



The Brontë Society

**131ST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
OF THE BRONTË SOCIETY
Saturday 3 October 2026**

NOTICE OF THE 131ST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE BRONTË SOCIETY

Notice is hereby given that the 131st Annual General Meeting of the Brontë Society will be taking place on Saturday 3 October 2026 at 3pm (UK BST) via a Zoom webinar link.

For security reasons, members who are joining the meeting online will need to register their intention to attend to receive the online joining link.

Please register by 5pm (UK BST) on Thursday 1 October 2026 by following the prompts at <https://www.mi-nomination.com/thebrontesocietyregistration>

AGENDA

1. Welcome, introductions and reminder of the Brontë Society policy of respect:
'All trustees, staff, volunteers and members are expected to behave towards each other and speak to and about each other with respect at all times and do their utmost to promote and embed respect in all areas of the organisation.'
2. Apologies received
3. To approve the draft minutes of the 2025 Annual General Meeting held on Saturday 4 October 2025 and declare the advance ballot result (see notes 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 overleaf)
4. Any matters arising from the minutes of the 2025 Annual General Meeting
5. To receive the Brontë Society Annual Review 2025-2026
6. To receive the Annual Accounts and Auditors' Report for the twelve-month period ended 31 March 2026 – included in the Annual Review
7. To re-appoint Clive Owen LLP as Auditors of the Company, to hold office until the conclusion of the next Annual General Meeting, at a fee to be agreed by the BS Board of Trustees – declaration of the advance ballot result (see notes 2, 3, 4, and 5 overleaf)
8. Brontë Society trustee election – declaration of the advance ballot result (see notes 2, 3, 4, and 5 overleaf)
9. Any Other Business items received (see note 6)
10. Close of meeting

After the meeting has been closed, there will be a short break followed by an informal Q&A session. We particularly encourage new members, or those attending their first Brontë Society AGM, to take this opportunity to meet trustees, senior members of staff and learn more about our work.

NOTES FOR THE 131ST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE BRONTË SOCIETY

1. The draft minutes of the 2025 Annual General Meeting are included in this booklet, and can also be found by following the prompts at <https://www.mi-nomination.com/thebrontesocietyregistration>
2. In accordance with Article 21.3.4 trustees have requested that there be a members vote regarding Agenda item 3 (approval of the 2025 AGM draft minutes), Agenda item 7 (re-appointment of the Auditors) and Agenda item 8 (Brontë Society trustee election).
3. Voting on these three items will be made by way of an advance voting ballot process so please note that votes will not be accepted at the AGM.
4. Members who receive documents electronically will receive their Unique Voting Code (UVC) via an email together with full details of the voting process.

Members who receive their documents as hard copies, via the post, will find their Unique Voting Code (UVC) at the top of the Advance Voting Ballot Paper, enclosed with this notice. The ballot paper will also provide full details regarding the voting process.

However, once mail recipients receive their Unique Voting Code, those members who wish to do so may use their code to cast an online e-vote by following the prompts at www.mi-vote.com/secure

Members may only cast one vote for each item of business.

5. The deadline for submitting votes, either online or by post is by 5pm (UK BST) on Thursday 1 October 2026. Please note we are unable to accept ballot papers by any other means.
6. Items of Any Other Business (AOB) are required to be submitted, in writing and in advance. Items can be submitted either electronically by following the prompts at <https://www.mi-nomination.com/thebrontesocietyregistration> or can be mailed to the Brontë Society c/o Democracy Technology Ltd, Unit 8, Mill Court, The Sawmills, Durley SO32 2EJ, United Kingdom.

The deadline for submitting items of AOB, either electronically or by post, is 5pm (UK BST) on Thursday 1 October 2026. Again, we cannot accept items of AOB by any other means.



Lucy Powrie, Chair of the Brontë Society Board of Trustees

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE 130TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE BRONTË SOCIETY

Held on Saturday 4 October 2025

1. Welcome, introduction and opening remarks by Helen Meller, Vice-Chair of the Brontë Society Board of Trustees

Good afternoon, or good morning, depending on where you are joining us from – and thank you for attending our 2025 Brontë Society AGM. Also, a warm welcome to all those who are joining us here at the venue – St James Church in Thornton. The meeting is also being streamed live via zoom webinar.

