



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

Newsletter: Spring 2021

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## **Julie Shorland**



It is with much sadness that we report the death of Julie, our Treasurer and Membership Secretary. She suffered a massive bleed on the brain at Christmas and died on Monday 25 January.

Julie was a stalwart, taking over from Thelma Thompson as Treasurer around 20 years ago and later taking on board the Membership Secretary role as well. That must have been around the time I joined, under pressure from Rosemary Culley. Julie, Rosemary and Peter Barton (chair) were the triumvirate at the Millennium.

So, we have all known Julie for a long time: always smart, quietly spoken, very efficient, and, most of all, a good friend. Oh, and she always provided the biscuits for committee meetings!

Her interests outside the ALS included Jane Austen (as a member of the JA Midlands Society), and she served as a volunteer at the Museum of Carpet in Kidderminster.

In the last few years, Julie had a battle with cancer (which she won), and then lost her husband John in March 2020, at the start of lockdown. But, throughout, her commitment to the Alliance never faltered. We shall all miss her very much, not only as a colleague but as a friend.

Linda J Curry  
Chair – and Acting Treasurer/Membership Secretary

## **ALS AGM Weekend**

In conjunction with members of the Betjeman and Hopkins societies, the ALS committee has decided to move this year's ALS weekend to 1-3 October, by which time we hope life has returned to something like normality and people will feel more confident about travelling. Additionally, there is a possibility that we may be able to livestream lectures from the venue for those who don't wish to or cannot travel. Further information will be included when we send out the registration forms in a separate mailing in the Summer.

Because of the need to finalise our financial accounts, we have decided to hold our AGM as planned on Saturday, 22 May at 2 p.m. via Zoom. We will be voting for a new chair, secretary and treasurer, so please do participate. As usual, I will send the AGM papers out around a month before the meeting and do let me know before then if you have any items for the agenda.

Our friends in Highgate (see below) will provide us with time on Saturday, 2 October, to hold an informal ALS meeting with a chance for discussion, feedback, etc. Not to mention the raffle!

Marty Ross  
Secretary

## **Literary Highflyers of Highgate**

The Hopkins Society and The Betjeman Society jointly invite you to be with us on the weekend of 1 to 3 October 2021. Gerard Manley Hopkins and John Betjeman? Don't they sound like poetry's Odd Couple? Indeed – that will be the theme of the Saturday morning presentation. Despite the obvious differences, there are surprising overlaps. Such as their education at Highgate School (50 years apart, of course).

So, the venue will be in Highgate in North London, full of literary associations. On Saturday afternoon there will be four options to choose from:

1. A guided walk round the sites and memorials of Highgate's other literary figures: Andrew Marvell, ST Coleridge, Christina Rossetti, AE Housman, TS Eliot; with Keats and Dickens not far away.
2. A guided walk round John Betjeman's childhood homes and haunts, and readings of the poems he wrote about them.
3. A tour of Highgate School's Hopkins, Betjeman and other literary archives, and its attractive museum.
4. Non-walking alternative: An illustrated presentation of Hopkins' and Betjeman's views on church architecture.

The Friday and Saturday dinners will be in Highgate restaurants. And there will be directions for self-guided tours of literary London on the Sunday.

We imagine that many will have their own ideas where to stay for a weekend in London. But for those who want to be near at hand, the London Archway Premier Inn is at the foot of Highgate Hill.

Andrew McCallum

## **Writers in Lockdown: an appeal for parodies for *ALSo***

Readers of *ALSo* are reminded that the next issue is devoted to parodies of any authors writing in English. 'Writers in Lockdown' can feature writers from all periods describing their fears, frustrations, boredom, joy etc at being in Lockdown. Poetry and drama should be no longer than 50 lines and extracts from novels, short stories and essays no longer than 1,000 words. Entries in the form of an attachment to an email should reach me at R.Healey709@btinternet.com by 1st May 2021 at the latest. Entrants can also post their parodies to me at 28 John Impey Way, Melbourn, Cambs. SG8 6HZ. Submissions should be accompanied by two sentences providing details of the contributor.

Robin Healey  
Editor of *ALSo*

## **A lesson in creating learning resources**

This article charts the development of the Betjeman Society's online learning resources from the original spark of the idea to the present issue of obtaining useful feedback to determine whether to expand the content in future. The lessons we learnt might be of interest to any society inspired to embark on a similar voyage with the aim of introducing your writer's works to a younger generation.

