

# Brentford & Chiswick Local History Society

## Minutes of the 65th Annual General Meeting, held on-line, 15 May 2023

**Present:** 16 members including the following officers: James Wisdom (in the chair), Val Bott (*Journal* editor), David Bright (Membership Secretary), Janet McNamara (Vice-chairman), David Shailes (committee member), Roger Squire (Hon Treasurer) and Cluny Wells (Hon Secretary).

**Apologies:** These were received from Sue Adams, Meg Clarke, Wesley Henderson-Roe, Moyna Leithead, and Mike Paterson (*Journal* designer)

**Chairman's Report January 2022 to May 2023:** While our Financial Statements cover the calendar year to 31 December 2022, the Chairman's Report, as usual, also includes the first few months of 2023.

**Programme:** We continued our online monthly talks programme though we postponed the talk which would have taken place on the day of the Queen's funeral in September. Members were sent the spring and autumn programmes, then booking details were issued for each individual talk. When TicketSource began to charge a fee we moved to TicketTailor which was not only simpler to manage but also free to use. We offered a joint event with the Hounslow & District History Society and the Isleworth Society in November 2022, when Bob Cowie spoke of the findings from decades of *Syon Abbey* excavations. The average attendance on-line was 49.

In 2022 I gave a talk in January on *Making a Living from the River*, Dr Alison Appleby presented her recent research on the *Impact of the Great War on Health & Housing in Brentford* in February, Phil Philo's talk on *Local Men who Voyaged with Captain Cook* took place in March and Nadege Forde Vidal described the *Black Chiswick Through History* project at Chiswick House in April. Following the AGM Val Bott shared her study of 125 years of the residents of the *Hartington Park Estate*. In October John Collins described the stunning work on *Refurbishing Boston Manor House*, and in December Janet McNamara and Val Bott presented a quirky *Winter Scrapbook* of images and news-cuttings.

**Other Groups and societies:** Individual committee members have given talks to some local groups on Brentford and Chiswick subjects. David Shailes and Jim Storrar (both B&CLHS committee members) have worked tirelessly monitoring the impact of redevelopment on Brentford's historic buildings and landscape, mainly for Brentford Voice but keeping our committee informed. David promoted street displays for Local History Month in 2022 while Jim co-ordinated the production of heritage panels in Brentford, the first to be launched in summer 2023. Our Society continued to be one of the nine sponsoring societies for the annual West London Local History Conference. The 42nd conference, entitled *Play the Game*, about sport in South & West London, was held on-line in November 2022 but attracted a very modest audience. The steering group was reviewing the future and with the aim of putting on a face to face event in future.

**Publications:** We published *Brentford & Chiswick Local History Journal 31* in late May and distributed it to all members. The *Journal* continued to be something in which we should take great pride, for its excellent content (for which we thank our authors), the careful editing by Val Bott, the elegant layout design by Mike Paterson and the handsome production by Carfax Cards, the printers with whom we have worked for many years. Once again we sold a number of copies via mail order.

**Website:** We used the website to keep in touch with our members and with the public, promoting our talks and lectures of relevant interest put on by others. The online bookshop page had 31 items for sale, all able to be ordered using Paypal; during 2022 there were 41 different purchasers. We continued to buy small stocks of publications with local connections, some linked to Society lectures, to help them reach a wider audience. Once a *Journal* has sold out, we post its articles for open access onto the website, and in 2022 we added *Journal 17*.

About a dozen email local history queries came in each month via the website. Janet McNamara, our Vice-Chairman, monitored these and co-ordinated responses wherever practicable; some were passed on to the Local Studies team.

In 2022 the number of website users slipped from the 22,560 of the previous year to 19,478; 76% came from the UK, 7.2% from the USA and the rest from 143 other countries. The visitors made 38,879 page views (50,960 in 2021). We had three inexplicable spikes of interest: 414 users on 11 April 11, 692 on 17 May and 286 on 13 November. As before, the most read pages were about the Great West Road; other popular topics were the Glebe estate, Gill Clegg's brief history of Chiswick, Public Houses, the Corona stage school and the V2.

**Social media:** Emma White continued to oversee our Twitter and Facebook accounts (both @BCLocalHistory). Her regular messages on various topics promoted interest in local history and raised awareness of our talks and publications. On Twitter we had 2,568 followers (an increase of 178) at the end of the year. Followers received everything we posted; some were local organisations who re-tweeted her stories to a wider audience. Because of the way that tweets were multiplied through the users, they received an average of about 25,000 views a month. On our Facebook site we ended the year with 378 users (an increase of 55) with about 4,000 views per month.

