Not Only, But ALSo: Autumn 2025

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ALS Events and News

ALS ANNUAL AWARDS 2026

At next year's AGM on 23 May at Bedales School in Steep, we will be presenting the first of our new ALS annual awards: one to a volunteer and one to a president/patron for their contribution to an ALS society. We are now looking for nominations. The deadline for submissions is **1 December.**

Nominations must be made by either the chair or the secretary of the society in question, but of course, any member can put forward a name to these officers. The ALS committee will decide on the awards at our February meeting and they will be announced in the spring newsletter. We hope those selected will be able to attend the AGM in person to receive their award.

Each society may nominate one volunteer and one president/patron.

Please complete the details below and return it to allianceoflitsocs@gmail.com by 1 December. If you have any queries, please contact us via this address.

We feel it is time for the ALS to honour the people who put so much work into the running of our societies, and to our presidents and patrons who give up their time and lend us their names to further our work.

Marty Ross, Chair

Volunteer nominated:

President/patron nominated:

Society:

Name, position, and e-mail of person nominating:

Please tell us in no more than 500 words, why you are nominating this individual and what they have contributed to your society:

‘Let’s Start at the Very Beginning’: Marketing your Literary Society

Tuesday, 14 October 2025 at 7p.m. via Zoom

Dominic Edwardes, Chair of the Trollope Society, and Director of Fundraising and Communications at the Terence Higgins Trust, provided a quick introduction to digital marketing at the ALS Gathering in Brighton. This generated many questions and a lot of interest, so we thought we would follow up with a Zoom workshop on marketing and its importance for our societies. Dominic will be joined by our Secretary, Anita Fernandez Young, who has long experience teaching marketing at Nottingham University.

An invitation and registration form will be sent out via Mailchimp in early September. This, we hope, will be a really valuable opportunity to focus on how your society can market itself, something which tends to be overlooked by societies. When you register, we will ask you to list any questions you would like to put to Dominic and Anita, so please discuss this in your committee and give it some thought.

We look forward to seeing you on 14 October!

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With half a blank page to fill, here is a teenaged Charles Dodgson’s take on the merits of literature, in its broadest sense, as an escape from life’s tribulations. (At least, that is my interpretation.) He drew it as the frontispiece of ‘The Rectory Umbrella’, one of several family magazines he produced to entertain his many siblings, in about 1850.

(Any cartoons or images of a similar ilk would be very much welcomed by the editor.)

ALS Annual Gathering and AGM 2026

Friday, 22 to Sunday, 24 May 2026

hosted by The Edward Thomas Fellowship at Bedales School, Steep, Petersfield, Hants.

Talks about Edward Thomas, his prose, poetry, and relevance today, plus a visit to the Bedales Memorial Library. Sunday options will include a guided walks around Steep (where Thomas lived for ten years) or a visit to The Edward Thomas Centre in Petersfield.

Details will be posted on the ALS website and here: https://edward-thomas-fellowship.org.uk

PUT THIS DATE IN YOUR DIARY NOW!: 3 OCTOBER 2026

The ALS is planning to hold an event, open to the public, on Saturday, 3 October 2026 at the Birmingham & Midland Institute (BMI). This is, so far as I know, the first time that the ALS has held a public event, but we feel it is time to open our doors and try to attract new audiences and new members to our writers and societies. Many details still need to be hammered out over the upcoming year, but some exciting ideas are already in place.

We have a large room reserved for society stalls and hope as many of you will participate as possible, to show off your writers and your societies' work. A second room is available to us if we get a very large response. Adjacent to the first room is a lovely room for lectures, and we hope that societies will put forward speakers to give short talks on their writers. We hope also to attract a 'name' as a keynote speaker. We may also be able to involve the Writer-in-Residence at the BMI, Anna Lawrence. There is a café on site.

We hope to attract university students from the area as they return for the start of the academic year, as well as members of writing groups and other literary groups in the area. *Slightly Foxed* hopes to come and we will also invite a good, independent, local bookshop and perhaps a second-hand book dealer. We are being assisted by Writing West Midlands and the Birmingham Literature Festival (see pages 20/21). The Festival will begin soon after our event, and although we won't be part of that, they will give us a tremendous boost by getting the word out. And we hope they will be there on the day, as well as the BMI itself, which is undergoing a renaissance and hoping to attract new members.

The BMI is in Margaret Street, a conveniently short walk from New Street Station.

I would be grateful to hear expressions of interest from societies who would like to have a stand and/or would like to offer a speaker. If you would like to help plan this event, we would also love to hear from you. Please write via the ALS email: allianceoflitsocs@gmail.com, or contact me directly (martyross73@gmail.com). The sub-committee will meet via Zoom, starting probably in late October or early November.

Details will be given, along with a registration form, in the spring newsletter. In the meantime, we hope you will discuss this in your committee meetings and think about participating. The more the merrier, and we are hoping for a really lively and interesting day celebrating our writers and attracting a new audience.

Marty Ross, ALS Chair

Three accounts of the 2025 ALS Annual Gathering

1) Rudyard Kipling: from the Jungle to the South Coast

Colin Greatorex, Johnson Society (Lichfield)

I love irony. I have such an appreciation for it that, when I see it, I have an irresistible urge to point it out. So, irony made an early appearance at the ALS AGM weekend, held from 16 to 18 May 2025, at the University of Sussex, near the Sussex coast, hosted by the Rudyard Kipling Society. One of the first contributors was James Naughtie, the ALS President. Jim covered the state of the world, in his pithy, dour way: saying that people reach for literature as an escape in times of bad world news. Trump is sacking librarians due to having the wrong books on their shelves and, in an increasingly AI world, computers are now making decisions, so books are a form of security in an uncertain world.

University of Sussex (Photo Winifred Wilson).

Jim Naughtie and pals (Photo via Deb Fisher).