2017 marked the centenary of John Betjeman's arrival as a 10 year old boy at the Dragon School in Oxford where he spent three years which he later declared to be the only part of his schooldays when he was happy. Our Society decided we'd like to mark this centenary by visiting the school and holding our AGM there that year. By pure serendipity it also happened to be the culmination of my one year as Chairman covering an inter-regnum between the outgoing Chairman and our present one which was fortuitous as I too had been at the Dragon School and was thus well placed to approach them with this idea. The school embraced the idea enthusiastically despite it being on a busy Saturday in the Summer term (it is a day and boarding school) and they treated us to a memorable day with use of a lecture theatre for the formal business, a splendid lunch at which

the wine flowed freely, a tour of the school (with their impressive Betjeman collection on display in the library), a display of archive material and a talk by the archivist and, best of all, contributions from some children, some of whom read their own poetry compositions while others read poems Betjeman had written when he was at the Dragon and which were published in the school's magazine in 1920.

Later that year our Society's Council met for three days at what became known as our "boot camp" to thrash out our way ahead and we brainstormed various possible projects. We soon realised that one way to keep Betjeman's name alive and introduce future generations to him would be through the provision of educational resources. We reflected that much of his poetry lends itself to being ideal to engage children and encourage them to explore writing some verse themselves. However, he is not officially on the curriculum and, after some discussion, we concluded that it might be too much of an uphill struggle for us to try to influence any change by the relevant authorities but we felt that some provision that would work across a wider age range but broadly aiming at the lower secondary years might be appropriate.

Straightaway we realised we would not manage this project unaided as none of us had the relevant experience of producing educational resources and, crucially, we had no current or recent teacher in our number so we would need some expert help. Therefore, I contacted the Dragon School and asked whether they would be interested in working with us to produce some materials to be made available online to any teacher, anywhere. In brief, their reply was: "Yes, of course we would."

I met their then Head of English and we agreed that what would work would be a few self-contained lesson plans, each based on a Betjeman poem which give a teacher an entire lesson "on a plate" with plenty of suggestions for learning activities as well as an analysis of the poem and that this would embrace the needs of above average ability children. We then submitted a shortlist of possible poems with a brief explanation of their background and why we considered it a candidate from which they selected three to take further. Crucially, the Head of English engaged both her teaching colleagues and her top year class in the project so even producing the lesson plans became a lesson itself. Naturally the demands of running a busy department got in the way to some extent and it was some months before we had sight of the completed plans and it then took us a little while to prepare the introductory section on our website but eventually we got there with the plans freely available for anyone, anywhere to download and use as they think fit.

What, then, are the pitfalls we encountered? To ensure the lesson plans are relevant to the needs of teachers it is essential to have the services of a current practitioner or a recently (and I stress recently) retired professional. Teachers are, of course, busy people and will be far more likely to use a resource if all the preparation has been done for them; therefore, there is little point in providing an analysis of the relevant text (prose or poetry) without also providing the activities based around it. It helps hugely if your writer is out of copyright because then you can include the full texts, which makes it even more "on a plate" for the teacher. However, in our case, Betjeman is still in copyright so we were not able to include the texts of the poems in the plans but, having said that, any teacher worth their salt would have no difficulty locating them as they are all widely available. I should add that in addition to the plans being free to use, no money changed hands between us and the school.

Having got the resources onto our website we intended to undertake some targeted marketing by way of a media release and use of social media. It wasn't till late 2019 that we were able to begin thinking about this but for various reasons we deferred till the spring but then the pandemic broke loose and it did not seem right to pursue this with schools closed and teachers under lots of pressure. We fervently hope we'll be able to do so later this year.

This brings me to the matter of obtaining user feedback. Our website tells us how many times each of the three plans has been downloaded but we have no way of knowing whether these figures are above or below what might be expected. We also have no idea what use has been made of the downloads; we do have a feedback form on the relevant page but it hasn't given us the information we want. Once we have engaged in some marketing activity, we would hope to obtain some helpful/useful user feedback which would enable us to decide whether to try to add to the resources.

We would be interested to hear from other societies who have embarked on similar projects or are considering doing so, to exchange ideas and in particular over the question of user feedback. Naturally we would be delighted if any readers of this newsletter wish to spread the word especially if you know any teachers who might like to try our lesson plans. Please get in touch by clicking on my name on our Contacts page or email: [events@betjemansociety.com](mailto:events@betjemansociety.com)

Finally, to view the lesson plans you'll find them listed under Resources on our website as below.

