



Hitchin Historical Society

Registered Charity No. 280746

REPORTS AND ACCOUNTS For the year ended Thursday 31 DECEMBER 2020

February 2021

Dear Member

After giving notice of the 43rd AGM on Thursday 26 March 2020 this had to be cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic so there are not any Minutes. Committee meetings have been held on Zoom.

We have published Hitchin Journals, Newsletters, and the new book *Hitchin - Glimpses of the Past* also kept in contact with you all by emails, mailings, and our website.

We received enquiries from all over the world about Hitchin and district and have responded to people on various topics.

At January 2021 committee meeting it was unanimously agreed that the best course of action for our Society in the current circumstances is to postpone the 44th AGM. To demonstrate good governance the reasons for this decision are because a virtual meeting is not a viable solution, as not accessible for all members, and the meeting might well not be quorate.

However, we have prepared Reports on our various activities that we hope you will find interesting.

Our thanks go to Messrs John Shilcock for providing us with storage area for our archives and publications stock.

As the vaccine is being rolled out, we all look forward to being able to meet up in-person later this year.

Keep Safe.

Yours sincerely

Pamela Skeggs

Secretary

secretary@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk

Treasurer's Report

A year of marking time in which we have largely succeeded in keeping our finances intact.

Subscriptions have decreased due to fewer members taking out life membership.

Sales of "Hitchin – Glimpses of the Past" totalled £2,148 showing a surplus of £196, with still a substantial stock at the end of year. Sales of other publications amounted to £681 and have now been written down still further, so please contact Mike Clarke if you wish to book a bargain. For obvious reasons events were non-existent after March.

John Skeeles F.C.A

Annual Accounts 2020

Hitchin Historical Society

Accounts Statement, 1 January 2020 - 31 December 2020

Receipts and Payments basis

Section A, Unrestricted funds	2020		2019	
Receipts				
Subscriptions	1,738.10		3,282.03	
Visitors and Donations	143.90		198.39	
Trips & visits	15.00		546.50	
Social Events	0.00		250.00	
Commemorative Events, Lectures	0.00		499.50	
Sale of Society publications	2,829.30		4,045.23	
Bank Interest	12.87		23.06	
Total receipts	4,739.17		8,844.70	
Payments				
Speakers' Fees	100.00		240.00	
Hall Hire and related Items	319.00		617.00	
Stationery, Postage etc.	324.85		381.59	
Website	0.00		86.09	
Newsletter and Society reports	118.80		316.40	
Journal	272.50		317.40	
Producing Society Publications	3,479.00		2,453.30	
Other publications	0.00		0.00	
Book launches and related expenses	25.00		0.00	
Social Events	0.00		243.00	
Trips and Visits	0.00		657.98	
Refreshments for meetings	0.00		12.60	
Equipment purchase	0.00		0.00	
Commemorative Events	0.00		626.14	
Subscriptions	107.50		182.50	
Grants & donations	0.00		50.00	
Bank Charges	60.00		60.00	
Advertisements	50.00		75.00	
Physic Garden	339.40		410.25	
Total payments	5,196.05		6,729.25	
Net Receipts (Payments)	(456.88)		2,115.45	
Cash funds last year end	20,406.38		18,290.93	
Cash funds this year end	19,949.50		20,406.38	
Section B, Restricted income funds				
The society has no restricted income funds				
Section C, Endowment funds				
The society has no endowment funds				
Section D, Statement of Assets and Liabilities at year end				
Cash funds	Unrestricted funds	Restricted funds	Unrestricted funds	Restricted funds
Cash	347.90		349.96	
CafCash current account	3,534.43		4,002.12	
CAF Gold deposit account	16,067.17		16,054.30	
	19,949.50	0.00	20,406.38	0.00
Other monetary assets	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Investment assets	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Assets retained for the society's own use				
Stock of publications for sale	5,370.75	0.00	5,316.45	0.00
Debtors	356.00	0.00	29.10	0.00
Liabilities	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Programme Report

Last year's Programme Report noted how Society activity, over the recent past, has come to be made up of eleven meetings, twelve visits and events and several activities linked to the annual Hitchin Festival. Well, not for 2020.....

The year opened as planned with two interesting and well attended meetings at Church House. In January, our longstanding member Dr Mike Clarke revisited an area of his personal specialism with a talk entitled 'Cold Baths Don't/ Might Work'. This looked again at the history of mental health care and was illustrated with both local and wider examples plus newer perspectives developed since the publication of his book *Cold baths don't work: a history of mental health care in the Hitchin area* ten years ago. In February Dr Kris Lockyear came to us to explore 'Verulamium: Busy Places and Empty Spaces'. Kris's talk provided new ways of looking at our biggest local Roman city based very much on the recent use of improved techniques in ground radar survey and interpretation of areas of the settlement relatively little explored by conventional excavation. It was also revealing to learn more about the practical methods, benefits, pitfalls and even the costs of using such radar techniques.

