

Brentford & Chiswick Local History Society

Minutes of the 64th Annual General Meeting, held on-line, 16 May 2022

Present: 32 members including James Wisdom (in the chair), Val Bott (*Journal* editor), David Bright (Membership Secretary), Janet McNamara (Vice-chairman), Jim Storrar (Committee member) and Cluny Wells (Hon Secretary).

Apologies: These were received from Greg Finch, John Grigg, Taya Low (Hon Treasurer), Diana Oppé, Mike Paterson (*Journal* designer), Cate Maybury, David Shailes (committee member) and Ruth Todd

Chairman's Report January 2021 to May 2022: While our Financial Statements cover the calendar year to 31 December 2021, the Chairman's Report, as usual, also includes the first few months of 2022.

Programme: During 2021 all of our monthly talks have been held on line and we expect this to continue as long as there is a high risk of infection. We continued to book and pay for the meeting room at the Chiswick Memorial Club in case it became possible to return. We wish to maintain our link with the Club and the cost to the Society is modest.

We sent seasonal programmes to all members, then notified those who use email of each talk, inviting them to book a place. We also placed on our website and promoted the programme by social media to reach a wider audience. Handling online bookings demanded a lot of administration for our Hon Secretary so from October we used Ticketsource for bookings which was very successful. A few of our members continue to be unable or preferred not to use Zoom so were unable to join the online talks. However, some members who live too far away to participate in person joined us online, together with many more non-member guests than before. Numbers attending varied from 45 to 79. The average attendance was 56 per event.

In the spring programme Val Bott spoke about the 1841 Brentford Flood on its 180th anniversary in January, I described the Mourning and Funeral of Sir John Maynard of Gunnersbury in 1690, David Shailes shared his passion for London Routemaster buses which were designed in Chiswick, and David Stockdale, Hounslow's Head of Culture, told us about the restoration work at Boston Manor House and Park. In May we promoted a joint event with the Friends of Gunnersbury Park & Museum, a talk by Francesca Murray on the Rothschilds' passion for growing orchids.

In the autumn James Marshall spoke about the History of the Great West Road, Kathryn Rooke, the Gunnersbury archivist, presented some of the extraordinary women associated with the Gunnersbury estate, Jon Cotton gave us his expert knowledge of 10,000 years of Brentford and our Christmas meeting comprised talks by members: Giz Marriner on her early 19th century ancestors in The Hollows, Brentford, Martin Daly on the owners of houses in Paxton Road and Adam Grounds, Local Studies Librarian, on a set of Brentford drawings he had acquired for the collection.

The spring programme for 2022 began with my own talk on Making a Living from the River, Alison Appleby sharing her recent research on the impact of the Great War on health and housing in Brentford, Phil Philo on Perry, Monk & Billings: three local men who voyaged with Captain Cook to the far side of the world, 1768-1780 and an account of the Black Chiswick Through History project at Chiswick House from Nadege Forde-Vidal. We were delighted to include an article by Alison Appleby in *Journal* 31 and Phil Philo would be providing an article for *Journal* 32 in 2023.

Other groups and societies: the Society was still one of the ten sponsoring societies which run the annual West London Local History Conference. The 41st conference, entitled *Liquid History – the Thames in the past of South & West London*, was held on line in November 2021. Several committee members gave talks to local organisations on Brentford and Chiswick subjects. David

Shailes and Jim Storrar (both B&CLHS committee members) continued to work tirelessly, watching the impact of redevelopment on Brentford's historic buildings and landscape and its archaeology mainly for Brentford Voice, but keeping our committee informed.

Publications: We published *Brentford & Chiswick Local History Journal 30* in late May and distributed it to members. The Society should take great pride in this publication, for its excellent content, the elegant design (created by Mike Paterson) and the handsome production by Carfax Cards, the printers with whom we have worked for some years. This issue was not sold in the libraries but mail order sales were successful.

Two articles – one on Thornycroft road vehicles and another about a Huguenot diplomat at Little Sutton – arose from email contacts from their authors. The other articles were by society members, topical pieces – a short history marking Brentford FC's ambitious recent move to a new stadium and a sampling from burial records at St Lawrence's, Brentford, which was being restored. Also included were the story of an 18th century 'resort' on one of the Brentford islands and a comparison of shopping in Chiswick High Road in 1936 and 2020. Our thanks go to the authors who have added to our knowledge of our area, and to our editor, Val Bott.

For the second year running one of the articles was given a prize by the British Association for Local History Publishing and Research Awards 2022. On this occasion Wesley Henderson Roe's article, 'Chiswick High Road - a retail revelation' has won the Award for best short article, selected from over 300 in the local history society journals and transactions sent to the BALH's magazine, *The Local Historian*, during 2020. We are delighted both for Wesley and for the Society.

