



## Not Only, But ALSO: Autumn 2023

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## The 2023 AGM in Winchester, hosted by the Charlotte M. Yonge Fellowship, 21 to 23 April, provides some bonus surprises ...

Colin Grestorex, Johnson Society – photos by the author

There are always a few pleasant surprises from a visit to the Alliance of Literary Societies (ALS) AGM weekend. More about the 2023 ALS surprises at St Swithun's School later.

As one of the representatives of the Johnson Society of Lichfield, it was good to meet up with familiar contacts of the other societies' members. Our host society was the Charlotte M. Yonge Fellowship. Yonge was born and lived in Otterbourne, near Winchester. We were welcomed by Alys Blakeway, the host society's chair, and Marty Ross, the ALS chair, also representing the Johnson Society of Lichfield.



James Naughtie, the BBC presenter, had recently accepted the position of President of the ALS. He gave his inaugural presidential address and did not hold back on his views of the state of political culture. In the current political environment existing in the USA, UK and, in particular, Scotland (the talk was at a low point of the SNP fortunes), he said that the collective activities of societies

were part of the answer. He therefore saw a significant role for organisations such as the ALS. The ALS was founded in 1973 to save a Dickens property from destruction and this was a prime example of what the ALS could achieve from collective campaigning. He declared his love of literature and the rich culture of the UK. He added that social media, by comparison, was toxic, best described as a shouting match, and that the media were guilty of influencing this practice.

The work and life of Charlotte Mary Yonge were then described by novelist, Penelope Wallace, and Dr Julia Courtney, retired Fellow of the Open University, and finally by Dr Clemence Schultze. Charlotte was an English novelist (1823–1901). While her most famous work, *The Heir of Redclyffe*, was a novel for adults, she also wrote stories for children, some non-fiction and a wide range of poetry and plays.

John Keble, a leading voice in the Anglican Church, had a strong influence over Charlotte's thinking. Enormously popular in her lifetime, Yonge was read and referenced by Virginia Wolfe, Agatha Christie and Barbara Pym. The Charlotte M. Yonge Fellowship were proud to host the ALS AGM weekend in her 200<sup>th</sup> year and also during the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ALS.

The AGM itself was chaired by Marty Ross, who reminded members of the sad passing of the former Chairman, Linda Curry, after a period of ill-health. There had been other committee resignations of Mark Green (as Secretary) and Cally Phillips, Jodie Robson and Frieda Barker from other roles during the year. Marty was duly re-elected as Chairman with Jeremy Mitchell (Edward Thomas

Fellowship) as Treasurer for the forthcoming year. Anita Fernandez-Young of the Dickens Fellowship became Secretary.

Anita Fernandez-Young had a slot on the agenda to talk about '50 Years of the ALS'. She gave more detail of the ALS campaign in 1973 to save 11 Ordnance Terrace, Chatham, Charles Dickens' childhood home. There were 32 informally involved member organisations in the early days of the group, but only 14 when it was formalised in 1978. There are now over 100 member groups. Early meetings were mainly held at the Birmingham and Midland Institute building.

A final talk (remotely from Canada) on Victorian deathbeds by Judith Flanders was a strange, but interesting, way to end the day.

One treat from the AGM was to see St Swithun's School, the venue for Saturday's talks and AGM. It is an independent day, weekly and full-boarding school, for girls in Winchester. It is named after St Swithun, the Anglo-Saxon bishop and patron saint of Winchester Cathedral. There are extensive sports facilities, including nine lacrosse pitches, 13 tennis courts (one indoors), six netball courts, a 25-meter indoor swimming pool and a multi-purpose sports hall. 'Old Swithunites' include actress Emma Chambers (1964–2018) and Fi Glover (born 1969), the BBC radio presenter.

Some of us had already 'met' James Naughtie during an online get together earlier in April, hosted by the ALS. Meeting him in person at Winchester allowed me to speak with him about the BBC and his involvement with the corporation. He is still an employee (rather than freelance), but is, in not being tied to the *Today* programme on Radio 4, able to be more selective about his work.

