



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 30th Annual General Meeting

6.15 pm on Wednesday 1 July 2026

At St Paul's Church, Church Street St Paul's, Canterbury

Present

14 members attended the meeting. It was quorate.

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from David Clarke, Guy Mayhew and Paul Roberts.

2. Minutes of Last Annual General Meeting

The minutes of the 29th Annual General Meeting held on 3 July 2025 were approved as a true and accurate record. There were no matters arising.

3. Chair's Report

- Stewart Ross, Chair, presented his report on the Society's activities during 2025–26. The full report, for the interest of members, is attached to these minutes.
- Stewart highlighted the successful first phase of the Blue Plaques programme at St Augustine's Abbey, the establishment of a dedicated Blue Plaques Working Group, progress on the Michael Steed Toleration Memorial, preparations for Heritage Expo 26, support for Canterbury's UNESCO City of Literature bid, the continuation of play readings, talks and fundraising events, and thanked trustees, sponsors and volunteers for their work.
- The Chair announced his intention to step down as Chair at the end of the calendar year after six years in office on 31 December 2026.
- The report was accepted with thanks.

4. Report and Accounts for the year ended 28 February 2026

- Sean Mohan presented the report and accounts.
- Tribute was paid to the society's great friend, the late Alan Turner, for his longstanding service as Treasurer.
- The Society's finances were reported to be stable, with reserves maintained for the Blue Plaques programme and the Michael Steed Toleration Memorial. Recent fundraising, sponsorship and Gift Aid income were noted positively.

- The report and accounts for the year ended 28 February 2026 were accepted.

5. Election of Hon. President

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

6. Hon. Vice Presidents

- The meeting noted that Professor Elaine Hobby, George Metcalfe and Jenny Uglow OBE continue as Honorary Vice Presidents.

7. Election of officers and trustees

- The following elections took place, with appropriate proposers and seconders from members attending:
 - Chair: Stewart Ross
 - Vice Chair: Charlotte Cornell
 - Treasurer: Sean Mohan
 - Secretary: Brian McHenry
 - Executive Committee: Alan Barnett, Andrew Webster, Carolyn Oulton, Connie Nolan, Gillian Rushton and Nicola Waddington.

8. AOB

- It was agreed that a digital copy of the Chair's report would be circulated with the minutes of the meeting.
- There being no further business, the meeting concluded before the Society's guest lecture.
- The meeting concluded at 7pm, with the welcome news of England's world cup goal in the game against DR Congo.

Chair report for the year ended 1 July 2026

This was the year the Society mirrored the trend in global conflict. It switched from the nuclear option, big projects like high-cost statues, to drone warfare in the form of multiple smaller missions such as blue memorial plaques. The first wave came with the impressive display of large blue plaques that appeared on the external wall of St Augustine's Abbey, Longport. The original plan, conceived with The Canterbury Society, was for seven plaques. This rose to eight when a little-known but vociferous charity, the Nubian Jak Trust, came in with the offer of funding for a plaque for St Adrian. The plaque appeared, thanks largely to the patient and painstaking labours of Brian McHenry. Sadly, the funding did not. However, representatives of the Trust did, dominating the launch ceremony with striking array and rousing speeches. Alas, their offer to fund the event also came to nothing. Nonetheless, the plaques were funded and installed, and now stand as impressive monuments to both distinguished inmates of the Abbey and the work of the Society.

The second Blue Plaque wave was launched with the formation of a dental-sounding Plaque Group. Its first task was asking the public who or what they would like to see commemorated, and where. The next task was to sift through fifty responses. Out went the trivial, the unworthy and the undead, the out-of-city, the tediously parochial, the royal, and the archepiscopal (though after much lobbying Archbishop Sigeric managed to sneak in under the radar by disguising himself as a pilgrimage route). A shortlist of twenty-two remained.

With one eye on the tourist industry, we chose to commemorate a trio of rebels and rogues, including the Hermit Blewbeard and Mary Modders, the celebrated seventeenth-century bigamist fraudster, alongside a galaxy of warriors, scholars, scientists, creatives, pioneers, and a distinguished medieval Jewish banker. Fourteen of these proposals came with generous offers of funding. Our next steps, long and frequently frustrating, involved verification of sites and credentials, and seeking various permissions. As with HS2, planning is proving an expensive hurdle. Nevertheless, five plaques have already been cast and are ready for installation. A further six are with the city planners, three await text for our forthcoming blue plaque website, and eight await permission from the owners of

the buildings concerned. The new plaques will all bear a QR code taking the viewer to a site on the CCS website listing all the city's monuments and giving further information about each plaque, with the name of its sponsor.

At the time of writing, all but two or three plaques are fully or partially funded. Paying for these, for planning permissions, for the installation of all twenty-two and for some sort of unveiling ceremony will be met by further fundraising and from the Society's own coffers. If a third round of blue plaques ever emerges, may the first be dedicated to the current group of plaquers, whose sterling work will leave our city an unarguably more interesting place.