Then, the Jim Naughtie irony bomb. He said that members of the ALS were the representatives of the memory of an author in their home location. Writers so often give a flavour of that place's culture and spirit. I thought, Jim, you are so right! As a member of the Johnson Society of Lichfield, I am aware of Dr Samuel Johnson's references to the city; for example, telling Boswell that he wished to show him 'genuine civilised life in an English provincial town'. He also called it 'a city of philosophers' and said, 'We work with our heads and make the boobies of Birmingham work with their hands'. The ALS weekend last year was hosted by The Arthur Ransome Society, which suitably made the most of the Lake District attractions that featured in his work. Similar links were evident when the ALS was hosted by The Charlotte M. Yonge Fellowship in Winchester, where she was schooled, or Philip Larkin in Hull, where he lived and worked, and with The Brontë Society at Haworth, where the whole family were based.

The irony is that Jim had chosen to mention the writer and location relationship in the very year where it was least evident. Kipling did not attend the University of Sussex, nor did he spend his formative years in the back streets of Brighton, kicking a ball against a wall or skimming pebbles into the sea. However, he did live at Rottingdean for several years, and then at the beautiful Jacobean house, Bateman's, in the Sussex Weald, which were the destinations for trips on Sunday.

Friday evening we gathered at the Old Ship Hotel on the seafront for dinner, a literary quiz and great quantities of welcome talk, as old friends and new acquaintances met up for the weekend.

On Saturday, Andrew Scragg, Chair of the Kipling Society, was on hand to put matters straight with an overview of Kipling's life and work. Kipling was born in India. As a youth, he loved India with its 'golden fruits at the level of my shoulder'. The prospect of him kicking a ball against a wall anywhere seems unlikely as he hated football; instead, he turned to reading and writing. He was educated at the United Services College in Devon. When he was16, he returned to India, to Lahore, where he pursued a career in journalism. After establishing himself as a writer, he lived in London and then in Vermont, where he wrote *The Jungle Book*, from his memories of the beasts of the Indian rainforest rather than the seabirds of England's south coast!

Next, Dr Alex Bubb spoke about Rudyard Kipling in relation to other authors of his time. At the age of 16, Kipling was writing parodies of other writers' works. A later work, 'Chant-Pagan' is an amusing parody of 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' by Yeats. Kipling's life straddled the lives of Robert Louis Stevenson, Oscar Wilde, Virginia Woolf, and Henry James, among others. Oscar Wilde said of Kipling that he was 'a genius who drops his aspirations' and one who 'knows vulgarity better than anyone has ever known it'. Later known admirers of Kipling's output were George Orwell, Bertolt Brecht, and Maya Angelou, which demonstrates the broad appeal of the writer.

The ALS AGM included an announcement of new annual awards: one for a society volunteer and the other for a president or patron. Marty Ross, chair, also announced a public event to be held at the Birmingham and Midlands Institute in October 2026 to feature society stalls and talks on ALS writers (see page 2 and 4).

Following the AGM, Tim Pye, National Curator of Libraries for the National Trust, spoke about writers' homes owned by the National Trust. Two hundred of the Trust's houses have literary collections of some sort.

Dominic Edwardes, chair of the Trollope Society and a member of the ALS committee, spoke on the subject of digital marketing. Figures are higher than you might imagine: 94% of people have some means of accessing the internet; 82% of people over 65 use it; and 66% of people use Facebook. Dominic described the merits of owned media (e.g. your own website, email or Facebook account), earned media (the sort created by press releases, etc.) and paid media. The last may be worth pursuing. For instance, the Kipling Society paid £200 to reach 56,000 people by boosting a Facebook post about a future event. More information and help will be provided by an ALS Zoom workshop on marketing to be held in the autumn.

On Saturday evening there was a convivial meal at the Hotel du Vin on the Brighton seafront, and dinner was followed by the traditional readings by ALS writers.

On Sunday morning there were two outings to choose from. One was a guided walking tour of Rottingdean, where Kipling, Edward Burne-Jones, and Angela Thirkell lived. The walk was jointly led by members of the Kipling Society and the Angela Thirkell Society. It covered, at a gentle pace, the seafront, the church, and adjoining cemetery, and the couples' homes and other significant houses of Rottingdean.

Outside the Kiplings' former home in Rottingdean and a Burne-Jones window in the local church. (Photos: Mark Davies, the latter included partly because I suddenly realised at the AGM that I was there as the sole member of the Pre-Raphaelite Society as well as my usual Lewis Carroll Society role).

Others chose to go to Rudyard Kipling's house, Bateman's, at Burwash in East Sussex, led by members of the Kipling Society. Kipling and his wife bought it in search of privacy after becoming the prey of celebrity hunters in Rottingdean. He lived there for the rest of his life. As a special privilege we were taken to the attic, which, like all attics, became the repository of Kipling detritus and other materials which the National Trust is unable to display. There we saw Kipling's fishing rods, model boats, his son John's school uniform, and many other items of interest.

Bateman's, Burwash: Kipling's study.
(Photos: Alison Rudd-Clarke)

Glorious honeysuckle outside the back entrance.

Our great thanks go to the Kipling Society for their warm welcome and an informative weekend.

2) AGM & Conference: 16-18 May 2025

Paul & Winifred Wilson, The Arthur Ransome Society

Winifred and I attended this year's event, organised and hosted by The Kipling Society (TKS), at the University of Sussex at Falmer, Brighton, along with two other members of The Arthur Ransome Society and over 60 participants from other ALS societies. Last year, at the Windermere Jetty Museum at Bowness-on-Windermere, we heard about this year's meeting, and realised that was exactly 50 years since Winifred graduated from Sussex in July 1975, and I attended my thesis viva in December, graduating the following July. We hadn't been back to the campus since! We stayed in Lewes, easily accessible from the University by the coast railway line. On Friday evening we attended the dinner at the Old Ship Hotel on the Brighton seafront.

Next morning we were up early to get to the campus in good time before the meeting – we wanted to see how much things had changed in the 50 years since we were last there. We recognised the entrance to the site, with Falmer House predominant; our immediate reaction was how much the parkland trees have grown. Unfortunately, the Meeting House (the University Chapel) was closed: we were both members of the chapel choir, where we first got to know each other. However, we progressed up the valley, and saw where we were to meet in the old Refectory building. We were interested to see the residences where we lived in Park Village, but hoardings protecting a large building site, with several massive cranes, meant that the Village had been recently demolished to make way for new high-rise en suite student residences!

