



Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution

The Promotion and Advancement of Science, Literature and the Arts

Annual Report to Members

for the year
1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023

16-18 Queen Square
BATH
BA1 2HN
Bath (01225) 312 084
www.brlsi.org

Board of Directors of the Trustee Company

There were fourteen Directors for the year 2022-2023, eight elected and six appointed

Mr. Richard Bateman	Elected	from 20 October 2021	retired 12 Oct 2022
Mr. Stephen Bird	Appointed	SW Federation of Museums and Art Galleries	
Mrs. Mary Burton	Elected	from 12 Oct 2022	
Mrs. Julie Cole	Elected	from 20 October 2021	
Mr. Michael Davis	Elected	Vice-Chair	
Prof. Jonathan Dawes	Appointed	University of Bath	retired 31 July 2022
Dr. Daniela de Angeli	Appointed	University of Bath	retired 31 July 2022
Dr. Simon Hayhoe	Appointed	University of Bath	from 1 st Aug 2022
Prof. Farooq Mughal	Appointed	University of Bath	from 1 st Aug 2022
Prof. Ian Gadd	Appointed	Bath Spa University	Chair: from 20 Oct 2021
Mr. Christopher Garcia	Elected	from 18 October 2019	
Prof. Barry Gilbertson	Elected	from 20 October 2021	resigned 12 Jan 2022
Mr. David Hall	Appointed	Bath Preservation Trust	
Mr. Joe Houlihan	Elected	from 20 October 2021	
Cllr. Bharat Pankhania	Appointed	Bath and NE Somerset Council	
Mr. Rob Randall	Elected	from 20 October 2021	
Dr. Joe Willson	Elected	from 20 October 2021	

ATTENDANCES	28 April	30 Jun	15 July	8 Sept	21 Sept	12 Oct AGM	10 Nov	12 Jan	19 Jan	9 Mar	27 Mar
Mr. Richard Bateman	●	●	●	●	●	●
Mr. Stephen Bird	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○
Mrs. Mary Burton	●	●	●	●	●	●
Mrs. Julie Cole	○	○	○	○	●	○	●	●	○	●	○
Mr. Michael Davis	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Prof. Jonathan Dawes	○	●
Dr. Daniela de Angeli	○	○	○
Prof Ian Gadd	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Mr. Christopher Garcia	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	●
Prof. Barry Gilbertson	●	●	●	○	●	●	●
Mr. David Hall	●	○	○	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	●
Dr. Simon Hayhoe	.	.	.	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	●
Prof. Farooq Mughal	.	.	.	●	●	○	●	●	○	●	●
Mr. Joe Houlihan	●	●	○	○	●	○	●	○	●	●	○
Cllr. Bharat Pankhania	○	○	●	○	○	○	○	●	○	●	●
Mr. Rob Randall	●	●	○	○	●	●	●	●	○	●	●
Dr. Joe Willson	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	○	●	●



Chair of the Board of Directors
Of the Trustee Company
For the year ended 31st March 2023

Hello and welcome to this, the Annual Report for the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

The Institution has been producing some kind of Annual Report ever since its foundation. In its present version, the Report has a formal purpose, to accompany the official accounts for the charity and the corporate trustees, and so it is circulated at the Annual General Meeting and made available on our website. It is also an important opportunity for those who run the Institution on your behalf to update you on activities during the past financial year. As a result, this Report provides written accounts of our **finances, fundraising, collections, membership, staff, programmes, digital and communications, digital subscriptions, premises, volunteers, and bicentenary** — each prepared by the key volunteer who was primarily responsible for that particular area during 2022/23. I commend these individual reports to you.

Among the highlights:

- we acted as a main venue for Bath Festival in May and the Children's Literature Festival in September;
- our wonderful 'Beyond Beastly' exhibition attracting more visitors (almost 4000) than any previous exhibition;
- we held two lively 'Town Hall' events and a very well attended 'new members' event;
- we hosted a fantastic and thought-provoking Victor Suchar Christmas lecture given by Dr Tristram Hunt, Director of the V&A Museum;
- we organised a very promising pilot exhibition, 'Engineered in Bath', celebrating contemporary engineering and innovation in the city.

