



THE THOMAS HARDY SOCIETY

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**Minutes of the 58th Annual General Meeting of the Thomas Hardy Society
held at 4pm on Saturday 13th September 2025 in
The Casterbridge Room, The King's Arms Hotel, Dorchester, DT1 1HF**

Council of Management present:

Mark Chutter (Chair), Felicity Burnet, David Burnet, Lucy Boyle Brown, Sue Clarke, Katherine Kerr, Alban O'Brien, Byron Silver, Julie Skelton, Dee Tolfree, Miranda Woodgate.

Attending on-line Rebecca Shipp, Andy Worth

Members in attendance:

In addition to the above there were twenty-two members in attendance.

A list is available on request.

1. Apologies for Absence:

Jonathan Elcock, Tony Fincham, William Gibbons, Jan Nelmes-Thomas, Jeremy Newton, Sue Theobold, Gail Witherspoon.

2. To Approve the Minutes of the 57th Annual General Meeting:

The Minutes were approved with no amendments and signed as a true record.

3. Matters Arising There were no matters arising.

The Chairman welcomed all to the Meeting and introduced our AGM speaker Dr. Ruth Burton, Project Officer for the Thomas Hardy Archives.

Ruth gave a detailed presentation to the meeting and insight into this important collection and the tremendous work carried out on the project to date. This commenced in March 2024 when Ruth was appointed for eighteen months and based at the Dorset History Centre in Dorchester with the privilege of working on what is the largest collection of THS archive material in the world.

The project has proved exciting and interesting. It has included liaising with the Steering Group members (Dorset Museum and Art Gallery, National Trust, Exeter University and the Thomas Hardy Society) together with donors, many people who have knowledge to share and numerous volunteers who have helped go through around 150 boxes of manuscripts, letters, notebooks, photographs, correspondence, events and memorabilia held which tell so much about Hardy's life and works. The project has also proved there is always something new to discover which Ruth was delighted to share.

The results now include the creation of an on-line catalogue. Although the project will not be completed until October 2025 this is now live and can be viewed on the Dorset History Centre web pages. Items can be requested to view at the History Centre making the Thomas Hardy Archives more accessible and to be enjoyed by all.

4. Chairman's Report:

Good afternoon and it is wonderful to see so many members here today. My name is Mark Damon Chutter – I am the Chairman and Academic Director of the Thomas Hardy Society. I am also a Head of Faculty, and I have been teaching English and Drama for nearly 30 years. I was shortlisted as one of the top six practitioners in the country for the 'Times' Most Innovative Teacher of the Year Award and Teacher of the Year respectively. Since 2023, I have been working hard to reach out to the local community and to represent our society as Chairman and Academic Director strengthening our many partnerships such as with the National Trust, the Dorset Museum and Art Gallery, Athelhampton House, Poxwell Manor and the Dorset History Centre.

This year Dee Tolfree is sadly retiring, and she has been a stalwart of the Hardy Society for many years (more on that later). It has been a busy year for the council of management. We have a fantastic team with Miranda Woodgate as our Secretary organising events, Julie Skelton as our Finance Director and Felicity and David Burnet managing membership. Rebecca Shipp is our editor of the THS Journal which brings academic gravitas to our society. Sue Clarke will be kindly managing merchandise and publications after the departure of Dee.

Our events page on our website is excellent – we have such an eclectic and varied programme, and the newsletter is innovative. A highlight in July 2025 was the fundraiser at Stafford House by kind invitation of Lord Julian and Lady Emma Kitchener-Fellowes, and we raised over £3000 for the society. As you are aware, Julian is our President and Patron. Our council of management consists of a group of talented volunteers, including Alban O'Brien, Byron Silver, Andy Worth, Lucy Boyle-Brown and representatives from the Dorchester Town Council, The National Trust and the New Hardy Players. We have been on a journey of modernising and securing the future of the society – membership, events and of course finance. I would like to personally thank the council of management for their dedication and expertise in moving the society forward with great gusto. The council of management are collegiate and give hours of their time for free. I would like to emphatically stress that we are volunteers and a charity. Further events are planned such as the Hardy and Woolf Bloomsbury Weekend in Lewes organised by Lucy Boyle-Brown, our War Poetry Remembrance Weekend in November in conjunction with the War Poets' Association, Wilfred Owen, Edward Thomas, Siegfried Sassoon and T.E. Lawrence societies. In December, we have the London Walk and Lecture and then 'Going the Rounds' at Stinsford. As Academic Director, I have been liaising with world renowned scholars for the 2026 International Conference to be held in Poundbury. Keynote speakers include Dr Trish Ferguson, Professor Mark Ford, Professor Roger Ebbatson and Professor Jacqueline Dillion. Miranda and I have been working hard to deliver an outstanding conference.

Furthermore, it is important to remember that alongside the academic lectures many members enjoy the walks, talks and workshops that we offer and facilitate. We are an inclusive society, and our mission is to make Hardy accessible to all

regardless of class and wealth. There should not be any barriers to accessing Hardy as mirrored in the excellent work of Byron Silver and Alban O'Brien with their schools' outreach work – delivering a Hardy workshop in one of the most deprived schools in the country. This mirrors Hardy's own humble beginnings at the cottage at Higher Bockhampton.

