

# **THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY BIRMINGHAM & WEST MIDLANDS**

## **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2016**

The Victorian Society is the charity championing Victorian and Edwardian buildings in England and Wales. Our Conservation Advisers help local planning authorities and churches to make better decisions about adapting Victorian and Edwardian buildings to the way we live now, while keeping what is special about them. We also seek to engage the public in our campaigns to help increase the likelihood of conserving buildings.

The Birmingham and West Midlands Group embarked upon its 50<sup>th</sup> year on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2016, achieving our semicentenary just a few weeks ago. We will be hosting the national Society AGM weekend between 21<sup>st</sup> - 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2017, as well as a special luncheon at Highbury Hall on April, with many civic dignitaries attending from across the West Midlands. For our semicentenary, we have commissioned two commemorative items; an English bone china tankard made in Stoke-on-Trent, available at £15.00 and a Tea Towel, made in Lincolnshire from English cotton, using Sutton Webster's design from the 1980s and incorporating notable Victorian buildings in Birmingham, available at £5.00.



Semicentenary Commemorative Tankard featuring The Grand Hotel, Birmingham circa 1900

Our period is defined as 1837 to 1914 and our casework area covers the West Midlands Metropolitan Area: Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall, Wolverhampton; Warwick District including Leamington; Redditch and Bromsgrove; although our membership base takes in parts of Staffordshire, Shropshire, Worcestershire, Warwickshire and Herefordshire; which is more akin to the Government's West Midlands region.

Our casework activities combined with the educational programme, provided by our events, are the tools for championing and protecting buildings at risk.

## **GROUP EXECUTIVE**

I would like to thank the Executive Committee for all their work in 2016. They are Barbara Shackley (Vice Chairman); Joe Holyoak (Vice Chairman); James Fletcher (Treasurer & Minutes Secretary); Mary Worsfold (Honorary Secretary); Nina Hatch (Programme Secretary); Andy Foster, Jasna Jaksic, Eva Ling and Gill Sockett.

## **CASEWORK**

Our Conservation Adviser, Tim Bridges, is paid for by the Mary Heath Trust, a bequest made to the Society for the benefit of the Birmingham & West Midlands Group. The Regional Group Executive made a decision a few years ago to recommend to the Trustees of the Trust that we focus funds from the Trust on this important area.

Tim receives notifications from Local Authorities (although we have been experiencing difficulties receiving them from Birmingham recently) on listed buildings and those in Conservation Areas. Sometimes he discovers these matters himself, in the absence of any notifications from Local Authorities and he is assisted by an able team of voluntary caseworkers.

Joe Holyoak chairs the Casework Committee and along with Tim they are assisted by a the voluntary caseworkers, who are Rob Allen (Sandwell); Malcolm Baxter (Royal Leamington Spa); Andy Foster (churches); Jeremy Handy (Redditch); Angus Kaye (Coventry); Jennie McGregor-Smith (Bromsgrove); Gillian Roberts (Wolverhampton); Barbara Shackley (Solihull); Roy Taylor (Dudley); Jasna Jaksic; Eva Ling and Mary Worsfold. David Low translated from the Executive Committee and was appointed to the Casework Committee in

April. After three years service, Michael Tivey resigned from the committee in September, as he was re-locating to London with his job.

I extend my thanks to them for giving their time and knowledge freely for the good of the Society and, of course, our Victorian and Edwardian heritage.

Looking at a few cases during 2016, we can see quite a few of the highlights of the year, as well as the lowlights:

### Highlights

- *Crockett's Lane Schools, Smethwick;*  
The ownership is changing and the new owners' architect has been to see the Conservation Officer at Sandwell Council to discuss repairing and developing these historic buildings.
- *Paragon Hotel, Highgate, Birmingham;*  
New scheme to extend the hotel by building in the courtyard.
- *44-47 Princip Street, Birmingham;*  
A good scheme conserving derelict listed and unlisted factory buildings as residential.
- *Moor Street Station, Birmingham;*  
Plan for illuminated displays has been withdrawn.
- *UCB, Holland Street, Birmingham;*  
A plan to close the street to public access and glaze over has been withdrawn. Lodge Cottrell building still being demolished though
- *Belmont Works, Jennens Road, Birmingham;*  
We await the realisation for incorporation of this building in a new scheme.
- *Waterloo P.H., Smethwick, Sandwell;*  
Slow but thorough progress with conversion of upper floors to flats.
- *The Roundhouse, Birmingham;*  
A very good restoration scheme.
- *Louisa Ryland House, Birmingham;*  
New upper storeys and entrance plans modified. Not great though.
- *Garth House, Edgbaston, Birmingham;*  
Restoration as part of hotel plan, which we consider to be very good.

- *Brandauer Works, Birmingham;*  
Restoration and adaptation as student accommodation. Very good modified scheme.

## **Lowlights**

- *12 Bracebridge Road, Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham;*  
A bad extension, though some concession in the retention of the outbuildings.
- *Mary Street, Jewellery Quarter, Birmingham;*  
Restoration of house, but we have objected to extension and loss of industrial premises in the heart of the Jewellery Quarter.
- *431 Hagley Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham;*  
Grade II building de-listed following disastrous fire.
- *60 Sandon Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham;*  
Early Victorian cottage ruined by recent modernisation subsequently granted permission to demolish.
- *Archway of Tears at City Hospital, Birmingham;*  
Permission granted to demolish.
- *St Luke, Cradley Heath, Sandwell;*  
To be demolished (though we were able to be instrumental in the relocation of many of the contents, particularly the memorials and stained glass).
- *Coachmakers Arms, Wednesbury, Sandwell;*  
A very poor refurbishment.
- *Zara's, Broad Street, Birmingham;*  
The saga of the illegal canopy continues.
- *431 Hagley Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham;*  
Loss of listed building. Poor design of new Arts & Crafts houses.
- *St Philip, Dorridge, Solihull;*  
Demolition of church, poor replacement design.
- *St Paul's School, Jewellery Quarter, Birmingham;*  
Demolition of Chatwin building in the Conservation Area.
- *Methodist Church, Headless Cross, Redditch;*  
Demolition of Harper church & open work spire.
- *Four Oaks Methodist Church, Birmingham;*  
A poor quality extension that could have been much better.

- *22 Ladywood Road, Four Oaks, Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham;*  
Appeal against refusal to allow demolition of substantial upper parts of walls dismissed, although the ongoing state of the building is regrettable.

You may draw the conclusion from this, that our successes are evenly tempered with our failures and it certainly underlines the fact that we still have to be vigilant in getting owner's and authorities to value Victorian & Edwardian architecture more. Despite this, the Casework Committee work very hard and achieve tremendous results. So, a big well done to Joe, Tim and the casework team.

## **PROGRAMME**

Our Programme Committee, led by Programme Secretary Nina Hatch, comprises the following members: Mary Collins, Eva Ling, David Low, Celia Potts, Helene Pursey, Gill Sockett and Barbara Shackley. Over the year it has provided a varied, enjoyable and interesting schedule of events, as follows:

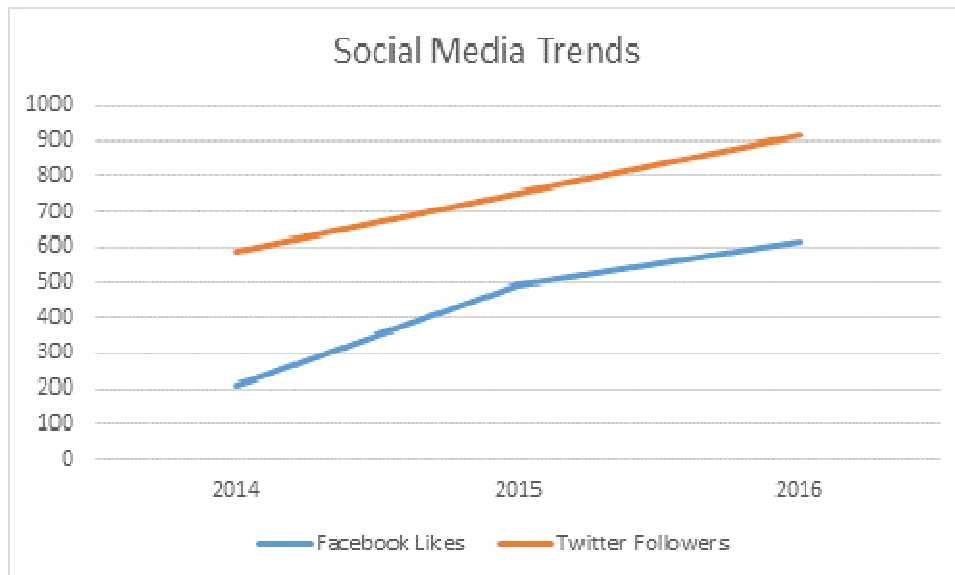
- 16<sup>th</sup> January: Day School on Victorian & Edwardian Domestic Interiors (Part I)
- 24<sup>th</sup> January: Annual Lunch at the Plough & Harrow
- 10<sup>th</sup> February: AGM & Casework Report
- 9<sup>th</sup> March: Black Country Landscapes of Edwin Butler Bayliss (1874-1950)
- 18<sup>th</sup> May: Moving Men of Stone - The Statues of Birmingham
- 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> May: Weekend in the Wirral
- 16<sup>th</sup> June: Visit to Stirchley Baths
- 10<sup>th</sup> July: Garden Party, Book and Art sale at the home of Niky Rathbone
- 23<sup>rd</sup> August: Visit to Rodmarton Manor & All Saints Church, Selsley
- 15<sup>th</sup> October: Day School on Victorian & Edwardian Domestic Interiors (Part II)

## **MEMBERSHIP**

Our Regional Group remains the largest in the Society and has been remarkably consistent at just over 250 for a number of