

## Life goes on, but not as we know it



An eerily quiet High Street at the height of the lockdown, where most of the shops were shut

Who could have imagined only a few months ago what was heading our way. The sheer scale of this pandemic and the utter devastation it has wrought across the world beggars belief, and all this stemming from one animal market in a city most of had never heard of.

It is difficult to exaggerate the cost of this virus on our lives, from health to economic, mental and physical wellbeing to environment. The effects will be felt for years, long after this emergency passes.

One thing seems certain - the world will never be the same again. The shadow of this pandemic will hang over billions of people like never before. In this, perversely, we have become a united world, brought together through a shared danger that recognises no borders, creeds or races.

For the time being, wars, famines, droughts, the environment and all the other usual crises that preoccupied us until March this year have been put on the back burner.

New words have entered the national lexicon – Coronavirus, PPE, lockdown, furloughed, the 'R-rate', social distancing.

Even fiction has been helping out. The

eerily prescient film *Contagion* foretold with almost unerring accuracy what happens when a viral pandemic spreads across the world. Though it was largely ignored on its release in 2011, it has enjoyed a renaissance, with millions of people streaming it since March.

Here in Barnet, we are barely a dot in the ocean but we too have been joined with the billions of other people across the world in a weirdly surreal fellowship.

**We have been brought together through a shared danger that recognises no borders, creeds or races**

For once, we are all united against the common enemy, even if the virus is not the great leveller some commentators would wish us to believe. Try telling that to the bus drivers and security guards and other frontline workers who have been disproportionately affected in the number of dead from coronavirus.

Yet, for all the misery, some good has been coming out of this pandemic. As Nick Jones reports, the people of

Barnet have responded admirably to the situation, helping out where possible. Also, that sense of British reserve seems to have melted a bit, not least from the regular Thursday night clapping for the NHS and essential workers.

In Barnet, some people have seen neighbours for the first time as they stand outside clapping. One wonders if all this new-found togetherness will survive the current crisis. We'll see.

Even when the immediate crisis passes, there are a lot of things that will need to be re-calibrated. Social distancing, for example, might well become the norm, with all the implications that entails for leisure, education, transport and spectator sports. The economy, the environment - all will need serious attention. Will even the almost-universal greeting of shaking hands stop?

What a difference a few months has made. From utter complacency about the threats posed by pandemics to panic. Maybe the old aphorism that something good always comes out of a crisis will hold true.

**Eamonn Rafferty, Newsletter Editor**

*More Covid-19 reports by Nick Jones, Pages 2&3*

## CORONAVIRUS

## Medieval Festival falls victim to pandemic



Barnet's highly successful medieval festival, due to have been staged during the last weekend in May, was one of the many local events that had to be postponed or cancelled because of the coronavirus crisis.

Organisers have rescheduled this year's festival from its original date of May 30-31 to the weekend of September 19-20.

All the medieval re-enactment groups and societies that join together to bring the 1471 Battle of Barnet to life have been automatically re-booked for September and it is hoped that as many as possible of those involved will manage to make the new date.

Last year's festival attracted over 350 medieval re-enactors representing Yorkist and Lancastrian forces who enthralled a crowd of over 5,000 on the final day of what is now considered to be London's top attraction for Wars of the

Roses military enthusiasts.

As the lockdown over the pandemic evolves, the organisers will keep the date under review and the festival, now in its third year, will only be held "if it is safe to do so".

Plans are already being drawn up for the 2021 medieval festival which will mark the 550th anniversary of the Battle of Barnet.

Volunteers who would like to help shape next year's commemorations are asked to contact the festival team at [info@barnetmedievalfestival.org](mailto:info@barnetmedievalfestival.org)

Another casualty of coronavirus was the spring clean litter pick planned by High Barnet Green Beings for Sunday 29 March.

After the success of last year's spring clean-up, organiser Nanna Blomquist had been expecting a tremendous turnout.

Organisers of the nationwide Great British Spring clean are re-arranging the campaign and hope litter-picking events will run from September 11 to 27.

