A year in the life of The Royal Society of Literature
“75% of adults in Britain have read something in the last six months which they consider to be literature”

#LiteratureMatters

Literature in Britain Today report, published 1 March 2017

Our aims

1. To honour and encourage great writers
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2. To engage people in literature
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Cover photo: RSL event on The Good Immigrant at the British Library, with L R Nikkiish Shukla, Eva Hoffman FRSL, Vahni Capildeo, Mike Phillips FRSL, and Razia Iqbal. Photo: Adrian Pope.

A. L. Kennedy FRSL speaks at European Literature Night, Young People’s Laureate for London Caleb Femi reads at the Annual T. S. Eliot Memorial Reading, and Colin Thubron FRSL in conversation at the On Memory event.
A year in review

“The Society is flourishing.”

In this first full year under our new Director Tim Robertson, the Society is flourishing. We have increased and diversified our programme of events (with a growing number outside London), continued our vigorous sponsorship of writers and our outreach to disadvantaged schools, while intensifying our presence online. At the same time we have streamlined the work of our Council by the creation of specialised sub-committees.

In this, the final year of my Presidency, I am especially pleased that Dame Marina Warner will be succeeding me. A renowned scholar, historian and novelist – and the first female President of the Society – she will help guide it to its anticipated two-hundredth birthday in 2020.

We are saddened, as in other years, by the death of distinguished Fellows, who in 2016-17 include Richard Adams, Prof. Bernard Bergonzi, Sir Christopher Bland, Helen Dunmore, Tim Heald, Hugh Honour, Jeremy Lewis, Venetia Newall, Gerard Noel, Prof. Norman Sherry, Lord Thomas of Swynnerton and William Trevor.

As an independent charity, we are indebted to a vital range of donors and Patrons, including many Fellows and Members. We would not exist without you. In a year of widespread and often disturbing change, our advocacy of literature (and literacy) has never been more necessary, and we continue to rely gratefully on your enthusiasm and patronage.

Colin Thubron CBE FRSL
President

Lisa Appignanesi OBE FRSL
Chair

“Long may literature matter. It is one of the touchstones of our humanity.”

Early last spring as I began to think my way into my role as Chair of this august Society, I scanned the list of Fellows and was struck by its sheer wealth and variety of talent. The names evoked knowledge, a complexity of ways of seeing and being, hours of reading pleasure. How arid both our public and private spheres would be without the writing, the imaginative verve here represented. Literature matters. It matters even more in these times of local and global uncertainty.

This was the theme that emerged to unify the RSL’s many activities, as I began working with our splendid Council, President, and the compact and energetic RSL staff team. If the ‘advancement of literature’ is the primary task with which our Charter charges us – one our audience surveys wholeheartedly support – then exploring and championing the many ways in which literature matters is key to that task. It is under this banner that we sail into our bicentenary in 2020: new awards for writers, for schools, and a bonanza of lectures.

Meanwhile, in this last year, we have carried out a nationwide opinion poll ‘Literature in Britain Today’ and added two sparkling new prizes to our list. Our many events, marked by passion, wit and an array of voices from here and abroad, are now partnered with the British Library, and take place in its spacious Knowledge Centre. They also travel the country. Long may literature matter. It is one of the touchstones of our humanity.

Colin Thubron CBE FRSL
President

Lisa Appignanesi OBE FRSL
Chair

A year in figures

In 2016, we...

...visited 11 state schools in disadvantaged communities, working with 807 students

...began live-streaming our events to libraries, reaching new audiences from Exeter to York

...held a public vote for the Nation’s Favourite Second Novel, with Pride and Prejudice topping a shortlist of 140 novels

...elected 13 distinguished writers as Fellows

...welcomed 346 new Members

...presented 13 awards and grants worth £56,000

...received 1,001 responses to our survey of Fellows, Members and e-newsletter subscribers
Aim 1: To honour and encourage great writers
Fellowship

Election as a Fellow of the RSL is a uniquely prestigious honour, because the decision is made by other distinguished writers. Around fifteen new Fellows are elected by secret ballot each year, and must be nominated and seconded by existing Fellows. Newly elected Fellows are introduced at our annual Summer Party and are invited to sign their names in our historic Roll Book using either T.S. Eliot’s or Byron’s pen.

