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 27th Annual General Meeting

7pm on Tuesday 4 July 2023

At St Peter's Anglican Church, Canterbury

Present:

22 members and 1 visitor (the latter being Jennifer Watson-Bore, who spoke after the meeting about the architecture and history of St Peter's church).

1. Chair of the meeting

Michael Steed, the President, was regrettably too unwell to attend the meeting. The Secretary was asked to write to Michael, saying that he was sorely missed and that the meeting wished him happier days. In his absence and by agreement of the members present, Stewart Ross took the chair, except for the election of officers and trustees, for which former City Councillor Nick Eden-Green took the chair.[1]

2. Apologies for absence

Deborah Broadbridge, David Broadbridge, Patricia Erskine-Hill, Jane Plumptre, Paddy McKeating, Tim Fox.

3. Minutes of Last Annual General Meeting

The minutes of the 26th Annual General Meeting held on 8 July 2022, circulated before the meeting were approved. There were no matters arising.

4. Chair's Report

- Stewart Ross presented his report on the past year's activities of the Society.
- Stewart's report is attached to these minutes.
- His report was accepted. A vote of thanks to him for his inspiring and ever-enthusiastic leadership of the Society was passed with acclamation.

[1] Pursuant to clause 7(3) of the Society's Constitution.

5. **Report and Accounts for the year ended 28 February 2023**

- Alan presented the report and accounts.
- He echoed Stewart's report in describing the last financial year as remarkable. There was a £25K surplus in contrast to the previous year when there was a loss of £6K. Income from subscriptions was up from £6K to £16K. Income from events had substantially increased. On the other hand, the Society's expenses had increased. So, it needs more members' subs. At the end of the financial year, the Society had £97K in the bank. This was allocated respectively to the Whitstable Harbour project (£38K), the Tudor Martyrs' project (£4.5K), the Aphra Behn statue (£43K) and the General fund (£10K). All the Society's contractual duties are covered by its finance but not any ancillary costs for the Behn statue. The Society was in a very stable financial position.
- The report and accounts were agreed. Brian will arrange the uploading of the accounts to the website and will make the annual return to the Charity Commission.

6. **Election of President**

Michael Steed was re-elected.

7. **Vice-Presidents**

- The meeting noted that Jenny Uglow and Professor Elaine Hobby had previously been appointed Vice-Presidents. [2]

8. **Election of Officers and members of the Executive Committee**

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, Christopher Palmer, Helen Gillis, Julian Waltho, Paddy McKeating and Stephanie Rudgard-Redsell.

9. **AOB**

There was no further business.

The AGM concluded at 740 pm.

[2] The Society's constitution does not specify a term of office for the Vice-Presidents. Clause 9(1): "Each annual meeting shall elect an honorary president and may from time to time also appoint one or more honorary vice-presidents".

Chair's Report for 2022-3

This time last year, your Chair, perhaps unwisely, declared 2021-2022 to have been an 'annus mirabilis' for the Society. After 'mirabilis' surely there is but one way to go? Fortunately, the appropriate Latin aphorism for the past year is not 'annus horribilis' but rather 'annus solidi progressi' – in other words, we have enjoyed an excellent year of sound progress.

PROJECTS

Aphra Behn Statue

I begin with the project for the raising in the High Street of a bronze memorial statue to Harbledown-born Aphra Behn, the English language's pioneering first professional writer. Having toured the country with four bronze maquettes shortlisted from the many submitted designs for the statue, raising funds and informing the public about Aphra, last July we held a spectacularly enjoyable and successful dinner at which the maquettes were auctioned and around £35,000 raised for the cause. Our sincere thanks are due to auctioneer Charlie Ross, actor Alexandra Galbreath from the RSC, the many who sponsored the event (especially Heppington Vineyard) with gifts and prizes, those who worked so hard to organise it, to the 75 guests who attended and spent so generously, and to the King's School who allowed us to use the spectacular St Augustine's dining hall.