Andrew McCallum  
Vice Chairman, The Betjeman Society  
[www.betjemansociety.com](http://www.betjemansociety.com)

## **The ALS Website**

Our website is currently undergoing a bit of a revamp. We hope that it will make it easier to access our various publications, information on AGMs, and our membership, in particular.

So, please pay it a visit. Don't forget that you can pick up past newsletters and copies of the journal there too.

Linda J Curry

## **Wanted: Society quotes**

Linda writes above about the revamp of our website, and we would like to refresh the quotes we use as well. Please suggest a favourite brief quote from your author that could be displayed on our pages. It would be wonderful if we could have all our societies represented. As it currently stands, most of the quotes are about books or writing, but please feel free to send anything of interest.

They must be free of copyright or with permission. Send them to me ([martyross73@gmail.com](mailto:martyross73@gmail.com)) and see your author's name in lights!

Marty

## **The Library of The Arthur Ransome Society**

While reading a recent ALS Newsletter, a question arose in my mind – how many literary societies possess libraries? As the second Librarian of The Arthur Ransome Society (TARS), I have the pleasure of looking after over 1000 volumes relating to our author, in various categories. Back in 2000, my predecessor had been discovering that quite a lot was known about Ransome's own reading, and she wanted to read what he had read, so with other members of the society she started collecting some of the titles which interested her. This led to the founding of our Library,

which I took over from her care in 2011. Not having room in my house for what had by then become quite a large collection, a room was rented for it locally, and since January 2019 it has been housed in a small attic room within Moat Brae, the Georgian house in Dumfries where J. M. Barrie played in the large garden with the boys who lived there. He later said that it was that garden which inspired his 'Neverland', and in turn led to the writing of the play *Peter Pan*. The restored house is now the National Centre for Children's Literature and Storytelling, and what better place for the Library of TARS? Of course, the Library itself is for the use of members of TARS, and not normally open to the public, but we play our part in the life of Moat Brae. Books may be borrowed by post or at TARS events. So which authors did Ransome read?

Well, as I now realise, we happen to know that, among many others, he read works by at least 32 of the authors represented in the membership of the ALS! Those represented in the Library are: Abercrombie (of the Dymock poets), Allingham, Austen, Barrie, BB, Bennett, Buchan, Conrad, Forester, Hazlitt, Jefferies, Kilvert, Mansfield, Nesbit, Nicholson, Ruskin, Saville, Sayers, Shaw, Stevenson, Thomas, Tolkien, Trollope, Walpole, Wells, Wilde, Williamson, Wodehouse, Yonge.

Ransome personally knew some of them, through the different phases of his life (1884-1967). For example, Lascelles Abercrombie was a close friend. At the 2017 TARS Literary Weekend, Jeff Cooper, who is Abercrombie's grandson, gave an enlightening illustrated talk entitled '*Arthur Ransome and the Dymock poets*'. Afterwards, he was shown the collection of his grandfather's books which we have acquired over the years for our Library. One of these, *The sale of St Thomas*, is dedicated to Ransome, and our copy of another, *Deborah*, is inscribed with the name of Ransome's first wife, Ivy Constance Ransome. As this is a review copy, it would almost certainly have been sent to Arthur rather than Ivy, so in effect we have his own copy.

Edward Thomas helped Ransome find his first home as a married man and the two men took walking holidays together.

Some of these authors and their books were major influences on Ransome's life – R. L. Stevenson, Joseph Conrad, John Ruskin, for example – and, in his early years as an author, in 1912, he wrote a critical study of Oscar Wilde, <sup>1</sup> at the request of the publisher, Martin Secker. This resulted in a long-running court case brought against Secker and Ransome by Lord Alfred Douglas, who lost the case.

