

The Kipling Society (Registered Charity No. 278885) – Annual Report 2023/24

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Trustees at 30 June 2024

Alex Bubb (Chair and Meetings Secretary)
Jan Montefiore (Deputy Chair and Journal Editor)
Mike Kipling (Secretary and Treasurer)
David Forsyth (Bateman's Liaison Officer)
Fiona Renshaw (Membership Secretary)
John Walker (Librarian)
Paolo D'Indinosante
Mary Hamer
Fred Lerner
Erin Louttit
Sarah LeFanu
Christopher Morrison
Andrew Scragg
Rufus Vaughan-Spruce

The Society is governed by its Rules, approved by the Charities Commission in 1999 and amended at the AGMs in September 2014, July 2019 and July 2023.

As set out in the Rules, the objective of the Society is the advancement of public education by the promotion of the study and appreciation of the life and works of Rudyard Kipling.

The main activities in furtherance of this aim are:

- (a) to print, publish and issue quarterly (or at such other intervals as the Council of the Society may from time to time determine) a magazine entitled The Kipling Journal devoted to matters of interest to readers and students of Kipling.
- (b) to promote and hold lectures, discussions and meetings, and generally to encourage the study of Kipling's life and writings.
- (c) for the purposes of education and study, to maintain a library comprising Kipling's works, the works of writers on Kipling, and other material (in any form or medium) relating to Kipling.
- (d) to provide speakers on Kipling's life and works for suitable functions organised otherwise than by the Society.
- (e) to employ any electronic or other form of information technology to store, process or provide information about Kipling, the Society and its activities.
- (f) to give assistance and advice regarding Kipling's life and works and on the organisation of any suitable function dealing with them.

In pursuing these objectives, the Trustees have had due regard to Charity Commission guidance on public benefit.

Achievements and performance

Individual members: As of 24 June, there were **367** individual members, a net decrease of 25 overall since my report to last year's AGM. In the intervening 12 months, we have welcomed 34 new members and a total of 59 existing members have left the Society or been removed from our list of members for a variety of reasons. The membership rise experienced during the Covid pandemic has now reversed, and the total is now below 2019's number of 378. The new student membership category introduced in July 2020 has proved popular, attracting 26 new members to the Society so

far. We currently have 10 student members, mostly located in the UK. So far we have had 14 takers for the new non-student online membership option which was introduced at the beginning of this year.

Corporate members: The current total is **54**, a decrease of six since last year's AGM (and 22 below 2019's level). One British and three American university libraries decided not to renew their subscriptions for 2023-2024, as did a British public library. Two gratis subscriptions were discontinued due to a lack of contact with the subscribers and a new gratis subscription was granted to the library of the Army and Navy Club in London, where the Society's in person meetings now take place.

We have continued with our programme of three hybrid meetings, with the in-person element being in London, and two on-line only meetings. After a final meeting at the Royal Over-Seas League in November, we switched on cost grounds to the Army & Navy Club, where we were most impressed with the facilities when we met there for the first time in February. We continue to invite in-person attendees to stay for dinner with the speaker and Council members after the hybrid events.

The September 2023 meeting continued the trend established last year of a pre-recorded filmed tour, this time visiting those parts of Rottingdean associated with Kipling. Our thanks go to Richard Howell, the main narrator. Richard has also just been involved, alongside several Council members and National Trust staff, in leading a walking tour of Burwash village and the wider grounds of Bateman's, and in filming a similar walk to be shown at our meeting in September this year.

November saw our farewell meeting at the Royal Over-seas League, at which our speaker was John Walker, our Librarian, who delivered an entertaining talk that didn't pull any punches while musing on what manhood and masculinity meant for Kipling, covering such texts as *The Light that Failed*, 'Follow me 'Ome', and 'The Betrothed'.

In February we sidled along Pall Mall and inaugurated our new era at the "Rag", welcoming Dr Charlotte Boyce from Portsmouth University who proved a brilliant speaker. Charlotte spoke about Kipling's 1895 story "William the Conqueror" in relation to several specific nineteenth-century Indian famines that Kipling would have been informed about. After a superb talk covering the story's historical context, characterization, the role of infrastructure and the operation of gender in the story, the subsequent Q&A was very interesting and enthusiastic.

