Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution
The Promotion and Advancement of Science, Literature and Art

Annual Report to Members

for the year

1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021

16-18 Queen Square
BATH BA1 2HN

Bath (01225) 312 084
www.brlsi.org
The Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution (BRLSI) exists for the promotion and advancement for the public benefit of science, literature and art in the City of Bath and its surrounding areas by such means as the Directors of the Company think fit, including but not limited to:

3.2.1 the provision and maintenance of a museum in or near the City of Bath for the display of exhibits of historical, scientific, literary or artistic significance or interest;

3.2.2 the provision of a library, lectures and other facilities for education relating to literature, science and art; and

3.2.3 the promotion of research relating to literature, science and art and the publication of the useful results of that research.
Until March 2020, BRLSI actively engaged with various audiences through a programme of talks, exhibitions, meetings, publications, newsletters, trails, trips and a symposium.

However, in March 2020, the Institution was closed due to the pandemic and did not reopen until 17 May 2021. We did not stop providing talk but, instead of physical talks, we moved the programme online.

So far, this virtual activity has generated 130 recorded videos that are available through YouTube and we have gathered 500 subscribers. Two special events, a week of Jane Austen related talks and a weekend Symposium on Vienna, were both delivered successfully. We estimate that more than 3000 people have joined our online talks.

We have been fortunate this year to be awarded funding from the Arts Fund and the MH Wray Trust permitting the development of a Discovery App providing 4 trails through Bath, completed in collaboration with Bath Spa University and a new website. Recently, we successfully applied for another grant to improve our digital offerings and to assist us in reaching larger audiences through social media.

The major BRLSI exhibition planned for the year, 'Jurassic Ark', had to be postponed until May 2021 to which attendance has been especially high. All through the year, we shared via the weekly bulletin and Instagram, highlights from the historic collections.

And through our relationship with Bath Spa University its students have been involved in various aspects of 'Institutional promotional activities such as the production of an International Women's Day Map..

The number of Members fell back to 2016 levels during the closure, and will be trying to reach out during the forthcoming year to bring the Membership level back up to the January 2020 high of more than 830 Members.

An 1824 Fund set up in recognition of our impending 200th anniversary is an endowment fund which can be built up will help ensure our future. We are thankful to Geoff Catchpole for his legacy and to others who have donated this year. We wish to remember three active members who died during the year: Ian Wallace, former chair of Directors, Valerie Lorenz, who was a founding supporter of our Saturday student workshops and Robert Blackburn, the Literature and Humanities convenor and organizer of several excellent symposia..

Various internal meetings and the usual cycle of Board meetings were conducted this year via Zoom. Directors agreed to make significant use of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme by placing several staff on furlough during the lockdown. Three staff left during the year through redundancy and resignation. A professional bookkeeper has been hired to ensure that financial matters are properly handled and Gerie Herbert has been promoted in recognition of her invaluable contribution during this difficult time.

The Secretary to the Board, John Gardner, waived his fee for the year and many other volunteers have given generously of their time and talent. We estimate conservatively that the total number of free hours contributed by our volunteers exceeds 10,000 hours.

This is a remarkable effort and permitted us to continue our outreach during a difficult year.
As a long-serving member of the Board since 1993, I have decided to step down as Chair of Directors at the 2021 AGM.

My time at Queen Square has been exciting and most stimulating and I am grateful that in recognition of this service the Directors have granted me an Honorary Life Membership.

I will of course keep active as a Bath Royal volunteer.

**Betty Suchar**
Chair of the Board of Directors

**Management**

Thanks to David Haywood’s rapid and near-faultless implementation of the Zoom conferencing system the Management Committee, along with many sub-Committees, managed to hold meetings at regular intervals through both lockdowns, to keep the cultural endeavours of the ‘Institution alive and well though unprecedented time – sometimes producing surprising and welcoming developments that almost certainly would not have occurred otherwise.

As I only took over as Acting Chair of Management at the beginning of this year (2021), it seems to me more fitting and appropriate that I should leave the Chairs to speak for their respective sub-Committees, rather than presenting what would amount to a precis of an altogether wider range of activities.