We were impressed by the University Conference suite on the third floor of Bramber House: a terrace gave excellent views of the campus, with its many new (to us) buildings among the trees. Proceedings began with welcomes from the chairs of The Kipling Society and ALS, followed by President Jim Naughtie. TKS chair, Andrew Scragg, gave a most interesting overview of Rudyard Kipling's life, work and legacy. After coffee, Alex Bubb of TKS spoke about Kipling in relation to other authors. The long lunch break allowed us to visit the University Library, where we were made welcome by staff after our half-century absence – Winifred had worked there during the vacations. I also found the building where I had spent the last two years of my lab work.

After lunch the formal ALS AGM was followed by a talk by Tim Pye, National Curator, Libraries at the National Trust, who is very keen to make his libraries more accessible. Then Dominic Edwardes of The Trollope Society spoke about the rôle of literary societies in the digital age. Later we enjoyed another dinner at Hotel du Vin in Brighton. It was an exhausting weekend but well worth it to meet new friends, as well as a reminiscent one for us.

3) ALS visit to Bateman's, 18 May 2025

Alison Rudd-Clarke, Malcolm Saville Society

Whilst watching the Wimbledon tennis in June it was almost impossible not to recall the famous words of Kipling from his poem 'If', which are above the entrance to Centre Court: 'If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster and treat those two imposters just the same…' The lines serve as a reminder to players to approach both victory and defeat with a balanced perspective. Perhaps this poem is the best known and loved of all Kipling's poetry.

It was therefore a privilege to see the exact spot where this poem was written on a visit to Bateman's, Kipling's home near Burwash, with a group from the ALS organized as part of the Kipling weekend in May of this year. Bateman's was a place of solace for the Kiplings, who moved here after the death of their daughter Josephine in 1899. Apparently they had been looking for some time before they drove down the secluded and winding road from Burwash. On seeing the house Kipling exclaimed, 'That is she – let's make an honest woman of her, quick!'

James Naughtie, President of the ALS, had given an inspirational speech to kick things off at the beginning of the ALS weekend. Here are some of his memorable insights:

- We all still have books that keep us alive
- They comfort and nurture us
- We read to remember
- Good writing never fades
- We are not preservationists, but constant explorers
- Visiting the homes of writers, we shouldn't look at them as stuck in aspic, they represent the living spirit of the writer and can give us some new insights

This last point is particularly valid. The study is the centre-piece of Batemans and the National Trust have clearly tried to recreate it as if Kipling had just left the room What struck me most, was seeing a day-bed (what a brilliant idea!) and the position of his desk underneath the window, so letting in a great deal of natural light. And what amused me most was the wastepaper basket, full of scrunched up pieces of paper…inspiration indeed!

We don't have to believe in everything Kipling believed; he has been seen as a proud imperialist after all, but by preserving this space, and seeing some of the hundreds of objects he collected we can learn a bit more about Kipling the man and the more appreciate his work. Bateman's is not a Kipling museum – it is the home of a complex man whose work endures to this day. My thanks go to members of the National Trust team, David Forsyth, and Mike Kipling.

The AGM Host Society Special Essay

‘Your Dam Society …’: Rudyard and the Kipling Society

Andrew Scragg, The Kipling Society

Most literary societies are formed after their writer is long dead and their literary reputations are a matter of historical fact; the case of the Kipling Society is somewhat different. Such was the nature of Kipling’s global literary renown, his celebrity, and public interest in his works that there was strong demand for a society to promote the reading and enjoyment of his writings in 1927, nearly a decade before his death.

The rationale for forming the society was given in the first issue of the *Kipling Journal* by Sir George MacMunn, a noted writer on Kipling and future Treasurer of the Society:

> The formation of a Society which aims at studying a Master and glorifying his work, cannot be expected to meet with his approval or even acquiescence. Mr. Kipling, when approached by those who have long aimed at the formation of a Kipling Society, has given it as his opinion that such a society is better formed, if formed at all, after a man's death. But many of those who have the matter at heart, are contemporaries, and they have said, if we wait till the Master leaves us, we too shall have crossed the Bourne and cannot meet together for our purpose in this world. (i)

So, on the 4th of February 1927 an inaugural meeting was held, where:

> Sir George MacMunn explained how the need for such a Society had been felt by many people, that it would have been formed long before but for the aversion that the man, in whose honour the Society was now being formed, had to its formation, at least during his lifetime. Now, however, the public had been sounded through the Press and as there seemed to be an enthusiastic desire for such a Society, he felt that they were but doing their duty in coming together to formally inaugurate it in the name of one whose writings combined the best of literature with the noblest patriotism. It was then moved and unanimously agreed: That the Kipling Society be formed. (ii)

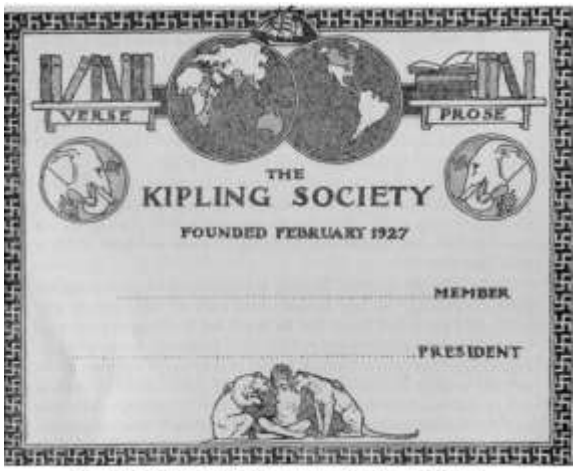
It was agreed that Major General L. C. Dunsterville (Kipling’s school friend at the United Services College and the model for ‘Stalky’ in *Stalky and Co*.) be elected President. A Marconigram was sent to Kipling, then on *RMSP Andes*, on his way to Brazil:

> Honoured to advise that Kipling Society formed at founders' meeting' to-day, officers elected, rules drawn, papers offered, and hundreds applications membership tabled. We send respectful greetings to yourself and Mrs Kipling. (iii)

Kipling, who was generally a private man, was personally appalled by the idea of a Kipling Society. Kipling’s attitude was that he wanted his books to be read and enjoyed, but that was as far as it should go. He hated the idea of people being interested in him as a person or as a writer; the books should speak for themselves. While living in Brattleboro, Vermont and at Rottingdean he had been subject to a great deal of attention from journalists wanting interviews or day trippers looking for local sights – of which he was considered one; his

home at Bateman's in the quiet village of Burwash offered a haven of peace away from prying eyes. In December 1927 he wrote to his friend and American publisher, Frank N. Doubleday:

> Your publication figures are amazing. …They (the books) aren't doing badly here: but there is a dam' organization called 'The Kipling Society' which makes me feel more absurd and ridiculous than – Allah knows! – I really *am*. And that is saying something. (iv)



MEMBERSHIP CARD. (Coloured red and blue.)

