**CLEVELAND and TEESSIDE LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY**

**ANNUAL REPORT**

**FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31 December 2020**

The year ending 31 December 2020 was an unprecedented one in the long history of the Cleveland & Teesside Local History Society.

Whilst over the previous fifty years there may have been occasions when speakers at Society events or those writing articles for Cleveland History may have had cause to make reference to pandemics – such as the Black Death and the Flu Pandemic of 1918 – the activities of the Society had never been directly affected by a pandemic. Until 2020.

The year started well enough, with a number of talks being held as part of the Winter Programme, and the Committee meeting twice – on 29 January and on 28 February 2020.

A meeting took place on 1 February 2020 at which Ian Stubbs spoke about ‘Linthorpe Cemetery’ and Tosh Warwick delivered a talk entitled ‘The Tees Transporter Bridge: ‘Majestic Dinosaur’ and ‘Monster’.

Then came COVID-19 and ‘lockdown’.

The first victim of the new situation was the Joint Society / Teesside University Day School - planned for 14 March 2020.

The Twenty-Third Joint Day School organised by Cleveland and Teesside Local History Society and the Teesside University History Subject Group was to see six speakers explore different aspects of Care and Conflict in the local area. However, concern about coronavirus led to low bookings and the decision was taken to cancel the event.

Shortly after, the Committee took heed of government advice and decided to cancel all face-to-face activities, initially until May 2020, but subsequently on an ongoing basis.

Committee meetings were cancelled and the AGM scheduled for 6 April 2020 was postponed.

The two talks planned for 6 April 2020 - ‘Building on Quaker Foundations: John Ross, Architect of Feethams, Darlington’ by Joan Heggie and ‘Ralph Jackson and The Development of West Hartlepool’ by Olwyn Hart – were cancelled.

The planned summer activities - guided walk in Skelton on Saturday 6 June 2020 and a ‘Behind the Scenes’ tour at Kirkleatham Museum on Wednesday 22 July 2020 – were both postponed, then cancelled.

The situation did not improve and activities planned as part of the Winter Programme for 2020/21 – a talk by Geoff Braddy on ‘Middlesbrough 900 Years Ago’ and by Ken Braithwaite on ‘Drovers Roads in the Early 19th Century’ planned for 12 September 2020 and talks by Alan Pallister on ‘Excavation of the Deserted Medieval Village of West Hartburn’ and by Christine Hutchinson on ‘TheHistory of Preston Park Museum and Grounds’ planned for 7 November 2020 were also cancelled, as was the first event of 2021 – talks by Caroline Brannigan on ‘War Kids; Stories of Yorkshire and the North East’ and by Christine Clarke on ‘Tales from Gisborough Priory’, planned for 6 February 2021.

Difficulties with printing meant that production of the bulletins and newsletters also ceased.

The Society attempted to maintain some form of service for its Members – and so combat social isolation – by regularly updating its web site and providing regular posts on its Facebook page. In addition, The Scroll became an essential tool for communication with Members – eight editions were produced and distributed between March and December 2020, providing details of on-line talks and other internet-based activities that might be of interest to members.

During this time the potential for delivering ‘virtual’ talks using Zoom was explored.

The Committee held two meetings using Zoom on 20 October and 1 December 2020.

In between these the AGM originally planned for 6 April 2020 was held using Zoom on 17 November 2020, and was attended by 18 participants.

Membership numbers declined in 2020, possibly as a result of the pandemic.

As of 31 December 2020, there were 176 Members including 19 institutions (compared to 260 Members and 22 institutions on 31 December 2019).

The financial position also reflected the unusual year: income being reduced to £1,570 (compared to £2,742 the previous year) but expenditure also being significantly reduced to £957 (compared to £3,974 the previous year).

Early in the year we received the sad news that Ian Campbell had died on 2nd January 2020. Ian had looked after auditing the Society's accounts from the beginning of the Society in 1968.

The activities of the Society are coordinated by the Members of the Management Committee, ably led by our Chairman, Geoff Braddy.

In their new roles as Programme Secretary and Treasurer respectively, Matt Falcus as and Julie Tweedy, coped admirably with the unprecedented circumstances.

Lee Firth, the Membership Secretary continued to provide an excellent service in her twentieth year in the role.

We are grateful that Stephanie has taken over the job of Distribution Secretary and our long-serving Bulletin Editor, Val Harrison, and Newsletter Editor, Jenny Braddy, have continued in their roles.

The importance of the internet as a communication tool was heightened by lockdown and: Martin Peagam and Matt Falcus responded appropriately.

Despite the lack of activities and meetings, the Society has benefitted from the enthusiasm, expertise and ideas of other Committee Members – Vice-Chairman Linda Polley, Ian Stubbs, Alison Brown, Paul Stephenson, Stewart Ramsdale, and Francine Marshall - as they guided the Society through the unchartered waters of the pandemic, offering advice and ideas.

As the year drew to a close, there was no sign of the pandemic abating, but the Society was poised to continue delivering services to its members, utilising the power of the internet to deliver a full programme of virtual talks.

2020 was a difficult year. Everyone hoped that 2021 would bring a return to ‘normality’, or at least a new form of ‘normality’.

Martin F Peagam