

BRENTFORD & CHISWICK LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Annual General Meeting, 20 May 2024

Agenda

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of 2023
3. Chairman's Report
4. Hon Treasurer's Report
5. Appointment of inspector of accounts
6. Introduction of joint membership – see attached documents
7. Subscription charges - see attached documents
8. Review of our constitution - see attached documents
9. Election of Officers and Committee
10. Any other business

Chairman's Report, January 2023 to May 2024

While our Financial Statements cover the calendar year to 31 December 2023, parts of this Report bring us up to date to the AGM.

Programme: We continued our monthly talks programme online via Zoom until last year's AGM in May. In September 2023 we embarked on using a hybrid model, combining meetings in person at the Chiswick Memorial Club with online via Zoom. This has had teething troubles because we do not have a skilled technical adviser, but we have persisted!

As usual we sent out the spring and autumn programmes to members, followed by booking details for each individual talk. We were pleased to provide a rich and varied programme. When we were only offering online talks they drew an average audience of 50. The average audience for the hybrid talks has been 64, with roughly equal numbers in person and online. After a few days grace to allow members to make their bookings, each talk is also posted on our web site, and they are usually picked up by the online community sites [brentfordtw8](#) and [chiswickw4](#) to inform the general public.

We began 2023 with a talk from journalist and writer Nick Higham based on his book about London water supply, *The Mercenary River*. In February Dr David Jacques spoke about Lord Burlington, Duchess Georgiana and the Chiswick gardens, the subject of his recent book. In March Ann Rix and Professor Francis Ames-Lewis, from the St Nicholas Church archives team, introduced us to some of the lesser-known people buried there. For a joint meeting with the Hounslow and District History Society, Howard Simmons explained how Benjamin Stone's Sword Factory made Hounslow Heath the centre of sword manufacture in the 17th century. Following the AGM several speakers contributed short presentations about local objects showing how they revealed aspects of our local story.

In September David Shailes shared his recent research on Brentford's enormous 19th century gas works and in October John Collins, Hounslow's Historic Houses Manager, returned to describe how a greater understanding of the building itself and research into the people who lived there had informed the new presentation of Boston Manor House. I presented the November talk about Sutton Court Farm, Chiswick's largest farm, using the inventory of property and goods made after the farmer, Daniel Burford, died in 1726. Val Bott revealed the possessions of 18th century local people which were bequests recorded in their wills in December. Howard Simmons returned to give January's talk about love and death at Syon House, while in February Dr Sally Jeffery

provided an account of Lord Wilmington's walled gardens which later became part of Chiswick House grounds, using information which she had recently discovered at Chatsworth. Steph Hagan shared her research into people associated with Boston Manor House, undertaken as part of the restoration project there and in April I spoke about the historians of Brentford and Chiswick.

Other Groups and societies: Individual committee members have given talks to various local groups on Brentford and Chiswick subjects. Val Bott and I presented a talk about Chiswick's local historians at the Tabard Theatre for the 2023 Chiswick Book Festival which sold out (and so was repeated and expanded for our April talk). David Shailes and Jim Storrar (both B&CLHS committee members) have continued to monitor the impact of Brentford's redevelopment on the town's history, mainly for Brentford Voice but keeping our committee informed. Jim co-ordinated the installation of the first of a series of new information panels, one for the Market Place and one for Ferry Quays. David and Jim also gave talks to the Friends of Waterman's Park, David on the gas works and Jim on Brentford Ait. The Society continues to be one of the nine societies which sponsor the annual West London Local History Conference. The 43rd conference, *By Hand and Eye*, about the Arts and Crafts Movement, took place in April 2024. While the 42nd conference (online) had been poorly attended this one sold out and extra tickets had to be added; over 120 bookings were made altogether.

