booking forms from: [contact@dymockpoets.org.uk](mailto:contact@dymockpoets.org.uk)

John Drinkwater was the manager of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre when it opened before the First World War. He wrote a number of plays, and his most successful, *Abraham Lincoln*, premiered in Birmingham 100 years ago. During the afternoon of 20 October, a reading of *Abraham Lincoln* will take place on the stage of the Old Rep. Tickets (free) for both the opera performances (see below), and the play reading may be booked on the Old Rep website. Anyone interested in taking part in the reading please contact Richard Simkin: [chair@dymockpoets.org.uk](mailto:chair@dymockpoets.org.uk)

*Quilt Song*, a new opera by Drinkwater's grand-daughter, Susie Self, premieres on Friday, 19 October 2018, at the Old Rep Theatre, Birmingham, exactly 100 years to the day from the premiere of *Abraham Lincoln*. Much of the text for the new opera is drawn from the original play. Woven around the assassination of Lincoln are the stories of Rosa Parks, civil rights activist, John Drinkwater himself, the bus driver James Blake on whose bus Rosa took her fateful stand against racism, and the boatman who ferries passengers across the River Styx. Mixing historical fact with fantasy, fabulous choruses, and beautiful solos, the opera blends musical style in a quilt-like fashion. (For further information see: <http://www.selfmademusic.co.uk>) Admission is free and tickets must be booked in advance via the Old Rep Theatre box office.

Note there are two performances only: 19 and 20 October at 19.00 – with the *Abraham Lincoln* reading on 20 October at 15.30. More information is available from the Old Rep Theatre, 45 Station St, Birmingham B5 4DY (<https://www.oldreptheatre.co.uk>).

## J.M.Barrie at Wigtown Book Festival

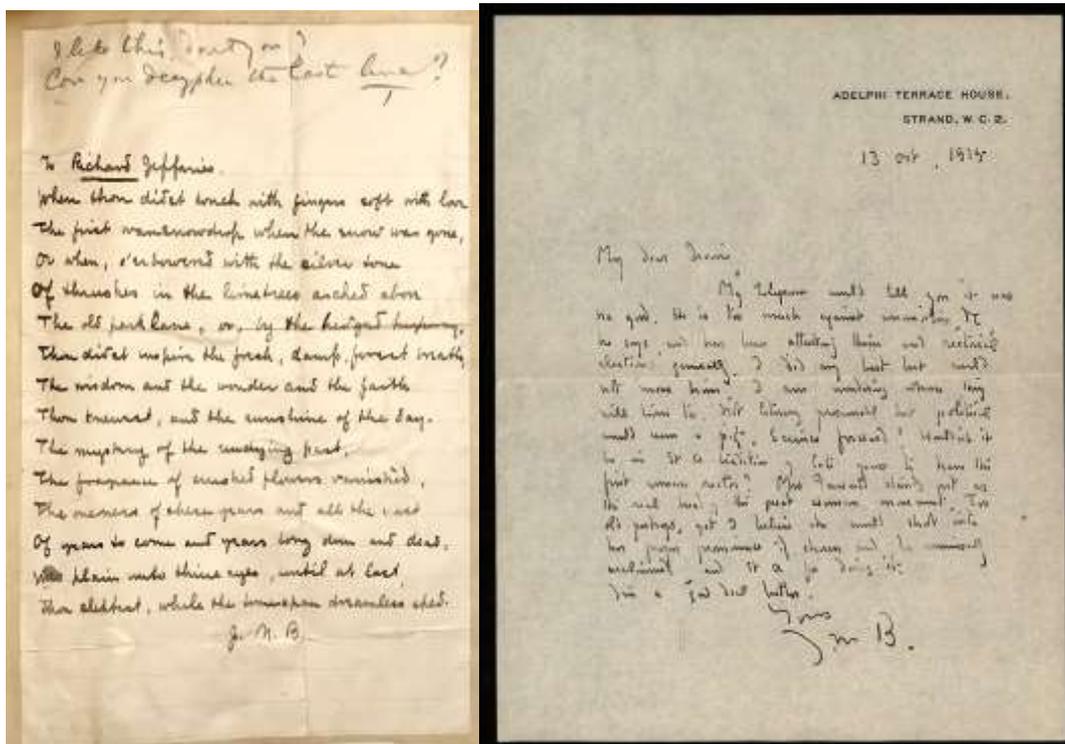
On Friday, 28 September at 10.30 a.m., Cally Phillips (of the J.M.Barrie Literary Society) will give a talk on Barrie and the four plays which together form *Echoes of the War* (<http://www.wigtownbookfestival.com/programme/event/428203680/>).

