

# CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2024

## West Midlands Regional Executive Committee

Chairman	Stephen Hartland
Vice Chairman	Joe Holyoak
Honorary Treasurer	James Fletcher
Honorary Secretary	Dr Jake Scott (to August) Akil Dowe (from August)
Programme Secretary	Nina Hatch
Committee:	Mark Bench (from August) Andy Foster Jasna Jaksic Eva Ling Helene Pursey Gill Sockett

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# CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2024

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 Society's formal objects are to:

- Awaken public interest in and appreciation of the best of Victorian and Edwardian arts, architecture, crafts and design;
- Encourage the study of these and related social history and advise owners and public authorities on the preservation and repair of Victorian and Edwardian buildings and the uses to which they can, if necessary, be adapted;
- Save from needless destruction or disfigurement Victorian and Edwardian buildings or groups of buildings of special architectural merit including promoting the inherent sustainability of the repair and reuse of historic buildings.

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.

The Birmingham and West Midlands Group was 56 years old on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2023.

## REGIONAL EXECUTIVE

I would like to thank the Executive Committee for all their work in 2023. They are Joe Holyoak (Vice Chairman); James Fletcher (Treasurer & Minutes Secretary); Jake Scott (Honorary Secretary to August); Akil Dowe (Honorary Secretary from August); Nina Hatch (Programme Secretary); Mark Bench, Andy Foster, Jasna Jaksic, Eva Ling and Gill Sockett. Especial congratulations to James this year, as he achieves 20 years as our Honorary Treasurer – well done!

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## 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 decided a few years ago to recommend to the Trustees that we focus funds from the Trust on this important area.

Tim receives notifications from Local Authorities and Ecclesiastical organisations on works to listed buildings and those in Conservation Areas, although this is more consistent in some authorities than others, nonetheless Tim strives to improve this in those areas. This means that he sometimes discovers these matters himself, in the absence of any notifications 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, and Inspectors from Historic England.

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); Barbara Shackley (Solihull); Jasna Jaksic, Eva Ling, David Low, Matthew Vaughan and Mary Worsfold. Additionally, Angus Kaye represents the Society on Warwick DC Conservation Advisory Forum. Gillian Roberts re-joined the committee during the year, with responsibility for Wolverhampton.

During the year we introduced a defined Terms of Reference for the committee, with input from Priory Gardens, so that there is a clear statement of what the committee is here to do. This will help any prospective members who might wish to join the team.

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 2023, some significant cases are as follows:

### **Some Positives**

We have had some further successes this year in getting buildings listed as nationally significant by Historic England, notably **Tettenhall Court, Wolverhampton**, a fine

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house mainly of 1913 by William Weller, and **St Mary, Bearwood**, a church of 1888 by J.A.Chatwin (though the pews are still likely to be removed and the halls of 1897 were excluded from the listing). Both have been listed at Grade II. We have been informed by Historic England that Birmingham and the Black Country are currently special priority areas for listing, which means that applications for buildings to be added to the List can be submitted without having to specify a threat. This is welcome news, and we are identifying priority buildings for submission.

We were consulted on a regeneration and conservation project for **West Bromwich Town Hall**, Grade II listed of 1875, by Alexander and Henman, and had no objection as is often the case with well-considered projects where we sometimes comment on details. Similarly, we were pleased that proposals were approved for the sensitive conversion of the long derelict **Kenrick & Jefferson Building**, also in West Bromwich Conservation Area, and Grade II of 1883 by Wood and Kendrick.

Whilst the long-awaited extensive project to restore and reorder the Grade II\* listed **Moseley Road Baths** of 1906-7 by William Hale and **Library** of 1895 by Cossins and Peacock is of course a positive in overall terms for this building that has twice been on our Top Ten Threatened Buildings list, we raised concerns about the level of alteration particularly to the sets of slipper baths with the creation of a café and the making of internal access to the library, as well as the changes within the library and the works on the gala and second class pools themselves. These changes have now been granted consent.