He enjoys being able to report from both sides of 'The Pond' and was due another visit to the United States to cover the Biden and Trump campaigns. At the time of the ALS weekend, he was looking forward to being one of the main BBC Radio anchors to cover the King's Coronation events. However, he was not looking forward to being located for it atop of an 18 feet ladder within a temporary broadcast box, where there was no toilet facility and a whole day to be on air!

Other events for the AGM delegates over the weekend were a visit to the Hampshire Archives and Local Studies to see a Charlotte M. Yonge display in the foyer, and an informal supper Friday night with entertainment by a select group of literary ladies: Yonge, Austen, Burney and Edgeworth. Saturday night we had dinner in the grounds of Winchester Cathedral, concluding with the traditional readings from ALS authors. On the Sunday there was a Charlotte M. Yonge Bicentenary Walk around Winchester, which included access to two privately owned houses with Yonge connections. It was interesting to see an author-based walk, considering that, in the last few years, I have organised the Johnson Friendship Walks to and from the Johnson Willow, taking in the city sites connected to the great Lichfield writer.



The Sunday walk, outside Winchester Cathedral

# Best-selling/most popular titles of 1973/1974

prepared for the ALS 50<sup>th</sup>-anniversary AGM in May 2023:

## Publishers Weekly (USA)

1. *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* Richard Bach
2. *Once Is Not Enough* Jacqueline Susann
3. *Breakfast of Champions* Kurt Vonnegut
4. *The Odessa File* Frederick Forsyth
5. *Burr* Gore Vidal
6. *The Hollow Hills* Mary Stewart
7. *Evening in Byzantium* Irwin Shaw
8. *The Matlock Paper* Robert Ludlum
9. *The Billion Dollar Sure Thing* Paul E Erdman
10. *The Honorary Consul* Graham Greene

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Books of 1973 [but are they all?!] 'most frequently added to Goodreads members' shelves' (as of March 2023)

1. *The Princess Bride* William Goldman
2. *Breakfast of Champions* Kurt Vonnegut Jr.
3. *Rendezvous with Rama* Arthur C. Clarke
4. *Sybil* Flora Rheta Schreiber
5. *Gravity's Rainbow* Thomas Pynchon
6. *Sula* Toni Morrison
7. *A Wind in the Door* Madeleine l'Engle
8. *On Photography* Susan Sontag
9. *Knowing God* J. I. Packer
10. *The Gulag Archipelago* Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

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The first Sunday Times best-sellers' list was published on 14 April 1974, within the first year of the ALS' creation. These were the top ten fiction books sold in a representative 300 outlets that week:

1. *Jaws* Peter Benchley
2. *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* Iris Murdoch
3. *Burr* Gore Vidal
4. *Widow of Windsor* Jean Plaidy
5. *The Mollen Girl* Catherine Cookson
6. *The Cooler* George Markstein
7. *Black as He's Painted* Ngaio Marsh
8. *Snare of the Hunter* Helen MacInnes
9. *Eagle in the Sky* Wilbur Smith
10. *The Sunday Woman* Carlo Fruttero & Franco Lucentini

# The 2024 ALS AGM in the Lake District, to be hosted by the Arthur Ransome Society

Amanda Ardagh-Walter

The ALS AGM next year will be hosted by The Arthur Ransome Society and we will be meeting in the glorious Lake District, a place which was very close to Arthur Ransome's heart. The dates are **17th May-19th May 2024** and the venue for the meeting will be The Windermere Jetty Museum in Bowness-on-Windermere. The meal on Friday night and everything on Saturday will be based in Bowness. On Sunday we will head across to Coniston where there will be a variety of options: the museum in Coniston, a cruise around Coniston Water on the Gondola ferry, Brantwood (John Ruskin's home) which could be a good place for lunch and Bank Ground Farm for afternoon tea. If you feel that we are over-focused on food, I would like to point out that there is a very good literary reason for this: read any of the *Swallows and Amazons* books and you will rapidly discover how much the children eat!

There will be plenty of time to talk about books and our favourite authors, one of the most charming parts of these events is conversations with other enthusiasts. There will be talks about Arthur Ransome, his links with other authors and also a talk on the boat *Nancy Blackett* as a literary artefact, and her subsequent life promoting Ransome.