In 2016, the following writers were made Fellows of the RSL:

- Tahmina Anam
- Sir Christopher Bland
- Helen Castor
- Artemis Cooper
- Paul Gilroy
- Germaine Greer
- Tanika Gupta MBE
- Sarah Hall
- Tom Holland
- Val McDermid
- Ian Rankin OBE
- James Runcie
- Sathnam Sanghera
- Simon Schama CBE
- Meera Syal CBE

“I was genuinely moved when I heard I’d been elected a Fellow of the RSL. Mostly the act of writing feels like shouting in a dark cave; to be honoured in this way by other writers is the ultimate acknowledgement that my work does speak to people.”

Val McDermid FRSL

“I’ve never been one for joining-in. I only managed a few months as a member of a political party, and only a year or two as a subscriber to a London members’ club. But accepting membership of a family that includes most of my favourite living writers is irresistible. Humbled and grateful.”

Sathnam Sanghera FRSL

Awards and prizes

We present a range of awards and prizes to reward literary merit and encourage writers at all stages of their careers, from the RSL Ondaatje Prize for a new work evoking the spirit of a place, to the RSL V.S. Pritchett Memorial Prize for an unpublished short story. In 2017, we welcome the RSL Giles St Aubyn Awards for Non-Fiction (following the last RSL Jerwood Awards for Non-Fiction in 2016), and the RSL Encore Award for best second novel.

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Sathnam Sanghera FRSL

2016-17 AWARD AND PRIZE WINNERS

- Benson Medal
  - Christopher MacLehose CBE
- Brookleaze Grants
  - Chris Monks
  - Camilla Whitehill
- RSL Jerwood Award for Non-Fiction
  - Afua Hirsch
  - Damian Le Bas
  - Violet Moller
- RSL Ondaatje Prize
  - Francis Spufford FRSL for Golden Hill (Faber)
- V.S. Pritchett Memorial Prize
  - Fiona Marshall (winner)
  - Clare Colvin (shortlist)
  - Jasmine Donahaye (shortlist)
  - Kenneth Steven (shortlist)
- RSL Encore Award
  - Ian McGuire for The North Water (Scribner)

“Place has always been central to my work, so I’m delighted to win this prize of all prizes. The 18th century New York of my book had to be conjured from maps and analogies and a few contemporary pictures, supported by walks round and round Lower Manhattan with my eyes fixed on the pavements rather than the skyscrapers. It’s a joy to find that what I built in my head seems solid enough for others to walk in, in their imaginations.”

Francis Spufford FRSL, winner of the 2017 RSL Ondaatje Prize
Aim 2: To engage people in literature
Membership

Our membership is open to everyone, and offers the joys and benefits of a literary festival and book club rolled into one, all year round. Members enjoy free entry and discounted guest tickets to our acclaimed annual programme of events, access to Members-only book groups, exclusive partner offers, and a complimentary subscription to the twice-yearly RSL Review magazine.

“We encourage the appreciation and exploration of literature with two seasons of public events each year, featuring discussions and talks on a range of literary subjects. Events in the past year have included Rowan Williams on Dostoevsky; Posy Simmonds on graphic fiction; Vahni Capildeo, Eva Hoffman, Mike Phillips and Nikesh Shukla on the literature of immigration; and Alan Ayckbourn on playwriting.”

Public events

Clockwise from top: Mike Phillips FRSL speaks at The Good Immigrant, Carol Ann Duffy FRSL reads at the Annual T. S. Eliot Memorial Reading, Ali Smith FRSL interviews writers shortlisted for the V.S. Pritchett Memorial Prize at the Telling Tales event.

““The British Library is delighted to be working with the RSL to present an ongoing series of public events in our Theatre. Over the last year these stimulating talks and conversations, featuring many exceptional Fellows, have been a wonderful addition to our cultural programme. It has been a pleasure to introduce RSL Members to the Library, and our audiences to the RSL.””

Jon Fawcett, Head of Events, British Library

“I joined the RSL because I wanted to keep up with literature in the UK. I am now a member of an amazing community of fellow readers and writers. I always leave events inspired to read more, and more widely. The first event I went to was ‘On Shakespeare’s Sonnets’ and I came away reminded of everything I loved about literature in the first place. I try to go to as many of the events as possible because, even if I’m not familiar with the speaker, I know that they will always be interesting and thought-provoking.”