My name is Helen Meller, and I have been a trustee since 2018, and I have been Vice Chair of the Brontë Society Board for three years.

I am joined here in Thornton by several of my fellow trustees and the members of the Senior Leadership Team whom I will introduce in a moment. Firstly, a few housekeeping matters:

This meeting is confidential and only open to members of the Brontë Society. If you are not a member of the Brontë Society, we politely request that you leave now.

I would also like to take a moment to remind everyone about the Brontë Society Policy of Respect this means that *'All trustees, staff, volunteers and members are expected to behave towards each other and speak and/or write to and about each other with respect at all times; and do their utmost to promote and embed respect in all areas of the organisation'*.

For those attending online you will see at the bottom of your screen a Q&A button. If you have a question related to the business being discussed at a certain point in the meeting, please use this function and type your question in the box. If you have a question not directly linked to our AGM agenda, there will be an opportunity to ask it after the meeting, during our informal Q&A session.

You will also see a 'chat button' so, please use this to say hello and let us know where you are joining us from today. Please don't use this function for questions, as they may get missed.

If members in the room have a question related to a particular agenda item, please raise your hand and wait to be called on by the chair. For minuting purposes please do not forget to tell us your name.

Finally, please note that this meeting is being recorded, not for future sharing or broadcast, but solely to assist with the minuting of the proceedings.

Welcome to our members, particularly those of you who are attending your first meeting and to our invited guest: Chris Beaumont from Clive Owen LLP (our auditors). Stephen May, our Relationship Manager for Literature from Arts Council England has forwarded his apologies.

I am joined here today by current trustee, Shahidha Bari who has served as a trustee for the last four years, and by Lucy Powrie and Andy Midgley who are standing for re-election

at this AGM. Joining us online are trustees Laura Beare, Tom Hendry and Penny Jenkins so please say hello to them in the chat. Trustees Lauren Watson and Ciara Gallagher have forwarded their apologies for the meeting.

We are also joined by members of our Senior Leadership Team: Rebecca Yorke, Director; Mhairi Tomlinson, our Head of Finance; Gail Price, our Head of HR & Operations and Ann Dinsdale, our Principal Curator.

I would also like to extend a warm welcome to members of the Brontë Parsonage Museum staff who are assisting us with this meeting: Mia Ferullo, our Digital Engagement Officer, Diane Fare, our Outreach Officer, Hayley Pink, our Marketing & Development Officer, and also Alison Boardman, our Governance Coordinator, who is minuting this meeting.

Membership currently stands at 1,682, and I can confirm that the meeting is quorate. Over 100 members have registered to attend, and 272 members have participated by voting. This equates to a turnout of 16.7%, which is in line with last year's turnout of 17.5%.

We have received two items of AOB and several other questions which will be dealt with at the appropriate point in the agenda.

2. Apologies Received

Apologies, for this year's meeting have been received from: Isobel Stirk, Laura Potts, Elaine Simpson, Catherine Rayner, Akiko Higuchi, Patricia Goodwin, Erin Adams and our President, Dame Judi Dench.

If anyone has any other apologies, please let us know by raising your hand now, or writing them in the chat box. [There were no further apologies received.]

3. Election of Brontë Society Trustees – declaration of the ballot results

For the practicalities of running this meeting, I am now going to move to item 8 of the circulated agenda, the result of the trustee ballot.

Firstly, on behalf of everyone at the Brontë Society, I would like to thank Shahidah Bari for her hard work and commitment, having served as a trustee for the last four years. I would also like to thank Julian Sladdin for his commitment to the Board since 2021. Julian has unfortunately had to step down as a trustee very recently.

Before, I declare the results of the ballot I would like to respond to three questions, which we received from Margaret McCarthy, related to the election of trustees, so I will address these first.

Margaret McCarthy asks:

Question 1 – The Trustees have asked for members of the society to vote for new members of the Board, as stated in the Articles of Association. Why, are there no trustees who show an interest in the society members who voted for them?

Our response:

All trustees are members of the Brontë Society and are elected to provide governance and oversight to the Charity. Their duty as charity law trustees is to act in the way in

which they consider to be in the best interests of the Charity.

Margaret McCarthy also asks a further two questions which we will address together:

Question 2 – Can you tell us how many members put up to be a board member? If more than the two we were asked to vote for, why were the other members unsuitable?

