



Not Only, But ALS*o*: Spring 2024

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The ALS Annual Gathering & AGM

Bowness-on-Windermere: hosted by

The Arthur Ransome Society

17th-19th May 2024

Friday 17 May

An opportunity to meet old friends and form new acquaintances at a two-course dinner at the Old England Hotel, 23 Church Street, Bowness-on-Windermere LA23 3DF

<https://macdonaldhotels.co.uk/oldengland>

Saturday 18 May

The ALS AGM and conference will be at Windermere Jetty Museum, Rayrigg Road, Bowness-on-Windermere, LA23 1BN <https://lakelandarts.org.uk/windermere-jetty-museum/>

10.30 Registration opens, coffee and tea will be available and the opportunity to browse the society stalls and purchase ALS raffle tickets.

11.00 Welcome from The Arthur Ransome Society and from Marty Ross, the Chair of the ALS.

11.15 James Naughtie, the President of the ALS.

11.30-12.15 Talk by Peter Wright. A former Chairman of The Arthur Ransome Society, Peter will guide us through the life of Arthur Ransome and his works.

12.15-13.00 Talk by Winifred Wilson. Winifred was The Arthur Ransome Society Librarian for many years. She will be talking about connections between Arthur Ransome and other ALS authors.

13.00-14.15 Lunch and a chance to browse the society stalls and buy raffle tickets.

14.15-14.30 Raffle

14.30-15.30 AGM followed by **15.30-16.00** Coffee/Tea break

16.00-16.45 Talk by Peter Willis. Peter is the rescuer of the boat *Nancy Blackett*, and is Chairman of the Nancy Blackett Trust. He will talk about the boat, her rescue and subsequent role promoting Ransome.

18.45 for 19.00 A three-course dinner at The Boathouse, Windermere Marina Village, Bowness LA23 3JQ. Afterwards we shall have short readings from some of the societies.

<https://www.theboathouse-windermere.co.uk/>

Sunday 19 May

There are a variety of options for Sunday. All of these are to book yourself. They are centred around Coniston, a thirty-minute drive from Bowness.

Brantwood, the home of John Ruskin. <https://www.brantwood.org.uk/visit/>

Coniston Launch or the **Steam Yacht Gondola**, enjoy a cruise on Coniston Water, see the surrounding countryside from the lake and immerse yourself in the scenery that inspired Arthur Ransome. <https://conistonlaunch.co.uk/> or

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/lake-district/steam-yacht-gondola>

Ruskin Museum, not just about Ruskin, this museum includes information about Donald Campbell, Arthur Ransome and Coniston itself. <https://ruskinmuseum.com/>

Bank Ground Farm, this was 'Holly Howe' in *Swallows and Amazons* and includes the field that Roger tacks up in the opening paragraph of the book. Bank Ground Farm is a working farm and has excellent tearooms. <https://bankground.com/>



Booking

Please book by completing the registration form here:

<https://allianceofliterarysocieties.wordpress.com/agm-weekend/>

The last date for bookings is **Friday 12th April**. Full details of venues, directions and menu choices will be sent to you once you have booked.

The ALS Christmas Cracker on Zoom: 14 December 2023

A selection of the contributions to the question: 'Which fictional character would you invite to your Christmas dinner?'

Oscar Wilde Society (Vanessa Heron)

In the spirit of Oscar, I would like to be thoroughly trivial. So for Christmas dinner I would like to invite John Worthing (sometimes known as Ernest) and Algernon Moncrieff, the two young men about town from *The Importance of Being Earnest*. If you are unfamiliar with these two, they are both 'ostentatiously eligible' young men, and both drink excessive amounts of champagne and flirt constantly with women.

You could guarantee a fun time. They would drink pints and pints of the best champagne, eat everything put in front of them and still have room for cucumber sandwiches and muffins afterwards.

They would flirt outrageously both with young women and your older aunts, probably proposing marriage to a couple of your prettiest younger relatives between courses, just for practice. Algie would treat you to his terrible piano playing (quote, 'I don't play accurately, anyone can play accurately but I play with wonderful expression') whilst keeping up a string of light and silly nonsense.

Then of course, just as the main course was about to be served, The formidable Lady Bracknell would burst in uninvited and demand to know why Mr Worthing had been flirting with her daughter Gwendoline again, and why her nephew Algernon hadn't yet arranged the German songs for her next soiree. She would then sit down uninvited at the head of the table and take over.

So there would be excessive amounts of champagne, cucumber sandwiches, English muffins, secrets, family drama, gossip, proposals and long lost relatives. And Lady Bracknell pulling your Christmas cracker with you. Pretty much the most fun you could have over Christmas lunch really. After all, as Oscar said, 'Pleasure is the only thing one should live for ...'

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Trollope Society (Dom Edwardes)

Picking a character from the 47 novels and 1500 characters by Anthony Trollope for Christmas lunch is no easy task. There are two characters I'm considering — Madame Max and Miss Dunstable. They're both outsiders, keen observers of society, wealthy, independent, good judges of character, friendly, strong-willed, generous, and have a good sense of humour.

Between the two, I'd choose Miss Dunstable. I feel Madame Max might be a bit too reserved, whereas Miss Dunstable would bring a lot of laughter to our lunch. Miss Dunstable, the wealthy heiress of the Ointment of Lebanon, resides in Ointment Hall. Her life involves turning down numerous suitors who are all after her money. In the end, she chooses her husband, Doctor Thorne, the main character in one of Trollope's most popular novels.

