



**BERKSHIRE LOCAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION**  
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**43rd Annual General Meeting of the Berkshire Local History Association**  
**- Committee Reports (2019 and 2020)**  
Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> April 2021 - to be held online

**Treasurer's Report**

**2019**

Subscriptions for the year to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019 at £1,803 are equivalent to those of 2018 and are sufficient to cover the continuing expenses of the Association.

The Association's printing costs for both the newsletter and journal have remained much as in 2018, although the cost of postage has increased significantly, this year amounting to £449.

No grants were made from the Association's unrestricted funds in 2019, to match those given in 2018 to the Victoria County History of Oxfordshire (historically, forming part of the county of Berkshire) £500, and the Berkshire Record Office, Education project £500. The Association's Trustees are not considering any similar grants for 2020, although this is kept under review.

Each year a prize of £100 is given to an undergraduate from Reading University for the best third year history dissertation, the expense being shared equally between the Association and the Berkshire Record Office. The Association's share is within the total cost of the AGM, which also includes room hire and donations, and amounted to £342 in 2019.

Other expenses in 2019 were much as in 2018, with the income of the Association in the year to 31<sup>st</sup> December amounting to £1,803, £40 greater than its expenses.

The accumulated unrestricted reserves of the Association at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019 stand at £4,520, and are sufficient for its continuing activities.

Restricted reserves of the Association amount to £3,786 at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019. There have been no payments from these funds in the current year.

Of the Association's total reserves, which amount to £8,305, £7438 is held on deposit with CAF bank.

There have been no events since the Association's year end at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019 requiring provision to be made in the Statement of Income and Expenditure.

**2020**

Owing to health restrictions the activities of the BLHA have been restricted during 2020; the planned March AGM was cancelled and to avoid the need for personal gatherings, the association purchased a licence to hold virtual meetings on Zoom. This licence will also allow future AGMs to be held electronically.

Other expenses of the Association remained in-line with earlier years, the cost of printing the journal and newsletter remained unchanged.

The association had a surplus of income over expenses for the year of £223.

There were no claims on the Association's restricted funds of £3,787, to assist research activities or in meeting publication costs.

The unrestricted reserves of the Association stand at £4,747 and are sufficient to fund the association's activities for the foreseeable future.

The accounts will be subject to financial review once government restrictions on meeting in person are lifted.

### **Journal Editor's Report**

'Berkshire Old and New' no. 36 was published as planned in 2019 with three varied and strong articles. We published 'Berkshire Old and New' in 2020, on schedule, despite the circumstances. There were only two articles this time, but both were of substance, meaning the journal was its usual length in total.

We expect to have a journal this year if all the expected articles arrive.

All the back issues of 'Berkshire Old and New' are now available to view on the BLHA website. Thank you to Dave Osborne for doing that and making them searchable and indexed. Web publication of each year's new journal will be delayed until 6 months after publication in print.

### **Newsletter Editor's Report**

Since the last AGM we have continued to publish the BLHA Newsletter every January, May and September. Usually, the printing is done at Reading University but for the May 2020 edition we had to go to Instantprint of Rotherham where we got a colour version for a slightly higher cost.

In the last four issues we have had eight book reviews and four articles with contributions from twenty societies of which five have contributed to every issue. I thank them all for their news and look forward to more of our forty societies, some of which have never made a contribution before.

It has been noticeable how many societies are now reliant on Zoom which has enabled some societies to gain attendance from members or friends as far away as New Zealand and the USA.

All past editions are available on our website and we post each edition as soon as it goes to press, which is often some time before the printed versions appear.

### **Membership Secretary's Report**

Membership has stayed almost the same as last year, with 80 individual members and 39 local history societies. Our membership of libraries and museums has declined from 16 to 10, mainly due to cuts in local government funding.

We welcomed the most recent society to join in January 2020: The Aldermaston History Group. Sadly, two local history societies - Arborfield and Theale - have ceased to hold regular meetings.

### **Web Designer's Report**

The 'back end' of the website was overhauled during 2019 to ensure security and that it conforms to the latest standards.

In addition, you may have noticed the slightly changed design of some of the pages to make them more mobile and tablet friendly. Hopefully this helps when viewing the site on your mobile devices.

Over the past year, the website has been updated to include a number of additional items. The main one being the ability for viewers to download the full contents of each Journal from the very first edition to the

latest one. All Journals are now readable in PDF format. Thanks to Jonathan Brown for taking the time to scan every single page of every Journal!

Our Events page has been updated to include the various Member Society's events. Thank you to those Societies that have sent in their respective details.

We are working towards installing electronic payment methods for Membership Renewals and new Joiners. Hopefully this will be in place fairly soon.

If you have any suggestions for improvement or additions to our website then please do let us know.

### **Chairman's Report**

#### **2019**

This has been a "quiet" year: the things that usually happened have happened, but next year, it looks as though things will be different, with more icing on the cake, as it were.