And, of course, running alongside all this our regular diet of diverse, engaging and informative public talks and other activities organised by our stalwart team of subject convenors and supported by our room hire team who have ensured that those watching by Zoom get the best possible online experience.

The year saw important financial and operational achievements that will contribute to our long-term sustainability: all our leased spaces occupied by tenants and bringing in rent; our revenue from room-hire and programme talks increased; and a new interim operations manager appointed in February 2023. Our membership increased, and we awarded honorary memberships to Marie-Louise Luxembourg and Martin Sturge; we also raised our membership rates for the first time in many years.

On behalf of the Board, I want to thank all our staff and volunteers for their exceptional work and commitment during 2022/23.

This Annual Report formally covers the year ending on 31 March 2023. Since then, we have continued to build on all these achievements. I'd like to mention the following:

- we added new benefits for our members with discounts at the Francis Hotel, the Little Theatre Cinema, and Mary Shelley House of Frankenstein;
- our membership has continued to rise, standing at 788 as of last month. Our membership form now provides an opportunity for members to share details of age and ethnicity, allowing us to get a better sense of our demography;
- we held two successful lecture series:
 - six 'World Heritage' lectures about Bath's six attributes of 'Outstanding Universal Value' as noted in Bath's 1987 UNESCO inscription, organised by Professor Barry Gilbertson;
 - 'The World in 2050', a series of eight talks 'discussing what need to know today to make the world a better place tomorrow', organised by Andreas Wasmuht;
- we hosted a very well attended concert featuring two Swiss musicians, violinist Noëlle Grüebler and pianist Olivia Geiser;
- a record-breaking 8300 visitors viewed our summer exhibition, 'Riches of the Earth', curated by Matt Williams, and we held three special talks related to the exhibition, organised by Betty Suchar;



- we hosted the Duke of Edinburgh for what we believe was the first formal royal visit in our history;
- we moved the Modern Library collection into a new bookcase in the Duncan Room (we're particularly grateful to Rosemarie Davies, James Hamilton, and Paul Browne for organising this);
- the stonework, guttering, windows on the rear façade and the Moore Building have been renovated over the summer;
- we awarded honorary membership to Michael Davis.

I want to thank the following volunteers and staff who have retired or stepped down from the following roles since the last AGM:

- Barry Gilbertson, elected Director (2021–23);
- Michael Davis, elected Director and Vice-Chair of the Board (2014–23);
- Joe Houlihan, elected Director (2020–23);
- Simon Hayhoe, appointed Director (2022–23);

- Joe Willson, Chair of the Finance Subcommittee (2019–23), succeeded by Adam Wynne Hughes;
- David Haywood, Chair of the Membership Subcommittee (2019–23), succeeded by Meyrick Williams;
- Andreas Wasmuht, Chair of the Programmes Subcommittee (2019–23), succeeded by rotational chairs;
- Mike Twohig, Chair of the Premises Subcommittee (2019–23);
- Emily Riches, Intern and Operations Technician (2022–23).

We also note with sadness the passing of several volunteers since last October, some of whom had been associated with the Institution since the 1990s: Nancy Catchpole, Bob Draper, Brian Hood, Brian Shane McElney, Paul Stephens, and Brenda Vicary-Finch. We organised a special memorial event for Bob on 21 October.

The coming year will be our most important yet. In January, we will begin a 12-month programme of special activities and events to celebrate our bicentenary; this will also give us an opportunity both to reflect on our history and achievements and to think carefully and seriously about our immediate and long-term future. To support our bicentenary and other important new initiatives, we have recently submitted a large grant application to the Heritage Lottery Fund; we should hear the result of this before Christmas. In early 2024, we will establish a new permanent managerial staff role and, linked to this, reconfigure our operational structure to improve further our communications, decision-making, and efficiency. As always, our priority is to ensure that the Institution has the necessary strength, dynamism, confidence, and resilience to deliver its charitable objectives successfully. Without your support as members and volunteers, we could not do what we do — and I hope we can continue to count on your commitment and contributions for the years to come.