Question 3 – Can you please remind us of when members were asked to put themselves forward, as a board member, for the next three years?

Our response:

We understand that Margaret's question is referring to Article 26.2.1 which states that the vacancies for elected Trustees must be openly advertised.

Ahead of this AGM, Lucy Powrie and Andy Midgely were both coming to the end of a term of office – Lucy after a second year of being a directly appointed trustee, and Andy after a term of three years. Lucy and Andy both expressed their intention to re-stand as trustees, which given the service given by both to the Charity, and their relevant skills and experience, was endorsed by the Board.

Having identified two candidates and feeling that their re-election would serve the board well whilst remaining within the maximum numbers and composition specified in the articles, we acknowledge that the board may have overlooked the procedural element of advertising.

We also acknowledge that this was a procedural irregularity and would like to thank Margaret McCarthy for bringing it to the charity's attention.

Succession planning is a current organisational priority. The trustees agreed that it was important to establish the Charity's strategy for the next few years and undertake a skills audit to ensure that the board was in the best possible position to oversee and support the strategy. This will take place at our annual planning day next month. This staggering of trustee appointments is beneficial for succession planning and allows time to consider the skills and experience required and a longer period of advertising to reach as many potential candidates as possible.

We acknowledge that this planned staged process of recruitment could have been more clearly stated in the information provided with the ballot paper.

The very recent resignation of Julian Sladdin means that there is one space left on the board for a member elected trustee (which would bring the total number of members elected trustees to 10 which is in line with article 23.7). In this instance, and in an acknowledgement of the procedural irregularity, the trustees do not intend to exercise their power to co-opt, but after a period of advertising, will run a second ballot for a trustee to be elected by the members, in accordance with the articles, in the new year.

In this instance, and in an acknowledgement of the procedural irregularity, the trustees will conduct a period of advertising and recruitment in the new year, to facilitate a ballot for a trustee to be elected by the members, in accordance with the articles.

Finally, when the procedural irregularity was brought to our attention, legal advice was sought as to its impact in relation to the articles, and any additional action that might be required. Our advisors Wrigley's confirmed that the matter did constitute a technical breach of the articles of association but that no further action in relation to the technical breach would be required, other than noting for the future to ensure it is not repeated.

Thanks to the information provided by Mi-Voice, I can now confirm that both candidates standing for election have received more votes in favour than against, and are both duly elected. I therefore confirm the re-election of Lucy Powrie and Andy Midgley.

I would like to extend my congratulations to both candidates and thank all the members who took part in the voting process.

I am now going to invite my colleague Lucy Powrie to chair the rest of the meeting.

4. Approval of the draft minutes of the previous Brontë Society Annual General Meeting, held on Saturday 5 October 2024

Members were asked to vote, in advance, to accept these minutes as a true reflection of the 2024 Annual General Meeting. There were 24 abstentions, but all other votes cast, some 248, were in favour, so I can confirm that the minutes have been accepted as a true record of the meeting.

5. Matters arising from last minutes

If you wish to raise a matter arising from the minutes of the 2024 AGM, please let us know now by raising your hand or typing it in the Q&A box. [No further matters were raised.]

6. Presentation of the Review of the Brontë Society 2024-2025 by Lucy Powrie

If you've had the chance to read the Annual Review included with the AGM papers, you'll know what an exciting, jam-packed year it has been for the Brontë Society.

And this is my opportunity to expand on some of the highlights and share with you the significant moments from the past year. I really could be here all day, which would be no hardship in this beautiful setting, but without further ado, here is the Brontë Society's Review for 2024-2025.

So, 2025 has seen Bradford take centre stage as UK City of Culture, and we're proud to have been a cultural partner, building connections within the local authority and other cultural and heritage organisations across the district.

From Bradford 2025's Cultural Capital Fund, we were lucky enough to receive funding for our project to build new visitor facilities on site at the Museum, which I will speak about further in a moment.

One of my personal highlights was the *Wandering Imaginations* project. Last weekend, I was in Haworth for the Brontë Festival of Women's Writing and was blown away by the talent on display from the writers and creatives who have been involved in the project since the beginning of the year, and who were invited to Haworth to discuss their work.

