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REPORT
2021

24 APRIL 2021

Stephen Hartland

**THE VICTORIAN
SOCIETY**

**BIRMINGHAM &
WEST MIDLANDS**

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 20

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.

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 54 years old on 19th January 2021. Unfortunately, in 2020 the United Kingdom was hit by the global pandemic of COVID-19 and episodes of lockdowns were prevalent throughout the year, meaning none of our programme of events were able to be fulfilled after our lunch in January and the AGM in February.

Our casework activities were able to continue by virtual online meetings, making the most of technology to ensure that we continued our important work unhindered.

REGIONAL EXECUTIVE

I would like to thank the Executive Committee for all their work in 2020. They are Barbara Shackley (Vice Chairman); Joe Holyoak (Vice Chairman); James Fletcher (Treasurer & Minutes Secretary); Alex Read (Honorary Secretary); Nina Hatch (Programme Secretary); Andy Foster, Jasna Jaksic, Eva Ling, Gill Sockett and Mary Worsfold. Mary Worsfold stood down as Honorary Secretary nine years' service and Alex Read has been Hon.Sec. since that date.

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.

Tim receives notifications from Local Authorities and Ecclesiastical organisations on works to listed buildings and those in Conservation Areas. Sometimes he 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. For much of the past year this has necessarily been by phone or Zoom, and I am pleased to report that since my last report the situation regarding communications with the Conservation Team at Birmingham City Council is much improved. Tim is once again in regular communication with officers in the team, so we now have a much better working relationship with our largest local authority.

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); 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:

‘ P o s i t i v e ’ c a s e s

One Eastside; Our objection to proposals for a 51-storey tower close to the many listed Victorian buildings at the top of Corporation Street and the Steelhouse Conservation Area were not taken into account by Birmingham City Council in the decision to grant planning consent. The case has subsequently been taken to judicial review following an appeal by agents for owners of an adjacent site. Our comments

have become one of the grounds for the review, and although it is possible that ultimately consent will be granted, there has been much weight attached to our comments by the High Court, and helpful publicity for the work of the Society.

Selly Oak Hospital; We objected to the proposed demolition of the locally listed Nurses' School (block) and Well House as part of a residential scheme for the adaptation of 'K' Block, one of King's Norton Workhouse of 1872 by Edward Hoare. The Well House are now being retained and adapted for residential use.

Tudor Grange, Solihull; We objected to aspects of a revised scheme for the conversion and over-large extension of this Grade II* former home of Alfred Bird, of 1887 by Mansell and Mansell, but are generally pleased to see this fine building being conserved and brought back into use.

Darlington Street Methodist Church, Wolverhampton; This magnificent Grade II* listed Baroque style church of 1900 was included in the Historic Buildings in 2020. Whilst a suitable new use has yet to be found and necessary repairs have yet to be undertaken, the higher profile of the plight of the church is resulting in increased interest from potential purchasers through a much-improved marketing strategy and close involvement of Historic England.

Moundsley Lodge, Edgbaston; We initially objected to plans for the extension of this derelict Grade II listed Victorian lodge building, but after improved revised plans were produced and we were re-consulted, permission has been granted. Hopefully restoration of this attractive building will soon get underway.

' Negative ' Cases

Dudley Road Police Station; Both positive and negative! We were disappointed that Historic England declined our application for listing of this empty and vandalised building at the entrance to Summerfield Park, of 1878 by Martin and Chamberlain. However, we are encouraged by the fact that it is no longer under threat of demolition as part of a proposed road widening scheme for Dudley Road, though disappointed that it remains in a derelict state. The Society posted the news on social media that it was not to be listed, which became the second most successful tweet to date seen by over 83,000 people. Hopefully the owners and Birmingham City Council are very aware of our interest in the building.

778 Pershore Road; Although we objected to three versions of plans for the extension of this Grade II listed 19th century house, none of which we considered appropriate, permission has been granted for a glazed extension that is unlikely to look comfortable with the historic fabric.