The whole devastating experience, combined with the state of his disastrous first marriage, led to Ransome departing for Russia in 1913 to learn the language so that he could read Russian fairy tales in the original. Ransome's own version of some of them, *Old Peter's Russian Tales*, has been continuously in print since 1916. Returning later to Russia in order to write a guide to St Petersburg, which because of the First World War and the subsequent revolution was never published, he then became the most prolific and well-informed reporter to Britain of the events of the Russian Revolution. As a recent publication makes clear, the British government eventually hired him 'as an intelligence agent (which is not the same as a spy; Ransome never spied, but rather reported honestly to his masters in London what he had seen in Russia ...)' <sup>2</sup>. Later, the author says '... Ransome worked for a newspaper, not a government.' <sup>3</sup>

Before being persuaded to write about Oscar Wilde, Ransome's original plan had been for a critical study of R. L. Stevenson, and in fact he had already almost completed it before Secker changed his mind, and asked for the Oscar Wilde work. He later commissioned a study of RLS from Frank Swinnerton, who took a very different approach to the subject. In a second edition of Ransome's *Oscar Wilde: a critical study*, he decided to leave out the offending passage although, as he said, he was not obliged to, having won the case.

In 1990, a brown paper parcel was found in the strong room of the offices of a firm of London solicitors, which turned out to contain the manuscript of Ransome's first draft of the Stevenson book, and in 2011 this was published, together with a substantial introduction and notes, as Arthur Ransome's long-lost study of Robert Louis Stevenson, edited by Kirsty Nichol Findlay. <sup>4</sup> In it, we learn a great deal about Stevenson's influence on Ransome himself, and his development as a student of the authorial process.

Hugh Walpole spent time in Russia during World War I, and Ransome came to know him well, although they had a falling-out, and were only reconciled years later when Walpole wrote a glowing review of one of Ransome's books. In 1916, Ransome wrote to his mother from Petrograd, telling her: "By the way, you must get from the library at once and read *The Dark Forest*, by Hugh Walpole. It is the first book I have read which gives anything like a true impression of Russians as seen by English .... It's an astonishing piece of work, especially considering he's not had a year of Russia and is still very shaky in the language. It's the best book I've seen which is a direct result of the war." <sup>5</sup>

Rupert Hart-Davis, Walpole's biographer, was also a close friend of Arthur Ransome, who supported him in his publishing business. Towards the end of his life, he asked Rupert to edit and publish the *Autobiography* he had been writing, but not until after Ransome's death, and this was duly published in 1976. <sup>6</sup>

Arthur and Evgenia, his second wife, were readers of detective fiction, and indeed he wrote a regular review column for *The Observer* under the name William Blunt for 6 months in 1939. Dorothy L. Sayers presented him with a copy of *Tales of detection*, the collection which she edited in 1936.

When Ransome read *The Hobbit*, he noticed a discrepancy in Tolkien's description of the hobbit as a 'man', so he wrote a very polite letter to the author, and received a grateful and friendly response, mentioning that the Tolkien children enjoyed Ransome's own books. Both letters are held in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. Tolkien made the change in subsequent editions of the book.

In common with many other authors, Ransome tends still to be known, if at all, by one title – *Swallows and Amazons*, partly as a result of the television adaptation and the two films which have been produced. By the time he came to write this book, he had to his name some 26 published works, and 11 more titles were to follow in the series. In the year 2000, Wayne Hammond produced a substantial bibliography, <sup>7</sup> listing not only Ransome's own books, but also his contributions to many others, and the articles and newspaper reports filed over a long period. This is a book to dip into, revealing many fascinating discoveries, a recent one of mine being Ransome's full-page obituary of Lenin in *The Manchester Guardian*.

By the end of Ransome's life, he had amassed a large collection of books and, on his death, his widow, Evgenia, gave a selection of them to the Abbot Hall Art Gallery in Kendal. She then sold the remainder to a bookseller, who sold them on to a university in the USA. Fortunately, the first TARS librarian, Margaret Ratcliffe, developed a good relationship with the librarian there, and even paid a visit to the library, and so we have a complete list of the titles which were bought.

Thirdly, Evgenia gave a large collection of papers, letters, diaries and photographs to the University of Leeds, where Arthur's father had been professor of English literature and history, and where Arthur himself had studied for two terms before going off to London to try and make a living in books. After Margaret had passed on the library of TARS to me, she set about transcribing all of Arthur's diaries in the Brotherton Library at Leeds University. From these, we

are able to read his opinions of many of the titles as he read them. Represented in the list are these further ALS authors: Robert Frost, Thomas Bewick, and Rev. James Woodforde.

