

Chairman's Annual Report to members at the close of 2023

2023 was a year when our Society refreshed its programmes for education, promotion and internet presence. The year ended with membership numbers once again marginally lower, project activity boosted by the commencement of several significant new ventures, a database now containing in excess of 3.4 million records, and more presentations using a variety of platforms and thus reaching more members than before, at home and overseas. This pleasing outcome is largely the result of the commitment and diligence shown by my fellow officers and trustees, a willing and enthusiastic group of volunteers and the loyal response received from our members. My thanks go to all for contributing to another year of achievement.

Our modern website and management system continues to combine well with our other public services to provide a gateway for members and the public alike to obtain the guidance required to assist their research. The daily attention to the smooth-running and integrity of the system by Webmaster John Marsden, our Contents Manager, Hilary Hartigan and our team of Branch administrators are key to this outcome.

Helpdesk

Our unique service, 2023 being its ninth year in the refurbished Central Library, welcomed more than 3,500 visitors throughout the year. The 1921 Census Returns released in 2022 again proved a popular source for researchers alongside the many other sources offered by our knowledgeable teams.

A local radio broadcast interview by our Helpdesk coordinator with a well-known broadcaster served to promote the service reminding listeners across the local area of the steps a beginner should take to start one's research.

I applaud the work of coordinator Leslie Turner, who continues to maintain a high quality service through astute recruitment which adds to a core of seasoned volunteers.

Fairs and Presentations

The Society's annual Family and Local History Fair in the Spring has already become a popular fixture in our programme to reach the Manchester public. 2023's event, Discovering Family Lives, was opened by Society Patron, the Lord Mayor of the City of Manchester and attracted a large number of visitors to interact with stall holders representing a range of Society activities, our Library partners in Archives+ and 15 local community organisations.

The Promotions and Education Committee organised a well-filled programme of presentations promoting the work of the Society at Family and Local History Fairs held by other groups across the North of England, carrying our message to visitors at Chetham's Music School in Manchester, the U3A in Buxton, as well as events in Styal, Salford and Huddersfield.

We continued to support events hosted by our partners, Manchester Libraries Festival and Local Community History Month.

I am grateful to Mark Campbell and his committee for delivering this platform so that the Society can reach the local family historian.

Meetings

Your Society hosted 46 meetings throughout the year bringing family history to members and non-members alike at our homes in Manchester, Bolton and Oldham as well as reaching researchers elsewhere in the UK and overseas with our schedule of online and hybrid events. The introduction of

a 'week of meetings' online proved a well-received addition to our offering, attracting large attendances including many from Australasia and North America.

The development of our Explore programme aimed at beginners and intermediate researchers focussed on the 'next step' following initial research illustrating the use of deep-diving research techniques.

Thanks are due to the many volunteers who make these meetings possible including our systems team who manage the increasingly complex technologies and the ubiquitous greeters and booksellers.

Collaborations with our Archives+ partners continued throughout the period and we are, in turn, grateful for their support for our own events.

Projects

Our projects programme continued to identify historic records for preservation and publication on the Society's Great Database.

Among projects completed in 2023 were Bolton Workhouse Creed Registers, the Admissions Registers of both the Royal Manchester School for the Deaf and Dumb and Baguley Sanatorium plus a tranche of Baptisms kept at parishes within the Salford Roman Catholic Diocese. A number of smaller projects were also completed in the year.

Ongoing projects added more than 20,000 BMD references from the pages of the Manchester Mercury and Manchester Courier, as well as over 8,000 burials recorded in the Sexton's Books of Manchester Collegiate Church. Work continued to record more than 11,000 names of staff listed on the Staff Records Cards of Horwich Locomotive Works.

The year saw the beginning of a major project to transcribe, index and digitise the staff records cards of Manchester City Transport Division, which potentially holds more than 35,000 entries.

The efforts of our teams of transcribers, indexers, digitisers and data managers once again contributed to a large increase in the number of entries held by the Society for the use of members and the public. The total number at year-end stood at 3.4 million records, a significant increase on the year.

My thanks go to Webmaster, John Marsden, Projects Committee Chairman, John Henshall and their teams for this marvellous outcome.

I make special mention this year of the contribution made by Madeline Best, who retired at the year-end after leading the Roman Catholic Registers project for 10 years. This project is probably the most popular database we have and that is in no small way the result of the work of Madeline and her team.

Lancashire BMD

Since taking the lead in managing this major project from its start in 2003, the Society is close to bringing the project up-to-date and so completion. The project to index civil birth, marriage and death registers for the Lancashire BMD public web index added further records during the year, bringing the lifetime total for the project districts Bolton, Manchester, Oldham and Salford in which the Society is directly involved, to 9.3 million of over 22 million records for the project as a whole.

