

The Lewis Carroll Society

Chair's Report AGM – 15 November 2024

Following January's EGM when the tabled motion for the disbandment of The Lewis Carroll Society was discussed and voted down, the Committee have made early but excellent progress towards rebuilding the Society and reinvigorating everyone's morale.

As Chair (having relinquished the Presidency of the Society as required by the governance rules relating to a charity, forbidding a President from serving as a Trustee) I've worked closely with our Secretary, Jane Skelly, our Treasurer and Membership Secretary, Tracy Gribble (who has been doing sterling work wrangling bureaucratic bank systems), Mark Davies (who has agreed to be Deputy Chair) and our other Trustees: Judith van den Berg, Alice Chapman, Joe Cheal, Steve Kimminau and Sarah Stanfield. I want to acknowledge all their hard work and support over the last 10 months.

We had our first in-person meeting for some time in May when we got together at the Art Workers' Guild in London for an evening with artist Oleg Lipchenko who not only talked about his work illustrating the *Alice* books and *The Hunting of the Snark* but giving his audience the rare opportunity of getting 'up close and personal' with many examples of his stunning original art. The evening was a huge success attended by a mix of new and long-standing members and non-members interested in finding out more about Lewis Carroll. We were helped in arranging this meeting by former Chair, Mark Richards, and fellow Carroll-scholar (and wife) Catherine.

The Committee is looking at possible ways of extending our meetings potential in terms of venues (not always in London) and hybrid options to reach the widest audience of a membership that is now international.

Once again we had an excellent presence at this year's Alice's Day in Oxford. We were represented on the committee for this annual event by past Chair, Lindsay Fulcher, and Mark J. Davies who arranged and hosted a programme of talks in the Weston Library Lecture Theatre at the Bodleian Libraries.

The speakers were: Mark Carnall, Life Collections Manager at the Oxford University Museum of Natural History, discussed the cultural resonances, extinction, conservation and human interpretation of the Dodo and showed the Carrollian links with specimens at the Museum; and Lenny de Rooy, author *Alice's Adventures Under Water*, explored the 'fabulous monsters and curious creatures' featured in her novel and their parallels with the original *Alice* books – along with some surprising revelations about real marine life. The third speaker was your Chairman who embarked on a 'Quest for the Jabberwock' — an expedition that will be reprised when we have finished this evening's formal business.

Publications: Mark Davies has produced four issues of *Bandersnatch* which, as we have now come to expect under his editorship, have been full of news and reviews and is costing us less to produce and mail since converting to a (largely) online readership. And don't be alarmed, anyone wanting a print copy can still have one. Jane has completed editing the latest issue of *The Carrollian* which will soon be with you, if it hasn't already arrived. Two further issues are in preparation focused on the 150th anniversary of *The Hunting of the Snark*. In this work, Jane has been joined in the 'Editorial Office' by our Trustee, Joe Cheal.

The Committee has decided, for the immediate future, to discontinue announcing *The Lewis Carroll Review* as one of the Societies publications. There hasn't been a cause for concern for a considerable time and, with a largely 'new' Committee facing a sharp learning curve in taking on the many tasks required to keep the Society functioning, we need to conserve energies by focusing on improving and consolidating the Society's other commitments to its members.

We have recently produced a new membership leaflet – many thanks, Joe – a copy of which you will have seen and which can be copied and passed on to friends.

There's been a very busy few months online with Alice Chapman joining Franziska Kohlt and myself as Facebook administrators. We have kept the Society's Facebook page buzzing with almost daily news on a wide range of topics from the academic to the populist – *or vice versa!* As a result we have significantly increased the number of our followers to its current total of 5.1k!

Perhaps the most 'curiouser and curiouser' event of the past few months was when, in September, the Society acquired, at auction, its very own Ox! *Don't worry – it's only temporarily in our keeping and is not **a live one!*** Our four-foot-high Alice-themed ox sculpture, decorated by Oxford artist Caroline Ritson, was one of 138 oxen of various sizes which had been on display throughout Oxfordshire during the summer.

The OxTrail was the initiative of Sobell House Hospice, which provides 'compassionate care to people in Oxfordshire facing life-limiting illness, and support to their family and friends'. At the auction, financial contributions by three supporters, matched by the Society, were sufficient for our £3,000 bid to be successful, much to the delight of Sobell House and the artist herself.

The proviso had always been that the sculpture would afterwards be positioned in a very public location, and display due acknowledgement of LCS. That goal was achieved, and it will take up its new home in Oxford's very busy Westgate Shopping Centre, to be admired by visitors from all over the world for years to come – alongside a notice telling visitors about Lewis Carroll the Society! We are grateful to Mark Davies for this initiative to further awareness in Oxford of our writer and the Society.

In passing, this bullish story brings to mind Mr Dodgson's description of Pythagoras's theorem on right-angled triangles – the area of the square on the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the areas of the squares on the other two sides – as being “dazzlingly beautiful now as it was in the day when Pythagoras first discovered it, and celebrated its advent, it is said, by sacrificing a hecatomb of oxen — a method of doing honour to Science that has always seemed to me slightly exaggerated and uncalled-for. One can imagine oneself, even in these degenerate days, marking the epoch of some brilliant scientific discovery by inviting a convivial friend or two, to join one in a beefsteak and a bottle of wine. But a hecatomb of oxen! It would produce a quite inconvenient supply of beef.”

But I digress...

At this meeting, members will be asked to elect Trustees for the year ahead, as required under the terms of our Constitution and as set out in the attached Agenda. Under the rules, (13 (2)-(6)) one third of the Trustees must annually stand down and, if willing, offer themselves to the membership for re-election. This year, the Trustees required to stand down are Mark J. Davies and Jane Skelly.

I am sorry to have to announce that Jane Skelly will not be putting herself forward for re-election and will be standing down as Secretary. Jane has served the Society across many years and we are indebted to her for her long service.

Happily, I can announce that Mark Davies is eligible and willing to stand for re-election as a Trustee.

Committee members Alice Chapman, Joe Cheal and Steve Kimminau who were appointed by the elected Trustees, will be standing down as appointees, but will be offering themselves for election as Trustees by the membership at this meeting.

Steve Kimminau has offered, if elected, to take on the role of Secretary – and, indeed, has already been pitching in to help Jane over the past few months. Also, if elected, Joe Cheal will continue to assist with *The Carrollian* and Alice Chapman will continue in her 'social media' role as well as offering assistance to the new Secretary.

Jane (who will be concentrating on working with Joe on *The Carrollian*) has promised to be around to provide back-up advice and I am grateful to Sarah Stanfield for agreeing to remain on the Committee for a further year without a specific portfolio in order to share her long knowledge of the Society and provide valuable Wise Owl advice to the new Committee.

At this AGM, Trustees Tracy Gribble (our Treasurer and Membership Secretary), Sarah Stanfield, Judith van den Berg and myself are not required to stand down.

Running a Society like ours is always presents the challenge in marrying-up volunteers with the various tasks that need to be done; and whilst the Secretary has not been advised of any other nominations for election to the Committee, we will always welcome offers of assistance from members who would like to be involved and would invite you to contact the Secretary or myself.

That concludes my Chair's Report and I'll hand over to Jane for her final (at least for now) Secretary's report.

Brian Sibley
(Amended 30 October 2024)