

Chairman's Report 2021-2022

Another unusual year. Our 2021 AGM took place via zoom without the customary presentations, and lectures were continued using the internet until the Government restrictions on public meetings were lifted. Zoomed lectures were a mixed success: they ensured that the Society continued to function, but were of limited interest to members; whereas the monthly e-mails and letters with news and announcements proved a popular way of keeping members in touch with the Society's plans.

When the Racecourse reopened in September, face-to-face meetings were resumed with a well-attended celebration lunch. Danesgate Community accepted the invitation to display some of their students' artwork at the meeting, which attracted a great deal of interest. May Townsend continued to collaborate with the teaching staff at Danesgate to sponsor an Arts Competition for their students, under the auspices of the Young and Community Arts programme; this will be judged at Easter 2022.

The lecture programme has been well received, and Carolyn Haynes's excellent choice of lecturers covered a variety of topics all of which proved interesting and stimulating. Helen Gregory, who became Honorary Secretary, continued as Vice-Chairman. She has communicated with the Racecourse regarding the arrangements for meetings, which included following safe distancing and other Covid-related regulations, as well as efficiently taking the Minutes at Committee meetings and providing valuable and helpful advice as Vice-Chairman.

Membership numbers, unsurprisingly, dropped during lockdown, but Jane Ashby has been assiduous in converting enquiries into memberships, and has given a warm welcome to new members upon their arrival at the Racecourse. Susan Dudley-Smith, who helps Jane with registration on meeting days, also acts as our qualified First Aider, a vital role providing reassurance to members and the Committee.

Caroline Hepworth relinquished the Honorary Treasurership to Rose Xu in December, having looked after the accounts and budgets since 2010 – a marathon undertaking for which the Society is grateful and appreciative. Caroline chased committee members for their event accounts as well as members for their subscriptions, and did it quietly and without fuss. She initiated payments by BACS and ensured that we claim back Gift Aid, both which aid efficiency and income.

In May, as soon as there was a glimpse of freedom from lockdown, a Study Day to Harewood House was arranged. One of the curators gave a talk on the lawn outside, before members toured the House at timed intervals. It was a popular and happy event, with the group socialising with friends face-to-face. 2021 ended on a high note with a Study Day to the Northern Ballet performance of "Merlin". In February, the first Study Day of 2022 took place with a guided tour of the major "Barbara Hepworth Art and Life" exhibition at The Hepworth in Wakefield. Thanks and gratitude are due to Susan Elliott, who organised these events, for being both patient and tenacious when dealing with venue managements. The difficulties of contacting staff who are working from home cannot be underestimated.

In June, Joanna Finlay organised a splendid Visit to the Gardens of North Wales, led by Tony Russell, a knowledgeable horticulturist and arboriculturist. Twenty-two members visited six gardens in four days, revelling in the sunshine and glorious gardens. In October, a select group,

which included two members from other societies, finally reached Crete and travelled around the island without problem, touring archaeological sites as well as other places of interest. Joanna must be congratulated on two very successful Visits, achieved despite all the difficulties and problems.

All voluntary activities remain suspended, with heritage volunteer teams either waiting to return or disbanded. Deborah Bird retired from her role with heritage volunteers, having helped to form a new team as well as work at Castle Howard for many years, and the Society's thanks are due to her. The church recording members retired from the group and there are, at present, no plans for a new team to be formed to work with the Church Recording Society. The Record for St Helen's Church, Stillingfleet, was completed by the team prior to dissolution and presented to the Church in August. Appreciation is due to Isobel Stones for the time and energy she expended on Church Recording.

Kilmeny Denny, having designed and produced a new website, had to resign due to pressure of her business commitments, and the Society is fortunate to have persuaded John Finn to take on the website management. Kilmeny must be congratulated upon the success of the website, which has become a valuable aid to recruitment. Her creation of Society e-mail addresses has also proved useful.

It is with regret that I record the deaths of a former President, Dick Reid, and one of our Vice-Presidents, Janette Coleman. Both were long-standing and loyal supporters of the Society and are greatly missed.

This is my final report as Chairman. I have enjoyed the chairmanship immensely, learnt a great deal, made friends, and laughed a lot. My wish to the next Chairman is that she enjoy her term as much as I have done. I wish the Society well – it has been a privilege to serve it.

Helen Byard