To Lionel Dunsterville he was blunter:

> As to your dam Society – how would you like to be turned into an anatomical specimen before you were dead, and shown up on a table once a quarter? It makes one feel naked as well as ridiculous. What's worse, it loads up my already-heavy-enough mail with all sorts of extra correspondence, silly questions and demands for information. (v)

For Kipling, if there had to be a Society 'let it be *as private and quiet as possible*'. (vi) He later wrote to a friend, Lionel Curtis:

> As to the Kipling Society, that is in the hands of Allah. Maybe the Committee will decide to chuck it. I don't think, myself, that there will be abounding enthusiasm on the subject. The generation that I tried to write for conked out between '14 and '18. (vii)

So, as the Kipling Society approaches its centenary in 2027 it is interesting to reflect on his words. Clearly, the Committee of 1927 did not decide to 'chuck it'; we have continued to run a society for anyone interested in the prose and verse, and the life and times, of Rudyard Kipling and, as the only one which focuses on Kipling and his place in English Literature, we attract a world-wide membership. He was wrong, too, to suggest that there would not be 'abounding interest' in his work. Despite Kipling's contested reputation as an imperialist and reactionary thinker, out of date in contemporary society, his stories and poems are still read,

enjoyed and discussed by readers of all ages while the amount and the quality of articles in the *Kipling Journal* shows that Kipling studies are still going strong, developing understanding of his works, their meanings then and to contemporary audiences. The focus of the Society remains on the works first, then the writer; we tend not to pick over his life like the 'hyenas' of the press whom he hated. I like to think that, despite a shaky start, we have found a balance that Kipling could live with.

(i) The *Kipling Journal*, 1 March 1927, p.5 https://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/pdf/KJ001.pdf (accessed 9 July 2025).
(ii) *Ibid*, p.6.
(iii) *Ibid,* p.6.
(iv) R.K. to Frank N. Doubleday, 22 December 1927. *The Letters of Rudyard Kipling Volume 5 1920 – 1930*, ed. Thomas Pinney, Basingstoke 2004, p.396.
(v) R.K. to Lionel Dunsterville, 20 November 1927, *ibid*, pp.393-4.
(vi) Quoted in Lord Birkenhead, *Rudyard Kipling*, New York, Random House, 1978, p.303.
(vii) *Ibid*.

Connections: Kipling and Carroll

Mark Davies, Lewis Carroll Society

At the Brighton ALS Gathering I was told that Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936) was a great fan of 'Alice', and was advised to investigate, via the excellent website (www.kiplingsociety.co.uk), *From Sea to Sea*. This is a series of newspaper articles written by the young Kipling about his journeys around India, Burma, China, Japan, and the United States between 1887 and1889. In the spirit of the talk given by Winifred Wilson at the 2024 Gathering, on interconnections between different ALS authors, here are a couple of examples:

Japan: 'The passengers themselves were altogether delightful. A large number of them were modified Europeans, and resembled nothing more than Tenniel's picture of the White Rabbit on the first page of Alice in Wonderland.'

Japan: 'Never have I seen such a wild dream of equitation as the Tokio parade-ground showed. Do you remember the picture in Alice in Wonderland just before Alice found the Lion and the Unicorn; when she met the armed men coming through the woods? I thought of that, and I thought of the White Knight in the same classic, and I laughed aloud.'

India: from 'A Break in the Line' in *Kipling's India,* reporting on railway tracks undermined by a flood in 1887: 'At the stations, very wet gentlemen in white uniforms, with lanterns, talked about the Gap. There was a certain 'Bill', like Bill the Lizard in *Alice in Wonderland*, supposed to have done or left undone everything that was possible.'

I also found a couple of Alicean references in Kipling's fiction. In 'An Important Discovery' (*Civil & Military Gazette*, 17 August 1887) Kipling playfully suggests that Carroll's 'coruscation of genius, *Jabberwocky*' could only have been inspired by having seen the British equivalent of the Punjabi newspaper compositor who created the mangled English of

'The Poligs of the Oern Vent in dugard to the Brounincinl Coutrick is the colic of the unscrifulouse Gawler' instead of

'The policy of the Government in regard to the Provincial Contract is the policy of the unscrupulous lawyer.'

Kipling concluded, 'What Lewis Carroll did must have been this. He must have seen the rough proof of a very vilely written poem and used it bodily for Jabberwocky. Perhaps, knowing the value of misprints, he made the printer drunk beforehand.'

Closer to home, in 'The Brushwood Boy', published in *The Century Magazine* for December 1895, seven-year-old Georgie is taken, appropriately enough to Oxford. At a play: 'Next to him sat a little girl dressed all in black, her hair combed off her forehead exactly like the girl in the book called "Alice in Wonderland," which had been given him on his last birthday. The little girl looked at Georgie, and Georgie looked at her. There seemed to be no need of any further introduction.'

Georgie had recently discovered the joy of composing stories in his head, so when his imagination leads him to a brushwood-pile, 'it was perfectly right and natural that … he should find her waiting for him, her hair combed off her forehead, more like Alice in Wonderland than ever, and the races and adventures began'.

Carroll owned 14 works by Kipling when he died in 1898.