Here's a description of Miss Dunstable:

"She has a very high colour, very red cheeks, a large mouth, big white teeth, a broad nose, and bright, small black eyes. Her hair also was black and bright, but very crisp and strong, and was combed close round her face in small crisp black ringlets. Since she had been brought out into the fashionable world some one of her instructors in fashion had given her to

understand that curls were not the thing. 'They'll always pass muster,' Miss Dunstable had replied, 'when they are done up with bank-notes'" - *Doctor Thorne*

Imagine having Miss Dunstable at our Christmas table, sharing stories of Ointment Hall, making witty observations about society, and maybe even sharing some wisdom on matters of the heart. Her presence would add a joyful and festive spirit to our gathering. So, let's make this Christmas special by inviting Miss Dunstable and creating memories that reflect the charm of Trollope's stories.

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Angela Thirkell Society (Hilary Temple)

May I introduce Gregory Villars to you? He will not mind my saying that he is not my favourite character in Angela Thirkell's Barsetshire novels. That honour goes to a robust young woman who dashes around energetically, bossing people about and saying "I'll tell you what..." every five minutes. But she would be far too exhausting and probably cause us all indigestion.

Mr Villars has something special to say which a few of us may find pertinent at this time of year. He was a headmaster of a private school and then got ordained, which his wife Verena (called after Guy's mother in *The Heir of Redclyffe*) accepted with equanimity. He is now Rector of Northbridge, which is Chipping Campden in disguise. It is 1941, so the effects of World War II are very obvious on the Home Front, particularly rationing and those pesky evacuees. Thirkell is writing a novel a year during the war, in real time, the rules on paper-rationing having been somewhat relaxed as such works are regarded as good for public morale. And of course she does not know who is going to 'win'...

The following is from the beginning of Chapter 10 of *Northbridge Rectory*:

'Christmas, bad enough at the best of times, now began to cast an even thicker gloom than usual over the English scene. No one has ever yet described with sufficient hatred and venom this Joyous and Festive Season. As the Rector when off his guard so truly said, the war was little but an intensification of Christmas in that it either separated families that wanted to be together, or far worse, herded together families for whom twelve counties were not large enough. Outwardly, he said, on the Third Sunday in Advent, that once again families were drawing together at this season and not only finding in the companionship of fathers, mothers, sons, daughters and many others a joy they had never felt before, but rejoicing also in the privilege of having among them some less fortunate than themselves, victims of one of the most terrible crimes known in the history of our so-called civilization. Everyone said what a nice sermon the Rector had preached, and went home to lunch.'

We often need a diplomat at our Christmas gatherings and Gregory Villars would fill the role perfectly.

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Johnson Society of Lichfield (Marty Ross)

As Samuel Johnson only wrote one novel, *Rasselas*, he provides slim pickings and I definitely did not want Prince Rasselas, who is something of a prig. I then thought of being patriotic and choosing Huck Finn, but having re-read *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* with great enjoyment, I decided he would be great fun, but too chaotic even for me. Goodness knows what would happen. I nearly decided on Maggie Tulliver from *The Mill on the Floss*, because any girl who hammers nails into a

doll's head is a girl after my own heart. I'd love to talk with Maggie and, by extension, her creator, George Eliot, and tell them about the wonderful possibilities open to clever women in the 21st century.

However, I finally decided on another girl after my own heart: Lyra Silvertongue, from Philip Pullman's great fantasy trilogy, *His Dark Materials*. She is brave and she is clever. She is loyal to her friends. She is funny and, as her honorific suggests, she is a great talker. She can talk herself out of any difficult situation – not always truthfully – and she is always up for an adventure. So, she would be a really lively companion at our dinner table, and I'd love to hear her tell us about her friends: Iorek Byrnison, the armoured bear; or Lee Scoresby, the hot-air balloon pilot from Texas; or the witch, Serafina Pekkala. As a bonus, Lyra's daemon Pan would be there and, if the conversation lagged, we could ask Pan to entertain us by shape shifting.

For me, Pullman's books epitomise the pure delight discovered in fiction when I was a very young child and always wonderful, and rejuvenating, to re-discover as an older woman.

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Lewis Carroll Society (Mark Davies)

Oxford provides the setting for a disproportionate number of novels for a city of its size. As a local historian I am deeply grateful for this, because it provides numerous opportunities to assess the city's historical facts through its fictional facets. Even those most unlikely sources, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and its sequel, reveal much about Victorian Oxford, but it is not one of Lewis Carroll's characters – generally unhelpful, bossy, rude or even violent –

whom I would want at any dinner party. No, my choice is Peter Priggins, the creation of Joseph Hewlett in *Peter Priggins, the College Scout* (1841), the reason being that from my guest I'm after information not entertainment! And from the elderly Priggins I would be keen to know just how many of his succession of Oxford anecdotes and recollections are pure fantasy and how many are based on fact. Clearly the latter is true of many, though clearly embellished – but to what extent?

For instance, Priggins' amusing tale of how a Cambridge student was hoodwinked by an Oxford coach-driver is definitely based on Oxford's actual, University-educated 'Classical Coachman', and Stephen Davis features under his real name: a boatbuilder – or 'private nautical, or rather fresh-aquatic, or cymbatic tutor' (Priggins was an exceptionally erudite scout!) – who was largely responsible for Oxford's victory in the very first University Boat Race in 1829. How fascinating too, to hear of Priggins' recollections of the early days of the Oxford Canal, of the first hot-air balloons, and of the 'rattling, smoking, steaming, screeching, and stinking annoyances of the train' – all topics in which I am especially interested. And what about 'Old Explicator' ... a specimen of that now nearly extinguished genius, an Oxford guide'? Yes, my own tours would benefit hugely from an hour or two in Priggins' company – tours such as the one sampled by some of the ALS committee after our meeting last October, for instance – see page 7.

