



Chairman's Report

This year our general meeting, scheduled for May 2020, will not take place physically due to the impact of lockdown and Covid19. Notwithstanding this, we are pleased to report to our membership on the activities of the year past.

The attached papers outline the activities which have taken place and our thanks are due to Lindsay for the work undertaken in organising the talks and visits. We look forward to further events in the coming year once the government's rules are clear on how we all come out of lockdown and into a new reality of meetings.

It is clear that the acceleration of change in retail is going to result in a very different town centre. The era of the department stores seems to be over with the closure of Debenhams and plans to convert the bulk of the building into a hotel for which planning permission is currently being sought. The previous BHS site is also subject to a planning application for a hotel. We should expect to see other changes of use for buildings along the historic spine and adjoining streets. Many businesses are unlikely to survive the current lockdown and consequent economic recovery! Our task as a society, to ensure the preservation of the character of our town centre, will become more and more critical in the coming years.

Home delivery of goods and services continues apace and most of us have had to severely restrict our use of retail buildings for the past number of weeks. Of course, we survive and our habits change. We are likely to see similar changes in the use of commercial office buildings as many companies have discovered that corporate life can continue with modern communications without having to house all employees together in one or more buildings. As I write this note, I am aware of a major town employer reviewing their need for accommodating their current six hundred employees differently.

Your society officers have begun to discuss how the pressures outlined above might provide both opportunity and threat and how we should respond. In particular, we have asked ourselves what single issue (if indeed there is one such issue) might be the key for future development. Furthermore, where are the points of influence which we might touch to seek the best outcomes for us all in our civic environment. In particular, what additional changes are likely to occur over the coming decades as we transition to an economy not so dependent on fossil fuels?

In the next couple of years we will seek to bring together a plan whereby we, The Stratford Society, might help frame the landscape of change which is unfolding in front of us all. Until we meet next, on behalf of all in The Society, can I wish you all the best of health.

Kevin Bond
Vice-Chairman and Acting Chairman

THE STRATFORD-UPON-AVON SOCIETY
REGISTERED CHARITY NO: 251182

CHARITY INFORMATION AS AT 31st DECEMBER 2019

President	Sir Brian Follett		
General Committee (Trustees*)	*Kevin Bond	(Vice-Chairman, Acting Chair)	
	Lindsay MacDonald	(Vice-Chairman, Events)	
	*Jonathan Craig	(Treasurer)	
	*John Deegan	(Chairman, Transport Group)	
	*Ian Prosser		
	David Renfrew	(Chairman, Planning Group)	
	Julie Renfrew	(Membership)	

Note: John Scampion and Julie Crawshaw stood down from the Committee at the 2018 AGM, but remained Trustees through 2019.

Hon Secretary To be appointed

Bankers	Barclays Bank	Independent Examiner	J N White, FCA
	Market Cross		4 Mansell Street
	Stratford-upon-Avon		Stratford-upon-Avon
	CV37 0EA		CV37 6NR

The Annual General Meeting of the Society for the year to 31st December 2019 was scheduled to take place on Monday 18th May 2020. Due to the Covid19 pandemic and consequent ban of public meetings the Trustees, having taken advice, decided to cancel the meeting for this year. The Trustees are not aware of any extraordinary circumstances that would adversely impact the Society, and the Reports and Accounts have been prepared in the usual way.

CONSTITUTION, OBJECTS AND POLICIES

The Society is constituted by Trust Deed dated 19th January 1966 and is registered with the Charity Commission, Registration Number 251182.

Appointment of Trustees is governed by the constitution of the Charity. The Board of Trustees is recognised to appoint new Trustees to fill vacancies arising through resignation or death of an existing Trustee.

The Trustees comprise the officers of The Stratford upon Avon Society and are responsible for managing the business of the Society according to Charity Law.

The Charity is established for the public benefit which through its objects and principal activity is to stimulate public interest in and care for the beauty, history and character of the town and its surrounds. To encourage the preservation, development and improvement of features of general public amenity or historic interest. To pursue these ends by means of meetings, exhibitions, lectures, publications, other forms of instruction and publicity and promotion of schemes of a charitable nature.