**Gerry Kontos**
Chair of Management Committee (Acting)

**COVID Response Team (CORT)**

Following the start of the first COVID lockdown, the ‘Institution set up a COVID Response Team (CORT), and has met monthly since 17 March 2020 to discuss and define the Institution’s policies and responses to the pandemic, and develop guidelines.

The Queen Square building was initially closed to visitors from mid-March 2020 and reopened for the Jurassic Ark exhibition in mid-May 2021 and for live lecture at the end of July. At the time of writing (mid-August 21) a number of control measures are still in place.

Throughout, the team has been hugely supported by the time Paula Riseborough has spent reviewing the rapidly changing HMG guidance, and producing Risk Assessments with their operating procedures.

**David Heywood**
Chair of COVID Response Team

**Membership**

During the Covid-19 lockdown 'Institution membership fell from 838 in January 2020 to a low of 585 in March 2021, but has since recovered somewhat to 620 in August.

As soon as Bath Royal closed its doors against Covid-19 in March 2020 a team comprising the Membership Secretary, Chair of Membership and Secretary to Management Committee replaced plastic and cardboard Membership cards with an E-Card, designed to form part of each confirmation email. This could be shown on a mobile phone or printed off and used like the previous Membership Cards for entry to lectures. After one or two teething troubles this system has worked well.

Our very sincere thanks is due to the Membership Secretary Sheila Pickthorne, who looked
after the onerous but rewarding task of processing applications and keeping records of Members.

After Sheila retired in December 2020, Rob Randall took over until Easter 2021. Now David Haywood has the Membership Secretary position, who also oversees our compliance with General Data Protection Regulations.

Many thanks to Sheila, Rob and David for their unsung work in these back-office areas.

We did not hold a Volunteers' outdoor Summer Party in 2020 but instead held a successful online version with a quiz run by Volunteers' Coordinator, Gerie Herbert.

All 30 who attended agreed it was great to see each other again and we all had a lot of fun, augmented by Betty Suchar’s Bring and Buy stall which made enough profit to finance the whole event. Well done, Betty!

The current team has now held six such Summer Volunteers' Parties: four in the Courtyard; the rainy June 2016 party in the much drier Elwin Room; and one online. Incidentally the seventh, 2021 Summer Party was held in Elwin and was very successful.

Penny Holroyd had the great idea of holding a Lockdown Christmas Reading’s Party on the evening of 12th December 2020.

The event was cobbled up by Mike Twohig with a team version of The12 Days Of Christmas made up of individual readings on the medieval origins of each verse, rounded off with Ian Gilchrist and his brilliant Bath Mummers video.

It all made for an unusual and enriching Christmas event.

Dick Bateman
Chair of Membership sub-Committee

Finance
The Institution was heavily affected by the Covid-19 pandemic during the year, with significant reductions in income from Room Hire and Programmes. Rental and Membership income were similarly diminished, but to a lesser extent.

We responded to the challenge by restricting expenditure to the minimum required to keep the Institution ticking over. Regrettably, this included making two employees redundant (after an appropriate consultation process), and one other resigned at the year end.

We received Covid-19 support from the Government in the form of several Small Business Grants, and used the Job Retention Scheme (“furlough”) to cover some of the costs of our employees. We also took out a Bounce Back Loan for £50,000 to ensure we had sufficient cash on hand.

In addition to these measures, we successfully applied for new grants for specific projects to continue to develop the Institution for the future, despite the pandemic.

During the second half of the year, global stock markets showed some recovery, and our
investments increased in value by £49,450.

The net effect of these factors was that our total funds (prior to revaluation of the Investment Property) actually increased by £67,669. Note that this figure is not affected by the Bounce Back Loan.

As part of the annual Statutory Accounts process, we have to revalue the Investment Property, which is that part of the building that we rent out to commercial tenants. Given the uncertainty in the current commercial office rental market, the impact of the revaluation was a reduction in book value of £200,000.

Overall, our total funds therefore declined by £132,331 in the year — compared to a reduction of £105,846 in the previous year.