My thanks go to the team of Society volunteers led by John Marsden who manages the project.

Social Media

We maintained contact with researchers by daily postings on our social media platforms, reaching an astonishing 500% increase in our Facebook visitors as well as more than 100 readers of our newly introduced Instagram account. A noticeable result was an improved attendance at meetings. We have Elsie Lowe, Leslie Turner and Hilary Hartigan among others to thank for sustaining a ready supply of interesting postings. Thanks, too, to our Branch Moderators who ensured that our branch accounts benefitted from similar activity.

Online Bookshop [powered by Shopify]

This service continues to provide a significant and steady income from the sale of books, DVDs and downloads, due in no small way to the careful day-to-day management undertaken by Elsie Lowe and Barry Henshall, to whom I pass on your thanks.

Meetings and Events

The introduction of a 'Week of Talks' to our regular programme proved a popular addition to our offering. Delivered online it allowed us to reach more of our members residing overseas. Alongside our loyal band of supporters in the UK, attendances reached pre-Covid numbers. Altogether including branch programmes, we hosted 46 meetings using a variety of formats during the year.

We are especially pleased that the introduction of the Explore programme later in the year, aimed at beginners and intermediate researchers, attracted great interest with a well-supported presentation of deep-diving research techniques .

Thanks are due to Speaker Secretary, Carol Lee and our meetings team both in Manchester and at the branches, who devote much time to providing a varied programme with wide appeal to every aspect of research.

Fairs and Events

Our Patron, the Lord Mayor of the City of Manchester opened this year's renewal of our annual Family & Local History Fair, *Discovering Family Lives*, in March. With the support of Manchester Archives, our Archives+ partners and 15 local community organisations we welcomed a wide range of visitors.

Society volunteers exhibited at five other Fairs across the North of England, forming and reinforcing links with organisers and exhibitors, whilst reaching a new group of researchers. Our presence at events arranged by our Archive+ partners and other city-based groups lent reciprocal support as well as carrying our message to a wider audience.

None of the above would take place without the commitment and organisational skills of our Promotions and Education Committee, led by Mark Campbell and his team together with the volunteers who so willingly support our programme. On your behalf I pass on a large vote of thanks.

TMG and other publications

We published four editions of our house journal, The Manchester Genealogist [TMG], in its 59th year, using the well-established size and format, each member receiving a copy. Regrettably increasing overseas postal charges compelled your trustees to offer only a digital edition to overseas members. The printed and mailed edition continues to be available to overseas members on payment of a small supplement. In spite of increasing mail costs at home UK members were broadly

in favour of continuing to receive a printed and mailed copy of TMG. Trustees will monitor future mail costs which are expected to continue to rise.

The content of the journal continues to yield some outstanding research articles and these were considered by the judging panel for the prestigious Earwaker Prize, an award now in its 34th year. Together with its branches, the Society all publish regular monthly newsletters as well as daily postings on social media platforms and blogs on the Society website. All serve to inform members and the public of the many activities offered by the Society to the family historian.

Thanks are due to our Editor, Rhondda Griffiths, her proof-reader, Barbara Merdith, our newsletter editors and all our contributors for delivering a first-class house journal and information stream to such a high standard.

Branches

Our branches, Anglo-Scottish, Bolton and Oldham. continue to make a significant contribution to what the Society can offer. The addition of fresh faces to their committees ensures renewed energy is brought to their programmes. I have referred to their contribution to the overall meetings agenda. More pleasing is the effort put into attracting new members to the joys of family history research.

Our projects work has gained from the addition of significant datasets provided by each of the branches. The regular supply of articles to TMG ensures we are able to sustain the traditional 98-page format.

Accordingly, my thanks go to Michael Couper, David Baker and in Oldham's case, Linda Richardson and her successors, Jan Costa and Gillian Melton together with their respective committees for their promotion of our special interest groups.

Volunteers

I take a moment to applaud the commitment and devotion of our teams of volunteers in every area of our activities. We could not sustain the performance reported above without their contribution. That has ever been so during the existence of the Society, but be sure it is not taken for granted. Thank you all.

Officers and Trustees

As I complete my assessment of any year's performance, I am constantly reminded of the support I receive from my fellow officers. This year I add my fellow trustees to that list. Each has made my own role much easier to discharge.

And so, thank you, Elsie, Barry, Keith and our trustees for your counsel and advice in addition to your support.

David Muil

Chairman

24th April 2024