

THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY BIRMINGHAM & WEST MIDLANDS

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2019

The Victorian Society is the charity championing Victorian and Edwardian buildings in England and Wales. Our Conservation Advisers help local planning authorities and churches to make better decisions about adapting Victorian and Edwardian buildings to the way we live now, while keeping what is special about them. We also seek to engage the public in our campaigns to help increase the likelihood of conserving buildings.

The Birmingham and West Midlands Group was 53 years old on 19th January 2020. Throughout the year we held many events, which you will see listed in the Programme Committee report on page 4.

Our period is defined as 1837 to 1914 and our casework area covers the West Midlands Metropolitan Area: Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall, Wolverhampton; Warwick District including Leamington; Redditch and Bromsgrove; although our membership base takes in parts of Staffordshire, Shropshire, Worcestershire, Warwickshire and Herefordshire; which is more akin to the Government's West Midlands region.

Our casework activities combined with the educational programme, provided by our events, are the tools for championing and protecting buildings at risk.

GROUP EXECUTIVE

I would like to thank the Executive Committee for all their work in 2019. They are Barbara Shackley (Vice Chairman); Joe Holyoak (Vice Chairman); James Fletcher (Treasurer & Minutes Secretary); Mary Worsfold (Honorary Secretary); Nina Hatch (Programme Secretary); Andy Foster, Jasna Jaksic, Eva Ling and Gill Sockett. Mary Worsfold has completed nine years as Honorary Secretary (three terms of office) and is not seeking re-election for a fourth term, so she will be standing down this year as

Honorary Secretary, but remaining on the Executive Committee. So, a very big thank you to Mary for her hard work over the past nine years.

CASEWORK

Our Conservation Adviser, Tim Bridges, is paid for by the Mary Heath Trust, a bequest made to the Society for the benefit of the Birmingham & West Midlands Group. The Regional group Executive made a decision a few years ago to recommend to the Trustees of the Trust that we focus funds from the Trust on this important area. The Trust has, however, made an exception this year and has contributed £6,500 towards the photographs for the new West Midlands Pevsner, which is due for imminent publication and is authored by Andy Foster.

Tim receives notifications from Local Authorities on listed buildings and those in Conservation Areas. Sometimes he discovers these matters himself, in the absence of any notifications from Local Authorities and he is assisted by an able team of voluntary caseworkers. Tim has done very well in expanding our influence and now has regular meetings with many of the Conservation Officers across the West Midlands, except for Birmingham where that previous arrangement has been prohibited by the officers' superiors and which is something I will write to Birmingham City Council about.

Joe Holyoak chairs the Casework Committee and along with Tim they are assisted by the voluntary caseworkers, who are Rob Allan (Sandwell); Andy Foster (churches); Jennie McGregor-Smith (Bromsgrove); Gillian Roberts (Wolverhampton); Barbara Shackley (Solihull); Richard Bullows, Jasna Jaksic; Eva Ling; David Low, Alex Read, Matthew Vaughan and Mary Worsfold. Additionally, Angus Kaye represents the Society on Warwick DC Conservation Advisory Forum.

I extend my thanks to them for giving their time and knowledge freely, for the good of the Society.

Looking at a few cases during 2020, some significant cases are as follows:

- **The Children's Hospital, Birmingham**

We were successful in getting the building listed at Grade II, which is an

important achievement as they hospital is due for re-location and the site earmarked by development.

- **6 Norfolk Road, Edgbaston**

We made clear our opposition to proposals for demolition of this unlisted house of c1870, and its replacement with new houses and apartments. The development then proposed included the retention and conversion of the house.

- **St Thomas, Dudley**

We have been involved in the project here as stakeholders from an early stage and whilst we accepted the need for the removal of the Victorian pews from this fine grade II* church of 1819, we hope that alterations have helped secure its future as a 'Resourcing Church'. Other key fittings notably the font, pulpit, reredos are to be retained.

- **Dudley Portersfield (Bus Station)**

We objected to the massing of the proposed development opposite the Roman Catholic Church of 1840 by Pugin, and are pleased that the scale of the new buildings is being significantly reduced in revised plans.