The Lake District is full of literary associations, so perhaps you might want to plan your own visits while you are in the area.

Recommended reading for the weekend is *Swallows and Amazons*, the first of the series, and *We Didn't Mean to Go to Sea*. The relevance of the second one is that the boat is accurately based upon the *Nancy Blackett* and reading the story will add to your enjoyment of the talk.

Entertainment for the Friday evening is at an embryonic stage and we will, in ALS tradition, invite societies to provide readings at Saturday's evening meal.

Booking accommodation in good time (now!) is advised as it can be very busy in this area in May. A list of suggestions is available on the ALS website in the AGM section.

So, we warmly invite you to come and join us.



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## ALS COMMITTEE

We are delighted to welcome Susan Bailes, of the **Children's Books History Society**, and Dominic Edwardes, of the **Trollope Society**, to the ALS committee. However, we would love to have some more, so please consider joining us. We meet once a year in person and once via Zoom, in addition to getting together over the AGM weekend. It is not onerous, and it is interesting and fun. Please contact me via the ALS email: [allianceoflitsocs@gmail.com](mailto:allianceoflitsocs@gmail.com).

Marty Ross, ALS Chair

Meanwhile, **three new member societies** are: **Anne Lister Society**; **De Vere Society** and **T E Lawrence Society**.

## ALS Zoom Session with James Naughtie 4 April 2023

*Maggie Parsons, Barbara Pym Society*



One evening at the beginning of April ALS members had the opportunity to meet our new President James Naughtie virtually on Zoom and to ask him questions. Twenty-six people attended the session, representing 16 literary societies for a session that lasted for one and a half hours. James was very enthusiastic and erudite in his responses to a variety of questions. He began by saying how thrilled he was to be part of the ALS and pledged to do anything he could to assist and promote the work of the ALS. He said that some of the writers of member societies he knew well and others less so and that was the joy of belonging. We learnt he would have enjoyed spending a night out with Charles Dickens, given that prior to going on stage to perform a reading from his books, Dickens would drink a pint of sherry. According to Claire Tomalin he was also a great dancer.

He was asked by Penelope Wallace (Charlotte M Yonge Fellowship) about Scottish writers and James said he grew up with R L Stevenson's *Kidnapped* and *Treasure Island* and feels he is an underrated but wonderful writer and a great poet too. He also admired Walter Scott saying 'he took Europe by storm in 1830 although he did go on a bit; you can

easily skip 20 pages'. He agreed with Seamus Heaney in thinking that Norman MacCaig should have been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

When questioned about his own novel *Paris Spring* set in 1968 he said he had enjoyed researching it and had tried to create the atmosphere of what it was like to have been there. He told us that a woman who had studied at the Sorbonne at the time had come to a book signing bringing with her a cobblestone she had picked up from the Left Bank in 1968 and kept on her mantelpiece ever since.

His response to the question from Mark Davies (Lewis Carroll Society): 'Do you read much historical fiction and how do you feel about the blurring of fiction and fact?' was 'If it works and you can convince the reader it's fine; if rules are broken with gusto and elan that's fine too'.

Tracey Hayes (Thomas Hardy Society) wanted to know his views on Hardy and he cited 'The Darkling Thrush' as a wonderful poem; he had given a copy of it to his colleague Fergal Keane as an 'uplift' during the Pandemic. He had read *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* when he was 16 in the beautiful edition owned by his father.

Antionette from the Norman Nicholson Society was interested in what he felt about the recent Literacy Trust's Annual Survey for Children which found that fewer than 3 in 10 of the young people aged 8 to 18 they interviewed said they read daily and wondered what it would take to encourage younger readers. James said it was depressing, but he felt it was important that young people are exposed as much as possible to the printed word. He mentioned his disappointment in seeing the leader of Aberdeenshire County Council justifying the closure of six libraries on the grounds that a 'a building does not teach people to read'. He has a

new grandchild himself and is aware that in the past reading was a great distraction for children, but now there are so many others. He was encouraged by seeing children queuing at a book festival to get their books signed by Michael Morpurgo. He stated, 'This stuff matters: we shouldn't be too snooty about how people are sent to books often by television adaptations'. He encouraged all societies to encourage interest in their authors. He remembered how he was 'hooked' on *Treasure Island* by hearing the tapping of Blind Pugh's stick and wanting to know how it would end.