The detailed Statutory Accounts for 2020/21 are available on the Bath Royal website.

Joe Willson
Chair of Finance sub-Committee

Premises

Apart from the brief interregnum between lockdowns last summer 2020, the main building at Queen Square has lain strangely quiet and deserted for the whole of the period under review until well into 2021.

This not to say it has been left abandoned and uncared for as we put together a scratch rota to ensure someone came in every weekday to check round the meeting rooms and basement to make sure everything remained tranquil and unharmed.

The Premises sub-committee met several times during the year through the Zoom conferenceing system to discuss matters of continuing interest and concern.

The Moore Room: Kerve Creative

The lease to Kerve Creative was for five years from June 2015, which accordingly expired in June 2020.

Nothing came of tentative approaches for a Renewal and Kerve duly cleared away – only to leave an array of very large and heavy draughting desks/tables and filing cabinets which they appeared to have abandoned.

They were eventually removed at no cost to the ‘Institution, save for some glass filing cabinets which are of no detriment to the accommodation and have been left to await a future outcome. Marketing of the Room on CSquared’s website was commenced more or less straightaway and has to date elicited one or two (very) hesitant enquiries.

Top floor: Regency Offices

The leasing of this floor to Regency Offices had been the cause of anxiety for some time and their debt in unpaid Service Charges continued to mount until finally overtaken by events when in November 2020 they went into liquidation owing to the failure of the office lettings market.

The floor remained unoccupied though in generally in good order for the remainder of the financial year.

(The accommodation was satisfactorily relet on a new Lease at a modern rent with a proper level of Service Charge in July 2021, on which I expect to report more fully next year 2021-2022.)

Michael Twohig
Vice-Chair (Acting) of Premises sub-Committee
Fundraising

Following our success last year with the National Lottery Heritage Fund, we have been successful with several more grant applications.

A grant from the South West Museums Development Project recovery fund enabled us to procure a digital streaming camera which has been used in a number of successful hybrid events - bringing together face to face and virtual audiences.

A further significant success was the award of £40,000 from the Art Fund and a generous donation of £15,000 from the M St J Way Charitable Trust towards developing a new digital App that provides four trails focused around items in our marvellous collection. The trails take users around Bath and then directs them back to the Institution to see these items themselves.

The design of these trails has been carried out by staff and students at Bath Spa University, as part of our ongoing collaboration. The funding has also helped us develop a new website more aligned to our new online activities with a number of useful new features.

We were also extremely fortunate to receive a substantial legacy of £10,000 from the estate of the late Geoffrey Catchpole, a long-standing member, which will allow us to continue to invest in the development of the Institution in these difficult times.

We should also like to thank the many other members and visitors who gave us smaller contributions via our donation facilities online or in Queen Square. All support, no matter how large or small is hugely valued and our 1824 fund remains open for legacies or other donations in support of future developments.

Chris Garcia
Chair of Fundraising sub-Committee

Collections

Bath Royal took the decision to furlough Matt Williams, the Collections Manager, for most of the year and to flexi-furlough for some of 2021. Regardless, we have managed a remarkable series of collaborations with other Institutions, together with and a considerable amount of research work.

Exhibitions:
With the relaxing of the lockdown over the summer of 2020 we took the opportunity to create an interim exhibition based upon our Instagram series ‘Take 5’.

Throughout 2020 and 2021 Jude Harris has been using the popular social media platform to present groups of 5 objects unified by a common theme. Thus, the research and careful writing undertaken for one project was put to good use in another.

The exhibition proved surprisingly popular, considering the impact of the pandemic and the disruptive road works outside the building. Manoel Akure (Blohaus.com) made an innovative film of the setup of the exhibition which was shared on YouTube.

In 2021 Matt returned from furlough to set up the postponed exhibition
‘Jurassic Ark: Spectacular Fossils from an Ancient Somerset Sea’, an overview of the Strawberry Bank Lagerstätte, first presented in 2014, but now updated with new research, a video installation, and a report of out 2019 excavation.

Jurassic Ark is proving very successful, particularly appealing to young families. A series of four lectures to accompany the exhibition have been given online and posted on YouTube, alongside a promotional piece about the exhibition.