- **Wednesbury Heritage Action Zone**

We supported Sandwell Council's successful application for funding and hope this will lead to improvements to the neglected historic buildings in the town centre. We were pleased to learn of a similar scheme to create a Heritage Action Zone in Brierley Hill, Dudley, and will be involved in helping to save unlisted but historic buildings in the town.

- **The Anchorage, Handsworth Wood**

We were quick to alert the conservation officer to the recent sale of this beautiful grade II* listed house of 1898 by Crouch and Butler in Handsworth Wood, and pleased that action seems to have been taken to keep the property secure during transition. We hope to maintain contact with the new owners, who have sought our views on redecoration.

- **St Philip, Dorridge.**

Whilst we remain dismayed at the demolition of this unlisted church of 1878 by E.J. Payne with a chancel of 1897 by J.A.Chatwin, we have been pleased at the thorough approach by the parish and Diocese to the reuse and relocation of artefacts from the church. The east window and reredos from Chatwin's chancel will form a centre piece to the new church.

So, a big thank you to Joe, Tim and the casework team for their noble efforts.

PROGRAMME

Our Programme Committee, ably led by Programme Secretary Nina Hatch, comprises Mary Collins, Eva Ling, David Low, Celia Potts, Helene Pursey, Gill Sockett and Barbara Shackley. Over the year it has provided a varied, enjoyable and interesting schedule of events, as follows:

- 20th January: Annual Lunch at Edgbaston Golf Club
- 9th February: Regional AGM at the Birmingham & Midland Institute;
Casework Review and announcement of the 2018 Conservation Award Winner
- 6th April: Burne-Jones Day School
- 20th July: Edgbaston Archery & Lawn Tennis Society Visit
- 31st August: Kidderminster Town Visit
- 12th October: Herefordshire Churches Tour
- 9th November: Visit to Winterbourne House & Gardens

Whilst all of the events may be considered a success, of particular note must be the Burne-Jones Day School. Due to the success of the day, we were able to give a donation to the Divine Beauty project to restore the windows. This was initially £2,000, but this was increased by a further £600 later on, once all accounts for the Day School had been settled. This kickstart to the fund-raising would have helped the Cathedral's National Lottery Heritage Fund Application and this was confirmed to have been successful by the Cathedral's Heritage Manager. It will allow the cathedral to develop the project, appoint relevant consultants, fundraise further and make an application for the full delivery costs at a later date.

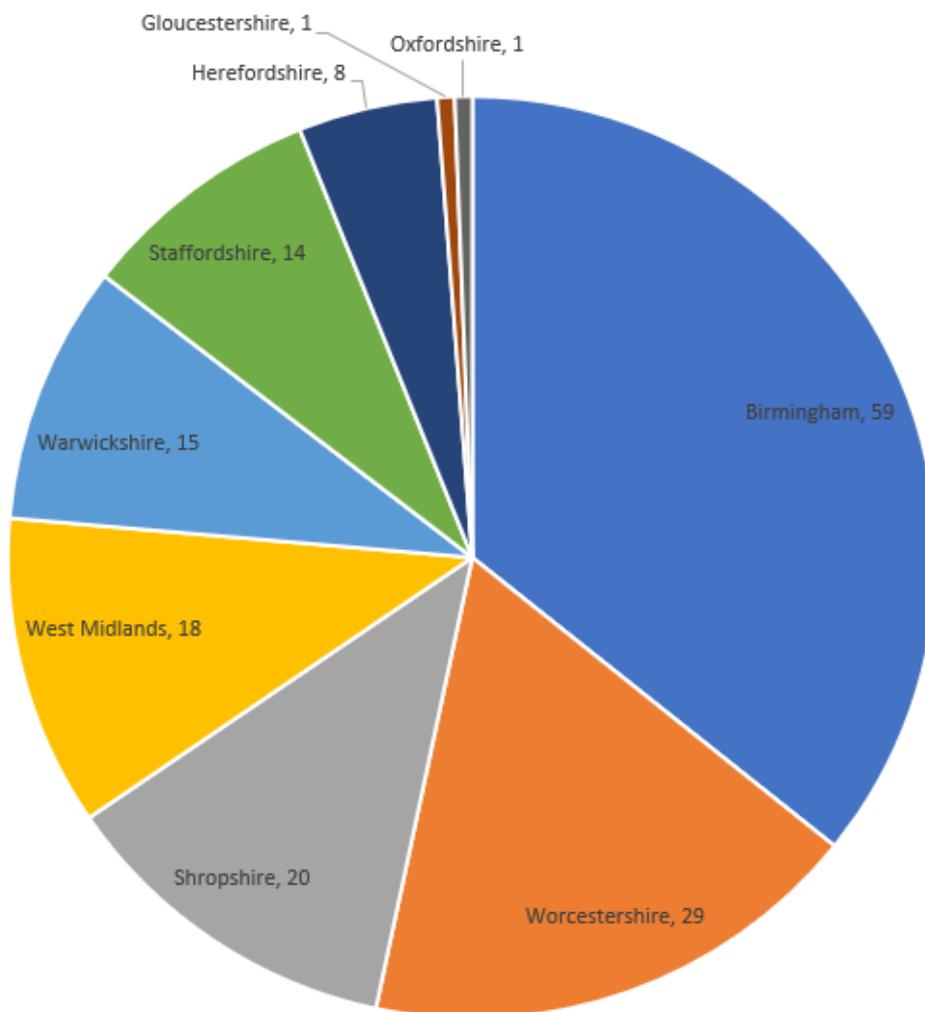
Thank you to all those who support our events, as this allows us to raise funds to maintain the work of the Society in the region.