37-42 Tenby Street; Along with neighbours we objected to plans for the replacement of a factory building with a mixed-use development on the corner of Tenby Street and Albion Street at the heart of the Jewellery Quarter Conservation Area. Whilst we do not regret the loss of the existing modern factory building, the development that now has consent is too large, not in accordance with the Design Guide, and brings yet more residential use into the 'Industrial Mi

Jewellery Quarter major applications; We objected to proposals for the redevelopment of the car park on Great Charles Street, Livery Street and Lionel Street, which include a 39-storey tower. We also objected to the third set of proposals for redevelopment of the A.E. Harris site around Northwood Street, which includes 6 storey buildings. There are many issues with these, but both schemes do not reflect the scale of traditional Jewellery Quarter architecture and are contrary to the Design Guide. We are opposing many other proposals for tall buildings in and around city centre conservation areas, notably Digbeth, but all look likely to gain consent.

Former Archibald Kenrick Works, Hall Street South, West Bromwich; We are involved in the ongoing case regarding the future of this Grade II listed Gothic style factory of c.1880 by Martin and Chamberlain. We have been concerned about unauthorised repairs and applications for residential conversion to an HMO, which have not found favour with Sandwell Council. Later in 2020 we were shocked to learn from the press that the building has been used for the largest illegal cannabis factory yet discovered in the region. Further information is awaited on progress, but we remain wary about the future of this prominent landmark next to the M5.

Eagle and Tun, New Canal Street; Despite our objections over the years, this locally listed brick and terracotta public house of 1900 by James and Lister Lea was closed in early 2020, damaged by fire later in the year and has since been demolished. It was in the path of HS2.

20 Ladywood Road, Four Oaks; We objected to a retrospective planning application for the rebuilding of this modern house in the Four Oaks Conservation Area. We were pleased that this was refused consent by the Council, but dismayed that it was allowed

on appeal. There are many recent and ongoing instances of erosion of the character of this conservation area, but this case is particularly unfortunate as it is close to the now ruined Grade II-listed 22 Ladywood Road, the house of 1902 by Bidlake that is one of our longest standing cases.

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

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. Sadly their usual aplomb in organising events that educate us was not able to be deployed, as meetings were made illegal after 23rd March by The Coronavirus Act 2020.

REGIONAL GROUPS

Priory Gardens organises regular regional groups days and this year's was one, on 20th February 2021, which was attended by Nina Hatch and me. For obvious reasons, there wasn't one in 2020. It is a share their ideas, problems and seek solutions from each other. With the appointment of Joe O'Donnell as the Society's general director, relationship between Priory Gardens and the regions that is more collaborative, rather than the previous head office and provinces relationship.

