

**Friends of the Centre for English Local History**  
**Unapproved minutes of the Annual General Meeting**  
**held on Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> November 2024 via Zoom**

**Present:** Mary Bryceland, Anne Coyne, Mandy de Belin, Karen Donegani, Pam Fisher, Michael Gilbert, Sue Hughes, Graham Jones, Stephen Marquis, John Parker, Carol Perkin, Sylvia Pinches, Dave Postles, Andrew Wager, Ralph Weedon  
The meeting was opened by the Chair, Michael Gilbert, and was quorate.

**Apologies:** Freda Raphael, Sue Rumfitt, Elizabeth Pegg, Marion Hardy, Phil Batman, Trixie Gadd, John Goodacre.

**Approval of the minutes** of the AGM held on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2023.  
The approval of the minutes was proposed by Mandy de Belin, seconded by John Parker.  
Approved as an accurate record.

**Matters arising from the minutes:** none.

**Chair's report**

Michael Gilbert spoke about his report which had been circulated with the Agenda. This is my last report as Chair of the Friends and it is pleasing that we are continuing to grow and develop as a group. The past five years have been exceptionally challenging both for the Friends and for the Centre and could have led to our demise. In 2020 we had the double hammer blow of Covid and the closure of our spiritual home in Marc Fitch House. We had to curtail our in-person activities for a number of years although successfully moving online with the provision of talks, lectures and even a virtual Hoskins' Day. The loss of Marc Fitch House was a particularly sad event with the challenge of maintaining the Centre's unique character during the move to the Attenborough Building on the main campus. This combined with the financial difficulties faced by the university, and academic institutions in general, have placed the future of the Centre at risk. It is a tribute to Angela Muir and Richard Jones that it has been able to weather these storms and to continue to provide high quality local history teaching and research.

These trials have inevitably brought the Friends and the Centre ever closer together. We have been instrumental in helping to set up the joint Centre for Regional and Local History and Centre for Urban History libraries in the Attenborough Building. We have been able to run a series of events for members including, most recently, the Study Day at the Centre for Fenland Studies in Ayscoughfee Hall Museum, Spalding in September. We are planning another Study Day at Naseby in spring 2025. This year's Hoskins' day was particularly successful bringing together a number of speakers including Colin Hyde and Pam Fisher as well as our Hoskins' Day lecturer, Professor Corinne Fowler. It was well received with double the attendance from the previous year. The placement programme has continued with the Friends facilitating opportunities for students and researchers, so far successful placements have been found for three MA and Undergraduate students. Work on the programme is continuing with three organisations offering placements in 2025 (SGS, Spalding; Delapre Abbey, Northampton and St Mary Magdalene Church in Newark). Through our website and social media engagement we are attracting considerable interest from outside the membership and providing a hub for sharing local history news and information. A final optimistic point to note is that the Friends membership is continuing to grow.

Inevitably, there will be difficult times ahead and with falling numbers and financial challenges the future of the Centre may continue to be at risk. Along with that the future role of the Friends must be discussed. I believe we must be more than just an alumni group for the university and embrace a wider role in supporting study and research into local history. This would include inviting and even encouraging membership from outside our normal catchment of the Centre. Our membership has a wealth of knowledge on all aspects of the discipline and I am sure can offer much more in terms of supporting students and publishing research material. The support of the Friends is a valuable asset to the Centre.

Finally, I would like to thank everybody for their support for the Friends over the past five years. It has been a pleasure and privilege being the Chair of the body and it is pleasing to be able to leave in a robust state for the future. I would like to wish the Friends and my successor my very best wishes.

Regarding links with the local history community Dave Postles commented that he had recently taken on the role, with LAHS, of making links with other local history groups. Sylvia Pinches said she is still teaching on the Advanced Diploma in Local History at Oxford Continuing Education and continues to push FCELH and its events.