Meanwhile, we have two new members: **Maria Edgeworth Centre, Eire** (see page 17) and **Ted Hughes Society**.

ALS Zoom

Zoom events have been a great success among many societies, offering a convenient way to come together and share ideas. The Alliance of Literary Societies understands the value of these virtual meetups and wants to help.

If your literary society doesn't have a Zoom account or finds itself stuck with the 40-minute limit, we can help. The ALS is extending an offer to host member Societies meetings on Zoom, making it easier for you to connect and discuss without any limitations.

Simply drop us a line at help@trollopesociety.org if you'd like to chat about setting up a Zoom meeting hosted by the ALS.



'Old Explicator' Mark Davies (see page 6) by the River Thames with (mostly) other members of the ALS committee after our Oxford meeting on 30 September 2023. (Photo: Julia Bukus)

The PG Wodehouse Society (UK) asks: "Does Social Media Matter?"

By Jo Jacobius

We would welcome views from ALS members about their use, or otherwise, of social media platforms.

As the committee member of The PG Wodehouse Society (UK) charged with publicity, I often ponder what Wodehouse would have made of social media. Would Plum, as he is affectionately known in these parts, have embraced the system wholeheartedly, using social channels to promote his latest novel or praise the performers in one of his successful musicals? Or would he have spurned the whole rigmarole asking, to paraphrase Bertie Wooster discussing with Jeeves the matter of trousers, 'Sometimes I wonder, does social media matter?'. Jeeves may have responded, 'The moment will pass, Sir.' Or he may have counselled against social media altogether, preferring the telegram or the Junior Ganymede Club Book as the best formats for important news and views.

I recently asked our committee whether, in view of the ownership and policy changes undergone by X (formerly Twitter), we should dispense with this channel, or continue with it but also join other platforms. It was agreed that we should seek the opinions of other like-minded literary organisations.

Our Society joined Twitter in Spring 2017, expecting to engage with, perhaps, 1,000 people if we were lucky – roughly the number of members of our organisation. To our delight, our followership has climbed to over 4,400 and we generally attract a satisfactory number of impressions and engagements on X. A post about our recent Society meeting garnered over 2,300 impressions whilst

The PG Wodehouse Society (UK) Essay Prize announcement generated 2,400 impressions. We also set up a Facebook page specifically for this competition but not for other purposes.

The questions I put recently to my fellow Committee Members were:

- Should we move to Threads?
- Should we move to another platform or platforms?
- Should we stick only with X where, amongst the gloom that is now so prevalent there, we can do what our hero did best, which is to seek to spread sweetness and light?
- If remaining on X, should we add other channels to the mix and, if so, which ones?

Please could any individuals or Committees with useful experience or strong views about the value of social media and possible answers to the above questions kindly get in touch? Email jo@axiom-uk.com

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Literary Societies and Social Media – can we learn anything from Taylor Swift?

By Lyn Lockwood (Deputy Chair Philip Larkin Society, writer and presenter of 'Tiny in All That Air', the PLS Podcast)

It can sometimes feel like everything takes place on social media – if it hasn't been tweeted, live streamed or Insta-ed then it hasn't happened. The world of literature is no different- Penguin Books has 394k X followers, Margaret Atwood has 515k Facebook followers, Shakespeare's Globe has 204k followers on Instagram and if you search #GeorgeOrwell, you are taken to over half a million posts. #Booktok is

now a serious marketing tool for publishers and writers. A TikTok post showing a trip to Sylvia Plath's grave currently has over 570K views and there are dozens of videos on there of young men reading Rudyard Kipling's 'If'. Perhaps rather surprisingly, Barbara Pym appears to have not made much of an impact on TikTok (surely a perfect fit for social commentary and influencing!), although Thomas Hardy and Beatrix Potter are doing a brisk trade.

For literary societies it can be a great tool for conversation and interaction. The Philip Larkin Society has a more modest 4,800 X followers and 2,860 followers on Instagram. Occasionally we put out a tweet that gets a big reaction - maybe up to 1,000 likes – and we feel very giddy with excitement. But Taylor Swift (95M X followers) only needs to put out a picture of herself with a cat and she gets 790K's worth of love. So is social media worth all the effort, we sometimes wonder?

I would say it has been of value, for the PLS at any rate. We have been running the Twitter/X account for about 12 years so it is quite well established. We have three people contributing so the posts are varied and the page generally looks fresh. We have Honorary Vice Presidents such as David Quantick (62K followers) who regularly retweet for us which is great. It has been a way of sharing information and bringing people along and we know that some of our members came from initially being Twitter followers. For a writer who can be seen as controversial by some people, we get very little trolling or abuse.

In fact, Larkin, as a keen photographer and lyrical poet, lends himself well to social media. His image is instantly recognisable, which also helps. In an effort to 'future proof' ourselves when Elon Musk appeared to be dismantling Twitter piece by piece last year we (along with lots of other media types) set up a Bluesky account, which is an ad free and quieter version of X, but Bluesky does not appear to have set the media world on fire yet! We never ventured into Facebook or TikTok, although we do have a rich and

developing dedicated You-Tube channel, a useful website and a podcast too. (There are very few literary societies with a dedicated podcast, so we're proud of that!)