While the fundraising continued, a statue committee, guided by the overwhelming popular vote, chose the delightful design proposed by Christine Charlesworth of a 17-year-old Aphra. The Trustees duly commissioned Christine to create the piece. The artist, whom the Trustees have visited in her workshop south of Guildford on several occasions, has been a pleasure to work with. She has kept us informed of the work's development at every step with emails and photographs; her enthusiasm has matched, even excelled, our own; and she has unstintingly devoted far more time and emotional energy on the project than she ever anticipated at the outset. The statue is being cast in bronze at this very moment, and half-a-dozen Trustees are going to the foundry to see our belovéd Aphra being poured out hot. She will be complete, ready for installation, in the autumn.

At this point, your chair has a confession to make. So absorbed were the doughty Trustees in fundraising, commissioning, and watching the creation of their wonderful Aphra statue, they did not give sufficient thought – rather like Robinson Crusoe and his boat – to what they were going to do once they had it. The public had been consulted, Christine Charlesworth visited the proposed sites on a dripping wet late autumn day, and hopes were raised when the far-sighted Canterbury Tales of England (CToE) project envisaged the ugly space beside the old Nason's store – sometimes known as Biggleston Yard – as the Aphra Behn Garden. Indeed, that's where we hope Aphra will stand one day. We have written to the Church, who own the land, and received a pleasant but non-committal reply; the British Legion, which holds an Armistice Day parade at the East Kent Regiment Memorial that currently stands on the site, says it has no objection to the Buffs memorial being moved to the proposed new Memorial Garden in the Dane John; we have contacted Setha, the

developers of the site beside and behind the Yard, and they say they have agreed to 'spruce up' the place; three or four times we have contacted to the Council, whose permission we need to go ahead, but – alas! - received no reply.

Three factors complicate and perhaps explain the situation. First, the change in the political complexion of the Council following the May local elections, meaning that the new Cabinet have had to get their feet under the table before pressing ahead with their agenda; second, the Council's staff shortage; and third, most awkwardly, at the start of the year, the previous Council received a substantial Levelling Up Fund grant from the government, much of which was earmarked for tourism-promoting heritage projects. Among these was the idea of Story Gardens, one of which is the Aphra Behn Story Garden. The positive side of this position is that *if* the story gardens idea goes ahead and *if* the Council agrees that the Aphra Garden will be one of the first, then some Levelling Up Fund money will be used to prepare a suitably fine garden in which our statue will stand. Should none of this happen – and we won't know until the end of the year – then Aphra will remain in the ranks of the homeless until an alternative site can be found for her. There is a possibility, if Aphra turns up before a site has been agreed and prepared, that she may stand behind glass in an empty shop front where all will be able to marvel at her in two dimensions before she emerges onto our High Street in tangible and glorious 3-D.

To date we have raised around £55,000 for the project. Although a considerable sum, it is not sufficient to meet the cost of the artist, the foundry, and storing and installing the statue on an appropriate base with quality signage and information panels. A further £20,000 would enable us to breathe easy.

Whitstable Harbour Model Project

Over the past year, trusty Trustee Christopher Palmer has almost singlehandedly driven this project forward to the point where a scale model of Whitstable Harbour in 1923, housed in the South Quay building, will be handed over to the Harbour Board. The date for the ceremony, kindly paid for by the Harbour Board, is Thursday 23 November. This is a stupendous effort on his part, and one for which the Society and all who visit the Harbour for years to come will be hugely grateful.

Christopher has talked to and negotiated with the Harbour Board, who have been warmly receptive of the project. He has spent hours researching, drawing and designing the OO/HO scale model of the harbour, ships, buildings, personnel, railway track and wagons. He has purchased scale models and undertaken to build the harbour-scape and the structure on which the model will stand, as well as its protective screening.

