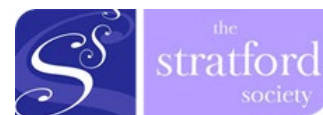


Chairman's Report



During 2022 the Committee decided that, because of the effectiveness of the covid vaccination measures, it was safe to resume normal meetings in person. From April onwards we met in the congenial surroundings of the function rooms at the White Swan, where we heard some excellent presentations.

In the first half of the year we participated in a number of memorable events. We were shown around the ancient Mason's Court in a private tour; we joined Nick Birch at the boat yard to celebrate the addition of the beautifully restored 100-year-old 'Merry Widow' to the river cruising fleet; we attended the official opening of the new marina by Seven Meadows; we gave a spirited reading of *King John* at the Town Hall, with Roger Pringle in the title role and Janet Anslow as Lady Falconbridge remembering her passionate affair with Richard *Coeur de Lion*; we carried flowers and banners with great style to represent the Society in the Shakespeare Birthday procession; and we enjoyed a comprehensive tour of the newly rebuilt RSC Costume Workshops.

The Committee met six times during the year, at two-monthly intervals. My sincere thanks to all the committee members for their hard work and many contributions throughout the year. Thanks in particular to our Treasurer, Jonathan Devereux, for his very effective management of the finances, and to our Secretary, Olga David, as she steps down from the Committee, for the excellent minutes she has produced.

Three significant achievements for the year were:

- We signed the Contract with Historic England for the StratFire project, to investigate the rebuilding of timber-framed houses in High Street and Chapel Street following three disastrous town fires in 1594, 1595 and 1614. This project was masterminded by Dr Robert Bearman, who continues to lead the documentary research group.
- Five new pavement plaques were designed and produced, for installation in 2023 in front of key buildings along the Historic Spine: Harvard House, the Old Vicarage, the Almshouses, the Dower House, and Holy Trinity Church.
- We have continued to add content to our website at <https://www.stratfordsociety.co.uk> including the Historic Spine, the StratFire project, and publications relating to Stratford.

The over-riding concern is that our membership continues to decline, and not enough new members are joining. It has been noticeable that the number of members in attendance at our meetings at the White Swan has not returned to the previous level, perhaps because of continuing fears about the prevalence of covid. In a town with a population approaching 30,000 we should be able to mobilise people to be involved with matters relating to town planning, protection of the environment and preservation of cultural heritage. Somehow we need to reach out through social media to two generations of younger residents to get them involved. The issues of planning, tourism, traffic, roads, house building, conservation, the river and the environment remain as important as ever to the quality of life in Stratford.

I am stepping down this year from the position of Chairman, and encourage my successor to take up these challenges. The Stratford Society is important for Stratford and its future, with an eye to its wonderful heritage. We need to be stronger in collaborating with the Town and District Councils to ensure that all aspects of the Neighbourhood Plan are implemented and to resist opportunistic developments that are not in the town's best interests.

Lindsay MacDonald (Dr)