Soon after this, however, Society plans were dislocated by a developing public health crisis that is still, unfortunately, very much with us. As a result, the Annual General Meeting in March was cancelled at short notice and then subsequently, in phases, all the other meetings and events of the year fell victim to increasingly tight restrictions on gatherings and events. We produced a series of 'What we would have seen.' pieces for most of the cancelled visits; these were placed in date sequence on the website. There was a brief window in September when it looked as though some small-scale meetings or events might become feasible but, just as organisation of these was about to start, that window was closed. All in all and viewed from the perspective of a Programme Secretary who has had four separate stints of organising things since the early 1980s, 2020 has been the most disappointing and frustrating of years. Let's hope that, as 2021 unfolds, there will soon be scope to plan a return to something much nearer to 'normal' activities.

David Howlett
Programme Secretary

Membership Report

At the end of 2020 membership totalled 376 which is slightly less than in 2019. We welcomed 12 new members; 6 singles and 3 (6) family members. Two additional Life Members converted from ordinary members making 32 in total.

Thank you to all members who renewed promptly, particularly those that did so by Bank Transfer. Effectively all renewals were confirmed before lockdown in March 2020. From then we had to adapt how Newsletters and Journals were distributed and thanks are due to those members willing to accept email/website distribution. This has helped enormously and reduced risks to our members involved in local distribution. It has reduced our postage costs and effectively given many members very timely receipt of publications. The distribution of the Journal, however, reflects those members that wish to receive a hard copy. Thanks to Phil Rowe for facilitating emails and to Vicki Lockyer for organising the distribution of our remaining postings out and hand deliveries in the Hitchin area.

Members renewing by post may wish to know that their stamps are currently donated to Parkinsons UK.

Is there a member that would like to take on the membership secretary role?

It requires the use of a computer able to run an XL spreadsheet and a printer. The membership database is easy to use, just completing entries in pre-set fields to automatically generate the membership number. With many members now paying by bank transfer the renewal process it is quite efficient. Thereafter enrolling new members and producing mailing labels three times a year is not an onerous task. If you are interested and would like to know more please feel free to contact me at membership@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk I would like to hand over the reins by September this year to enable the new secretary to learn the ropes and give full support for renewal time in January 2022.

Peter Moss
Membership Secretary

Glimpses of Hitchin

The book has sold reasonably well, given the pandemic and restrictions relating from it. When I was compiling it, I quickly realised there was far more material than I had first thought – sufficient for several volumes in fact.

This led me to think what a good Christmas or birthday present it would be, if we were to make it a series. If we were to go for four volumes, just imagine – that would be Christmas or birthday presents for the next four years! And we all know how difficult to know what to buy for people these days. But you need to buy the first volume, so we can gauge demand.

I have already compiled a second volume, tentatively titled *Hitchin – More Glimpses of the Past*, and chosen a painting of Bucklersbury by the late Hector Connell for the cover. Hector was a Scot who settled in Hitchin in the 1970s, selling copper plate etchings from his West Alley Market stall.



Here are just a few of the items selected for Volume 2:

- The Hitchin British Schools: Yesterday and Today
- F. W. Coopers, Butchers, Tilehouse Street, 1937-41
- The Great Fire of Potton 1783 - The Hitchin Connection
- A Hitchin Man's Contribution to Victory in 1918
- A Victorian Cottage in Hitchin
- A Relic of the Bancroft House School, Hitchin
- Transport in Hitchin in the 1940s - 50s
- Malting and Brewing In Hitchin
- Eastern Railway in the 1930s
- Hitchin Thespians – a Century of Success
- Victorian Pubs in Hitchin
- The Hitchin Physic Garden
- Memories of an Evacuee in Hitchin
- Not Just a Dry Old List of Names: a Look at the Registers of Hitchin British Boys' School, 1827-1877
- Elizabeth Lane: The White Witch of Walsworth
- Journal of a Fireman
- Stained Glass Panels in Hermitage Road

and much, much more.

Simon Walker
Journal Editor

The first volume is available from sales@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk

Publications

The main event of 2020 was the production of 'Hitchin – Glimpses of the Past'. Simon Walker did a magnificent job in selecting and editing Hitchin Journal items from 1977 to 1992. The feedback has been very good, and we look forward to the next volume being produced later this year.

The production was done using Dragon Print & Design – partly to keep it local – and we have been pleased with the end result. It has been a learning curve (next time remember the bar code!). Sales have been clearly comprised by the virus – a surge before Christmas cut short by lockdown. We had a reprint delivered just before Christmas but now have a large stock still to sell. Merryfields have been our main retailer and we are very grateful for that.

