

ORMSKIRK & DISTRICT FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 26th MAY 2020

Honorary Secretary's Report 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020

This report incorporates the principal activities of the Society.

Accommodation

We continue to rent accommodation at the Scout HQ in Wigan Road, Ormskirk, which houses our Library and is where we hold our Admin Sessions on a Monday afternoon, when members and visitors were able to come along and use the resources we hold. However this had to cease due to the Coronavirus Disease just before the end of the financial year. Rent for the room has remained static for the past 4 years, and we thank Ormskirk Scouts for renting the room to us.

Membership

The total membership for 2019/20 is 146 people, including 5 who have free membership. 27 new members have joined during the year and to date we have 5 new members for 2020/21. Also 6 members rejoined during the year. 1 member cancelled their membership, and 3 members died during the year.

83 members have gift aided their payments to the Society in 2019 and so far 72 have gift aided for 2020. All have signed Declarations or have consented to gift aid via the Parish Chest website.

12 members and 3 Exchange Societies have requested their magazine electronically. Our 9 overseas members comprise 7 from USA, Canada, Australia & NZ, 1 member from the Orkney Islands and 1 from the Channel Islands.

Our thanks go once again to Sally Dean for her excellent work in keeping our membership records up to date, and collecting subscriptions and renewal monies.

The Library

During the year we have received a steady stream of material from members of the Society for the library. Wendy Moores in particular has donated many items, and we are very grateful to all who have donated. The Society also purchased several items at our Dig Up Your Roots Event. One item of particular interest is John Haigh's Account Book for his Tailoring business, which lists customers from the 1850's and 60's. This is currently being photographed and indexed to make for easy searching. Our Librarian, Kathryn MacDonald, has done an excellent job in keeping everything cataloged and filed appropriately, ably assisted by Jean Gidman, so many thanks to both of them.

Publications & Sales

Since October 2019 sales have been low with only 3 CD's being sold outside our meetings, and 2 more during meetings.

Bill has now developed the technology to email any size of data package (the biggest is Burscough St. John's at 2.06GB) on a data pen, which can be used during lockdown.

The Parish Chest website has been out of action for a large part of the year, which may account for the lack of orders, however this has now been taken over by the Federation of Family History Societies and is now up and running again. Our products can be viewed at <http://www.parishchest.com/ormskirk-district-fhs>

Research help

For most of the last year our library facility in the Scout Hall has been open each Monday from 2 – 3pm and we have continue to operate a research desk in Ormskirk Library, which takes place on the 1st and 3rd Thursday afternoon each month.

However we have had to curtail both of these services due to Covid 19.

We also have a Q & A facility on our website whereby members of the public and members of the Society can leave their family history queries in the form of a message. Unfortunately this facility has been very much underused over the past year.

Request for help are also received via Facebook, letter and email, and we do our best to assist in all cases, or redirect them to the most appropriate place.

Thanks go all the Committee for the success of the Help Desk and for help in dealing with research requests.

Websites

There have been no major issues with the website. The new layout appears to be stable and working well. About 10 members have requested a new login to the members area, and no problems have been reported. Our magazine and exchange magazines are updated on a regular basis as new material arrives, and the publicity for “Roots” (now archived) went well.

Innovations and modifications include: A link to the ODFHS Video Archive in the main menu; a new Gallery page which is gradually being populated but more contributions are welcome; the old Message forum replaced by a new Q & A forum link which is more user friendly; thanks to Richard Clare and Kate links to potentially useful websites has been updated.

We are very grateful to Alan Cooper for taking over the website and wish to thank him for all his work and updates to the site.

Boatfamilies website

In the year to April 2020 we added another 5,000 people to our main Boatfamilies tree, including 23 individuals on our Canal 3 tree after a connection was uncovered. This leaves only three trees on the site, Canal 1, Canal 5 and Canal 9.

Although most new names were among Cheshire watermen’s families, several more connections to Ormskirk area boatmen have been established. We have also connected families from Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire, the West Midlands, the Isle of Man, and one Thames bargeman. Details are given in the Update History records in the Media/Documents section of the website.

Magazine

In Issues 80 (July 2019) and 81 (November 2019) Kate tried to concentrate on using up a significant back catalogue of submitted items from members.