All this moving between different platforms is a bit of a minefield for literary societies. Where do you place yourself? The ALS once had a presence on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, until about 2 years ago. But we found it impossible to keep them up to date without a small and dedicated team of people posting regular content (which we didn't have). So we focused on Twitter, as the follower numbers were the most promising. Then the aforementioned Elon Musk 'happened' (as they say) and X looked like a hostile and graceless world especially to such tiny minnows as @allianceoflitsocs. We decided our energies would be best put into the annual AGM, regular Zoom events (a new direction for us), the website and the newsletter. So no 'social media' at all which is a bit counter intuitive, but also no current plans to return to that world.

The ALS will be hosting a Zoom event this year for all members about the role of social media in the world of literary societies and we know this will generate a really lively discussion. There aren't going to be any right or wrong answers of course! We hope you can come along and share your thoughts, successes and failures, tips and advice, and will send the date out in due course.

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Receipt of Overseas Payments

Sally Phillips, [The Angela Thirkell Society](#)

sally@amblecote.plus.com

As a Society we do not have a great many payments of any kind, being small in size. But if anything this makes payment of subscriptions from overseas more of an irritant, for instance we have members in Ireland, France, Australia and the USA. Recently we have handled these on an ad

hoc basis: for example, several Irish members paid their subscription jointly with a bank draft; others through a friend who lives in England or with sterling notes. And one of our Committee had, until this year, been accepting euro cheques, using her own euro account and then paying amount into the Society's account. Now her bank is discontinuing service. Overall our overseas membership base is decreasing and we are anxious to stop this decline without too much expense to the Society by way of bank charges.

We have been thinking of opening a PayPal account but their charges too are quite high. We would be very grateful if any other Societies with a similar problem could give us some guidance.

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ALSo: the journal of the Alliance of Literary Societies

With regret, the committee of the ALS has decided to pause publication of our journal until further notice. Since we went wholly digital, contributions have been few and, while those contributions we've received have been excellent, the results have not justified the work put in by our writers and editors. Next year's theme was to be 'Writers in the News'. We apologise to anyone who has started work on an article; if there is anyone who has actually written an article, please send it in and we will print it in the autumn newsletter.

And please note that we have decided to pause publication, not to terminate it altogether. If there is anyone with ideas about a future ALS journal or who would like to participate in starting a new journal, please do get in touch.

Robin Healey & Marty Ross, co-editors
allianceoflitsocs@gmail.com

The following article was submitted for last summer's edition of ALSO: the journal of the ALS, and unfortunately was not printed. The co-editors, Robin Healey and Marty Ross, would like to offer their sincere apologies to Miriam Al Jamil and the Burney Society UK.

The Adventures of Frances Burney and Evelina

By Miriam Al Jamil (Chair of the Burney Society UK)

The **Burney Society UK** celebrates the lives and work of the Burney family: Frances Burney (1776-1828), the novelist; her father, musicologist Charles Burney (1726-1814); her brothers James Burney (1750-1821), the navy captain who witnessed the death of Captain Cook, and Charles Burney Jnr (1757-1817), teacher and collector; along with other talented family members, and the wider network of writers, artists and musicians in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who were connected to the family.

Frances Burney lived firstly in King's Lynn, then in London, at the Royal Court in Windsor, Mickleham in Surrey and later in France where she followed her French emigré husband, M. D'Arblay, and had to remain until a window in the Napoleonic Wars allowed her to return. Her life affords many examples of perilous adventure by land and sea and personal ordeals which she survived. The most well-known of these was her mastectomy without anaesthetic which she described in detail. However, the adventures I wish to highlight here are those formed in Burney's imagination, those of the young ingénu, Evelina, who is the subject of her novel, *Evelina, or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World*, published

in 1778. This was the first of her novels and still the best known. Burney published anonymously initially but her book was greeted with great acclaim and enthusiasm by a public that recognised much of itself in the pages. 'Adventure' can be interpreted in different ways, and in the eighteenth century, it was not always associated with the innocence of the curious traveller. It could suggest immoral, illicit and unlawful conduct, and was a particularly potent term when associated with women. A 'misadventure' could have serious repercussions for the life chances of a young woman.

Brought up in the country by her kind and benign guardian, the Rev. Villars, Evelina is unprepared for the dangers and embarrassments of life in London which she recounts in her letters home. A stigma of illegitimacy hangs over her throughout the novel, with its associated assumptions about moral conduct which Burney uses to highlight the hazards of many of Evelina's encounters, until her absent father finally acknowledges her as his own and admits to his marriage before her mother died. Her vulnerability is thus acute in every sense and her adventures in the novel shed a satirical and critical light on many cultural and social mores of eighteenth-century life, sharply observed and unflinchingly presented.

We move through the social life in fashionable London and Bath, balls and pleasure gardens, theatres and operas with their predatory young men and unsettling crowds. Becoming lost in the dark alleyways at Vauxhall Gardens results in a frightening confrontation based on presumptions about her sexual status; one of the frequent literary settings signalling sexual peril for young women in eighteenth-century novels is invoked when Evelina suddenly finds herself alone in a closed carriage with someone intent on

trying her virtue; a feigned highway robbery and shocking physical attack on the mature and stereotyped French character Madame Duval is described with unsparing detail. The entitlement of wealth, prejudice against foreigners, and infliction of cruel tricks on the weak and defenceless all feature in the novel. However, Evelina's ordeal is not without its reward. She survives her adventures which prove to be valuable experiences leading to a happy and settled future with the principled and exemplary Lord Orville.