Evie Ioannidi, RSL Young Member since January 2016

Right: Audience at The Good Immigrant.
Below: Evie Ioannidi talking to Vahni Capildeo, a panellist at The Good Immigrant event. Audience members chat at a reception after the Telling Tales event.
In the classroom

Our Schools Outreach Programme, delivered in partnership with educational charity First Story, takes RSL Fellows into targeted state secondary schools, bringing an experience of top quality literature to disadvantaged young people. A visit might consist of a talk to a large assembly group, followed by a writing workshop with a smaller number of students.


Moira Buffini FRSL visited Highgate Wood School, Haringey
Wendy Cope OBE FRSL visited Regent High School, King’s Cross
Kate Clanchy FRSL visited King Solomon Academy, Marylebone
Michael Frayn FRSL visited Willowfield Humanities College, Walthamstow
Jamila Gavin FRSL visited All Saints Academy, Cheltenham
Romesh Guneskera FRSL visited Acland Burghley School, Tufnell Park
Deborah Moggach FRSL visited St Martin-in-the-Field High School for Girls, Tulse Hill
Michael Morpurgo OBE FRSL visited Exeter College, Exeter
Meg Rosoff FRSL visited Feversham College, Bradford.

Meg Rosoff FRSL speaks to students at Feversham College, Bradford.

On 15 July 2016, Meg Rosoff visited Feversham College in Bradford, a specialist Science College for Muslim girls. Meg spoke to 120 pupils in Year 9 about how, after a career in advertising, she became a novelist, writing extraordinarily successful Young Adult fiction including How I Live Now, Just In Case and What I Was. Following this Meg ran a workshop with 25 pupils in Year 9, inviting them to share some of the things that inspired or might motivate them to write – what scares or angers them, who they love, how they feel about their siblings – and explored why stories and storytelling are important.

“I really enjoyed the author’s talk. It inspired me to read and write stories.”

Sidra, 13, pupil at Feversham College, Bradford

Thank you so much for coming. The girls absolutely loved Meg and have taken so much from this.”

Naveeda Kahn, Teacher, Feversham College, Bradford

Measuring impact: After each school visit, students are given a postcard to write a goal for their reading and writing. We then post this card back to them six weeks later, and ask them to tell us of their progress in an online survey.

Audience survey

As part of our organisational review in 2016, we commissioned the Audience Agency to survey all of our Fellows, Members and e-newsletter subscribers. This helped us understand our audience demographic and gave supporters the opportunity to comment on our work, informing plans for future development. We received 1,001 responses. Key findings are detailed below.

Key findings

- The most commonly chosen adjectives for the RSL are “prestigious” (59% of respondents), “informative” (54%), “London-centric” (44%) and “well-organised” (44%).
- Just over half of the respondents live in London, four in ten elsewhere in the UK, and one in ten overseas.
- 84% of Fellows and 75% of Members chose “acting as a national voice for the value of literature” as the most important goal for the RSL to pursue, while e-newsletter subscribers considered “supporting and encouraging emerging writers” the most important (65%).
- The five most common primary literary forms in which Fellows write are novels (35%), biography (22%), non-fiction (15%), poetry and history (14% each).
- The top three ways Fellows would like to be more involved with the RSL are by: nominating other writers for Fellowship (58%), participating in a school visit, and contributing ideas to the Society’s development (47% each).

What difference has the RSL made to you?

Fellows

- Helped increase my public profile as a writer
- Brought me into contact with other literature lovers
- Deepened my appreciation of books I have already read

Members

- Introduced me to new books to read
- Deepened my appreciation of books I have already read
- Brought me into contact with other literature lovers
Aim 3: To act as a voice for the value of literature

Literature in Britain Today

In late 2016, in partnership with leading market research organisation Ipsos MORI, we conducted a ground-breaking survey of 1,998 members of the public to determine what literature means to people in Britain today. The resulting Literature in Britain Today report was published on 1 March 2017 and attracted coverage in The Daily Telegraph, Evening Standard, Times Literary Supplement, the Guardian and the Daily Mail. The full report can be found on our website. Key findings are detailed below.

