

Black Country Society Annual General Meeting 2021

Chairman's Report: Dr Malcolm Dick OBE

I am privileged to serve as Chairman of the Black Country Society. Given that we could not hold our 2020 AGM because of lockdown I am pleased, alongside other members of the committee, to submit myself for election by members for the first time. I am conscious that I am a successor to a number of eminent chairmen, who have left an impact on the Society. I am especially grateful to my immediate predecessor, John Woodhall and Judith Watkin who served as Secretary for very many years, for inviting me to become Chairman in the first instance and for guiding me through the responsibilities and challenges of the role.

I am a teacher and historian. Formerly I taught at Rowley Regis College, and currently I work at the University of Birmingham as Director of the Centre for West Midlands History. I was not born in the Black Country, but in nearby Lichfield, however, I have lived locally in Rowley Regis, for most of my life. I especially want to encourage research into the history and heritage of the region in its different dimensions and increase knowledge of the region both inside and outside the Black Country.

Since becoming Chairman, it has not been possible to meet face-to-face in public, but as a committee we have been conducting business on online. Our focal points are to maintain and enhance the offering to members via our magazine, website and communications, make certain that publications continue to be sold and distributed, and ensure that our finances are in order. We also need to make sure that our membership subscriptions enable us to meet our commitments and our administration is effective and efficient. I am delighted that many committee members – as their reports show – have actively and successfully contributed to the vitality of the BCS in these difficult times.

I am conscious that the success and continued relevance of the BCS depends on many things. It is essential to continue catering for the aspirations of our members and, especially, we must return to a programme of events once lockdown ends. I hope to be able to make some announcements about these at the AGM to include informal entertainment evenings, talks, day schools, walks and book launches. We are also working with other organisations – too many to list in a simple report – to take the aims of the BCS forward. It is vital to encourage research into the history and culture of the Black Country – industry and skills, women's history, dialect and the arts and literature, to name a few. The BCS itself has a rich history and we need to record and preserve our own history. One essential way forward is to increase our membership, particularly by recruiting more young people, women and individuals from the Black Country's diverse communities.

If, over the next few years, I see the Black Country Society broadening its activities and engaging with the present and the future as well as the past, I will feel that we are safeguarding our presence in the twenty-first century.