**Hounslow's heritage:** The 5-year restoration project at Boston Manor House, costing around £6 million, was expected to open to visitors in summer 2023. Queen Camilla visited earlier in the year to mark its 400th anniversary and it recently won a Civic Trust Award. Work on restoring the Park continued. Both elements of the work received substantial grants from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The projects would complete Hounslow Council's investment in its major heritage sites, including Gunnersbury Park and Hogarth's House, putting them into good heart for the future. In September we learnt that Gunnersbury Park Museum had received a grant for an oral history study on the Great West Road. We were delighted that the first steps had been taken towards a bid for Lottery funding to support the conversion of Gunnersbury's stable blocks into storage and study space for the Museum's collections, including the transport collection, along with the archives and local studies holdings of Ealing and Hounslow and the Thomas Layton Collection.

As part of the redevelopment of Brentford, in 2022 the Museum of London Archaeology team created a virtual tour of the interior of St Lawrence's, in which Janet McNamara, Jim Storrar and David Shailes took part.

In September we placed our usual wreath on the V2 memorial in Staveley Road, Chiswick.

**The committee:** The Society's small committee organised our activities and monitored aspects of local history and archaeology. The members were Janet McNamara (Vice-Chairman), Cluny Wells (Hon Secretary), Roger Squire (Hon Treasurer), David Bright (Membership Secretary), Val Bott (Editor), Adam Grounds (Hounslow Local Studies), David Shailes and Jim Storrar (Committee members). We thanked them for their enthusiasm and support for the Society.

**Our membership:** Membership numbers have remained stable at just under 200. As always I want to offer my enthusiastic thanks to our loyal members who have continued to support our talks. We look forward to the time when we can once again make them lively and sociable events where we meet in person.

**Discussion & Questions:** Christabel Ames-Lewis asked whether it would be possible to return to in-person meetings. James replied that we were obtaining advice about running hybrid meetings so that long distance members could continue to participate. Some members commented that the talks had been very good.

**Hon Treasurer's Report:** Roger Squire, who had been co-opted during the year, presented the accounts for the calendar year to 31 December 2022. Prof Margaret Price had inspected these and found them satisfactory. The format remained similar to that used in the past but the subscription

income had been split between the operational and publishing accounts to recognise the fact that the *Journal* was a membership benefit. It was difficult to compare these statements with those for 2021 because income via Paypal for that year had not been included in the final accounts, being added in 2022 instead. In addition the Society had benefitted from some bulk purchases of envelopes and stamps in the past so postage and packing expenditure could not be compared year on year. Roger thanked James Wisdom, Val Bott and David Bright for helping him to understand the Society's finances when he took over. The accounts were approved unanimously and we recorded a vote of thanks to Roger for the huge amount of work he had put into managing the Society's funds.

The Accumulated Funds for the year comprised:

- the Operating Fund £10,866 (£10,577.59 in 2021)
- the Publications Fund £3,933 (£4,011.62 in 2021)

**Appointment of Inspector of Accounts:** Margaret Price was prepared to continue in this role and we recorded our thanks for her work. 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), Roger Squire (Hon Treasurer), Val Bott (Editor), David Bright (Membership Secretary), Adam Grounds (Hounslow Local Studies), David Shailes and Jim Storrar Committee members). We thanked them heartily for their energetic support for the Society. Cluny Wells was stepping down at this meeting and we thanked her warmly for her work confirmed by the meeting. The Chairman said the Society would be searching for a new Hon Secretary in the coming months and would welcome nominations.

**Any Other business:** There was none.

Following the meeting we heard a series of short talks on the theme of using objects to discover aspects of the past in our area.

- Janet McNamara reported on the accidental discovery of a prehistoric human femur upstream of Kew Bridge by a rower. This had made BBC News and the national press
- James Wisdom showed a prehistoric flint knife he had found on foreshore just downstream of Kew Bridge where gravel had been churned up by pleasure boat propellers. He related this to reports of archaeological work on the Brentford bank upstream of the bridge at 41-42 Kew Bridge Road, where there had been a Mesolithic or Neolithic causewayed enclosure.
- James also presented recent research into the Brentford horn cap, a bronze artefact with celtic interlace decoration from the Thomas Layton Collection. It was one of 32 from the UK of which 3 were from the Thames. A new study suggested that it would have served as a counter-weight at the handle of a switch or whip.
- Janet described some of the fine memorials which had been lost from St Lawrence's Church in Brentford. One, which commemorated James Clitherow of Boston Manor who died in 1688, had been found in a Hampstead garden where the owner had purchased it from a salvage dealer and incorporated it into his garden wall. The other had been discovered in Australia and had been returned for display at Boston Manor House.
- Val Bott showed a pocket watch she had acquired. Its silver case had the date letter 1781 and its gilt brass mechanism was by John Upjohn of New Brentford. It was inscribed with the name of the Rev Dr Morris of Brentford Butts, who had been headmaster of a school there and was a cruel bully. Though the watch was attractive, he was not!