

**RECORD SOCIETY OF LANCASHIRE AND CHESHIRE
COUNCIL REPORT, 2023**

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 It aims to advance public education primarily by the transcription, editing and publication of original historical documents relating to the two palatine counties.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, 2023

President	Professor M.R.V. Heale
Secretary	Dr Dorothy J. Clayton
Treasurer	Mr J.R.H. Pepler
General Editor	Dr Fiona Pogson (until 18/10/23)
General Editor	Dr A.G. Crosby (from 18/10/23)
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 (from 05/04/23)
	Dr A.G. Crosby (until 18/10/23)
	Dr S. Edwards (resigned 18/10/23)
	Mr A. Miller (from 05/04/23)
	Dr Fiona Pogson (from 18/10/23)
	Professor Emeritus D. Szechi
	Professor T.J. Thornton

Council

During 2023 the Council met twice: on 5 April and 18 October. The April meeting was held in person at Liverpool Central Library and the October meeting met online using the Zoom video conferencing platform.

Council started to implement some key policies from the Five-Year Plan for the Record Society, which had been proposed by our President, Prof. Martin Heale, in 2022. The Council has been augmented by two new members: Dr Paul Booth (a long-standing member of the Society and also a former Council member); and Mr Alex Miller (Archives & Resources Manager, Lancashire Archives).

Following a very successful 6 years as our General Editor, Dr Fiona Pogson is stepping down, to be replaced by Dr Alan Crosby. Council recognizes that having one person responsible for all the editorial work of the Record Society is too onerous a task. Therefore, we are trialling a new system. Dr Crosby will co-ordinate and lead an editorial team of six members. We are very fortunate that our two previous General

Editors (Dr Pogson and Prof. Heale) have kindly agreed to be part of the initial editorial team.

Other key areas identified in the Five-Year Plan include declining membership levels and the usefulness or otherwise of the website in promoting the Society. Dr Peter Cotgreave, the Society's Webmaster, prepared a detailed paper on the future of the website and, following the April Council meeting, a small working party met to discuss this in more detail and to suggest a way forward. The working party reported to Council in October. Some key points from the various discussions are noted here:

- The good news is that the number of users of the website continues to be healthy; it increases year on year.
- Like similar organizations (Chetham Society, Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire), the RSLC's basic business model is fast becoming unsustainable. Expenditure has exceeded income by c.£20,000 for the past 5 years, although some of this figure represents the society's investment in digitization of its backstock. The three societies each produce one publication per year, and each has a similar number of members which is declining year on year. Our membership lists overlap to a significant degree.
- Interest in local history is certainly not declining; and modern digital communications allow organizations to reach more people than ever before. The challenge is how a Society like ours can preserve its core purpose (publishing a variety of texts with scholarly introductions which analyse and contextualize the content) at the same time as devising alternative methods of engaging a wider group of people which will enable us to pay for the annual publication.
- Dr Cotgreave believes that most successful societies in 2023 have methods of sustaining the interest of a wide selection of members by offering 'little and often', rather than 'just' an annual volume which is unlikely to be of interest to ALL the members every year.
- We need to update and rejuvenate the RSLC website for technical and practical reasons. It is 15 years old, with an old-fashioned and rigid structure which it is difficult to adapt or change. We have problems uploading PDFs and usage statistics are increasingly hard to generate. E.g. we have no statistics for the second half of 2023. Dr Cotgreave believes that the websites of CS and HSLC are both more effective in directing users. Most important, our valuable digital library resource needs to be made more user friendly.
- Council has accepted the website working party's proposal to replace the present website asap. It was also agreed that we should buy in a bespoke website. Quotations are presently being sought from a number of companies which design and maintain websites for similar heritage organizations.
- We must embrace the challenges we face re. declining membership and think carefully about what we want the website and associated initiatives like the Facebook page, *Newsletter* etc to achieve. Are there ways of presenting more short-form content, such as individual documents or short sections of records, that would allow a wider range of individuals to engage with the Society and its aims more regularly? Which audience or audiences should we be aiming to appeal to?
- Members of Council made various suggestions. Dr Stephen Roberts volunteered to write a short article about the lecture he gave at the 2023 AGM. Prof. Tim Thornton suggested that we might upload interesting 'gobbet'-size text from back volumes at intervals throughout the year. Prof. Heale would like to encourage some university students to write short blog items on topics of local

and regional history. Seeking to publish an article in the local press about each new volume would also help to enhance the profile of the Society.

- It was agreed that the local history societies should co-operate with each other in a more organized way. This is, in fact, now starting to happen with joint meetings involving the RSLC, HSLC, CS and the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society due to take place in early 2024.

