



MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE ALLIANCE OF LITERARY SOCIETIES HELD ON 18 MAY 2019 AT THE TOWN HALL, NUNEATON AT 1.45PM

Chairman's welcome: Linda Curry (John Clare Society) welcomed everyone to the AGM and thanked the George Eliot Fellowship for all their hard work in preparing for the weekend. She read out a list of the societies represented: Margery Allingham Society, Jane Austen Society, Arnold Bennett Society, Betjeman Society, Brontë Society, John Buchan Society, Lewis Carroll Society, John Clare Society, Wilkie Collins Society, Friends of the Dymock Poets, George Eliot Fellowship, Elmet Trust, Gaskell Society, A Ghostly Company, Sherlock Holmes Society of London, Richard Jefferies Society, Johnson Society (Lichfield), Keats-Shelley Memorial Association, Charles Lamb Society, Leamington Literary Society, Marlowe Society, John Meade Falkner Society, Norman Nicholson Society, Wilfred Owen Association, Barbara Pym Society, Arthur Ransome Society, Siegfried Sassoon Fellowship, Angela Thirkell Society, Edward Thomas Fellowship, Trollope Society, ULEMLA, Walmsley Society, Sylvia Townsend Warner Society, War Poets Association, Mary Webb Society, Virginia Woolf Society, Charlotte M. Yonge Fellowship.

Apologies for absence: Penny Aldred, Janet Allan, Angela Crow, Don Lee, Maggie Parsons, Cally Phillips, Jodie Roberts.

Acceptance of minutes: The minutes of the 2018 AGM were accepted (proposed by Michael Williamson (Trollope Society)); seconded by Glenn Lang (Norman Nicholson Society); and signed by the chair.

Matters arising: There were no matters arising.

Chairman's report: After many years of service on the committee, Angela Crow Woods is standing down this year, due to ill health. We will really miss her cheery face at our meetings and would like to note our gratitude in the minutes. Linda also thanked other members of the committee, particularly Marty and Julie, for their work.

In February it was pointed out to us that there was an American website calling itself the Alliance of Literary Societies, also hosted by Wordpress. It is a commercial site, based in Houston, blogging about books. Linda emailed to express our concern, but there has been no reply in spite of reminders. The site is still there, but appears inactive. There is really nothing to be done about it, and as our site comes up high on web searches and we are sufficiently well known in the UK, it should not cause problems.

Society events for the website should be sent to Linda for our website calendar. It is a valuable resource.

Linda appealed for volunteers to join the ALS committee.

Secretary's report: Marty Ross (Johnson Society (Lichfield)) reported on attending the 25th anniversary event of the Friends of the Dymock Poets in October 2018. It was a pleasure to meet members of the group and the committee, and to hear about the problems – and pleasures – of running a literary society today. Thanks to Richard Simkin and the committee for the invitation. She would like to get out and about to more society events in future.

In November she attended the 15th LitHouses conference, held at Knebworth House. About 40 professional and volunteer staff from literary properties all over the country attended. This was a valuable opportunity to network, as well as to get our publicity (leaflets and bookmarks) into literary houses, which are great places to promote the ALS and our member societies.

More resources have been added to the website. Following last year's discussion of GDPR at the AGM, Dominic Edwardes of the Trollope Society wrote a guide to data protection for the ALS. After further input and tweaks from David Leigh-Hunt of the Keats-Shelley Memorial Association, the guide was put onto the website and we hope societies will find it useful. Thanks to David and Dominic for their time and effort. Marty has written 'A Quick Guide to Editing for Literary Societies', now also on the website.

We have another splendid bookmark to commemorate this year's AGM, and we hope members will help publicise the ALS by distributing these, as well as our leaflets.

Finally, Marty urged everyone to keep in touch with news, suggestions and feedback. The committee is here to facilitate the work of our member societies, but we can only help if you keep us informed.

Treasurer's report: Julie Shorland (Jane Austen Society) reported that although there was a deficit for the year of £203, the balance sheet shows a healthy sum of £6,644. The accounts have been prepared by our accountants once again without charge.

The 2019 AGM was hosted by the ALS and Julie wanted to pay tribute to Linda Curry for all the time and effort she put into researching and organising the speakers and venue. Thanks are also due to Marty for her administration and to other committee members for help on the day. A special word of thanks to Frieda Barker of the Marlowe Society, who walked the streets of central Birmingham (a building site at the time) to determine distances between various venues we considered using.