Professor Ian Gadd
Chair of the Board of Directors

FINANCE

We continued to see a strong post-pandemic recovery in operational income across all areas.

Having had a challenging couple of years with loss of tenant lease and service charge income, we had the benefit of a new lease to Vio (Bath) Ltd of the ground floor space, and we signed a new lease with Chronicle Books for the Moore Room (albeit with limited impact on income in the financial year). Room Hire income was very strong, more than doubling in the year and returning to pre-pandemic levels. Programmes income was strongly up, with the premier events being particularly successful. Membership income also recovered strongly, aided by the increase in membership rates introduced during the year.

In contrast, our non-operational income (Designated and Restricted donations and grants, Covid support) was down significantly.

Overall, our Income was flat (£310,355 vs last year at £310,599).

Our Expenditure was also flat year on year, with increases in Wages/Salaries and Premises offset by reduced spending on grant-funded projects and other costs. The increase in Wages/Salaries was due to a number of factors, including additional investment in social media activity, promotions, and a significant pay review reflecting the high inflation levels that we are all experiencing. The Board also decided to appoint an Interim Operations Manager in February. In addition, the higher Room Hire activity of necessity means a higher staff cost to support those customers.

Premises expenses were higher year on year primarily due to the necessary refurbishment of the Moore Room prior to the new lease, and higher inflation in most areas (excluding utilities which are on a fixed rate contract until August 2023).

Overall, our expenses were largely unchanged (£327,649 vs last year at £328,145).

Our net Income (prior to revaluation of investments and the building) was therefore a loss of **-£17,295** compared **-£17,546** in the previous year.

In terms of our investments, we saw a reduction in funds held by Rathbones of **-£25,150**, but an increase in the valuation of the investment part of the property (that occupied by tenants) of **+£140,000**. With regards to the latter, we are required to revalue the building every year to reflect its “fair value” and given that we now have full occupancy of the lease space, the building valuation was higher than during the pandemic.

Therefore, including revaluations, our total Net Movement in Funds was **+£97,556** vs prior year of **+£19,384**.

With regards to the balance sheet, the Planned Maintenance Programme designated fund was at £67,000 at the year end, in preparation for the major works during 2023/24.

In summary, the finances of the institution have largely recovered from the turmoil of the pandemic, as we see very encouraging growth in all of our operational income streams. However, the challenge to achieve a sustainable surplus is ongoing, especially given the inflationary pressures in the economy.

Finally, I would like to thank all the staff and volunteers who have helped drive our income streams during these challenging times. Without their considerable investment of time and energy we would be in a much more challenging position financially.

The detailed Statutory Accounts for 2022/23 are available on our website.

Joe Willson

Chair of Finance sub-Committee

FUNDRAISING

The previous year (i.e. 2021/22) was a particularly busy year on the fundraising front; the focus this year has been to complete the delivery of the associated activities on those grants from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the South West Museums Development Project recovery fund (SWMDF).

The grant from the Lottery enabled us to undertake a pilot project to promote our digital resources and enhance the digital and user infrastructure in our building. Visitors to the building have been able to experience much-improved Wi-Fi and internet connectivity as well as new audio equipment and displays in several rooms.

Additionally, we finished work on a further trail in our digital smartphone App, this time to celebrate the local connection with Jane Austen, as well as new podcast audio equipment (funded by SWMDF) so we can spread our talks far and wide. If you haven't yet tried one of the trails download the BRLSI Discovery Trails App to your smartphone from the usual Apple or Android App stores and set off on a guided tour of our lovely city.

