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**ANNUAL REPORT**

**FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2019**

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**NOTE: This Report is also available in the Society’s folder in the Benson Library and on the Society’s website.**

1. CHAIRMAN’S ANNUAL REVIEW

I guess that, like for a lot of people, to me the world seems to spin faster with each passing year. It certainly does not feel like a year since I sat down to ‘pen’ last year’s review.

My research shows that this is the 47th Chairman’s review and, once again, about a Society with a healthy membership and, as far as I can tell, one that is satisfied with the direction of travel. Of course, with a membership of over 170, we will not please all of the people all of the time but I can assure you that your Committee is committed to fulfil the Society’s constitutional aims in an inclusive a way as possible.

I will now move on to a review of the year. I start with a sad note - the sudden death of our Treasurer, Tony Holder. Apart from being deeply mourned by his wife Brenda and all his family and friends, Tony is much missed by our Society. It is therefore fitting that I should record, in this report, our thanks for the time he gave to our Society, his stewardship of our finances, the sage advice he proffered on many occasions and for just being an all-round great chap.

Most members of the Committee are still in place, performing the roles that you elected them to at the last AGM. Consequent on Tony’s death George Verdon stepped in to take on the Treasurer’s role, having largely designed the accounting system and having fulfilled the role in the past. However, in November we were pleased to co-opt Richard Peters onto the Committee and he has been understudying George and taking training in the role. As you will see later, he will be standing for election as Treasurer at the AGM, along with other members of your Committee who are willing to continue in their roles.

George will give a separate Treasurer’s report to accompany the Annual Accounts statement but suffice to say here, our finances are in good order. Looking forward, 2020 is the year we will be reviewing our investment policies. This did not happen in 2019 due to both existing commitments and the lack of a stable investment market within which to make sensible decisions.

Our Secretary, John Murphy, has been doing a great job in ‘minding’ the Committee and ensuring that our meetings are accurately reported. As part of his role he is our correspondent with the Benson Bulletin and his pieces are not just informative but help add to the new ‘feel’ of the BB under its new Editor Christopher Swann. As Secretary he also manages our links with outside bodies such as CPRE and the Chiltern Society. Being heavily involved, as he is, with fund raising for St Birinus and their choir, the Davey Consort, we are grateful to him for adding us to his workload.

Our membership Secretary, John Tchighianoff, reports that with the usual ‘churn’ of members – a few moving away, sadly some deaths but with the addition of 15 new members (7 of whom came from our membership promotion in October) – our membership is a little more than last year. By now you should all have received your Membership Renewal form and I know John would be very grateful for an early return and payment of subscriptions, to help avoid long queues on the evening of the 31st January. However, the Hall will be open for membership renewals on that evening from 6:30 pm.

To keep the data we hold on Members as secure as possible, John is now the only Committee member that holds this information and all correspondence to the membership goes through him.

To simplify our accounting, your Committee is proposing to the AGM that we change our Society’s Membership Year from running from AGM to AGM (as stated in the Constitution) to align with our Financial Year, which is the Calendar year.

Our Friday evening talks are now run by Fenella Galpin and she has put an interesting programme together for 2020 – from ‘Misadventures in Movie Locations’ to ‘Cribs Cards and Christingles’. Having done the role of Talks Secretary myself, I know just how difficult it can be to put a programme together that has a range of interesting subjects, delivered by competent speakers, at a cost we can afford. So, ‘hats off’ to Fenella. As usual, she would welcome your suggestions of either subjects or speakers.

Joan Weedon and your Outings Sub-committee arranged a series of four interesting and successful trips for the year and, as Joan says, “Thankfully, for all our outside events the weather was kind to us with blue skies and sunshine. Most of the trips included a guided tour which always makes visits much more interesting and we hope to include this in our trips for 2020.  Planning is well underway for these and we hope you will enjoy what is planned.” At our Friday evening meeting in October Joan made a plea for a couple of members to join the Outings Committee to help with the shepherding duties on the visits. As at the time of writing no members have stepped forward. I would ask all those who enjoy the outings to please have a rethink and talk to Joan.