The period between February 2019 and February 2020 has also seen a lot of activity and general news items from other organisations and groups; therefore, compiling the previous year’s magazines has been something of a balancing act, but hopefully members have appreciated the results

Issue 82 (coinciding with our 40th anniversary) included articles taken from a variety of sources (e.g. Facebook, past magazines, original material) and the result was not what was expected - it was much better, more diverse and we thank everyone who contributed

It is still hoped that the November 2020 edition can be themed around the 400th anniversary of the Mayflower sailing; if any members can send in anything related to the ship (or on a general seventeenth century theme), they will be gratefully received

Many thanks to Kate Hurst who does a brilliant job producing our magazine.

Facebook

As of 29 April 2020, the page had 975 likes (compared to 885 on 28 April 2019); this is quite a gradual and regular posts on our page still get a positive response. Facebook is an invaluable tool for communicating details of new projects and publications).

On 20 April, an enquiry was received about whether the grave of Wilfred Hollinshead Blundell (d.1899) was at Ormskirk Church; a search of our Ormskirk MIs suggests not, but if it is possible to transcribe the Halsall MIs at some future date, this data may provide the answer

YouTube

In July 2019, our full set of 24 videos had an overall total of 4643 views (average = 172 per month); as of 5 April 2020, this had increased to 38 videos (overall views - 7937 , average = 208 per month), and the cancellation of our meetings due to coronavirus caused a dramatic rise in the number of views, reaching 8381 by 29 April (i.e. 444 in 24 days)

YouTube has served us well to show off some of the events we have attended/organised e.g. Dig Up Your Roots, and our disrupted 2020 programme has prompted Kate to use it more creatively, by devising an extended 42-minute mini-talk to celebrate the tenth archived photos to showcase our past activities. It is impossible at present to say whether this will result in new members, but it may raise the society's profile.

33 individuals now subscribe to our channel (meaning that they get specific notifications whenever a video is posted); an increase from 28 in late March 20

Many thanks to Kate who produces all of our videos and is also the Administrator for our Facebook page. She certainly works hard for the Society.

Monthly Meetings

Our monthly meetings, held in the Guide Hut, Moorgate, Ormskirk, have been well received with an average of 25 people attending. The most popular talk was that given by Paul Sherman on Vikings in West Lancashire, which drew our largest ever audience of 58 people. Lancashire Cowkeepers, by Dave Joy, attracted 49 people in October and 32 came to hear about the Wilding Family in July. The increased number of members and visitors to our meetings was pleasing to see. Perhaps this is due to increased publicity via Dot's weekly Advertiser column together with her good choice of speakers. Unfortunately we had to cancel our March meeting and are not sure when we will be able to resume them.

Sheila Galligan assisted by Kathy Isherwood has continued to serve tea, coffee, biscuits and cake at our regular monthly meetings. Sheila says this is a pleasant task as they usually end up chatting to lots of the members. Dot Broady Hawkes came to

the rescue when Sheila went on holiday. The charge for refreshments continues at 50p except at our November meeting when it is free to all.

Many thanks to Sheila, Kathy and Dot for all of their efforts in making our meetings so successful.

The Executive Committee

The Committee meets about 4 times a year to discuss the activities of the Society and formulate plans for the future. In between that, those of us who are available, meet at the Scout Hall each Monday afternoon to carry out the day to day admin tasks, helping visitors to the research room, enveloping the magazines etc. and generally having a chat. We also man most of the outside events which the Society attends and get to chat to a wide variety of people.

A major focus for the Committee during the past year was our “Roots” event held in October 19. Whilst Kate was the main organiser, all of the Committee, plus Norma Gregson, pulled together on the day to help make this a very successful event.

In March we were very sad to learn of the death of Don Holt, who had been a valued member of the Committee for many years. Our condolences go to his wife and family.

Earlier in the year we lost Morris Parry, a long standing member of the Society, and again our condolences go to his family.

The fact that the Committee can't meet at the moment doesn't mean that the work has stopped. There is still a lot of work going on in the background, such as transcribing, updating records, administering Facebook and making videos.

So a big thank you to all of the Committee for their dedication and work carried out on behalf of the Society.

Thanks also to you, the members, for continuing to support the Society and keep it afloat.

Pam Richardson,
Honorary Secretary
20.5.2020