MEMBERSHIP

Our membership remains constant and it is important that our members support our events and that we keep them informed of the work we are doing. This is achieved by regular mailings from Helene Pursey, who updates Members with the latest events. This is done, where possible by e-mail, as it saves a large amount of money by not having to print, post and pay for postage. Members are encouraged to supply their e-mail address to Helene to assist in this process.

As to actual Membership figures, the current “memberships” in our region amounts to 165. This does not reflect the actual number of members, as some are single memberships, some are Joint (2) and some are Household memberships (3+). This figure remains fairly consistent and it is encouraging that it is so, although it must be noted that future membership presents a challenge, as younger people do not tend to subscribe to Societies, but rather follow them on Twitter or Facebook (see Social Media Section below)

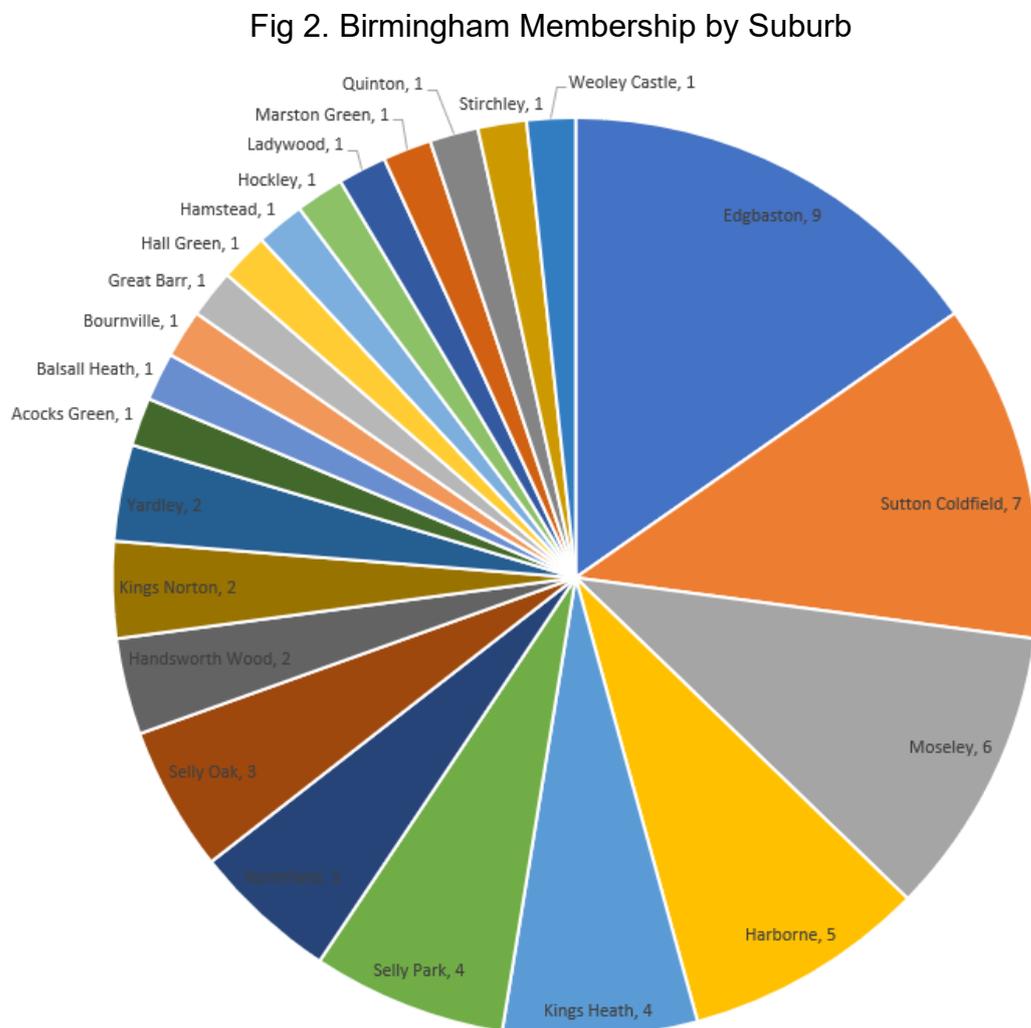
Fig 1. Membership spread by Birmingham & Counties