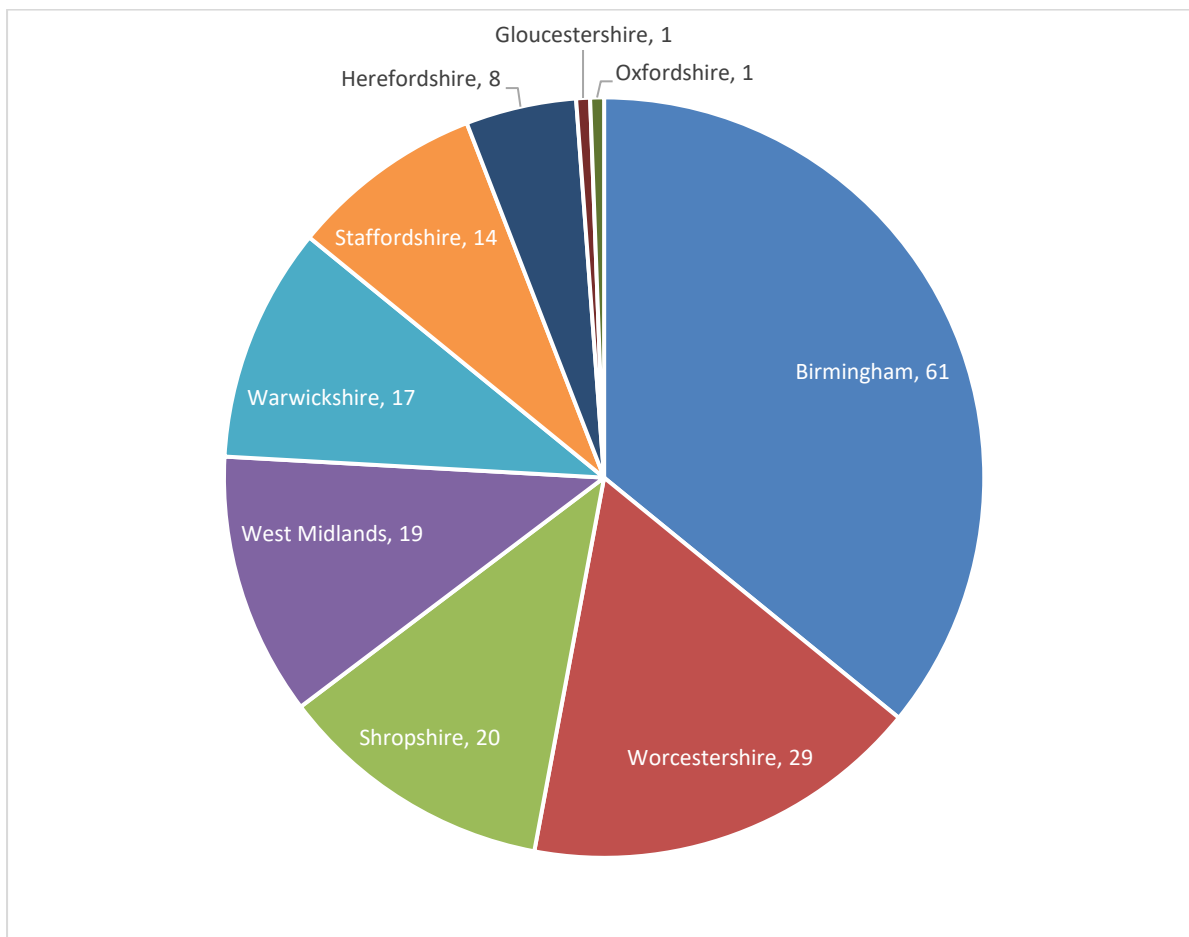
MEMBERSHIP

Year on year our membership remains constant and it is important that our members support our events. The outlawing of meetings has had serious repercussions on many organisations. Having been unable to raise money to carry out our objects, it has been a difficult year, but virtual meetings have acted as a necessary substitute and supplement. They are not a replacement, but they do serve to be able to deliver interesting lectures and raise much needed money, where there would otherwise not have been anything.

As to actual Membership figures, the current "memberships" to in our 170, which has increased by 5, thanks to the following new members:- Paul Baker, Patricia Carr, Emma Gilliland, Cavan Hawker and Madeleine Westrop. 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 on pages 7-8).

