

Dear Members,

As we come to the end of this strange year, it is surprising to look back and realise that we have not held a single 'live' meeting where we could all get together. For one thing, the Shakespeare Centre in Henley Street has been closed all year, so our usual meeting room was not available. For another, covid never quite went away, and many members were understandably cautious about getting together.

Instead we have been using the Zoom online meeting software to good effect, and have held 12 monthly meetings. Before covid arrived no-one had ever heard of Zoom, and then suddenly it was everywhere! The advantage is that we can all participate in meetings from the informal comfort of our homes. Also the meetings can be recorded and put online. There are now 15 recordings available publicly on our YouTube channel, one of which has had over 600 viewings.

We did at least get out for three memorable events: a spine walk led by Bob Bearman in August, a garden party hosted by Tony and Janet Bird in Billesley in September, and climbing the scaffolding to view the restoration of the masonry of Holy Trinity in November (thanks to Diana Owen and the Friends of the Church).



Spine walk



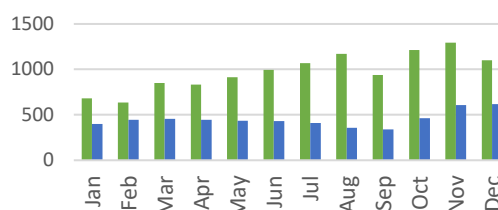
Garden party



North transept of church

Five working groups are focussing our activity: (1) Town Centre, led by John Scampion; (2) Historic Spine, led by Bob Bearman; (3) Environment, led by Diana Owen; (4) Planning, led by Margaret Cund; and (5) Transport, led by Jann Tracy. These groups have enabled the Society to be represented in important forums for town development policy, including the Town Strategic Partnership, Town Transport Group, Stratford Climate Action, and Stratford Cycle Forum.

During the year content has steadily been added to the Website, not only in the pages with notices of meetings, but also information about our other activities and a list of books about the town. The spine walk commentary has been optimised for viewing on mobile phones. As a result we are now getting over a thousand visits per month, with a peak of nearly 1,300 in November, more than double last year.



Web visits/month in 2020 (blue) and 2021 (green)

We are putting together an interesting and varied programme of speakers for the monthly meetings during the coming year. These will again be held by zoom for the first few months, but we remain hopeful that in summer we may be able to meet in person. Also some excursions are being planned: a visit to the Marina construction site; a group reading of Shakespeare's play *King John*; a tour of the all-new RSC costume workshop; an outing to the Brandon Marsh wildlife reserve near Coventry, a Garden Party, and an exchange visit with the Leamington Civic Society.

I do hope that you will all be involved in these activities, both the meetings and the visits. The Society exists to preserve the special qualities of Stratford as a town in which to live and as an attractive place to visit.

With best wishes for a Happy Christmas and a more active year in 2022.

Yours sincerely,
Lindsay MacDonald, Chairman