Sub-committee chair Brian McHenry has been at Christopher's side at all times and in all weathers, as has, when his health permitted, CCS President Michael Steed. Brian must also be warmly thanked for generously sponsoring the construction of a remarkable scale model of the Thames Barge 'Nautilus' that will adorn the presentation. This and other fine models, including the sailing collier 'Emma Ernest' that docked in the harbour a century ago, have been made for us by William Mowll, a brilliant model-maker of international renown. CCS and Whitstable Harbour owe him a considerable debt of gratitude.

So by Christmas, after years of discussion and hard work, Brian Porter's princely bequest to the Society for a suitable commemorative construction in Whitstable Harbour will finally be in place.

Other Projects

Trustee Julian Waltho has liaised with the City Council and Mr Keffer, the City Cemetery Keeper, to produce two bright new boards, adorned with the CCS logo, giving visitors a clear and up-to-date map and guide to the extensive and genuinely beguiling City Cemetery. Fans of the novelist Joseph Conrad, in particular, should be delighted. Julian is now planning to raise further explanatory boards in the cemetery, one of which will offer information about the graves of citizens killed in the 1942 Baedecker Raids.

Remarkably, the Society has been involved in still more projects over the past year.

Stewart Ross, sitting on the Heritage Committee of the Canterbury Society, has been responsible for the preparation of two new blue plaques, one in Harbledown near the birthplace of Aphra Behn and a second in Orange Street commemorating Sarah Baker, the pioneering theatre manager.

Brian McHenry has talked to English Heritage and John Walker of the Canterbury Society to press for large plaques of distinguished early medieval Christians to adorn the currently blank wall of the St Augustine's Abbey site on Longport.

Andrew Webster and Brian McHenry have pressed ahead with our President's plan for a Tudor Martyrs Memorial – commemorating victims of all faiths, not just the Protestants currently memorialized in Wincheap. A site in Oaten Hill may well be the most appropriate.

President Michael Steed and his team arranged for the design, creation and unveiling of a new and historically accurate storyboard near the Bertha and Ethelbert statues on Lady Wootton's Green.

Stewart Ross has joined the board of the CToE project, where he has endeavoured to uphold the interests of the Society. Unfortunately, he has yet to convince CToE of the need for a Tudor Martyrs memorial. To our great delight, however, Trustee Charlotte Cornell, our Vice Chair, was recently elected to the Council and, as a Cabinet member responsible for Heritage matters, is also on the CToE Board where she will be – subject to conflicts of interest – in a position to wave the Aphra, Martyrs and other CCS banners.

Stewart has also contacted Jason deCaires Taylor about making his statues on the bed of the Stour near the Westgate bridge more visible. When the call for a volunteer to take this project forward, Hilary Brian stepped forward with welcome enthusiasm.

The Society has been in constant touch with the group seeking to raise a statue of Christopher Marlowe. The Committee likes the idea, but as the Marlowe project's fund-raising efforts clash with our own, and as their proposed St George's site does not accord with the CToE's plans for the same area, our endorsement has been understandably – if reluctantly – muted. We do, however, fully support the Marlowe project's request for Levelling Up Fund money to be used for a Marlowe Story Garden.

Finally, a faux pas. Having received the go-ahead from the church council of St Peter's and St Mildred's, we had an eye-catching plaque made to recognise our adoption of St Peter's Anglican

Church as our HQ. Unfortunately, the diocese did not agree with our wording and the plaque remains unfixed and unused in the Chair's garage.

EVENTS AND GOVERNANCE

Events

Over the course of the past year, as part of our mission to raise the profile of Aphra Behn, the Society has held readings of a dramatized version of her novel Oroonoko, and her plays The Emperor of the Moon, Abdelazer and The Rover Part II. All were well attended and provided chuckles as well as insights into the mind of Mrs Behn and Restoration England. We also read, as a counterbalance, Christopher Marlowe's Dr Faustus. Further readings are planned for the autumn. Unfortunately, a one-woman Aphra Behn show, tabled for September, ran into technical difficulties and had to be cancelled.