For me, as chairman, things have been easier, since we have a secretary again. At last year's AGM, I was surprised and delighted when Jo Alexander-Jones offered her services. The Association has been very fortunate. But there is still, according to our constitution, room for another committee member. Please have a word with me, or any other committee member, if you are interested in helping run the Association. Dare I hope for yet another volunteer at the next AGM?

Membership levels are about the same. We have lost one or two, but I'm particularly happy to be able to welcome a newly-formed society, the Aldermaston History Group, as members of the Association. I trust that they will find us helpful and useful, and remain BLHA members for many years to come. They already have an interesting website.

BLHA finances are in good shape, and we have been able to make the odd small donation here and there. Hopefully, next year, we shall need to spend more. Thanks are due to our treasurer and our honorary examiner of accounts for keeping us in order.

The main disappointment of the year was our failure to find sufficient interest to run a workshop for local societies and individuals who look after archival collections. The idea was to give people the chance to share their experience, and to say what they had, where they kept it, how they knew what was in the collection, and how others knew what they had and knew how to gain access to it. Then we would have a few "experts", from the Berkshire Record Office or the Community Archives Group of the Archives and Records Association, maybe from the British Library, and maybe from a computer software developer, to give us their ideas on best practice. Unfortunately, the four organisers, of whom I was one, were unable to find enough local people wishing to take part on the day we had in mind. For the time being, there is an "Archives and Local Societies" page on our website, but we may in future decide to hold a smaller meeting or form a small group for people interested in managing these collections and sharing ideas.

I'm also sorry that the programme of archive movie films is not yet ready for showing. This is largely my fault - too many other commitments and distractions, I'm afraid. I hope it will be a different story at the next AGM.

However, one project which seems likely to go ahead is for another symposium or study day. Encouraged by the previous sessions in Reading and Ewelme, the committee is strongly in favour of another such day, and an event is planned to look at the "Swing" Riots of 1830, which threatened to tear holes in the fabric of society in the corn-growing parts of the country. It might be run in West Berkshire, where many of the disturbances occurred - machine-breaking, the burning of ricks, the smashing of windows, riotous assembly, and the sending of threatening letters to landowners and farmers signed by "Captain Swing." We hope to do this in co-operation with the University of Reading (Museum of English Rural Life), and the Berkshire Record Society, which is to publish a volume on the subject later this year.

In connection with this, we are planning a walk, to take place in July, along the Kennet and Avon Canal from Hungerford to Kintbury, passing the sites where some of the unhappy events of 1830 took place.

At this time last year I was able to report on the publication of "Berkshire Schools in the Eighteenth Century," a volume from the Record Society. The research had been carried out by a team of volunteers, working mainly, but not exclusively, at the Berkshire Record Office. Following publication, the volunteers were keen to continue, and they are now working through the records for schools built between 1870 - the year of Forster's Education Act - and the outbreak of war in 1914. The eighteenth-century volume took about six years to appear, but already, information for the next one is coming in. BLHA has supported the projects, financially and with advice and practical help.

Our Association works with the Record Office and the University of Reading over the Berkshire History Prize, which is awarded for an outstanding undergraduate dissertation on Berkshire history. The History Department of the University decides annually on whether or not to award the prize, and the BRO and BLHA finance it. In return, a copy of the dissertation is given to the Record Office, and the BLHA gets a piece for the newsletter or the journal. In 2019, the Berkshire connection was perhaps more tenuous than we would have liked. Its subject was John Wolfenden, from 1956 Sir John, and from 1974 Baron Wolfenden, and how his 1957 report helped changed the law regarding homosexual offences and prostitution. He was Vice-Chancellor of the University of Reading from 1950, and his papers were left to the University.

BLHA, together with Reading Central Library, which has a large local studies collection, meet several times a year at the Record Office, to exchange news, and to help one another. I've always found it a useful meeting, and recently, I've been invited to join the Standing Conference on Archives. This all sounds rather grand: it probably isn't, and I should be in a position to say more next year, if re-elected at today's AGM.

The main work of the Association - disseminating information to its members and to anyone with an interest in the history of Berkshire, and publishing worthwhile articles, has continued. The latest 'Berkshire Old and New,' our annual journal, had three articles - "The Windsor Miracles of Henry VI, Religion and the History of Football," and on witchcraft in seventeenth-century Reading, and brewing and malting at Cookham. The last of them involved a painting by Stanley Spencer, "Mending Cows," and three-dimensional images of the maltings, showing them from different angles, produced using "SketchUp" software, which had me fascinated. We have had the three newsletters, by e-mail or on paper, in May, September and January, with occasional e-mail bulletins, sent out free to anyone expressing an interest in receiving them. The website has been re-designed, and kept up-to-date. I hope you like the new pictures!

All of this happens, of course, through the dedication of the committee members, and the people sending in articles and notices for publication. Please keep them coming - it would be good to have even more, with a fatter journal, and more pages in the newsletter. I should like to thank everyone who helps in this work.

