

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE DICKENS FELLOWSHIP HELD AT THE CHARLES DICKENS MUSEUM (AND VIA ZOOM) ON SATURDAY 22 JULY 2023

Present:

Cathy Waters (CW) President
Jacquie Stamp (JS) Chair of Council
Eddie Jones (EJ) Hon. Treasurer
Paul Graham (PG) Hon. General Secretary
Emily Bell (EB) Hon. Editor
Sati McKenzie (SM) Joint Hon. General Secretary Elect and 13 members

1. Welcome

JS invited CW to welcome members to the meeting. CW welcomed members attending both physically and via Zoom. CW thanked Dr Cindy Sughrue the Director of the Museum for hosting the meeting. She also congratulated past President Professor Jenny Hartley on the recent award of an OBE in the King's Birthday Honours for her work in encouraging literacy in prisons.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from: Vanessa Grenfell and members of the Christchurch (New Zealand), Paul Turner (Central), Jan Recknell-Turner (Denmark), and Thelma Grove (Philadelphia).

3. In Memoriam – Deceased Members

A period of silence was observed in respect of the following members who had died since the last meeting of Council: Tony Buckland (Rochester & Chatham), Lynn Drew Bartlett (Central), Elisabeth Neales and Glenda Benness (Melbourne), Miriam Bennett (Southwold), Cees van Steynen (Haarlem), Val Lawson (Nottingham), Trevor Draper (Bristol & Clifton), Wilfred Grove (Central), and Bill Owen (Cleveland).

4. Minutes of the Previous Annual General Meeting

The minutes of the previous AGM held on 15th July 2022 had been circulated. JS proposed that they be accepted as an accurate record of proceedings. This was seconded by PG and approved unanimously.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. Honorary General Secretary's Report

PG noted that this would be his final report to members as HGS and, he thanked all the volunteers who have ensured that the activities of the DF could continue throughout the past year. These included - Paul Allen for his role as Membership Secretary – ensuring that membership cards are sent out to members and *Dickensian* subscriptions recorded; Alison Gowans who has edited and produced the London Particular; and Liz Velluet, who operates our e-mail postbox. PG also thanked Sati McKenzie, Eddie Jones, and Simon Newton for their ongoing work on our website. The DF twitter account (@DickensFellowHQ) now has over 4,200 followers.

The annual wreath-laying took place on 9th June this year in Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey. The DF wreath was laid – and the oration given - by one of this country's leading authors and historians, Tom Holland. Around 45 members attended – including Mark and Debbie Dickens. PG

thanked the Dean and Chapter of the Abbey for facilitating the event. Tom Holland has kindly agreed that we can print his oration – which will appear in a forthcoming edition of *The Dickensian*.

The MC have agreed to part-sponsor a special exhibition at the Dickens Museum next year which will celebrate the bicentenary of the birth of Wilkie Collins by focusing on the various collaborations between him and CD. The agreed sum is £7,500 – approximately half the amount needed to enable the exhibition to proceed as planned by the Museum. The exhibition will run from 15th November 2023 through 25th February 2024, incorporating the 200th birthday of Wilkie Collins on 8th January 2024.

PG noted that in the past year the DF managed to get some national press coverage – firstly from a meeting arranged by a member in Cornwall, Barry West, between members of the Dickens family with those of the Marley family – to commemorate a meeting that is reported to have taken place on 17/03/1843 between CD and Dr Miles Marley in Cork Street, Piccadilly. PG expressed his thanks to Barry for arranging, and to Mark & Debbie Dickens and Lucinda Hawksley for attending. The second occasion was when *The Daily Mail* sought some suitably robust views on the latest television adaptation of *Great Expectations*.

At the behest of Medway Council, PG wrote on behalf of the DF to the Rochester Bridge Trust in respect of the campaign to raise funds to restore the chalet in Rochester. The Trust have responded to the effect that, despite being supportive of the bid, the Trust is unable to give grants which relieve public funds. As the chalet is owned by Medway Council, and as it remains unclear how any future use, maintenance, and management of the chalet will be organised, they are unable to provide funds. They are considering whether they could give a grant. PG has subsequently written a letter of support of a bid for funding on behalf of the Council to the National Lottery Heritage Fund. It is hoped that the bid will be submitted before the end of this month.

7. Honorary Editor's Report

EB joined the meeting via Zoom and talked members through her written report, which is appended to these minutes.

8. Honorary Treasurer's Report

EJ had submitted a written report to the meeting, which is appended to these minutes. Accounts for both 2021 and 2022 had now been audited and approved by Bill Kerr. In response to a question from the floor, EJ explained that the 'Oliver Fund' was established to facilitate charitable giving.

9. Election of Officers

All officers of the DF are subject to annual re-election. Both EJ and EB stood for re-election and were re-elected unopposed.

PG was standing down as HGS after eleven years in the post. JS and SM had agreed to stand as Joint Honorary General Secretaries and were unanimously elected as such.

10. Report from the Charles Dickens Museum

Dr Cindy Sughrue, the Director of the Charles Dickens Museum, gave a verbal report on behalf of the Museum. The text of Cindy's report is appended to these minutes.

11. Future Conferences

PG reported that the 2023 conference in London was scheduled to begin on Wednesday 26th until Saturday 29th July. The proposed strike on the London underground had been called off.

No branch had volunteered to host the 2024 conference. The Management Committee would decide at their September meeting what form that conference would take.

12. Any Other Business

JS noted that the Committee needed some new members. Anyone interested should let the Committee know.

CW reported that a conference would take place on Friday 6th October to honour former President of the DF and editor of *The Dickensian* – Professor Michael Slater. The numbers able to attend physically will be very limited given the size of the venue and the number of guests Professor Slater was inviting. There would, however, be an opportunity for all members to attend via Zoom. Details of how to register would be available soon on the DF and Institute of English Studies websites.

CW then thanked PG for his work as HGS on his standing down from the role. CW presented him with a bottle of champagne, a print of a sketch by R.W. Buss executed in preparation for an illustration for the Pickwick Papers, and a certificate bestowing honorary life membership. PG thanked CW and the DF generally for the gifts and their support during his time in office.

13. Date of Next Meeting.

The AGM in 2024 would again take place in July – precise date and venue to be confirmed in due course.