We should also like to thank the Estate of Philip Bayliss for the legacy of £1,000, another donor who wishes to remain anonymous for another £1,000, a donation of £500 from Kevin Doyle and the late Stanley Atkinson, and 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 from wills or other donations in support of future developments.

We have a number of grant applications and donation discussions in progress so I hope there will be more to report next year.

Chris Garcia
Fundraising Team

COLLECTIONS

Our exhibition, *Beyond Beastly: Creatures Natural and Imagined* was displayed from 9th April to 1st October 2022, and was visited by almost 4,000 people, a third of whom were children. An online version of the exhibition is available here: <https://www.brlsi.org/exhibitions/beyond-beastly/>

We have expanded our presence on the internet with online exhibitions, web-posts, and digitised objects, and shall continue to do so.

The development of exhibitions, hosting of researchers, conservation work, and other curatorial tasks require a lot of equipment and materials, and over time disorder and clutter can become a problem, so we are grateful to our volunteers who organised a major rationalisation and reorganisation of our workroom.

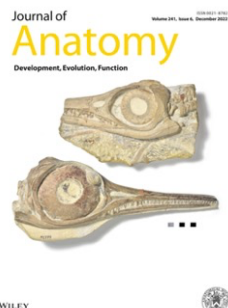
Two of the collections team attended a three day ‘*Collections Care Advanced Training course*’ organised by South West Museums Development and learnt new knowledge and skills that will help us maintain high standards in the stewardship of our museum, library, and archives.

We also had our temperature and humidity data-loggers recalibrated and repaired or replaced, so that near-optimal conditions can be maintained in our stores.

We renewed loans of objects to the National Museum of Wales Cardiff, The Roman Baths, Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, and Victoria Art Gallery. We also issued a new loan to Bath Abbey, who have incorporated Saxon stonework and medieval tiles into their new Discovery Centre, as part of the Bath Abbey Footprint project.

A photograph taken by our Collections Manager Matt Williams of fossil ichthyosaur skulls from the Jurassic of Strawberry Bank, Ilminster, was the cover of the December 2022 issue of the *Journal of Anatomy* (Matt was one of the authors of the featured paper). He also contributed to new research on an Early Jurassic fossil of wood colonised by barnacles and mussel-like bivalves published in *Acta Palaeontologica Polonica*. We have sold image licences to authors, museums, and advertising agencies in relation to Hong Kong via 1860s photographs we have hosted on the Historic Photographs of China website: <https://hpcbristol.net/>

For the 2022 Victor Suchar Christmas Lecture we developed a ‘pop-up’ exhibition, inspired by Dr. Tristram Hunt’s lecture title: *The Civic and the Global – the V&A and the cultural mission of museums*, of which an online version can be found here. <https://www.brlsi.org/exhibitions/the-civic-and-the-global/>



As with all the Institution’s areas of operation, the Collections are dependent on and grateful to our wonderful team of volunteers, who continue in their valuable work alongside Matt: documenting the collection, digitising objects, improving storage conditions, conserving artefacts, and developing exhibitions.

Matt Williams
Collections Manager



MEMBERSHIP

Over the period 1 April '22 to 31 March '23 membership increased from 685 to 742 (+8.3%). However, this was against a typical backdrop of ~75% of Members leaving in the first 3y of their membership.

On 1 January '23 membership subscriptions were increased by ~20% which reflected the impact of inflation and higher costs. Unfortunately, this has negatively impacted subscription payments with some members choosing not to renew.

David Haywood

Membership Secretary

Honorary Members

Ms Cindy Beadman
Mr Michael Davis
Mr John Gardner
Mr Michael King
Dr Evelyn Lewis
Ms Marie-Louise Luxemburg
Mr Martin Sturge
Mrs Betty Suchar

Complimentary Members

Wera Hobhouse	MP for Bath
Dine Romero	Mayor of Bath
Kevin Guy	Leader of Bath and North-East Somerset Council
Will Godfrey	Chief Executive of Bath and NE Somerset Council

STAFF

Dick Bateman continued as Chair of Staff sub Committee (SsC) until the end of 2022 He had intended to retire at the 2022 AGM (when he stood down as a Director) but he generously stayed in post for a few further months.