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The Housman Society is looking for help

The Housman Society is one of the UK's oldest literary societies, founded in 1973 to celebrate and commemorate the life – but especially the poetry – of A.E. Housman. The Society played a key role in the founding of the ALS. So it's appropriate that we now hope to find, via the ALS newsletter, an additional member of our committee.

We need at least one new and younger member with all or some of the following interests and skills:

- website design and management
- use of social media
- membership administration
- marketing the Society's publications
- interaction with literary festivals.

We are looking for new blood and fresh thinking. This is an opportunity to help shape the future development of this long-established Society. Back copies of our Newsletters, and of our prestigious Journal, are here: www.housman-society.co.uk.

For further information about the roles please contact Max Hunt, the Secretary, at maxhunt468@gmail.com

ALS recent events

Writing on their Stomachs – A Literary Feast: online presentations made 10 April 2025, summarised by Mark Davies.

I was not present for this event, and the following highlights, in no particular order, have been taken from the textual auto-summaries of each presentation. If I've misunderstood any of the contexts, please, therefore, blame (mostly) the technology, not the scribe! My purpose is only to provide literary *soupçons* to whet your appetites.

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Antoinette Fawcett, Norman Nicholson Society, has a personal association with the extract she chose from *Wednesday Early Closing.* As a boy, in order to help his parents save on food, Nicholson sought surreptitiously to collect some of the small crumbs and wastage from the counter of his local shop: 'Not stealing, of course … but just picking up the fragments like the disciples after the feeding of the five thousand.' The shop where he first practised this stratagem was run by Mr and Mrs Walmsley, whose great-granddaughter is Antoinette's goddaughter!

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Robin Healey, Charles Lamb Society, read from a letter of 1817 in which Lamb expressed his reservations about the John Dory fish, which 'hath not that moist mellow oleaginous gliding smooth descent from the tongue to the palate, thence to the stomach etc. that your Brighton turbot hath, which I take to be the most friendly and familiar flavour of any that swims'. Lamb likened it to pike or carp, thinking that it 'like them should have been tamed and corrected by some laborious and well-chosen sauce'.
John Walker, Kipling Society, began with 'I don't approve of food, because food means greasy finger marks and coffee stains and crumbs.' But then John is the society's librarian, so fair enough! John referred us to the cardamoms, ghee, millet, chillies, and rice in *Kim* – but also *The Bull That Thought* for Kipling's first experience of champagne and *The Master Cook*, written in the style of Chaucer. In wry conclusion: 'Mr Kipling offers so much exceedingly good writing on food.'

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Vanessa Heron, Oscar Wilde Society, referenced the food in *The Importance of Being Earnest,* namely cucumber sandwiches, crumpets (pronounced decadent by Lady Bracknell), bread and butter (more fashionable than cake in the 'best' houses), and sugar, which was not. Towards the end of the play, the two wronged young ladies, Gwendolyn and Cecily, gaze at their disappointing young men and declare, 'They're eating muffins.'

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Marion Kennett, Edith Nesbitt Society, citing *A Woman of Passion* by Julia Briggs, told us of how in her early teens Edith had a trap-door in the ceiling of her bedroom, which eventually led to the roof where she and her brothers kept books and some provisions. To be on the roof and to eat tinned pineapple in secret constituted sublime happiness!

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Hilary Temple, Angela Thirkell Society, told us that references to food are sprinkled throughout Thirkell's novels with the casual confidence of the good cook. 'Her most succulent works are arguably those published during World War II' and in *Cheerfulness Breaks In* rabbit stew, and the mixed reaction of London evacuee children, is the focus.
Clemence Schultze, Charlotte M. Yonge Fellowship, read from *The Pillars of the House*, which traces the progress of the orphaned family of a clergyman from

poverty to prosperity. A first experience of chicken and converting mashed potato into a fort bombarded with cannonballs of rice both feature when they are young. Later a playfully proposed menu for some visiting guests – consisting of beef, hams, rabbits, pigeons, chickens, lobsters, curds, cream, lemon cheesecakes, melons, cucumbers, grapes, figs, mulberries, dewberries, and apricots – echoes a feast from Shakespeare.

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Jane Ellis, Walmsley Society, chose an episode from Leo Walmsley's childhood, in *British Ports and Harbours*. Packed off to Liverpool to stay with a very religious uncle and aunt, young Leo became fed up of not being fed enough, quickly enough, and ran away. He was rewarded on the boat on which he managed to hitch a ride home with ham and boiled eggs and plenty of cakes, and a captain who *didn't* make him wait while Grace was said!

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Susan Vincent, T. E. Lawrence Society, related Lawrence's bicycle journey through France, when he was a teenager. Recounted in *Home Letters,* Lawrence told his mother that he would live on prunes, cheese, and milk, all the way from Dinard to the south of France. The meagre diet was good practice for desert life later on. He also told her about the types of bread to be found near the Sea of Galilee, noting especially the type which doubled as a spoon and made a splendid dipper.

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Lindsay Moen, Beatrix Potter Society, referred us to the opening of *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* and old Mrs Rabbit's warning not to enter Mr McGregor's garden if they wanted to avoid ending up in a pie. *The Tale of Jeremy Fisher* strikes a happier note (unless you are a butterfly) when he eats butterfly sandwiches, while a little brown mouse enjoys cake, cheese, and jam. Food is referenced in many more of Potter's tales: like 'a Fortnum and Mason hamper, all beautifully packaged and waiting to be discovered'.

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Geraldine Perriam, Dorothy L. Sayers Society, read from *Strong Poison*, in which Harriet Vane is on trial for poisoning her lover, Philip Boyes. The judge sums up by listing everything that was consumed on the evening in question: sherry, cold bouillon set to a clear jelly, a piece of turbot with sauce, a chicken casserole, a sweet omelette filled with jam, a bottle of burgundy, and coffee. There is, of course, 'an ingenious solution' as to how the poisoning occurred.

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Dominic Edwardes, Friends of Tilling Society, focussed on the role of redcurrants from E. F. Benson's 'Mapp and Lucia' series. Iced red currant fool is at the centre of the plot, this being an invention claimed by Miss Mapp, who feels it should therefore be exclusive to her. Ready to denigrate another's efforts, the first spoonful she took was so delicious and exhilarating, that her intentions were never realised. The reason? Well, let's just say that champagne and brandy played its part!