Together with the team at Bradford 2025 and the British Council, two writers from Bradford and two writers from Ghana were selected to create a piece of science fiction and fantasy writing inspired by the young Brontës' worlds of 'Glasstown, Angria and Gondal'. Then, their work was illustrated and animated and recorded as audiobooks – which you can either listen to by visiting the exhibition at the Brontë Parsonage Museum, or online in your own time.

It was clear just how meaningful this collaboration has been for all involved, offering community and support and cultural exchange. Truly, it epitomises for me everything that Bradford 2025 has been, a celebration and fostering of creative talent.

The completion of our visitor facilities really does deserve a section of its own – because I'm so proud of the vision, the immense teamwork, and effort that has meant we finally have accessible toilets and a Changing Places facility at the Brontë Parsonage Museum. Inclusivity should always be at the heart of the decisions we make for the future and now visitors can come to the Museum knowing that this significant barrier to access has been removed.

As I mentioned, this was possible because of Bradford 2025's Cultural Capital Fund and we also received funding from the Arts Council England's Capital Investment Programme.

So, 2024's exhibition, *The Brontës' Web of Childhood*, gave way to 2025's exhibition *From Haworth to Eternity: The Enduring Legacy of the Brontës*. Featuring items that showcase Haworth as a destination of literary pilgrimage, props from film and TV, and letters and drawings made by the Brontës, it's given me a different perspective on my visits to the Museum as just one person amongst the millions who have stepped through the Parsonage doors since it opened to the public nearly 100 years ago.

Elsewhere in the programme, we continued with an array of events that target all ages: from our Brontë Babies sessions to our Thursday Talks, workshops and courses, we hope that there's something for everyone to engage with. A vital part of the programme is also our Sandford Award-winning learning programme, as well as our outreach events that go directly into the community, which are so valued by educators and those who participate in them. In many respects, they're the unsung heroes of our programme – but I love nothing more than singing their praises because they're at the heart of what makes our offering so special, continuing the work the Brontës themselves did around the importance of education and outreach.

We've also worked with creatives such as Sophia Hatfield, had Dame Jacqueline Wilson headline the 2024 Brontë Festival of Women's Writing, and I loved the artist Franklin's *Imaginary Worlds* exhibition, which displayed the most beautiful, detailed drawings inspired by the Brontës' works that required a magnifying glass to fully take in – not unlike the Brontës' little books!

Our jewel in the crown of the Brontë Parsonage Museum, is our Designated and Outstanding Collection and I still find it amazing that despite the fact the Brontës lived so long ago, so much is still coming to light.

- 'The North Wind' is, for me, one of the most exciting recent additions to the collection but the great thing is that we've had so many exciting additions that I'm sure somebody

else would answer differently as to their favourite. We acquired it at auction in March, and it's a watercolour painting by Emily Brontë striking for its bold blue colours and its protagonist, who looks like she's stepped out of the lines of Emily's Gondal poetry.

- We've also welcomed to the collection a purse belonging to Charlotte, an oil painted portrait believed to be by Branwell. We have also been loaned several items such as Anne Brontë's 'Geneva', and Charlotte's Christening bonnet.
- But we also continue to add to the collection through our Contemporary Arts Programme, and welcomed one of Franklin's drawings to the Museum, called 'Thornfield Hall'.

In Autumn last year I was voted by my fellow Trustees to the role of Chair of Trustees which has been such an honour for me. Whether it's writing to you in the *Gazette*, being able to meet you all throughout the year at our exhibition preview evening or at the Women's Writing Festival, my priority has always been increasing visibility of the Board to members, as well as supporting the activity of the Team wherever appropriate.

We welcomed three new Trustees at the last AGM, which was held online: Tom Hendry, Ellie Keel and Lauren Watson, and it's been a pleasure to work with them and learn from them. Each year, we host a BS Board Away Day where we gather in person to discuss the Brontë business for the year ahead with the Senior Leadership Team, and I continue to be so inspired by the opportunity to work alongside such passionate, interesting people who give up their time in aid of the Brontës.

Earlier this year, we sent out a membership survey, which asked you an array of questions about your experiences as members – and rest assured we're working hard to implement the feedback you've given us, and appreciate the chance to listen and learn from our members.

