

Chairman's Report 2026-26.

It has been a good year, with membership holding up, and adequate funds. I should like to thank all who have worked towards this, the committee members and the members who continue to support our Association.

As usual, three newsletters have appeared, containing, besides news from the member societies and institutions, reviews of new books, and short articles on aspects of Berkshire local history.

Our annual journal, *Berkshire Old and New*, contained more substantial articles on Shakespeare and Windsor, 17th-century Quaker women in Reading, and West Berkshire, and British Restaurants across the county during the Second World War.

Disappointingly, the usual Berkshire Bibliography did not appear this time. The impending move of the local studies collection in Reading Central Library meant that the staff there hadn't the time to put it together. The Library will be moving later this year. I'd like to appeal for help in putting together a 2024-26 bibliography for this year's journal, so if you have details of any books or useful articles in journals, I'd be grateful if you could send them along to chairman@blha.org.uk We just need author(s), title, publisher, year of publication, and price if you have it.

Last year's AGM was unusual because it was held in the Biscuit Factory Cinema in Reading. This was to enable us, after the meeting proper, to see a programme of archive films. It was an enjoyable occasion, with some of us staying in the cinema for lunch afterwards.

In June 2025 our information stand was taken to Wokefield Park, to the day conference on "The Victorians," which marked the 50th anniversary of the Berkshire Family History Association.

Also in June, Ann Smith led a local history walk, over the river around Little Marlow. The walk was enjoyable, but the weather was very hot.

September brought the launch of a new volume from the Berkshire Record Society, *Early Quaker Controversy in Reading*, to which we had been invited. The talk was most enjoyable.

Then in October, a few members and our information stand went over to Marcham, for the celebration of the 30th anniversary of The Marcham Society. Many of us will remember the 2023 AGM, and how well the Society looked after us.

The Berkshire History Prize was not awarded in 2025. The prize, funded jointly by ourselves and the Royal Berkshire Archives, goes to an undergraduate student who has completed an outstandingly good thesis on some aspect of Berkshire local history.

But I'm pleased to report that the "Building Schools for Berkshire" project is back on track. An editor oversees the research done by a group of amateur local historians to produce an account of schools built between 1870, when Forster's Education Act became law, and the outbreak of war in 1914. The result should be a

worthwhile volume, to be published by the Berkshire Record Society. Progress had stopped during the Covid pandemic, but some new enthusiastic volunteers have come forward.

For 2026, a walk is planned, round the Whiteknights Park campus of the University of Reading, for 27th June. This will be a part of the University's centenary celebrations.

On Saturday 18th July, the Association will have a presence at the online Berkshire Heritage Fair. This is where enquirers from around the world can contact groups and institutions with an interest in local and family history, and can move from to another for a few hours. In the past, we have been able to assist people, and have made some useful contacts. As before, the Fair is organised by the Berkshire Family History Society.

Our Association goes over the Thames into Buckinghamshire once more for the 2026 AGM, as guests of the Hedgerley Local History Society. They are a very active society, and are about to publish a new history of their village. It's good to have them as members.

At the meeting we hope to make a slight amendment to the constitution, and to remove the need to have the accounts signed off by an independent examiner. These days, the Treasurer does not handle cash and cheques, and this change would remove the need for some administration and expense. Of course, the accounts will still need to be accepted by the executive committee and general membership.

After our deliberations and votes, we can enjoy a talk about Hedgerley, and lunch, before making our way home via Langley. You may be surprised to find that Langley, since 1974 a part of Berkshire, is more than a railway station and industrial estate. The medieval church has a 17th-century parish library tacked on the back, and old almshouses round the churchyard. The library is in a highly decorated room, and is named after the lords of the manor around 1700 – the Kedermisters. The whole group of buildings is a remarkable survival – I hope you can join us.

David Cliffe, Chairman, B.L.H.A.