Frances Burney went on to publish three more novels, and wrote eight plays, several of which have been produced more recently. Her journals and letters are invaluable records of her contemporary milieu and family life, and scholarly interest in her work continues to thrive and develop. The Burney Society attracts both scholars and interested readers and always welcomes new members.

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Calling all citizen researchers!

Open University's *Coastlines* project

The Open University is leading on an exciting new project called *Coastlines* – and we are asking you for your help. *Coastlines* explores how Britain's coast has been written in the past and how it might be written for the future. It maps a coastal literary canon and uses it to inspire newly commissioned writings. It creates a new literary geography of the coastline to make it available to walkers along the Coast Path.

We are beginning by concentrating on the 170 miles of coastal path that encircle the Isle of Wight. We want to collect one item of literary material for roughly every 1 or 2 miles of the path. We plan to feature this material at the IOWLitFest 2024 in conjunction with the Island's walking festival. **The deadline is 31 August 2024.**

The following year, we expect to produce this material as a book, *Coastlines*, to be sold at the IOWLitFest and through independent bookshops on the Island. Proceeds will go to support the literary festival.

You can help through your in-depth knowledge of the authors you specialise in. Did they holiday on the Island and describe it in their letters or in a diary? Or might they have set a poem, story or novel on the Island?

We are looking for short pieces of literary material that can be keyed to specific places along the coastal path.

Please send suggestions to me, Professor Nicola J. Watson at The Open University (nicola.watson@open.ac.uk). (You can find out more about me on my webpage at the university -- [Professor Nicola J Watson | OU people profiles \(open.ac.uk\)](#)).

Please head your e-mail with the subject 'Coastlines – IOW' and provide the following information:

1. Suggested text of 300-500 words
2. Author
3. Title
4. Publisher
5. Place of publication
6. Date of publication
7. Page reference
8. The name of the location which is being described or referred to
9. The geo-code from 'What3words' if you are familiar with that system.

LitHouses: 17 November 2023

By Marty Ross

LitHouses is an umbrella group for professional and volunteer staff at literary and musical museums all over Britain. Its annual conference provides an important opportunity to listen to reports from members and for networking. It is chaired by Henry Cobbold of Knebworth House and this year celebrated 20 successful years. About 50 museum staff and guests attended; the latter category included Anita Fernandez-Young, ALS secretary, and me. In my report I stressed the importance of literary societies and literary museums working together. I was also keen to give away ALS leaflets and bookmarks, as one cannot imagine better places for our publicity material to be located than the various museums represented, ranging from William Cowper and Philip Sidney to Milton and Anne Lister.

It seems that museums are still in recovery from the pandemic, with finances being an almost universal headache, compounded in some cases by squeezes on local government finance. However, the pandemic also brought benefits and nearly every museum runs some sort of programming on Zoom, which brings in an international audience (and support). With the proliferation of QR codes and other ways of accessing information, an interesting question was raised: are guidebooks now redundant? (As a fan and collector of guidebooks, I hope not.) Many museums are wrestling with their colonial legacies and a LitHouses-wide project is addressing this with AHRC funding, headed up by Jeff Cowton of the Wordsworth Trust.

This year's conference was hosted by the Charles Dickens Museum, but held in the Foundling Museum. The Foundling Hospital was founded by Thomas Coram and established by Royal Charter in 1739. The museum now displays the very moving tokens left with infants for future

possible identification by their parents: these include coins, ribbons, a thimble, a little mother-of-pearl fish (apparently a gambling token) and a ceramic label for ALE (a strange thing to tie around an infant's neck). Artists providing support in its early days included Handel and Hogarth – the former's will is on display and several paintings by the latter, including a wonderful portrait of Thomas Coram.

With the formal activities of the day over, we walked to the Dickens Museum for celebratory prosecco and a chance to see their special Wilkie Collins exhibit. And from there on to the Handel Hendrix House, where we concluded the day with more prosecco and period music in the recently refurbished museum. The opportunity to talk with colleagues and friends is clearly welcomed by everyone involved, and when fuelled by prosecco, became nearly as loud as an ALS event.

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Henry Reed; a New Society?

By Anita Fernandez Young

'And today, today we have naming of parts...' Who doesn't recognise that line? Who among us, having had the privilege, or perhaps toilsome responsibility, of coaxing students into the Margate Dreamland that is poetry appreciation, hasn't turned with confidence to the poetry of Henry Reed, whose ironic tone tempered by wit and flair can grab the attention of bored macho boys equally with sentimental girls? Henry Reed was a poet, journalist, playwright for radio, humourist and member of a generation of writers and friends like W H Auden, Louis MacNeice and Walter Allen, all of whom he knew during his time at the University of Birmingham. Among his radio plays, including the *Hilda Tablet* satirical series, he adapted Melville's *Moby Dick*. He

wrote a thesis on Hardy, but many years later told a friend that the only novels he read were by P G Wodehouse and Stendhal. During the Second World War he worked at Bletchley Park, because of his knowledge of Italian, but once Italy was out of the war he was asked to learn Japanese, which he did, although later he was to say that after the war he dedicated himself to forgetting a word of Japanese every day.