Other members were **Henry Ford**, Chair of Collections, **Richard Guthrie**, a former Director, **David Hall**, Director, **Joe Willson**, Director and Chair of Finance, **Julie Cole**, Director and **Barry Gilbertson**, Director. Ex-SsC Chair **David Haywood** also supported this sub-Committee on occasional tasks.

Appraisals and contracts of current staff were all completed by summer 2022.

During 2022–23, the staff team comprised the following:

Matthew Williams

Matt continued to manage our Collections downstairs and, with volunteer Jude Harris, curated a colourful and very well received 2022 exhibition on “Beyond Beastly – Creatures Natural and Imagined”.

Gerie Herbert

Gerie continued to be a tower of strength not only as the ‘friendly face’ of the Institution but also by organising Front Desk Volunteers, Jenyns Room activities and keeping everyone informed of events via the BRLSI Bulletin and many other tasks.

Paul Browne

Paul has also successfully managed the maintenance of Institution's internal fabric.

Elham Jones-Redman, Operations Technician

In addition to her room hire responsibilities, Elham's IT skills meant that she was able to contribute valuably to the Institution's social media and digital marketing, initially as part of an external grant

Matthew Little, Operations Technician

Matthew Little was successful in an application to join University of Bath's Molecular Biology PhD programme and left the Institution's employment in August 2022. His work was well regarded and Staff Subcommittee thank him for his mature, helpful and efficient work for BRLSI, including the responsibility of closing the building after evening activities.

Finn Clark, digital intern

Finn, a student from Bath Spa, undertook an internship for March–June 2022, supporting the development of the Digital Membership proposition.

Emily Riches, Intern and Operations Technician

Emily, a student at Bath Spa University, undertook an internship from October 2022 to February 2023, during which time she was also employed as an Operations Technician. As part of her internship, she prepared a presentation about how BRLSI could improve its diversity.

James Hamilton, Operations Manager

James was appointed in February 2023 initially for six months (subsequently extended for a further six months), and within a few months had made a significant contribution to BRLSI's activities and revenues.

The Staff Subcommittee is now chaired by **Julie Cole**.

Dick Bateman and Julie Cole

Chairs of Staff sub-Committee

PROGRAMME

The cultural programme at the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution continued to flourish.

The continuation of hybrid talks, in-person and live streaming online simultaneously has proven to be a great success. As a result the Institution is not only able to attract a much wider and diverse audience, but also manages to secure international speakers from around the world, who join a live and online via live stream. The experience has been further enhanced by new audiovisual equipment and a more sophisticated Zoom set-up.

Audiences in the Elwin Room appreciate having access to international experts who 'beam' live onto the big screen. In addition to the regular talks programme, the Institution has hosted several symposia and talks series,

including the popular Beyond Beastly, Bath Gothic Fiction, Herschel, World Heritage and The World in 2050 events.

During the year, the Cultural Programme delivered:

- 105 Live talks at the BRLSI, online or both
- An audience of 3,695
- Record Revenues for the Institution of over £22,000
- A video legacy of more than 300 talks on the Virtual BRLSI YouTube channel

Youth activities continued with the 6th Form Philosophy seminars, focusing on the meaning of life, which covered fundamental concepts such as the Duty of Care, the existence of God, the nature of knowledge and Free Will v Determinism. We will continue our partnership with the Royal Institute of Philosophy in 2024.

The Institution extends its heartfelt gratitude and thanks to all the convenors who have been instrumental in making the cultural programme a reality. We would also like to thank Stuart Reynolds for organising the excellent Victor Suchar Christmas lecture for 2022: Dr Tristram Hunt speaking on 'The Civic and the Global – the V&A and the cultural mission of museums'. The success of the cultural programme would not have been possible without the first-class contributions by the other areas and sub-committees of the Institution.