Website: The website continued to be an important way of keeping in touch with members and with the public. We used it to promote our talks and those of historical and local interest put on by others such as the Bedford Park Society, Hogarth's House and Chiswick House

In 2021 the number of website users rose from 19,721 in 2020 to 22,560; 69% came from the UK and 22% from the USA. The visitors made 50,960 page views (about 6,000 more than in 2020) and the use spiked on 23 March, 10 April, 17 May and 29 July. Apparently 27% of our users were aged 18-24, and 33.5% between 25 and 34. 11% were over 55. The Great West Road, the V2, the Glebe Estate, Gill Clegg's Brief History of Chiswick and the Grand Houses pages were the most popular.

The site attracts enquiries, perhaps a dozen each month; Janet McNamara co-ordinated our responses, with information provided by our committee members where possible or passed on to Adam Grounds in Local Studies. Responding to a few of those who have contacted us led to articles being written for the *Journal* which we would not otherwise have discovered.

The on-line access to the bookshop was lower in 2021 than in 2020, with 1,400 visits to this page (compared to 2,829 in 2020). The peaks were the weeks beginning 10 Jan, 13 June, 8 August and 23 October, though it is hard to know what provoked the greater interest.

Social media: Emma White continued to manage our Twitter and Facebook accounts (both @BCLocalHistory), and posted frequent messages and pages on a rich variety of local history topics. She promoted our talks and, where appropriate, often referred to a publication in the online book shop which prompted occasional sales.

On Twitter we ended the year with 2,372 followers (an increase of 363). Followers are registered to receive everything we send, and a number of them are local organisations who often re-tweeted her stories to a wider audience. Because of the way that tweets are multiplied through the users, the tweets were reaching an average of 51,318 readers a month, who could then open the messages on their phones or computers. This was an increase of 12,600 on 2020. On our Facebook site we ended the year with 319 users (an increase of 36) with an average of 4,244 views per month.

Hounslow's heritage: When the Local Studies & Archives Dept re-opened after long periods of closure due to the pandemic, this was by appointment only to limit numbers of users and observe

social distancing. Staff embarked upon responding to a considerable backlog of email inquiries direct to the library. During the year a set of handsome pen and ink drawings depicting unusual views of Brentford was purchased for the collection. The works are by John Tavenor Perry, who prepared them to illustrate his article on Brentford published in the *English Illustrated Magazine* in 1904. After James Marshall's retirement Hounslow Council did not recruit a replacement before the pandemic, so Adam Grounds had to manage collections at Chiswick and Feltham alone. In the autumn of 2021 he was promoted to the senior post temporarily and a temporary assistant appointed alongside. At the time of the AGM, it was not known whether these posts had been made permanent.

Remarkably high quality restoration work at Boston Manor House continued and we looked forward to visiting it. At Hogarth's House the Weston Studio and the garden began to be used with a lively programme of talks and activities. After a period of visits by appointment only, the House was fully open to visitors by the time of this AGM. Gunnersbury Park Museum remained closed for a long period but re-opened for limited hours from summer 2021. David Shailes and Jim Storrar began working with the Gunnersbury archivist to plan a research group to digitise the existing catalogue but she moved to a new post before this could begin.

Our membership: Membership numbers remained stable at just under 200. As always my heartfelt thanks went to our loyal members who continued to support our talks. We looked forward to the time when we could once again make them lively and sociable events where we meet in person.

Christabel Ames-Lewis proposed a vote of thanks to the Chairman and committee, which was warmly approved. She also stated that the *Journal* was superb.

Hon Treasurer's Report: In the absence of the Hon Treasurer James Wisdom presented the accounts for the calendar year to 31 December 2021. These had been inspected and found satisfactory by Prof Margaret Price.

The Accumulated Fund at that date comprised:

- the Operating Fund £10,577.59
- the Publications Fund £4,011.62

A further sum of £1,009 had been received via Paypal for mail order sales (purchase costs and postage) during the year but had inadvertently not been transferred to the Publications Fund before 31 December 2021. It would therefore appear in the accounts for the year ending 31 December 2022. As a general principle the Society aimed to cover running costs through subscriptions. We would consider allocating expenditure on the website and social media to the publications fund.

Appointment of Inspector of Accounts: Margaret Price was prepared to continue in this role. We thanked her for her work and the meeting approved her re-appointment.

Election of Committee: The Society's small committee organised its activities and monitored aspects of local history and archaeology in our area. The members were Janet McNamara (Vice-Chairman), Cluny Wells (Hon Secretary), Taya Low (Hon Treasurer), David Bright (Membership Secretary), Val Bott (Editor), Mike Paterson (Journal layout), Adam Grounds (Hounslow Local Studies), David Shailes and Jim Storrar. Our thanks went to them for their enthusiasm and support for the Society. Taya stepped down from the role of Treasurer at the meeting, with our thanks for her careful work. All other members were prepared to continue in their roles and this was approved by the meeting. However, the Chairman said that we would be searching for a new Hon Treasurer in the coming months and would welcome nominations.

Any Other business: Francis Ames-Lewis was concerned that requiring members to book a place at the AGM limited who could attend. The Chairman explained that bookings were needed because Zoom online meetings had a limited capacity and we needed to monitor potential attendance levels.