We objected to an application for the total demolition of the unlisted **Smethwick Enterprise Centre**, the former corporation yard and fire station mainly of 1909-10 by C.J. Fox Allin, which form a prominent group of buildings in the Summit Galton Valley Conservation Area, particularly as there were no definite proposals for a replacement development – a requirement for such applications in conservation areas. It is positive that the application for demolition has been withdrawn for now, but unfortunately it seems likely to reappear once new proposals have been drawn up.

## Some Negatives

Although it is just outside our casework area and indeed earlier than our period, the tragic destruction of **The Crooked House** in Himley in August has had a profound effect on historic buildings casework across the country. However, a change in

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legislation to help better protect locally significant historic buildings and those under consideration for listing would be positive outcomes.

Earlier in the year we accompanied the Conservation Officer on a site visit to the **Waterloo Hotel**, Cape Hill, Sandwell. This Grade II\* building of 1907 by Wood and Kendrick with magnificent, tiled interiors has been on our list of Top Ten Threatened Buildings and remains on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register. We were shocked at the building's condition and the woeful lack of security, and after we wrote letters to Sandwell Council some enforcement action has been taken, but a positive long-term solution to the plight of this building still seems distant.

Similarly, we visited **St Luke's Church, Wolverhampton** with the Conservation Officer, and Historic England Inspector in November. This has also been on our list of Top Ten Threatened Buildings and remains on the Heritage at Risk Register. Since the closure last year of the antiques emporium in the church, it has been sold and is to return to being a place of worship. This should be positive, though we have yet to see definite plans for alterations. However, the damage from neglect and vandalism of the building in the meantime has been deplorable, and whilst this is currently being addressed by the authorities, these unwelcome developments are certainly negative.

After years of concern for the future of **Darlington Street Methodist Church** of 1900-1 by Arthur Marshall, also in Wolverhampton, another previous Top Ten Threatened Building and on the Heritage At Risk Register, a new owner with plans to use the Grade II\* listed building as a wedding venue is positive in so far as the building is being repaired and secured for the future. However, we objected to internal changes to the church, including the removal of pews and gallery seating and alterations to the rostrum, but these proposed changes were given approval, and we continue to urge careful monitoring by the authorities of consented works.

**St Clement, Stuart Street, Nechells** was largely demolished in 1977, but the porch and south wall of the nave from J.A.Chatwin's first church, along with the church hall of 1887 by William Jenkins, were incorporated into a 20<sup>th</sup> century housing scheme. We objected to proposals to rebuild the structures on the site of the church and demolish the hall aside from its façades, but this has been granted consent. However, it may be that our earlier comments on the significance of Chatwin's work prevented proposals for the total demolition of these historic structures.

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We objected to proposals for the almost complete demolition of the unlisted **City Hospital, Dudley Road**, leaving just the front range of the Infirmary by W.H. Ward to be included in a residential redevelopment of the site. We felt that many of the other buildings on the site, notably the former Workhouse Boys School of 1869-70 by Martin and Chamberlain, had the potential for conversion, and although consent has been granted, the hospital is still functioning, so we are looking at the possible listing of some of the buildings.

We were pleased when **Birmingham Children's Hospital** of 1894-7 by Henman and Cooper with its fine terracotta work was listed Grade II in 2019. However, we have objected to plans for a new front entrance and a large extension on Loveday Street, but are disappointed that consent has been given.

Finally, amongst several applications for tall buildings in Birmingham that have been given permission this year, we objected to the proposals for a 47-storey tower at **90-97 Broad Street** next to the former Lying-In Hospital of 1815, but with work by J.J. Bateman of 1863 and boundary railings of 1869 by Martin and Chamberlain, and the former Bank at 78-9 Broad Street of 1898 by C.E. Bateman. Both these buildings are Grade II listed and both will be increasingly vulnerable in the shadow of yet more very tall structures.