Editors' report: Our newsletter and website editor, Cally Phillips, was unable to attend and Linda Curry read out her report:

The synchronisation of the newsletter and website seems to be going well. The website is your one-stop shop for information about the ALS and its member societies. The Publications page allows you to access newsletters, journals, resources and Quick Guides. It also lists societies' forthcoming events and has information about all our societies, with simple, direct links to their websites. For people whose societies have a problem receiving bulk e-mail (it can easily be diverted into spam), the website is invaluable to keep up to date. You can now

download current and past newsletters (as PDFs) easily. These can be made available to your members (either by linking to the ALS website, by uploading to your own website, or by sending out as an attachment to your members). The newsletter is intended to have a wide reach – its real power is if each society passes it on to its own membership. This can transform it from a newsletter read by about 100 people to one read by about 50,000.

The biannual newsletter now has two main functions. It provides a reminder for annual subscriptions and the AGM weekend, and it provides space for articles about things literary. Our series on literary walks has been well received. We are always on the look out for other topics for articles and would encourage all literary societies to send in articles and ideas for articles. While the annual journal offers a place for longer articles on a specific theme, the newsletter offers broader opportunities for sharing more eclectic topics. We are ideally looking for articles of 500-1,000 words.

Mailings are delivered via the Mailchimp platform. This caused some confusion at first, but now that we have all dealt with the horrors of data protection, it can be seen simply as a secure way of sending out e-mails to a large number of people. The careful use of interim 'e-news' has been helpful for getting important information disseminated in between the spring and autumn newsletters.

All text submitted needs to be supplied in Word document format with separate (well labelled) jpeg images, if required. Please make sure you are 'connected' with us via your up-to-date society e-mail (add us into your contacts list). If you want to send us information, the website contacts page has details. The deadline for submissions for the autumn 2019 newsletter is August 1st.

Linda Curry, editor of the ALS journal, *ALSo*, then gave her report:

Articles for this year's edition have been received and the journal will be out soon. The theme of next year's edition will be '20:20 Vision'. Contributions would be most welcome.

Social media officer's report: Jodie Roberts (Dorothy Dunnett Society) was unable to attend and Linda also read her report.

Our following continues to grow gradually. Jodie is trying to widen the scope of what is posted by celebrating author birthdays and other anniversaries. This is time-consuming, so it is proceeding slowly. Please keep news about your activities coming, ideally with images and website links. Press releases should be reformatted, and tend not to be so eye-catching. If you have set up a new Facebook page or Twitter account, please let her know, so that she can follow you.

Election of officers and committee: David Leigh-Hunt (Keats-Shelley Memorial Association) proposed, and Hilary Temple (Angela Thirkell Society) seconded, the block re-election of the current officers and committee, minus Angela Crow Woods, who had stood down. The motion was passed.

Constitution: Linda Curry said that the existing constitution was out-dated and a more flexible document was required. She had based the new constitution on the model on the Charity Commission website. Richard Simkin (Friends of the Dymock Poets) asked if provision had been made for winding up the ALS, and Linda

confirmed that it had. Andrew Davison (Walmsley Society) proposed and Colin Greatorex (Johnson Society (Lichfield)) seconded the proposal, which was passed.

Subscriptions: Marty Ross explained that subscriptions for the ALS are based on a sliding scale, with the largest societies paying more. The lowest rate has been £10 for societies with fewer than 100 members, but some very small societies struggle to pay this. She therefore proposed that a fee of £5 per annum be charged for societies with fewer than 25 members, and the proposal was passed.

Campaigns: Antoinette Fawcett (Norman Nicholson Society) reported that the society is still hoping to purchase Nicholson's house in Millom. The Heritage Lottery Fund turned down their initial application; their advice was to apply for a smaller grant with a specific project in mind. There will be a Norman Nicholson Festival on 28-29 June this year.

Janet Kennerley (Gaskell Society) asked about plans for the George Eliot visitors' centre at Griff House. John Burton (George Eliot Fellowship) reported on several setbacks, including the rejection of their HLF application. The outbuilding to be used needs to be entirely rebuilt in order to comply with building regulations. However, in spite of all this, Whitbread (who own the building) are still supportive and they hope to get there eventually.

Richard Simkin (Friends of the Dymock Poets) reported that their bank account was suddenly closed due to a change of treasurer, causing enormous problems. Linda Curry said that a similar thing had happened with John Clare. Be aware.

Future AGMs: Andrew Davison of the Walmsley Society provided information about next year's AGM in Robin Hood's Bay on 13 June. Accommodation is limited and he urged everyone to book early. He distributed a map of Robin Hood's Bay showing Walmsley associations, which has been printed by the Walmsley Society.

2021 will be co-hosted by the Betjeman Society and Hopkins Society in London.

2022 will be hosted by the Larkin Society in Hull.

2023 will be hosted by the Charlotte M. Yonge Fellowship in Winchester.

And 2024 will be hosted by the Arthur Ransome Society, possibly in the Lake District.

Any other business: There was no other business.

Date and venue of next AGM: 13 June 2020, hosted by the Walmsley Society, in Robin Hood's Bay.