April's online-only meeting was extremely well-attended, in part because we welcomed participants from another organization, the American Trust for the British Library. The speaker was our President, David Richards, who delivered a delightful talk on the origins and growth of his Kipling collection. Dave is without doubt the greatest living collector of rare books, manuscripts and ephemera related to Kipling and his family, with his collection now housed within the Beinecke Library at Yale University. Joining us via Zoom from his home in Connecticut, Dave regaled us with stories of four decades of book collecting, of dealers, catalogues, and auctions, of treasures discovered and fought for, bookplates and dedications, autograph letters and marginalia. Of course he is still adding to his collection, and listeners were struck by his account of the daily vigilance with which he maintains his watch for new items on the antiquarian market.

July will see us back at the Army and Navy Club for a talk from a long-established member, Dr Howard Booth of the University of Manchester, who will present to us his recent research on Kipling and E.M. Forster.

We continued our practice of holding on-line Kipling reading events, with one in December and one in June, both organised once again by Jan Montefiore. Many thanks to Jan for keeping up this tradition originally established during the pandemic but which remains as popular as ever. We also held a collective on-line reading of two of Kipling's *Plain Tales from the Hills*, and a book discussion meeting focussed on the story 'The Mark of the Beast'. Thanks to Jan for leading the former and to Siobhan Smith for leading the latter.

As foreshadowed last year, we reduced the number of editions of the Journal to three, in September, January and May, all edited so ably by Jan as usual. This will continue to be our practice in the future. Five e-mail newsletters were also issued by Mike.

Our website continues to flourish and provides a valuable service to many thousands of users each month. At the start of 2024, John Radcliffe stepped down after many years of sterling service to the Society as on-line editor. He was replaced by Ian Bell who will be joining Council. Ian has already implemented a number of changes aimed at attracting more users to the website and providing more information and resources to members. We fully expect these developments to continue. Please do let the Society know if you have any suggestions regarding the site.

In May, the Society was represented by three Council members at the AGM of the Alliance of Literary Societies at Bowness in the Lake District. A stall promoting the Society was manned, featuring our new freestanding banner and life-sized cut-out of Rudyard himself. As previously announced, we will be hosting the 2025 ALS AGM on 16-18 May 2025. The main meeting will be held at the University of Sussex on the Saturday, followed by a visit to view exhibits relating to Kipling and other authors from the University's special collections. There will be dinners in Brighton on the Friday and Saturday evenings and a choice of a walking tour of Rottingdean or a tour of Bateman's on the Sunday. Attendance is open to all Kipling Society members. Further details can be found in last month's newsletter. Applications will open early next year.

Also as foreshadowed, we successfully transferred ownership of our library to Haileybury School, assuring its continued preservation and open access to members and others. Enquiries about the library may still be addressed to John Walker in his capacity as Librarian. We would like to thank John, and also Dr Toby Parker, our honorary archivist, who is based at Haileybury, for making this opportunity possible.

Financial review

The Society's Accounts are prepared in respect of calendar years. Those for 2023 were published in the May 2024 edition of the Kipling Journal. The accounts have been approved by the Independent Financial Examiner, Charles Gillams.

The Society's net assets increased by around £3,600 in the year to December 2023, mainly because only three editions of the Journal were produced during the year (the cost per edition being about £2,600). The variation in the incidence of subscription payments around the year-end has also resulted in higher income than in calendar 2022, albeit membership numbers have changed little. The cost of website maintenance was only paid in January 2024 but has been included as a creditor in the accounts for easier comparison with the prior year.

The Society's investments are held in two charity term accounts with United Trust Bank, maturing in 2024 and 2026.

One material change to note since the year end is the donation of the majority of the library contents to Haileybury School, effectively reducing the amount of the 'Library books, etc' item to zero.

Reserving policy

At 31 December 2023, the Society held as earmarked reserves amounts of £2,749 and £17,850 being respectively the balances of donations made by former members John Slater and Eileen Stammers-Smith. These funds are earmarked respectively for the financing of children's writing competitions and for public lectures relating to Rudyard Kipling. The prizes awarded for the John McGivering competition were met from general funds (which also received the entry fees for the competition), with the exception of children's prizes totalling £105 which were met from the John Slater Essay Competition Fund. The Eileen Stammers-Smith Memorial Lecture Fund was charged with the cost of a small gift for the 2023 lecturer.

The Society also had general reserves of £40,328 amounting to around three years of expenditure at normal levels. The Trustees have not specified a particular target for general reserves and are content either for them to remain around current levels or to gradually reduce should appropriate uses be found for their expenditure.