years. However, a change in banks at Priory Gardens has led to the rejection of a number of Direct Debits and we are down to 188 memberships. However, 'memberships' may be an individual (1), a couple (2) or a household (3+) and once this is taken into account, the number of members is just 227. The reduction from last year is not because of any resignations, but rather a failure to renew manually by those members who were on automatic renewal.

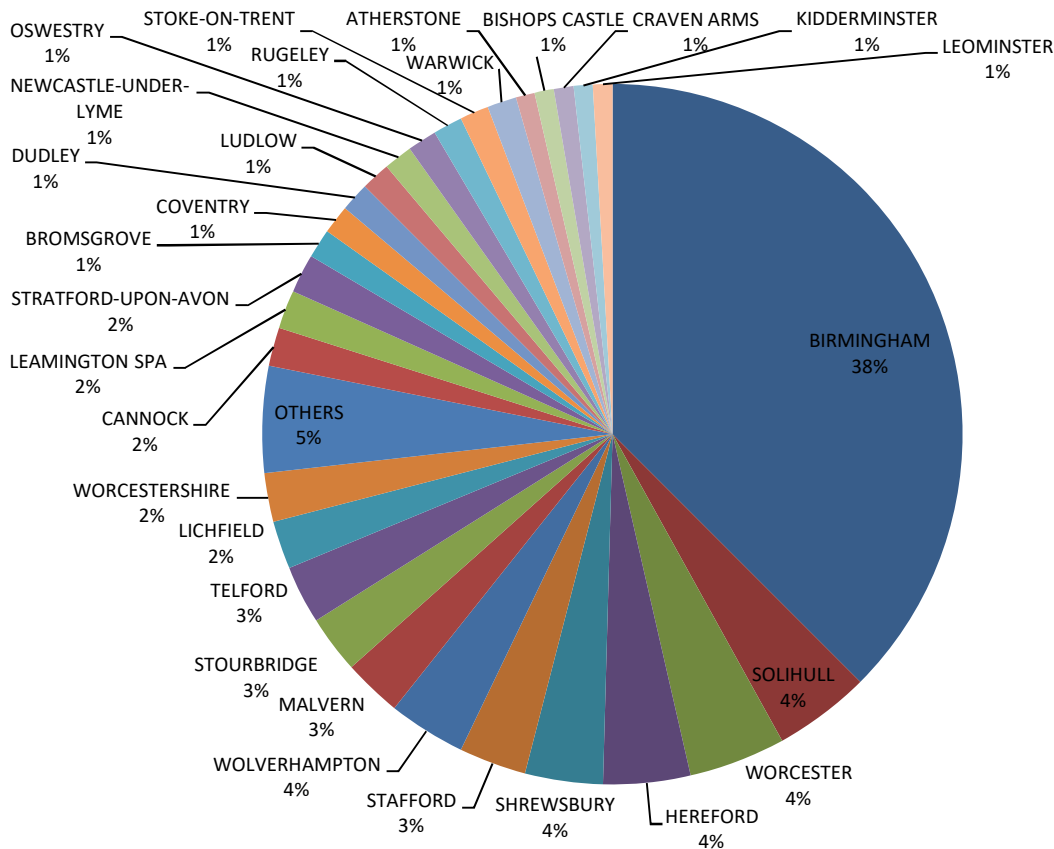
I cannot stress too highly the importance of our members supporting events and that we keep them informed of the work we are doing. This is now achieved by regular mailings from Helene Pursey, who updates Members with the latest events. This is done, where possible by e-mail, as it saves a large amount of money by not having to print, post and pay for postage. Members are encouraged to supply their e-mail address to Helene to assist in this process.