In summary, our society is an international collective of members who join to celebrate their love and passion for our great novelist and poet. Our membership numbers have risen and long may that continue. We are a member of the Alliance of Literary Societies – and we have formed many partnerships here which have resulted in joint study weekends. Please do come and support your Thomas Hardy Society and find out more and develop and deepen your intellectual curiosity around 'the man who used to notice such things'.
Thank you for listening.

5. Treasurer's Report and Accounts for the year ending 31st December 2024:

The Statement of Financial Activities for the year ending 31 December 2024 together with the Balance Sheet was presented by Julie Skelton, THS Treasurer who addressed the meeting.

Highlights of the Balance Sheet

Total charitable funds: £12,186 (2023: £18,383)

Unrestricted Revenue Funds: £6,586 (2023: £6,622)

Endowment Reserves remain at £5,600* (2023: £11,761)

*This figure was adjusted due to incorrect classification of Unrestricted funds which had been recorded as Restricted.

Net assets: £12,186 (2023: £18,383)

Comprising:

- Net current assets £6,286 (cash less monies owed at year end)
- Fixed assets £5,900

Highlights of Financial Activities

Total Income: for the year amounted to £39,670 (2023: £30,854)

Total Expenditure: £46,219 (2023 £37,916) Thus recording a deficit of £6,549 (2023 £7,062 deficit)

Outlook – Following the appointment of the new Treasurer, the observation that expenditure was exceeding income was brought into focus. Areas of high expenditure were identified and have since been addressed. – 2024 was a conference year resulting in increased income and increased costs. Tighter controls are in place to ensure the thorough budgeting of financially viable activities. – We will aim to build a reserve fund in preparation for the 2028 centenary celebrations.

Approval of the accounts for the year was proposed by Lucy Boyle-Brown, seconded by Felicity Burnet and approved unanimously.

6. Appointment of Independent Examiner of Accounts:

Purple Business and Personal Accountants, Armitage House, Victor Jackson Avenue, Poundbury, Dorchester, Dorset, DT1 3GY was proposed by Julie Skelton seconded by Miranda Woodgate and agreed.

7. Election of a) Managers, b) Chair, c) Treasurer

a) Pursuant to the Society's Articles of Association there was one Manager due to retire. Dee Tolfree - Publications

Dee would not be standing for re-election and said a few words. which included:

'I took over Publications in 2002 and during this time worked with seven Chair: Geoffrey Tapper, Michael Irwin, Furse Swann, Tony Fincham, Helen Lange, Richard Franklin and now Mark Chutter. As well as Chair there are many other marvellous and supportive colleagues. So, I happily thank you all for your patience – humour and good company.... And finally, the last word goes to Thomas Hardy and his Poem - "The Superseded" - who else could have written such an appropriate ending! But for me none of sadness or regrets that he feels. Just happy to have been there! Thank you all.'

b) Election of Chair:

Mark Chutter was elected as Chair. Proposed by Lucy Boyle-Brown and seconded by Byron Silver and agreed.

c) Election of Treasurer:

Julie Skelton was elected as Treasurer proposed by Miranda Woodgate seconded by Byron Silver and agreed.

8. Appointment of Presidents and Vice-Presidents:

The Council of Management ratified the appointment of Julian Fellowes, Baron Fellowes of West Stafford as President together with the Vice Presidents. Proposed by Miranda Woodgate seconded by Alban O'Brien and agreed.

In addition to the above the Chair would like to add one more to the list and proposed Dee Tolfree as a Vice-President as tribute for all the wonderful work done. Seconded by Lucy Boyle Brown and agreed.

9. Proposed Increase to Membership Subscription Fees.

Owing to the increasing running costs of the Society and the printing and distribution of the Journal to our membership at home and overseas and having looked at similar societies in comparison the Council of Management is proposing to increase the membership fees as from January 2026.

Proposed at the meeting by Lucy Boyle-Brown, seconded by Felicity Burnet and agreed.

There was a concern however expressed from the meeting in favour of a concession for the long term unwaged/unemployed.

it was agreed this would be reviewed at the next CoM Meeting. The THS has a concessionary rate for students.

10. Any Other Business:

The Secretary had received correspondence from member Jeremy Newton who could not attend today but wished it raised. It had been noted that the version of

the Articles adopted at the AGM in 2021 had not been filed at Company's House. To rectify this Jeremy has put together the following proposal:

- that there should be a new resolution to confirm the latest version of the Articles (if not at the AGM itself then at an EGM convened as soon as possible for that purpose);
- that, if that resolution is passed, it should be duly filed at Companies House within 15 days, along with the revised Articles;
- that the Society's Constitutional documents should also be made available on the website, so that all members can consult them easily.

The Society agreed to put together a resolution to correct this at our earliest opportunity. It will review the constitutional documents and update the Memorandum and Articles of Association accordingly to be adopted at an Extraordinary General Meeting or at the next Annual General Meeting. The Society's Constitutional documents will be made available on the website.

The meeting closed at 4.55pm