



BERKSHIRE LOCAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION
Registered Charity 1097355
President: Joan Dils

Email: secretary@blha.org.uk
Website: www.blha.org.uk

**44th Annual General Meeting of the Berkshire Local History Association
- Committee Reports (2021-22)**

Saturday 26th March 2022 - Eton Wick Village Hall

Treasurer's Report

The Association's subscription income held-up well in 2021, at £1,631 against £1,583 in 2020, but owing to the COVID pandemic, its usual activities were inevitably scaled back.

Both the newsletter and Journal were published in 2021, although as fewer members required a printed version of the newsletter, the cost of printing and distribution was reduced in 2021. In total this saved £262.

The BLHA committee continued to meet in 2021, although not in person, saving the cost a meeting room, but by zoom, incurring the cost of a licence fee, amounting to £140. Since this arrangement has proved convenient for committee members, it is proposed to renew the zoom licence into 2022.

Other running costs of the Association are minimal: bank charges increased from £60 in 2020 to £96 in 2021, with no change in the subscription to the British Association for Local History (BHLA) at £75, maintained because of the public liability insurance cover it provides.

In total the unrestricted reserves of the association stand at £5,226, while the restricted reserves, linked to specific purposes, stand at £3,787, together amounting to £9,013. These reserves are adequate to cover the continued activities of the Association, being held in cash with the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) Bank.

No applications were received in the year for access to publication grants or research awards, although the committee approved a publication loan of £1,00 in January 2022 relating to the Berkshire Record Society volume 28, 'Living in Tudor Windsor; the records of the Sixteenth Century town', edited by David Lewis.

The accounts were examined without comment by Dr Clive Burgess, a Senior Research Fellow at St Andrew's University.

D G Lewis FCA, Treasurer

Journal Editor's Report

We published Berkshire Old and New no. 38 on time last year, with two articles, making it a little shorter than usual. We have the prospect of two or three articles for 2022.

Dr. Jonathan Brown, Journal Editor

Newsletter Editor's Report

As usual we published three editions of the Newsletter in May 2021, September 2021 and January 2022. I am grateful to those societies who send us reports each time and wish some of our other societies would send in at least one report a year.

We are currently running with 36 pages and could easily go to 40 if we added more photographs. We are at the moment constrained to black and white reproduction so photos do not come out well. Could the Society bear the extra cost of 40 pages and colour I wonder.

We understand the pressures that local authorities are under which are having an effect on museums and libraries; but we do try to include items from them even if their membership has been terminated.

John Chapman, Newsletter Editor

Membership Secretary's Report

Membership has seen a small decline since last year, with 75 individual members, 10 libraries and museums and 37 local history societies. We lost Slough Library when Slough Borough Council went bankrupt. We welcomed The Mills Archive Trust as a new member in 2021. They are based in Reading.

Some individual members have moved out of Berkshire but kept their membership. The BLHA has had only virtual events and one walk in the last two years and it has been difficult to recruit new members. The proposed Berkshire Heritage Day with the Berkshire Family History Society should help to raise our profile.

Ann Smith, Membership Secretary

Web Designer's Report

There have been regular updates to the website and more recently a revised Speakers List and Talks page. We invite Members who provide talks to send in their details so that we can advertise them for you. Overall, the website has been re-vamped and has a slightly more modern look with the added functionality of being suitable for tablets and mobile phone viewing (i.e. responsive).

We have also added digital copies of every single Journal that has been produced. These are free to view online.

The Diary Dates (Society Events) has also been updated and expired events are now put onto a separate page.

If you have any suggestions on improvements that you think we could make to the website then please contact us.

Dave Osborne, Web Designer

Chairman's Report

Another low-key year, I'm afraid, but the future is looking brighter. Things the committee had planned just could not happen because of the Covid-19 restrictions and the risks involved in indoor meetings.

In April we held an unusual "double" AGM online via Zoom. No AGM was held in 2020, when he had intended to be at Marcham, in the north west of the old county. By 2021, many people had got used to online meetings, so we decided to hold an AGM using the Zoom "platform." The day had been set, and to make the meeting more of an event, we were to have three short talks from different speakers, about pandemics in previous centuries. Unfortunately for us, the Saturday afternoon chosen turned out to be the afternoon of the state funeral of H.R.H. The Duke of Edinburgh. Rather than abandon the meeting, or delay it further, it was decided to hold the "business" part of the meeting in the early afternoon, before the funeral, and to dispense with the three short talks. I should like here to thank the three speakers who volunteered their services.

