

2021 Annual Reports

Report of the General Secretary Jackie Cotterill

So much has happened over the past two years, it is difficult to remember a time that was 'normal'. Despite the frustration of not holding meetings, some of our groups were able to meet face to face and although it tended to be a bit hit and miss, it is hoped that this situation will ease in the near future.

Despite not being able to meet the work of the Society has continued during lockdown and we are indebted to all our volunteers who have carried on regardless.

First and foremost must be to our Chairman, Phil Lamb who has held us all together not only by keeping us in touch with one another, he has also used his expertise to organise the many interesting talks via Zoom. One of the nice things about Zoom, it allowed us to see so many of our members, and for them to see us, especially if they don't live locally. So, our grateful thanks must be given to Phil Lamb and his team of 'knob twiddlers' without whom we would have all been sitting staring at blank walls.

We must also thank Steve Freeman and his merry band of workers for all their hard work in adding stock to the online shop and processing the orders. Our volunteers working on the Warwickshire County Record Office parish registers under the guidance of Kim Walker have continued during all this time to make images available for sale through the Society shop. As these volunteers live across the globe, we really appreciate the hard work put in.

I would also like to say thanks to Caroline and Mark dealing with the subscriptions and renewals. The new membership database has made this task easier, albeit with a few glitches along the way.

The library volunteers deserve a mention as well. The Family History Centre opened its doors again in the autumn and although visiting is now by appointment only, at least it is open. Please view the website to book your appointment.

It is impossible to mention all the volunteers who work tirelessly on behalf of the Society, but I would like to thank our Editor of the TMA, Linda Newey; Peter Middleton and Haydn Lewis.

Back in January 2020 I decided to email out a monthly newsletter just to keep members up to date with what was happening. These I have continued with since then in order that our members do not feel that they are forgotten. I have also been publishing via our Facebook pages (BMSGH Members Only Group: Midland Ancestors page: Midland Ancestors DNA Special Interests Group: and the 1921 UK Census Users Group (thanks to Mike Fisher) what I consider to be relevant information to our members from the Internet. These I will continue to do in the near future.

Membership numbers for 2021 came to 1567 paid up, 1610 active, 91 new members.

Reports from local groups

London Group – David Kerr, Chairman

The London Group began its twenty second year still in “Covid Lockdown”. As the April meeting and AGM could not be held the Committee agreed to remain in post until an AGM could be held, in line with advice from the parent organisation.

David Kerr continued as Chairman with committee members Lesley Exton, Deryn Hawkes, Rosemary Fishburn and Margaret Crane continuing in post. Sadly Hilary Chalmers resigned as Treasurer and Margaret Crane is temporarily deputising in this position. Hilary is to be thanked for the outstanding support she has given the Society over several years and I hope she will continue to maintain contact. We have however been very fortunate with Brian Gubbins volunteering to join the committee and these appointments will be confirmed at the next AGM.

We did however manage to have one meeting in 2021, in October, when Brian Gubbins told us about a relation of his, a cabin boy, murdered at sea. This was a very good piece of research ideal for getting us back into research mode. Twelve attended which was a promising number after over a year without a meeting.

With the Society of Genealogists closing its doors there was a task ahead in finding an alternate location. However, Wesley’s Chapel was recommended, and this has proven to be an excellent and friendly location. Meetings will be held there throughout 2022.

On the financial side our opening balance in January 2021 was £1,267.52 which we saw reduce marginally to a closing balance at the end of 2021 of £1,250.52. Although this is a period loss of £17.00 there has been a deposit of £48 made against 2022 meetings bookings.

We hope that our 2022 programme will be able to commence on 1st April but the committee remains very aware of the threat of the virus and will constantly monitor any risks against the safety of our members. Three interesting talks have been arranged for the year.

Wolverhampton Group – Penny Smith, Chairperson

In common with other groups Wolverhampton was not able to meet until September 2021.

We held our first meetings at the new location in Perton and these have been well attended in spite of covid concerns. Numbers attending have been higher than during the corresponding months of 2019. We also attracted new faces at each of our three meetings and five people have since joined Midland Ancestors.

It is intended that we will promote Midland Ancestors and the Wolverhampton group in the district to try and encourage more members when we can be sure of being able to circulate with the room.

At present there are no arrangements for the group to represent Midland Ancestors at any external events but if opportunities arise these will be considered.

One family history course was run in October at Perton Library and two more are booked for the spring of 2022 but obviously these are dependent upon any Covid restrictions that may be in place at the time. Further courses will be arranged as and when possible.

Kenilworth Group – Lesley Plant, Chairperson

The Kenilworth Group has been running online only meetings since November 2020, having access to the MA Zoom account.

The 2021 programme (published in November 2020 and mostly consisting of postponed talks from 2020) continued to presume that lockdown would end and that there would be a return to in-person meetings, but this was not to be and the Committee maintained constant contact with speakers to confirm whether they would go ahead with an online talk or postpone again, depending on their confidence with Zoom and/or preparedness to share their material. When speakers elected to postpone the Committee either confirmed a new speaker at short-notice or held a 'members' meeting'.