We also regularly post on Facebook and Twitter. At the time of going to print, we have 916 followers on Twitter (753 in 2015 and 586 in 2014) and 616 'Likes' on our Facebook page (490 in 2015 and 212 in 2014), so that is clearly an increasing media.

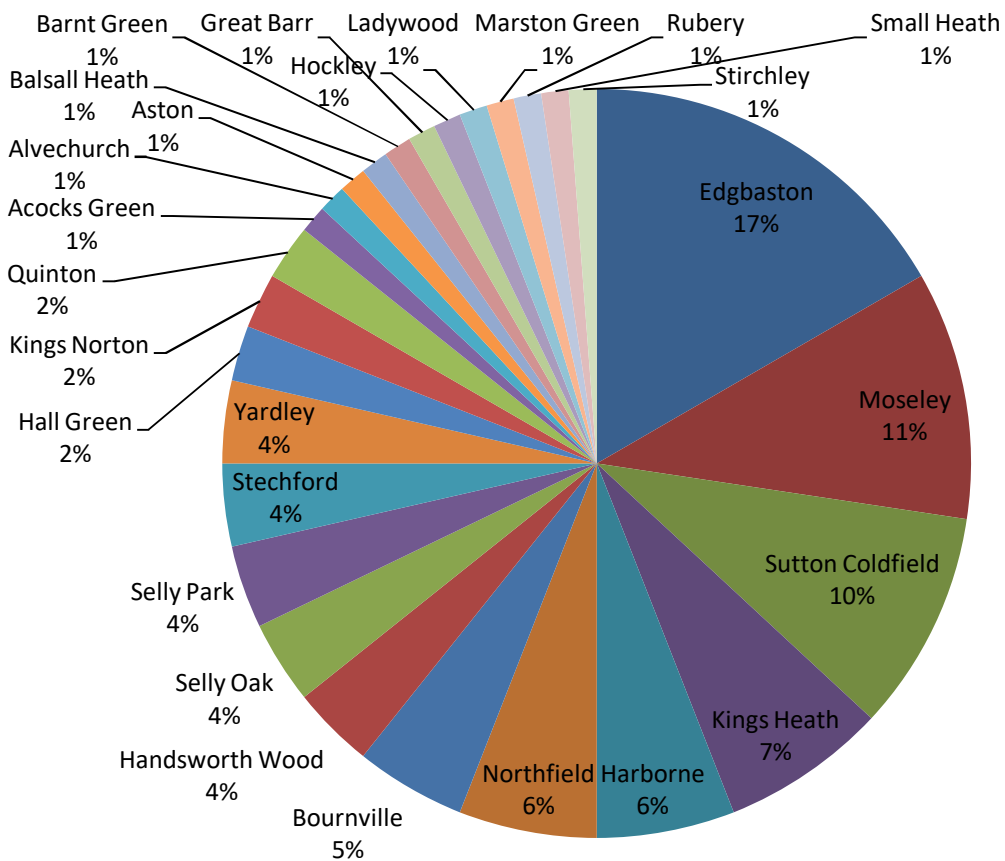


There is a lot of interest and interaction in both these mediums and often you can see posts that have been shared and re-shared to this online media community which goes into the thousands. So, it is very important in maintaining this presence, where there are many users in their twenties and thirties and as such may be the emerging members of the future.

To create some interest to the demographics of our Regional Membership, and to augment what some may see as a bald and unconvincing narrative, I have created the usual colourful pie charts on the following page, which hopefully add some artistic verisimilitude:



**REGIONAL MEMBERSHIP DEMOGRAPHICS**



**BIRMINGHAM MEMBERSHIP DEMOGRAPHICS**

## TREASURY

Our Treasurer, James Fletcher, will discuss the accounts further, and you will see that all of the events organized by the Programme Committee have contributed a sizeable sum to our bank balance, increasingly through the highly successful Day Schools. This is important, as it is the only way we generate income for the Regional Group and would have helped pay for the Conservation Award, had Hortons' Estate Ltd not agreed to fund it for the next three years; so attendance at events is critical to the success of the regional group. Surpluses on previous events will allow us to subsidise the Semicentenary Luncheon in April 2017 and to invite civic dignitaries as our guests from across the region to help us celebrate this milestone.

## CONSERVATION AWARD

The Group's Conservation Award was inaugurated at our 2015 AGM and we had a number of high quality nominations, some of which were re-submitted for consideration for the 2016 award.



**The Presentation of 2015 Conservation Award at the Grand Hotel, Birmingham**

The winner of the 2015 award was Hortons' Estate Limited for their restoration of the façade of the Grand Hotel. In May 2016, we had an excellent presentation ceremony which the Lord Mayor of Birmingham attended, along with the members of our executive and casework committees; national Chairman, Hilary Grainger; Director, Chris Costelloe; members of the Birmingham City Council Conservation team; City Heritage Champion, Cllr Phil Davis; Historic England; representatives of the contractors who worked on the Grand; and, of course, the Horton family themselves. Hortons' received a very heavy 18" bronze disc and illuminated scroll.



Subsequently, Hortons' Estate Limited advised that they would sponsor the cost of the Award for 2016, 2017 and 2018. So, I am delighted to record my thanks for their generosity.

## **RICHARD MYALL**

We were saddened to hear of the death of Richard Myall, which occurred on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2016, aged 86.

Richard was a stalwart of the Birmingham Group in the 1970s, organising trips and providing casework expertise for the group.

## **BARRY SELWOOD**

We were also saddened to learn of the untimely death of Barry Selwood in January 2017, just in his late 60s. Barry was a long-time member of the Society and former Executive Officer of the Regional Group in the 1980s. He was also greatly involved in St Agatha's church in Highgate.

## **SUMMARY**

Thanks to the small number of dedicated members who give their time freely and thanks to the professionalism and dedication of our paid Conservation Adviser.

The number of cases we have been able to influence positively is a cause for celebration, whilst at the same time noting that losses and failures in other areas remind us that we are in a constant battle to show the virtues of Victorian & Edwardian buildings, often to those who choose to be blind to them. As we enter the third year of our Conservation Award it is also to be hoped that this will assist us in championing the restoration of these cherished works.

It is to be hoped that the problems with automatic membership renewals have been overcome and that we shall see our traditional membership numbers recovered across the year.

**Stephen Hartland**  
**Chairman**  
**The Victorian Society**  
**Birmingham & West Midlands**

**10th February 2017**