## Anglo-Saxon to the fore

Cultivating an allotment was one of the few outdoor activities still permitted during the coronavirus lockdown and High Barnet's plots have never been busier or looked in better shape.

Strict rules on self-distancing and site hygiene applied and allotment holders literally kept themselves poles apart.

This was hardly surprising given that allotments are measured in rods or poles – a measurement that dates to Anglo-Saxon times.

The accepted size of an allotment is 10 poles – the equivalent of 250 square metres, about the size of a doubles tennis court – but many of today's generation of gardeners prefer a smaller plot of 5 or 2.5 poles.

Plot holders at the popular Byng Road allotments gave a cheer when the cabinet office minister Michael Gove announced

that tending an allotment counted as a form of permitted exercise so long as social distancing was maintained.

He told the BBC it was "perfectly sensible" for people to go to an allotment".

"It's in the very nature of an allotment that there is a safe distance between people on individual allotments."

But the government ban on gatherings of more than two people had to be observed on allotments.

Safety guidance was issued by the National Allotments Society and this was backed up by the Byng Road group, part of the Barnet Allotment Federation, with its own strict protocol on the use of wipes/sanitiser/gloves at points of contact such as gates and water butts.

"We all realise how lucky we are right now to have a plot and somewhere to escape to. Please let us all keep it as safe as we can," said the official guidance.

At Byng Road, where there is a long waiting list, plot holders recognised they were in a privileged position in being able to exercise safely out of doors with countryside all around them.

"We are so lucky in having plots that look out across the Green Belt. We can enjoy the fresh air and get on with our cultivation, a real bonus with so many people confined to their homes and few options for safe exercise."

## Twitter boosts Mitre landlord's plea to help pubs survive



High Barnet publican Gary Murphy, licensee of the Mitre, went viral in a campaign to force pub owners to agree to a rent holiday during the crisis.

After attracting over 400,000 views of his tweet "No pub, no rent", he appeared on the BBC Radio 4 programme You and Yours and was interviewed by the Daily Telegraph.

Greene King charge Mr Murphy just under £2,000 a week in rent for the Mitre which meant that by June he would be facing a debt of nearly £24,000.

When challenged by You and Yours, Wayne Shurvinton, managing director of Greene King's tenanted and leased division, promised there would be support for licensees in financial difficulty, but he resisted the call for rents to be cancelled during the crisis.

Unless the pub companies agree to a rent holiday for tenants, Mr Murphy fears that many will be forced to give up their businesses.



Digging in down at Byng Road allotments

## CORONAVIRUS

## Neither swings nor roundabouts



Locked and taped off playgrounds became a poignant reminder of the impact that the coronavirus self-distancing restrictions had on the opportunities for children to exercise and enjoy themselves.

High Barnet's most popular parks and playing fields including Ravenscroft Park, the Old Courthouse Recreation Ground, Byng Road playing fields and of course Hadley Green and Hadley Common, remained open and were all well used.

But the large and much-loved playground at the Old Courthouse Recreation Ground was firmly padlocked with the two gates bound up with hazard tape: "For your safety, this playground is closed until further notice".

Barnet Council said all play areas, toilets, leisure centres and outdoor facilities across the borough were closed in order to reduce the risk of infection.

To ensure parks and open spaces remained in good order – and council policy was to keep them all open to the public – regular inspections were being made by the council's ground maintenance service.

Litter bins were being emptied regularly, as well as those in town centres.

During lockdown two environmental response teams remained on duty to deal with fly-tipping that was considered a public health risk.

## Not much action at the Everyman

Wooden boarding was installed to protect the art deco windows of the Barnet Everyman – a sure sign that a trip to the cinema or theatre was out of the question for weeks to come.

At the front of the building, in place of the daily programme of films, there was a bold message of praise for front line staff tackling the coronavirus pandemic:

"Barnet Hospital and local key workers: You are amazing."

Everyman Cinemas told the Barnet Society that the front windows had been boarded up as a safety measure, and to prevent vandalism.

"Don't worry, we're not closing any of our cinemas. We'll be opening them up just as soon as we can."

