

Chair's report

Dear Friends of the Centre of English Local History

This is my report as Chair of the Friends for 2024/2025. When Michael Gilbert wrote his final Chair's report last year, he detailed the difficulties the Friends and the Centre had faced during the previous few years, that was the Covid pandemic and the closure of Marc Fitch House. Unfortunately, the challenges continue, and as you are all probably know 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. This process is still ongoing and the outcome is not likely to be known by the time of the AGM on the 18th of November.

Despite the unknowns, the committee of the Friends remain committed to promoting and supporting the study of Local History as taught by the Centre. In 2025 to date, we have supported post-graduate students and PhD researchers with Small Grant Awards to help meet research and travel costs. We would like to do more so if you know of 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>

One success of 2025 is the launch of the Phythian-Adams Award; this 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 are made via Dr Angela Muir.

Hoskins Day was a great success again with 57 people attending. Professor Mark Gardiner gave the keynote address and the talk focused not on the rural landscape but the dwellingscape and looked at the extant medieval houses. Hoskins Day also featured two postgraduate students Chloe Phillips, researching Black Histories of Cornwall prior to 1900 and Rob Hedge, who is examining the patterns of small rural settlements in North Worcestershire and South Shropshire between the 11th and 15th centuries.

There have been two student placements this year at Spalding Gentleman's Society who are currently running the Fenland Study centre at Ayscoughfee Hall.

We have held two very interesting study days this year. The spring visit was to the Buddhist centre at Thornby Hall looking at the building and its history, followed by a tour of Naseby Battlefield. The autumn visit was to the local museum at Ashby de la Zouch, a talk about the history of Grace Dieu Priory and then followed by a tour of the ruins of Grace Dieu and the surrounding estate. Everyone who joined the study days, enjoyed these but the study days did not attract the expected numbers. The study days are designed for Friends to join so I would encourage you to come along to the next one. If you would like to visit a certain town or area for a day or examine a certain topic related to local history, please email me with those suggestions. It is your Association so please tell us what you would like the committee to run. We may have to curtail the study days if they are not supported in the future.

Our social media presence continues to expand with engagement increasing with both followers and other associations. I would like to conclude by thanking all members of the committee for their hard work throughout the past year. So, thank you to Karen, Mary, Mandy, Sue, John and Michael. As always if we have more committee members we can do more to promote the study of Local History, so please email me if you would like to volunteer. We will make some minor changes to the constitution at the AGM so please join us online as we need 20 people present to authorise the changes.

I would like to thank you all for supporting the Friends and I look forward to meeting you in person at one of our events.

Anne Coyne

Chair of the Friends of English Local History

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