Publications: In late May we published *Brentford & Chiswick Local History Journal 32* and distributed it to all members. Every year I underline how proud we should be of this publication. It is exceptionally pleasing that new research continues to be shared, providing us with excellent content. It is carefully edited by Val Bott and the elegant layout is designed by Mike Paterson. Carfax Cards, with whom we have worked for many years, always provide a fine quality product. Once again we sold some copies via mail order through our online bookshop. We are delighted to report that James Marshall has updated his 1995 history of the Great West Road; we will be supporting its publication later this year in time for the 2025 centenary of its opening. A new bookshop will be opening in Brentford in the near future and we have been liaising with Adam Grounds at Local Studies to see what local history material we might be able to offer for sale there. Since we returned to face to face meetings we have been selecting items to sell which relate to the theme of the talk.

Website: This continues to be a significant means of keeping in touch with our members and with members of the public, promoting our own talks and relevant lectures of historical and local interest put on by others. The online bookshop page dealt with 32 different purchasers during 2023. We have added small stocks of publications with local connections to ensure that a wider audience is aware of them. The 28 items currently for sale can be ordered online using Paypal.

Once a *Journal* has sold out, we post its articles for open access onto the website. Now all articles from editions up to number 20 (2011) have been uploaded. This historical information is very rich and of considerable value. We use Google Analytics to keep records of web usage – the upgrading of that service has caused difficulties, but by July 2023 we know we had been getting around 2000 visitors a month, and as usual the most popular article was on the Great West Road. Most of the users are in the UK, with around 20% from the USA.

Janet McNamara, our Vice-Chairman, monitors email local history queries which come in via the website. Up to a dozen requests each month seek local history information and she co-ordinates our responses wherever practicable or passes them on to the Local Studies Library team.

Social media: Emma White has continued to oversee our Twitter and Facebook accounts (both @BCLocalHistory). By posting regular messages and pages on a variety of history topics she promotes interest in local history, and raises awareness of our talks and our publications.

On Twitter we ended the year with 2745 followers (an increase of 177). Followers are registered to receive everything we send, and a number of whom are local organisations who often re-tweet her stories to a wider audience. Our tweets are reposted on average 56 times a month. Because of the way that tweets are multiplied through the users, the tweets are receiving an average of c24,000 views a month. Readers can then open the messages on their phones or computers; on average 232 are “liked” each month. On our Facebook site we ended the year with 441 users (an increase of 58) with an average of c.5,000 views per month.

Hounslow's heritage: Both the refurbished Boston Manor House and the restored Park were officially re-opened in the summer of 2023. The National Lottery Heritage Fund provided substantial grants to both projects. We were disappointed to hear of the rejection of an initial application for Lottery funding for the restoration of Gunnersbury's stable blocks. This would convert them 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 Layton collection. We hope a revised application will be submitted in the near future. We commissioned Peter Coughlan, the blacksmith at Urban Iron in Brentford, to devise a set of replacement fixings for the information panel beside the V2 memorial before we placed a wreath there in September. During the summer Sandersons, whose works occupied both sides of Barley Mow Passage until a disastrous fire in 1928, will be moving their head office and archive back to Chiswick. The white glazed brick factory designed for them by Voysey in 1902 has been immaculately refurbished.

The committee: The Society's small committee organises its activities and monitors aspects of local history and archaeology in our area. The current members are Janet McNamara (Vice-Chairman), Roger Squire (Hon Treasurer), David Bright (Membership Secretary), Val Bott (Editor), Adam Grounds (Hounslow Local Studies), David Shailes and Jim Storrar (Committee Members). We must thank them for their enthusiasm and support for the Society. We have been without an Hon Secretary since Cluny Wells stepped down at the AGM in 2023; Val Bott has undertaken most of the administrative work during the last year.

Our membership: Membership numbers have remained stable at just under 200; it has been a pleasure to welcome a number of new members during the year. As always I want to offer my enthusiastic thanks to our loyal members who have continued to support our talks. We have been delighted that we have once again been able to meet in person.

James Wisdom, Chairman
May 2024