



BERKSHIRE LOCAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

Registered Charity 1097355

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47th Annual General Meeting of the Berkshire Local History Association - Committee Reports (2024-25)

Thursday 17th April 2025 - The Biscuit Factory Cinema, Reading

Treasurer's Report (for year ending 31st December 2024)

Summary

The association's finances remain in good health at the date of this report. The accumulated unrestricted fund stands at £4,847 and the restricted fund, for research and publication grants, at £3,698.

Incoming funds for the year at £1,661 (including interest earned) fell £135 short of total operating costs. The trustees do not consider this sufficiently material to require an increase in the membership subscription. The operating shortfall in 2024 represented a slight deterioration compared with 2023, when the association made a small surplus of £10.

Income

Subscription income in the year was on a par with 2023 at £1,535, bolstered with improved interest income of £126 compared with £96 in 2023.

Operating costs

The association aims to distribute its newsletter through the internet without incurring printing and postage costs, both of which have again increased in price during 2024. Although printing costs have increased, the number of copies made has decreased, overall reducing this cost to the association from £326 in 2023 to £263 in 2024. The cost of printing the journal has increased by £30 compared with 2023. Postage represents a major cost to the association, and although fewer newsletters were sent out, this cost increased from £290 in 2023 to £331 in 2024.

The Society's AGM in Wargrave incurred a cost of £334, including £50 contributed to a £100 prize for the best undergraduate history dissertation at the University of Reading, awarded jointly with the Royal Berkshire Archive.

The association maintains a Zoom subscription, used for committee meetings and with other software / user licences necessary for the operating the association's website, the association incurred a cost of £298, an increase of £51 compared with 2023.

In total the association's operating costs in 2024 were £1,798 which compares with £1,738 in 2023.

Use of the association's restricted funds

The association holds a number of funds with which to make historical research grants and awards. There were no applications for new grants against these funds in 2024.

A publication loan of £900 made in 2022 had a further repayment in 2024 of £348, leaving a balance to be repaid in future years of £211.

Dr. D G Lewis FCA, Treasurer

Membership Secretary's Report

Sadly, we have said farewell to two local history groups last year: Cox Green Local History Group was reduced to 3 members and closed in Oct 2024. Pangbourne Heritage Group also ceased to belong to the BLHA, due to low membership and lack of funds, but still continues to meet as a group. We welcomed Hedgerley Historical Society as our newest group member in January 2025.

We had a good year in attracting new individual members in 2024-5. This was possibly due to our participation in the Berkshire Heritage Online Fair and other events which have helped to raise the BLHA's profile.

The membership charges remain unchanged for this year.

Ann Smith, Membership Secretary

Chairman's Report

On the face of it, 2024-25 has been fairly quiet for the Association. Membership remains fairly stable and our finances are sufficient for our purposes.

Last year's AGM, at the St. Mary's Church Centre at Wargrave was a happy occasion, and the hospitality was first rate. A pity about the weather – in the afternoon we opted for a visit to the church and an illustrated talk indoors, rather than facing the wind and the wet and going on a walk round the village. The one change to the committee was John Chapman standing down. He had edited our newsletter for the last ten years, and had been a committee member for a good many years before that. Jo Alexander-Jones gallantly took on the editorship, as well continuing as secretary.

The 2025 AGM itself will probably be much the same as the previous year, but the setting will be very different, and I hope people will stay on afterwards to enjoy a programme of archive movie films in the Reading Biscuit Factory Cinema in Reading. All the committee members are willing to stand for another year, so I hope you can be there to elect them.

Looking back over the last year, in June some of us had an enjoyable walk from the church at Waltham St. Lawrence to Shottesbrooke and back, led by Ann Smith. At Shottesbrooke, we were guided round St. John's Church by David Lewis, our Treasurer, and afterwards, those who wanted to walk a little farther could see the outside of the house from which Robert Gibbings had run the Golden Cockerel Press. Then most of us met up again at the Bell Inn for lunch.

The Berkshire History Prize was won by Anne Woodhead for a dissertation on the question "Did the Geographical Nature of Reading Influence Suffragette Activity?" The prize is given for an exceptional undergraduate dissertation on some aspect of the history of the county. The University of Reading decides on whether a prize should be awarded in a particular year, and it is funded jointly by the Royal Berkshire Archives and our Association.

Work on the "Building Schools for Berkshire" project is proceeding, but more slowly than was hoped. A good proportion of the work has been done, and the remaining volunteers are determined to complete it. The object is to produce a volume for the Berkshire Record Society about the schools built between the time of the 1870 Education Act and the outbreak of the First World War, and is led by the Peter Durrant and the Royal Berkshire Archives, with support from our Association.

In December the Record Society launched their latest volume, *Greyfriars, Reading: from Prison to Parish Church*, edited by Malcolm Summers. Our members and all the local history societies were invited to meet in Greyfriars Church on a Saturday afternoon, where they could enjoy an illustrated talk by the editor, visit the church, and buy a copy of the book at a reduced price. A good number were there, and the BRS is considering inviting us all to the launch of their next volume, containing the records of the Reading Quakers in the Meeting House, later this year.

We are still hoping to be able to fix a date to visit the Kedermister Library at Langley. It used to be in Buckinghamshire, but was transferred to Berkshire in 1974, and is an extraordinary survival from the early 17th century. The library is attached to the church.

Over the year, three newsletters have been published, and a journal, and several e-mail bulletins, for which we must thank everyone involved – Jo Alexander-Jones and Jonathan Brown the editors, Dave Osborne our web designer, and all of the authors. Communication is a major part of our activities, and I trust that you enjoy the things we produce. I've just finished reading a couple of interesting articles for this year's journal, *Berkshire Old and New*, and several more are promised, which is encouraging. Thanks must go to all members of the committee – I can assure you that there is no "dead wood" but a lot of behind-the-scenes activity, much of which goes unnoticed – like arranging to get things printed, mailing things out, taking bookings, looking after the funds, and lots and lots of "networking."

Finally, I must thank our members for their continuing support. Together, we are the B.L.H.A.

David Cliffe, Chairman