Key findings

- 75% of people (adults in Britain) have read something in the last 6 months which they consider to be literature.
- 55% of people who do not currently read literature would definitely or probably like to read it in the future.
- 88% of people agree that literature should be part of everyone’s education.
- 67% believe that literature comforts people in times of stress.
- 81% of people agree that literature helps people understand other points of view.
- 20% of people cannot name a writer of literature.
- 15% of people believe that literature is too difficult to understand.
- Readers of literature are more likely than others to be white, to be female, to come from higher socio-economic groups, and to use the internet.
- The factors most likely to encourage more reading of literature are recommendations of what to read, cheaper books and more local libraries.
- The most frequently named writers of literature are: William Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, J. K. Rowling, Roald Dahl and Jane Austen.

“This is a most important and impressive study.”

Professor Rick Ryland, Director, Institute of English Studies, University of London, formerly Chief Executive, Arts and Humanities Research Council

“Literature matters: to society, to education, to future generations. It matters for our minds, brains and hearts; it matters because it widens our scope of life and intensifies our perceptions; it takes us on journeys, invites us to share our lives with strangers, challenges and threatens, moves and changes us. It matters to every one of us; and it matters to me. And for these reasons I celebrate the Royal Society of Literature and its raising of literature’s profile in this report.”

Professor Dame Hermione Lee FRSL

There seems to be a gulf that shuts off 20% of people from the benefits of literature, a gulf that I know the RSL and others are determined to bridge.”

Michael Morpurgo OBE FRSL

Spreading the word

The RSL Review

Published twice a year, the RSL Review magazine includes essays on a range of literary topics, prominent writers in conversation, reports on activities, and a leader article on a current literary issue. All Fellows and Members receive a free subscription to the magazine which is published in Spring and Autumn. The magazine is also available from the British Library shop.

Live-streaming

In December 2016, we started live-streaming our events to libraries around the country as part of the British Library’s “Living Knowledge” network. Since then, we have broadcast events to new audiences in Exeter, Huddersfield, Leeds, Manchester, Poole, Reading, Sheffield and York.

Social media

In 2016, we launched the RSL Instagram feed, which gives followers a unique behind-the-scenes view of our work. We also continued to update our website with new digital resources, with Fellows’ Reading Group Recommendations from Lisa Appignanesi, Jim Crace, Jamila Gavin, Tessa Hadley, Margaret Jull Costa, Hilary Mantel and Yann Martel, and audio recordings of past events ensuring our work is accessible to as wide an audience as possible.

Since January 2016:

- Subscribers to our e-newsletter have increased by 30% to 7,219
- Followers on Facebook have increased by 22% to 7,761
- Followers on Twitter have increased by 30% to 9,012
- Our audio recordings have been listened to 83,400 times
Aim 4: To be a responsible and effective organisation

Governance

The RSL was founded in 1820 by King George IV and incorporated by Royal Charter in 1825. As a Society, we are governed by our Charter and byelaws, and are registered with the Charity Commission under the number 213962. Our Council, Chair and President are responsible for direction and governance, and are drawn from our Fellowship of writers.

Patron
Her Majesty The Queen

President
Colin Thubron CBE FRSL
(unti l June 2017)
Professor Dame Marina Warner FRSL
(from June 2017)

President Emeritus
Sir Michael Holroyd CBE C Lit FRSL

Vice-Presidents
Anne Chisholm OBE FRSL
Maureen Duffy FRSL
Maggie Gee OBE FRSL
The Hon Victoria Glendinning CBE FRSL
Sir Ronald Harwood CBE FRSL
Dame Hilary Mantel FRSL
Sir Richard Eyre CH CBE FRSL
Lavinia Greenlaw FRSL
Abdulrazak Gurnah FRSL (from June 2017)
Jonathan Keates FRSL
Peter Kemp FRSL
Dame Hermione Lee FRSL
Deborah Moggach FRSL
Fiona Sampson FRSL (until June 2017)
Timberlake Wertenbaker FRSL
(Dame Hermione Lee FRSL)
(departing in April 2017)