As can be seen in Fig 1. 36% of our Membership is in Birmingham, whilst the remaining Memberships are spread roughly across Worcestershire, Staffordshire, West Midlands, Warwickshire and Staffordshire, but with some memberships in Herefordshire, Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire. This latter three are outside of our

usual area, but will be members who have requested to be aligned to the West Midlands group.

Examination of Fig 2, reveals the split of members between suburbs in Birmingham. Edgbaston, Sutton Coldfield and Moseley are the largest membership concentrations, but with Harborne, King's Heath and Selly Park putting in a good challenge.



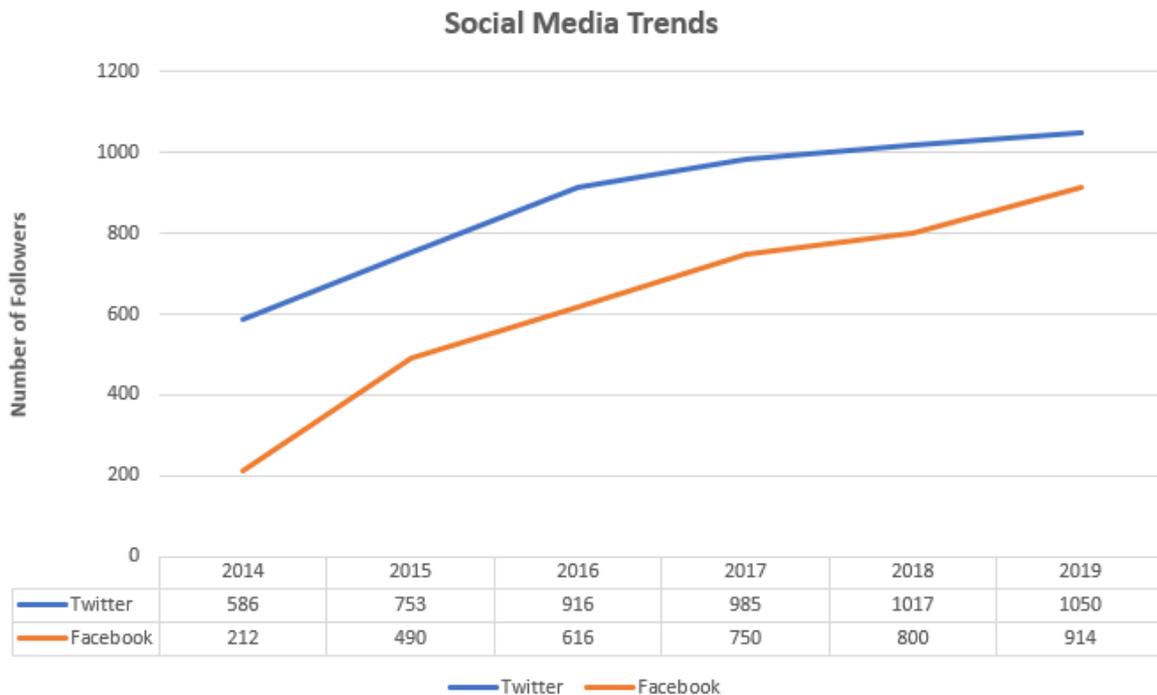
As members of the Society, I would encourage you to try to get your friends and family to join us, or even buy them Gift Membership, which is easily accessible on the Society's website.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Fewer people are joining Societies, choosing instead to subscribe to feeds in Facebook, Twitter and other social media. We often post updates on Facebook and Twitter and currently we have 1,050 followers on Twitter (1017 in 2017, 985 in 2017,