Thanks to Joe, Tim and the casework team for their ongoing dedication and work.

## PROGRAMME

Our Programme Committee, led by Programme Secretary Nina Hatch, comprises Mary Collins, Eva Ling, David Low, Celia Potts, Helene Pursey, Gill Sockett and Barbara Shackley.

Like the Casework Committee, defined Terms of Reference for the committee were created during the year which are now in place. There was some reluctance to have a financial target set for the committee, but I am happy to say – and congratulate the team – that this target was easily exceeded.

Discussions during the year about a Refund Policy culminated in an agreement of wording and this will be implemented for all 2024 bookings.

Events organised during the year are listed below:

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- ◆ 14<sup>th</sup> January            New Year lunch at Severn Street Masonic Hall
- ◆ 11<sup>th</sup> February            AGM & Casework Review
- ◆ 11<sup>th</sup> March                A visit to the West Midlands Police Museum
- ◆ 18<sup>th</sup> & 26<sup>th</sup> April        Visits to the Dreadnought Works, Dudley
- ◆ 25<sup>th</sup> May                 A visit to Churches in the Forest of Arden
- ◆ 8<sup>th</sup> July                  Victorian Open Day at Sandfields Pumping Station
- ◆ 12<sup>th</sup> July                 A coach visit to Stoke-on-Trent
- ◆ 5<sup>th</sup> August                A guided visit to Moseley Road, Birmingham
- ◆ 24<sup>th</sup> October             A visit to Great Malvern and Malvern College
- ◆ 28<sup>th</sup> October            A Day School on Victorian & Edwardian Architects working in Birmingham and the West Midlands

## REGIONAL GROUPS

Priory Gardens organises regular regional groups days and this year's was once again a virtual one, held on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2023, which was attended by Nina Hatch and me. It is a very useful forum, where the regions can share their ideas, problems and seek solutions from each other. As a result of this group, there is now a Regional Events Committee, which meets regularly online, to share experiences and help each other.

## MEMBERSHIP

Year on year our membership remains constant, and it is important that our members support our events.

As to actual membership figures, the current "memberships" in our region amount to 173 which is following a full report on paid-up memberships. These memberships will be single, joint and household (3+) and so the number of people will be much greater. We have welcomed five new members during 2023, who are: Emily Callen, Jon Colton, Rosalyn Hatfield, Suzanne Hope, and Sally Bigwood.

The Society has an initiative to welcome younger people to the organisation, called *Young Victorians*. They must be under 35 and they enjoy reduced membership rates and the option to pay subscriptions monthly, rather than all in one.