Income and Expenditure Account for year ended 31st December 2019				
		2019		2018
INCOME	£	£	£	£
Subscriptions and Gift Aid				
Subscriptions	2535		2,814	
Gift Aid			531	
		2535		3,345
Grants and Donations				
Probus			40	
Town Trust	500			
Other donations	17			
		517		40
Talks and Presentations				
Falcon Restoration event	657			
Sales - pavement plaques/misc			1,700	
		657		1,700
Events and Visits				
Summer Party				
Visits			99	
		0		99
Bank Interest		19	19	19
Total Income		3,728		5,203
EXPENDITURE				
Governance				
AGM	327		142	
Historic Towns Membership			0	
General Committee			0	
Website, leaflets, promotions	1294		535	
Postage and Stationery	50		60	
Insurance	334		334	
Audit	264		264	
Commission and charges	2			
		2271		1,335
Talks and Presentations				
Accommodation and Refreshments	866		938	
Speakers		866		938
Events and Visits				
Summer Party				
Exhibitions			105	
Visits Falcon Restoration	680		99	

		680			204
Projects					
Pavement plaques	3896				
Marie Corelli				36	
		3896			36
Donations					
Shakespeare Parade					0
Total Expenditure		7,713			2,513
Surplus/deficit		-3,985			2,690
Reserves at 31.12.18 (17)		14,724			12,034
Reserves at 31.12.19 (18)		10,739			14,724
Statement of Assets and Liabilities as at 31st December 2019					
		2019			2018
CASH FUNDS					
Barclays Bank - Current Account		1,636			5,456
Barclays Bank - Deposit Account		9,310			9,291
Total Cash		10,946			14,747
LESS: LIABILITIES					
Subscriptions in Advance					23
Unpresented cheque		207			
Reserves at Year End		10,739			14,724

N.B. Accounts have not yet been signed off by the Examiner.

Events in 2019

January Stratford's Historic Spine – Where do we go now? Dr Robert Bearman described the achievements so far, having published a guide, provided a set of annotated pictures on the web site, and laid pavement plaques. A funding-raising campaign is proposed to perform dendrochronological analysis on the timbers of key buildings along the route.

February The Stratford Town Archives The archive of the SBT is famous for its Shakespeare collection, but it also holds one of the best town and local history collections in the UK. Madeleine Cox presented a range of the objects and services provided, from archaeology to Borough records to local business to the Stratford Herald.

March The changing street scene in Stratford Picture postcards were immensely popular in the first half of the 20th Century, especially in Edwardian times. Lindsay MacDonald presented highlights from his collection and showed the changes visible in streets and buildings around the town.

April Developments in transport policy John Deegan, Chair of the Stratford Town Transport Group, discussed the latest developments and proposals in transport policy around the town and district. The recent adoption of the Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) made it an ideal time to take stock.

May Plans for managing the Shakespeare properties Following the AGM, Tim Cooke, the CEO of SBT, talked about the maintenance and conservation of the five Shakespeare properties and plans for how the visitor experience at each will be enhanced in the future.

June Celebration of re-opening of the Falcon Hotel The mid-summer event was jointly organised with The Shakespeare Club in celebration of the restoration of the building. The event was in three parts: (1) Presentations by three expert speakers; (2) Tours in small groups to see highlights of the building; (3) A superior afternoon tea. The speakers were: Peter McCurdy, leader of the specialist team that restored the timber frame; Dr Bob Bearman, the distinguished historian; and Sylvia Morris, Secretary of the Shakespeare Club.

--- Summer Break ---

September The Garrick Jubilee of 1769 Although the original event was literally a washout, it put Stratford on the world map as a tourist destination. To mark the 250th anniversary of the Jubilee, members of the Society enjoyed a talk by Rosalyn Sklar of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, in which she showed items from the SBT Museum collection.

October Swan's Landing – a development update Oliver Jago presented the plan by St Joseph Homes for a major housing development within the Canal Quarter Regeneration Zone. Both he and Mr Williams (the accompanying architect) covered many aspects with competence and assurance.

November Stratford in the English Civil War 1642-1646 Lindsay MacDonald explained how Stratford avoided much physical damage during the Civil War because it had no defences, and hence the soldiers of both sides could come and go as they pleased. The effect on the civilian population, however, was serious because of the continuing damage to property and theft of possessions and demands for freequarter.