Investment in digital infrastructure was another key principle of our recent capital investment projects, and I hope you'll have had a chance to browse our new website since it went live at the end of 2024. Visiting it is now such a smooth, pleasant experience, with all the information you could need about what we offer living on it, but this project was also about investing in the systems behind the scenes that enable the team to carry out their work to a high, consistent standard. These systems really are like a fellow colleague in the team, and it's great to see them implemented so well.

But the digital programme has also consisted of the continuation of the *Behind the Glass* podcast, which is going from strength to strength; the arrival of the Brontë Parsonage Museum to TikTok, and embedding digital in the visitor experience; across the Museum, for example, you'll see QR codes in the garden where you can listen an audio guide, we continue to use the Bloomberg Connects app to enhance the visitor experience – which acts almost like a mini museum, right from your phone.

Our new website also means an improved online shop experience – so if you're looking for presents to buy as we approach the festive-season, it's the place you're going to want to browse!

And last, but most certainly not least – I'm delighted to be able to talk to you about our recent property acquisition at West Lane and The Fold in Haworth. If you follow us on social media, or have read the news section of our website, you may already know that

in August we were successful in our bid to acquire a cluster of buildings in the heart of Haworth, right near the top of Main Street. It's been amazing to see the reaction from the community, especially as the buildings have been in a state of disrepair for a long time, and we're excited to begin the process of breathing new life back into them.

Much of our conversation as a Board over the past few years has revolved around the kind of legacy we want to leave as we approach the Museum's centenary in 2028. With a growing collection comes the challenges of storage, and we're always looking to enhance the experience we offer to visitors, so we're about to start discussion as a team as to securing funding for its renovation and shaping a vision for its future.

We will of course keep you updated every step of the way, and there'll be lots of information featured in the October edition of the *Brontë Gazette*, which you'll receive shortly. The purchase wouldn't have been possible without the bequest we received last year from a member of the Brontë Society, which makes it more special, and we are very thrilled and excited about the project.

On a final note, I would like to thank the Senior Leadership Team, staff, volunteers, and my fellow Trustees, who have all worked with passion and dedication over the past year. Conditions are challenging in the wider arts and heritage sectors, and I'm aware that we're asking a lot of visitors and members who may be facing their own challenges in the cost-of-living crisis. We are just so grateful that people continue to visit the Museum, enjoy our offering, and choose to support us.

I'd also like to thank Sharon Wright, editor of the *Brontë Gazette*, and the editor of *Brontë Studies* Claire O'Callaghan, who are here with us today. We're so lucky to have such a vibrant community of Brontë lovers engaging with what we do as a Society, and with the Brontës' works and lives within an academic context – and Sharon and Claire's thoughtful editorial work benefits all of us who care about the Brontës and their legacies. Personally, there's nothing more I enjoy than receiving a new edition of both and feeling part of the wider network of Brontë enthusiasts; it's a community that both publications foster so beautifully. So, thank you, Sharon and Claire.

It has been a year for the Brontë Society that I won't forget, and I look forward to everything that the next year holds, which is sure to be filled with the same enthusiasm for the vital work that everyone across the organisation wholeheartedly throws themselves into. I really am so proud to be a member of the Brontë Society and hope you'll agree that the 2024–25 period really has been one of the most exciting yet.

Are there any questions or comments relating to the Review and activities of the 2024–2025 period? No questions were raised.

7. Presentation of the Annual Accounts and Auditor's Report for the period ending 31 March 2025 by the Chair of the Finance, Risk and Audit Committee, Andrew Midgley

Good afternoon. I have been a Trustee for just over four years now and I want to take a few minutes to run through the accounts and financial performance for the year.

This was a year defined by the successful implementation of two major infrastructure projects and despite the challenges and distraction of this Rebecca Yorke and the team have ensured that this year was again underpinned by another strong financial performance. Our overall operating results were just shy of our original budgets, and both infrastructure projects were completed on time and within budget. Of course, none of this would have been possible without the hard work of the staff and the generosity of members and funders.

The Society is a complex organisation with income generated from several sources (museum admissions, retail sales, membership subscriptions, events, grants and donations). The accounts reflect the complexity, and this year is no exception, particularly in relation to the funding of the capital projects. I'm just going to give a high-level overview – but if you have more detailed questions, I will be happy to field them at the end with help from the experts – Mhairi Tomlinson the Head of Finance and Chris Beaumont from our auditors.