Communicating with the Membership

The Society has continued to keep in touch with members and friends via its annual *Newsletter* edited by Prof. Heale. To view the latest issue, published in January 2024, see <http://rslc.org.uk/api/file/Newsletterno5.pdf> The issue features an interview with Dr Paul Booth who has been a member of the Society since the 1980s and has been involved with four editions of historical records for the Society, as well as being a Council member, and the speaker at the inaugural Colin Phillips Memorial Lecture, held in 2021. The current *Newsletter* also profiles the research being undertaken by Oliver Mumford, a PhD student at Liverpool Hope University. He describes some of the documentation he has uncovered about the colonial connections of the original teacher training colleges from which Liverpool Hope University was founded.

As stated above, under ***Council***, one of the key reasons for having a new website is to improve our membership offer by enhancing communication with members and friends both within the historic counties of Lancashire and Cheshire and throughout the UK and beyond. 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 c.170 followers at the end of 2023.

2023 AGM

The 2023 AGM was held at Liverpool Central Library on 5 April. It was followed by the Colin Phillips Memorial Lecture, delivered by Dr Stephen Roberts, the Society's Publicity Officer. The lecture, entitled, 'Welfare, Riot and Bereavement: The Great War through the Eyes of the McGuire Family of Wallasey, 1914–1919' was fascinating and very well received by members of the Society and others who attended the public lecture. An edition of the correspondence of the McGuire family of Wallasey during the Great War is to be published in a future RSLC volume.

The 2024 AGM is on 27 March, starting at 1.45pm. It will be held again in Liverpool Central Library. The short business meeting will be followed by the Colin Phillips Memorial Lecture which this year will be given by the Society's President, Professor Martin Heale. His title is 'Robin Hood in the Medieval and Early Modern North-West'. Again, the AGM and public lecture will be livestreamed. Only members may vote at the AGM, but the Colin Phillips Memorial Lecture is free and open to all.

Membership

There was a significant fall in individual membership in 2023, down from 78 at the end of the previous year, to 68 paid-up members. This can partly be accounted for by two reported deaths of members and two resignations, but we are losing members each year at an accelerating rate without being able to attract enough new members to make up the deficit. This is naturally of concern to members of the Council, and as outlined above under ***Council***, we are actively addressing the issue. On a more positive note, institutional membership has remained relatively stable in 2023 although we have been informed of some resignations to take effect from January 2024 – the Guildhall Library, London, the Dr Williams Library, London and the University of Central Lancashire.

This trend indicates what we have known for a while, that both Public and University Libraries, as well as private individuals, are increasingly finding it difficult to accommodate large collections of printed books.

We continued to use the AGM as an opportunity to publicize the aims and the publications of the Society more widely than amongst our current members by holding a free Public Lecture. Despite a good attendance at this event in 2023, we did not recruit any new members as a result. We will continue to engage with our members through our website, Facebook and the annual *Newsletter*. Members are also contacted by email regularly with information on forthcoming local history events, in particular the large number of events publicized in the *Lancashire Local History Federation Newsletter*. We currently hold email addresses for c.68% of our members and we would like to increase this percentage to avoid the high cost of postage.

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, and indeed, he delivered the Public Lecture following the 2023 AGM. In relation to the 2024 AGM, Dr Roberts has been advertising the meeting and Public Lecture widely, including to specialist groups such as living history societies. We are hoping that the subject of ‘Robin Hood in the Medieval and Early Modern North-West’ will appeal to a wide audience.

Publications

Although we did not publish a volume in 2023, due to a delay with our latest edition (the volume editor found additional relevant material), we are expecting a fruitful 2024 with two editions due for publication. The first, *Prisoners of the Fifteen*, ed. Jonathan Oates, is an edition of the lists of Jacobite prisoners taken at the battle of Preston in 1715, and then held, tried and disposed of from various gaols in Lancashire and Cheshire. The second, *Cheshire Motor Vehicle Registration Records, 1908–11*, ed. Craig Horner, is the second and final part of early registration records, charting car ownership in early twentieth-century Cheshire.

Details of our upcoming publications are given in the 2024 *Newsletter* (p. 2). It is evident that these volumes cover a wide variety of topics and periods.

Financial Statement

The total net assets of the Society on 31st December 2023 were £62,573.7. The comparable figure for 2022 was £57,812.98. Overall, annual income was c.£30 less than in 2022, but nonetheless it exceeded our expenditure by c. £5,600. This is not a realistic picture of our financial situation or expenditure, since we had no printing costs in 2023. The annual accounts show a drop of c.£240 in income from personal subscriptions, partially offset by a small increase of c.£70 in institutional subscriptions. Income from our M&G investment continues to produce a healthy revenue stream, delivering £2,063.05, a small increase on 2022, while the capital value fluctuated with the vagaries of the market, ending the year at £34,625.22.

Dorothy J. Clayton
Secretary
February 2024