December Stratford's first Shakespearean Theatre Sylvia Morris presented an extensively-researched history of the theatre in Chapel Lane, which in its heyday hosted some of the leading Shakespearean actors, but was demolished in the 1870s when the Great Garden was reconstructed behind New Place.

Other activities in 2019

In January the Society gathered views from members and submitted a response to SDC re the Council's proposal to site the new Chinese Pavilion at the end of The Firs gardens in Rother Street. But the Council went ahead anyhow.

An ambitious crowd-funding campaign for the Historic Spine was conducted through the Spacehive service, led by member John Scampion. Two boys from KES provided strong support for the funding application to County, developing the website, and promoting the activity on social media. Sadly the campaign failed to reach its funding target.

Two projects were conducted with students from Stratford College, one to develop a social media strategy and the other to produce several short videos of routes around the town centre. These will continue until Easter 2020.

Efforts were made to organise a visit by the Society to Compton Wynyates, the grand historic house at the foot of Edgehill, even engaging Tim Cox, the Lord Lieutenant of Warwickshire, to make representations to Lord Northampton on our behalf. Yet all to no avail.

Observations on the Programme during 2019

Meetings during summer (April to October) were held in the evening, commencing at 7pm, and those in winter (November to March) were in the afternoon, usually commencing at 3pm. Wine was served after the evening meetings, whereas tea was served before the afternoon meetings. The venue for all but one was the Shakespeare Centre in Henley Street, normally in the Wolfson Hall, and the facilities and catering were of a high standard.

No charges have been made this year for visitors (i.e. non-members) attending meetings. The Committee wishes to encourage potential new members, nevertheless it may be necessary in future to introduce a small charge per head, as is the norm with other Societies.

Bookings for the summer event were taken through the online Eventbrite facility. This worked very well and was used by most members. The disadvantage was that their service fee was nearly 10%. In future it would be better for Society finances to take bookings and payment directly from members. But for free events where advance registration is required, Eventbrite could be used routinely, as there would be no charge.

Ideally the topics of meetings should be equally distributed among the three main interests of the Society: planning, town affairs and history. In actuality, of the ten meetings in 2019 five were on history, two on planning and three on town affairs. More focus is needed on planning if the Society is to maintain its strong voice and involvement in the development of the town.

There were no excursions during the year to sites of interest outside Stratford, such as castles, manor houses, battle fields, canals, and so forth. In addition to being a pleasant afternoon out, such excursions could have a didactic purpose, for example to inform members about planning policy, to see examples of good practice, to review new architectural styles, to inspect sites for proposed new roads or industrial developments, etc.

The Society enjoyed close cooperation during the year with the Shakespeare Club, but did not have contact with any other like-minded groups in Stratford or elsewhere. There is scope for collaboration and joint meetings with other groups with overlapping interests. It would also be beneficial to compare our programme and mode of operation with comparable organisations in nearby towns (Alcester, Warwick, Leamington, Kenilworth, etc).

Lindsay MacDonald
Events Coordinator

Membership

Our membership now stands at 181, a net reduction of 2, so remains stable in these difficult times. Most of our members pay by standing order dated for 2nd January annually, which is a great help to both the Membership Secretary and also the Treasurer. It would be appreciated if all our members paid in this way.

Julie Renfrew
Membership Secretary

Planning

There has been little recent activity. Most emails from the SDC Planning Department have concerned Reserved Matters on large scale developments.

The South Western Relief Road saga seems to have ground to a halt for lack of funding. I understand the government has been asked for money, but that is unlikely to be forthcoming in the present Covid19 lockdown. When things begin to open up again, funds for Stratford's bypass is unlikely to be near the top of the list. Having said that, there are still some 400 homes to be built at Long Marston and I note a sale board inviting enquiries for Industrial sites at the entrance to the airfield site. Potentially there could be a lot more traffic coming into, or through, Stratford in due course.

The Picture House has closed and work has started on the new Travel Lodge Hotel. During the year we have seen the design for the future of Debenhams: an imaginative scheme combining a hotel with retail units, and also residential units to the upper floors on the Wood Street frontage.

These are unprecedented times with many questions unanswered: nobody knows what the long-term effects of this pandemic will be, but it is safe to predict that tourism will not recover quickly. If there are any Society members who would be interested in joining me to form a small group to review planning applications, I would welcome the opportunity to share this, not onerous, task.

