A.G.M.
FRIENDS OF THE CENTRE FOR ENGLISH LOCAL HISTORY

(now the Centre for Regional & Local History)

(Registered charity No. 1073528)

Chair's Report

Dear Friends of the Centre for English Local History

This is my report as Chair of the Friends for 2025/2026. In June of 2025 the University announced that History, including the Centre for Regional and Local History would be part of a change consultation process due to financial pressures facing the University. The outcome of the review was that the University offered voluntary severance to reduce the number of posts by six in History. As part of this process Dr Angela Muir left the University at the end of June 2026. The Friends committee would like to thank Dr Muir for her help over the years and especially for organising events and administering the various grants schemes on our behalf.

Thankfully Dr Richard Jones remains in post as acting Director of the Centre, and the committee has expressed their full support to Dr Jones as the future of the Centre emerges. The committee of the Friends remain committed to promoting and supporting the study of Local History as taught by the Centre. We support post-graduate students and PhD researchers with Small Grant Awards to help meet research and travel costs. We would like to do more of course so if you know of a current postgraduates or PhD candidates who are studying some aspect of Local History at the University of Leicester, please direct them to the application form on the website. https://www.englishlocalhistory.org/wp/the-friends-grants-and-bursaries

During the past year we have made Small Grants to four PhD candidates and covered the travel costs for a BA student on placement to the Spalding Gentlemen's Society. Our other grant, The Phythian-Adams Award provides financial assistance to students studying for the BA in History at Leicester University who are preparing their dissertation topics and need to visit and conduct research at an archive within the UK. Applications can be made via Dr Richard Jones.

Hoskins Day was thoroughly enjoyed by all who attended with one committee member describing the Keynote presentation by Prof Rob Liddiard, from the University of East Anglia, as a 'cracker'. His talk was entitled "Shall we fight them on the beaches? Landscapes of coastal defence in the Second World War". Professor Liddiard focused on how the building of extensive anti-invasion defences along the coastline changed not only the physical landscape but also shaped the lives and experience of local communities who suddenly found themselves on Britain's front line. He revealed new insights into a subject normally the preserve of military archaeologists.

The Focus on the Centre part of the day showcased the recent work of two Ph.D. students. Carol Gurnham is a M4C/AHRC PhD student at the University of Leicester, and her talk was entitled 'Window into the Neolithic': Analysing landscape patterns through a Medieval lens. Although Carol's research is focused on the Neolithic occupation, for Hoskins Day she focused on medieval ridge and furrow and its relation to antecedent prehistoric landscapes.

Julie Chamberlain is also a M4C/AHRC funded PhD student at the University, and her presentation was entitled 'The utensils of my trade': women's paid work and businesses in Warwickshire towns 1660-1740'. As the title suggests Julie focussed her talk on the paid work for women, but she is also researching the role of women in guilds in Coventry and Stratford.

About two thirds of the people who had booked for Hoskins Day were present, but it was an extremely hot day so that was expected. The Special Collections team at the David Wilson Library reported that the display of Hoskins related material was very popular with people wanting to book for a further visit and offers of donations.

There have been two undergraduate student placements this year at Spalding Gentleman's Society who are currently running the Fenland Study Centre at Ayscoughfee Hall. One was working on the collections and another on the VCH project.

The committee would like to thank all of you who completed the survey about the Study Days. Unfortunately, after analysing all the responses there was no real agreement about places to visit, distance or topic etc. The one common thread was working with local history groups or societies either at a regional level or to work in partnership with these for our local visits. The committee will look at the topic again during the coming year.

The work of the Friends is reliant on the donations made by you, our members, and we would like to thank you for your continued support. Although our numbers remain stable at around 165 members, we face the challenge of recruiting new members at a time when MA student numbers have declined.

I would like to express my personal thanks to the committee, Karen, Mary, Mandy, Sue, John and Michael, for all their hard work again this past year. We look forward to working with Dr Richard Jones at the Centre and we would like to thank you all for supporting the Friends both in the past and as we navigate new horizons. We always welcome new members to join the committee or stand as officers so please consider this if you are interested.

Anne Coyne
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