



The Black Country Society

Annual General Meeting

Date: 22 March 2023

Time: 7.30 pm

Location: The Court House, New Street, Dudley, DY1 1LP

1. Welcome from the Chair and Apologies

- a. The BCS Chair, Malcolm Dick, gave an over-view of proceedings and indicated he had received apologies from the following committee members: *Chris Baker, Brendan Clifford, Andrew Homer, Emma Purshouse and Tony Ridge*. Apologies were also received from the following BCS members: *David Cattell, Sue Dabner, Roy Donnelly, Barbara French, David Preston, and Ramon Wyre*.
- b. The total number present at the AGM was **56** (54 members and two visitors).

2. Minutes of the previous AGM – 23 March 2022

There were no issues relating to the accuracy of these minutes.

3. Matters Arising from the minutes of the previous AGM

There were no matters arising from the minutes of the AGM held on 23 March 2022.

4. Chairman's Annual Report (Malcolm Dick)

Several reports were delivered in advance of the meeting (by email), and three at the event. All reports are included at the end of this document. Any additional points are included below.

The Chairman paid fulsome tribute to those members of the BCS committee who were standing-down. Keith Hodgkins, Tony Ridge, Simon Briercliffe and Barbara French had given many years of valuable service to the society, and he thanked them for this. Also standing-down was BC President, Marlene Watson. The Chairman gave thanks for her many positive contributions to the society. Moving forward, he also thanked the several new members of the committee, who were helping to maintain and expand the BCS's excellent reputation across the region, and beyond. The Chairman highlighted the financial issues the BCS faced, which necessitated an increase to the various membership fees and the price of visitor admission. He also referred to the quest to find an alternative venue for BCS presentations and called on members with relevant expertise and experience to offer themselves as committee members.

There were no questions relating to the Chairman's Report

5. Treasurer's Annual Report and appointment of Auditors

The Treasurer reiterated the Chairman's observations concerning the state of BCS finances. Whilst the society had healthy sums in its HSBC and Monmouthshire Building Society accounts, it was in fact running a deficit budget – spending more money than it was earning, through events and publications. It was for this reason that the remedial measures (below) had to be approved tonight. The Treasurer stated that she was still not in possession of the 2021 and 2022 accounts but hoped the previous Treasurer would soon make those available.

The BCS auditors nominated were: *ADB Accounts*

There were no questions relating to the Treasurer's Report.

6. Election of Officers and Committee Members

The following new executive committee was elected en bloc, as proposed by Keith Hodgkins and seconded by Kathryn Skelson-Reece:

Dick	<i>Malcolm</i>	Chairman
Robinson	<i>Keith</i>	Vice-Chair
Watt	<i>Quintin</i>	Secretary
Knight	<i>Kathy</i>	Treasurer
Baker	<i>Chris</i>	Digital/Stock Officer
Price	<i>Jack</i>	Membership
Purshouse	<i>Emma</i>	Journal Editor

The following new wider committee was elected en bloc, as proposed by Jack Price and seconded by Quintin Watt:

Galley	<i>Dave</i>	Guided Walks and Visits
McFadyen	<i>George</i>	Digital and Media
Singh	<i>Narinder</i>	Community Development
Skelson-Reece	<i>Kathryn</i>	Raffle
Taylor-Smith	<i>Geoff</i>	Minute Secretary
Asprey	<i>Esther</i>	General Support
Bott	<i>Ian</i>	"
Clifford	<i>Brendan</i>	"
Homer	<i>Andrew</i>	"
Stallard	<i>Matt</i>	"

7. Resolutions: approval sought for the following:

The following resolutions were presented to the membership and voted through unanimously:

- a) Annual subscriptions to the BCS were to be increased to the following amounts from May 2023:
Individual Member - **£20** Couples/Joint Membership - **£25** Organisations/Institutions - **£20**
- b) The cover cost of *The Blackcountryman* was to increase to **£5** from the Summer 2023 edition.
- c) The admission rate for visitors to BCS presentations was to increase to **£4**, from April 2023

8. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

9. The Presidency.

Departing President, Marlene Watson, gave a brief overview of her time in the role, illuminated by printed photographs she showed the members. She said she had enjoyed her time in office and encouraged her successor to make the most of his great opportunity to promote the Black Country through his position as President. The Chairman then introduced the new BCS President, Graham Worton, and thanked him for agreeing to take on this significant role. The new President accepted the position willingly and hoped he would be able to help the society continue its outstanding progress over the forthcoming year.

The AGM concluded at 8.15pm



The Black Country Society

Annual General Meeting

7.30pm, Wednesday 22 March 2023

Annual Reports from Executive Committee Members



Chairman's Report – Dr Malcolm Dick OBE

My first report to the AGM as Chairman of the Black Country Society was in 2021. Despite the problems posed by lockdown we continued to publish four issues of our flagship publication, *The Blackcountryman*, and reinstate a programme of talks and walks. We now have online presentations as well as in-person events and we are producing occasional films. Our website and social media presence have been enhanced and we are selling more publications – we have many in store. I can justifiably claim that our services to members, both new and old have improved.