Over the coming year, the cultural programme will continue to evolve with the establishment of several symposia, panel discussions and new convenor groups. Everyone is most welcome to participate and the programme team look forward to hearing from you.

Andreas Wasmuht

Chair of Programme sub-Committee

DIGITAL AND COMMUNICATIONS

The subcommittee was formed to replace the Website and Publicity Subcommittees and its terms of reference were set out in draft in March 2022.

It is accountable to the Management Committee for routine operational oversight and management of the Promotional, Publicity and Digital activities of the Institution, including the website, YouTube channel, third party sites and online and offline advertising. Responsibilities include the planning, development and implementation of all communications and digital activities.

It meets monthly to monitor the performance of the various means by which BRLSI and its activities are publicised and analyses statistics that the digital media provide so as to maximise their effectiveness. This includes assessing the design of the website and making changes to improve its functionality where necessary, tailoring content on social media outlets to the demographics of the audience they attract, and monitoring the

effectiveness of electronic newsletters in advertising our programme of lectures.

It is also responsible for ensuring that the website facilities for payment of subscriptions, purchase of tickets and marketing and processing of room hire work correctly and for ensuring that other means of publicity such as press releases and posters are effective.

It is the body through which specifications for changes are communicated to the company responsible for website maintenance and that responsible for maintenance of the office server, on which our administrative data is stored.

Rob Randall

Chair of Digital and Communications sub-Committee

DIGITAL SUBSCRIBERS

Within the last year we have launched a new tier of supporter membership – Digital Subscribers.

Digital Subscribers pay a reduced membership fee allowing them to attend online talks at the member discounted rate. However, they are not permitted to attend in-person talks at discounted rates, nor do they have any voting rights (so are not considered full members under our Articles).

The aim of the DS tier is to produce a revenue stream from people who would not normally attend events at the Institution, in particular: those who live in other parts of the UK or other countries; students; people whose infirmities make it impossible for them to attend events in person.

It is to be hoped that during our bicentenary year we can devote some resources to promoting the DS tier more widely targeting universities and heritage organisations around the UK.

Without any promotion whatsoever, 23 people have so far signed up as Digital Subscribers.

Joe Houlihan

Digital Subscribers Lead

PREMISES

The Institution occupies about half the available floor area of the main building in Queen Square, of which the income is a significant part of the Institution's total income.

With the appointment of CSquared (then Colston + Colston) in 2019 as Chartered Surveyors and the Institution's Managing Agents, these matters have now been put onto a proper professional footing of which the benefits are beginning to work their way through.

Except for the Moore Room, on which negotiations with a potential tenant are continuing, all the commercial floor areas on the part-ground and upper floors are now let on lease at modern rents with proper Service Charge provisions, which together are working out well.

At the time of writing, it appears that the worst of the energy crisis may be over. All that can be said for the moment is that the 'Institution is much better placed to deal with whatever the future may bring than it had been in former years.

Energy crisis

Members will be pleased to hear that the Institution has a Fixed Tariff Contract with its energy suppliers that lasts until August this year (2023), which should at least have seen us through the winter. After that, it will of course drop back onto whatever is the going rate at the time – although there are signs the Government is preparing to lower the price cap.

Planned Preventative Maintenance

For all the obvious reasons connected with the pandemic, it has been impossible to carry out any substantial maintenance works to the main building and external fabric at Queen Square, for which the eventual costs have however continued to accumulate and held on account under the Service Charge provisions until normal operations can begin again, hopefully this summer.

Mike Twohig

Chair of Premises sub-Committee

VOLUNTEERS

Since our foundation in 1824, the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution has been the key public space for learning and discussion in Bath.