If you can't get to Wigtown, and especially for anyone in a society or community group looking for a literary way to commemorate the end of the Great War, the *Echoes of the War* resource pack is available free to download with all that you need to stage your own reading (<http://www.jmbarriesociety.co.uk/echoes.html>).

## 6. Making Connections

### A poetic mystery

Through their joint connection with ALS, a mystery may be solved. A member of the Richard Jefferies Society has a poem with a signature (see below left) J.M.B. and so contacted the J.M. Barrie Literary Society for help. Could this be Barrie's signature? The poem was found in a scrapbook that belonged to Thomas Mosher. He was notorious for pirating publishing works in the USA in the early 1900s.



Barrie's handwriting (shown above right) varied considerably over the years, especially once he changed from writing right-handed to left-handed later in life. The provenance of the poem is under scrutiny from academics at present – and while early suggestions are that this is not Barrie's work, the jury is still out and the mystery remains, who is the J.M.B. poet?

Whether or not this turns out to be authentic, one of the many benefits of being a member of ALS is the opportunity to connect with other societies. Lots of 'our' authors were contemporaries, often friends. Why not have a look through our members listing and make some connections with other societies? Technology makes it ever easier to broaden our horizons and share our passions.

***Cally Phillips***  
***J.M. Barrie Literary Society***

### **It's Good to Talk!: A Request for Guest Speakers from the Mary Webb Society**

The Mary Webb Society was founded in 1972 to honour the memory of the Shropshire writer, to promote her work and the landscape of Shropshire which inspired her poetry and prose. Her work includes the novels *Gone To Earth* and *Precious Bane*.

The society is still thriving today with members from around the world including members of Mary Webb's family. The society also has a long history with the ALS. Checking back in our archives I discovered that the society joined the ALS at its inception in 1988. There was a meeting in Birmingham where 80 people representing 27 societies were present. The annual fee was set at £5! The Mary Webb Society hosted the AGM in 1997 at the Birmingham and Midland Institute; this was before the event became a 'moveable feast'.

In the early days, I recall that the ALS held a list of representatives from member societies who would be willing to be guest speakers for other societies. Over the years, we have sometimes struggled to find guest speakers for our events, to complement our main speakers on Mary Webb. Guest speakers usually have some connection to Mary Webb or Shropshire and have included speakers from the Housman, Wilfred Owen, Brontë, Gaskell and Barbara Pym societies. Speakers from other societies add variety and interest to our programme. They have an opportunity to promote their author, encourage further reading and maybe even recruit new members. This fits with the ethos of the ALS to widen our literary scope and to derive inspiration from other societies.

How do other societies feel about the feasibility of having a list of guest speakers available to other member societies, possibly on the website? Fees could be arranged between the societies. You can contact me at [lizstamps@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:lizstamps@yahoo.co.uk)

***Liz Stamps***  
***Vice Chair & Membership Secretary, Mary Webb Society***

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

In a fast-changing world, it is comforting to know that since the last newsletter there have been no comings and goings. However, if you know of a literary society that is not yet an ALS member, why not encourage them to join us?!

## 8. Last but not least

We welcome your feedback and information. Bear in mind that we are all volunteers and we are always happy for others to join in taking an active role. 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 ( [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 1 February 2019 to Cally Phillips at [callyphillipsis@gmail.com](mailto:callyphillipsis@gmail.com). It is very useful if you send your piece in good time, and in Word format with any images separately in jpeg format. We reserve the right to edit copy for space. The next newsletter will be published on 1 March 2019.*