Barnet's Everyman cinema – formerly the much-loved Barnet Odeon – was refurbished in 2016 after the Everyman group purchased four Odeon cinemas.

It is Grade II listed by Historic England which says such buildings are "of special interest warranting every effort to preserve them".

Once listed, a building may not be "demolished, extended or altered without permission from the local planning authority".

The former Odeon was designed by Edgar J Simmons and it is said by enthusiasts to be one of the architect's finest buildings, famous for its "Moorish styling, art deco features and octagonal shapes".

Originally it had seats for 1,553 – 1,010 in the stalls and 543 in the circle – and was converted into a triple screen cinema in 1974. A fourth screen was added in 1992 and a fifth was added when refurbished by Everyman.

The Odeon Barnet opened on 15 May 1935 and the first films to be screened were "Transatlantic Merry-Go-Round" starring Gene Raymond and Laurel and Hardy in "Them 'Thar' Hills".



## Hospital's vital role

Barnet Hospital has been playing a "vital role" alongside the Royal Free Hospital in treating patients from across north London suffering from Covid-19.

By late April well over 500 patients at the two hospitals had made a successful recovery and had been discharged to their homes – thanks to the care of "heroic staff".

Medical teams at Barnet Hospital were said to be especially grateful to the local community for having rallied round with donations of fresh fruit and drinks and

toiletries such as hand cream and lip balm. In the fourth week of April a total of 132 Covid-19 patients were discharged from the two hospitals – taking the total since the start of the pandemic to 517.



Clapping for the carers: the Barnett family

Deborah Sanders, chief executive of Barnet Hospital and also Royal Free group chief nursing officer, said:

"We're absolutely delighted to see so many of our patients, many of whom have been extremely poorly, go back to their homes and families. I thank our staff for their incredible work during these difficult times."

Donations to hospital staff from local community groups are being co-ordinated by the Royal Free Charity.

Carla Bispham, of the charity, said local residents had earned a well-deserved bravo for their amazing generosity.

BULL THEATRE'S 45th ANNIVERSARY

# Bull's fight for survival is a lesson worth Learning for other community groups



Community groups hoping to find ways to encourage a revival of High Barnet's distressed town centre should take inspiration from the imaginative and dogged campaigners who worked so tirelessly in the 1970s to build the Bull Theatre, writes Nick Jones.

By the late 1980s, the former High Street pub had been transformed into a thriving artistic and cultural centre – a recognised go-to destination for art lovers and theatre goers across North London.

Such was the success of the venture that Barnet council switched its funding from the Bull Theatre towards the cost of constructing and operating the much larger Artsdepot at Tally Ho Corner, North Finchley – a new purpose built “multi-functional arts facility” which opened in 2004 and became the borough's focal point for theatrical and artistic endeavour.

Inevitably, there was concern that High Barnet was about to lose its only arts centre.

A Save the Bull group was launched and when the Susi Earnshaw theatre school was assigned the lease, there was a sense of relief that High Barnet would continue to have an auditorium for budding actors and actresses.

Notwithstanding the theatre school's success over the last 16 years, the Bull's 148-seat theatre – opened with great fanfare in 1988 – is currently under used during evenings and at weekends.

In what is the 45th anniversary year of the original opening of the Old Bull as a craft fair and art gallery, there could hardly be a more opportune moment to consider how best to attract new audiences to a venue for public entertainment that is ideally placed, just across the High Street from Barnet College and the parish church.

Amid all the interest being generated around the preparation of a new Chipping Barnet community plan – and ideas for reviving the town centre – the Bull Theatre has a tale to tell about the importance of focusing on, and then fulfilling, long-term objectives.

Boxes of files and records kept by the bull's most indefatigable defender, Pam Edwards – who is the long-standing secretary of the Barnet Borough Arts Council – give a fascinating insight into the struggle to create an arts centre for High Barnet.