Research relating to the site is ongoing and will be presented at the first international Marine Reptile Conference at The Etches Collection: Museum of Jurassic Marine Life Kimmeridge, Dorset in May 2022 (postponed from 2019).

Collaborations:
As part of an Art Fund supported project, Forward to the Future, we made Bath Discovery Trails smartphone app, reforaging and drawing upon a 2019 collaboration with the School of Design at Bath Spa University.

This innovative project, using four objects from the Collection, invites the user to take one of four guided walks around Bath, with information and interactive tasks based around a narrative linked to one of the objects. Each trail ultimately leads the user to the object exhibited at Bath Royal.

A second collaboration, with students studying Creative Computing at Bath Spa University, in conjunction with Adelaide University, was based on photogrammetry of another four museum objects which the students rendered in 3D and incorporated into an unusual web display. The students chose objects related to the marine environment and based their interpretation around climate change.

This student-led project produced an exciting set of images and graphics which we will use on our website.

Collections care:
We have had a most generous conservation of our magnificent Burmese Saung, a court harp of doe skin, wood, lacquer and fine glass work, by one of the world’s leading conservators of Burmese artefacts which we hope to display at some stage next year. Our volunteer team are now back on a rota basis and the work of cleaning, monitoring, researching, documenting and conserving has resumed.

The Future:
The new development of the website has challenged Bath Royal to present its collections in new ways. We are working on new content and online features as well as developing a submission for

Our talk by A. C.Grayling attracted a large live audience and has subsequently been viewed by more than 2,000 people on our YouTube Channel.
Google Arts and Culture, which we began early in 2020 but has been on hold for the last 14 months: and which enable the Collection to reach an international audience.

The new website gives much more user-friendly access to the Collections information, but will take some time to fully populate.

**Henry Ford**
Chair of Collections sub-Committee

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**Virtual BRLSI**

**The Past Year**

With Covid restrictions dominating the last 12 months and the Queen Square building closed to the public for most of that time, Virtual BRLSI has again been at the forefront of maintaining cultural activities.

In the year since September 2020 we provided 119 individual events for members and supporters to watch online, the majority of them being live online talks via the medium of Zoom.

Highlights among the online talks included A.C. Grayling on the history of philosophy, Tim Mackintosh-Smith in conversation about his life and works, a talk about Frank Ramsey, Cambridge’s unknown genius and many more.

We also organised and staged a virtual symposium on a fascinating period of European cultural creativity. “A New Worldview: Vienna 1890 – 1935” attracted leading speakers from the UK and abroad to discuss subjects ranging from Freud and Wittgenstein to Stefan Zweig, Schoenberg and the artist Oskar Kokoschka.

A total of 79 people bought tickets for the three-day event, and all eight lectures were attended by almost all those who had bought tickets, making for an excellent atmosphere online and vibrant Q&A sessions Afterwards. The symposium raised just under £2,000 in gross ticket sales and a further €500 in sponsorship was received from the Austrian Cultural Forum.

All our live online events throughout the year were subsequently uploaded to our Virtual BRLSI YouTube channel where they can be watched by people who were unable to attend live.

In the year since September 1st 2020 the YouTube channel gained 391 subscribers (bringing the total subscriber numbers to 629) and had almost 22,000 visitors.

**Trails App**

The past year also saw the development and roll-out of a phone app to encourage Bath locals and visitors to explore the city’s history and heritage via four trails, all of which end up at 16 Queen Square.

The trails are: The First Meteorite, The War Crosses, On the Origin of Species and The Railway Leviathan.

**Looking Forward**

The coming year will be an exciting and challenging one for Virtual BRLSI as we segue from online-only mode to a combined online and in-person approach. We have started experimenting with ‘hybrid’ talks where a talk in front of an in-person audience at Queen Square can also be simultaneously enjoyed online.

There are some teething troubles with making this work smoothly but we are confident they will be ironed out in the near future.
Allowing online streaming of in-person talks extends the cultural reach of the Institution, raises additional revenue and allows people who cannot physically get to Queen Square the opportunity to participate in our activities.