The food provided by Sue Fowler and her team, along with the Salad Organisers and makers, has continued at the usual very high standard, while keeping well within budget. Personally, I am always surprised at the ingenuity of the makers with the variety and quality of the salads provided. Yvonne Griffiths and Barbara Goss have retired from their involvement, likewise Sue Fowler has ceased to be our Catering Manager for the Friday evenings. I want to thank Sue for giving us her expertise and organisational skills over the past few years and for helping Tanya Ellis to be ready to take on the role of Catering Manager, in charge of food procurement (except Salads), presentation, serving and the final clear-up – supported by her usual team of washers-up. This is now a ‘paid role’ and Tanya is paid as a self-employed sub-contractor. However, I am very pleased to say that we will not be losing Sue’s expertise, as she is volunteering to stay on your Committee as Catering Committee Member.

After many requests over several months, we have found two people to organise our salad producers on a temporary basis. Barbara Verdon and Liz McGill will take on the role as of the January meeting. Please give them your help and support by volunteering to make a salad - we need more volunteers to ensure people only have to make a salad two or three times a year.

Judging by the number of glasses and bottles returned to the hatchway, the Bar is very well used. Sue and David Cooper always have a wide range of drinks available which, by their canny buying, offer great value to their many supporters. Sue is one of the busiest people I know and, with her recently acquired position of Leader of SODC, how she finds time to cope with her many other commitments is one of the mysteries of the world. We are truly grateful to both her and David.

In September we increased the prices of drinks at our meetings to ensure that the bar makes an appropriate contribution to the overall finances of the Society, while also ensuring they are not out of line with prices charged by other organisations. Following a suggestion by Sue, in concern for excessive amounts of plastic in the environment, we have discontinued offering bottled still water. Instead we now have a jug of tap water to which members can help themselves for free.

Our President, Martyn Spence, still triples his involvement by also looking after our oversight of local planning issues and is our Audio-Visual maestro. It is thanks to him, and in his absence Pete Eldridge, that our speakers have few problems in setting up.

Regarding planning, Martyn has reported that the adopted Benson Neighbourhood Plan (NP) defining the levels of future development within the Parish has been, in at least one case, instrumental in the rejection of an application for new housing in an area excluded by the NP for development. The NP should eventually lead to a much-needed relief road connecting the B4009 to the A4074. Those interested can view the NP at: **http://www.bensonplan.org/benson-plan/** - it is well worth viewing.

SODC manage an informative website showing all planning applications in our area. For those aware of a planning application affecting their home or are simply interested in what is going on, the website provides much useful data. Access it via this link: **http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/ccm/support/Main.jsp?MODULE=ApplicationCriteria&TYPE=Application**

Finally, for those without web access, the Parish Council holds hard copies of the NP and all current planning applications which are available to read on request during office hours.

Our thanks also go to Pete Eldridge who doubles-up as both Martyn’s AV deputy and our Fire Warden and Health and Safety Advisor. A role you will all be aware of, with his excellent mimicking of an Airline Steward at our Friday Evenings.

Our other ‘triple header’ is George Verdon, who in 2019 filled the roles of Vice President, Treasurer and Webmaster. I think he thought that when he stepped down as Chairman life would become easier – think again George – you don’t get away from us that easily………Our grateful thanks for stepping up to the plate when the chips were down (if that doesn’t win the prize for the paragraph with the most mixed metaphors, I give up).

The Committee’s other sub-committee, the History Group, continues to do a really wonderful job, largely unsung but very much appreciated. This year, the 16 members have been collecting and collating information for the archives and website. Research is ongoing into Preston Crowmarsh history, local families’ stories, graveyard inscriptions and village buildings. The website at www.bensingtonhistory.org is very popular, even on a global basis. Regular support from the HG continues at the RAF Benson Heritage Centre and the Library’s Family History Clinic. Also this year, the Group have been instrumental in having the Wells Crossing plinth reinstated at the corner of Chapel Lane and Watlington Rd. It is liaising with the Neighbourhood Plan Delivery Team regarding archive storage and, next year, will be looking to promote the 100th anniversary of Benson’s War Memorial’.

I hope, that having read the above, you will agree that 2019 was another successful year and I can assure you that your Committee will try its hardest to ensure that 2020 will be likewise. Over the last 47 years the Society has metamorphosed from one that was almost entirely centred on Planning issues and Benson’s history into one that, as our Constitution shows, is also concerned with social issues. I quote Aim (f):-

*To promote the improvement of the benefit area by associating with the local authorities, voluntary organisations and inhabitants in a common effort to provide facilities in the interests of social welfare for recreation and leisure time occupation.*

While our Constitutional commitments to our local society and area have not changed over the years, our Society has become more – not solely, but certainly more - of a social grouping of people who value living in Benson and the surrounding villages, hopefully allowing us to contribute to bringing together new residents and old to form one fellowship, helping to keep our area a great place to live. To help achieve this, it is one of the aims of the Committee to make this more of a ‘Members’ Society’ with involvement in its running by the many not the few, helping to ensure that we keep a modern and useful Society for our growing community. The larger our membership is, the louder our voice is in matters that can affect us all – so spread the word.