Fading press clippings from the Barnet press and numerous financial appeals highlight a dramatic story of repeated threats of closure and near demolition. Indeed, the Old Bull has had



more than its nine lives, and was on the point of being pulled down in the 1960s in order to provide an access road for the proposed but never agreed by-pass for the High Street that was to run alongside the eastern edge of the town centre, from the A1000 road junction with Station Road, across Meadway, and on to Hadley Green.

Barnet Urban District Council had purchased the pub from Benskins brewery in 1961 in support of Hertfordshire County Council's proposal for what would have been a High Barnet ring road, allowing the High Street to be converted into a pedestrian precinct – a project that was finally abandoned in 1972.



The Bull's various phases. of construction. (Above) Old Bull theatre bills, including of Spittin' Image exhibition and Humphrey Lyttelton concert. (Below) Jenny Remfry and



## BULL THEATRE'S 45th ANNIVERSARY

Their prayers were about to be answered, and another chapter was starting in the life of a former coaching inn which dated from about 1750, built on a site where there had been an inn since the 1400s



When Barnet Borough Council was established in 1965 and took over responsibility for the Old Bull, it was used first as a civil defence centre and then as offices for Barnet magistrates court, ultimately becoming surplus in 1975.

A large council-owned building vacant on the High Street presented a tantalising prospect because in the early 1970s organisers and supporters of the annual Barnet Festival were desperate to find a town centre venue for the performing arts.

Local church halls, cinemas and other public rooms were either being sold off for redevelopment or were failing to meet the new safety requirements for public entertainment that had been introduced by the Greater London council.

In 1972, for example, the year of the first Barnet festival, the only available location for a sculpture exhibition was Scratchwood service station on the M1 motorway.

Exasperated organisers of the 1973 festival gave full vent to their anger over Barnet council's failure to respond – a tirade that has echoes with the frustrations of today:

“Unless we act soon, we may find ourselves living in a cultural and socially barren town...It is ironic that one of the richest areas of London should be so starved of facilities... Chipping Barnet can be a better place to live.” (1973 Barnet festival programme).

Their prayers were about to be answered, and another chapter was starting in the life of a former coaching inn which dated from about 1750, built on a site where there had been an inn since the 1400s.

Barnet Borough Arts Council, which had been established in 1965 following the creation of the new borough council, had ambitious plans to support the 1972 festival of London by organising four annual arts festivals – at High Barnet, Finchley, Hendon and Edgware.

High Barnet's art lovers responded with alacrity. Pam Edwards and Luke Dixon organised the first meeting of the Barnet centre action group; they invited the orchestral conductor Norman del Mar to become president; and launched their campaign to find a suitable building for a community arts centre.

To stimulate interest, the group arranged an impressive line-up of events for the 1973 Barnet Festival including a folk concert in Ewen Hall, an art exhibition at the Tudor Hall, drama in the Wood Street council chamber, puppets at Church House and supper at the now demolished Salisbury Hotel.

Such was the enthusiasm and strength of support for what was now the Barnet Centre Association – under the chairmanship of folk singer Dennis O'Brien – that as soon as the Old Bull became available the association set about securing a monthly lease, and in November 1975 the unoccupied building was re-opened as a venue for weekly craft fairs and then a craft shop and art gallery.

The first floor was strengthened as part of a job creation scheme for unemployed youngsters sponsored by the manpower services commission.

A room overlooking the high street was turned into a 30-seat theatre, which became a popular venue for children's and youth drama classes and rehearsals for local music groups.

Second-hand book fairs and jumble sales helped with fund raising and by 1980 the association was ready to expand.

Initially there were plans for a dome shaped 500-seat theatre behind the old bull, but this was scaled down to a 180-seat theatre. When this application was rejected by Barnet Council the project was revised again and approval was finally obtained in 1981.

In her monthly committee reports, written in her inimitable style, Pam Edwards captured the real-life drama behind the project: “all fall down. Our house of cards has collapsed”, she wrote in May 1981 when the council rejected the revised plan because of a lack of funding. In July she declared: “eureka. We found it! The magic formula for the new theatre.”

A phased, self-financing programme of work had been agreed, starting with the conversion of stables into craft workshops; the opening of a new ground floor studio theatre; and then, when funds permitted, the construction of a theatre large enough to seat 180.

