**RECORD SOCIETY OF LANCASHIRE AND CHESHIRE**

**COUNCIL REPORT 2024**

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 It aims to advance public education primarily by the transcription, editing and publication of original historical documents relating to the two palatine counties.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

**COUNCIL AND OFFICERS, 2024**

President Professor M.R.V. Heale

Secretary Dr Dorothy J. Clayton

Treasurer Mr J.R.H. Pepler

General Editor Dr A.G. Crosby

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 P.H.W. Booth

Dr Bertie Dockerill (from 16/10/24)

Mr A. Miller

Dr Fiona Pogson

Professor T.J. Thornton

## ***Council***

During 2024 the Council met twice: on 27 March and 16 October. The March meeting was held in person at Liverpool Central Library and the October meeting met online using the Zoom video conferencing platform. In October we welcomed Dr Bertie Dockerill, whom we expect to be elected to the Council by the membership at the 2025 AGM. Dr Dockerill has already made a significant contribution to the work of the Record Society. Unfortunately, due to work and family commitments, Dr Laura Balderstone has decided to step down from the Council at the 2025 AGM. We would like to thank her for the work she has done for the Society especially in relation to the setting up of our Facebook page.

***Communicating with the Membership***

The Society has continued to keep in touch with members and friends via its annual *Newsletter* edited by our President, Prof. Martin Heale. To view the 2025 issue, see <http://rslc.org.uk/api/file/Newsletterno6.pdf> It features an interview with Dr Bertie Dockerill (University of Manchester) and Dr Marc Collinson (University of Bangor), in which they describe the research behind their forthcoming RSLC volume, *Realities of Reorganisation: Manchester City Labour Group’s Experience of Reformed Local Government, 1973–1977*, scheduled to be published during 2025 as RSLC vol. 161. The authors are also giving the Colin Phillips Memorial Lecture following this year’s AGM. The current *Newsletter* also profiles the cataloguing of the medieval archives of Poulton Hall near Bebington which is being led by Stephen Roberts, a local historian and Publicity Officer of the RSLC.

We are constantly trying to improve our membership offer. As stated in the 2023 Council Report, we believe a new website is key to enhancing communication with members and friends both within the historic counties of Lancashire and Cheshire and throughout the UK and beyond. Led by Dr Peter Cotgreave, our Webmaster, we have pursued this aim rigorously over the past 18 months. A detailed specification was drawn up and we approached companies which design and maintain websites for comparable organizations. Unfortunately, most were simply unaffordable, given our present membership figures (see below, ***Membership Statistics***). All external providers charge a start-up fee and an annual maintenance charge. The cheapest company’s offer did not include any more facilities than we already provide. Although no final decisions have been made, we are now considering the feasibility of building our own website with some paid professional help from newly graduated computer studies students. A comparable local history society has done this with considerable success.

As mentioned in last year’s Council Report, the challenges which we face are shared by many other local and regional historical societies. In late 2023, officers of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society called for the main local historical societies to collaborate and discuss mutual challenges – notably, falling membership and financial constraints. In March 2024 there was a meeting of representatives of the four Lancashire and Cheshire publishing societies (RSLC, LCAS, Chetham Society and Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire) to try to take discussions forward. The four societies are now actively sharing ideas and supporting each other’s events. Further collaborative meetings are planned for 2025.

Our Facebook page continues to be used to publicize our publication activities to existing members and others who are interested in local history. We had 169 followers at the end of 2024.

***2024 AGM***

The 2024 AGM was held at Liverpool Central Library on 27 March. It was followed by the Colin Phillips Memorial Lecture, delivered by Professor Martin Heale, the Society’s President. Dr Fiona Pogson, until recently the Society’s General Editor and before that our Treasurer, hosted this part of the proceedings. She spoke about the history of the lecture series and paid tribute to Colin Phillips who had been a RSLC Council member for 25 years and its President for 5 years. He initiated the Society’s annual public lecture, and following his death in 2019, the Council renamed the lectures in honour of him. We were very pleased that Colin’s widow, Jan Phillips, attended the AGM and lecture. Entitled, ‘Robin Hood in the Medieval and Early Modern North-West’, the lecture was very lively, and the large number of questions posed by the audience is clear affirmation of how well it was received.

***2025 AGM***

The 2025 AGM is on Thursday, 27 March, starting at 1.45pm. It will be held again in Liverpool Central Library. Council has decided to seek the approval of the membership to adopt new subscription rates to take effect in 2026. We have been very reluctant to take this step: indeed, rates were last raised back in 2013. Clearly our costs have risen substantially in the past decade or so, particularly for printing, postage and storage. At the same time, our finances have been adversely affected by low interest rates for savings, and a steady overall decline in membership, both institutional (as local public libraries, in particular, have faced budget cuts) and individual.

