



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT ON THE YEAR 2021

Last year was again dominated by the Coronavirus pandemic. It started with a "lockdown" lasting over 3 months, before the national vaccination programme enabled us gradually to return to a more normal existence. Face to face meetings did not really resume until the autumn. The Society's AGM was postponed until September. Even now there are members of the Society who prefer to meet on Zoom, with whose technology we have all become quite proficient! Thanks are due once again to Asif Malik for arranging innumerable online meetings.

Regular users of Zoom have been members of our Local History Group, led by Michael Norman-Smith, who have continued their monthly meetings. Until his death in July, Charles Toase was a regular attendee of these meetings, ever happy to share his encyclopaedic knowledge of Wimbledon's history. Charles's book "An A-Z of Wimbledon" continues to be our best-selling publication. Another attendee was Monica Ellison, who sadly passed away on Christmas Eve. Monica was editor of our newsletter for 4 years, and for 10 years a Trustee of the Society. She launched the biennial Richard Milward Essay for local history. Both Charles and Monica are greatly missed.

A casualty of the pandemic has been our Activities & Events programme, arranged by Jane Healey. I am pleased, however, that although most walks and visits had to be cancelled or postponed, we were able to continue with our series of talks (on Zoom naturally), for which we also have to thank Michael Norman-Smith.

All through last year our planned refurbishment of the Society's Museum progressed well and we expect to re-open the Museum in summer/autumn 2022. We are extremely grateful to the Village Hall Trust for undertaking the base-build at their own considerable expense, and to all those members who have generously donated to the project. One of the unforeseen consequences of Covid has been a considerable hike in building costs. This has inflated the cost of the Museum project but, thankfully, the Society's reserves are sufficient to meet this increase. Thanks are due to the Refurbishment Committee, ably led by our Museum Director Jacqueline Laurence. May I also single out for particular praise Jane Allen for guiding the project, Charlotte Peacock for leading the fundraising effort and Pamela Greenwood and her family for their hard work in clearing the Museum ready for the building work.

As ever, among the hardest working people in the Society are the Planning & Environment Committee (PEC) chaired by Chris Goodair. Its core activity is reviewing all planning applications in our area of interest. Last year the Board decided, on the advice of the PEC, to slightly extend that area to include, inter alia, the "Apostles" in Raynes Park. One major planning application reviewed last year was the massive development in Wimbledon Park proposed by the AELTC. The PEC has met with the Club and worked with other local and national organisations and politicians opposed to the scheme. The PEC has also been busy with strategic and environmental issues, including commenting on Merton's draft Local Plan and the Parliamentary Boundary Commission's proposals, and participating in Merton's Climate Action Group. A signal success in the past year has been persuading UKPN to undertake restoration of the electricity transformer in Sunnyside.

Communication is paramount, and never more so when our lives are restricted. In the past year nearly 14,000 users visited our new website and our Twitter followers have increased by 17%. In order to maintain interest in these digital media we need continually to refresh the sites with new content, and to that end a new Digital Editorial Committee has been established, chaired by Kevin O'Neil. Its aim is to generate more high quality and informative content and establish editorial guidelines and standards. Thanks are due to Kevin and also to Christine Goodair who looks after our Twitter account. Another important organ of communication is our quarterly Newsletter, which the vast majority of members now receive electronically. Thanks are due to its editor Sally Gibbons, and also to Nigel Davies who is responsible for its excellent quality of production.

I would conclude by thanking all my fellow Board members for their support and extraordinarily hard work in another challenging year. We were very pleased last year to be joined on the Board by Gillian Darlington, a longstanding member of the PEC, and by Simon Hood who has 40 years' experience in the financial services industry. As I have not already singled these out for particular praise, may I express our gratitude to our Treasurer Corinna Edge who looks after our money so diligently, to our Secretary Maureen Field who has kept the Board in order for the past 5

years but who intends to retire at the next AGM, and to Simon Ingall who runs our membership system so capably. Finally I must thank our President Tony Michael and my predecessors as Chairman – John Mays, Iain Simpson and Asif Malik – for their wise counsel and encouragement over the course of the past 12 months.