In January 2021 this is precisely what happened, and we had an enjoyable discussion about what research the Kenilworth had been doing through lockdown. In February speaker, Mary Bodfish, chose to give her talk online and *The Baby in the Locket* was again advertised on the MA website and well attended by 57 people. In March the scheduled Members' meeting went ahead with a theme of Censuses, which were on our minds as we prepared to complete the 2021 Census. In April our scheduled speaker opted to postpone, but we were fortunate to book Professor Rebecca Probert to talk about 'Marriage law and practice in the Midlands, 1837-1900' (82 attendees). In May we heard about 'The Blind Postmaster General and the Suffragist' (Henry Fawcett MP and Millicent Garrett Fawcett) from Alan D Godfrey FRPSL (47 attendees). In June, again as a replacement, Paul Millington spoke about 'My Criminal Past', which was actually about that of his ancestor, Edward Millington (47 attendees). In July, which is traditionally our Summer Social, we held a members' meeting with the theme of 'Artists and Entertainers' and members told us stories they have discovered in their family trees. In September John Frearson talked to us about 'Maundy Rodgers: A Doctor Abroad' and we were joined by the subject's descendant (30 attendees) and in October another short-notice speaker that was very successful was Vanessa Morgan who talked about 'A Brummie in the Family' (38 attendees). Sadly, we were forced to cancel our November meeting due to a death in the family of the Committee Member who holds the MA Zoom account license and in December we had a Christmas Social where a member gave a demonstration of using Ancestry DNA.

During 2021 the Committee had a consultation with the group about online -v- in-person meetings and it was agreed that the winter months' meetings would be held online, due to the reluctance of members to drive in the dark, so our 2022 programme began with a continuation of Zoom meetings, with Mary Bodfish returning to talk about 'Beer, Bets and Bull-Baiting', the amusements enjoyed by the 'common man', in January (25 attendees). February brought a fascinating talk about a collection of glass slides discovered belonging to 'Fred Hancox - An exceptional Edwardian amateur Coventry photographer' (37 attendees). March 2022 heralded the second anniversary of our last in-person meeting and brought a return to The Kenilworth Centre for a select few, who had an informal discussion session, including one member who got locked-down in New Zealand and took the opportunity to extend her stay and undertake some family history research on a grave she came across in the far north of North Island, with the help of a member back here!

During 2020 MA Member Jacqui Kirk had provided an excellent newsletter, which sadly ended, so we returned to writing our own newsletter in March 2021, which are now distributed via email on or around the Monday before our monthly meetings.

Like many charities and societies, we have been caught by HSBC introducing charges and fees for use of cash and cheques. We tried to change accounts to Virgin Money as soon as we were notified, but appear to have got lost in their system and we now understand they intend to introduce charges soon, so we are now in the process of moving over to another bank.

Looking forward to the rest of 2022 we are looking forward to finally having a talk from an Heir-Hunter at our April meeting, a subject that has been much postponed since September 2019, welcoming those speakers who were postponed sometimes more than once during the pandemic ('Looking for Answers... a family quest' by John Berkeley OBE [May], 'My Churchley Family: a typical west midlands family?' by Richard Churchley [Jun] and 'Family networks in Elizabethan England' by Dr Cathryn Enis [Oct]). November will see a return to Zoom meetings and we very much look forward to welcoming Dr Nick Barratt to talk about 'Family History and the Media: Behind the scenes of *Who Do You Think You Are?*'. After a difficult two years, the Committee is looking forward to getting back to some semblance of order and will be sharing its news and getting feedback & input on the running of the group from our members at the ABM in May.

Stourbridge Group Midland Ancestors meetings held in 2021

Due to the situation caused by the Covid pandemic, we were unable to meet in person for most of 2021 but we managed to hold two live meetings in October and November both of which were a change from the programme in the yellow book.

On Tuesday 19th October 2021 at St Peter's Church Centre, Pedmore John Billingham, with the aid of slides and maps gave a very interesting talk entitled An Amble Around Worcestershire. John's talk accompanied by a slide show of many familiar places in our old county of Worcestershire was made even more interesting by John referring each time to a map of the county. It was really enjoyable, and we learnt quite a lot. 17 members attended.

On Tuesday 16th November 2021 at St Peter's Church Centre, Pedmore 19 members braved the elements to attend our meeting entitled My Family Heirloom when members were invited to bring in a family heirloom, photograph or interesting article and do a short presentation describing the item. Over half the members attending took to the floor to tell us of their family heirlooms and other interesting stories and we partook of some festive fayre, mulled wine and soft drinks and had the opportunity to chat and catch up with friends, a very successful meeting to end the year.

St Peter's Church held a Christmas Tree Festival which was open to the public for viewing on the 3rd and 4th December 2021. Interested parties were asked to submit a decorated tree depicting their group's interest or their business. Stourbridge Group Midland Ancestors submitted a beautifully decorated tree advertising our group's interests which drew a lot of attention and many 'likes' on a Stourbridge Facebook page.

Several of our members joined the online talks held on Zoom throughout the year and I kept in touch with them via my regular newsletter reminding them of the online meetings and other snippets of news.

Coach Trips & Outings - Phil Lamb

Sadly all coach trips during 2021 have remained "off" due to the Covid 19, Group visits were still not allowed at TNA. As restrictions on movement are now becoming relaxed, providing trippers do not remain nervous, with enough to make the outings viable, we will be able to resume our visits. We can only see what 2022 brings forth.