As a result of all of this, and of Ransome's many interests, including fishing, sailing, chess and natural history as well as children's literature, the Lake District and the Norfolk Broads, the TARS Library covers many subjects, reflecting the diverse interests of this polymath. I have not mentioned the winners of the Carnegie Medal for children's literature, of which we have a complete up-to-date collection, beginning with the first winner, *Pigeon Post*, by Arthur Ransome; and a complete set of the books in Rupert Hart-Davis' Mariners (sic) Library, for which Ransome wrote introductions to seven of the titles, and 'acted as godfather and nanny to the series', according to H-D himself. <sup>8</sup>

## References

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6. Hart-Davis, Rupert, ed. *The Autobiography of Arthur Ransome*, edited, with prologue and epilogue by Rupert Hart-Davis. Jonathan Cape, 1976
7. Hammond, Wayne G. *Arthur Ransome: a bibliography*. Oak Knoll Press, 2000
8. Hart-Davis, p. 354

Winifred Wilson

## Welcome to New Members

Over the past few months, we have been joined by the International Djuna Barnes Society (a newly formed venture celebrating the American artist, illustrator, journalist and author of *Nightwood*), the Howdenshire Literary Society (promoting classical literature and poetry), and the Milton Society of Georgia (recently set up by Professor Edward Raupp at the Gori State Teaching University). A warm welcome to these societies. Visit the membership area of the ALS website to find out more about them.

## Tweeting for Arnold B

It was good to read, in the last ALS newsletter, of our Staffordshire friends the [Samuel] Johnson Society and their resolve to dip their toes into the wonderful (and sometimes alarming) world of Twitter. Welcome in, Johnsonians! And it's good to see that your 'follower' count has risen somewhat since Marty Ross's article in last autumn's *Not Only, but ALS* ..., from 190 to nearly 250.

Not that numbers matter, of course, but we at the Arnold Bennett Society are proud to say that we have 844 followers at the time of writing [early January 2021]. It's been a steady climb since the society joined Twitter in 2012, but we are still a long way off the numbers that some other literary societies can boast: the Trollope Society has some 1325 followers, the Wilfred Owen Society's figure is 2389 and the International Dickens Society's is 2782.

Still, never mind the quantity, what of the quality? It looks like the Johnsonians are doing well in their first year of tweeting and re-tweeting; it's especially useful for their purposes that there's an active Twitter account emanating from Lichfield's Johnson Birthplace Museum, whose tweets and pictures they can re-purpose.

So while the Johnson Society hardly needs any further advice from us, the Twitter-shy among other literary societies may appreciate some encouragement. So here, from our experience of tweeting for Arnold B, are a few observations:

- Twitter is a publicity machine. So once you've joined, remember to tweet, plenty of days in advance, any special events such as conferences or seminars you are holding. (In the present circumstances this obviously means remote meeting technologies such as Zoom, which we as a society have successfully used for an AGM and a couple of talks about our author.) We also make a point of tweeting on special occasions such as Arnold Bennett's birthday – and even anniversaries of publication dates, where they are known, of his novels. Recently, too, we got a lot of mileage, metaphorically, from our announcement of the winner of the annual Arnold Bennett Book Prize: it was local author Lisa Blower, who has quite a Twitter following of her own.
- Arnold Bennett wrote extensively about the Potteries and its industry in his 'Five Towns' novels and stories. Which means he has a considerable local following in north Staffordshire, and also means we can exploit his local appeal. For example, tweets about Burslem, thinly disguised as 'Bursley' in several of Bennett's stories, can sometimes be quoted with added allusions to a relevant novel. It should be added, though, that not all Bennett's books are set in the Potteries: one of his best novels, *Riceyman Steps*, is set in London, and we have been able to re-tweet announcements of literary walks that have included the novel's Clerkenwell locality.
- Twitter is great for providing 'links' to your own website and other substantial offerings elsewhere on the internet. Some of our most fruitful finds and re-tweets have come from simply typing 'Arnold Bennett' into Twitter's 'search' facility. Granted, what emerges is often disappointing – as often as not, quotations attributed, rightly or wrongly, to our author: a particularly common one is 'It is easier to go down a hill than up, but the view is best from the top' in various languages, which is hardly worth re-tweeting. (Do other authors have 'inspirational' quotes attributed to them on Twitter to the same extent?) The famous Omelette Arnold Bennett gets its share of tweets – too numerous in fact for us to bother re-tweeting except in exceptional circumstances. Sometimes, however, the search results will come up with tweeters of a literary bent praising one or more of Bennett's novels – his *The Old Wives' Tale* and *The Card* are frequent favourites. Obviously they are prime candidates for re-tweeting, especially as many will also link to literary blogs and similar websites, which is a bonus. And occasionally there'll be something a little more surprising: it was through Twitter, for instance, that we discovered there had been a trawler named *Arnold Bennett* (one of several Hull-based trawlers named after famous writers in the 1920s and 1930s). Research into this vessel, which saw service as a minesweeper in the Second World War and later was captured by the Russians during the Cold War, made for an interesting article in the society's newsletter.
- We are fortunate that Arnold Bennett left behind not only a wealth of novels, short stories and journalistic writing but also extensive journals. From these extracts can be quoted on Twitter from time to time, usually on the corresponding date that the original journal entry was made. Here's an example from last August, which had the merit of also referring to another author:  
[#onthisday](#) in 1917 Arnold Bennett + wife dined with J.M. Barrie and met Thomas Hardy (then aged 77). "Hardy was very lively; talked like anything," he recorded in journal. "He has all his faculties, unimpaired. Quite modest and without the slightest pose."

