



CANTERBURY COMMEMORATION SOCIETY

Founded in 1996 to celebrate the history and heritage of Canterbury
Registered charity no. 1057977 www.cantcommsoc.co.uk

Minutes of the 29th Annual General Meeting

6.45 pm on Tuesday 3 July 2025

At St Peter's Anglican Church, Canterbury

Present:

22 members of the Society attended. The meeting was quorate.

1. Apologies for absence

Gillian Rushton, Charlotte Cornell.

2. Minutes of Last Annual General Meeting

The minutes of the 28th Annual General Meeting held on 2 July 2024 were approved. There were no matters arising.

3. Chair's Report

- Stewart Ross presented his report on the past year's activities of the Society.
- He said:

"After last year's AGM, there followed the customary fallow August before, faces bronzed and hearts aglow with rekindled enthusiasm, the Society and its band of diligent trustees burst into life with the dramatic installation and illumination in the River Stour of Jason deCaires Taylor's new, Ophelia-esque Alluvia statue, generously funded by our President and Paul Abbott. The initially controversial piece attracted widespread attention from the national media, preparing the way for even more coverage for CCS in early 2025. Our special thanks are due to Café des Amis wiring up the statue from their kitchen and to the intrepid American tourist who waded into the Stour in her knickers to clear away a few weeds.

Leaving Alluvia glowing amid the silt, off we went on Charlotte Cornell's long-awaited and much anticipated historical tour of the city's pubs. The sold-out event was a huge success and led to a request that it be repeated. The play readings resumed in September, too, kicking off with Somerset Maugham, a new and hugely enjoyable entry on our list of Canterbury playwrights. Marlowe's Tamburlaine part I followed, with a selection of Joseph Conrad's works, celebrating the centenary of his death, in October. The latter occasion

was much enjoyed, despite some of the readers sharing in public their ambivalent attitude towards the author's talents.

Goran Stefanovski's modern drama *Shades of Babel* was also enjoyably read in November, a month that also saw the Society's stall attracting considerable attention at a Heritage Expo in the Westgate Hall. The calendar year then rounded off with a cracking Christmas Party at which trusty trustee Carolyn Oulton stretched her evidence to the limit with a delightful talk on Dickens and Canterbury before the evening relaxed into seasonal revelry.

No sooner had the new year been rung in than we were off again, this time with a fine ceremony in St Mildred's Church to mark the unveiling of a new monument board, partly funded by the generosity of the King's School, to Councillor Simmons, the city's remarkable 18th century benefactor. Our Secretary, Rev Brian McHenry, brought a suitably clerical tone to the proceedings with a witty sermon at matins and apposite prayers before a small crowd of onlookers in the churchyard.

Our long-awaited event on 25 February 2025 attracted a vastly larger crowd. Shortly before midday, a sleek cavalcade of black cars drew up in the High Street outside the Beaney House of Art and Knowledge, and Her majesty Queen Camilla emerged to unveil our magnum opus of the past five years, Christine Charlesworth's statue of Aphra Behn. The event, which attracted the widespread attention of the media, both local and national, was rounded off with a cheerful and exceptionally well-attended reception in the Abode Hotel. The only small hiccoughs in an otherwise perfect day were technical: the failure of the Lord Mayor's microphone and our new card readers' inability to collect a single penny from our guests.

Things returned to normal in March when Rory Loughnane trailed his forthcoming book on the young Shakespeare in a fascinating talk on the English theatre in the (later) 1580s. Christopher Marlowe was in evidence, too, of course, and the audience was especially interested in the extent to which he and Shakespeare cooperated.

The play readings got going in April 2025 with Maugham's startlingly modern *The Sacred Flame*, followed in May by Aphra Behn's unusual and most enjoyably accessible *The Roundheads*. We rounded off the first half of the season with another cracker, Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*. While this was going on, three of our trustees were acting as midwives, facilitating the birth of the Friends of Canterbury Cemetery. Focus returned to the headstones and ancient bones when former trustee Julian Waltho, along with cemetery warden Jonathon Kreffer, devised an information board commemorating the victims of the 1942 Blitzes buried in the cemetery. Rev McHenry was again on hand to give the civic unveiling an appropriately religious aura.