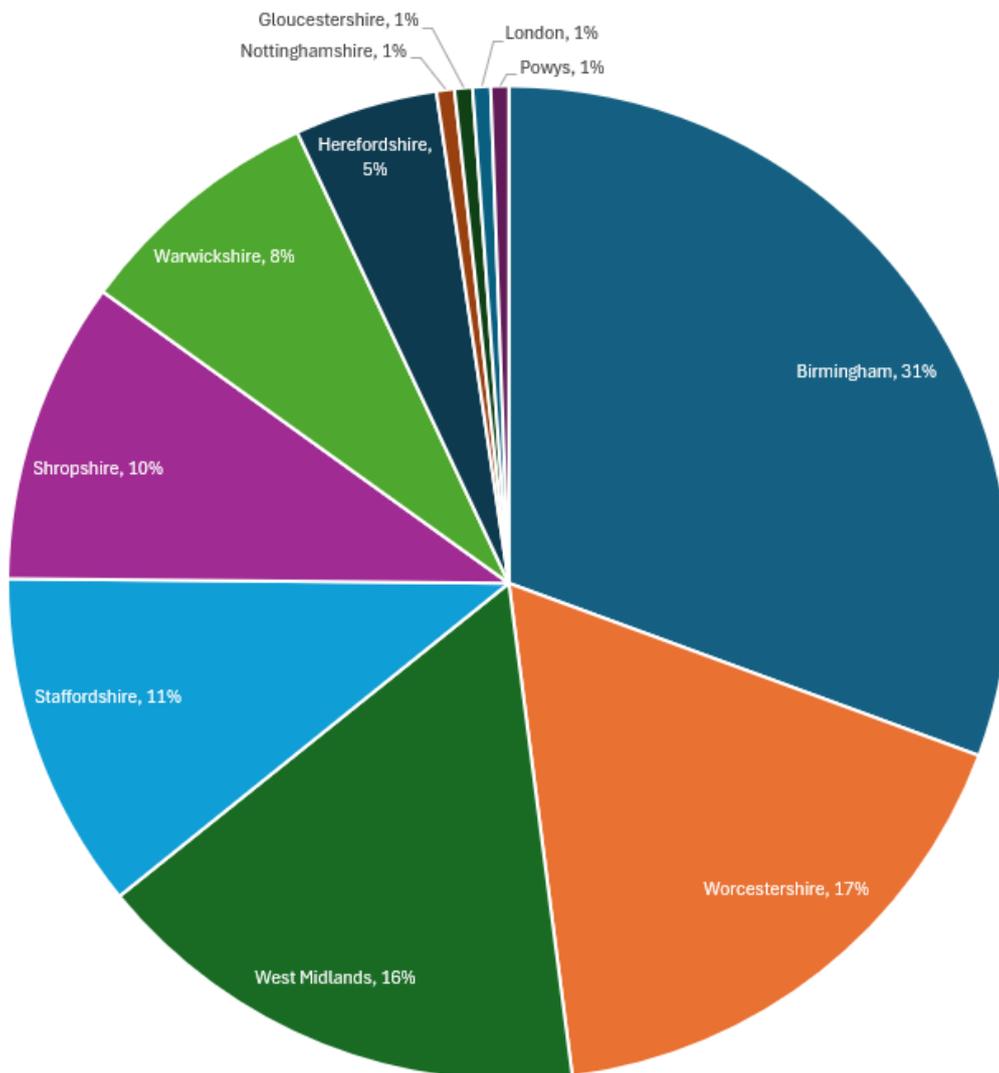
In the West Midlands we have 12 Young Victorians. It is refreshing to note this, as I have mentioned before that there is evidence that younger people do not tend to

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subscribe to societies, but rather follow them on Twitter or Facebook (see Social Media Section on pages 9-10).

In the past I have been able to show pie charts on actual numbers of members, but this year I only have the number of memberships to interrogate, which are:

Fig 1. Membership spread by Birmingham & Counties

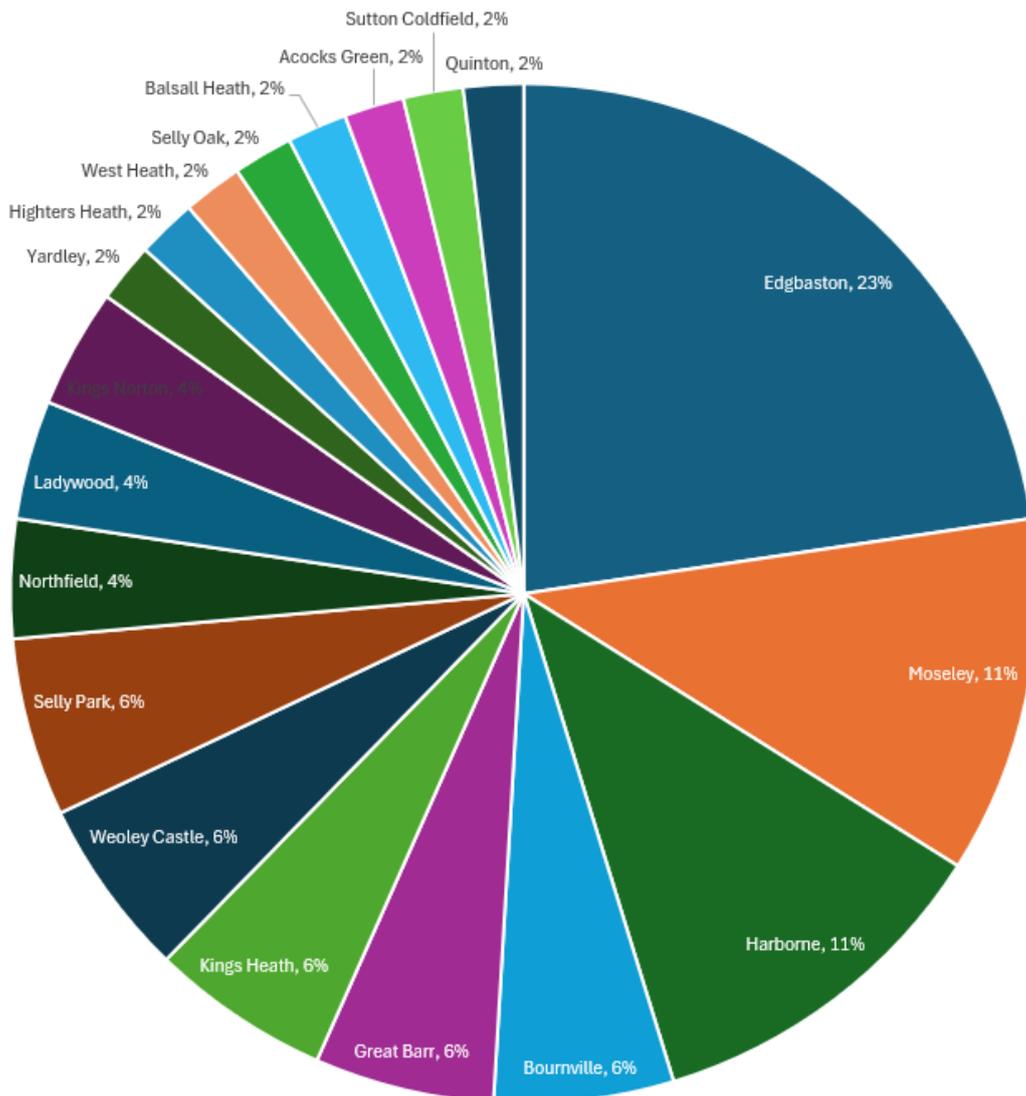


Because of this change in reporting, I'm not able to report on comparative changes in the spread across areas. In Fig 1. what I am able to observe is that whilst Birmingham is still the largest area, its dominance in the region has reduced and what was once around 50% of our membership, now only represents 31% of our membership, with Worcestershire coming second and, very close on its heels, the rest of the West Midlands. The small number in Nottinghamshire, Gloucestershire, London and Powys will be members who have requested to be aligned to the West Midlands group.

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Examination of Fig 2 reveals the split of members between suburbs in Birmingham. Edgbaston (23%), Moseley (11%), Harborne (11%), with Bournville, Great Barr, King's Heath, Weoley Castle and Selly Park sharing fourth place with 6% each. Fifth place is shared between King's Norton and Ladywood.

Fig 2. Birmingham Membership by Suburb



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.

