

Bitterne Local History Society

2020 AGM

Chairman's Report

Ladies and gentlemen, members of Bitterne Local History Society, I hope you are keeping well and safe in these difficult times. Regretfully we have not been able to hold a physical AGM in the normal way due to the coronavirus situation; however, I am able to present my Chairman's Report in a virtual format, which allows me to summarise BLHS events, achievements and news from the past 12 months.

People News:

Congratulations go to one of our members, Burma Star veteran Bert Warne, who celebrated his 100th birthday on 10th December 2019. Congratulation Bert!

Sadly, I have a number of deaths to report:

Marion Brown, the wife of BLHS Vice President Jim Brown, passed away aged 88. She was very involved in the BLHS Charity Shop from 1995 for many years.

One our members John Martin, a former mayor of Southampton, passed away in 2019, aged 94.

Long standing BLHS member, Mary Huggins, who acted as one of our Museum stewards for many years, died aged 88.

On behalf of the Society, I extend my sincere condolences to the family and friends of all those members who have passed away during the past year.

Resignations and Appointments

BLHS Treasurer, Carol Masters, decided to resign from her post in January. I considered Carol's resignation as a devastating blow as she was a highly valued member of my team. As a result of Carol's resignation we have appointed a professional accountant, Jeremy Robbins of Genio Accountants, to prepare this year's accounts. However, I am pleased to report that Jill Abrahams has kindly agreed to be co-opted as interim Treasurer until the AGM.

Long standing member, Keith Marsh, who has made a major contribution to the society over the years, also resigned in January.

My thanks go to Jo Stacey, who has offered to take on the role of Minute Secretary. Welcome Jo.

Financial News:

A number of things have happened worthy of mention. I successfully applied for a grant of £10,000 from Southampton City Council to help us get through the coronavirus pandemic. We also received a substantial legacy from Bob Lavington's estate and a generous legacy from the late Alan Leonard. Our landlord has also agreed to a reduced rent for three months. All of which helps put us in a sound position financially as will be seen from the accounts.

Events:

If I can take you back to the beginning of the BLHS financial year to August 2019, to a time when no-one knew the meaning of COVID-19 – seems a long time ago now doesn't it – I can begin.

Bitterne Festival, a community event in Bitterne Precinct took place on Thursday 8 August 2019. BLHS organised a treasure hunt which was very popular again, with many children taking part. In addition, we had a display of images of bygone Bitterne generating a lot of interest and many of our own publications were on sale providing some welcome income.

Another August event BLHS were involved in was Trifest at Riverside Park. A reasonable throughput of people attended the BLHS stall and several potential new members were engaged in conversation.

Carol Masters organised a Coach trip to Frogmore House and Savill Garden in August 2019, which was very successful. The trip was well supported and financially viable. The weather was good, which always helps, and we have had lots of positive feedback.

The big event of the year was Heritage Open Day on 14 September, when BLHS were represented at Southampton Heritage Fayre in Westquay by a team of volunteers who covered the event from the set-up time before 9.00 am until the close down around 7.00 pm.

On the same day our Museum in Peartree Avenue was open to the public from 10.00 am to 4.00 pm serviced by a vintage bus, courtesy of Southampton & District Transport and Heritage Trust dropping off visitors hourly from Castle Way Southampton. On entry to our museum BLHS display boards could be seen telling the visual story of the creation of Bitterne Bypass, showing the devastation of the old village and the Press coverage of the time. A team of volunteers, some dressed in period costume, were around to provide information and guidance to visitors. A quiz was open to children who like to have fun and enjoy learning about the past.

The main display had a 1920s theme and was based around objects and magazines held in the Museum's own collection. Local food historian, Emma Muscat, dressed in period costume, was on hand to talk to visitors about 1920s kitchen equipment, and food products that were available at the time. A bean slicer was the favourite item for visitors to try out. We are very grateful to Emma for her valuable contribution.

In 2020 we have been pleased to receive organised visits from the 1st Itchen South Beaver Group on two evenings in March. The group were lively, noisy and boisterous as you would expect of 6 -7 year-olds but hopefully we have instilled some interest in local history.

