

### **Chairman's Report March 2023**

2022 was a busy year for SANHS. Some projects were coming to an end whilst others were just beginning. Webinar lectures have continued to be an important part of our programme of events, allowing a means of access to those who through geographical distance or for other reasons were unable to attend in-person events. Thanks to everyone who has contributed and to those who provide seamless behind-the-scenes support.

The 2022 AGM was held in May, when a rule change was tabled and approved to allow the present chairman to extend his tenure as a trustee from six to seven years, and thereby to allow him to remain as Chair. However, the Charity Commission advised us that the approach we had adopted to extend tenure was inadmissible and a further Special General Meeting had to be held in July to rectify this matter. Thank you to all the members who attended these meetings to ensure the meetings were quorate – one member was even whisked from Taunton Town Centre into the Friend's Meeting House to complete the required number!

The Norman Gardens Project is largely complete apart from safety fencing and integration boards which still need to be installed. Chris Jessop and the volunteer gardeners spent many hours transforming the gardens into a beautiful, usable space and I would like to thank them for all their work.

The Dunster Project, headed by Mary Ewing with a team of enthusiastic researchers, continued to provide nationally significant insights into the construction and date of early wooden framed buildings in this village. The project is expected to complete in 2023.

One of the important means by which the Society meets its charitable objectives is by making grants to support individuals and organisations. The various endowment funds provide vital funding for research projects within Somerset. A few examples in 2022 include a grant to the Bath and County Archaeological Society to help with the costs of dating the Landsdowne Camp Project, a grant to the Watchet Market House Museum to help fund an exhibition of the photographs of James Date. The latest SANHS publication "George Cumberland - farming, family, fossils: aspects of a Somerset life in letters 1800-35" by K. Jane Evans was also launched in Weston-super-Mare in the summer and in the Museum of Somerset in December.

The conversion of SANHS from an Unincorporated Association Society to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) was agreed in principle at the May 2022 AGM and work started immediately to investigate the requirements of the process. Although this is primarily a governance issue, it reduces the liability of trustees and in certain circumstances, other members of the Society. The conversion process is complicated, exacerbated by the numerous Society assets and endowment funds and is expected to continue well into 2023.

The crowning event in 2022 was the return of the Wyndham Hall into SANHS guardianship. It had been built in 1927 under a grant from the Wyndham foundation for SANHS lectures. Some SANHS members will remember it being used for that purpose! For many years it was held by Somerset County Council, unused and unloved. During 2022, the keys were handed

over to SANHS so that the Society could start to use this useful community hub again. The hall was opened up during Heritage Open Days in September 2022 to allow people back into the building to have a look round and to sign up to volunteer in transforming the hall back into a usable space. The hall was also used to launch the availability of SANHS Family Membership during a Family Fun Day, where a number of activities gave a taste of the Family friendly events that will soon be available.

Chris Chanter

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