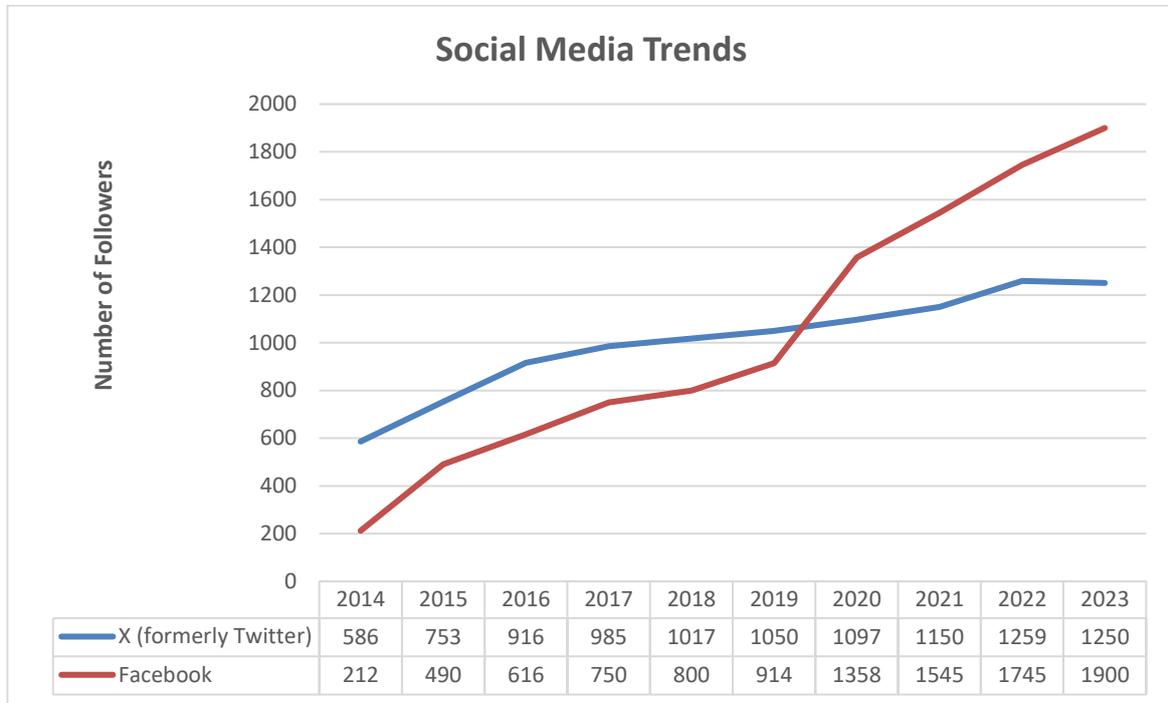
## SOCIAL MEDIA

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

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Twitter and as can be seen from the chart below; followers have increased year on year. It is therefore vital that we continue to share our message through these media.

Fig 3.



We also have an Instagram page, but the number of followers is not captured.

## TREASURY

Our Treasurer, James Fletcher, will discuss the accounts further, and as we did last year, the accounts are included within this report as Appendix A.

All our events made a healthy surplus, which has enabled us to buy ten further Tour-Talk units, to complement those purchased by with the Andrew Todd legacy. This is very important, as we receive no funding from Priory Gardens.

## CONSERVATION AWARD

The Group's Conservation Award was inaugurated at our 2015 AGM, so that a quick arithmetical calculation will reveal that in 2024 the award will be in its tenth year.

The purpose of the award is to draw attention to the high-quality conservation work of architects and other groups across the region.

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Previous winners are:

- 2015 Hortons' Estate Limited for the restoration and conservation of the façade of The Grand Hotel, Birmingham
- 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
- 2018 West Midlands Historic Buildings Trust for their restoration of the Thomas Pearson Building (formerly Lye & Wollescote Cemetery Chapels).
- 2019 Sandwell Council for the restoration of Smethwick Council House.
- 2020 Wedge Group Galvanizing Ltd for the restoration of the former Little London School, Willenhall.
- 2021 Midlands Industrial Association Ltd for conservation of the Argent Centre, Birmingham
- 2022 Birmingham City University for the conservation of the Eccles Building, Birmingham

On 22<sup>nd</sup> July, the Society's Vice President, Professor Sir David Cannadine, came to Birmingham to present the 2022 Award to Birmingham City University and was joined by the Society's Chair, Professor Hilary Grainger OBE.