The fundraising summer party three days ago was larger and more spectacular than ever, with the return of the pig, extracts from Aphra's plays performed by the Canterbury Shakespeare Festival, and lashings of ice cream. It raised perhaps £2,000 for our funds, largely from a splendid raffle with prizes donated by generous individuals and supportive local businesses.

Behind the scenes, the Society's membership held steady at around 100, three new corporate sponsors were added (Deals Daddy, Godwin Curtis and Abbott Construction, to whom we are most grateful), and we were delighted when Paul Roberts Canterbury kindly agreed to become our primary sponsor, giving us a most welcome reliable income stream. Our website has been undated, with more on its education section, including material previously found on the A is for Aphra site. We have also donated a set of Aphra's works to the Beaney and drawn up a new contract with St Peter's Anglican Church as a venue.

At the time of writing, the future looks as busy as ever with readings, talks and a range of commemorative projects. At the top of our list are blue plaques on the Longport wall of St Augustine's Abbey, further blue plaques within city, a Michael Steed memorial in the castle grounds commemorating all those – Jews as well as all denominations of Christianity – who suffered for their faith or ethnicity over the centuries, and support for a refurbished World War II Anderson shelter in the Franciscan Gardens.

Swirling in the smoke of pipes are dreams of a roundabout commemorating the burgeoning local wine industry, and statues or models of children's favourites of local provenance, such as Rupert Bear and Ivor the Engine.

I find just reading about the events of the past year and the possibilities that lie ahead utterly exhausting! This is the only cloud on our horizon: the Society's long-suffering trustees are overworked and several of them, me included, are nearing their sell-by date. If the organisation is to continue with the same degree of vigour and creativity as seen over the past five years, replacements and reinforcements are urgently needed. Your City Needs You!

In the meantime, I take this opportunity to thank most warmly all who have done so much for the Society over the past year, supporters (both royal and plebian), members, sponsors and those magnificent trustees. Politicians liked to talk of a Big Society without ever stating clearly quite what they meant – they should have visited Canterbury to find out."

- The report was accepted, with warm thanks to Stewart for his enthusiastic and never-flagging leadership of the Society. He was described as the Society's 'motor'.

4. Report and Accounts for the year ended 28 February 2025

- Alan Turner presented the report and accounts.
- The year had been very successful.
- Subscriptions from members and corporate sponsors have increased.
- The Society received £3K from the Whitstable Harbour Board for the project telling the history of the Harbour a hundred years ago. The Society had received £5k from another source. £1300 had been donated towards the Aphra Behn statue fund. Our total income was £14000.
- How had the Society spent its money? Some £2K was spent on IT support (Mr Ed Ludlow, our consultant) and £300 on settling a copyright dispute. Our central expenses are met through subscriptions and gift aid. Over £21K was available for general purposes. Some £66K was raised over the years in an extraordinary effort to raise the funds for the Aphra statue. There was a surplus from the Whitstable Harbour project. The executors of the estate of Mr Brian Porter, who had donated the money for the project, gave the Society permission to use the surplus for its other projects, which was very generous of them. The Society had a bequest from Michael Steed of £4500 for the memorial in the Castle grounds to those who had died for their faith or their ethnicity.
- The report and the accounts for the year which ended 28 February 2025 were accepted.

5. Election of Hon. President

- Paul Roberts was re-elected the President with acclaim and thanks for his support of the Society.

6. Hon. Vice Presidents

- The meeting noted that Professor Elaine Hobby, George Metcalfe and Jenny Uglow OBE had previously been appointed Hon. Vice Presidents under clause 9(1) of the Society's constitution.

7. Election of officers and trustees

- The following elections took place
 - ❖ Chair: Stewart Ross
 - ❖ Vice-Chair: Charlotte Cornell
 - ❖ Treasurer: Alan Turner
 - ❖ Secretary: Brian McHenry
 - ❖ Members of the Executive Committee: Andrew Webster, Carolyn Oulton, Hilary Brian, Connie Nolan, Gillian Rushton, Nicola Waddington and Sean Mohan.¹

8. AOB

- There was no further business.

The AGM concluded at 7pm.

¹ Clause 10(1) of the Constitution provides for up to eight persons to be elected as trustees at the AGM, in addition to the four officers.