

Report of Council 2015-2018

Ladies and gentlemen, you will all, I am sure, be aware of the death earlier this year of one of our great stalwarts, Raymond Frostick, sometime secretary and chair of the Society and, since we last met in 2015, one of our vice-presidents. Raymond worked tirelessly for the preservation of our heritage and we on Council will all miss his calm and reassuring presence. In recognition of the support that they both gave to the Society, Council has invited Claire Frostick to become an honorary life member, and I am delighted to report that she has accepted. Sadly, we have also lost one of our contributing editors, Professor Christopher Harper-Bill, a distinguished scholar and convivial friend to many of us here today. His work on the Castle Acre cartulary will be continued by our medieval editor, Elizabeth Rutledge.

There have been some changes on Council since we last met: Dr Roger Ryan resigned as treasurer with effect from this March, when he was succeeded by Kristopher Harper, who unfortunately cannot be with us tonight. Although he has left Norfolk to be nearer his family, Roger will remain a greatly valued member of the society. After years of service on Council and, indeed, as one of our contributing editors, Dr Alan Mackley has also decided to step down and I'd like to thank both him and Roger for all the work that they have done on our behalf.

Our new treasurer has hit the ground running, having been obliged to deal not only with changes in the law regarding data protection, but also the unilateral (and intensely annoying) decision by Barclays Bank to terminate the type of account that we were using for the payment of our subscriptions. We are extremely grateful to all those of you who pay by standing order for your understanding and your readiness to make the necessary changes in response to Kristopher's circular.

As was the case in both 2012 and 2015, I have to report a gradual fall in membership as people die, retire or simply forget to renew their subscriptions. All in, including overseas and UK institutions, it currently stands at 305, having fallen by 14 since January. We remain indebted to you for your continuing support, and are acutely aware of the fact that we need to attract new and if possible young members who can keep the Society going in future. We have no immediate plans to increase subscription rates, and hope that another recruitment drive, which Council is currently considering, will enable us to continue balancing the budget without recourse to such an unwelcome measure. I should point out, however, that a survey of other County Societies, undertaken by Kristopher Harper, has revealed that we do offer an amazingly attractive membership package: a Fortnum and Mason product at Lidl prices!

Many of you, I know, find it difficult to get hold of the Society's older volumes, which are out of print and often out of stock. So, I'm especially pleased to report that we have begun a digitisation programme that will make the more popular of these volumes available online as a reference aid and teaching resource. *The Norwich Census of the Poor of 1570* (volume 40) is already accessible on archive.org: once you're on their home page all you have to do is type in 'Norfolk Record Society' and go from there. We shall be adding more titles in future.

Such activities are an important part of our charitable remit, which also extends to assisting in the acquisition and preservation of manuscript material by the Norfolk Record Office so that it remains in the public domain. Since our last triennial meeting, we have contributed to the purchase of various important items that would otherwise have left the county (or even the

country), notably through the Morningthorpe Manor Appeal in 2016, when some of the now late Ron Fiske's remarkable collection went on sale. In this context I would like to draw your attention to the promotional leaflet for NORAHA (the Norfolk Archives and Heritage Development Foundation), which this Society is very pleased to support in work parallel to its own. Do pick up a leaflet after the lecture if you haven't already got one.

When we last met in 2015 I reassured everyone that we had a firm publication schedule in place and had finally said farewell to the bad old days when publishing an annual volume was a positive cliff-hanger, as nails were bitten to the quick and introductions drafted at the very last minute. This was, indeed, tempting fate. As the Ancient Greeks knew only too well, hubris is invariably followed by nemesis, in this case in the form of the BRS, which you will recall was due to publish a joint volume of *The Norfolk Hearth Tax* with us in 2011-13, but failed to meet the agreed deadline.

Having faithfully promised us delivery of the manuscript for publication in 2017, the BRS once again let us down at the very last minute, while assuring us categorically that everything would be ready for 2018. It was not: and, for two years in succession, we have depended on the sterling work of our early modern editor, Jean Agnew, and of a dedicated group of contributing editors to fill the gap. Thanks to them, annual volumes *have* appeared on time, albeit in a rather different order from the one that you may have expected:

2016 – Jo Margerum's edition of *The Cartulary of Binham Priory* was launched on a lovely autumn evening at the priory on schedule as volume 80.

In 2017, however, *The Bacon Papers, VI*, which was due to appear in 2019 was completed ahead of time thanks to the efforts of the Jean Agnew and the editorial team, Elizabeth Rutledge, Alan Metters, Barry Taylor and Vic Morgan. It was launched at the NRO as volume 81, in place of *The Norfolk Hearth Tax*.

This year, *The Great Blow*, originally scheduled for 2020, has been turned round at remarkable speed by Andy Hopper, Emily Wilbur Alley and Jean Agnew, whose name, very fittingly, now appears on the cover.

Although the BRS hopes to publish next year, in 2019, the text is apparently still far from ready: and we have now reached the disappointing but pragmatic conclusion that *The Norfolk Hearth Tax* can only be assigned a date on the roster once a complete and acceptable edition has been submitted to the Society. (We shall also be extremely wary of embarking on joint publications with other Societies unless we ourselves are responsible for producing the text.) Instead, you can expect to receive an edition of the *Norwich Chamberlains' Accounts 1539-1545* next year; the Letter Book compiled in the 1670s by the Norwich merchant, Thomas Baret, in 2020; and either a volume of Repton letters or *The Literary Papers of the Reverend Jermyn Pratt* in 2021.

A number of other publications, including a collection on early Socialism in King's Lynn and Suffragism in Yarmouth, are also well advanced in the pipeline; and so, despite the vicissitudes that have beset us, we keep calm and carry on, grateful for the continuing support of our membership.

Carole Rawcliffe

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