

The Book Society AGM 2026

Chair's Report from Amanda Harris 19/05/2026

The Book Society has gone from strength to strength this year, with sold-out events, sound finances and a growth in membership.

I became Chair when the society was in a strong financial position, and thanks for that must go to Lisa Milton and Jonathan Paterson. Having positive funds enabled the committee to focus on event provisions and three new directives to future proof the society.

Along with providing a stellar line-up of guest speakers, the committee focused on achieving three objectives across the year:

- Launch of a Members' Survey
- A new members drive
- Refresh the society's website and logo

The Members' Survey was launched at the beginning of 2026. The survey identified industry gaps in our membership and gave us important feedback on our events. We reacted to the latter by providing more networking opportunities at our dinners, plus a free drink ahead of being seated. Thanks must go to Truda Spruyt for finding Browns, a venue that could accommodate this small but important change. Feedback on food and drink continued to improve throughout the year, and Jo Dawson has worked with Browns to keep dinner ticket prices down while menu choices plentiful. On our speaker format, we acknowledge some members would prefer a presentation-style offering. However, to secure a higher calibre of speaker, without payment for their contribution, the Q&A format is proving the most successful and enticing invite format. We will continue to monitor this and, as ever, welcome feedback from members.

Our **New Members Drive** has been a key directive for the year, and we are pleased with the results, with more work to do. Philip Jones must take credit for the Book Society's collaboration with *thebookseller's* 'Rising Star' programme. It has brought a new cohort of industry talent to the society, and we will continue this partnership for the foreseeable future and are grateful to *theBookseller* for their ongoing support. Special thanks must also go to David Headley and his generous hosting of the Wine & Pizza party at Goldbroro Books. This event is a money-raiser that enables us to fund initiatives and sponsor 'Rising Star' memberships. It also provides members with a lower-priced ticket point to invite more guests, so more potential members and further opportunities to diversify our membership profile.

The new **Book Society logo** will be launched at the Summer Party, and we are aiming to have the **redesigned website** live at the same time. As our membership evolves so too does the look and feel of the society. Thanks must be extended to Emma Shercliff for her work on refining our nomination and membership guidelines. They will be live on the new-look website on launch.

The year's guest speakers have been hugely entertaining, enlightening and generously honest as they perched on the high stools. Thank you to David Headley and Daphne Tonge, Baroness Beeban Kidron, Alex Fane and Lucy Banks for sharing their expertise and insights. Their Q&As explored some of the most urgent issues and opportunities for our industry: subscription box innovations; IP protection and the impact of AI on copyright; live events and their importance to the publishing ecosystem; and the social media opportunities we can embrace to sell more books, generate ideas and increase bookshop footfall.

To quote ex-TikTok and YouTube creative director, Lucy Banks, we are 'in the mothership of IP.' Coming together, in our collegiate cross-industry way at the society's events, has never been so welcome or important. This was keenly felt at our annual Christmas party when the society donated a record amount to the Book Trade Charity (£2k) and also hosted the ebullient Jonathan Douglas CBE, as he discussed the National Year of Reading 2026 and the GO ALL IN campaign.

It's been an honour and privilege to be Chair of the Book Society, and I hand over to the brilliant new Chair, Truda Spruyt, supported by Vice Chair, David Headley. Truda has fantastic ideas to build upon the committee's work of 25/26, particularly on the diversification of our membership and the society's event offerings.

Thank you to the society and its committee members – Rebecca Gray, Philip Jones, Lisa Milton, Jonathan Paterson, Emma Shercliff, Truda Spruyt and administrator Jo Dawson – for making the year so fun and so productive. Thanks also to Amanda Ridout, our president, for her support throughout the year. We look forward to seeing you at Amanda's Summer party on 23rd June.

Amanda Harris