**RECORD SOCIETY OF LANCASHIRE AND CHESHIRE**

# COUNCIL REPORT, 2019

The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire was founded in 1878. It aims to advance public education primarily by the transcription, editing and publication of original historical documents relating to the two palatine counties. It is a registered charity, no. 500434.

**VICE PRESIDENTS OF THE SOCIETY**

Mr G. Higgins

Dr C.B. Phillips (died 4 July 2019)

Dr B.W. Quintrell

**COUNCIL AND OFFICERS, 2019**

President Dr M.R.V. Heale

Secretary Dr Dorothy J. Clayton

Treasurer Mr J.R.H. Pepler

General Editor Dr Fiona Pogson

Membership Secretary Mr J.C. Sutton (until 24/04/19)

Mrs Diana E.S. Dunn (from 24/04/19)

Publicity Officer Mr S. J. Roberts (from 24/04/19)

Webmaster Dr P.Z. Cotgreave

Other Members of the Council Dr I.J. Atherton

Dr Laura Balderstone (co-opted 30/10/19)

Dr A.G. Crosby

Mr J. Davies-Colley

Mrs Diana E.S. Dunn (until 24/04/19)

Dr Sam Edwards (from 24/04/19)

Mr S. J. Roberts (until 24/04/19)

Mr J.C. Sutton (from 24/04/19)

Professor D. Szechi

Professor T.J. Thornton

## **Council**

During 2019 the Council met twice in full session: on 24 April at Liverpool Central Library; and on 30 October at 46 Fountain Street, Manchester.

Dr C.B. Phillips and Professor Alan Harding, both former Presidents of the Record Society, died during the summer of 2019. Colin Phillips served as a Council member for more than 25 years before becoming President in 2013. He held that position until June 2018 when he reluctantly resigned because of ill health. During his tenure, Colin presided over and drove forward some important initiatives, including: revitalising the AGMs by including a public lecture on an aspect of the history of Lancashire and/or Cheshire; organising the Society’s archives, and collecting a master set of its volumes; holding book launches to promote and celebrate its publications; creating a website for the Society; and initiating a major project for the digitisation of its past volumes, in order to make them freely and widely available to the public. At the October 2019 Council meeting we discussed how we might commemorate Colin’s great contribution to the Record Society. On the Society’s website (in the Blog section), we have uploaded a tribute to him, written by his successor as President, Dr Martin Heale. We decided that a fitting and lasting tribute would be to rename our annual public lecture. Thus, the inaugural Colin Phillips Memorial Lecture will be delivered immediately following the 2020 AGM. We are very pleased that Jan Phillips, Colin’s widow, will be attending the lecture.

Professor Alan Harding was a highly respected Professor of Medieval History at the University of Liverpool between 1980 and 1996. He served as President of the Record Society for 17 years between 1981 and 1998. Miss Elizabeth Danbury, a former colleague of Prof. Harding at Liverpool and herself a former member of the Record Society Council, has written a tribute to him which has been uploaded to our website.

***2019 AGM***

This was held on 24 April at Liverpool Central Library. Following the short business meeting, Dr Craig Horner of Manchester Metropolitan University, gave a public lecture entitled:‘Old Crocks and Dodgy Car Salesmen: Interpreting Cheshire’s Vehicle Registrations, 1904–07’. Cheshire vehicle registrations are amongst the few complete collections in the country for the period up to the First World War. The fascinating lecture provided a ‘taster’ for Record Society volume 156 – Dr Horner’s edited transcript of these records, which was published in December 2019. This was the first time the Record Society had held the AGM in the centre of Liverpool. The newly refurbished Central Library was a good venue. The central and well-known location, together with extensive and targeted advertising, were undoubtedly behind the larger number of people attending the AGM and the public lecture in 2019.

***Membership***

At the end of 2019 the number of individual members stood at 98, and the number of institutions and libraries was 85. As some institutions have multiple subscriptions, the total number of institutional subscriptions was 97.

The decline in the Record Society’s membership over the past decade continues to be a matter of considerable concern to the Council. As reported in the 2018 Council Report, Mr Jim Sutton, the then Membership Secretary, spearheaded a membership drive, seeking the views of all present members. This resulted in the Council agreeing various strategies and practical suggestions for improving the Society’s profile and increasing membership. During 2019 significant progress has been made: a ‘vision and purpose statement’ for the Society has been written; Mr Stephen Roberts has been appointed the Society’s Publicity Officer; Dr Heale has updated the Society’s membership leaflet which will be distributed to libraries, record offices etc; and an annual newsletter, edited by Dr Martin Heale, is to be launched in January 2020. We will aim to have an interview in the newsletter with either the editor of the previous year’s volume, or the editor of the volume to be published that year. This should introduce and advertise the volume to the readership. It is also expected that the newsletter will be an excellent medium for advertising the spring AGM and the public lecture following the AGM.

Mr Sutton resigned as Membership Secretary at the 2019 AGM. Both at the AGM and the Council meeting, Dr Heale thanked Mr Sutton for his important contribution in the office: he has worked tirelessly to nurture and increase membership, and he has played a key role in volume launches. Fortunately, Mr Sutton has agreed to stay on the Council, and so we will continue to benefit from his sound and practical advice.