Presentation of the 2022 Conservation Award

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Hortons' Estate Limited has sponsored the awards for the past nine years and will sponsor the 2023 award. The current sponsorship arrangement ended with the 2023 award, but I am delighted that Hortons' has agreed to sponsor the award for a further three years, up to and including 2026. The value of the sponsorship is almost £10,000 over the next three years. I am extremely grateful to Hortons' Estates for their commitment over the past nine years and for the next three years.

The winner of the 2023 award will be announced at the end of the 2024 AGM.

## JENNIE MCGREGOR-SMITH BEM

It is sad to record the loss of Jennie McGregor-Smith, who died on 15th September 2023, aged 85 years. She had been the volunteer caseworker for Bromsgrove for over 20 years and only stood down from her role on the casework committee in July 2021.

Over many years Jennie had been involved in several organisations in and around Bromsgrove, and further afield, which had earned her the epithet of a "phenomenal" champion of the arts. She was involved in the Bromsgrove Society, the Housman Society, Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, and as Artistic Director of Huntingdon Hall in Worcester.



Jennie wrote three books: *John Cotton: The Life of a Midlands Architect, 1844-1934* (2002); *From Bromsgrove to Aston Fields: A Story of Victorian Expansion* (2008); and *The Story of Finstall: The 1640s to the 1940s* (2018).

She was awarded the British Empire Medal in recognition of services to the community in Bromsgrove in the 2018 New Year's Honours list.

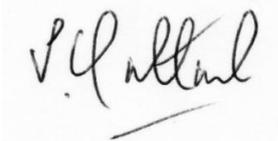
## SUMMARY & THANKS

A very big thank you to all of our many volunteers who gave their time and expertise during 2023, and who have helped to make our region such a strong and vibrant group. As a region I believe we faithfully adhere to the Society's objects to:

- Awaken public interest in and appreciation of the best of Victorian and Edwardian arts, architecture, crafts and design;

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- Encourage the study of these and related social history and advise owners and public authorities on the preservation and repair of Victorian and Edwardian buildings and the uses to which they can, if necessary, be adapted.
- Save from needless destruction or disfigurement Victorian and Edwardian buildings or groups of buildings of special architectural merit including promoting the inherent sustainability of the repair and reuse of historic buildings.

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**

17<sup>th</sup> January 2024

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## APPENDIX A

### INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT

	2023	2022
	£	£
<b><u>Income</u></b>		
<b><i>Social events &amp; visits</i></b>		
New Year lunch	2	
Police Museum	115	
Dreadnought Works	80	
Stoke-on-Trent	126	
Forest of Arden Churches	99	
Moseley Road	78	
Malvern	73	
Architects Day School	988	
	<u>1,561</u>	995
Sales of items	25	5
Interest	10	9
Donations, legacies and fees	-	10,164
	<u>1,596</u>	<u>11,173</u>
<b><u>Expenditure</u></b>		
Catering and room hire	254	69
Printing, stationery & postage	389	106
BMI Affiliation fee	350	350
Expenses for Historic England project	-	3,391
TourTalk headsets and hearing loops	1,375	4,169
Conservation Award	151	-
Sundry costs	159	113
	<u>2,678</u>	<u>8,197</u>
<b>Net (Deficit) / Surplus</b>	<b><u>(1,082)</u></b>	<b><u>2,976</u></b>

### BALANCE SHEET

	2023	2022
	£	£
Debtors	265	-
Bank balances	7,551	8,341
	<u>7,816</u>	<u>8,341</u>
Creditors	(774)	(216)
	<u>7,043</u>	<u>8,125</u>
Fund brought forward	8,125	5,149
(Deficit) / Surplus for the year	(1,082)	2,976
	<u>7,043</u>	<u>8,125</u>