

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

5th April 2022

For the first time since April 2019, the Chairman's report can be laid before an actual physical Annual General Meeting of the Mere Historical Society: and it is my privilege, and first duty, to welcome back all our members, and to confirm that the Society has survived intact, to reach its 50th year.

During the period of the worst of the Covid 19 pandemic – and we are all conscious that the infection remains still rampant, and indeed at record levels – some of us did wonder if this Society, like other voluntary country village and small town associations, could survive at all; or if it did, regain its previous form and vigorous health. I am very happy to see that it has survived. We have enjoyed a full programme of Autumn and Spring talks, of – in my humble opinion – first-rate quality. This is due especially to two members of your Committee, David Bett and Derek Fisher, to whom I wish to record our special thanks: to David, for arranging the speakers; and to Derek, for an unseen, unsung, single-handed effort to restore the Grove Building, essentially deserted and neglected since March 2020, to a state suitable to continue as the home of the MHS.

I wish also to record my thanks to my predecessor as Chairperson, Gerry Cook, who – as most of you will know – very sadly passed away last summer. It was typical of him that he was anxious to hand on the Society – which at that time had been dormant for almost a year and a half – in as good a shape as it could be to burst back into life in the autumn.

I am pleased to say that the Society's financial reserves, husbanded in previous years, have proved their worth. As the overheads are fortunately low, the Society was able to extend memberships to March 2022 at no cost to members; despite which, the financial position remains sound, as the Treasurer's Report will show.

However, we have not passed through this unfortunate sequence of events unscathed. With the resignation of Caroline Cook from the Committee on health grounds, we have lost our organiser of the Summer Visits Programme. It is not often that someone who is described as "irreplaceable" proves literally to be so, but that is the case with Caroline. To her also I wish to extend the Society's warm thanks and sincere appreciation. Resuming the Summer Visits Programme is the main

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remaining task facing the Committee, and the principal objective for the coming year: for which we will need new blood.

I am therefore very pleased to say that we have had two volunteers to join (or re-join) the Committee, in Simon Edkins and Hamish Bell. However, we still need a person or persons to take on the visits. Please consider if you can help.

Another casualty of the pandemic has been the Newsletter. Printing costs, and the absence of a distribution method, meant that it made no sense to distribute the Spring 2020 issue that had been almost completely prepared; the subsequent absence of visits and talks meant that further issues would have been pointless. The Committee has decided that the reports of talks that previously made up the main content of newsletters will appear instead on the MHS website, starting with those prepared for the Newsletter that was never printed, followed by those of the Autumn programme: these will appear on the website shortly. In the future, we will aim to put these reports up as soon as they are written, rather than accumulating them for periodic publication.

I should like to add a word or two on what I might call my hopes for the MHS, as it reaches the age of 50. Its origins lie in the enthusiasm of its founding members for *local* history. Over time, its programme has evolved to include all sorts of history; reflecting the interests and enthusiasms of members. In particular, the morning talks began as informal gatherings where a member would simply talk about a subject that had engaged his or her interest, rather like a University of the 3rd Age seminar. The distinction between morning talks and evening lectures has evolved into a more practical issue of which time best suits the speaker, and time of year. But I believe that the involvement of members in giving their own talks, on whatever subject be it local, national, international, or simply interesting, is a real strength. So I hope that the very various mixture of the local, general, and personal will continue for the next 50 years. This means that you, the members, are permanently invited to offer ideas at any time to our programme controller, David Bett. You do not need a 'good platform manner' or a glossy slide show – necessarily!

Finally, I should like to thank you, the members, for your support in keeping our Society in good health and living an active life as it enters, shall we say, middle age.

Peter Landymore