

2020 Report for the OFHS 2021 AGM

I think we can safely say that 2020 was a year that will not be forgotten for some time. While many of the memories will be negative, some will be positive.

The first memory for OFHS must be the sad loss of Hugh Kearsey. He was known by name, if not in person, by a great many of our members and it has often been said, in response to why OFHS has such a large financial reserve, that it was all down to Hugh. As well as doing much of the work, he oversaw the mass transcription projects that went first onto paper, then onto microfiche and then onto CDs. Hugh is a “hard act to follow” all round, be it in terms of project work, chairmanship and finally as our president.

This is a good point to mention that Malcolm Graham, also well known to many of you, accepted the nomination to be our new President and was elected to that position at our (delayed) 2020 AGM.

The big event of the year was, of course, Covid and lockdown. This has changed the ways of many Family History Societies and I’m pleased to say that OFHS was near the front when it came to engaging with doing everything online. Yes, we missed out on a couple of meetings (and one meeting of the committee) but from June onwards we were running regular Zoom meetings and engaging with members who had previously had no opportunity to attend our meetings. The world of Family History Societies has changed and while some Societies have not survived, we are going strong and are now committed to holding monthly online meetings even when we are allowed to return to the Exeter Hall. On the negative side, we had to suspend our advisor sessions in libraries and at the Oxfordshire History Centre and cancel our October Fair. The summer activities of our MI transcription teams (a.k.a. graveyard crawlers) were also suspended.

Another big event, perhaps not on the scale of Covid, was the launch of our new web site and the accompanying new online shop. This has had a very favourable reaction from those using our site and the new shop has allowed us to finally move towards making research material available by download. The production of the new web site has involved numerous people and all deserve our thanks for their efforts.

I will mention a few statistics from the year. 2020 saw:

- a doubling of the enquiries to our Search Service;
- a 60% rise in the number of email and telephone help requests;
- an 80% rise in the attendance at our meetings (about 10% of which were from overseas);
- an increase in membership of around 5% based on end-Feb figures;
- increased engagement with, and interest in, OFHS activities via social media.

The DNA and Surname projects are proceeding apace. Transcription work has also been progressing well on both new transcripts and the re-keying of older typed and photocopied transcripts.

In summary, I think I can say that OFHS has weathered the storm and is coming out as strong as ever and maybe stronger.

Malcolm Austen, Chairman, on behalf of the Executive Committee.