We also have Bennett's collected correspondence to mine for interesting observations: recipients of his letters include a number of famous friends and acquaintances, from H.G. Wells and Hugh Walpole to Andre Gide and Paul Nash. And there's a splendid collection of columns about literary matters that Bennett wrote for the *Evening Standard* that are worth quoting when the opportunity arises.

- It's worth following other literary tweeters who might offer insights into your chosen author's life and times. In our case the likes of 'Great War Fiction' and the Edwardian Culture Network are well worth following; they in turn follow us. And if your author has celebrity fans, so much the better. Prolific tweeters such as Sathnam Sanghera, Samira Ahmed and Gyles Brandreth will on occasion, unbidden, praise Arnold Bennett – which is nice. But it can be annoying when people on Twitter confuse our author with Alan Bennett. ...

So there you are. As the Johnson Society's Marty Ross says, crafting a tweet, or editing an author's quote to fit into Twitter's 288-character limit, can be 'a bit like writing haiku'. And just as, if not more, rewarding. Meanwhile, if you want to follow the society, we're @BennettSoc. See you there!

John Davies

*John Davies shares tweeting duties for the Arnold Bennett Society with the society's secretary Carol Gorton. He also tweets in a personal capacity as @JRSDavies and occasionally blogs about his re-reading habits at <https://oldgeezerrereadingblog.wordpress.com>*

## **Child safeguarding and literary societies**

All organisations working with or alongside children must have a child safeguarding policy in place. A safeguarding policy is a statement that makes it clear what an organisation or group will do to keep children safe. It must stipulate the organisation's commitment to protect and outline the practical measures and procedures it will undertake to support this statement.

Many of our member societies have no child members. If that is the case, the society does not require a child safeguarding policy. However, if even one child member starts to come to events it is important to put one in place.

Imagine a scenario where a child has a very keen interest in an author. They discover that there is a literary society celebrating that author, they join and become an enthusiastic member. As this may be an unusual occurrence, many people in the membership might take a great interest in this child, perhaps offering lifts to events, establishing an email correspondence or spending time with the child without their parent present. All of these are potential problems from a safeguarding point of view.

It could be said that the most risky time for a society is when it goes from having no child members to having one, as the policy and procedures are not in place.

It is sad that we even need to consider these issues, but for the protection of the child and the protection of the literary society, we must. Trustees of your society can be held responsible if something untoward happens that should have been prevented by good safeguarding practices.

Please may I suggest, even if you have no children in your society, that you have a look at the generic child safeguarding policy which has been added to the Publications section of the ALS website. Perhaps it is something to keep in the back of your mind should you ever need it, or you could consider putting in place a safeguarding policy in case a child or children should become members.

The generic policy will need to be slightly adapted to the individual requirements of your society. There is a brief list of suggested considerations along with the generic policy and also a generic consent and medical form for children attending events.

Amanda Ardagh-Walter

The Arthur Ransome Society and ALS committee member

## **Research for PhD in Creative Writing**

I live in Bailiff Bridge, near Halifax. In 2019 I completed an MA in Creative Writing at York St John University, the main part of which involved writing a play for radio. After taking time to think about what I should do next, I decided, at the age of 79, to start a research PhD in Creative Writing, and I have just finished my first term. Some of my friends think that was a reckless move, but as I intend to retire from work next April (on my 80<sup>th</sup> birthday) I thought I made a timely decision.

