

Bitterne Local History Society

Chairman's Report 2024/25

The past year has been another busy one in the life of our Society. Our meetings have generally been well attended, particularly our guest night in March when eighty people were present. We have had a variety of interesting speakers, and our thanks must go to Peter Richards who arranged this year's speakers prior to standing down as programme secretary at our last AGM. Carol Cunio has taken on this responsibility, and we look forward to another series of excellent speakers in 2026.

Our charity shop has continued to support the opening of our museum and heritage centre and we must thank all our wonderful volunteers who, week in - week out, greet our customers and hopefully extract money from them! We have recently produced a publicity leaflet which is available should anyone like to get some exercise by delivering to local roads and streets. We have again taken some more valuable items to auction in Chippenham, but we are still struggling to set up eBay sales. We have had several stalls at Bitterne Market and would like to do this more regularly dependant on enough volunteers and the weather. We have been unable to find a location to hold another pop-up book sale as we did last year, despite now having four empty bank premises in Bitterne. Sadly, our shop blind remains unusable, and we are in discussion with the landlord about the possibility of a permanent cover on the forecourt instead of another blind. Our stock of local history books has finally been sorted so we can now help most customers looking for a local book, many of which have been long out of print, my thanks especially to Steve Adams who deals with internet orders.

Our Heritage Centre and Museum continue to be open with stewards on duty Monday to Friday afternoons and visitors are always warmly welcomed whether they have a particular enquiry or are just having a nostalgic look round. We continue to change some of our displays regularly and are looking at replacing our aging computer as well as continuing with the ongoing digitisation of our photographs and other archives. Amongst the items donated this year are a large collection of archives from the former St Marys College and another about Vosper Thornycrofts. I am very grateful to those stewards who undertake research for our enquirers and welcome our visitors, amongst whom we recently entertained a group of thirty local scouts, not all at once I hasten to add. Steve continues to field internet enquiries and pass them on to others who may be able to help.

We have recently erected a permanent sign in the precinct to try to encourage more people to visit us. Sadly, we have not been able to fulfil our ambition of having an occasional presence with a display of artefacts and photographs in the precinct due to lack of available volunteers most of whom already lead very busy lives.

We have attended the usual special events again this year including the Christmas ones in Bitterne and Bitterne Park and Trifest at Riverside Park. In addition, we provided special displays for Bitterne Library to commemorate the 80th anniversary of VE Day and several of our members were invited to share their memories with children at Bitterne School and were featured on BBC South Today. We continue to put displays in Walters and Sons window in Merry Oak, courtesy of Simon Walters and at present we have one depicting the large houses that once graced Bitterne. This was put together by our stewards for heritage open day last month when the theme was architecture. We had an enjoyable day despite only seeing a small number of visitors this year, more publicity required in future.

Sadly, our school liaison officer, Alex Houghton has had very few requests to borrow our boxes of artefacts, possibly due to changes in the history coordinators and a very busy curriculum, we are going to contact local schools to remind them that we offer this service.

Mary Abraham organised an excellent trip to Southwick Revival earlier in the year, despite sadly being too unwell to attend herself, all enjoyed the day, being transported back to the 1940s and several who went said this would become an annual event on their calendar.

The Southampton Heritage Federation, which ceased to operate after Covid, has now been resurrected as Southampton Heritage Network to give an opportunity for local heritage groups to meet with each other and I am pleased to say we are planning a local history fair for June next year to be held in Southampton Art Gallery.

We continue to publish an excellent quality magazine thanks to our editor Steve Adams and our printer John Buttler, not forgetting those who contribute to its contents. The magazine is well received by all who read it and we always have spare copies should you wish to take one and introduce anyone to our Society, do enclose a membership form please.

We thank Pam West who continues to look after our membership and magazine distribution and will be pleased to receive your subscriptions for 2026, please remember if you pay through the bank to let her know.

Sadly, we have lost a number of members during the year, namely Barrie Clark, Malcolm Corbidge, Marie Edmunds, Michael Smith, Edwina Cooke, Gill Buchanan, Joy Smith, and our dear friend and most senior member Bert Warne at the age of 105. We remember with thanks their contribution to the life of our Society, several over some forty years. Another of our members, Stan Rickeard, reached the grand age of 100 years recently and we sent our congratulations. He lives in the Royal Victoria Country Park Officers Mess and regularly attends the meetings of Hound Local History Society.

We have been working with the Spitfire Makers Team, led by Alan Matlock, who are erecting plaques at the locations where production continued following the bombing at Itchen, in particular we sponsored one at Deep Dene in Midanbury Lane. Many of them are in the Hazel Road area and a trail has been produced which for a £1 donation will lead you around all the plaques in that area.

Our web group will be giving their own roundup of what they have been doing led by Spencer Millard, and we thank them for all they are doing to make our archives more accessible.

In closing I would like to thank all our Vice Presidents for their continued support, your officers and committee for all their hard work and you, the members, for all continued loyalty and support.

Nicola Jenks had to relinquish the post of Minute Secretary earlier this year, we thank her for her service and Carol Cunio who has taken on this task. We would warmly welcome anyone who would like to consider joining our committee. As you will remember, Mary Abraham has been acting as Treasurer for some time now and we especially thank her as she has had a very difficult year health-wise. The good news is that one of our shop volunteers Katie Dyer has expressed an interest in helping out with this work.

We continue to strive to find somewhere where we can improve our Museum and Heritage Centre and put much more of our collection on display.