How can this brilliant and entertaining author, whose war poems have such resonance for us, not be celebrated and remembered by a literary society in his name? If you think you would like to belong to such a society, please contact the Secretary of the Alliance of Literary Societies, Anita Fernandez Young, anita.fernandez@ntlworld.com

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An Appreciation of Kenn Oultram

By Anita Fernandez Young

I was sorry to hear from Mark Davies (of Lewis Carroll Society) that Kenn Oultram had died. He was one of the founder members of the Alliance of Literary Societies, as the representative of the Lewis Carroll (Daresbury) Society and the Randolph Caldecott Society. Kenn attended the formal meeting in 1988 which took the Alliance from an informal group to the properly constituted organisation it now is. He was responsible for the first newsletter of the Alliance, *Chapter One*, which he produced for ten years. He always referred to it in meetings as a 'fanzine', but he was indefatigable in raising money to publish it from the many advertisements he coaxed out of his contacts.

Kenn had been a journalist on the *Chester Chronicle*, a weekly journal, and his professional skills were always clear to see in the presentation of his unique perspective on life and literature.



Photo courtesy of Carole Tallon Bailey

Kenn continued to be a member of the Alliance of Literary Societies' committee until he felt that he was no longer able to sustain the societies he represented, and the Daresbury group of the Lewis Carroll Society and the Randolph Caldecott Society which he had founded in 1970 folded.

Without societies to represent he resigned from the ALS committee in 2013 and was very much missed; his wry interventions and cheerful humour were always welcome. We presented him with a glass plaque in thanks for his 25 years' service to the ALS.

Noah's Ark & other mathematical puzzles: a lost Johnson letter acquired by the Johnson Birthplace Museum

By Marty Ross

On 24 July 1783 Samuel Johnson wrote Sophia Thrale, the 12-year-old daughter of his friend Hester Thrale, recommending a book which contained 'a very curious calculation...to show that Noah's Ark was capable of holding all the known animals of the world with provision for all the time, in which the earth was under water.' It is not commonly known that Johnson was fascinated by mathematics and especially mathematical puzzles, which he used as a sort of self-help medication to ease his frequent depressions. This letter, encouraging a girl to study maths, was published in Bruce Redford's *The Letters of Samuel Johnson* with a note stating, 'Current location unknown'. However, it was discovered in a country house cupboard in Gloucestershire recently and was sold at auction on 20 September.

Kimberley Biddle, the new Lichfield Museums & Heritage Officer, and curator of the Johnson Birthplace, had only been in post for a few days when she learned of the letter. Working in partnership with the Johnson Society of Lichfield and Lichfield City Council, funds were put together inside a month. I was able to recommend the Friends of the National Libraries as a source of funding, since the ALS formed an informal partnership with them some years ago. The speed with which they were able to turn the grant application around was amazing – haste was of the essence! – and we are very grateful to them for their support.

Displaying nerves of steel, Kim participated in the competitive auction and acquired the Johnson letter for £38,460.

Funding came from the FNL, Lichfield City Council, the Johnson Society and a personal donation from our society's chair, Phil Jones.

The letter will go on public display in the Birthplace Museum and will be an important tool in showing a more benevolent side of Johnson than is generally perceived. His tone throughout is affectionate and paternal; he begins by apologising for his delay in writing and says, 'Why you should think yourself not a favourite I cannot guess; my favour will, I am afraid never be worth much, but be its value more or less, you are never likely to lose it...' Johnson is also often perceived as being misogynistic. This letter demonstrates his interest in girls' education, and he had a large number of highly educated and distinguished women friends. I am sure he hoped Sophia Thrale would grow up to join their number.

Lessons learned from this experience:

a) The importance of literary societies and literary museums working together. In my experience, the Johnson Society and the Birthplace Museum have enjoyed a close and cordial relationship. Long may it last!

b) Friends of the National Libraries as a funding source. They provide numerous annual grants for the purchase of manuscripts and rare books to libraries, local archives and museums. The Parsonage Museum in Haworth, the Edward Thomas Study Centre in Petersfield, and the Keats-Shelley House in Rome have been other recent beneficiaries. Please consider an annual membership (www.fnl.org.uk or e:mail: admin@fnlmail.org.uk). In return you will receive their beautiful annual report, in which librarians and curators describe their acquisitions and their significance.

News from member societies

13 – 15 June 2024 Burney Society UK Conference: 'Exploring Burneys'

Old Royal Naval College, University of Greenwich, Historic Greenwich, London. Celebrating 25 years of since the Founding of the Burney Society.

The Call for Papers is now open. Proposal deadline is **31 March 2024**. We are offering two prizes for papers presented at the conference, each worth £100, a President's Prize, for students, including post docs., and the Conference Prize, for which all speakers are eligible. The theme is deliberately designed to be open and encompass a variety of approaches, from exploration and travel by members of the Burney family and their circle, to explorations of their lives and their friends, literature, music, art, cultural milieu, and significance. Full registration fee, to include daytime catering is £140, 50% reduction for students and precariously employed. Details, Proposal and Registration forms are available from <https://burneysociety.uk/conferences>



The **Byron Society** has two online events in March. First will be an interview with Sir Drummond Bone and Prof Andrew Stauffer discussing their new books, on the **12 March**. Then on the **20 March**, a PhD Bursary recipient will give a talk based on his thesis, exploring tolerance in Byron's *The Vision of Judgement*. Details and free registration here:

<https://www.thebyronsociety.com/events>

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Alice's Day, Oxford, Saturday 6 July, is an annual first-Saturday-in-July celebration of Oxford's contribution to children's literature, using the creation of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* on 4 July 1862 as its focus. This year the theme will be 'Fabulous Monsters and Curious Creatures', with numerous free children's activities throughout the city courtesy of The Story Museum – <https://www.storymuseum.org.uk/> In the morning, as usual, **The Lewis Carroll Society** will host several free short talks for an older audience at the Bodleian Library, followed by a guided walk and evening social.

