

General Secretary's Annual Report for 2023- Kim WALKER

Firstly, I would like to say a massive thanks to **all** volunteers who continue to work tirelessly behind the scenes ensuring the Society continues to operate successfully. A special thank-you to those who have retired last year.

Following last year's AGM, the decision to reduce the Quorum of 30, from 50 for an AGM was approved by the Executive Committee and the Constitution amended. Details of the amendment have been sent to the Charity Commission.

We continue to take an active part with the Family History Federation and have also joined the National Council for Voluntary Organisations- a highly regarded body offering advice and guidance to charities.

At the time of writing the report we have a total of 1354 active members residing all over the world, with the numbers steadily increasing again. This may be partly due to Initiatives, not only by attending family new history fairs but in July of 2023 collaborating with The Friends of Warstone Lane Cemetery and Key Hill Cemetery on a very wet Saturday. It created interest in the Midland Ancestors Society and our presence there was repeated during the National Heritage week in September 2023. On the same Saturday we also opened the Family History Centre and received a steady flow of visitors We also promoted the Family History Centre on Armistice Day with thanks to Linda Beilby and Andy Lound appearing in period costume that generated curiosity on Margaret Street.

Part of the Societies ethos is to provide education and so Penny SMITH- Vice-Chair continues to deliver training courses at several locations in the Wolverhampton area. She will be delivering one to the Stourbridge Group. The new committee will shadow her delivery and it's hoped that they will be able to deliver their own future courses. Birmingham will be delivering a training course at the BMI on Saturday 28th September following this year's National Heritage week.

It was felt that Exchange Journals received from other Family History Societies in the U.K and across the world, would be best suited to appearing on the website for all to read under the 'Members Only' area. The site is under construction.

A recent Trustee Skills audit has been completed and the Society will soon be advertising and recruiting a new Trustee to join the current board.

To seek feedback for future sustainability, a comprehensive Members Questionnaire has been developed and will be sent out to all members whether by email or post as required. Results of the survey will be published later in the year.

I continue to Project Manage the Warwickshire Parish Project and I hope that it will be completed this year- seven years in its making. Many thanks and gratitude to all transcribers and checkers who have dipped in and out over the years. A useful online resource providing indexes and original images from the 16th century.

Kim WALKER

Wolverhampton Group Report for year to 31.12.2023

Attendance at Wolverhampton group had been declining during recent years hence part of the reason for moving meeting location from Sedgley to Perton. If this location change had not occurred it is doubtful that Wolverhampton group would have successfully restarted after Covid. The majority of those who were members in the 2010's, and before, have passed away or ceased membership and there are very few at Wolverhampton now who were attending at Sedgley.

Moving location did result in a couple of individuals not continuing membership - e.g. one lady told me that she was no longer doing family history and had only been renewing her membership because she enjoyed the meetings although only attended about one in three of those available.

Our meeting attendance has improved during 2023. The majority of those attending are relatively new to family history research and new members of Midland Ancestors having joined the society following attendance at a family history course which demonstrates that local promotional efforts are encouraging and producing results.

Year	No of Meetings held	Average Attendance	Highest Meeting Attendance	Lowest Meeting Attendance
2014	9	23	29	19
2015	7	20	27	16
2016	9	22	30	15
2017	9	22	26	15
2018	8	19	23	16
2019	8	16	24	10
2020	2	11	12	9
2021	3	17	19	14
2022	8	13	16	9
2023	9	20	26	17

Average attendance comparable with 2014 to 2018

Highest meeting attendance recorded at 30 in 2016. 2023 at 26 is back to levels seen in 2017.

Lowest attendance at a Wolverhampton meeting was 9 pre covid and again at the end of covid in 2022. In 2023 the lowest level of meeting attendance was 17.

Eight family history courses were run by Wolverhampton group during 2023 at Perton, Codsall and Cannock libraries and at Wolverhampton Archives. Five courses are booked so far for the first half of 2024 including at a new location of Bethany Chapel in Wednesfield.

During 2023 Wolverhampton group represented Midland Ancestors at Perton History and Heritage Day in September, Wolverhampton Local History Day held in October at Wolverhampton Archives and Dudley Local History Day at Dudley Archives in November. We have continued to participate at Family History Help Desks at Wolverhampton Archives on a regular basis. We will continue to promote Midland Ancestors at these events during 2024 and consider other opportunities as they arise.

Penny Smith 31st December 2023

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North Staffordshire Group Report 2023

The programme we had for 2023. January no meeting

Feb 6th Research evening

March 6th Talk by Michael Morton "Where's my bag"

April 3rd Research evening

May 8th Talk by David Bardell "Shot at Dawn"

June 5th Talk by David Skillen "5yrs in 50 minutes the American Civil War "

July 3rd Research evening

August no meeting

Sept 4th Talk by Alannah Tomkins "Stafford Infirmary and it's staff from opening 1766 up to 1820 "

Oct 2nd Research evening

Nov 6th Talk by Dianne Shenton "The Hill Pottery Burslem and the Alcock family after bankruptcy 1859"

Dec 4th Social evening and Research

Secretary's Report - Dianne Shenton informed the meeting that the Branch had joined the Staffordshire History Network set up by Stafford Record Office. That allows 2 members from any organisation to each send 2 members each to the quarterly meetings. These meetings are at different points in the County to give different people chance to participate. Bill Harrison and Dianne Shenton had attended the Meeting at the V & A at Wedgwoods in Barlaston and also at the Nicholson Institute in Leek and then Derek Cliffe and Dianne Shenton attended the meeting at Middleport Pottery Stoke on Trent. These meetings give people the opportunity to just spend a couple of minutes saying what their organisation does in the various branches of History. Afterwards there is usually coffee and the chance to talk to the other participants and if appropriate a quick tour of the venue.

