

## **Bitterne Local History Society**

### **Chairmans Report**

**AGM 14<sup>th</sup> October 2023**

The past twelve months have seen attendance at our monthly meetings return to something like pre covid levels and I would like to thank you all for your support. We have again had some excellent speakers and I must thank our vice president and programme secretary, Peter Richards, for all his efforts. Peter is standing down at this AGM after ten years as programme secretary but he has kindly booked our 2024 programme so we are looking for someone to undertake this task to book our programme for 2025, Peter is more than happy to offer support to anyone who might be interested in taking on this important role.

We have continued to produce an excellent quarterly magazine which is particularly valuable in keeping our further away members in touch with Bitterne. My thanks to our editor Steve Adams for all he does in this regard and to those who have contributed to its pages. If an article strikes a memory why not jot down a few words and send them to our editor. I would also thank our printer John Buttler for his continued help in keeping costs as low as possible. Thank you to our membership secretary Pam West who deals with the distribution and to all who help with deliveries. Pam has also done an excellent job in keeping our membership list and as you will hear in her report welcomed a number of new members during the year. Sadly, we lost four long serving members over the last year, namely Bill Smith, Beryl Varilone, John Stockly and more recently Doreen Hall. They had clocked up a total of more than 100 years between them.

My thanks to our website manager Spencer Millard and his team for looking after the face of our society on social media. We shall hear a report from them shortly. Thanks to Alex Houghton who has dealt with issuing our school loan and reminiscence boxes, although demand to borrow these has not returned to pre covid levels to date. I have undertaken a number of talks to local groups on behalf of our society which always attract a generous donation and I am pleased to say that Russell Henson, one of our museum stewards, has also given several presentations, particularly about Bitterne Park. As you will remember we had hoped to plant a tree to celebrate our late Queens long reign, but sadly Southampton City Council have not been forthcoming with regard to this.

We have continued to provide stewards to welcome visitors to our museum on most afternoons, Monday to Friday, and have recently welcomed Chris Lewis to our team. As well as helping folk face to face with their enquiries we have also continued to deal with email requests from far and wide and our thanks go to Steve Adams for being the point of contact in this respect. We continue to have a variety of items donated on a regular basis

which serve to enhance our displays. We have managed to thin out some of the artefacts which have been donated over the years in particular typewriters and radios, discovering that we had amassed over 50 of the latter. Storage of our artefact collection continues to be a problem and we shall shortly have to find a new location for some of our collection. We are presently looking for someone to help by laying some donated paving slabs in an area of garden at the rear of the museum so that we can make better use of this area to sort items in our stores. We have recently been gifted a small piece of land originally owned by members of the Holden family and latterly known as Bitterne Community Corner. It is situated behind the shops on the north side of the precinct and we are hoping to provide some storage here as well as using it as a base for publicising our museum in the precinct.

We continue to raise funds through our charity shop and our thanks are due to Helen Taylor and the team of volunteers who keep it open and welcome visitors. We are now able to take payment by card and I must thank Mary Abraham who has been dealing with the shop income and unfortunately many problems with the card payment system in recent months. During the year we received some very generous donations of collectible toys and models and we are grateful to Jonathan, one of our volunteers, who is arranging for them to be sold at auction. We have also received a donation of stamps and postcards which thanks to the efforts of the local stamp and postcard clubs has realised over £200 so far.

We have had several stalls at Bitterne Market again this year which not only raise funds but also our profile in the village. We also continue to have a stall at the Mercantile Flea Emporium which has raised £2694.97 over the last year and we are very grateful to the team there for their support. Please do support this venture by going in sometime to have a look around. After the successful publication of the book on Chessel House this has been followed by one on Midanbury House. Our thanks to Steve for all his work on this ongoing project to publish seventeen books written by local author Garth Groombridge. I understand Thornhill Park will be the next one.

When our vice president Jim Brown moved from the district he left a stock of his publications for us to sell. He has recently gifted the remaining copies to us and we are very grateful for his continued support in this way. He also of course continues to contribute regularly to our magazine.

We have attended a number of events this year including Bitterne lights switch on, Peartree Church Fete and Bitterne Library 60<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations. My thanks to those who facilitated these events. Sadly, Trifest at Bitterne Park was cancelled this year due to bad weather. We also held a very successful party to celebrate King Charles 111 Coronation, jointly with Bitterne URC and held our annual Christmas party and summer picnic to thank our shop volunteers and museum stewards. We took part in the national heritage open day again this year and were pleased to welcome the Lord Mayor of Southampton, Councillor Valerie Laurent who is looking forward to joining us at our guest night in March next year. Some of our members took the opportunity to visit Bognor Regis local history society

museum. They are very fortunate that some years ago one of their members purchased a former public house and gifted it to the society for use as a museum.

Unfortunately, we were not able to produce a calendar for this year 2023, but the 2024 calendar will hopefully be available next month.

Finally, may I thank our vice presidents, my fellow officers, committee members and you our members for your continued support. We were pleased to welcome Nicola Jenks on board as our minute secretary earlier in the year, but sadly we do not have a general secretary or someone to administer gift aid as we would dearly love to tap into this source of income. My thanks in particular to our treasurer Mary Abraham who has not only kept our finances in order but undertaken many other tasks, not least in doing the excellent window displays in our shop.

We are still hoping for a time when we might find larger premises to enable us to display more of the archives and artefacts which we have collected over the last 40 plus years. I look forward to another year trying to preserve and display items which will show future generations how our village has changed over the years and what it was like in days gone by as well as encouraging an interest in local history generally.