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Anita Fernandez Young, Dickens Fellowship, took a different line. Rather than refer to any published works (other than a passing reference to the Cratchits' Christmas dinner) she informed us of the Dickens Fellowship annual birthday lunch. As there are lots of toasts in his novels, the lunch always includes at least four: to the King, to the immortal memory of Charles Dickens, to the Fellowship, and to the Chair. There are also always readings of at least five quotations about food, coming this year from *Hard Times*.

Many thanks to all those who contributed or attended – plenty of food for thought!

Member Society Events and News

THOMAS HARDY SOCIETY WAR POETRY WEEKEND ... A Weekend to Remember

Saturday, 8th and Sunday, 9th November 2025

The Dorford Centre, St Mary's Church and The King's Arms, Dorchester

With the drums of war beating ever louder, what better time to explore the human cost of war? The Thomas Hardy Society is joining forces with the War Poets' Association and other literary groups to give voice to some extraordinary writers: Thomas Hardy, T.E. Lawrence, Siegfried Sassoon and Edward Thomas, who each had their own unique opinions and experience of the First World War.

The main conference will be held on the Saturday from 9.30am to 5pm. We will explore the nature of war poetry; the readings will cover themes of war in their many and varied aspects — courage, despair, patriotism, loss and sacrifice, and tell the stories, experiences and reflections of these gifted individuals.

On Saturday evening, there will be a concert for Remembrance – war, words and English song. The performance will bring together the words of Thomas Hardy and First World War poets with English song composers of the early twentieth century, echoing the lived experiences of composers and poets affected by the Great War. The concert is included in the THS War Poetry Conference weekend ticket, but can be booked separately.

On Sunday, there will be a more local flavour, with an exhibition and talk about Dorchester during the First World War and an opportunity to join in Dorchester's Remembrance services, follow the Poppy Trail or chill out in the Casterbridge Room.

After Sunday lunch at the King's Arms, we will enjoy a staged performance of 'Strange Meeting' and the words of Wilfred Owen.

Discounts are available for members of the Thomas Hardy Society, T.E. Lawrence Society, Siegfried Sassoon Fellowship, Edward Thomas Fellowship and the War Poets' Association. Non-member tickets will be available from **15 September 2025** and Saturday only tickets are also available.

As a precursor to the War Poetry Conference, there will be a special performance at Athelhampton House – 'WW1: Hardy at Athelhampton' on Friday, **7 November** at 6pm. Thomas Hardy and his second wife Florence were dining with Alfred Cart de Lafontaine at Athelhampton on the day that the First World War was declared. To set the scene for the War Poetry Conference, local actors will re-create that fateful dinner in the very room it took place, with the audience moving to other historic rooms to watch events unfold.

For more information and to book, please visit https://www.hardysociety.org/events/ Contact: Miranda Woodgate, Secretary, Thomas Hardy Society – secretary@hardysociety.org.

ALS President **Jim Naughtie** talking to **Sir Philip Pullman:**

Oxford, 18 November, 6.30pm.

Commemorating 200 years of the Oxford suburb of Jericho, a familiar haunt for Lyra and the gyptians (and also for Jude the Obscure, Inspector Morse, Lewis Carroll, the Pre-Raphaelites, and …).

Tickets (early September): www.jlht.org.uk

P. G. Wodehouse Society (UK) Essay Prize 2025

To mark the 50th anniversary of P. G. Wodehouse's death in 2025, the P. G. Wodehouse Society (UK) is excited to launch its second essay prize competition open to everyone, everywhere. P. G. Wodehouse's output was prolific, from poetry, to lyrics for stage and screen, short stories, journalism and novels. 'The object of all good literature is to purge the soul of its petty troubles', so Wodehouse once said, and his writings have provided lighthearted relief from the trials and tribulations of the world to millions of readers worldwide. A prize of £750 will be awarded to the winner of the competition.

The Prize launched on 1 June and entries will close on Monday 17 November 2025 at 23:59 GMT. All of the information for the prize, including full guidance, judging process and FAQs will be found here: https://www.pgwodehousesociety.org.uk/essayprize.

The guidelines for the Prize are as follows:

- Word count of 3,000 to 6,000 words, excluding footnotes and bibliography.
- Essays need to be formatted in the MHRA style.
- While the Society does not want to be restrictive in the areas or topics that may be covered (and understand that literary critical essays often draw on illuminating historical and contextual engagement), we are primarily seeking essays that focus on Wodehouse's novels, stories, lyrics, plays, and journalism, rather than essays of a purely biographical nature.
- Comparative essays are acceptable, but the focus of the essay must be on Wodehouse.
- Works submitted for publication elsewhere will not be considered, and the Society will run a plagiarism check on potential shortlisted essays to verify.

If anyone has any questions about the Prize, please email Dr Becky Andrew (Chair of the Essay Prize) at PGWSocietyUKEssay@gmail.com.

For more regular updates, you can find the Society on social media - Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/groups/pgwodehouseuk; Instagram/Threads: @pgwsocietyuk; BlueSky: @pgwsocietyuk.bsky.social.

Unveiling of statue for Sylvia Townsend Warner, Dorchester: December 2025

In 2024 the charity Visible Women UK began its 'Sheroes' campaign, calling for a statue of a Dorset woman for Dorchester, and for more representation of non-royal women in public art. Dorchester currently has statues of six men, one dog, one queen and a horse. In December 2025 these will be joined by a statue of the novelist Sylvia Townsend Warner (1892-1975).

'When people think of Dorset writers, they tend to think of men, Thomas Hardy and the poet William Barnes; that's why I'm so delighted that there is going to be a statue of Townsend Warner, who spent most of her life in Dorset. I think it's great that she is finally going to be acknowledged alongside the men.' (Tracy Chevalier, author and patron of Visible Women UK)

Dorchester Civic Society submitted the planning application for the statue on behalf of Visible Women, which was successful. After a public ballot the novelist, musicologist, Communist, lesbian, critic, biographer and poet Sylvia Townsend Warner was chosen to be formally commemorated with a statue in the town near which she lived for over 40 years. Her statue will be Dorchester's first non-royal tribute to a woman, serving as a focal point in the town to honour Sylvia's contribution to literature and providing a lasting tribute of remembrance and respect for a remarkable yet often overlooked writer.