One of the good things to proceed from the AGM was that we finally managed to get our Secretary, Jo Alexander-Jones, elected onto the committee.

Another was the suggestion that we should bring back the list of speakers and their talks to the website, and keep it up-to-date. At the meeting, its usefulness was brought home to me when someone said that they often turned to the Oxfordshire Local History Association's website when planning the meetings for their society in Berkshire. A small sub-committee met in person over coffee to decide on the way forward, and the Berkshire list is now viewable. You can see what a particular speaker has to offer, and all the talks are searchable by subject. If you can offer a talk on some aspect of Berkshire local history to local history societies, please consider adding your details, and make the list even more useful.

Volume XX of the Victoria County History of Oxfordshire should have been published by the time you read this. The Association made a grant towards its publication, since this is the volume which includes the parishes along the Thames opposite Berkshire - Goring, Whitchurch, Mapledurham, Eye and Dunsden, Shiplake, etc., not forgetting Caversham, much of which was annexed by Reading Borough in 1911. Members should have received an e-mail bulletin telling them how to obtain a 25% discount on the published price. The offer is open until the end of April.

The committee has also agreed in principle to make a loan to enable additional copies of the new book, "Living in Tudor Windsor," to be published.

The History Department of the University of Reading decided not to award the Berkshire History Prize in 2021, which was not surprising since access to many of the materials needed to write a local history dissertation had been off-limits or restricted for much of the past year,

The "Building Schools for Berkshire" project looks likely to resume this month. Its aim is to produce an illustrated volume on schools built in the county between the Education Act of 1870, and the outbreak of war in 1914, and much of the work is carried out by volunteers, working mainly at the Berkshire Record Office, under the guidance of an editor. Joan Dils and I are members of the Project Board, and the Association has made small grants to similar projects in the past. The volume will be published by the Berkshire Record Society. The last volume to be produced in this way was "Berkshire Schools in the Eighteenth Century."

Over the year, Jo Alexander-Jones has represented the Association on the West Berkshire Heritage Forum, and I have been the representative at the Standing Conference on Archives.

The one "in person" event of 2021 was the "Swing" Riots walk, in June. From Kintbury railway station, a group of us looked at sites in the village associated with the events of 1830, including the grave of William Smith (alias Winterbourne) in the churchyard. We walked along the canal to Hungerford, pausing along the way to hear from Ann Smith (our Membership Secretary) about what had happened in the vicinity. In Hungerford, one of the sites was that of the foundry, which built the threshing machines which were to some extent the cause of the rioters' anger. Lunch was also an "outdoor" affair, in a marquee on the garden of the John O'Gaunt Inn. It was an extraordinary day, with people obviously pleased to be able to meet and chat about their researches and projects. Thanks are due to Ann for arranging it.

Three well-packed newsletters have appeared over the year, in May, September and January. It would be good to have some occasional snippets of news from the local societies who don't usually contribute - news from the local area, reports of talks and events, notices of new books, short local history articles, etc. John Chapman, the editor, will be pleased to hear from you.

Our annual journal, "Berkshire Old and New," was thinner than usual in 2021. Maybe the Covid pandemic had something to do with it. The BLHA committee has been considering if there are individuals likely to have articles already up their sleeves, or who might be asked to write for us. But please, don't wait to be asked. You can see what the journal looks like from the website. If you would like to contribute and get published, please contact Jonathan Brown, the editor.

Perhaps I can remind you here of the events and activities which the committee has in the pipeline, many of them postponed on account of the pandemic:

- A community archives day, for local history societies which hold collections of archival material
- A seminar on the “Swing” Riots: a series of talks, possibly involving a short play on the subject
- An Archive film show: old movies from across the county which, if successful, might be repeated in different places
- Play a part, together with the Berkshire Family History Society, in a Berkshire Heritage Online Fair
- Possibly having a stall at a family history fair

I hope that before the 2022 AGM, at least some of these will have come to fruition. To help move things along, the committee has decided to meet four times a year, rather than the customary three. I thank them for their commitment and support.

I’m very much looking forward to the AGM at Eton Wick, our first face-to-face AGM in three years. I’m hoping we get a decent crowd, and it will be like old times, when members, and the members of member societies, can talk formally at the “proper” meeting, and informally before and afterwards. It’s also their chance to meet the members of the newly elected committee (who I suspect will look much like the members of the old committee) and share ideas on how the Association might help them and their societies, and how they might help the Association.

David Cliffe, Chairman