

CHAIR'S REPORT

It has been a challenging year and one of the most difficult that the Centre and the Friends has had to face. At the start of the year we received the bombshell from the University that they intended to close Marc Fitch House and relocate the Centre to the main campus. This was followed in March by the coronavirus pandemic and the ongoing lockdown. The University has put the closure of Marc Fitch House on hold for the duration of the emergency although they have confirmed that it is still their aim to sell the building when the market permits.

In his letter dated 27th February 2020 the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Nishan Canagarajah, stated that it was his intention to 'create a coherent new space for the Centre within the Attenborough Building which will include a resource centre to house the Marc Fitch Collection and maps'. The full letter can be seen on the Friends' website. Despite the financial impacts of the pandemic we must ensure the Vice-Chancellor and the University honours this commitment. The Friends will work with the Centre and with the University to find an acceptable solution that supports the Centre's students and enables it to continue its outstanding research work. In the academic world English Local History has an impressive reputation that benefits the University and this must not be lost.

Like all organisations in these troubled times the Friends have had to adapt to the new world in which we find ourselves. Sadly, it has been necessary to cancel all face-to-face events including the Spotlight Conference planned for March 2020 and the proposed study weekend in Derbyshire. Hopefully these will only be postponements and we will be able to meet again in 2021. However, the safety of our members is our priority and we will not meet again until it is safe to do so.

We are responding to the changing world in a number of ways. All Committee meetings are now held online, this has worked well and saved a lot of unnecessary traveling for members and will probably continue post pandemic. The postponed Spotlight Conference will be held as an online event in February 2021 and we are looking into the possibility of holding other online events for members. Probably one of the most important achievements during the lockdown has been the relaunching of the website and the establishment of a strong presence on social media. It has attracted much interest and helps to

demonstrate that we are still an active organisation and I would in particular like to thank Anne Coyne and John Parker for all their efforts.

Although we face many challenges that will change the way we operate as the Friends it has also created opportunities and made us think about how we engage with our members. In the coming year we will seek to build on these opportunities and our aims will be to:

- Support the Centre and its students,
- Grow the membership of the Friends, and
- Provide a wide range of online activities for our members (and when possible face-to-face events).

We are always seeking new initiatives and if you have any ideas or suggestions please contact us via the website and social media. I have also included my email address if you would like to contact me directly. I would like to thank our members for their continuing support and the Committee for their efforts as well as Phil Batman for again pulling together our Newsletter. Finally, I would like to congratulate Professor Andy Hopper on his appointment as Director of the Centre for English Local History in September 2020, we look forward to working with him in the coming year.

Michael

Dr Michael Gilbert

Chair, Friends of the Centre for English Local History

michael.gilbert@woadman.co.uk