**RECORD SOCIETY OF LANCASHIRE AND CHESHIRE**

# COUNCIL REPORT, 2020

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 It aims to advance public education primarily by the transcription, editing and publication of original historical documents relating to the two palatine counties.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 B.W. Quintrell

**COUNCIL AND OFFICERS, 2020**

President Dr M.R.V. Heale

Secretary Dr Dorothy J. Clayton

Treasurer Mr J.R.H. Pepler

General Editor Dr Fiona Pogson

Membership Secretary Mrs Diana E.S. Dunn

Publicity Officer Dr S. J. Roberts

Webmaster Dr P.Z. Cotgreave

Other Members of the Council Dr I.J. Atherton

 Dr Laura Balderstone

 Dr A.G. Crosby

 Mr J. Davies-Colley (until 08/04/20)

 Dr Sam Edwards

 Mr J.C. Sutton

 Professor D. Szechi

 Professor T.J. Thornton

## **Council**

During 2020 the Council met twice: on 8 April and 13 October. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, both Council meetings were held online using the Zoom video conferencing platform.

January 2020 saw the first issue of the *Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire Newsletter*, edited by Dr Martin Heale. This annual publication will report on both the previous year’s activities and alert readers to events to take place during the current year, including the AGM and the public lecture held following the AGM.

During 2020 Council authorised a sub group (Social Media Working Party) to consider the setting up of a RSLC Facebook account. Council accepted its recommendations and a RSLC Facebook page will be launched in January 2021.

During the year Council produced two new policy documents: *Disclosure of Interest Policy* and *Investment & Risk Management Policy.* These can be found on the Council page of our website (http://rslc.org.uk/council/).

As early as the Spring of 2020 AGM it was increasingly apparent that COVID-19 would impact adversely on the finances of the Record Society. Although the Council has long been prudent with our resources, our ambitions have remained high. We publish regularly and we have extended our ‘offer’ considerably in recent years with, for example, a major digitisation project and the mounting of past publications on our website; a free annual public lecture and occasional special events. Like the vast majority of comparable organisations, attracting new members and retaining existing members (individual and institutional) was already a matter for concern before the pandemic. COVID-19 exacerbated all these problems. Dr Heale prepared a paper: ‘Ensuring the RSLC’s Financial Security in a COVID/Post-COVID Environment’ for discussion at the October Council meeting. The paper considered various measures to cut costs (e.g. reducing the print run of the Society, reducing our volume storage costs, reducing the number of lengthy volumes published); as well as the old chestnuts (e.g. potentially increasing subscription rates, and developing new strategies to attract and retain membership). There are, of course, other factors outside our control which exacerbate the current situation, including a falling stock market and very low interest rates. The Council is constantly monitoring the situation and will endeavour to respond positively and appropriately in what is likely to be an ever-changing environment.

Mr John Davies-Colley, a member of the Council since the 2016, stepped down at the 2020 AGM. Dr Heale thanked him for his contribution to the Society’s work.

***2020 AGM***

Following the death in 2019 of Dr Colin B. Phillips, a long serving Council member and President of the Society, 2013–18, we decided that an appropriate tribute to him would be to rename our annual public lecture. The inaugural Colin Phillips Memorial Lecture was to have been delivered following the 2020 AGM, with Jan Phillips, Colin’s widow, in attendance. However, the national ‘lockdown’ introduced in late March meant that the lecture had to be cancelled and a short AGM was held ‘virtually’ using Zoom. Unfortunately, as these changes were of necessity made late in the day, the 2020 AGM was ‘attended’ only by Council members. The relevant paperwork was posted in advance on the RSLC website and members were invited to contact the Society if they wished to raise matters at the AGM.

Due to the very serious nature of the pandemic and the uncertainty surrounding it, we made the decision in October 2020 to hold the 2021 AGM (7 April) ‘virtually’. However, this time the AGM will be open to all our members, and we hope that members who live outside the North-West will welcome the opportunity to ‘attend’. Following the AGM, we will at last hold the inaugural Colin Phillips Memorial Lecture. This public lecture, given by Dr Paul Booth, a longstanding member of the Record Society, is entitled, “The Oldest Lancashire Ghost Story”.

***Membership***

Giving end of year precise membership figures is problematic. In a typical year, there are always some subscriptions which come in late, and we do not immediately drop subscribers if they miss one year. At the other end of the spectrum, some of those subscribers who pay through agents pay in the autumn for the following year. During 2020 the situation has been exceptionally volatile owing to the pandemic: institutional subscriptions have been particularly affected by the closures of libraries for long periods of time and the breakdown of normal administrative procedures.

This said, it is clear that we have lost some subscribers during 2020. A few have paid during January/early February 2021. At the time of writing (26/02/21), we have 82 individual members, compared to 98 at the end of 2019; and 82 institutional subscribers, down 3 from the previous year. Some institutions have multiple subscriptions, although the total number of extra volumes paid for has also dropped during 2020 – from 12 to 6.

The decline in the Record Society’s membership over recent years is a matter of great concern to the Council. At the beginning of 2020, we launched an annual *Newslette*r (ed. M.R.V. Heale) aimed at promoting the Society and its publications, as well as advertising forthcoming events. Although with the advent of COVID-19, face-to-face meetings and events had to be cancelled, the *Newsletter* has been well received by our members. The proposed Facebook page, will also, it is hoped, help to raise the external profile of the Society’s work.

We are encouraging individual members to provide their email addresses. This makes communication faster and more efficient, as well as reducing costs. We now hold email addresses for over 50% of individual members.

***Publicity***

Dr Stephen Roberts was involved, with Dr Heale, in publicising the launch of volume 156, *The Cheshire Motor Vehicle Registrations, 1904–07*, edited by Craig Horner, which took place in Manchester on 27 January 2020. This event was attended by around 25 people, including both members and non-members of the Society.

COVID-19 and consequent restrictions meant all face-to-face events were cancelled for the rest of 2020. Dr Roberts has been preparing for future events/launches, including advising on the Society’s Facebook site to be launched in 2021.

## **Publications**

*The First Minute Book of the Athenaeum Liverpool 1797–1809,* ed. David Brazendale, and Mark Towsey, was published in December 2020 as RSLC 157, the 2020 subscription volume. It is hoped that in the second half of 2021, the Society will be able to launch the volume officially at a gathering in the Athenaeum Library itself.

***Website***

The Society’s website, now in its seventh year of operation, continues to attract new users. Between 1 January and 31 December 2020, there were 2,544 unique users. This compares with 2,039 during the same period last year, an increase of 25%. During 2020 64% of views were made from UK computers, 9% from the US, 4% from China, 3% each from Australia and France, and the remaining 20% from various other countries. The following cities account for most of the UK users, in descending order: London, Liverpool, Manchester, Birkenhead, Chester and Macclesfield.

***Financial Statement***

The total net assets of the Society at 31st December 2020 were £55,863.02. This figure is *c*.£1,500 less than at the end of 2019, and £5,750 less than the 2018 figure. Moreover, because the invoices for the printing and despatch of vol. 157 were not submitted during 2020, the Society’s balance at 31 December 2020 is somewhat misleading.

The disruption caused by the pandemic has taken its toll: the value of the Society’s investment fell by nearly £7,000, although there were signs of recovery towards the end of the year. There was also a noticeable fall in subscriptions, at least in part, attributable to the interruption to normal administrative procedures in the HE sectors. There is reason to hope that some at least of these subscriptions will return in 2021.

Dorothy J. Clayton

 Secretary

February 2021