

REPORT OF THE COUNCIL OF MANAGEMENT

The Managers present their Annual Report and the Accounts for the year ended 31st December 2025.

Principal Aims and Activities

The Society's principal aim is the advancement for the benefit of the public of education in the life and works of Thomas Hardy. In pursuit of that aim the Society runs commemorative events each year, it organises events, conferences, study days, walks and activities and it publishes The Thomas Hardy Journal.

The Council of Management

Members of the Council of Management who are directors for the purpose of Company Law and Trustees for the purpose of Charity Law, and who served during the year and up to the date of this report are set out on page 1 of the Society's accounts. The officers of the Society are appointed by the Council. Members of the charitable company guarantee to contribute an amount not exceeding £1 to the assets of the charitable company in the event of its winding up.

Review of Activities

The 2025 programme began in January with the annual Thomas Hardy Memorial Service at Westminster Abbey with wreath-laying and readings at Hardy's grave to mark Hardy's death. Study Days in February and April were on Hardy & Architecture and Jude the Obscure respectively. A full programme of activities was organised for the Thomas Hardy birthday weekend in early June with Chair & Academic Director, Mark Chutter, leading a walking tour of *Mayor of Casterbridge* locations, featuring a raucous "Skimmity Ride" through the streets with the New Hardy Players, followed by the annual procession to the Hardy Statue in Dorchester for wreath-laying and tributes. Phillip Mallett delivered the main birthday lecture and on Sunday, a picnic in the grounds of Kingston Maurward Estate was enjoyed following a walk around Higher Bockhampton led by Alban O'Brien before the birthday service at St Michael's Church in Stinsford and wreath-laying at Hardy's resting place.

The highlight of the year was a fundraiser in July hosted by Lord & Lady Fellowes of West Stafford at their home. The event included a champagne lunch with entertainment from Bread & Roses, Alban O'Brien and jazz musician, George Vincent and raised around £3,000 for the Society. A river walk preceded the AGM in September and Lucy Boyle Brown organised a THS Bloomsbury group literary weekend away to Lewes in October. The first War Poetry Conference was hosted by THS over Remembrance weekend in November. The T.E. Lawrence Society, Edward Thomas and Siegfried Sassoon Fellowships collaborated, and it was a great success. Mark Chutter delivered the London Lecture: "Hardy in London" after a walk around old St Pancras Church in early

December and the year ended on a high note, with the hugely popular, biennial “Going the Rounds” organised by Alastair Braidwood and featuring the New Hardy Players. We are lucky to have Sarah Gregson on the THS CoM and she kindly offered her home, Poxwell Manor, to host a popular Christmas event with carols, mulled wine and mince pies. A great end to a positive and prosperous year.

Finally

The Society is successful because of its Volunteers. A huge thank you to all members of the Council, who meet around six times a year, but do so much more. Special thanks are due to our amazing Chairman & Academic Director, Mark Chutter, whose knowledge, enthusiasm and energy is boundless. Also, Alban O’Brien for his expertise on everything Hardy, including lectures and tours. Byron Silver and Andy Worth for their IT and Sound support, Lucy Boyle Brown for supporting the organisation of events, Sue Clarke for taking minutes and managing merchandise and publications. David and Felicity Burnet for taking care of membership, Becky Shipp, THS Journal Editor, our newly appointed Treasurer, Zoe Withers and the other Trustees recently co-opted onto the Council, Harry Coutts, Sarah Gregson, Giles Keating, Katherine Kerr and Adrienne Mathers. Also, Representatives from Dorchester Town Council - William Gibbs, National Trust – Hannah Jefferson and William Barnes Society – Mark North. Last but not least, I would like to extend gratitude to two special VPs: Dee Tolfree for her unwavering help with merchandise and Dr Tony Fincham for his continuous support over many years, especially his willingness to answer questions, deliver interesting lectures and lead stimulating walks.

MIRANDA WOODGATE
SECRETARY