The year's other monument began in the head and heart of our past President, Michael Steed. Irked by a memorial dedicated exclusively to the city's Tudor Protestant martyrs, he wanted one to all Tudor martyrs. He left a substantial bequest to bring this about. With the consent of his executors, the brief was broadened to all from the city who, over the centuries, were persecuted for their faith or ethnicity. The art students from East Kent College commissioned by the Society to design the memorial, have broadened its title broadened and given it a positive twist: The Michael Steed Toleration Memorial. We have shortlisted two designs (Waves and Dove), maquettes of which are open to public consultation via the Society's website and social media platforms. The memorial will stand in the grounds of the refurbished castle.

Three other projects were discussed during the year. The first, a Canterbury Commemorative Quilt, is on hold. The idea of a Canterbury Wine Roundabout is similarly in abeyance because we lack someone to make it their personal mission. A third project, a hi-tech digital reproduction of Corpus Christie Cambridge's portrait of Christopher Marlowe (supposedly), may come to fruition over the coming year. Our vigorous Vice-Chair is eager to see this happen.

Picking up from where the Canterbury Society blazed such a successful trail a couple of years ago, CCS has taken upon itself to organise Heritage Expo 26. It appointed Lucy White-Thomson as project administrator, a task she has taken up with enthusiasm and marked proficiency. The Westgate Hall is booked, forty stalls assigned, eight speakers lined up, a techie employed, and generous sponsorship promised from Paul Roberts, Paul Abbot and Canterbury Christ Church University. All seems set for a most successful all-day event on Saturday, November 28th.

As befits a society that has raised statues of Geoffrey Chaucer and Aphra Behn, installed plaques commemorating Aphra Behn (again!), John Lyly, Sarah Baker and Walter Pater, and is in the process of placing a corrected blue plaque to Christopher Marlowe, another to the pioneer printer John Mychell, and yet another to Margaret Roper, it is hardly surprising that the Society supports most wholeheartedly the city's bid to be recognised as a UNESCO City of Literature. Peter Henderson reinforced this with a guided display of papers, old and new, held in the King's School's Maugham Library.

Dear UNESCO, Canterbury is no tawdry little town boasting a couple of third-rate novelists and a doggerel versifier. It's a city whose literary heritage - not to mention its galaxy of more recent writers - is second only to that of London and, perhaps, Oxford.

To assist with the UNESCO bid and for our own entertainment, we have continued to read works by local playwrights. We were gripped by the dramatic adaptation of Hugh Walpole's *The Cathedral*; Behn's *Sir Patient Fancy* reminded us what a thoroughly competent and modern writer our Aphra is; we enjoyed a delicious double helping of Somerset Maugham: first *The Constant Wife* (recently degraded by the RSC), then his last play, the intriguing *Sheppey*. Moving to more recent times, we relished Goran Stefanovski's celebrated *Sarajevo* before giving a first ever reading to the Chair's *The Tapestry*, and *Eftsoons the Reckynge*, Antonie van den Broek's fascinating exploration of Canterbury's reception of the news of the death of Christopher Marlowe.

Feeling that the city is in danger of becoming lecture-saturated, this year we held fewer such events. However, the three we arranged were splendid. First came the Dean's amusing and sometimes challenging (even naughty?) overview of the men who held his distinguished office since the Reformation. At Christmas, Trustee Connie Nolan delighted and titivated with her through-the-keyhole peep at the Feisty Woman of Canterbury. The third talk, by John Bulaitis on the Swing Riots of 1830, was so inspiring that the Society pledged to raise a monument to the rioters in time for the bicentenary of their rising. Last Friday, 26th June, the Society rounded off its year with a glorious, sold-out Summer Fundraising Party in the idyllic grounds of St Augustine's Abbey. Players from the Canterbury Shakespeare Festival, informative words from Brian McHenry, and Gillian Rushton's plentiful

Pimm's ensured everyone left with a smile on their lips. The 24-prize raffle and bar profits ensured a handy financial return from the day, too.

The only dampener on the evening was the void in the corner normally occupied by Alan Turner, our former Treasurer, and his band of jolly buddies. Very sadly, Alan passed away in the Spring after a long illness.

Prompted by words from the Dean and an unwanted gift on the steps of St Peter's, we have decided to hold our full meetings here, in St Paul's Without the Walls, where we have been generously welcomed. The committee still meets in the hall of St Peter's. We are sorry to be losing the invaluable services of Hilary Brian as a trustee. Few have been so hard working, cheerful and helpful. Brian, our omniscient and sometimes overwhelmed secretary, is now being assisted by Otter (or Oscar in CCS-speak), a minute-taking AI machine. (I hope you're listening Oscar!). Sean, our new treasurer, has taken over with pinpoint precision. After six years, I have decided that at the end of the year I will hand over the role of CCS Chair to someone younger.

It remains only for me to express my most sincere thanks to our generous sponsors, especially Paul Roberts, without whose beneficence we would be but a shrivelled bloom, and to thank our long-suffering trustees for their support and hard work over what has been a thoroughly enjoyable and successful year.