Since 2013, our annual subscription rates have been as follows:

**Individual**: £20 for UK residents; £25 for overseas

**Institutional**: £25 for UK institutions; £30 (or US$60) for overseas

At the 2025 AGM, the Council will propose new subscription rates, namely:

**Individual**: £25 for UK residents; £30 for overseas

**Institutional**: £35 for UK institutions; £40 (or US$80) for overseas

The business meeting will be followed by the Colin Phillips Memorial Lecture which this year will be given by Dr Bertie Dockerill and Dr Marc Collinson. Their title is ‘A Window into Political Change: Preserving Local Labour Party Papers from the 1970s’. Again, the AGM and public lecture will be livestreamed via Zoom. Only members may vote at the AGM, but the Colin Phillips Memorial Lecture is free and open to all.

***Membership Statistics***

Mrs Diana Dunn, the Society’s Membership Secretary, presented a detailed report to the March 2024 Council meeting. During the preceding five years, there had been a clear decline in individual and institutional membership. At the end of 2023 we had 69 individual members and *c.*60 institutional members. The latest figures (January 2025) show that membership numbers remained static during 2024.

The significant decrease in individual membership over the past 5 years is partly a result of deaths and resignations, but it is mostly caused by lapsed membership and our inability to recruit enough new members to make up the numbers. There is evidence that people join to receive a particular volume and then allow their membership to lapse. The price of a RSLC volume to non-members is significantly higher than the yearly subscription rate. In relation to institutional membership, we are often not told the reason for cancellations, but in addition to financial constraints, libraries are increasingly reluctant to commit space to periodical-type publications which can be accessed electronically (N.B. At the present time, RSLC volumes are not, in fact, part of any electronic bundle).

Various options were suggested to alleviate the problems faced by us and similar societies. In common with many other subscription publications, access to the digitised version of the Record Society volumes is restricted and recent volumes (in our case, those published during the last 10 years) are protected behind a paywall. It was proposed that individual members of the Society could be granted access to this material. This plan would also help those people who are increasingly finding it difficult to accommodate hardcopy journals in their houses. Again, it must be acknowledged that such changes are dependent on us having a much improved functioning website.

Other ideas which were supported unanimously by the Council included: making it obligatory for Council members to pay for individual membership of the Society; and requiring all those who have an edition published by the Record Society to be members of the Society throughout the period that they are working on their volume and for a period of time (not yet quantified) following the volume’s publication.

***Liverpool University Press as Printer and Publisher?***

Council has been considering the feasibility of LUP taking on a bigger role re our annual volume. At the present time, LUP prints our volumes and handles distribution to our members. If LUP were our publisher, their remit would be much wider: as well as printing and distribution, it would include the storage, advertising and selling of our surplus volumes, as well as the potential production of e-books.

The present system, particularly storage, sales and advertising, is time consuming and expensive. Ideally it would be better if we could concentrate on volume and website content and associated activities – lectures, book launches etc. Prof. Heale and Drs Crosby and Pogson are leading on this and have had some good discussions with LUP. The Council hopes to progress this during 2025.

***Publicity***

Dr Roberts, our Publicity Officer, has continued to promote the Record Society, particularly with local and regional libraries and historical and archaeological societies. He is especially involved with promoting attendance at our AGMs.

***Publications***

2024saw the publication of RSLC vol. 159: *Prisoners of the Fifteen*, ed. Jonathan Oates. There was a delay in publishing this volume because the editor found additional important material. The result is a very substantial volume (350pp) which has received excellent reviews (e.g. “Oates’ comprehensive research and thorough documentation has created a work useful for local and family historians looking for sources regarding participants in the 1715 rebellion, as well as providing a major reference work for those interested in the Jacobite army, shedding as it does some new light on the forces that surrendered in Preston”, Alex McDonald, in *The Local Historian*, 54 (3), 2024).

We are now expecting to publish two volumes in 2025. The first, to be published in April, is *Cheshire Motor Vehicle Registration Records, 1908–11*, ed. Craig Horner (RSLC, vol. 160). It is the second and final part of early registration records, charting car ownership in early twentieth-century Cheshire. The second, *Realities of Reorganisation: Manchester City Labour Group’s Experience of Reformed Local Government, 1973–1977*, eds B. Dockerill and M. Collinson, with Foreword by Peter Shapely (RSLC, vol. 161), provides a rich insight into the development of local government policy in Manchester and into the activities and political culture of the city’s Labour Party.

***Financial Statement***

The total net assets of the Society on 31st December 2024 were £64,701.51. The comparable figure for 2023 was £62,573.71. Overall, annual income was *c*.£20 more than in 2023, exceeding our expenditure by *c*.£1,225, after paying £4,750 for printing and postage of vol. 159. Personal subscriptions remained steady, while institutional subscriptions were *c*.£350 higher, although this is a deceptive figure, since a number of large payments by agents were made shortly before or after year end. Income from our M&G investment continues to produce a healthy revenue stream, delivering £2,171, a small increase on 2023, while the capital value again fluctuated with the vagaries of the market, ending the year at £35,527. Interest rates are now falling, and political uncertainties may have an adverse effect on investments. It should also be borne in mind that in order to catch up with the publication programme, the Society hopes to issue more than one publication in any calendar year, resulting in substantial extra costs.

Dorothy J. Clayton

Secretary

February 2025