916 in 2016, 753 in 2015, 586 in 2014) and 914 followers on our Facebook page (800 in 2018, 750 in 2017, 616 in 2016, 490 in 2015, 212 in 2014). It is therefore vital that we continue to share our message through these media.

Fig 3.



There is a lot of interest and interaction in both these mediums and often you can see posts that have been shared and re-shared to this online media community which goes into the thousands. So, it is very important in maintaining this presence, where there are many users in their twenties and thirties and as such may be the emerging members of the future.

TREASURY

Our Treasurer, James Fletcher, will discuss the accounts further, and you will see that all of the events organized by the Programme Committee have contributed a sizeable sum to our bank balance, increasingly through the highly successful Day Schools. This is important, as it is the only way we generate income for the Regional group and would have helped pay for the Conservation Award, had Hortons' Estate Ltd not agreed to fund the Awards 2017-18 and to renew that sponsorship for 2019-21; so attendance at events is critical to the success of the regional group.

CONSERVATION AWARD

The Group's Conservation Award was inaugurated at our 2015 AGM. The purpose of the award is to draw attention to the high quality conservation work done by architects and other groups across the region. The winner of the 2018 award was West Midlands Historic Buildings Trust for their restoration of the Thomas Pearson Building (formerly Lye & Wollescote Cemetery Chapels). Previous winners are:

- 2015 - Hortons' Estate Limited for the restoration and conservation of the façade of The Grand Hotel, Birmingham (which re-opens in the summer of 2020)
- 2016 - Dudley Council for the restoration and conservation of the Dudley Fountain
- 2017 - The Trustees of Green Lane Masjid & Community Centre for the restoration of Green Lane Masjid & Community Centre, Small Heath, Birmingham



**The Presentation of the 2018 Conservation Award at the Thomas Pearson Building
8th May 2019**

Additionally, this year, the Patron of The Victorian Society, HRH The Duke of Gloucester came along to unveil the bronze plaque and this was done on 29th October 2019. It was a delight for all concerned, that the Duke was able to meet volunteers from the West Midlands group and have lunch with us, before carrying out the official unveiling.

Hortons' Estate Limited is sponsoring the Award for the next three years, until 2021 and I am delighted to record my thanks once again for their commitment to the idea of rewarding good quality conservation and for their generosity.

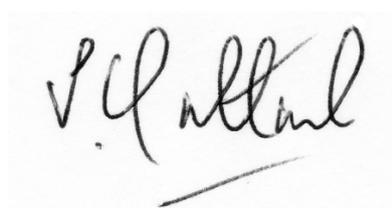
The winner of the 2019 Award will be announced at the 2020 AGM.

SUMMARY & THANKS

Thanks to all of volunteers who gave their time in 2019. The ongoing success of our region, and indeed the Society as a whole, is due to our committed volunteers, our supportive members, and also to the dedication and enthusiasm of our paid Conservation Adviser.

At last year's Annual General Meeting, the proceedings were concluded by our Vice Chairman, Joe Holyoak, presenting me with a mahogany gavel to mark my 10 years as Regional Chairman. So, my thanks, once again, to the Executive Committee who kindly chose to commemorate the anniversary.

One final thing; word reached me on Friday 7th February, that our Director, Christopher Costelloe had resigned and he will step down when a successor is in place (at least 3 months away). Chris feels it is the right time to move on, especially with the move back to Priory Gardens now complete. I am sure I am speaking for all our regional officers, volunteers and members in thanking Chris for all his work over the past decade and wish him well in his future endeavours.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Hartland', with a horizontal line underneath.

Stephen Hartland
Chairman
The Victorian Society
Birmingham & West Midlands

8th February 2020