Jeremy Hudson

REPORT OF THE PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Planning Application Statistics:

The Committee reviewed a total of 250 applications (2020: 223) and we objected or commented on 118 of these (2020: 112), a rate of 47% (2020: 50%).

Planning and other policy issues:

The major planning application of the year was the AELTC's plan to develop Wimbledon Park Golf Course for tennis use by building an 8,000-seater stadium, plus 38 other grass courts and many ancillary buildings. The Golf Course is Metropolitan Open Land, akin the Green Belt, and must not be built on. We have objected strongly and suggested that the spectator seating and player facilities should be temporary and cleared away after the "fortnight", as is done at various golf tournaments, Chelsea Flower Show etc. We have been working with other local groups, both in Wimbledon Village and in Southfields to co-ordinate our actions.

At the beginning of 2021 we joined Plan Wimbledon, who were seeking to set up a Neighbourhood Plan for the town centre and environs. Unfortunately the Council refused to validate their application. We shall consider any revised application by Plan Wimbledon if and when that occurs.

The Council's new Local Plan was submitted to the Secretary of State in December 2021. Inspectors have been appointed to examine this and issued their Preliminary Questions to Merton in January 2022. The dates for the Examination in Public are unlikely to be before May.

We were unable to hold meetings in 2021 with Council Officers to discuss matters of mutual interest because of Covid restrictions, but we were able to resume meeting early in 2022. We did meet with Diane Neil Mills, the Chair of the Wimbledon & Putney Commons Conservators, and with the new owners of Centre Court, who explained their ideas for improvements to the shopping centre.

We have suggested to the Council some extensions to Conservation Areas and to the Local List, and we have made various recommendations for their Scrutiny Panel. We have supported the group trying to save, restore and re-purpose Dorset Hall on Kingston Road.

Environmental Issues:

We have continued our involvement with Merton Council's Climate Action Group on which several members of the PEC are involved on behalf of the Society.

We have challenged the Council on their continued use of Glyphosate, and are supporting moves to develop a tree strategy for the Borough. The Society would like to donate a tree to mark The Queen's Platinum Jubilee. We have been pressing the Council to produce proposals for the retro-fitting of housing to meet climate change objectives.

Committee Membership:

Two members left the Committee last summer on moving away from the area. Otherwise, there were no changes to its composition.

I wish to thank all the members of the Planning & Environment Committee for their hard work and support during the last year, and for continuing to keep our work moving when Covid restrictions meant that we could not meet in person.

Chris Goodair

REPORT OF THE MUSEUM & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

2021 has been a very exciting year for the Museum, even though we were closed throughout the year. We finally embarked on the refurbishment, a project which has been under discussion for about a decade. The Society provided an initial sum of £85,000 which had been set aside in its reserves for the project, and an extra £4,000 from the very successful Dinner Dance in 2019 (how long ago that seems!). We raised as much again from generous individual donors, a crowd-funding campaign and grants from the Wimbledon Park Community Trust and the Wimbledon Foundation, for which we are very grateful. By spring we had a total of £180,000 to spend on the project.

Our designer is Philip Simpson and our project manager is Jason Lowe of Conservation Plus. Apart from these, the team working on this project consists entirely of volunteers. I am so grateful to them all. Special thanks are due to our professional volunteers – curator Pamela Greenwood and project lead Jane Allen, and to Graham Martin, the manager of the Village Club and Trust.

By the end of March all the objects which had been on display had been safely packed away in the Perry Room or the Norman Plastow Gallery. The old displays were then all stripped out and, bit by bit, we began to clear the room. At the same time the design work had begun. With the help of Philip's colleague Sophie Smith Sachdeva, an expert on museum interpretation, we chose and researched the new themes for the displays and new stories for each theme. We wrote and edited all the text for the panels and chose the objects to go with the stories or, sometimes, the stories to go with the objects. Pamela took photographs of objects which are too frail for display and we researched and sourced more than a hundred other images for the panels.

