

## Bitterne Local History Society

### Chairmans Report 2024

We have once again had an excellent programme of speakers at our meetings this year, indeed one attracted an attendance of over sixty people. Our special thanks must go to Vice President Peter Richards who arranged our speakers for this year. We have continued to produce an excellent quarterly magazine, thanks to all the hard work put in by our editor, Steve Adams, our printer John Buttler and all those who have contributed to its pages. Steve was also responsible for the bookmarks giving our annual programme of meetings and more recently an updated publicity leaflet as well as producing posters advertising our meetings, we are very grateful to him for all the work he does. Our membership secretary, Pam West, has expertly dealt with subscriptions and distribution of our magazine, our thanks must go to all who help with this which saves us a lot on postage costs. Sadly we have lost two members this year, namely Joy Bowyer and June Monk, their contribution to the life of our society will long be remembered. Another one of our members, Jean Taylor, reached the grand age of 100 years, and she joins our most senior member Bert Warne, who will be 105 in December.

We must thank our website manager, Spencer Millard, and his team for looking after the face of our society on social media, and Steve Adams for fielding the many enquiries which come via email, one of which resulted in £100 donation from one of our overseas members. Thanks to Alex Houghton who has once again organised the loan of our boxes of artefacts to local schools, Jill and I have led several reminiscence sessions with artefacts from our collection and Russell Henson and I have given a number of talks on behalf of our society. Our stewards have continued to welcome visitors to our museum and deal with face-to-face enquiries, items of local interest continue to be donated to our collection. We purchased two secure containers to site on the land known as Bitterne Community Corner at the rear of some shops in the precinct and these contain most of the artefacts once housed in various garages. Sadly, we have not yet had the opportunity to bring some of these items into the precinct to enable us to raise the profile of our society. We hope to do this during the coming year. We are sharing one of these containers with the Bitterne Shed Club who are paying us a nominal rent in lieu of this.

We continue to raise funds through our charity shop, thanks to our dedicated team of volunteers and we have taken two lots of items to a specialist auction and benefitted by some very generous donations of saleable items. We have had several stalls at Bitterne Market during the year, sadly our takings at the shop have not been great of late so this extra income has helped balance the books, especially since the closure of the Mercantile Flea last autumn. We held a very successful three week book sale in a shop in West End Road thanks to the kindness of the owner. We have also finally managed to set up our own ebay account which we hope will bring in some extra income.

We have published a further booklet in our series on the large houses east of the Itchen by Garth Groombridge, namely Thornhill Park and the next one is due to be about Ridgeway House. After poor sales of our 2024 calendar we have decided to give next year a miss and think again for 2026.

We have attended the usual events and some new ones this year, we had a stall at the switching on ceremony for the precinct Christmas lights, dressed a tree for Bitterne United Reformed Church Christmas Tree festival and again attended Peartree Church Fete, Bitterne Park Triangle Christmas event and Trifest at Riverside Park. We were also present at the Holy Saviour open day following the reconfiguration of the church (largely made possible by a very generous bequest from one of our members, John Shephard who incidentally would have

been 100 years old this year). We had a display in the chapel at Royal Victoria Country Park to commemorate the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of D Day and attended a new event called Showcasing Hampshire at Winchester, designed to give the opportunity for local history societies and other interested groups to come together.

Heritage Open Day was marked at our museum by displays on the theme of communications inside and classic cars on the forecourt, members in various costumes welcomed the Lord Mayor of Southampton, Councillor David Shields and a number of other visitors. We have provided photographs from our collection to the Friends of Bitterne Station, these are displayed in the old waiting room which has been restored and is being used by the local community. We also provided some images to Bursledon Brickworks for their exhibition in conjunction with the Imperial War Museum showing Southampton in the aftermath of the Second World War.

Our museum stewards continue to change the displays, one in particular proving very popular and that was about Merry Oak School when a number of former pupils visited, including BLHS member Phil Healey from Crawley who has kindly offered to digitise our Merry Oak archives at his own expense for which we sincerely thank him. We have purchased some up to date recording equipment to begin a long overdue oral history project and would like to hear from anyone who wishes to get involved and particularly whom we could interview. We plan to get more involved with the Spitfiremakers project and hope to be able to sponsor with the help of your donations one of the plaques they plan to place on a location where parts of Spitfires were produced after the bombing of Supermarine at Woolston, there are a number of sites on our side of the river which are being investigated.

Finally, may I thank our Vice Presidents, my fellow officers and committee namely Mary, Pam, Kate, Kevin and Nicola (it was also good to welcome Carol Cunio who joined us during the year) and you our members for your continued support. We still do not have a secretary and we are greatly indebted to Peter Richards who has carried on booking our speakers for 2025 in the absence of a new programme secretary.

As you will be aware we 'reviewing the situation' (as Fagin would say) and feel it is time we tried to improve our museum and Heritage Centre so that we can put on display much more of the artefact collection we have amassed over the last forty years. Your views on this are most welcome, particularly tonight, at our AGM via the slips of paper on your seats.