Our goals are to share knowledge and to stimulate the exploration of science, literature and the arts, enriching the quality of life for Bath's residents and visitors. As a centre of cultural activity open to all, we aim to provide everyone who visits with an inspiring, inclusive, and enlightening experience — whether attending a public talk, viewing an exhibition, or participating in the many other activities and events we organise.

None of this would be possible without our extensive community of friendly, smart, and enthusiastic volunteers. BRLSI has approximately 100 volunteer roles. Our volunteers help us in many ways: welcoming visitors to the Queen Square building, organising and promoting the 120+ public talks we organise a year, protecting and exhibiting our museum collection of over 150,000 objects, or sitting on our various operational and governance committees.

We are grateful to everyone who gives up their time to support us no matter the role or the amount of commitment.

With a fresh injection of life in the building post pandemic and some of our biggest attendance figures on record, it was fitting that this was the year we hosted our first Royal visit, with the Duke of Edinburgh making it his key priority to thank BRLSI volunteers for all the hard work they do.

A fresh team of volunteers that worked evenings meant that this year for the first time we were able to provide wine for all our premium evening talks, and a new team of volunteers working exclusively on children's activities meant we could broaden our activities to make families welcome.

The communications team, who work entirely online, continued to meet on a weekly basis, and the front of house team supported each other via the volunteer Whatsapp group, all stepping in to help one another if ever a team member was away. Team spirit was boosted by social activities which included a cocktail evening, and a boules match in Queen Square.

We thank all volunteers for their continual support, the fact we have emerged from a pandemic to find ourselves in the strongest position in our history is testament to all you do and look forward to celebrating your achievements in our bicentenary year.

Gerie Herbert

Volunteer Co-ordinator

BICENTENARY PLANNING

Planning began after the last AGM for BRLSI's 200th anniversary. 1824 saw initial financing and building work for the Institution's original headquarters in Terrace Walk.

The first lecture in the magnificent new setting was in January 1825 so it was decided to celebrate the Bicentenary for a whole year, January 2024 to January 2025.

Our Bicentenary is a unique chance to showcase the Institution, highlight our value to the people of Bath, host celebratory events, share even more of our extensive collection, widen our appeal, attract new audiences and look to the future.

Early in 2023 members' brainstorming sessions helped generate ideas for how best to seize this opportunity. Scores of suggestions arose, too many to fulfil in just one year.

The Institution was founded as Bath's centre of learning, science and culture so we decided to celebrate not only our own story but also the cultural, economic and scientific growth of the City as a whole since the days when the Battle of Waterloo was fresh in everyone's memories.

This stimulates us to look outwards and work with other Bath organisations, as well as inwards at our glory days, our collection, our ups and downs, and happy resurrection in Queen Square.

During 2023 firm plans took shape to build the year around several flagship events interspersed with specially curated talks and seminars throughout the 12 months. The board set up a sub-committee to oversee the celebrations. Detailed arrangements are being made for activities that include:

- gatherings to launch and close the year
- a major exhibition of star items from our extensive collection
- a celebration of commercial engineering in the area
- a new festival of history in Bath
- a revival of the BRLSI-inspired science festival 'Bath Taps Into Science'
- a fun outdoor summer daytime event in Parade Gardens, the Institution's original botanical garden beside its now-demolished first headquarters and a members-only event in the evening
- a symposium devoted to Extraordinary Women.

Meanwhile, convenors are arranging a full programme of talks to showcase our ability to enlighten, enthral and stimulate all the inquiring minds of Bath.