Meanwhile Philip came to measure up the room and to check the exits and the entrances. By the summer he had produced his full design concept, which was approved by the Board in August. We were ready for the next stage of the project, inviting tenders for the construction of the cases and cabinets for the new displays – the infrastructure of the new museum. We also turned our attention to the work which needed to be done to prepare the room. The floor needed levelling and a new floor to be laid, rewiring was needed, insulating and decorating. The Village Hall Trust, extremely generously, agreed to pay for this base-build work. However, we received a shock when the tenders came in for the base-build work and the construction of the displays, as they were all about 25% higher than expected. Supply chain problems, apparently driven by Covid and by Brexit, had caused prices to rise across the board. We are so grateful to the Trust which agreed to pay the extra for the base-build works and the Society which found the money to meet the gap on the contract price for the infrastructure of the new museum.

Covid had one last surprise in store for us in 2021. The Omicron variant meant we had to postpone a party for donors planned for December. In spite of this we finished the year in good heart. The party is merely delayed and not cancelled. In 2022 we will see the base-build work finished, the new infrastructure built and installed, the cases and cabinets filled with objects and a Grand Opening of the new Wimbledon Museum.

Jacqueline Laurence

LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

We have continued Zoom meetings, with our thanks to Asif Malik. After 50 years, we have now changed our meeting day to Mondays. With great regret Charles Toase passed away, a stalwart who had enormous expertise and extraordinary depth of knowledge our area. We also experienced the loss of Monica Ellison, who had particular interest in literary matters. On a more positive note we have luckily gained Alison Raffan as our secretary, who now records our researches. It does help to retain members' contributions, as they will become a resource for future historians. Instances of enquiries are questions about Cannizaro's kitchen garden, a query on schools in the 1840s and an 18th century kneehole desk which belonged to Lady Susan Melville, a descendant of the Viscount who lived on West Side.

From our members we have heard about developments at Dorset Hall and William Morris House. There has been extensive coverage on the history of Wimbledon Park, currently subject of a planning application, and mention of the

Sunnyside transformer, currently removed for restoration, as well as another in the town. Detailed research has taken place into the Worple Road shops, with particular reference to builder Henry Harmer and his family.

We have been interested in images turned up by the Wimbledon Reborn website. Newsletters have been examined and their contents catalogued, invaluable for reference purposes. We heard more about the development of the Alexandra Road area, along with discovered pictures of the railway.

There was coverage of pioneering lady politicians, and attention to locally resident actors, Stanley Baker, Bridget Armstrong, Edward Judd and Michael Crawford. A valuable joint project was carried out tracing descendants of Sir Henry Peek's Commons' Preservation Committee members. We reflected on our group's original members, and their contribution in books on our heritage. We were interested to hear about the stories of pubs in Wimbledon Town from an author, one of our number.

We would be pleased if the changed day to Mondays allows newcomers to join us. Arrangements are in place for us to assemble again in person when prudent, and we look forward to this.

Michael Norman-Smith

ACTIVITIES & EVENTS GROUP

In preparation for this piece I re-read last year's report. I was clearly too optimistic, we never did manage to hold talks in the hall! But this year we will be back in the hall for May, June, September and hopefully October. We plan to continue with Zoom through the darker winter months though. I would like to thank Michael Norman-Smith for keeping the Events Section going over the past 2 years with all the talks that he has arranged for us.

We will not be offering a coach trip in 2022. Jenny Humphries, who organised the coach trips, has resigned from the Committee. We would like to thank her for the sterling work and the time she has given to the Events Committee over many years.

We did meet in person in July and August when we managed to re-arrange 2 enjoyable talks on William Morris, courtesy of Margaret and Chris Smart. We arranged a Chelsea stroll during the autumn which was hugely informative and great fun. Everyone knew the area geographically but was astonished to discover so much more. We have arranged a programme for spring and early summer, details of which will be reaching you shortly, and we hope that you will feel confident enough to join us once again.

We arranged several walks during last summer and autumn in the hope they would be well attended as they were outside and socially distanced. Sadly we did not have the numbers we had hoped for. We are arranging a more interesting walks programme for 2022 and hope that you will join us when the weather improves. Thanks also to Ann Cantrell for organising the walks programme.

We are all learning to live with Covid and, as such, are once again bringing you a full programme. We always appreciate it when you book early for events as that really helps us with our planning. Be assured that should we have to cancel an event at short notice, as we did in 2020, we will offer you a full refund. As always, special thanks to Asif Malik for his contribution to the Committee. It remains for me to say that we all look forward to seeing more of you in 2022 and ask you to book early.

Jane Healey