Always remember, this is YOUR Society. Feedback to your delegated Committee is both essential and welcomed, so as to ensure that we move in the direction the membership wants and our Friday social evenings appeal to the majority of our members.

Finally, to achieve the above, your Committee would welcome new members to help us meet the Society’s Aims and to ensure both continuity and diversity. While in no way being ageist, we would particularly welcome younger members - our average age is fast approaching 70. If you feel that you can make a contribution, please contact any Committee member.

Thank you all for your support during the past year and, hopefully, for 2020.

David McGill

Chairman

2. DRAFT BALANCE SHEET AS AT THE 31st DECEMBER 2019



3. DRAFT INCOME AND EXPENDITURE STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2019



4. TREASURER’S FINANCIAL STATEMENT AND ACCOUNTING POLICIES

**Reports:** The Draft Balance Sheet, Draft Breakdown of Income and Expenditure and Examiner’s Report for 2019 (to follow) are attached.

**General.** This year we have made a deficit of £556.09, an improvement on last year’s deficit of £2277.00. Our cash figure is £7386.00 which is a rise of £422 on last year. When combined with our investments our total capital assets are £32,220.00, to this must be added the potential value of our book stock. Overall the Society remains in a sound financial position.

**Books.** Book sales remain consistent. Sales this year were £307.00 slightly down on last year. The stock value at the end of the year was £2654.98 having been devalued by an annual 20% in accordance with the Committee’s direction.

**Donations.** The Society made donations of £914 last year.

**Monthly Meetings:** It is the Committee’s view that the monthly meetings should be self-financing. The rise in the supper and drinks prices during the year has ensured that the income from the supper/talks evenings covers the total costs of the evenings. However, last year the monthly meetings had a small deficit of £389.00 due to a very low attendance at our Christmas meeting.

**Membership.** The annual membership fee has remained at £10 for many years. A proposal to raise the membership fee for 2021 will be made at the AGM. The membership for last year was 171.

**Gift Aid.** Gift Aid is claimed on membership fees. Problems with HMRC have been resolved and the Society has received rebates this year for 2017 (£128.62) and 2018 (£245.93).

**Investments**. Currently our investments are with the Coventry Building Society which last year brought in £409. Next year the Committee will investigate reinvesting our capital in a Charitable Investments Fund which could provide an annual dividend of 4.5%, which in turn could raise our income from dividends to £1100.

George Verdon, Treasurer.

5. INDEPENDENT EXAMINATION OF ACCOUNTS

There is no Independent Examiners Report, as the Accounts have not been examined yet.

Our appointed Examiner, Heather Emerson, has not been able to complete the task due to family personal problems. As such the Accounts in this Report are labelled DRAFT.

It is the Committee’s intention, when we have received the Examiner’s Report, to call an EGM to coincide with a normal Friday meeting. This EGM will be for the sole purpose of adopting the Report. The meeting will be the one that falls as near to 14 days, following the EGM notice to members, as possible.

6. GOVERNANCE

Our Society is governed by its Constitution and the Trustees also by the Rule Book, which is reviewed annually. Both of these documents are available on our Society’s Website and in its folder in the Benson Public Library.

The Constitution is very largely the general one suggested to our Society by HMRC, when we registered with them as a Small Charity, but adapted for our specific Society. We are not registered with the Charity Commission, only with HMRC for Gift Aid purposes.

7. AIMS FOR 2020

* To try to attract younger people to our Society
* To involve more of the membership in the running of our Society
* To continue our link to the Neighbourhood Plan Implementation Team.
* To maintain a wide range of interesting subjects for the talks to the Friday evening meetings and interesting places to visit for our Outings.
* To review the investment policy with the aim of securely improving our return.
* To review and update the Rule Book.
* To evaluate and respond to requests for a financial donation from local causes whose aims align with the Aims of our Society.

The above are not in any priority order.

**Approved unanimously by the Committee appointed at the 2018 AGM**