We have also begun work on a significant digital enhancement project (BRLSI 2.0) funded by a major grant award from the NHLF. Half of this award is for upgrading the digital infrastructure at Queen Square with a view to enhancing our attractiveness as a venue for room hire; the other half – more directly relevant to Virtual BRLSI – is for using an external expert of re-think and energise our digital promotional activities around talks, collections and our activities generally.

The second part of this project is under way and due to be completed by the end of the year.

The recent launch of the new BRLSI website provides a helpful and welcoming background to all the activities undertaken by the Virtual BRLSI team.

**Virtual Members**

During 2021 the Board approved the creation of a “Virtual Member” tier of membership to enable people who are not from the local area to join the Institution and have discounted access to our online activities.

Virtual Members (despite the name) will not be considered “members” under the BRLSI Articles of Association and will not, for example, be able to vote in elections and it is probably best to view them as paying supporters who are making an on-going commitment to the Bath Royal.

Getting the Virtual Member scheme up and running will form part of the remit of the Bath Royal 2.0 project.

**Joe Houlihan**

Chair of Virtual BRLSI sub-Committee

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**Programme**

As the world had to adapt to the pandemic, so did the Bath Royal by creating a live cultural talks programme and vibrant video content for members and audiences to enjoy during these unprecedented times.

Stuart Reynolds, the outgoing Science convenor, spear-headed a series of COVID-19 video talks early in the year to provide much needed expert explanation from leading scientists and virologists. This was followed in June by moving the live talks programme online across the various interest areas and convenor groups, which ensured the cultural programme at the Bath Royal continued to thrive despite the pandemic.

During the year, the Programme sub-Committee delivered:

- 73 Live talks online to a total audience of 2,826
- 118 videos on the Virtual BRLSI YouTube Channel

The online Jane Austen week generated significant international interest and the live talks and video content were much enjoyed by an avid audience, which actively participated in the discussion of Jane Austen’s life and her works.
In memory of the late Literature & Humanities convenor, Robert Blackburn, the second Vienna Symposium in March was a great success, attracting online audiences from around the globe, covering diverse topics such as philosophy, psychology, architecture and literature.

The Programme continued at pace and new convenor groups in Russian Culture and Sustainable Environment formed, with Philosophy expanding to also cover Psychology going forward. Many thanks go to the AI & Robotics convenor John Higgins. The former group has been integrated into the other convenor groups on specific topics as the notion of AI has become ubiquitous. Many thanks also go to Joe Houlihan, Chair of Virtual BRLSI and John Law, Chair of Website and IT, for their support and contribution which made the Virtual Programme such a success.

The 6th Form Philosophy seminars continued via Zoom, covering a range of interesting topics such as dealing with uncertainty, personal identity, artificial intelligence, transhumanism, colonialism and climate change.

At time of writing, the Bath Royal is once again open for live talks at Queen Square and going forward many of the talks will simultaneously be streamed live to a global audience.

During the international crisis, many valuable lessons have been learnt and implemented between the organisation of cultural programmes at the Bath Royal, staying in touch with members and existing audiences, whilst at the same time reaching out to a global audience interested in the many cultural interest areas the Bath Royal offers.

Andreas Wasmuht  
Chair of Programme sub-Committee

Publicity

With the arrival of the pandemic the traditional publicity focus on posters, calendars, magazine ads had to be abandoned and the new focus became digital, social media and online activities.

Our look is becoming more consistent, and we will be expanding the number of short videos celebrating our talks and collections. Campaigns for Facebook, Instagram and Twitter are now being planned and scheduled in an effort to reach a wider audience.
Much effort has gone into promoting our Discovery App funded by a grant from the Art Fund. The Bath Magazine has featured the Discovery App conveying how the App was designed to enhance the walking experience of both residents and visitors.

Wera Hobhouse MP has become involved and the App was sent out to volunteers across the city to show appreciation for all the hard work they put in during the course of the pandemic. The App along with our exhibition, Jurassic Ark, were promoted through an empty shop window, a banner, and with a combined leaflet.

