

PROCEEDINGS OF THE SOMERSET ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY: 2018

SANHS CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2018

The committees have produced another year of good quality events, some well attended but others have not been well supported. The committees are all volunteers who give up a considerable amount of their time to plan these events and it is disheartening for them when they are cancelled through lack of support so I ask you to come forward with ideas of events you would like to see arranged, or even get involved in organising. As a way of saying thank you to our volunteers an event was arranged with Julian Orbach, our current President. The volunteers all met at the Friends Meeting house in Taunton for coffee prior to Julian taking them on a walking tour of interesting buildings he had pre-arranged access to. They returned two hours later when lunch was served and all appeared to have had a good morning; at least, we heard no complaints.

As you all know, the management of the society is run by volunteers, ably supported by Louisa, our paid office manager and I have to say a big thank you to her for her support in my first year as chairman, not so sure about the amount of work she gives me. Without her, we would not have achieved the amount of work set by changes in legislation. The response to the GDPR request has been 100%. This has all been added to the new database and we are now working through the final piece of work to state where we have personal details stored.

The other big information gathering was updating Gift Aid declarations. The response to that has been rather disappointing, and our ability to claim what was a significant contribution to the finances of the society has had a negative impact on the money available to run the organisation.

All volunteers participating in discussions where finance is involved have been asked to fill in what is known as 'A Model Person' declaration, as suggested by our insurers. This has not resulted in 100% compliance; a minority have not returned completed forms, and this will be discussed with our insurers at the renewal of premiums.

Our Data Protection Policy has been updated and the Welfare Policy now contains a Catering Policy regarding food served at events.

Trustees continue to have joint meetings with both

the South West Heritage Trust (SWHT) and Somerset County Council as required by the various agreements. One result has been to grant Sue Goodman, Chair of SANHS library committee and deputy Hon. Librarian, access to the secure store of the library collection. This was previously only granted to David Bromwich, our Honorary Librarian.

The General Meeting held in December had updates and visual presentations, where appropriate, from representatives of committees. Grants are less freely available to researchers from previous funders, therefore the society's grants are of greater importance.

The Natural History committee held many successful field events, some jointly with connected societies and produced a varied programme of indoor talks for the winter.

The Library committee continued to add to the library and improve access to the online catalogue. Work on the three-year Library Management Plan is in progress with SWHT.

The Historic Buildings committee are progressing with the recording of ancient buildings in Dunster, and plan to have a series of talks by specialists on the preservation of buildings.

The Archaeology Committee has worked with a local community and SWHT on the preparation and excavation of test pits in their local area, followed by recording of finds and how to write up the reports. Due to the amount of time this whole process takes, only one such activity can be committed to each year and the next two years are already pencilled in. Those in attendance were informed of the progress on the development of the website, how committees will be able to update their own information, the potential advantages for the marketing and promotion of the society but also the ability to make our collections more widely available to the general public.

The Museum Collection Panel provided funds for the conservation of SANHS painting, *HEIC ship Taunton Castle* [Honorable East India Company] by J. Whitcombe (1791). The painting will be hung in the Discovery gallery of the Museum of Somerset. Work continues on the storage and cataloguing of our nationally important herbarium collection, by a group

of volunteers seen every Monday morning arriving at the Heritage Centre.

The society has successfully recruited a successor as editor for Proceedings as Mary Siraut will be standing down following the publication of this year's edition. We have to give Mary a big vote of thanks for her excellent management of this task, often having to chase contributors to keep to a time scale to fit with a slot at the printers and our mailing dates. Her replacement, Rob Webley, joins us at a time when we are reviewing the production of the Proceedings and he is involved in these discussions.

The Board agreed to fund the development of the first year of the website, with external funds to be sought for the second year. The content of the old website has been transferred across and is in the process of being updated and amended. Committees will be able to update their content following training, but there will be someone who will have an overview to ensure a standard is maintained. As we are short of volunteers to work on this project, and few with any expertise, we will continue to develop the site as knowledge and confidence is gained. It is planned that the site will go live to members on April 29th. We would like comments and suggestions to be returned to the office before we go live to the general public at the end of June.

The Norman Gardens project has been a big piece of work for our Vice Chairman. With support from SWHT, and other local groups, an application was submitted to the Heritage Lottery for a grant of £59,000 on 21st January; by the time you are reading this we will have had the result of our application. Should we be unsuccessful, we will need to raise the funds to repair the curtain wall, which is deteriorating, making it unsafe for public access. We are lucky to have support from the horticultural division of Bridgwater College who have already started on the garden clearance.

At the board meeting in January, the trustees were unable to adopt the 2019 Budget despite the work of our Hon. Treasurer. The trustees decided to hold quarterly budget meetings to keep abreast of the financial position of the society. Steps have been taken with some reluctance to reduce our costs, one of which is to keep to the contracted hours the office manager works. This will mean the office will be manned three days a week, thereby restricting what can be obtained in that time, so please be patient if your query is not attended to promptly.

Other money saving costs include withdrawing the £200 previously given to committees as operating costs, and implementing a minimum charge of £4 for events. This has been necessary to ensure the society

does not lose money when laying on events. One member has disagreed with this but understands why members are being asked to contribute; his view is that non-members should pay more. The decision to charge members and non-members the same for events is governed by HMRC rules on member benefits when claiming Gift Aid on supporter donations.

David Victor, our Hon. Treasurer, who has tirelessly worked on the finances and the insurances cover for the society and collections is, as many of you will know, standing down at the AGM. I would like to give him my own personal thanks for the help and support he has been to me during my first year, and I am sure you will reiterate that for what he has done for the society. He has agreed under duress to continue as a trustee, so his knowledge is still available.

It is not all doom and gloom, however. Some of you may remember Tom Winsborough who was Chairman of the society for a short time a few years ago. He was still employed full time and couldn't devote the time he felt he should to the role and resigned. As the CEO of Somerset Sight he has experience in all areas of management and we welcome him back as the Hon. Secretary. This post has been vacant for some time and will take some of the workload from the office manager and executive.

However, one post filled, another empty. When I asked David what time he felt was required to cover the financial content of his role, he thought about a half day a week, plus the meetings of the executive and Board. He is prepared to support anyone who takes on the position and has set the system for managing the finances to be more user friendly.

I have at times since becoming chairman last May felt I would not be able to continue, but I feel very deeply about the society, what it stands for, what it has achieved, and the people who had the forethought to set the society up all those years ago. There have been those who have given their time and, in some instances, money, to keep the society going. With the support of you, the members and the trustees who give their time so freely, we must not let those past supporters down. We do not have the financial support of the gentry as in times gone by; there are no William Wyndhams prepared to contribute the sums of money he did; and there are more societies like us looking for financial support to be considered.

The next year will be equally as challenging as this, but with the help and support of you, the members, and the volunteers who cover no end of tasks, we will succeed. A big thank you to you all.

Christine Jessop, Chair of SANHS, March 2019