# Busiest year, with Station, Whalebones and Victoria Quarter

**Robin Bishop** writes

Until lockdown in March, the past year was the busiest for the Society that I've known. The biggest proposals have been for High Barnet Station (292 flats), Whalebones (152 homes), the Victoria Quarter (652 flats) and Kingmaker House (145 flats). We accept the need for new housing, but opposed them on grounds of overdevelopment.

But we have several challenges. Sadiq Khan and Barnet Council have housing targets to meet. Both the draft London Plan and Local Plan encourage high-density development around transport hubs. The government can over-ride refusal, and the Housing Secretary, Robert Jenrick, has recently approved several high-rise and green-field housing projects. In the wake of Covid-19, construction of 'shovel-ready' schemes like these will likely be seen as a great way to kick-start the economy.

There was also a surge of smaller projects. Altogether, we reviewed 121 planning applications and submitted comments on 41 (including 30 objections, 72 per cent of which the planners agreed with). But we also supported sensitive design in appropriate places, such as Bridle Mews, Dury Road, Hendon Wood Lane and Salisbury Road.

The professed commitment of the Council, Mayor of London and government to protecting the Green Belt hasn't prevented damaging proposals coming forward, including for a power station off Partingdale Lane and a house off Langley Row, Hadley. The Council is also persisting with its £11.2m leisure hub in the middle of Barnet Playing Fields. We opposed them all.

We did, however, support The Totteridge Academy's application for a city farm – a welcome revival of agriculture in the Dollis valley. I'm also glad to report that the re-landscaping of Old Fold Manor Golf Club, which caused us great concern for the past



**The re-landscaping of Old Ford Manor Golf Club has been a bone of contention for years** five years, seems to be settling in. Once the new planting has grown up, the loss of the ageing Poplars along St Albans Road should be bearable.

Just before lockdown, a group of us planted 50 hawthorn trees on Barnet Hill, thanks to free saplings from the Woodland Trust, guidance by Ivana Turner from the Council, and volunteers from Kisharon, the Jewish charity. It was a fitting celebration of Tu B'shevat, the Jewish New Year of the Tree – and an apt gesture in the 75th year of a Society founded to safeguard Barnet's greenery.

In addition to all that, we commented in detail on Barnet's draft Growth Plan and Local Plan, and on its proposal for a new Heritage Advisory Panel (which we support, albeit with caveats). We also succeeded in getting 45 buildings of architectural and/or historical interest added to Barnet's Local List – though that hasn't saved No.1 Sunset View from being gutted by its owner.

We continue to be active in the Chipping Barnet Town Team, Conservation Area Advisory Committee, Federation of Residents' Associations of Barnet, London Forum and London Green Belt Council. My thanks go to Peter Bradburn, Guy Braithwaite, Simon Kaufman, David Lee, Markus Geiger and Nick Saul for adding their expertise to our cause.

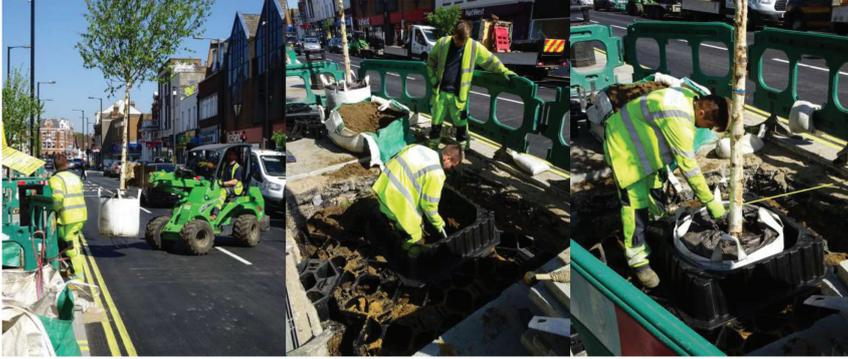


**The planters: members plant 50 hawthorn trees on Barnet Hill before the lockdown.**

**The trees were given to the Council by the Woodland Trust**

## Green shoots in town centre

**Robin Bishop** writes



**Workers plant Chinese Red Birch trees as part of the High Street improvements**

Despite Covid-19 delivering a hammer-blow to already struggling town centres, there are positive signs in Chipping Barnet. Eight trees have been planted in the High Street and Council's consultants, Architecture 00, are pushing ahead with a Community Plan.