Much has been achieved by our dedicated and inspirational committee members. Most have joined in the last two years which has meant that we have enhanced our administrative, financial, technical and marketing skills and broadened the committee's age profile and breadth of representation across the region. I acknowledge their commitment, support and contribution.

We are saying farewell to a number of people who have served on the committee. These include Keith Hodgkins, whose knowledge of Black Country history and archaeology and the origins of the society is considerable; Tony Ridge, who served as a highly successful Membership Secretary and provided wise insights at committee meetings; Barbara French who ably sustained our important Facebook presence over many years and Dr Simon Briercliffe whose contributions to recent Black Country history and heritage and publications have been great. Finally, our president, Marlene Watson, is retiring after a lengthy period of office. Marlene's knowledge of popular culture, wonderful sense of humour and entertaining President's Evenings have been appreciated and enjoyed by members. I know that Keith, Tony, Barbara, Simon and Marlene will continue to support the Society in the future.

The BCS is in a very strong position but given the increasing costs of printing and postage we have to raise our membership fees. Our fees are low compared to similar societies and the costs of producing *The Blackcountryman* are increasing notably. We are proposing that we increase individual membership to £20 pa and joint membership to £25 pa. We are also proposing increasing the fee for non-members to attend our events to £4 per person to help cover the costs of the venue. The Committee is also looking at securing a new location for our in-person meetings. The Old Courthouse in Dudley has served us well, but we need a room which has easier access for those with disabilities, contains suitable technical facilities and can cope with large numbers of attendees.

Finally, we need to continue to grow as a society and bring new people with relevant expertise and experience onto the Committee. Please encourage your friends and associates to join the BCS and if you have an interest in serving on the Committee, please let me know. Thank you for your support.

Malcolm Dick: m.m.dick@bham.ac.uk

Treasurer's Report – Kathy Knight

It was about this time last year that I applied for the position of treasurer with the Black Country Society. I was unaware at the time that the society had sadly lost Brian Ridout who was a pivotal figure in the society.

I think that I can say without causing offence that this caused some real difficulties within the society. To add to this my predecessor wanted to withdraw from his role as Treasurer which is where I came in. A substantial amount of work has been undertaken this year by members of the committee to overcome these difficulties but there is much more to do and going forward I will also be implementing different administration procedures

To date I have encountered some difficulties which were beyond my control in being able to take over absolutely all the primary functions that is required for me to fully carry out my role as treasurer. However, I am now in receipt of the 2021 accounts which show that as in previous accounts the society appears to be running at a loss. To date I am not in possession of the 2022 accounts, however I am positive that these accounts will also show a loss as it was apparent to me within a very short time of taking over the role of treasurer that expenditure exceeded our income.

The current membership offers great value for money as well as members receiving a good quality magazine every quarter. However, we have rising printing and postage costs and therefore after deliberation it was decided that to maintain the society's viability it would be necessary to increase the membership cost to £20 single membership and £25 for joint membership. Our magazine sold in outlets will now also be increased from £4.50p to £5.00p.

Although as I stated previously I am not in possession of the 2022 accounts I am able to advise you of our bank and building society balances. I have to point out that the building society account is £4,000 less than what I have been reporting to committee due to initially being in receipt of incorrect information. The HSBC current account stands at £16,808 and the Monmouth Building Society account stands at £15,592 making a total of £32,400.

I can report that the society was very fortunate in receiving a legacy several months ago which not only made our bank balance look healthier but also now gives the opportunity to invest in the ambitions and future of the society.

I would like to thank our chairman and fellow committee members for their continued support.

The firm of auditors to be appointed are: *ADB Accounts*

The Blackcountryman Editor's Report – Emma Purshouse

Since coming into post I have edited 3 editions. The first was a real learning curve! Having got to grips with the amount of work to create a good magazine, I feel measures have been put in place to work in line with the Society's aims as follows.

- Actively engaging people to write articles which reflect the diversity of the region.
- Actively working to engage younger writers.
- Actively working to increase the number of articles submitted so that there is a wider pool of work to choose from.
- Actively working on increasing subscriptions by offering contributor's copies to non-members. This seems to have encouraged new people to join the society.
- Actively working to improve the distribution system of magazines to retail outlets. We now have magazines for sale in Willenhall, Wednesbury, Walsall, Wordsley, and West Bromwich as well as our traditional outlets. I'm currently working on getting a retailer in Wolverhampton.

The above work is ongoing.

I have also taken the following practical steps for the benefit of the magazine:

- The engagement of a proof reader to improve the quality of the magazine.
- Created an outline of the role of the Editor and the work required.

I'm fully in support of the recommendations made in the Treasurer's report with regard to increasing the membership fees and the cover price of the magazine to insure that the publication continues to be viable and flourish.