Sylvia lived in East Chaldon and later in Frome Vauchurch with her lifetime companion, the poet Valentine Ackland.

The charity said: 'We aim to honour Townsend Warner's legacy by introducing her physical presence into Dorchester with a beautiful work of art. This public artwork will serve as a focal point of remembrance and respect, celebrating Dorchester's rich and diverse heritage while ensuring that her personal and literary story continues to inspire. Especially in rural communities, where LGBTQ+ heritage can often be lost or overlooked, such a tribute would provide visibility and connection, offering the next generation a chance to see themselves reflected in their town's history. By championing Townsend Warner's legacy, we aim to introduce her work to new readers, inspire further scholarly debate, and pave the way for greater acceptance and equality.'

The crowdfunding campaign to commission the statue was supported by the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society, and the statue will be created by sculptor Denise Dutton, well-known for her 2022 statue of the pioneering palaeontologist Mary Anning in Lyme Regis. Sylvia's statue will be unveiled on 18th December on South Street, Dorchester.

Mark Chutter of the Thomas Hardy Society, who worked on the campaign with Visible Women UK, will give a talk in Dorchester about Sylvia and the statue on **Saturday, 27 September** from 2p.m. at Shire Hall Museum, High West Street, Dorchester.

Blue Plaque for Barbara Pym's Pimlico home

The home that saw the beginnings of the celebrated novelist's literary career has a new plaque. The Press Release issued prior to the event follows:

Celebrated novelist, Barbara Pym, will be commemorated with an English Heritage blue plaque on 1 May. The plaque will mark 108 Cambridge Street in Pimlico, where Pym lived from November 1945 to autumn 1949, a pivotal period in her career, during which she began writing her most celebrated novel, *Excellent Women* (1952). It was at this address – which she shared with her sister Hilary – that Pym embarked on her journey to literary acclaim, capturing the essence of everyday life with her distinctive blend of wit and poignant observation. Her experiences of living and working in London during the post-war years of austerity provided rich material for her writing, and *Excellent Women* drew heavily from her surroundings and the lives of the often-overlooked women of the era.

Author, broadcaster and historian, Lucy Worsley, said, 'Barbara Pym's time at 108 Cambridge Street was transformative, marking her transition from aspiring writer to published author. Her novels, rooted in the everyday experiences of post-war London, offer a unique and enduring perspective on the period. This blue plaque celebrates her significant contribution to British literature and her ability to find the extraordinary in the ordinary.'

Dame Jilly Cooper said, ‘Barbara Pym has brought me more happiness and gentle laughter than any other writer.’

English Heritage historian, Susan Skedd, said, ‘It is a real pleasure to honour Barbara Pym at her home in ‘bedsit land’ where she found so much rich material for her writing and also enjoyed much happiness, both from living with her sister and from fulfilling her potential as a writer.’

Devon Allison, Chair of the Barbara Pym Society, said, ‘When the Second World War ended eighty years ago, the newly demobbed officer, Barbara Pym, moved into this Pimlico flat. A born writer, her most famous novel *Excellent Women* is set here, in her first civilian home after the war. No wonder the novel features a glamorous naval officer alongside people finding their way to new lives in post-war London. Barbara Pym was a writer of genius – brave, kind, intelligent, brilliantly funny, and endlessly re-readable. She is a precious artist indeed, and we are very proud that she is being honoured today by English Heritage.’

The second-floor flat at 108 Cambridge Street served as Pym’s creative sanctuary. From her corner room, overlooking Warwick Square and St Gabriel’s Church, she meticulously recorded her observations, laying the groundwork for her distinctive literary voice. Pym’s work from this period, including revising the text for her first published novel, *Some Tame Gazelle* (1950), reflects her keen understanding of human nature and her ability to portray the lives of ordinary people, particularly those of unmarried women, with empathy and humour. Her novels offer a valuable historical and social commentary which, together with her sharp social observations and ability to find humour in everyday situations, has cemented her place as a significant figure in 20th-century British literature. Barbara Pym now joins a distinguished group of 20th-century female authors commemorated by English Heritage blue plaques in London, including Angela Carter, Jean Rhys, Georgette Heyer, and Iris Murdoch.

A Cream Tea Fit for Jane Austen: 250th Anniversary Celebration at Hamstall Ridware

Under brilliant blue skies and in the height of summer sunshine, 100 guests gathered on the afternoon of Saturday, 12 July at the Church of St Michael’s and All Angels. The occasion was a ticketed event to mark the 250th anniversary of Jane Austen’s birth. After a welcome and brief introduction in church, guests were divided into two groups and enjoyed a talk on picnics by Emma Westwood, Chairman of the Jane Austen Society Midlands, a tour of the church and churchyard and an elegant afternoon cream tea.

The event took place in the picturesque Staffordshire village where Austen herself spent six weeks in 1806, staying with her first cousin, the Rev. Edward Cooper. It is widely believed that Hamstall Ridware and its tranquil setting served as inspiration for the fictional Delaford parsonage and estate in *Sense and Sensibility.*

Despite the scorching heat, guests in Regency attire and modern dress alike enjoyed a traditional spread of delicious sandwiches, cakes, scones with jam and clotted cream, and tea, served at beautifully laid tables shaded beneath a white awning. The air was filled with music and gentle laughter, as people strolled the historic grounds and imagined Jane Austen doing the same more than two centuries ago.

Providing a delightful and authentic touch to the occasion was the Lichfield Regency Dance Group, who entertained with costumed demonstrations of period dances. Their graceful reels and quadrilles brought the era to life and had many spectators tapping their toes and snapping photographs. Several guests even took to the dance floor themselves to join in the fun, following in Austen's very footsteps in a spot rich with literary heritage.