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August 3rd 2024 will see the centenary of the death of Joseph Conrad (Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski), 1857-1924. **The Joseph Conrad Society (UK)** has commissioned some refurbishment to his memorial and grave in Canterbury Cemetery, Kent, the county in which he spent the majority of his years as a writer. It is anticipated that there will be a small ceremony at the grave on his centenary, organised by the Polish Embassy.

The Children's Books History Society invites you to a STUDY DAY on *Carnegie: 20th century Prize Winners*. The Carnegie Medal for Writing, established in 1936, is a prestigious British literary award that annually recognises one outstanding new English-language book for children and young adults. **Saturday 19 October, 2024** at the Church Hall of the Great Crown Court Church of Scotland, Russell Street, Covent Garden, London WC2B 5EZ. Speakers include: Peter Hunt on *Arthur Ransome*; Nicholas Tucker on *Philip Pullman* and Alan Powers on *Lucy Boston* with more tbc. Details www.cbhs.org.com or contact the Secretary: rkirkpatrick.molesworth@virgin.net

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This year sees the bicentenary of Wilkie Collins' birth. Events highlighted by The **Wilkie Collins Society** are:

The University of Buckingham is arranging a conference on **20-21 June**. The meeting is being organised by Peter Orford, Senior Lecturer in the Department of English, to celebrate the bicentenary with the theme of Collins and Dickens.

Falmouth Conference. Our former Journal editor Joanne Parsons, is arranging a conference in Falmouth over the weekend of **2-4 July**. Although there is no specific Collins theme, he will no doubt feature among the papers presented there.

Dickens Society Conference, Birmingham. This will be held from **15-18 July** and will include Collins in the session on 'Family and Friends'.

University of Birmingham. There will be a small Collins-Dickens Special Collections exhibition from **1 July 2024 - 31 January 2025**.

The WCS will also arrange a walk during the summer (date tbc) around central London's Marylebone area, in which Wilkie lived for almost his entire life, based on William Clarke's original 'Rambles'.

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The **Dickens Fellowship** Annual Conference 2024 will be held at Portsmouth & Isle of Wight, **5-8 August 2024**. Further details can be found here: <https://dickensfellowship.org/index.php>

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The **Dorothy Dunnett Society** is keen to create a long-lasting legacy for Dorothy Dunnett's Centenary year so are thrilled to announce we have agreed with the University of the Highlands and Islands to fund two annual grants for research, to be known as the Dorothy Dunnett Centenary Awards. One PhD student will receive £1000 and £500 will be awarded to a PhD or Master's student, at the discretion of the UHI and in agreement with the DDS. These grants will be funded for the next four years, with a view to extending the funding, if the scheme proves successful.

Research must fit with our charitable aims, so applicants will have to be working on the history, politics, culture and religion of the 11th, 15th and 16th centuries or on fostering the literary appreciation of Dorothy's work. In return, we ask for an article for *Whispering Gallery* and/or a talk at a Dunnett or public event. Students at the UHI face some unique geographical challenges that can make research more difficult. A trip to consult an archive in Edinburgh or London might be prohibitively expensive or attending a conference could be out of the question. These awards will facilitate high-quality research and publicise Dorothy Dunnett's name in academic and literary circles, building on the success of the Centenary Conference. Dorothy was reported to consider *King Hereafter* to be her best work. For these Centenary Awards to be supporting those studying in Thorfinn's lands seems entirely fitting.

The **Maria Edgeworth** Festival of Literature & Arts: **10-12 May 2024**. The Maria Edgeworth Festival is an annual event held in May for over twenty-eight years. What started as a small gathering has now blossomed into a grand celebration, featuring talks for students, poetry competitions, workshops, readings, historical trails, musical performances, nature walks, theatre shows, and even an 18th Century Costume Tea Party.



EDGEWORTHSTOWN, CO. LONGFORD

10th - 12th May 2024

It's safe to say that the Maria Edgeworth Literary Festival in Edgeworthstown has become one of the most highly regarded literary events in Ireland, attracting visitors from near and far who share a passion for literary history. This year, mark your calendars for May 10th to 12th, as the festival promises to be bigger and better than ever. Alongside an educational talk on 'Resilience and Wellbeing through Education', there will be workshops on poetry, short stories, and storytelling. But the main event that everyone is eagerly anticipating is the 18th Century Mostrim Tea Party, taking place on Sunday. Don't forget to dress up in your finest period costumes, as there will be a prize for the best-dressed attendee. And that's not all! See <https://mariaedgeworthcenter.com/> for more ...

If you're not familiar with Maria Edgeworth, don't worry! You can come and visit us at the Maria Edgeworth Centre in Edgeworthstown, Co. Longford, Ireland. Alternatively, you can join in with the Festival in May. Discover the incredible world of literary legends, inventive intellectuals, and enlightened educationalists.

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30th anniversary of The **Barbara Pym Society** – 2024 conference.