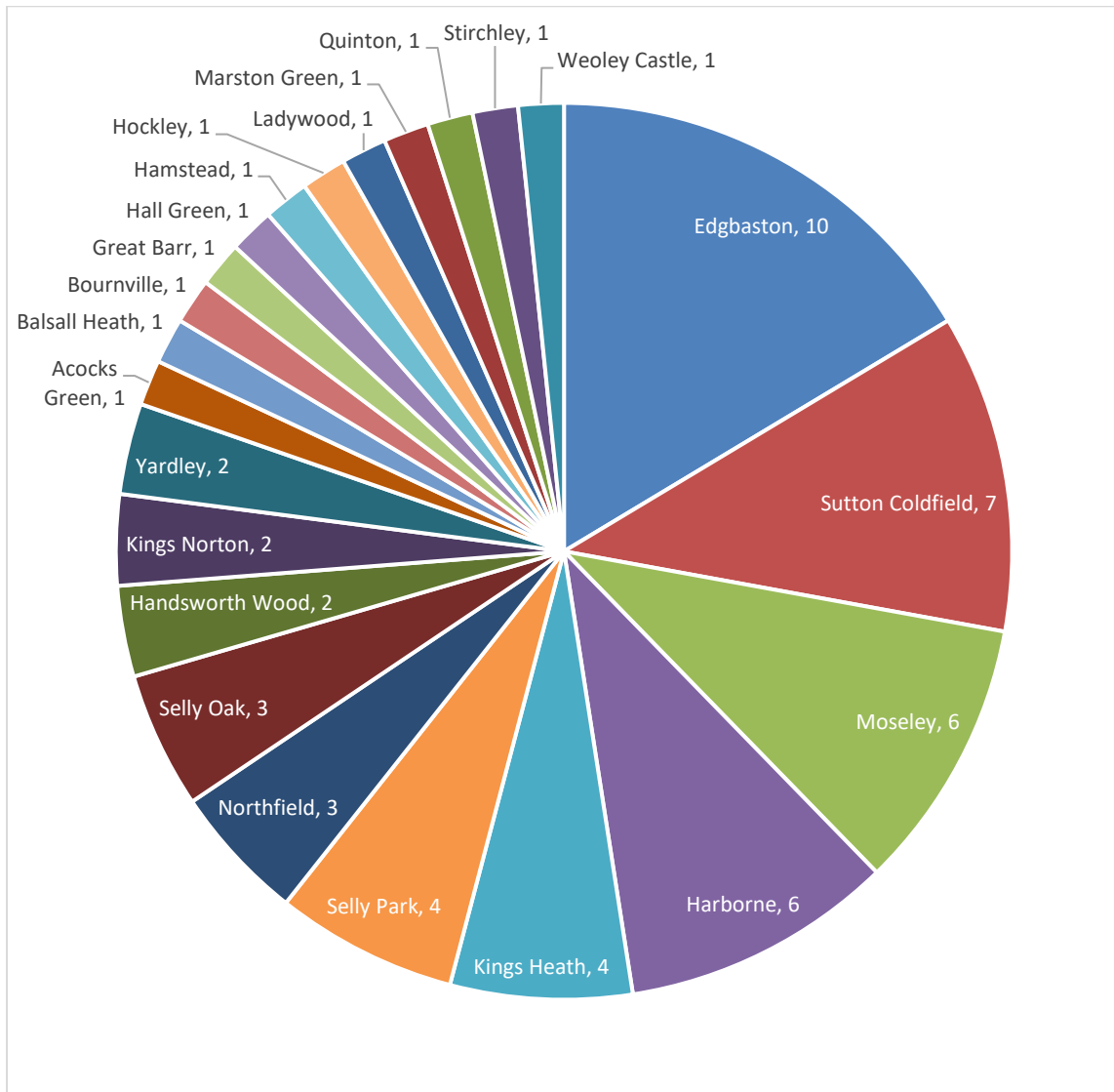
Fig 1. Membership spread by Birmingham & Counties



As can be seen in Fig 1. the percentage of our membership in Birmingham remains at 36%, whilst the remaining Memberships are spread roughly across Worcestershire (17%), Shropshire (12%), West Midlands (11%), Warwickshire (10%) and Staffordshire (8%), but with some memberships in Herefordshire (5%), 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 (16%), Sutton Coldfield (11%), Harborne (10%) and Moseley (10%) are the largest membership conce (7%) and Selly Park (7%) putting in a good challenge.