The trees have already improved the look of the High Street. They are Chinese Red Birches, tall enough to make an impact, but with compact canopies to minimise overshadowing and leaf-fall. They have pretty bark that will vary in colour during the year. They've been planted in perforated plastic crates within deep pits to protect, irrigate and aerate them, which should ensure their survival.

Their arrival is quite a symbolic moment. Back in 1998, our Vice President David Lee – then Chair of the Society's Planning & Environment Committee – first proposed a 'Green Chain' of trees from the foot of Barnet Hill to Hadley Green, so that residents and visitors would never be out of sight of a tree.

In 1999 nearly 50 trees were planted by the Council, including London Planes and Norway Maples up Barnet Hill. Eight years ago, Ginkgos and Liquidambar along the lower High Street and others near St Albans Road followed. But the central stretch of High Street was the missing link in the chain. The main obstacle was the network of drains, pipes and cables under what was then a fairly narrow pavement.

In 2012, the Society proposed building out sections of the pavement to make room for trees, as has been successfully done elsewhere in London

and the UK. This would reduce the domination of traffic, enhance air quality and make them more accessible and attractive for parents with children, those with disabilities or impairments, and the elderly. Together with de-cluttering and other improvements to the urban realm, they would transform the perceptions of residents, traders and visitors of the High Street, and make a significant contribution to regenerating the town centre.

In 2017, Transport for London agreed to pay for the project out of the Outer London Fund. Since then we've worked with Highways and the Town Team to get the design details right. After many delays work is almost complete, and new benches and other street furniture – including a Battle of Barnet information board – will be installed before long.

It's ironic that Covid-19 should slam the brakes on this ambition – though at least the wide pavements make social distancing easy! But the Council – and the Society – takes the view that it is all the more important for us to have a regeneration plan.

Drafting of the Chipping Barnet Community Plan, which was launched in January, is therefore continuing. Virtual workshops are being held with stakeholders in May, and a public exhibition of possible projects will go online for six weeks from 17 June. 'We asked the Council for a display in the town centre. Regrettably for those without computer access, the answer was no. In August we'll be involved in selecting five projects for detailed feasibility study and costing. The whole Plan will be complete by the end of November. We'll keep you informed. You can also contact the consultants direct at [cbcommunityplan@gmail.com](mailto:cbcommunityplan@gmail.com) and 217 Mare Street, London, E8 3QE.



**Founded in May 75 years ago, it's appropriate for us to celebrate with a photo of May blossom - the glorious flowers of the hawthorn tree - especially as these specimens were planted by Society volunteers at Whittings Hill for our 50th**

## Let's hear it for Robin

We would like to thank Robin Marson, who has decided to step down as Vice President in June, for his 25 years' service to the Barnet Society. Our Vice President and former Chairman Jenny Remfry, who worked with him, pays tribute:

"Robin was a great servant to the community and charitable organisations of Barnet. He joined the Barnet Society as Hon. Treasurer in 1995, a post he held for seven years, where his experience and skills in administration were greatly appreciated. He was already a Church Warden of St John the Baptist and clerk to the trustees of the Hyde Foundation. After retirement from business he became clerk to the trustees of Thomas Watson Cottage Homes and President, then Hon. Secretary, of Barnet & East Barnet Rotary Club. After his move away from Barnet to Codicote, he and Jasmine have remained active members of Barnet Museum."

# Chair's Annual Report

Robin Bishop writes



In May the Barnet Society was 75 years old! Our next issue will be a Commemorative Newsletter reviewing past achievements and looking to the future of Barnet and of the Society. We'd hoped to combine our usual June Annual General Meeting (AGM) with a celebration party, but because of Covid-19 that must be postponed

until later this year...we hope.