David Hall

Chair of Bicentenary sub-Committee

IN MEMORIAM

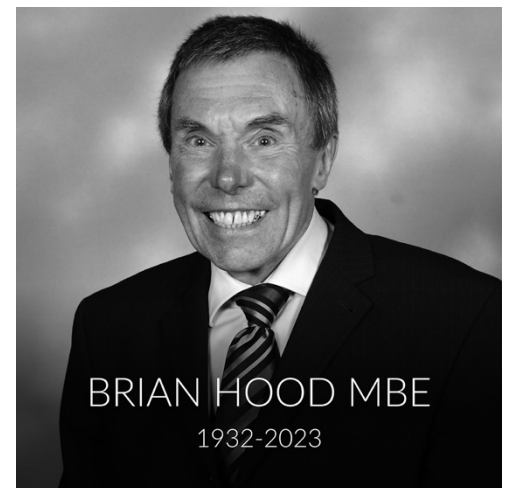
This year the Institution lost a number of friends:

Bob Draper, MBE, who died on 14 May 2023, devoted many years of service to BRLSI, for which he was awarded an MBE and is remembered for his kindness, ways of connecting people, his weekly bulletin covering topics from talks to music - and for his sense of fun. (See below for a full tribute.)

Nancy Catchpole, OBE, former Chair of BRLSI Directors, died on 11 June 2023, was active in various BRLSI activities as well as other organizations such as the Bath Historical Society and the Federation of Women Graduates.

Brenda Vicary-Finch, served as the first Membership Secretary of the relaunched Institution in 1993 and was the only paid administrator during the early years. She had many interests, including flying, and raised five children, Alison, Emma, Sarah, Adam and Jonny, who have created a story in multiple photos highlighting various aspects of her life, which can be viewed on our website at <https://www.brlsi.org/brenda-vf/>

Brian Hood, OBE, joined BRLSI more recently but with great dedication serving on the Finance sub-committee and lending a helping hand in various areas. His funeral in the Bath Abbey on 18 April 2023 reflected



his varied career as the former Councillor and Chair of Monmouthshire County Council (2011-12).

Paul Stephens, 5 February 1953 to 8 August 2023, served as a Director, Administrator of the Website, Newsletter Editor and long time member of the Finance sub-committee. More recently he was a regular attendee at the Saturday Coffee Mornings and a published author.

Brian Shane McElney, OBE, was most known as the founder of the East Asian Museum, however, he was also a member of BRLSI and a regular attendee at the Saturday Coffee Morning. In addition, he delivered several talks at BRLSI, held his book launches here and was a donor.

BOB DRAPER MBE

A personal reminiscence by Mike Twohig



Through the usual chapter of accidents, I became convenor of the Patrick O’Brian Society (of Bath) around 2013, not long after its creation by Ruth Mannion

Daniels. Whereupon Bob started referring to me as Master and Commander before promoting me to Captain and finally Commodore, which he seemed to regard as mildly amusing in the light of the more orthodox modes of address amongst other groupings within the Institution.

At the same time, I had widened our readings in the Society beyond the Aubrey Maturin series to take in other well-known authors of life at sea of the days of sail, together with the occasional foray into matters more recondite such as navigation and marine architecture.

At one such meeting I had taken the Society through the large-scale transformation, amounting to a virtual reconstruction of the entire interior, that Bligh’s vessel had undergone to convert the Bounty into what was known as an armed merchantman, in preparation of that terrible voyage.

With the ship’s company being now thus vastly better informed, I had somehow managed to bring the evenings proceedings to a close and thereupon repaired to the lower gun deck to apologise to Bob for our once again having gone over the 9 o’clock deadline, only to find him chatting away amongst those making their way home about the 1963 Hollywood film version of the Mutiny – which had Marlon Brando as Fletcher Christian strutting his stuff while arrayed in the full pantomime regalia of an English aristocrat, and attempting to carry off the cut-glass accent with all the aplomb of the captain of a Mississippi stern wheeler river boat.

I was too busy with the reconciliation and putting the takings in the black box to join in but can well recall the gusts of hilarity coupled with bouts of hooting derision which saw the ship's company go off for their run ashore with that warm sense of having had an enjoyable evening well spent which did so much to encourage the continuing success of the Society, through to its demise with the onset of the pandemic which in all probability was its natural life span anyway.

Ten years or so is quite a good innings for a reading group such as ours, but without Bob we might very well have had difficulty in keeping it going as long as we did.