Fig 2. Birmingham Membership by Suburb

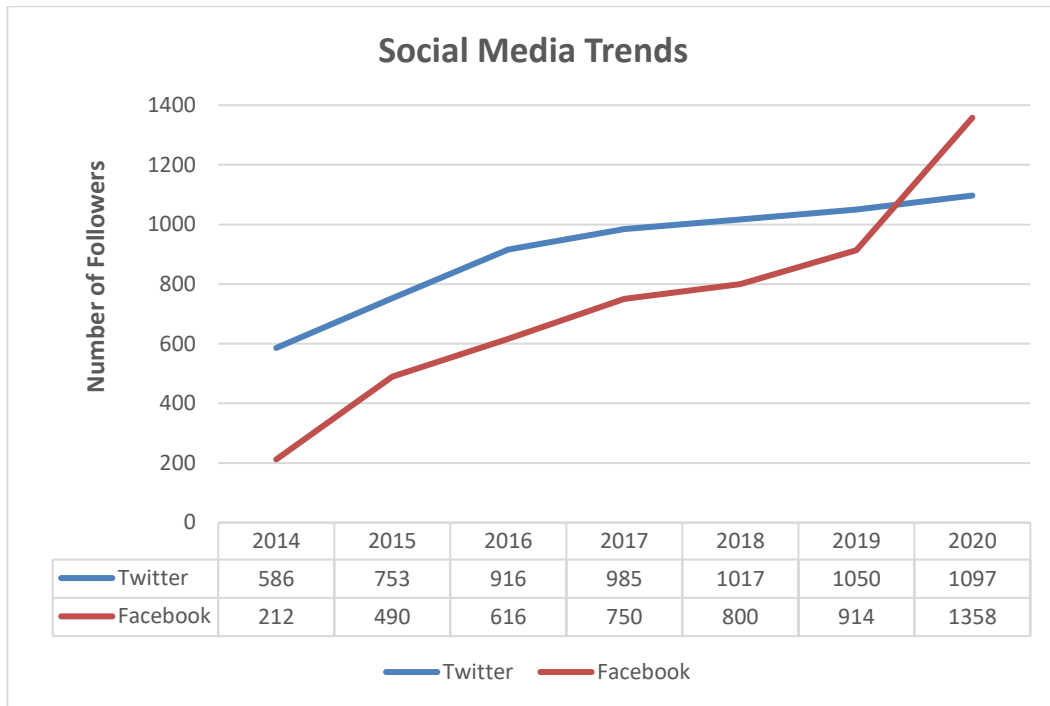


As members of the Society, I would encourage you to try to get your friends and family to join us, or even buy them Gift Membership, which is easily accessible on the Society's website.

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 Twitter and currently we have 1,097 followers on Twitter (1,050 in 2019, 1,017 in 2018, 985 in 2017, 916 in 2016, 753 in 2015, 586 in 2014); and 1,358 followers on our Facebook page (914 in 2019, 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.



Additionally, in December 2020 we launched a new Newsletter, which is in an electronic format only. Our next Newsletter is due out shortly.

TREASURY

Our Treasurer, James Fletcher, will discuss the accounts further, and you will see that COVID-19 had a most adverse effect on our finances, with only one paid event able to go ahead early in the year. As events are not surprising that the lack of these has resulted in a deficit. However, the funds built up from successful events in recent years has enabled us to weather this storm. We thank those members who had paid for events which have been rescheduled (in some cases three times) for their patience and support.

CONSERVATION AWARD

The Group's Conservation Award 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 2019 award was Smethwick Council House and we are still yet to make the presentation of the award, which we hope to do after 21st June 2021, when 'normality' is scheduled.

Previous winners are:

- 2015 - Hortons' Estate Limited for the restoration 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
- 2018 - West Midlands Historic Buildings Trust for their restoration of the Thomas Pearson Building (formerly Lye & Wollescote Cemetery Chapels).

Hortons' Estate has sponsored the awards for the past five years and will sponsor the 2021 award. I am extremely grateful for their commitment to the idea of rewarding good quality conservation and for their generosity.

The winner of the 2020 award will be announced at the end of the 2021 AGM.

DEATHS

At the time of the delayed AGM, it is sad but necessary to record the losses of key figures, viz:

DAME RACHEL WATERHOUSE

In October 2020, the sad news reached us that Dame Rachel had died, at the age of 97. There were many excellent obituaries in the newspapers, telling of her lifetime of achievements, but sadly none of them recorded that it was she who had founded the Birmingham Group in 1967 and had been its first Chairman. I was able to correct this and wrote to the Guardian newspaper, who published the fact. I had also written to Dame Rachel's family, expressing our condolences.

DAVID HENSON

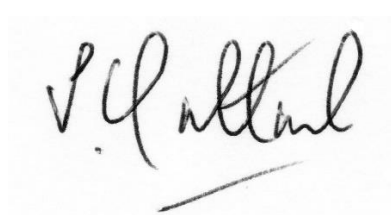
It is my sad duty to record the death of David Henson on Good Friday 2021. David has been a long-time supporter of the Society, along with his wife Pamela. David was a good supporter of intelligent conservation, particularly in Edgbaston and served for many years as the Secretary of the Calthorpe Society. I would like to express our condolences and we shall certainly miss him at our future events.

FR. MICHAEL FISHER

We also received news that the eminent Pugin expert Fr. Michael Fisher had died in April 2021. Fr. Michael was a widely-recognised authority on the art and architecture of the English Gothic Revival, particularly the life and work of A.W.N. Pugin. He was also the author of several excellent books, including '**Gothic For Ever**' (Spire Books 2012), written to commemorate the 200th anniversary of P u g i n ' s b i r t h .

SUMMARY & THANKS

Thanks to all of volunteers who gave their time in 2020, despite the frustrations of COVID-19 and having to fully grasp the forced technology of online meetings. This year has given us additional challenges to tackle, but we continue to secure long-lasting successes, only occasionally marred by setbacks. We are certainly looking forward to the time when we will meet gain, in a more traditional setting.

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

24th April 2021