The North Staffs Branch had hoped to be visited by the new General Secretary Kim Walker but this had to be cancelled and so far has not been re-arranged.

Dianne Shenton has now been granted access to the programme on the main website but it is also available on the Branch Website which is <http://www.northstaffsfamilyhistory.co.uk/>

Projects nearing completion are Cheddleton Lawn Cemetery and Wetley Rocks; Checkley is finished but needs checking. Also under way are the Carmountside Records but this is a big project and could take some time yet.

It is regrettable that numbers attending meetings have been dropping since covid. We have attempted to generate interest by adding informal "chats" to the research evenings if anyone wants them - we just suggest a topic that a member has a particular interest in and see if anyone else wants to talk about it. e.g. it could be computer programmes for storing information or Will etc.

Treasurer's Report. Derek Cliffe outlined the accounts he had produced at the end of 2023 which have gone to Birmingham. These have a balance of £1581.04 which was a loss of £268.35 on the previous year (£1849. 39.)

Accounts Passed.

Election of Committee.

There were no volunteers or nominations for the committee and the current committee were willing to continue so the current committee was re-elected en-bloc

from Steve Stutcinskas

WestmidlandsBMD after many years without volunteers this last year has resulted in a keen and able volunteer coming forward to help the project. Peter Loach is concentrating on filling the existing gaps in the marriages for the 1920s and 1940 up to an initial cut off point of 1970. Peter supplies the basic data which is then typed up by a typist volunteer in Wiltshire and then the data is uploaded to the website. Good progress is being made but we still hold hopes of finding another volunteers who would act as a liaison person with the West Midlands Registrars

StaffordshireBMD continues to be updated on a monthly basis with the County side of the project being complete for births and deaths . The Stoke-on Trent part of the project is up to the 1980s for births and deaths and has a projected last year of coverage as 2005 currently, though there may be opportunity to continue past that cut off date depending on the registrars view at the time . The outstanding element across both county and Stoke is the later marriages up to the Law change of a few years ago.

All marriage venues were instructed to deposit all their registrars copies with the registrars. A lot have completed this task but there are still a good number who still have registers to submit. Once the registers are received at the various registrars offices we have been indexing them and having those indexes uploaded to the web. The working relationship with the Staffordshire registrars continues to be well received and appreciated. Going forward in the County side of things and while we are awaiting newly submitted marriage registers we are revisiting those sub districts that were the first to be

uploaded way back in the early 2000s. These birth and death records were uploaded from the registrars own computerised RSS system . Over the years RSS data was found not to always reflect the registers content 100% correctly so with our new checking software and a re look at the registers old errors are being corrected on a monthly schedule. This process will continue for the foreseeable future

Dianne Shenton Secretary

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Midland Ancestors London Group Annual Report 2023/2024

The London Group began its twenty fourth year with the Annual Business Meeting. After 15 years in the role of Chair Dave again reiterated his wish to stand down but there was no one forthcoming to assume the responsibility. Dave offered to be elected for one year in the hope that a successor would come forward.

Note that Dave also sits on the Midland Ancestors Executive Committee and has been appointed as a Trustee to the Society. This gives us very close links to all parts of Midland Ancestors.

Margaret Crane continues in the post of Treasurer and Lesley Exton as Secretary. The team continues with Rosemary Fishburn, Brian Gubbins, and Helene Cox has along with a new member in Andy Startin.

The April meeting was with Sharon Hintze who talked about what we should do with all of the data and paper we had collected during our researches. This talk had been requested by members who had these concerns and it went a long way to assisting people sort out their information. In July Kathy Chater talked about insanity and in the afternoon we joined Northumberland's London Group for an interesting talk on "gatekeepers" on turnpike roads. In October Beverley Walker joined us after two cancellations (covid and rail strikes caused cancellations) to talk about Gypsy Ancestors in the West Midlands) and then in January Tim Emblem-English gave a fascinating talk on cine films for family historians.

We have a full programme for 2024 and will include afternoon visits to other nearby places of interest.

At present we are continuing to meet at Wesley's Chapel but with the reopening of the Society of Genealogists we will consider this as an option if it provides a little more flexibility.

The accounts are somewhat different now that we do not have our own bank account and with all funds being help by Central Midland Ancestors. However it is important to understand how much we are costing the group and a notional Profit and Loss Account is maintained. This is provided separately. This shows that this year it cost £302.70 to run the group. We will continue to see "best value" or even free speakers with perhaps just one or two notable and more expensive ones. This will rely somewhat more

on members to come up with ideas and we will be trying this with “An ancestor I would like to meet” in October 2024. It is also important to maintain low overhead costs with room hire and refreshments the only others than we can control. We may have to suggest a higher voluntary donation for attendance, bearing in mind that such donations are entirely voluntary and the same for both members and visitors.

It would be good to increase our attendances as we only average twelve over the past four meetings. Members should encourage friends, relations and other interested researchers to accompany them to meetings. If members belong to other groups in the south-east of England please let that local group have a list of our meetings. We do not want to be the next group to collapse.

I would like to thank all of the committee for their invaluable support and encourage them to keep going. To enable the Chair to “keep going” if no one is willing to take on the role we need to share responsibilities to make the job easier.

Finally, may I thank our members? Without you we would no longer function. Sharon Hintze made an observation when she last spoke to us. She told me, “You don’t really have a society, you have a social group.” I think that is very true and we all look forward to seeing one another at meetings – and thank you for the kind emails that I receive from my “friends”.

David Kerr

Chair, London Group of the Midland Ancestors