Attendance at Queen Square has definitely increased during the summer, and we have been delighted to see so many young families accessing our exhibitions for the first time. Jude Harris has been instrumental in producing eye-catching material though out the year.

A new website was launched recently which introduced a new design brief representing a fresh approach to our communications. We hope you find the new website more attractive, more informative and easier to use especially for joining and renewal of your membership. The website, www.brlsi.org continues to be a useful source of finding out what is on at the Institution.

Bob Draper who prepared the weekly Bob’s Bulletin for years has now moved away from Bath. It continues however as a weekly email summarizing upcoming events plus a commentary on a variety of other issues for the curious and concerned. Gerie has developed a publicity team building on our relationships with other organizations and especially with Bath Spa University.

Rachel Small edits the Members Newsletter which is sent as an electronic newsletter at the end of each month. She continues to brighten the newsletter with images and features. Rachel also overseas Eventbrite, our platform for online and physical tickets.

This year we have looked to increase co-operative working collaborations with sister institutions across the city and feel enormously positive about a new working partnership with the American Museum. Heritage Open Day and Heritage Open Week remain priority events.

We are promoting our brand-new virtual book club The Big Read; we are a part of the Children’s Literature Festival this year and as always are responsive to suggestions from our membership in ways to evolve our communications.

**Betty Suchar**
Chair of Publicity sub-Committee

**Publications**

From the new website it is now possible to order books, booklets and printed trails and pay for them on-line.

This is dandy if you are hooked up to the internet. In case you aren’t, it’s still possible to choose from our printed list of publications (illustrated here) and order by post (write to Publications at Bath Royal, Queen Square, enclosing a cheque) or leave your order at the Bath Royal reception desk.
Your order will be fulfilled by post (free for orders of £10 or more) or by collection from reception.

Now that the pandemic has quietened down we shall continue to add to our list of publications, bringing you interesting and intriguing insights into our Collections and the exploits and adventures of our distinguished Members over the last 200 years.

**Julian Vincent**
Chair of Publications sub-Committee

**Marketing**

It is just under 12 months (September 3, 2020) since the Marketing committee was resurrected as a functioning committee and admitted to the Management Committee as it was felt they could make a real contribution in advancing the mission and objects of the ‘Institution.

A research project sponsored by the Arts Council was undertaken which achieved a good response from just over 24% of the membership. An analysis of this when compared with other museums (over 100 participants) showed a much older age profile for Bath Royal members than the national average, along with other comparative data.

Following extensive debate, it was considered the new website needed a more inclusive, pronounceable, and memorable name than the acronym BRLSI.

After some constructive meetings it was agreed that any radical change might not be to everyone’s taste and could bring problems with our recognition by the Charities Commission.

The solution was **BATH ROYAL Literary and Scientific Institution**

The descriptor on activity of the Institution was reduced in size while the title **Bath Royal** was enlarged and set in a serif typeface

![Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution](image)

No drastic difference - just a ‘refresher’ - something ‘new’ without real ‘Change’, The former ‘pen’ logo was kept to maintain a sense of continuity with the past.

In 2024 the Institution will celebrate its 200th anniversary.

This will provide a once in a lifetime opportunity to bring about a renovation of Bath Royal, which is a subject which clearly will require careful consideration over the next year or so, but some outline thoughts have already been rehearsed.

A small group has considered a variety of opportunities to mark the anniversary, with the celebrations perhaps to include a ‘Son et Lumière’ in Queen Square, with displays in our building and in Queen Square itself to mark this major event.

**Brian Schrimpling**
Chair of Marketing sub-Committee

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END of **ANNUAL REPORT** to Members for the year

**1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021**
The Board of Directors of the Trustee Company is charged with acting in the best interests of the Charity, and the Trustee Company’s Memorandum and Articles of Association set out how it shall discharge those responsibilities.

There are fifteen Directors, eight of whom are elected and seven appointed. In 2020-21 they were:

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<td>Professor Ian Gadd</td>
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**DIRECTORS’ ATTENDANCE**

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## Chairs of sub-Committees

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