Mrs Diana Dunn is our new Membership Secretary. She had worked alongside Mr Sutton for some time and so there has been a very smooth transfer.

***Publicity***

Mr Stephen Roberts was officially appointed Publicity Officer at the 24 April AGM, but he was actively promoting the Society for the preceding six months. He played a key role in advertising and promoting this year’s public lecture. He has put together a list of all the kindred societies in the two counties and established contact details etc. He is now considering future events aimed at promoting the Society in the region, and will liaise with Dr Heale in publicising the upcoming launch for volume 156 (27 January 2020) and the inaugural Colin Phillips Memorial Lecture (8 April 2020).

## **Publications**

*Cheshire Motor Vehicle Registration Records, 1904–07,* ed. Craig Horner, was published in December 2019 as RSLC 156, the 2019 subscription volume. This substantial volume of nearly 600 pages is the first of a three-volume edition of the Cheshire vehicle registrations for the period up to the First World War. It shows the variety of motor-cars, motor-cycles and ‘lurries’ then on the Cheshire roads. A series of useful indexes allows us to identify successive registered owners and their addresses as the vehicles passed down (and sometimes up) the social chain. Additionally, the occupations and dates of birth of these owners have been tracked.

Work is advanced with the Society’s next volume, *‘An Ornament to the Town’: The First Minute Book of the Athenaeum Liverpool 1797– 1806,* ed. David Brazendale, with an introduction co-written with Professor Mark Towsey (University of Liverpool). It is expected that this will be published as RSLC 157, the 2020 subscription volume. The volume will be the subject of the Society’s inaugural Colin Phillips Memorial Lecture, delivered by Mr Brazendale and Prof. Towsey on 8 April 2020.

***Digitisation***

During 2019 we finally completed our digitisation project – a project conceived back in 2016 by Dr Colin Phillips and largely planned and driven by him until his resignation as President in mid-2018. At this point, it might be helpful to give a resume of the progress and outcomes of this project.

The majority of our volumes up to vol. 80 had been digitised already by archive.org and British History Online, and we have provided links to the online texts on the Record Society’s website. The first phase of the Society’s own digitisation programme was completed in March 2018, with the mounting of vols 137–146 on our website; and the second phase, completed in February 2019, resulted in vols 100–136 being digitised and made available via our website. During this second phase, some gaps were plugged, notably vols 52, 61, 64, 67. In May 2019 we completed the third and final phase, covering volumes 80–99. Five volumes have not been digitised (vols 74, 75, 78, 88, 92), we are still trying to purchase suitable copies of these texts in order to have them digitised.

Now that our digitisation programme is largely complete, we are embarking upon a publicity drive to promote our publications, placing announcements/advertisements in newsletters and on websites of local historical and record societies, such as the Lancashire Local History Federation, the Cheshire Local History Association, the North Staffordshire Historians and the Ranulf Higden Society. In the first issue of our own newsletter (in January 2020), there will be an announcement about our ‘digital library’, comprising 140 searchable volumes.

The Council has agreed that in accordance with convention for humanities periodicals, digitised versions of our volumes will hereafter be made available online, via our website, ten years after the date of publication. This means that the next volume to be placed online will be 147 (published 2013) in 2023.

***Website***

The Society’s website, now in its sixth year of operation, continues to attract new users. Between 1 January and 31 December 2019, there were 2,039 unique users. This compares with 1,883 during the same period last year, an increase of 8%.  During 2019 65% of views were made from UK computers, 13% from the US, 5% from South Korea, 3% each from Australia and Canada, and the remaining 11% from various other countries. The following cities account for most of the UK users, in descending order: London, Liverpool, Manchester, Chester, Birkenhead, Preston, and Blackburn.

Towards the end of 2018, the Council agreed some ambitious developments which we hoped to implement over the following 2 years:

1. Making the website more visually appealing
2. Producing a single list of titles, rather than separate lists of titles ‘in print’ and ‘out of print’, and linking each title appropriately to a digitised version and/or a list of volumes available to purchase
3. Widening the contributor base for the blog
4. Incorporating a map and/or timeline to show content in a more user-friendly format
5. Creating a Wikipedia page about the Society
6. Reorganising the website’s home page.

Dr Cotgreave has done work on all the agreed actions, and ii) and v) have been completed. Creating a single list of all titles, and linking each title to a digitised version and/or a print copy available to purchase, makes searching for our publications very straightforward. The list of digitised titles is now significant (140), reflecting the completion of our digitisation project. Dr Cotgreave played a pivotal role in bringing this important project to fruition – monitoring the work of House of Images and mounting all the files onto our website.

Our Wikipedia page is now live and a considerable amount of very useful information has been added to our page.

***Financial Statement***

The total net assets of the Society at 31 December 2019 were £54,315.94.

This figure is *c*. £4,250 less than at the end of 2018, largely as a consequence of paying for printing volumes 155 and 156 in the course of the year. Part of the shortfall has been offset by a recovery in the capital value of the Society’s investment which has risen by *c*. £5,700 over the course of the year. The income from the same investment exceeded £2,000.

Dorothy J. Clayton

Secretary

February 2020