Linda Hart (Housman Society) asked if he thought that celebrity culture had taken over bookshop shelves. James agreed that 'there is a lot of stuff that has flattened the landscape for other writers', but he is cheered by the number of Literary Festivals which are happening in every decent-sized town and have become a signpost of our culture and that good writing will rise to the top.

The session ended with James saying, when asked which character in *Alice in Wonderland* he most identified with, The White Rabbit, as it reflected himself 'rushing hither and thither'. He concluded by stating he was hugely honoured to be part of the ALS and the wonderful members who promote, defend and celebrate their authors and realise the importance of our written culture.



... which leads nicely to:

## New public memorial to Lewis Carroll in Oxford

On 23 May the writer and broadcaster Gyles Brandreth unveiled a plaque at Folly Bridge in Oxford. It commemorates the boat trip of 4 July 1862 during which the Oxford don Charles Lutwidge Dodgson ('Lewis Carroll') first told the story of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to the Dean of Christ Church's daughters, Alice Liddell and her two sisters.

The Thames influenced the story in many ways, with events and locations on or near the river inspiring some of the episodes and characters. This is the first permanent public memorial to Carroll and his internationally famous book in the city in which he lived all his adult life and where Alice resided until her marriage in 1880.

Brandreth – another White Rabbit, perhaps? – is a former Oxford student, is a huge fan of Alice, especially *Through the Looking-Glass*, and has written an Alicean play and designed a Wonderland board game. Among others present at the ceremony were Professor Sarah Foot, the new Dean of Christ Church; the newly appointed Lord Mayor of Oxford, Lubna Arshad; and representatives of the Liddell and Dodgson families, as shown here, with Brian Sibley, President of the Lewis Carroll Society on the right:



Photo: David Weeks

# Copyright or ‘copywrong’ – don’t fall foul of a complex law

Jeremy Mitchell, Edward Thomas Fellowship

The idea for this interactive session with copyright lawyers Marriott Harrison LLP came about after an enquiry about Copyright from an ALS who had been sent a demand for payment following an alleged breach of payment, and as a part of the ALS Committee’s wish to ‘add value’ for members.

Through some contacts of our Chair, Marty Ross, we were able to answer the initial enquiries but the whole area of Copyright law is so convoluted that we felt that putting this session together, based on some case studies provided by ALS members, and delivered by Marriott Harrison LLP (MH), who had provided the initial advice, seemed like a good idea.

A date of Thursday 20 July was set for the session and a presentation was put together by solicitor Joshua Little, together with his colleagues Sadie Jacob, Elisabetta Bestetti, Rory Duthie and Tilly Tribe, who between them covered everything from the basics, such as the different types of copyright; Statute Law covering ‘Periods of Protection’ (different for each type, of course!); Moral Rights; Exceptions (just to complicate matters!); to the “2039” rule (don’t ask but relates largely to pre-1989 unpublished works and Derivative Works: I said it was complex!)

Various different member scenarios were used to contextualise the content before we moved on (as if we weren’t bamboozled already!) to look briefly at Intellectual Property, Trade Marks and finishing with Unregistered Trade Marks followed by a brief Q&A session.