The Society is a charity and is not being run for profit, so it must act for the public benefit, in pursuit of its charitable objectives and must also consider its various stakeholders – the members of course – but also funders (particularly ACE), together with the staff and the local community.

I'll start with the background and the numbers I'm referring to can also be found on pages 19-23 of the Annual Review 2024-205 document.

As I mentioned there was another strong financial performance for the year. Unrestricted income was £1.654m compared to £1.633m last year. This year's income includes some of the capital grants we received for the facilities building, roughly £345k, and last year includes the significant bequest of £325k. After taking those two items out income was broadly the same in both years with an increase in admissions income being offset to some extent by a fall in revenue from the shop.

The increase in admissions income was mainly due to the decision to open for six days for a longer period in the year, admission price changes and an uptick in visitors' gift aiding. Income from educational visits also increased. The reduction in shop income seems to follow a general trend in the museum sector where secondary spending has fallen. However, recent retail sales seem to be bucking that trend as we have benefitted from the new website and new products especially the *Book of Rhymes* as well as Anne Dinsdale and Sharon Wright's new book *Let me in*.

Expenditure rose from £1.232m last year to £1.348m this year. The increase is mainly due to an increase in staff costs and some of the extra expenses are because of utilising funds set aside from last year's bequest. Staff costs increased as we maintained our commitment to paying all staff at least the Real Living Wage (a policy introduced in 2023-24). We also had an increase in staff support to cover longer opening hours and additional resources for our digital marketing development. IT costs in the year increased in relation to the implementation of the new technology infrastructure and website.

Funding from Bradford 2025, Arts Council England and the Murray family together with funds from last year's bequest enabled us to embark on the two infrastructure projects we have talked a lot about. One of the worries at the beginning of the year, though, was how

the team would cope with the project management of these developments knowing that projects like this invariably don't run smoothly. I'm sure that Rebecca and the team can comment on how stressful this was at times but at the end of the year we can look back at two very successful projects delivered on time and on budget.

As you have heard, during the year we acquired several new additions to the collection including 'The North Wind' and this was also largely funded from last year's bequest.

That's just to remind me to say that the year-end we are referring to is March 2025 so only represents three wintery months of Bradford 2025 so hoping next year's accounts will reflect the full impact of the 2025 City of Culture.

Also 2024 includes the bequest and 2025 includes capital grants for the facilities. If you take those items out and remove expenditure from the bequest in 2025 there was a surplus of around £80k in 2024 and a deficit of around £30k in 2025.

Admissions and shop now represent almost 74% of the income

Grants and donations are mainly the ACE grant but also include continued funding from Bradford Council, membership and events.

Unrestricted expenditure for the year was £1.348m.

Staff costs are the bulk of expenditure being £806k for the year and an increasing share of expenditure, particularly as we maintained the real living wage and we had an increase in headcount to cover opening more days and additional resource in digital marketing to develop our digital presence.

Just to dwell on staff costs for a moment. We received several AOB questions and observations from Catherine Rayner on our staff costs, so I wanted to go into a little more detail here to respond to those questions.

- Firstly, staff costs at this level, 60% of expenditure or 49% of total income this year, is comparable to others in the charity sector, particularly those in the heritage sector. Staff are integral to all our activities including looking after and preserving the collection and delivering the charitable objectives – without staff we would not be able to open to the public and generate an income. Our other overheads just aren't as significant. It is worth noting that our staff costs were above 50% of income in the years prior to the pandemic and staff numbers were higher.
- At least half of the increase in our staff costs from last year, roughly £100k, is attributable to the extra headcount I mentioned, and the rest is mainly related to pay rises. Since April 2023 we have been a Real Living Wage employer which means that all staff are paid at least the real living wage in relation to the hours they work. About half of our staff (largely the housekeeping and museum assistant roles) have pay rates determined with reference to the real living wage and this rose by 10% from the prior year, reflecting the previous high inflation rates. Other pay rises were around 5%.
- Pay rates are set with reference to the Real Living Wage and salaries within the charity heritage sector and are benchmarked to the Museum Association's salary guidance published every couple of years. Trustees review and approve proposed pay rates and

as we have a recognition agreement with the Prospect Union they are also informed, and union members vote on the proposals. On a quarterly basis the Board reviews salary costs as part of its overall review of income and expenditure and would approve any significant headcount changes. Catherine Rayner has referenced her own research that indicates that the average full-time salary for a charity role is £36.1k per year – if that is charities in general it probably isn't easy to compare to us but our average full-time salary (which you can easily calculate from the accounts) is just under £29.7k so significantly lower.

