

## Report of Council 2018-2021

We are all saddened by the death last year of Elizabeth (Lizzie) Griffiths, whose lively and incisive presence made Council meetings such pleasure to attend. She was a fine scholar, who edited the Society's 79th volume on *The Records of Alice Lestrangle* and we will miss her. There have been other changes to the composition of Council over the last three years. Our longest-serving member, Michael Begley, has recently announced his decision to step down after decades in harness and we are grateful for all he has done to support the NRS. Another of our most valued stalwarts, John Barney, has also retired, having performed sterling service for many years as treasurer to the Society. All our officers give freely of their time and expertise, prominent among them being Richard Wilson, my predecessor as Chair of the Society, who previously discharged a long stint as a series editor. Richard will today be elevated to the ranks of our vice-presidents, which means, I'm delighted to say, that he'll still be joining us for meetings.

I've never worked out the average age of council members, but it's fallen significantly thanks to the arrival this year Dr Eliza Hartrich, a distinguished medievalist with a particular interest in urban history, who joined the School of History at UEA in 2019.

The Covid epidemic has had a devastating impact upon all our lives and has disrupted the cycle of twice-yearly Council meetings, which were initially conducted in a rather tortuous fashion by e-mail exchange and then by Zoom during successive lockdowns. Despite (or perhaps in reaction to) these problems, we have seized the opportunity to bring ourselves up to date by tackling some long overdue issues.

Thanks to our treasurer, Kristopher Harper, improvements to our online presence have continued, with the result that we now have one of the most attractive and informative websites of any county record society. Sadly, our digitisation programme has been placed on hold because of the epidemic, but we've been adding blogs about previous volumes to the website (there are seven so far, with two more just received) and we have made it easier for people to buy books directly from us online.

Secondly, we've drawn up a short but comprehensive agreement to be signed by all our contributing editors, along the lines of those adopted by academic publishers. This gives our editors a clearer idea of what we and they can expect during the publication process.

Lastly, and most important, we've revised the rules of the Society in accordance with the current requirements of the Charity Commission. The old rules were last revised half a century ago and were woefully outdated. Rather than wait for the Commission to take us to task and question our charitable status, we decided to seize the day and implement the necessary changes. Over the last year, a sub-committee of Council has worked through at least eight preliminary drafts of the new rules that you now have before you, taking legal advice along the way and following an approved template. The task of rewriting fell to our secretary, Alan Metters, who must at times have felt that he was undergoing purgatory on earth, and I would like to thank him for all the hard work that he has put into this seemingly interminable exercise. He will be presenting the finished product for your approval later in the meeting.

It's less encouraging to report that our membership numbers have continued gradually to decline, with obvious implications for the Society's long-term financial health. If we include institutional bodies, membership currently stands at 289, representing a fall of 16 since our last triennial meeting. Many academic institutions are now, sadly, favouring online publications, and are, moreover, facing stringent cuts. Things would have been far worse had we not succeeded in attracting several new individual recruits, and I'm extremely grateful to all of you who have helped in our membership drive. Please do keep up the good work!

It's unfortunate that our income from subscriptions has fallen at a time when postage and publication costs are rising and, moreover, when it is proving increasingly difficult to obtain the support from external funding bodies upon which we rely to break even. Most of our volumes have, in the past, secured some type of subvention, but despite our best efforts none has this year been forthcoming. Thanks to some remarkably generous donations, including a one-off increase in the grant that we receive from the Royal Privy Purse, we have not yet been forced to make significant inroads into our capital reserves, but we do feel that an increase in subscriptions cannot be avoided much longer and plan to roll this out in 2023. As I've pointed out in previous reports, our current rate of just £12 a year for individual members is one of the best bargains around and is considerably lower than that of most other record societies.

We can, in return, promise you a firm publication schedule, which, thanks to the hard work of our editors and the splendid team at Carnegie Book Production, has seen the appearance since the last triennial meeting of:

*The Great Blow*, edited by Andrew Hopper, Jean Agnew and Emily Wilbur Alley (vol. 82) in 2018

*The Norwich Chamberlains' Accounts 1539-1545*, edited by me (vol. 83) in 2019

*Humphry Repton and his Family: Correspondence 1805-16*, edited by Heather Falvey (vol. 84), which came out last year and was launched very successfully online.

Each of these volumes has been well received with enthusiastic reviews in academic journals.

I'm pleased to report that the Covid epidemic, so terrible in other respects, has had no impact at all upon our schedule, which is on track for the foreseeable future. Tonight we will launch this year's volume, *The Letter-Book of Thomas Baret of Norwich*, edited by Siobhan Talbott. Copies are in the post to you as I speak. The volume for 2022 will be *The Literary Papers of the Reverend Jermyn Pratt*, to be followed in 2023 by volume seven of *The Bacon Papers*; in 2024 by a collection of material on *Early Socialism in King's Lynn and Suffragism in Great Yarmouth*; and in 2025 by *The Church Notes of Sir Stephen Glynne*. Sir Stephen's notes for Yorkshire have already been published in a lavishly illustrated edition by the YAS, which will give you some idea of what to expect. (The Society's subscription rates are £45 a year, by the way.) Also in the pipeline is a two-volume edition of the cartulary of Castle Acre priory, a major source for historians of religious, social and agrarian life between the twelfth and fourteenth century.

As an added inducement, we plan to offer members a second lecture (or double bill) each year, in addition to the annual launch. Despite some teething problems with the technology, the one-off event that we arranged on 25 March this year proved so popular that we have decided to add an Easter fixture to our calendar. News of next year's programme will be posted on the

website and circulated to individual members in due course. As this year, the event will be open to the public as part of our recruitment drive.

Our prospects are bright and will be even brighter if we can achieve a greater measure of financial security in these challenging times. So may I conclude by thanking all of you for your support in the hope that it will continue in the years to come.

Carole Rawcliffe  
8 July 2021