My thesis will comprise a novel of 60/80,000 words, and a critical analysis of up to 20,000 words. I had to sketch out my ideas for both sections as part of the application process. The novel involves friction in a family business where the owner believes in male primogeniture, and ignores the abilities of his eldest child, a daughter, in favour of a younger and less able son. He is also on the fringes of Asperger's Syndrome, and this adds to the stresses. I have parts of the novel sketched out, and I am going through the stages of changing my ideas as I write. I am finding this an interesting process as I have only written short stories up to now.

The academic paper is a much greater task for me. It will examine the treatment of entails and primogeniture in British novels since 1945. The Settled Land Act of 1925 made significant reforms to the use of primogeniture and entails (much of which I still have to understand), and with the Great Depression and then the War, I assumed authors would have more significant subjects to write about. I chose 1945 because of the social changes that started after World War 2, and I wanted to learn how these influenced modern writing.

Zouheir Jamoussi's book, *Primogeniture and Entail in England: A Survey of Their History and Representation in Literature* (Cambridge Scholars, 2011), which deals the subjects up to end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, influenced my area of study. He included reviews of Jane Austen's and George Eliot's works, together with the writings of many others. He commented that the topics have featured in literature for centuries, but now there is a "rarity of modern critical material dealing with it". I found I had chosen a new area of research!

I have just started my searches into post-War writing, and realise the task I face. With no references to guide me, I am trying to work out where to start and which way to go. I need help, and that is why I wrote to The Alliance of Literary Societies to ask if I could write an article for the Newsletter in which I would ask assistance in my quest from all members of the Alliance's societies. Kindly, Linda Curry and Marty Smith agreed to my request.

I should appreciate all help readers can give me. It may be titles of individual books, writers who have touched on the topics, or academic papers. Everything will help.

Email address: [robin.gallagher@yorks.ac.uk](mailto:robin.gallagher@yorks.ac.uk)

Robin Gallagher

## **The Sherlock Holmes Society of London, in Lockdown – a member's perspective**

Despite the fact that I only live in Birmingham, I don't normally get down to London to attend the Society's events, particularly the Annual Dinner. So, their holding events online during the Covid restrictions has been great for me – and it appears that I am not the only one.

The Society has a large international membership and the online meetings have reflected this – particularly so with US members.

I was able to participate in a virtual walking tour of Holmes' London, without leaving my seat!

The annual Spring Meeting would normally take place at the National Liberal Club but was on Zoom, with speakers musing on points of contention in the Holmes stories (only allowed 3 minutes each – so 'The Three Minute Problem').

In November, we had the AGM on zoom, followed by a special showing of the 1933 film A Study in Scarlet, with Reginald Owen as Holmes. The introduction to the film was absolutely fascinating and it made for a very enjoyable evening.

The 2021 annual dinner has gone online (and sold out very quickly). Everyone dresses up and provides their own canapes and drinks – two speakers and a live performance of The Blue Carbuncle.

Marvellous! I only hope that, when we eventually emerge from this, the Society will mix online with face-to-face meetings. It is a great way to include members for whom travel is difficult, and makes the world so much smaller.

Linda J Curry

### **Online Talks**

The Byron Society are holding a series of talks online between now and May. They are open to non-members and are free but you have to book. Their website has talk details (<http://www.thebyronsociety.com/events>) and the link to Eventbrite to book.

### **National Lottery Community Fund Grants**

The Local Connections Fund is a new £4 million fund to help charities and community groups in England that are working to reduce loneliness by helping them build connections across their communities. It is offering grants of £300 to £2,500 to organisations such as Literary Societies to support initiatives which bring people together. The Trollope Society, for example, has received a grant to finance costs incurred in putting on large-scale Zoom meetings featuring guest speakers and advertising these through social media.

For more information about to apply for funding, Societies can go to: [Local Connections Fund | The National Lottery Community Fund \(tnlcommunityfund.org.uk\)](#)

Please note: the first round of grant applications closed at the end of January, a second round of grant applications will be opened shortly.

## **The BorrowBox Library Service**

If you are running out of books to read during the Covid situation, and you have a device which you can download apps to, this could be the thing for you.

- Join your local public library, if you are not already a member.
- Install the BorrowBox app on your device.
- Select your library service.
- Activate with your library membership.
- Borrow free eBooks and eAudiobooks.

## **ALS Contacts**

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