As ever, I must thank all of the members and member societies for their encouragement and support.

## **2020**

In the last annual report I was able to mention a number of things that were expected to happen, but couldn't, for very understandable reasons.

For the 2020 AGM we were to have been at Marcham, near Abingdon, a part of Berkshire which in 1974 was transferred to Oxfordshire. We were to have met in the church, and to have enjoyed a walk round the village. And now it seems that for the 2021 meeting we shall not be able to get together at the village hall at Eton Wick, and to visit Dorney Court, in a part of the country that was given to Berkshire in 1974. So, I must thank all the people who were to have been the hosts for these meetings. We're disappointed, but hopefully we shall be able to visit you in 2021 and 2022. I must also thank those people who had booked to go to Eton Wick and Dorney this year, and who had already paid. Your payments will of course be refunded.

So, on April 17, a little later than originally planned, it will be a “double” meeting “on the Zoom platform” as they say. Apologies to those members who will not be able to take part in this: all members will receive the documentation, electronically or by post. Besides the AGM, members joining via Zoom will also have the opportunity to hear three short talks, one from our President, and two from other members of our committee. The subject will be epidemics of the past - from three different centuries. Doubtless afterwards we shall be able to make some interesting comparisons between how these tribulations were handled in the past, and what is happening now.

Not everything is at a standstill during the pandemic, of course. We have been able to make some changes and improvements to the website, where you can now read all the articles that have appeared in past editions of ‘Berkshire Old and New.’ There’s a subject index to the first 22 volumes, and you can also read all the recent newsletters. The list of useful contacts for organisations and institutions likely to be of use to Berkshire local historians continues to grow, and they have been included, whether or not they are members of the Association. If you know of more that should be included, please let our web designer know.

Well-packed Newsletters have appeared as usual, and thanks are due to the various societies and individuals who have sent in their news, queries, and interesting short articles. Special thanks to those who have contributed for the first time - we hope for further contributions in the future.

In the autumn, our journal, ‘Berkshire Old and New,’ appeared. Though it had only two articles, one of them, about women’s suffrage in Berkshire, was longer than usual. One of the objectives of the Association is to help in getting local history published, and the journal is one way of doing it. If you have a piece of research that might be suitable, please contact our editor - and maybe we can have a “bumper” edition for 2021.

Local societies seem to have varied in their response to the Covid “lock-down,” with some keener to try “virtual” talks and “webinars” than others. Even an old stick-in-the mud like me, who had reluctantly to buy a web camera and microphone, has to admit that “virtual” meetings have their advantages - like being able to see the pictures better, and not having to go out in the cold at night. And of course, if you lose interest, you can end the meeting! On the other hand, there all the awkward moments where any kind of interaction is required. The time-lapse between mouths moving and the speech arriving is off-putting, as are the odd times which the picture freezes. I sit there thinking “Gosh - I thought my study was untidy, but . . .!” “Doesn’t he/she look old!” and “Am I really that colour?”

In the History of Reading Society, membership has actually increased, because people can no longer drop into meetings in the church hall and pay a small visitor’s fee. If they want to hear the talks, they must join. I wouldn’t be surprised to find that when face-to-face meetings can resume, there is a demand to have the talks relayed via the Internet at the same time, and maybe to have them recorded and available on demand as well.

There were, of course, a number of local history books which were in the pipeline before anyone had heard of the pandemic, but were published after it had struck, and some of these have been described in our Newsletter. Please let the Newsletter Editor know if you come across any new publications that would be worth adding. I’m told that volume 20 of The Victoria County History of Oxfordshire, the volume containing the Thames-side parishes from Crowmarsh to Shiplake, has gone for printing and should appear later this year. Our Association gave a grant towards its publication, and since I live in Caversham and was asked to help in researching that section of the book, I’m looking forward to seeing the finished publication - though already you can read the draft version on the website. (Caversham was annexed by Reading in 1911, and so to some extent qualifies as being in Berkshire.) I’m hoping that in due course, when sales of the “big red book” have slowed down, it may be possible to have the Caversham section published separately in a cheap edition. Then I also played a part in researching a book on inns and breweries in Reading, which aims to pick up all of those for which records exist - over 500 are mentioned(!) The History of Reading Society is paying for the publication, which should appear in the autumn.

Hopefully later in the year, we'll be able to revive at least some of the BLHA projects - like the "Swing Riots" study day, the walk between Hungerford and Kintbury on the same theme, the film show of archive footage from around the county, and a session, jointly with the Berkshire Record Office for people who are looking after archival collection.

The BLHA committee met "virtually" in June, September and February. All the members are willing to carry on in their different roles for another year - we believe in the value of the study of local history and are determined to keep the Association alive. I should like to thank them for keeping things going at a difficult time, and making improvements here and there. And finally, I should like to thank our members for your continued interest and support. Like all local historians, I look forward to a time when it's safe for us all to browse the library shelves, to peer over documents in the record office, and to meet in person.