Vice-Chair
Kamila Shamsie FRSL (until June 2017)
Bernardine Evaristo MBE FRSL
(from June 2017)
Blake Morrison FRSL (from June 2017)

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Kamila Shamsie FRSL (until June 2017)
Bernardine Evaristo MBE FRSL
(from June 2017)

Staff
Tim Robertson (Director, full time)
Maggie Ferguson MBE FRSL
(Literary Director, part time)
Motly Rosenberg (Business Director, pt)
Lucy Howard-Taylor (Development Director, pt)
Annette Brook (Communications Manager, pt)
Ally Temple (Events and Education Manager, pt)
Martha Stenhouse (Membership, Awards & Office Coordinator, pt)
Paula Johnson (Associate Director, Awards, freelance)
Nicola Couldridge, Finance Officer, freelance

Treasurer
Colin Chisholm

Council Members
Simon Armitage CBS FRSL
Jonathan Coe FRSL
Imtiaz Dharker FRSL
Sir Richard Eyre CH CBE FRSL
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Achievements and plans

Looking back:
- In 2016, we revised our byelaws to ensure the society’s continued relevance and efficacy.
- In 2016, we added the RSL Encore Award for best second novel to our portfolio of literary prizes.
- In 2016, we conducted a survey to explore how best to engage and support our Members.
- For the 2016 Autumn/Winter season, we piloted a venue partnership with the British Library.
- We carried out a strategic review and produced Planning Words: a framework for the RSL’s development 2016-20.
- In 2016, we developed a new tool to evaluate the impact of our Schools Outreach Programme on students.

Looking forward:
- In 2017, we will appoint our first female President, Professor Dame Marina Warner FRSL.
- In 2017, we will introduce the RSL Giles St. Aubyn Awards for Non-Fiction.
- In 2017, in response to the survey, we will introduce Members’ forums and exclusive pre-event book groups.
- In 2017, we will develop our relationship with the British Library and holding events with European writers at literature festivals around the UK.
- In 2017, we will launch new events, awards and online resources exploring the theme of “Literature Matters”, leading up to our bicentenary in 2020.
- In 2017, we will consult on and develop plans for new initiatives for our Schools Outreach Programme.

“The RSL has been committed ever since it was founded in 1820 to furthering the making, reading, discussion, and enjoyment of literature in all its variety. I am proud – and touched – to become the first woman to be entrusted with the Presidency.”

Dame Marina Warner FRSL, incoming President

“The RSL is a powerful force for good in the world of literature as it reaches out to develop new communities of readers and to promote the importance of literature to the human psyche.”

Bernardine Evaristo MBE FRSL, Vice-Chair
2016 INCOME AT A GLANCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Source</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Investment income</td>
<td>£42,498</td>
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<tr>
<td>Membership subscriptions</td>
<td>£56,925</td>
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<tr>
<td>Donations</td>
<td>£726,213</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rental income and advertising</td>
<td>£10,030</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ticket sales and entry fees</td>
<td>£8,425</td>
<td>1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Restricted legacy</td>
<td>£800,000</td>
<td>76%</td>
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Total income: £1,047,091

Total start-of-year assets: £1,968,807

2016 EXPENDITURE AT A GLANCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenditure Category</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>£23,412</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools outreach</td>
<td>£18,822</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications and publications</td>
<td>£116,423</td>
<td>22%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fellowships and membership</td>
<td>£54,337</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundraising</td>
<td>£59,186</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public events</td>
<td>£113,550</td>
<td>22%</td>
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<td>Awards and prizes</td>
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Total expenditure: £524,564

Total end-of-year assets: £2,758,678

of which unrestricted reserves: £205,327

In 2016, we made a planned investment from reserves to establish the foundations for our future growth – including the full-time positions of Director and Development Director. We also received a one-off restricted legacy of £800,000 to establish a new endowment fund for the RSL Giles St Aubyn Awards for Non-Fiction.

Our auditors are Wilkins Kennedy LLP. Please contact us for a full copy of our accounts. Alternatively, they can be found on the Charity Commission’s website.
As a registered blind person the RSL is open to anyone to be involved with. I feel very honoured to be a Member and feel part of a big, literature-loving family.”

Paul Millross, RSL Member
#LiteratureMatters