Earlier this year I was contacted by Peter van Tongeren from Worcester, who said his mother-in-law Gillian Mallett (nee Turner) would like to visit the area and perhaps talk to BLHS about her WWII experiences. Gillian, now aged 94, lived at 34 Peartree Avenue as a child and was evacuated to Winchester during WWII. Her childhood home was bombed in September 1940. A visit was arranged and Gillian, her daughter Julia and Julia's husband, Peter, duly met up with our editor, Steve Adams, and myself on Peartree Green on 14 July. This was perfect as they were going there anyway to see where Gillian's mother was an air raid warden and where the anti-aircraft gun was stationed. It was a joy to meet Gillian, who is now a BLHS member, and hear her stories. My thanks go to Peter and Julia for making this possible and to Steve for his valued contribution on the day.

VJ Day on 15th August 2020, which marked the 75th anniversary of Victory over Japan Day, was not forgotten in Bitterne. A small group of people, including several Bitterne Local History Society members, gathered at the POW Memorial in Bitterne Parish Churchyard on 15 August to mark the end of World War Two on VJ-Day. A short service was conducted and BLHS member Bert Warne, who fought in Burma during the war, laid a wreath. Thanks go to Martyn Basford for representing BLHS on the day and taking a number of photographs to record the occasion.

All of these events rely entirely on volunteers stepping up and helping on the day and with the preparations beforehand. It is often the same few people who are involved and without them, these events couldn't take place. So, my thanks go to everyone involved.

Saturday Meetings:

Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak we continued to organise Saturday Meetings, which have been well attended. My thanks go to Ian Abrahams and Martyn Basford for sharing with me the role of hosting these evenings on a rota basis. I would like say a special thank you to those of you who have helped with the refreshments and the raffle; thank you to Deidre Abraham for welcoming members and guests on entry; thanks also to those who have provided technical support, as and when needed. I would like to personally thank Trish McPherson for stepping in and helping out whenever needed in a variety of different roles. Last but not least I would like to thank all those who came along to these meetings. Your support for the Society is much appreciated.

Here is a brief summary of these meetings.

Following the formal business of last year's AGM in October we were treated to the personal anecdotes of **50 years of Pharmacy** by Barbara Wright, who had a range of fascinating artefacts to exhibit and demonstrate.

The meeting in November featured a brilliant talk by Steve Foster, which was split into two parts: part 1 ***Escape from Stalag XXA*** and part 2 ***In Search of a Hero*** with a short interval in-between.

For our pre-Christmas meeting in December, Jigfoot and friends gave a presentation: ***Hither Side of the Hedge***, the story of Alice Gillington (one-time resident of Bitterne) - her life, poems and travels - interspersed with Romany songs, music and dancing. It was a brilliant show.

The talk by Dawn Perrier Baker on the ***Mary Rose*** in January 2020 received much positive feedback; the evening being considered a very successful and interesting one.

In February Andrew Negus, an engaging speaker, treated us with ***Winchester: Bishops Buildings and Bones Part 2***.

In March our President, Ian Abrahams gave his annual talk about Bitterne, which is always popular.

It was later that month that the coronavirus outbreak hit and as a result all the meetings booked for the rest of this year have been rescheduled for next year.

BLHS Website:

Thanks go to Celia Mayo for the work she has done as Webmaster during the past year, and indeed previous years, and to her son Christopher for his involvement. We will be offering Celia a well-earned rest very soon when the new webmaster is appointed. Their support over the years has been highly valued.

BLHS member, Spencer Millard, who has been in the web development industry for almost twenty years, is now in the process of redesigning and modernising the BLHS website offline to bring it right up to date with many exciting new features. As you can imagine this involves a great deal of work. My thanks go to Spencer, who has been working tirelessly on this project, with support from Steve Adams, Martyn Basford, and myself; we expect the new site to go live very soon.

BLHS Magazine:

Many thanks go to Steve Adams for doing a fantastic job as editor of our quarterly magazine *Bygone Bitterne*, which he compiles and edits to a very high standard. Thanks also go to 'John Buttler', our printer, for his work in making sure the publication is printed and issued on time; and to all those who contribute to, or advertise in, the magazine

BLHS Shop:

The BLHS Charity shop closed its door to the public on 19 March 2020 due to the Coronavirus outbreak. Much work was done during the lockdown period to prepare the

shop in Peartree Avenue to be ready to re-open on 3 August this year with COVID-19 safety measures in place; it is now trading on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays as a result. Thank you to Steve Adams for helping me purchase, set up and implement the changes needed.

