

Chairman's last Report AGM 06/03/2015

Item 2 on the agenda is my final report for you all, as tonight is the end of my final year as Chair of this Society.

It has been three years since I first stood here as your new Chairman, but it seems a lot longer. Remembering back to that first year & the first speaker that I introduced, & a fine speaker he was, it was Idris Evans & his excellent talk on the 'Treasures of the Dee'. Luckily he had one of those fine booming Welsh voices that didn't need the Norman Collier microphone that we had back then. We have had some excellent talks over the last 3 years thanks to Jackie Cawte, who works tirelessly to provide us with speakers. Sometimes they are a bit thin on the ground or out of our price range, with some costing as much as £150, but Jackie manages to get someone booked.

Some of my picks from the last 3 years are Geoff Williams & his talk on BICC at Helsby, Janet Bradshaw & her excellent talk on 9 eras of history at Tatton Park. You remember her, the lady that had all the changes of clothes. Casey & Nicki Carlin & their talk on Wet Plate Photography was fascinating, so was Michael Murphy & his talk on The Terrible Tale of Gin. Ken Bishop's story of Mather & Platt was a very interesting one as it told of how influential this company was on the lives of every working man & woman in the country. But for me the pick of all the talks in the past 3 years was Ian Bellard's about his Great Grandfather's voyage on the ship 'Cloch' in the late 19th century.

We have had some excellent Society outings as well with visits to Castle Howard in 2012, The Moorcroft Museum & Trentham Gardens in 2013 & last years trip to Ripley Castle. If I remember rightly, the weather has been kind to us, apart from the late stragglers at Trentham Gardens who got caught in the rain. They have all been successful trips with more or less full coaches & we've even managed to make a bit for the Society coffers to boot.

Our Christmas parties have been enjoyable affairs with entertainment provided by Michael Murphy & his terrible Gin, Centre 8 & their tale of the Runcorn FA cup squad of the 1930s & last years Typical Runcorn Christmas presented by Elaine Garner with the help of some friends. Richard Monk continues to provide a fine buffet, & Alex keeps the wine flowing.

One of my proudest moments as Chair of this Society, was when with the help of Jackie Cawte, we gathered together some other like minded groups & Societies to try & save the Carnegie library in Egerton Street. The Runcorn Carnegie Community Group was formed with this Society taking the lead, but with members of the Runcorn Family History Society, Runcorn Town Carnival group, The Todger Jones Statue Appeal, Runcorn Veterans Association & The Halton Community Partnership Trust. Together we looked at the viability of renting the building from Halton Borough Council, & the maintaining of it. The idea was to have a Civic Centre with provision for a Museum, study centre & meeting rooms. After several meetings with

HBC officers & other organisations, it soon became obvious that it simply was not viable. So we called it a day & disbanded the group. But we had a go, we didn't just look at it & say 'what a shame' & leave it at that.

Another moment in my 3 years that I am proud of is the Facebook page that Diane Stanley & I started. It has brought the Society to more people's attention, and we are constantly getting requests for information, just as our website does. The Facebook page is an enhancement to our website, which continues to attract very healthy interest with thousands of hits every year. Currently we have 378 likes on the page, which is a steady growth rate. If every one that saw some of the posts on their joined we would not be able to move in here, the last post about the 1100th anniversary celebrations for this year has been seen by 546 people!

When I made my first speech to you it was after one by David Sterry, who was concerned about the dwindling numbers of the Society. It has dropped from 100 to just over 80, but has maintained that figure. If you take into account that people die, move away from the area or just forget to renew, that is not too bad a result. We have had some new members, some directly from the Facebook page, which has helped to stem the flow. Action is needed to attract more people, & measures are under way toward this end. There is an expectation that the 1100 celebrations may get some new blood, & more schools want to get involved with that, so at least Runcorn's history will be taught to the children. Windmill Hill school want to get involved, which surprised me, but at the same time delighted me, as children want to get involved & they are from that part of town we still refer to as the New town. Which for me is excellent news.

Sadly it is a fact that Historical Societies all over the country are in decline, possibly because it is easier to 'Google' it & there are many Facebook pages like our own that cater for people who want to see old photos of Runcorn & reminisce. Rumour has it that Preston Brook Historical Society are looking to call it a day, as the support is just not there. Hopefully this will not happen, but rest assured, this Society's committee will not let this happen.

It only remains for me to thank all the Committee for their help in the last 3 years, & for you the members, for giving me the opportunity to be the chair of this Society, one, if not THE best in Cheshire. I only hope that you think that it is in good shape, for the next Chair to take over, & I have done a good job. I thank you.