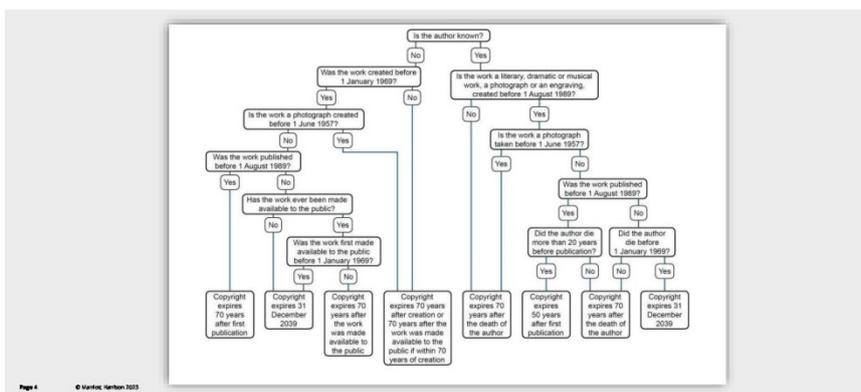
All in all it was felt to be a very informative and helpful meeting by all who attended – 40 society members and representatives were registered – and if anything we all came away with the understanding that the law cannot be ‘second-guessed’. In that respect, we are grateful that Josh has offered Marriott Harrison as an initial point of call if ALS members have any queries in these areas covered and members should send an email, confirming they are members of the ALS, to [ip@marriottharrison.co.uk](mailto:ip@marriottharrison.co.uk).

Slides from the presentation will be going out to all attendees, and other ALS members may request a copy from Jeremy Mitchell – [treasurer.als@outlook.com](mailto:treasurer.als@outlook.com).

We would like to run at least two of these a year and if any Member Societies have any ideas for sessions we would be pleased to hear from you - <https://allianceofliterarysocieties.wordpress.com/contact-us/>

## Period of Protection

MARRIOTT HARRISON



## Society of the Month

This new feature on the ALS website has been a tremendous success, with about 20 societies appearing so far. However, we are running out of entries. If your society has not yet been represented, please send us an entry about your author and a photo (with no copyright issues, please).

You can use the past entries as a template for your entry and you can also see which societies have already been represented at:

<https://allianceofliterarysocieties.wordpress.com/society-of-the-month/>

Please send your entries to [allianceoflitsocs@gmail.com](mailto:allianceoflitsocs@gmail.com). We'd like to keep this going until all 100+ societies have been featured!

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## Joining the Literary Tweeters

*Lyn Lockwood, Philip Larkin Society*

We all like to play that game from time to time of wondering what our historical literary figures would make of social media. As deputy chair of the Philip Larkin Society this question often comes up. We generally agree that Betjeman would be all over TikTok and Insta (he embraced new media and new ways of communicating) but Larkin would possibly have declined an invitation to be your new Facebook friend (he hated tv and even found the radio annoying). Most literary societies have some kind of social media presence now because it is generally accepted that's how most organisations communicate with their members and with each other. But this is not always easy to manage.

When we first started running the Larkin Twitter account we were told, 'Getting a decent number of followers and

interactions on Twitter or Instagram (so that it makes the account worthwhile) can be achieved as long as you have the following: regular posts (not just retweets), aiming for at least 3 a week, good quality images, relevant and original content.' A pretty tall order! We started off finding our feet: retweeting news about Hull, pictures of toads and lawnmowers, random lines from poems. It all felt rather experimental. But gradually we found our rhythm and we now have some regular Tweeters who interact with us brilliantly, and we now have over 4500 followers, with new people following every day. Our most popular tweets chime with issues and events of the day, such as a wonderful photo of the new fountain opened in Hull on 8th July this year that had a line of Larkin around the base; this had over 100 'likes'. During a spate of thunderstorms in June, a simple picture of Larkin and his mother Eva (who hated thunderstorms) and a line of Larkin's poem exploring this (Mother, Summer, I) also had over 100 likes and over 6000 interactions. There are 3 of us who hold the login for @plsoc and that really helps to spread the workload. We have attracted new members and been able to interact with people from all around the world.

When I joined the committee of the ALS last year, there were three social media outlets: Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, all of which were largely dormant. When social media accounts go quiet, people often unfollow them so they start to wither. We had a good look at all three and across the committee as to where we felt our strengths lay. None of us had much appetite for Instagram. Our Facebook following was reasonable as was our Twitter account. But when we started to survey which literary societies were present on FB and Twitter, it seemed that Twitter was a more obvious forum for the

ALS. Other active Twitter accounts include the @BetjemanSociety, @DracSoc, @BennettSoc, @Barbara\_Pym and of course our President James Naughtie at @naughtiej, so thank you to these societies and all the others that are making Twitter a more pleasant and interesting place to be.