- Catherine Rayner also asked about the Society's payment in respect of pensions – all staff are offered a choice of two pension arrangements and the Society's contribution is either 5% or 3% of salary depending on the individual's choice.

The **heritage funds** are the assets that comprise the museum and the collection (referred to as Heritage Assets on the balance sheet). For example, this includes the recent North Wind purchase and the donations from the Friends of the National Libraries in 2022 and the Little Book purchase in 2019. These funds are of course not something we would ever consider realising in cash. [Note some of the Blavatnik Honresfield items are jointly owned anyway – British Library/University of Leeds Library.]

Restricted funds are funds, usually held in cash, and are ring-fenced (by the person or organisation donating the funds) for a specific purpose. The funds are therefore kept separate for projects still to be completed or purchases that have yet to be made. Unusually this year restricted funds also includes the portion of the facilities that were funded by the Arts Council (£100,000) as they have applied specific restrictions to the future use of those buildings.

Finally, the **unrestricted funds** (or reserves) of £1.2m can be split between:

- those reserves represented by the remaining cost of the building and the capitalised elements of the website (£451k)
- cash and investments held as a buffer against unforeseen circumstances in accordance with our reserves policy (£330k in line with Arts Council guidance)
- designated funds that we have allocated to support future projects and acquisitions (£275k, largely the bequest in 2024)
- and other unrestricted reserves (roughly £100k) which we can use at our discretion.

There are full details of the individual funds in the consolidated accounts available from the website or Companies House.

Finally I'd like to thank Chris Beaumont and his team from Clive Owen LLP, our auditors for conducting a thorough and efficient audit.

The Audit Report was unqualified for 2025 which means that our auditors are satisfied that the financial statements are fair and accurate and that there is nothing specific that the auditors want to draw to the members attention. This is a tribute to Mhairi Tomlinson as Head of Finance and the finance team in general, who in an exceptionally busy year continued to maintain a very high standard of reporting and financial control.

8. Reappointment of Clive Owen LLP as the Society's auditors

We are very grateful for the support and advice offered by our auditors over the last twelve months and, prior to the meeting, asked members to support their reappointment.

I am pleased to say that the result of the vote is 248 in favour, with 21 abstentions and three against and so this motion is passed.

9. Any other business

We have received two items of AOB, the first from Linsey Irvine. Linsey says:

I was delighted to attend the Conference in Bradford in person and have been a member since 2020. Why is the AGM not the same weekend as the conference? I'm not local so can't make two journeys so close together to attend both. I value the opportunity to connect with fellow Brontë enthusiasts which isn't always possible in an online format. Connecting is an important feature of well-being which I feel we can nurture by having both events at the same weekend.

Lucy Powrie:

Thank you for your question, Linsey and we are so glad that you enjoyed the conference. It was a very inspiring day. The 2023 conference was held in Leeds, and was followed the next day by the AGM, also in Leeds. Our evaluation of that weekend revealed that very few people attended both events, even though we 'packaged' them together, and our takeaway from this is that our members and audiences have a broad range of interests and what appeals to one member may not be of interest to another. For example, our Women's Writing Festival last weekend attracted an audience of over 300 people, but those people won't all be members, or members who want to attend the conference or the AGM, but of course we always evaluate our events as well as the input from participants.

And our other item of AOB is from Beth Cunningham, who says:

I would like to express my appreciation and thanks to all involved with the monthly talks on Thursday afternoons – to Sue Newby, for the original idea, and to everyone who has delivered a talk. So much research and hard work involved, a high standard and always a fresh angle or new facts coming to light.

Thank you, Beth, that's a lovely note to end on.

10. Closing remarks

Thank you everyone. That brings our 2025 AGM to an end. We will take a 10-minute comfort break and then you are welcome to return for informal questions either in person or via the Q&A box.



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