My thanks go to all the shop staff for the work they have done before, during and after lockdown. Income and publicity was generated by offering free books on a table outside the shop during lockdown and inviting donations.

BLHS Museum:

A display was set up in a shop in West End Road, Bitterne, making use of empty shop space with the kind permission of the owner, in order to promote our Museum. Unfortunately, the BLHS Museum and Heritage Centre closed on 19 March this year due to COVID-19 and has remained closed during lockdown; it is yet to re-open. I would like to thank all of the stewards for manning the Museum and welcoming visitors prior to lockdown. In particular I would like to thank the stewards who have helped me deal with email enquires which have continued throughout the lockdown period.

Facebook:

I thank Steve Adams for maintaining our Facebook site and posting regular content, which continues to generate interest.

School Boxes:

These are still available for loan to schools as Educational Resource Boxes, which are packed with fascinating artefacts, documents, toys and memorabilia from bygone days. Thank you to Celia Mayo for her work in the recent past as School Liaison Officer and to Martyn Basford for enabling the service to continue.

Lion Cup Competition:

The BLHS Lion Cup Competition 2020 invited members and non-members alike to write about their experiences, or research local history, and submit an entry. The closing date was 31 July, 2020. I can now announce that this year's winner is Beryl Varilone. Congratulations Beryl. My thanks go BLHS Vice-President Jim Brown for judging the competition and to all those who took part. This competition has now been running continuously for ten years.

Fund Raising:

In the autumn of 2019 the Virgin Money Giving button was installed on the BLHS website by Carol Masters and subsequently has been frequently used by people to make donations to BLHS.

BLHS has a large collection of historic photographs of the area (dating back some one hundred and forty years). Due to their age and varying condition we would like to ensure

that these are preserved for the future and make them more widely available for use and research. As a first step we wish to digitise all of our photographs. A fundraising campaign was launched to raise £1500 to purchase the necessary equipment. An anonymous donor contacted me and very generously agreed to give us up to half of this amount, as long as we could raise the other half by 31st July. I am pleased to report that the BLHS fundraising appeal for digital storage hardware reached its target of £750 by the set deadline and I can now reveal that our mystery donors are Mary Ann and Jim Wilkes, who have been delighted to match this amount with another £750, allowing us sufficient funds to purchase a computer and external hard drives to store our photographic images collected over many years. This will involve a great deal of work by our volunteers but now at last this much-needed project can begin. I would like to thank all those who contributed to the fund with special thanks to Jim Brown, Ann MacGillivray, the 'Little Fryer' (Bitterne's local Fish & Chip Shop) and Brian Brisdon for their generous contributions.

Crisp Packet Re-cycling Scheme:

Thank you to Carol and Garry Masters for the crisp packet recycling scheme which they continue to operate for the benefit of the Society,

Additional Thanks:

Thank you to Barbara McCaffery for her splendid work as Membership Secretary; her conscientious attention to detail is much appreciated.

Steve Adams deserves praise for conducting his role of Data Protection Officer with diligence.

I would like to personally thank Marion Marais, for her unwavering support as Vice Chair.

Thanks also go to Martyn Basford for his work as Honorary Secretary and in particular for submitting the annual report to the Charity Commission. Martyn is also due credit for a range of other jobs he carries out for the benefit of the Society, which are many and varied.

Thank you to BLHS President, Ian Abrahams, who has continued to serve as a figurehead and ambassador for the Society.

Thanks also go to our three Vice-Presidents: Mr Jim Brown, Mr Robert Sperring and Miss Barbara McCaffery, for their valued support.

Thank you to my wife Lesley for putting up with me always doing something or other for the History Society.

Thank you to all our many members and volunteers whose help, I am pleased to say ensures the Society continues to function very well – your support is very much appreciated.

Thank you to all the members of the BLHS Committee, who have supported me throughout my seven-year tenure as Chairman and I am proud of the achievements we have made as a

team, working together for the good of the Society. Now the time has come for me to pass the baton on to a new Chairman and make way for a new Committee to take the Society forward and ensure Bitterne's history is kept alive for generations to come.

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