David Renfrew
Chairman, Planning Group

Transport

The Society co-sponsors the Stratford Town Transport Group (TTG), along with Stratford and the Town Council, and it addresses any transport matters of potential significance for the town. It meets ten times per year and its meetings are generally well attended. The Society is currently represented by John Deegan and Jann Tracy.

As in previous years much attention has been focussed on the Transport Strategy, which was adopted by Stratford on Avon District Council and Warwickshire County Council in Spring 2018. The TTG has continued to be critical of the Strategy, and this year has been particularly concerned about the lack of progress on detailed implementation plans. We sought to make progress last summer by meeting the M.P., the portfolio holders at both the District and County Councils, and the County Council's Director with responsibility for transport. Despite expressions of intent, little has been undertaken by the councils to progress the strategy since.

The TTG has therefore identified its own list of priorities for implementation, which are: experimental closure of High Street; Bridge Street pavement widening; Cycling provision across the river; the approved Birmingham Road proposal; and measures to reduce coach and HGV movements. It will look to promote these proposals, all of which are consistent with the adopted Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP), wherever appropriate.

The future of one element of the Transport Strategy, the proposed South Western Relief Road, now looks uncertain. The TTG had objected to the proposal in the absence of any evaluation of alternatives or of the costs and benefits it would bring. Homes England had been asked by the local authorities to contribute £95 million to the overall cost, but appeared to agree with us that it did not represent good value for public money and so refused the application for funds. If the scheme is abandoned, then the development of Long Marston Airfield, other than an initial 400 houses, could be at risk.

The Group has met the Town Council to explore ways in which our expertise can be harnessed to take forward transport issues of mutual concern, and we have agreed that our expertise will be used to advise the Town Council when appropriate. Some of our members have also been engaged with the District Council's climate change initiatives.

John Deegan
Chair, Stratford Town Transport Group

Historic Spine

The main project for the group is the laying of ceramic pavement plaques celebrating the historic buildings along the Spine from the Birthplace to Holy Trinity*. To remind members it is a scheme for some 20-24 plaques illustrating the history and importance of these buildings. So far we have 12 either in place or ready, all but one of which were financed by the current owners of the buildings. One, for the Old Town House, was financed by the Society.

After this initial number all financed with enthusiasm by owners we realised that were unlikely to be able to continue in the same vein. Owners were either unable to raise the funds or were insufficiently interested. And so we turned to public funding. In August 2019 we launched a crowd funding appeal with the encouragement of the County Council, who indicated that a grant from their place-making fund could well be payable if through the appeal we were able to demonstrate a significant level of Community support. Earlier funding applications to the Town Trust had twice been turned down, though the Trust did award the Society £500 to reprint our brochure on the Town's historic buildings.

Not put too fine a point on it, the crowd funding appeal failed. Unfortunately it didn't excite any widespread interest and was withdrawn in January with the few pledges amounting in total to around £200 cancelled. The County did not make any grant. Separate from the Crowd funding appeal we still have outstanding an application to the District Council and the LEP and we are awaiting a decision.

Failing support from the last named bodies, we need to consider what the next steps should be. We always saw this project as one to cover all the most significant buildings along the spine and there are conspicuous absentees. There is no doubt that the plaques are attractive and a feature for the buildings. The Tourist Office, run by the District Council, tell us that the information they hand out about our buildings is extremely popular. We need to include some further key buildings to give the scheme its necessary integrity – the obvious ones are the Birthplace, the Alms-houses, two Hotels, and Holy Trinity Church – but there are others which, from an architectural or historical point of view, should also be included. The design and production cost is £900 for each plaque. By including dendro-chronology to give an accurate age for selected buildings, we increase the cost to c.£2000 though adding a considerable authenticity to the project.

In the current circumstances nothing is happening and the Group hasn't met this year. Once we are able, we will discuss what options exist. In the meantime the views of members would be most welcome.

John Scampion

Chairman, Historic Spine Joint Working Group

* It should be said that the strict view is that the Spine runs from the traditional centre of the Town, say the top of Bridge Street, but in promoting the concept and the plaques scheme we have used the expression "From the Birthplace to the Resting place at Holy Trinity".