Magazine issues to be resolved:

- We are in need of more advertisers as we have lost two.
- We also need to agree a coherent set of advertising fees.

Membership Secretary's Report – Jack Price

As of the 2nd March, 2023 – the date on which this report was compiled – the membership of the Black Country Society stands at a total of 1,209 members. This includes 746 single and organisational memberships, 219 joint memberships (accounting for 438 members), and our 25 abroad members. Since the beginning of last March, before the previous annual general meeting, we have had a total of 91 new members join the Society, with members coming from different backgrounds, areas of the world, and with a varying and wide range of interests and knowledge.

I am pleased to report that we have received more applications for membership than we have had members cease to remain with the Society, whether for specific reasons or because of their passing. I will, however, ask the members to forgive me for not reporting on how many members we have lost. I do not feel I am confidently able to say how many this is, due to the fact it often takes some time before we discover a member is no longer able to continue as such (for various reasons).

Still, our members come from across the British Isles and further afield. Naturally, the majority of our membership is still located in the Black Country and the region's immediate surrounds, but we do have members from across the country and, indeed, from locations abroad, including France, Hong Kong, New Zealand, and Canada. It also brings me pleasure to say that we have a number of increasing membership applications from individuals located in the boroughs of Wolverhampton and Walsall; though I understand there will be many among us who consider the present borough of Dudley to be the "true" Black Country, we have among our aims as a Society the promotion of interest in the four metropolitan boroughs and the preservation of their heritage and history.

Despite the fact our membership figures are healthy and continue to increase, I will once again implore all members to invite family, friends, partners, colleagues, and others who they know that may have an interest in the Black Country to pick up a copy of *The Blackcountryman* or peruse the website and, if it tickles their fancy, to apply for membership. With the COVID-19 pandemic all but a distant memory now (depending on who you ask, of course), the sweep of our many events and the contents of the magazine is widening and increasing, so with each passing month there is surely something for anybody with even a remote interest.

As with last year, I would like to close with thanks. Firstly, once again, to my predecessor Tony Ridge for continuing to support me and to check in on me when he can. Secondly, to the wider committee, not only for their support and advice when needed, but also for putting up with me; with work at the Black Country Living Museum being a surprisingly demanding and certainly exhausting job, I am glad to know there are colleagues on the committee who are there to hold the fort and do their utmost to help me. And finally, most importantly perhaps, thanks is due to our members, for continuing to support the Society, for flying the flag of the Black Country (if you will), and for still making each event I attend warm and welcoming. The work of the Society is, if anything, a team effort, and each and every member has their own role to play in that. In the words of the inimitable Winston Churchill – "*Let Us Go Forward Together.*"

Digital Team Report 2022-23 – Professor Chris Baker

Web site

- The web site has been generally de-cluttered and tidied up and, hopefully, made easier to navigate.
- The domain name and web site ownership have been secured after a very tortuous process.
- A searchable index to back copies of the *Blackcountryman* has been implemented.
- A page of committee member profiles has been added.
- The Resources and People pages have been extensively restructured.
- A blog page has been added and to date 40 posts have been published with an average readership of around 44 for each
- Some changes have been made to the Shop page to give the Shop manager more control over the ordering process. The facility for charging postage has been added, and a number of special offers of book bundles are now available.
- Membership applications made through the web site have been much streamlined and online applications have increased.
- In 2022 there were 1829 unique visitors to the site, 3041 website sessions and 11.247 page views. There were 2841 website redirections from Google from the UK, 60 from the USA, 30 from Australia and 29 from Germany.

Social media

- The Facebook page and Twitter feed are used to post notices of meetings, publicise blog posts and share information with other societies.
- At the end of 2022 the Facebook page had 2877 followers and there were 9100 post views in the final three months of the year, with 473 positive engagements. The followers come mainly from the locality, but with a small number from elsewhere in the UK and around the world. The age profile of followers is very flat from age 35 upwards, with an even gender mix. The number of followers below the age of 35 is small.
- The Twitter feed has over 307 followers at the end of 2022 (and by late February 2023 this figure was over 360). In the last three months of 2022 there were 19890 views of tweets, 2777 profile visits, and an engagement rate of between 5 and 12%. The most popular Tweets are from the "On this day" series curated by Jack Price.
- The YouTube channel has 28 subscribers and 300 views to date. Further developments are under consideration.

Virtual Heritage Group

The Virtual Heritage Group has been set up to keep in touch with members outside the Black country and also with those who find the normal meetings difficult to access. The two meetings to date in February and March, both of which have been online talks, have attracted 20 and 40 participants and seem to have been appreciated. The video recording of the first meeting on the website has also attracted 28 views by the end of February. Future meetings include an open meeting for participants to talk about their Black Country memories, a further talk and a Black Country History quiz. A review of the activities of the group will be held in the summer.