



BERKSHIRE LOCAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION
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**46th Annual General Meeting of the Berkshire Local History Association
- Committee Reports (2022-24)**

Saturday 23rd March 2024 - St Mary's Church Centre, Wargrave RG10 8DH

Treasurer's Report

Subscriptions to the Society remain in line with those of the previous year, at c. £1,500. There are no plans currently to increase the subscription.

The expenses incurred by the Society have also remained much as in previous years, the slight decrease in the cost of printing the newsletter being off-set by increased postage costs.

Activities organised by the Society during the year have incurred no cost.

However, in a welcome change to earlier years, interest rates improved during 2023 and some interest income has started to be earned on the Society's cash deposits. This amounted to £96 on unrestricted funds this year.

The restricted fund remains little used by members for research and publication costs, but grant applications are always welcome. These funds amount to over £3,200, with approximately £600 owing from the loan advanced in 2022 for the publication of 'Living in Tudor Windsor'.

The Society's unrestricted reserves at £4,982 are considered sufficient to meet the cost of its continuing activities, and are held on bank deposit.

The Society's Financial Examiner, Dr Stephanie Hovland, had no reservations in approving the 2023 accounts.

Dr. D G Lewis FCA, Treasurer

Journal Editor's Report

Berkshire Old and New no. 40 was published last October. It contained four articles, and my thanks go first to the authors who provided them.

I also thank the reviewers who look through incoming articles, those who distribute the printed journal and who put it on the BLHA website (after an appropriate delay).

I have received expressions of interest in providing articles for this year, including a draft text for one. So, we can look forward to journal no. 41.

Dr. Jonathan Brown, Journal Editor

Newsletter Editor's Report

At the start of 2024 I took over editorship of the newsletter from John Chapman, who had been a stalwart of the activity producing the magazine for many years including the first two issues published since our last AGM. I want to thank John for the assistance he gave to me as I picked up the reins.

Thankfully a number of societies and individuals provided copy for the January newsletter, but it would be nice to see more groups contributing to what is your magazine and provides a place where you can share your activities and stories with the rest of the Association. Don't be shy, we want to hear your voices!

Jo Alexander-Jones, Newsletter Editor

Membership Secretary's Report

The BLHA has three kinds of members: individuals, local history groups and museums, archives and libraries. In 2023-24 we welcomed the Berkshire Historic Churches Trust as members of the BLHA. Sadly, former members Bracknell and Finchampstead local history societies, have ceased to meet. We had several new individual members join, balancing out the members who are no longer with us. Libraries and museums have had years of cuts to local government budgets, and their membership of the BLHA is in decline.

Ann Smith, Membership Secretary

Web Designer's Report

The website has been continually updated, both on the front end as well as the back end. Most noticeably we have changed the layout of the home page to incorporate a clearer view of what we do and how we can help the membership.

Talking of Membership, we have changed the way in which prospective members sign up. There is no longer a requirement to print and post a membership form, this has been automated which provides a much easier user experience.

We have made some changes to the website for security reasons. These include the change to the contact form and removal of email addresses shown to the public. It will hopefully alleviate the amount of spam received.

Our Speakers List page is growing steadily with a wide range of talks available to members. We invite Members who provide talks to send in their details so that we can advertise them for you.

The Diary Dates (Society Events) has been removed since there has been very little input from many Societies and we only had a few Societies that regularly sent information to us. Maintaining this was extremely time-consuming and the information was often out of date due to changes and cancellation of events. We have now made better provision for links to the Societies who promote their events on their own website.

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

Perhaps this has not been the most exciting year for the Association, but we have continued to pursue our aims, and have run three walks, and a study day. Some local history societies have found it hard to recover after the Covid lock-downs. In the Cheshire town where I grew up, the local history society has folded, after 60 years of existence, and in Berkshire, the societies in Finchampstead and Arborfield have recently ceased to exist. I gather that this is due, to some extent, to the lack of people willing to take on the running of them.

Fortunately, this, at present, is not a problem for the BLHA - though a few new committee members would be welcome, to ensure continuity. The membership has remained stable, with a few new individual members and the Berkshire Historic Churches Trust joining over the year, making up for those who have left. And as you will see from the Treasurer's Report, the finances are adequate for our needs.

Last year's A.G.M. took us to Marcham, formerly in Berkshire but since 1974 in Oxfordshire. The kindness of the members of The Marcham Society, who looked after us, will be long remembered. Apart from everything else, they organised access to interesting buildings that are not open to the public.

As a matter of policy, the A.G.M. moves to different parts of the county, and this year we'll be in Wargrave. During the course of the meeting we'll be asking those present about "diary dates" on the website and in the newsletter. These are advance notices of the talks and events of our member societies, and of other organisations if they're likely to interest our members. In fact, few of our member societies send in their programmes, and the newsletter editor spends a lot of time looking for them on websites. At its last meeting, the committee was wondering whether this was worthwhile. If you can't get to the A.G.M. and you have a point to make, you're welcome to send me an e-mail message using the chairman@blha.org.uk address.

Over the last year, 3 newsletters have appeared, each of them well filled. After 10 years in the editorial chair, John Chapman decided that it was time for him to relinquish it, and Jo Alexander-Jones has taken over. The Association owes them both a debt of gratitude. Dave Osborne has continued his sterling work on the website, and has set up a PayPal account, making it easier to collect payments for events or anything we might wish to sell. You can pay by bank transfer, debit and credit card as well as PayPal. Our journal, "Berkshire Old and New," appeared, with 4 articles. The Oxfordshire counterpart, "Oxfordshire History," had 6 articles, and both journals contained articles about "old" Berkshire. We had one about the Coleshill Estate, and they had one about almshouses in Harwell.

In June and July last year we had three walks around Windsor, led by our Treasurer, David Lewis. They were enjoyed by those who went, though there was room for a few more. This year, following on from the study day on Robert Gibbings and the Golden Cockerel Press, Ann Smith is planning a walk around Waltham St. Lawrence, where the Golden Cockerel Press actually was. The study day in October was attended by around 20 people, and was greatly enjoyed. It included a visit to the church at Long Wittenham, and the chance to take a print from the press which had belonged to Gibbings, in his studio in the village where he had ended his days. In organising this we were greatly helped by the Long Wittenham Local History Group.

The Berkshire History Prize, sponsored by the BLHA and the Berkshire Record Office, now the Royal Berkshire Archives, was won in 2023 by Samuel Armstrong. The subject of his thesis was Reading and the Second World War, and I went to the ceremony at the University of Reading to hand over the award.

The Second Berkshire Online Heritage Fair happened in late February. It was run by the Berkshire Family History Society, and our Association. In all, there were over 200 visitors, and many positive responses were received. Visitors had a list of the various subjects where experts were on hand, and could see which breakout rooms might interest them. Technically, all went smoothly as far as I could see, and the organisation of the event was exemplary.

Finally in this report, I'd like to thank our President, Vice-President and all the committee members for their encouragement and support, and their dedication to the cause of promoting the study and publishing of local history in the county. And I mustn't forget to thank the members, individual and institutional, for their support as well. I hope that we can meet up and have a happy time at our 2024 A.G.M. in Wargrave, or maybe at Waltham St. Lawrence for a walk in the summer.

David Cliffe, Chairman