Otherwise, sales have been down this year – there have been fewer events to sell at. Hopefully, that will change if the pandemic disappears. Leaving aside the new books and the town walks, we sold 181 'old books' in 2019 but just 43 in the past year. I have had a few interesting sales – someone curious about the maternity hospital in Bedford Road where they were born, family historians wanting to know what was entailed when their forebears plaited straw, and someone else wanting to see a report on the fire at their grandfather's shop in 1928.

Later this year 'More Glimpses of the Past' will be produced. The pandemic has only had one good outcome so far – Simon's prolific editorial labours.

Mike Clarke
Publications and Sales

Website

The inevitable disruption to Society activities in 2020 was reflected in a series of news items on the Society's website, attempting to keep members advised of cancellations of both indoor meetings and visits which had all been carefully planned for the year. As 2020 progressed, David Howlett, our Programme Secretary provided a series of one-page "What we would have seen ..." descriptions of the visit locations that had been planned for the year, and these were placed on the website for all to read.

Three short publications on the Biggin, Markets & Fairs, and Bicycles had long been out of print. It was decided to make these available on the website for free download, and this was done in May and June. The September 2020 edition of the Society's Hitchin Journal was made available electronically to members by a link to the website emailed to members at the end of August. This reduced the need for posting or delivering copies by hand – something it was sensible to minimise owing to the pandemic. We shall repeat this procedure for the Spring 2021 edition; members' preferences for printed -v- electronic distribution have been recorded and will be respected.

Most recently, we have placed past copies of Newsletters on the website, back as far as 2012. Members' opinions and ideas on any aspect of the website: content, design, ease of navigation etc. are always welcome. Please write to webeditor@hitchinhistoricals.org.uk

Phil Rowe
Website Editor

Library

With sadly no prospect of the resumption of our regular monthly meetings as yet, some of you may be wondering about books you currently have on loan.

Looking at our list, I can see that 16 books are currently out on loan to members, some on loan since 2018! If you suspect you are one of these borrowers, please do not worry! We would like you to bring them along to the first meeting we are able to hold, that you can attend of course!

Whilst our normal activity has been curtailed this last year, there have been some new additions to our library stock from kind donations from well-wishers, including a Hitchin Music Festival Programme from 1965, sent to us all the way from Australia! We also received a donation from a lady relocating to Bristol who wished to pass onto us her late husband's collection, including some interesting bound volumes of the Hertfordshire Illustrated Review from 1893 and 1894! So, if you have any items relating to Hitchin please email us.

Debbie Burstow
Librarian

Films and Photographs

2020 was a quiet year. We have not received any new material, but would still be delighted to receive any photographs, slides, cine film or video that illustrate our town's history with your permission for reproduction. Remember that history is anything earlier than yesterday. Hitchin is changing all the time and if someone does not record things, they will be lost forever.

Some years back the Society received a donation from the family of Bill Palmer of his collection of slides. Bill collected images of old Hitchin from many sources, including the North Hertfordshire Museum and private postcard collections. He added pictures of his own taken between 1950 and the 1990s.

I spent some time over the last three years adding my own pictures to make two presentations: Hitchin Old and New Parts 1 and 2. They have since been groomed and a fresh commentary added in 2020. The videos take the form of a tour of the town showing views with the classic 'then and now' format together with snippets of history in the commentary. They can be viewed from About us on the Films and Photographs page on the Society's website.

Sam Hallas
Film Archivist

Physic Garden and Chemist shop displays

The William Ransom Physic Garden along with our display at North Hertfordshire Museum and Hitchin Lavender represent the public face of Hitchin Historical Society.

Like all other heritage attractions, they have been affected by Coronavirus pandemic.

The lock down through Spring and early Summer 2020 meant that the garden was only open for a few months, the museum briefly opened for tours and Hitchin Lavender exhibit was not open at all.

Nevertheless, Jenny Dee and her band of garden volunteers have been maintaining the garden and enjoyed the scents and colour in social isolation. They are so important to us.

Hopefully, this Summer will see us welcoming the public to enjoy the garden again.

Our friend and loyal supporter, Alan Fleck, has continued to water, oversee, de-litter the garden as well as opening when Government rules allowed.

At the end of 2020, the ailing conifer on the left of the entrance succumbed to the woodman's "axe" before it became dangerous. This Spring should see a fresh coat of paint on the garden railings and benches.

Gerry Tidy

The Committee

President: Robert B Williams

Officers:

Chairman Vacant

Treasurer John Skeeles

Secretary Pamela Skeggs

Committee Members:

Debbie Burstow (Librarian)

Mike Clarke (Publications & Sales)

Vicki Lockyer (Distributions)

Peter Moss (Membership)

Maureen Sellers (Assistant Librarian)

Gerry Tidy (Physic Garden, and Pharmaceutical Collection)

Co-opted:

David Howlett (Programme)

Phil Rowe (Website)

Simon Walker (Journal)

Attends by invitation:

Sam Hallas (Film Archivist)