Happily, our lectures and parties went ahead as planned. In October, Jean Baker gave a well-attended lecture on the remarkable career of theatre manager Sarah Baker. With her customary energy and eloquence, Vice Chair Charlotte Cornell delivered a lecture to the Canterbury Branch of the Historical Association on Aphra Behn and Women at the Court of Charles II. A similar theme ran through Nicholas Reid's address at our Christmas party on December 15th. A few days earlier we held a very pleasant reception in the Eastbridge Hospital for our generous corporate sponsors.

In February, Secretary Brian McHenry delivered a fascinating virtual tour of St Augustine's Abbey, illuminated with informative pictures, and spiced with humour and anecdote. On 4 May, we held a successful first-ever joint meeting with the Canterbury Branch of the Historical Association. It comprised a reception in the Lattergate Garden, kindly provided by the King's School, followed by Martin Watts talking about the Baedecker Raids and his personal recollections of 'Bomber' Harris.

Governance

Despite the raising of the membership fee to £15.00 and the difficulties experienced by some in handling the automatic card renewal system, our individual membership has remained steady at around 100. Our corporate members, now known as Corporate Supporters, have also held steady in their generosity. We are delighted that Eastbridge Hospital, the Simon Langton Grammar School for Girls, and the Lilford Gallery have joined their ranks. More are expected to do so in the year ahead.

We have continued our close partnership with the Canterbury Society and have now forged strong links with the Canterbury's Tales of England and the Canterbury Branch of the Historical Association. Our links to other organisations, including the City Council, English Heritage, local schools, and the universities have strengthened.

Much of the day-to-day work of the Society has been handled by the monthly meetings of the hard-working cabinet the Society's officers. Meetings of the full Committee of Trustees have been reduced from bi-monthly to quarterly. We have failed to find a suitable person to run our Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts, though Brian, Charlotte, and I (assisted by Helen and Carolyn) have done our best to keep our name and activities in the public eye.

Throughout the year, our corporate sponsor and IT guru, Ed Ludlow, has managed our website, our subscriptions and our mailshots with Amazonian speed and efficiency. I have no idea what we would do without him.

David Reekie and Jane Plumptre have stood down from the Committee of Trustees. We are extremely grateful to them for the help they gave us during their tenure. Tim Fox joined us briefly before deciding that his work commitments did not permit active participation. We hope that he will return in retirement and thank him for bringing in the Simon Langton Girls School as a corporate sponsor.

Paddy McKeating, Head of History at Milner Court, has brought a welcome touch of youth and energy to the Committee. When able to attend, President Michael Steed graced our meetings with his knowledge and wisdom. Trustee Andrew Webster has continued to serve and place his indispensable financial acumen at our disposal; Helen Gillis has provided food for meetings and handled the tangled web of membership with admirable patience; Carolyn Oulton helps everyone everywhere with everything; Hilary Brian brings hospital efficiency and geniality to all occasions, and strengthens the familial bond to our sister organisation, the Canterbury Society; Julian Waltho lends us his sharp historical mind while providing an invaluable link to the Historical Association; without Christopher Palmer's titanic work there would be no Whitstable Harbour model; our charming Treasurer Alan Turner has coped magnificently with the taxing task of handling the day-to-day finances of the Society alongside the Aphra Behn fundraising campaign: with his permission, I looked at our accounts the other day – they were so enormous I could hardly pick them up, let alone understand what was going on inside; without the painstaking and good-humoured labours of Secretary Brian McHenry, who has served with a smile under taxing personal circumstances, there would be no Society; and without the dynamic contributions from Charlotte Cornell, the epitome of energetic and unflappable multi-tasking, we would be a bloodless shell of an organisation. To all these Trustees, I personally, as well as the Society and all Canterbury and the surrounding district, owe an immense debt of gratitude for all they have done over the past year.

With their continued presence in the engine room, and boosted by the most welcome arrival of the dynamic and experienced Stephanie Rudgard-Redsell, we can steam into 2023-2024 with optimism and unbounded energy.