

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE ALLIANCE OF
LITERARY SOCIETIES HELD ON 30TH MAY 2015 AT THE KING'S MANOR, YORK,
AT 1.45 PM

1. Chairman's welcome: In the absence of the chairman, Linda Curry, Anita Fernandez-Young (Secretary; Dickens Fellowship) welcomed all delegates to the AGM. Angela Crow Woods read out the list of societies represented: the Jane Austen Society; Arnold Bennett Society; Brontë Society; John Clare Society; Dickens Fellowship; George Eliot Fellowship; Gaskell Society; A Ghostly Company; Johnson Society (Lichfield); Keats-Shelley Memorial Association; Charles Lamb Society; Philip Larkin Society; Leamington Literary Society; Beatrix Potter Society; Barbara Pym Society; Romany Society; Sherlock Holmes Society; Angela Thirkell Society; Tolkien Society; Trollope Society; Mary Webb Society; Virginia Woolf Society; ULEMLA; and the Charlotte M. Yonge Fellowship.
2. Apologies for absence: Apologies had been received from: the Children's Books History Society; Daresbury Lewis Carroll Society; Birmingham Dickens Fellowship; Fulke Greville Society; Richard Jefferies Society; Marlowe Society; Martineau Society; Siegfried Sassoon Fellowship; P.G. Wodehouse Society.
3. Acceptance of minutes: The minutes of the 2014 AGM were accepted with one correction: in item 9 the Charlotte M. Yonge Society was changed to the Charlotte M. Yonge Fellowship.
4. Matters arising: There were no matters arising.
5. (a) Chair's report: In the absence of the chairman, Anita Fernandez-Young read out her report. Linda expressed her regrets at not being able to attend and also regretted the absence of Jenny Uglow, who was unable to attend, due to family illness. Jenny was due to step down as president this year, but has kindly agreed to stay on until 2016. The committee has prepared a short-list of candidates and will be approaching these soon. Two ALS committee members have resigned this year: Thelma Thompson of the Shropshire Literary Society and Janet Allen of the Gaskell Society. Linda urged societies to embrace social media, as an effective way to reach new readers and enthusiasts. Finally, she urged societies to keep in touch, to make sure that their contact details are up-to-date, and to send announcements of events so that they can be included on the website and in the newsletter.
(b) Secretary's report: The ALS newsletter has been renamed *Not Only, But....*. The next issue will deal with public liability insurance and the storage of society archives. Please ensure that the newsletter is circulated electronically to members. There are vacant places on the ALS committee and nominations or volunteers would be welcome.
(c) Treasurer's report: The accounts for the year ending 31st March 2015 were prepared by our accountants, who continue to do this without charge. There was a surplus this year of £432; income was a little higher but expenses were considerably lower. Linda did her usual excellent job of reducing the cost of *ALSo*, committee travel expenses were reduced (and are now capped at £50), and there was no need to reprint flyers. The cost of last year's AGM was met by the Marlowe Society, who were thanked for a wonderful event. Societies who have not paid their subscription for two years are deemed to have resigned and these include: the Evelyn Waugh Society, Oscar Wilde Society, William Barnes Society, Dubliners Literary Circle, Kenneth Grahame Society, and the D.H. Lawrence Society. The Shropshire Literary Society has been wound up. Since last year's AGM the following groups have joined: the International John Bunyan Society, Winston Graham & Poldark Literary Society,

ULEMLA, and the War Poetry at Sea Project. At last year's AGM the ALS voted to award a small grant to the Scottish Writers' Centre, who have sent their grateful thanks.

(d) Editor's report: This year's theme of 'Literary Places' has elicited a bumper crop of essays on H.G. Wells, Richard Jefferies, John Clare and others. The theme for 2016 will be 'Literary Scandals'. At the autumn 2014 ALS committee meeting it was decided to cease printing *ALSo* and to distribute it solely electronically. The principal reason is cost, but the distribution of hard copies within societies was also problematical. In future, any society or person requiring a hard copy will be supplied with one on request, at nominal cost.

(e) Publicity officer's report: The new Trollope Society bookmarks have been produced to commemorate this year's AGM and Trollope's 200th birthday. Please help publicise the ALS by distributing these and our leaflets to bookshops, libraries, literary festivals, etc. Our strapline, 'From Austen to Zola, over 100 societies representing 50,000 readers', sadly had to be dropped, because the Zola Society is now defunct. Suggestions for a new one are welcomed. New leaflets will be produced in the coming year, and the list of societies will be updated. Jenny Uglow, our president, will be standing down in 2016 and the committee are searching for a replacement. We are exploring partnerships with publishers and are delighted to welcome Joe Whitlock Blundell, production director of the Folio Society, to the AGM. A show of hands by societies present demonstrated that about half of our societies currently use social media – Facebook and Twitter, predominantly – and the use of these by the ALS is being considered. However, it requires a person dedicated to updating information on a constant basis and societies who are willing to forward details of events, new books, etc. Volunteers were requested.

6. Election of Officers and Committee: Janet Allen of the Gaskell Society and Thelma Thompson of the Shropshire Literary Society are standing down. Volunteers were requested, but none were forthcoming. Janet Kennerley of the Gaskell Society suggested that societies could put forward candidates. The election of the existing committee was proposed by Michael Williamson of the Trollope Society and seconded by Janet Kennerley.

7. Campaigns: Elaine Peake of the George Eliot Society reported on the progress of converting Griff House in Nuneaton, Eliot's childhood home, into a visitors' centre. The owners, Whitbread, have provided a grant of £80,000 and fund raising is currently taking place. It is hoped to complete the renovation in the next 12 months. Janet Kennerley of the Gaskell Society reported that Plymouth Grove is now open and looks absolutely beautiful. Anita Fernandez-Young of the Dickens Fellowship reported that they have an interest in Gad's Hill and there is currently a lot of debate about the future of the house. She suggested that anyone interested in literary properties should look at the website of LitHouses, and she stressed that it is an important part of the ALS role to keep an eye on literary properties and to campaign on their behalf.

8. AGM 2016 and future AGMs: Alexandra Lesley, chairman of the Brontë Society, announced that the 2016 AGM will take place in Haworth. Early booking is advised as accommodation is limited. Unfortunately, the Katherine Mansfield Society are unable to host the AGM in Bath in 2018 as planned. Societies were asked to come forward. It is a wonderful opportunity to promote an author and it does not have to commemorate a special anniversary.

9. Any other business: Howard Gregg of the Trollope Society gave a vote of thanks to the ALS and requested that the best wishes of the meeting be sent to Jenny Uglow and Linda Curry, who were unable to attend. Robin Healey, a member of the ALS committee, representing the Charles Lamb Society, asked if there was interest in the ALS sponsoring a parody competition. This was approved. An entry fee would be required and profits would go to the ALS.

11. Date of next AGM: Alexandra said that they planned to hold the AGM on the same weekend, but David Smith of the Johnson Society pointed out that this will be the Bank Holiday weekend. She will discuss this with the Brontë Society committee and a new date will be set, which will be circulated to ALS member societies as soon as possible.