Until lockdown in March, the Society was extremely busy. Not only has there been an exceptional amount of planning and environmental casework (reported separately), but the Committee has been reviewing the Society's purpose, effectiveness and financial efficiency.

In January we launched a survey of members. I'd like to thank the more than 60 who responded, and especially the 22 who volunteered to help in various ways. We will be in touch when circumstances permit.

Although most respondents thought we're doing the right sorts of things, a number said we should seek more publicity and expand our membership, especially among younger people.

To that end, we've appointed Susan Skedd as Media Officer to develop our publicity and use of social media, with support from member and IT expert, Simon Watson.

I'm also pleased to announce that another member, Kim Ambridge, will take over as Membership Secretary from John Hay, when his 3-year term of office ends in June. We're most grateful to John for all his conscientious work, and glad that he's willing to continue on the Committee. Kim, John and Simon will be formally proposed for election at our AGM.

The other papers normally considered at our AGM – the Planning and Environment, Treasurer's and Membership Secretary's Reports and the minutes of the last AGM – are elsewhere, or in a separate A4 sheet. If you have any questions about them, or are interested in standing for the Committee, please contact me at [robin.bishop@gmx.co.uk](mailto:robin.bishop@gmx.co.uk) / 020 8449 0088.

## Officers and Committee 2019-20

**President** Aubrey Rose

**Vice-Presidents** Judith Clouston, David Lee,  
Robin Marson, Jenny Remfry

**Independent Examiner** Jim Nelhams

**Chair** Robin Bishop (until 2020);

**Vice Chair** Nick Jones (until 2021);

**Secretary** Andrew Hutchings (until 2022);

**Treasurer** Derek Epstein (until 2022);

**Membership Secretary** John Hay (until 2020);

**Minutes Secretary** Frances Wilson (until 2021)

**Other Committee Members:**

Jessica Vamathevan (until 2020); Simon Cohen,  
Gail Laser, Eamonn Rafferty and Susan Skedd.  
until 2021);

John Gardiner & Andreas Tjirkalli (until 2022)

# Annual Membership Report 2020

We have 430 Household Memberships comprising 637 members as opposed to 427 Household Memberships last year. This is a slight increase and considering the current situation we are all in, I'm pleased, but surprised. Although we have sadly lost some members throughout the year for one reason or another, usually due to a number of elderly members passing away, we have recruited just 2 new members since 1st December 2019. This is not due to the current Pandemic, but largely, if not entirely to the loss of our Webmaster who resigned at very short notice. It has taken 3 months to get things going again and I'm sure our membership would have grown were it not for this. My thanks to you all for your patience in bearing with our teething troubles through this period.

## MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS AND DATABASE

A number of measures have been taken to cut costs on the membership administration as many of you will have already experienced. More than half the membership pays by Standing Order saving us a fair amount of money. In August we finally achieved a major improvement when we got our PayPal payment system to carry out recurring annual renewals without the need for us to send email reminders, and more importantly chase ups to members who weren't responding. This was previously a big headache because we were losing income from late payers. This was leaving the Society short of much needed funds and, if we are to keep subscription rates low, unsustainable.

Our database is now at its optimum level and is very efficient. Derek Epstein maintains this in addition to his role as Treasurer which means he can enter Standing Order and PayPal payment information directly into it in real time as he gets it from the bank. We can also import new member details from an email generated when someone has joined online through the Website and PayPal.

## LOOKING AHEAD

Some of you may well be aware that this will be my last report as Membership Secretary. The Committee have found a successor, Kim Ambridge. I've really enjoyed the 3½ years since October 2016 when I took over. Theresa Kelly, my predecessor, had mountains more paper to deal with than we do now. Modernising the membership processes has had its trials and tribulations but we have Derek Epstein and his amazing technical wizardry to thank for where we are at today. I will, of course, remain a member, and hopefully in another role on the Committee. It remains then to wish all of you well at this time and best of luck to Kim.

John Hay