So, if you want to interact with us on Twitter at @alliancelitsocs then it would be great to see you there. We are slowly building up our followers, with a couple of new people coming along every week. It's been a great place to celebrate our Society of the Month; July was the Norman Nicholson Society, for example, who are also very interactive on Twitter. Previous societies have included the Zola Readers and the Martineau Society. Our fellow tweeters at the Charlotte M Yonge Society @m\_yonge also tweeted about hosting the ALS conference earlier this year. Looking at your 'follower' list can give you a good idea of who is interested in your society, and if you want to contact anyone there you have an easy way of doing so via direct messages.

So should lit socs have a social media presence? I think so, as long as they can manage it. I think only having one person managing the 'socials' can be quite a tall order, but if you've got a few volunteers that can share the log in, then it can become a fun and lively place to be. It can feel like an extra task on top of organising events, producing newsletters, maintaining websites, and all the other things that literary societies do so we all have to be realistic about what we can manage but if you are lucky enough to have keen social media people then it can be a great asset. Here at the ALS we would love to make @alliancelitsocs a resource that works for all our members and can be used by our members.

We are actively looking for volunteers to help us grow our Twitter account, helping us to tweet about the ALS, our member societies and literature in general. If you are interested, please email me at [lynlockwood70@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:lynlockwood70@yahoo.co.uk). And to all our lit soc tweeters - please follow us, copy us into your tweets, like and retweet, it really helps us to grow. If you have any ideas for some shared or joint tweeting then we are interested in collaborating with our member societies so they can contribute to the ALS Twitter account and maybe even do some live tweeting - a sort of social media 'takeover'. You can DM us at our Twitter account, email us at [allianceoflitsocs@gmail.com](mailto:allianceoflitsocs@gmail.com) or email me personally if you would like to know more.

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### **Mailing publications to EU addresses**

*Chris Thomas, Powys Society*

The Powys Society has an international membership with addresses located in the EU as well as ROW mostly in USA, Canada and Australia. We ask a third party to print and mail our Newsletter 3 times per year and our scholarly Journal annually in July each year.

We have not encountered any problems with mailing publications to addresses overseas outside the EU where our Newsletter is treated with a value *de minimis* and so gets through without duty charged.

Problems occur within the EU where duty is charged even if a CN22 customs declaration is attached to the envelope. This problem appears to be due to changes in EU import regulations although we have noticed that a local tax is not always imposed universally in the same EU country so there are variations at a local level.

Naturally our EU members object to having to pay duty on what we consider is a free publication and one of the benefits of their membership of the Society. But if a recipient doesn't pay local duty when requested the item is not delivered and may be either destroyed or returned to the sender.

We are considering ways in which we might counter this situation including absorbing the costs of local duties ourselves. We already offer all our members the opportunity to access the Newsletter and Journal on line through our website but most members still prefer to receive a hard paper copy through the post.

I would be very interested to receive any feedback from other societies and learn if they have also encountered this same problem and whether they have any solutions to help overcome this issue for our members.

[chris.d.thomas@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:chris.d.thomas@hotmail.co.uk)

[www.powys-society.org](http://www.powys-society.org)

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## Subscriptions

This edition of Not Only, But ALSO is an example of the benefits of belonging to an organisation such as 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

For overseas membership, please add £4 to the above.

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 payments on receipt of our invoice and reminder. Any questions can be sent to:

[treasurer.als@outlook.com](mailto:treasurer.als@outlook.com)

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## And finally...

This newsletter is your chance to highlight your successes, difficulties, advice and any other information. Please use it!

The deadline for copy for the next newsletter is **1 February 2024**. Please send any contributions, with images where appropriate, to [allianceoflitsocs@gmail.com](mailto:allianceoflitsocs@gmail.com) with the subject header NEWSLETTER

## ALS Contacts

You can also contact us about other matters at [allianceoflitsocs@gmail.com](mailto: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)

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