For the society's 30th anniversary, we will celebrate our generous and forward-thinking founders, and explore Barbara Pym's life at thirty, when she became an officer in the Women's Royal Naval Service ("the Wrens") and served through the preparations for D-Day and then in Italy. Like many who signed the Official Secrets Act, Barbara did not discuss her war work, but it was reflected in her writing, notably in *Excellent Women* and in *So Very Secret*, her manuscript dealing with intelligence work and "the threat within" published posthumously in *Civil to Strangers*. New research into her intelligence work is revealing new insight into Barbara's young life, which will be featured in our society's 30th anniversary conference scheduled for **30 August to 1 September 2024** at St Hilda's College, Oxford.

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The **Mark Rutherford Society** (William Hale White) is no longer a membership society producing a journal, but existing members and others are welcome to submit articles via Nick Wilde, who will remain secretary for the time being. Any submitted articles will be considered for publication on the website by Professor Bob Owens, Dr Mark Crees and Nick Wilde, to whom they should be sent at nickwilde@myphone.coop.

10th Anniversary **RS Thomas and ME Eldridge** Festival 13-16 June 2024

Ten years ago, the organiser of a one-day poetry event in the remote Welsh coastal village that was the former parish of R S Thomas, priest and poet, never imagined how it would change the course of her life when she invited a speaker from America to extend his UK lecture series on R S Thomas, before returning to the States.

This year, Susan Fogarty celebrates the 10th anniversary of the Annual Poetry & Arts Festival in Aberdaron, now the director of the RS Thomas & ME Eldridge Society. A festival that attracts international speakers and attendees and has three former Archbishops of Wales as its patrons. The festival has a different theme each year. 2024's is "*Spiritual Writers*" inspired by the soon to be published "*British Anglican Spiritual Writers of the 20th Century*" by Brill Publishing.

This theme extends the reach of the festival beyond the obvious poets and writers to also include Welsh hymn writers, spiritual works of art by M E Eldridge, the wife of R S Thomas, and experiential events, such as a one-day poetry writing workshop in the Thomas's cottage and walking in the Welsh coastal landscape which inspired their work.

Speakers are: Prof. Nicola Slee, feminist theologian and poet, with Rev. Canon Dr Mark Pryce, Director of Ministry, Birmingham Diocese; Nathan Munday, a minister and author of "*Whaling*"; Daniel Westover, an American R S Thomas scholar and professor of English at the University of East Tennessee; and Hilary Davies, poet and teacher of creative writing, who is leading a one-day creative writing workshop.

The **Oscar Wilde Society** Chairman Retires

(abridged message from Vanessa Heron, new Chairman).

[Editor's note: we do NOT need to know about every change in your committees! This one *is* rather special!]

The Oscar Wilde Society was founded in September 1990, by a small group of enthusiasts for Wilde and his works, gathered in the Queensberry Room at the Cafe Royal. This was a very appropriate venue. Here Oscar often entertained his guests, including his lover 'Bosie' – Lord Alfred Douglas – and here Bosie's father, the Marquess of Queensberry, objected violently to his son's association with Wilde. It was the Scarlet Marquess's infamous misspelt card 'To Oscar Wilde, posing somdomite' which precipitated Wilde's trial, imprisonment for homosexual offences, and subsequent exile.

The Society has a world-wide membership, predominantly in the UK, but with significant numbers in Europe, the USA, Canada, and Japan. Members include scholars and academics, writers on Wilde and his circle, collectors of Wildeana, other enthusiasts, and libraries and institutions. We have a wonderful and active President in Gyles Brandreth, and our Honorary Patrons include Stephen Fry and Oscar Wilde's grandson Merlin Holland.

The main man responsible for the success of the Society, who was there from the early days, is Don Mead, who served as the Chairman of the Oscar Wilde Society for 20+ years, stepping down at the end of 2023. He was also the editor of *The Wildean*, the Society's journal, from 1994 until 2016 and has contributed numerous articles to it and to Wilde research in general. The Oscar Wilde Society can't remember a time when Don was not in charge, but with his 95th birthday coming up in March, he has finally decided to retire from the Committee and from being Chairman to a new advisory role, Vice President. Don fully deserves his retirement.



We suspect that Don Mead knows practically everything there is to know about Oscar Wilde. If someone wants to know something, perhaps an obscure quote from a film, we ask Don. He knows the answer, or knows someone who does. Or has a book somewhere with it in. Don knows everybody who's anybody in the world of Wilde. And they know and appreciate him in turn.

Much of this of course will not change. Don, as our new Vice-President will still be at the centre of the Society and all we do. As our President Gyles Brandreth has said, 'In terms of scholarship, courtesy, leadership, style, generosity of spirit, integrity, thoughtfulness, chairing skill and speaking skill, you are matchless, Don. You are and have been simply the best. Congratulations - and thank you for your years of service and dedication to the Society. It will be wonderful to have you as Vice-President.'

The next issue...

The deadline for copy for the next newsletter is **31 July 2024**. Please send any contributions to: allianceoflitsocs@gmail.com preferably as Word documents in Arial, with jpg images where appropriate, with the subject header NEWSLETTER.

Subscriptions

This edition of Not Only, But ALSo is an example of the benefits of belonging to the Alliance of Literary Societies. As a reminder, these are the current fees:

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

Payment is due **every April**, so if your society has not already done so, it will be much appreciated if your treasurer can make the necessary arrangements, by setting up a Standing Order (preferred), or making a bank transfer or cheque on receipt of our invoice and reminder. Any questions: treasurer.als@outlook.com

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ALS Contacts

You can contact us about any other matter 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 (Dickens Fellowship)

Newsletter editor: Mark Davies (Lewis Carroll Society)

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