St Michael's Church, where the Rev. Edward Cooper once preached, stood as a serene backdrop, its centuries-old stones witnessing both past and present. Inside, displays about Austen's connection to the area offered quiet reflection away from the heat.

The event was not only a joyful celebration of Austen's enduring legacy, but also a tribute to the local history of Hamstall Ridware – a place where fact and fiction so gracefully meet. It was the culmination of months of preparation by members of the Hamstall Ridware church and community working with the Jane Austen Society Midlands. The result was a day that none of us will forget.

A booklet 'Jane Austen and Hamstall Ridware' has been produced for sale, price £2. Copies are available to purchase in the Church or by contacting Sarah Elsom – sarah.elsom@btnternet.com Tel.: 07973 950476

BIRMINGHAM LITERATURE FESTIVAL

Thurs. 9 to Mon. 13 October 2025

The Birmingham Literature Festival, now in its 26th year, is the Midlands largest literature festival showcasing the very best writers, speakers, thinkers, activists and artists from the Midlands, the UK and across the world.

This year the Birmingham Literature Festival takes place from Thursday, 9 – Monday, 13 October 2025 and events will take place across the Birmingham Rep, Royal Birmingham Conservatoire and Birmingham Cathedral.

Highlights of this year's programme include events with Midlands own novelists Jonathan Coe (*The Proof of My Innocence*), Kit de Waal (*The Best of Everything*) and Mike Gayle (*Hope Street*), who will talk about their latest novels and about centring the Midlands in their work.

We will be joined by writer and activist Laura Bates to talk about her latest investigation into misogyny, the internet and AI (*The New Age of Sexism*), as well as writer and philosopher Julian Baggini who will talk about his latest book (*How the World Eats*) which examines our over-reliance on global food systems.

This year's programme features events about life on the canals with former Canal Poet Laureate Jo Bell (*Boater*) and the colonial history of National Trust houses with academic and author Corinne Fowler (*Colonial Countryside*).

More information about all these events, and many more, can be found on our website: Birmingham Literature Festival.

Writing West Midlands

Jonathan Davidson, Chief Executive

Writing West Midlands is one of seven ‘literature development agencies’ that support the development of creative writing across England. Along with its fellow organisations (New Writing South, Literature Works – based in the South West, Spread the Word – based in London, Writing East Midlands, National Centre for Writing – based in East Anglia – and New Writing North), Writing West Midlands runs a range of practical activities to support creative writers and creative writing. Each agency has slightly different interests and characteristics, but all are concerned to support creative writers at all stages in their development.

Writing West Midlands began in 1999 as the Birmingham Book Festival. This festival – now the Birmingham Literature Festival – is still a major project, but Writing West Midlands also runs other year-round programmes. Most important is its Spark Young Writers programme, (www.sparkwriters.org) which each year runs 240 creative writing workshops for children and young people across the region – from Ross-on-Wye to Stoke-on-Trent and all points between, including online. These workshops give young writers the chance to develop their skills and interests outside of the constraints of formal education.

Also important to Writing West Midlands are the many adult creative writers in our region. Alongside workshops, short courses and our National Writers Conference, we also have a development programme – Room 204 – which currently supports over 200 emerging (and increasingly established) writers. The support mostly takes the form of advice and guidance, but writers also benefit from being part of an informal community of writers in the region, many of whom have skills and experience they are willing to share.

Alongside the Birmingham Literature Festival, our Spark Young Writers programme, and our work with emerging writers, Writing West Midlands also connects people and organisations. We have networks of literature festivals, independent publishers, universities teaching creative writing, and literary translators and also keep strong connections with many independent bookshops. Finally, we have a partnership with a Writers & Translators House in Ventspils, on the Baltic coast in Latvia, which host writers from the West Midlands in need of time to write.

Most of Writing West Midlands’ work focusses on living contemporary writers, but we are also mindful of those who have come before. The Birmingham Literature Festival occasionally features events about ‘previously enjoyed’ writers, and being in the famously self-deprecating Midlands, we are certainly keen that just as we support new writers so we don’t forget those who have come before.

Our next Birmingham Literature Festival will take place from **9 to 13 October 2025.** Details on page 20.
For more about Writing West Midlands see:

www.writingwestmidlands.org

Subscriptions

Jeremy Mitchell – ALS Treasurer and Membership Secretary:

As at 31 March 2025 the ALS had 123 fully paid up members and despite invoices going out to each member society at the beginning of April, with annual subscriptions being due during April, **there are still 34 Societies who have not yet renewed their Memberships.**

This represents a whopping 28% of our membership base and, if you are a society Treasurer reading this, or perhaps Chair, would you mind checking please whether or not your subscription has been paid for this year?

In the meantime, a big thank you to the 89 Societies who have paid on time.

A reminder of our annual subscription rates, which are:
Societies/groups with:

1 to 24 members £5
25 – 99 members £10
100 to 499 members £15
500 to 999 members £20
1,000 + members £25

If you see payment has not been made and you would like another invoice please contact me on treasurer.als@outlook.com and I will send you one. Please be aware I shall be unable to respond to emails between 2 September and 2 October.

Reminder emails will be coming out in October to those Societies whose subscriptions are still overdue.

In the meantime, if you are linked to another literary society which is not a member please bring the ALS to the attention of their Chair or Secretary.

Thank you for being members of the ALS.

The next issue…

The deadline for copy for the next newsletter is **31 January 2026,** for publication at **the beginning of March**.

Please send any contributions (preferably 500 words maximum, please, to: allianceoflitsocs@gmail.com
with the subject header NEWSLETTER.

Attachments should preferably be as a Word document in Arial with your society's name in the document title and your name within the document itself.

Images in jpg format are welcomed.

You can contact us …

… at allianceoflitsocs@gmail.com using (where possible) an appropriate subject heading. This helps to direct your email to the correct person.

Chair: Marty Ross (Johnson Society (Lichfield))

Treasurer: Jeremy Mitchell (Edward Thomas Fellowship)

Secretary: Anita Fernandez Young (Dickens Fellowship)

Newsletter editor: Mark Davies (Lewis Carroll Society)

The views expressed in this publication are those of the individual contributors and not necessarily those of the Alliance of Literary Societies.