**CHAIRMAN’S REPORT TO MEMBERS 2023/2024**

My term of office started a year later than expected, but the club had benefitted from the excellent chairmanship of Richard Linsell during 2022/23. It is worth mentioning here that three weeks before the AGM there had been a successful visit to the Hindu Temple at Neasden.

An autumn lunch was arranged at Harpenden Golf Club in October, but numbers were low. This was to become a feature of both the normal monthly lunches and the seasonal special lunches, down, I think, to various influences, including increasing holidays – especially post covid – and other calls on members’ time.

A Guided trip around Spitalfields in September was followed by an interesting visit to the relatively close Bayfordbury Observatory. This had to be arranged in two groups on separate occasions, also affected by some atrocious weather to which we have become somewhat acclimatised during the subsequent winter and spring. Our thanks go to the events team for arranging, promoting and prosecuting these events.

The Christmas Lunch attracted 58 members and guests, just a few down on last year, and Aldwickbury had set out a bright and attractive dining room for the seasonal activities. It is worth noting here that the local golf clubs have weathered recent economic headwinds by raising prices and reducing choice, although Aldwickbury have stabilised prices for the current year’s monthly lunches.

There was a very successful ‘bucket’ trip to St Albans in late March, with our own Terry Turner as one of the two guides, taking us through the local history. Per Tutti proved a very successful post-tour lunch venue. This proved to be the last tour event of the current programme, as the Richard 3rd and civil war battlefield trip, which had taken significant planning, did not attract sufficient interest to be viable. Theo dePencier has been leading the events team, and we thank both Adrian Peter and Peter Webster who stepped down from the team after many years of service planning and leading trips.

The Spring Lunch was held successfully at the Mid Herts Golf Club in early May, with 42 members and guests; members comments were wholly positive.

We have again had a variety of speakers at the monthly lunches, including another tour de force from Martin Holmes, this time on General Franco. David Levy is now in charge of the speaker arrangements and is busy filling the diary ahead. Thoughts and suggestions for future speakers, from the membership and outside are always welcome.

We have had a full programme of walks under the leadership of John Berry, and thanks are due to those members who volunteered to organise, plan and lead them. It is very much appreciated by the sizeable cohort of walkers.

There continued to be full programmes for the Discussion Group, led by Chris Bunton, and the Finance Group, led by Charles Yuill and Fred Pointon, and I trust these will continue to the interest and benefit of members.

Now, turning to finance. You may recall Richard setting out, last year, why our finances were deemed too healthy! As a result, the annual subscription was reduced to £25, and we also procured new membership badges for everyone. The current state of play is that our surplus has continued to grow. This has exercised the committee, who will continue to look for further ideas and actions to benefit members and reduce our surplus as we move forward.

We have also made payment changes such that monthly lunches are paid for on the day, using one of the many settlement systems available. This was not considered a problem as the Golf Club itself is cashless, so cards are needed to pay for drinks. Thanks to John Berry for setting this up. But be aware that failure to pre-announce your nonattendance at a lunch, when prompted by the monthly lunch invitation, may result in you having to pay.

Direct bank transfer has been retained for the payment of trips and events/special lunches, and this is working well, with very few cheques now being proffered.

The committee has had much fun (!) updating banking authorised signatures with Santander to keep our finances live, but through the sheer persistence of Richard Linsell, abetted by other committee members, this has been achieved. This could continue to be an issue going forward.

This is the final year with Allan Atkinson as our Treasurer, and he goes with our enormous thanks for his companionship, diligence and service of over 14 years on the committee, as Chairman, Past Chairman and Treasurer. We are fortunate to have Stephen Mills, already on the committee, take over this important position.

It is a privilege, as Chairman, to nominate a charity to receive the surplus from our raffles. This year I have chosen The British Heart Foundation.

The membership has been reasonably stable over the past year. Philip Gransby, member since January 2005, passed away last Christmas morning. We have just lost (23 July) Brennan Hiorns, a member since 2010 and held in high esteem for his knowledge and important contributions to discussions and questions to speakers. He will be sorely missed. There have been a couple of resignations, and one member moving away from the area. These losses have been offset by two new members.

As we approach this year’s AGM, several gaps in the committee are appearing. We did of course lose Richard Koppell, who returned to the USA before Christmas, and we are thankful for all his work in updating our website. I will be moving away shortly, and Graham Lee is returning to south of the Thames, although we are thankful that he has agreed to continue as Membership Secretary until a successor is appointed. After several years on the committee, John Berry is stepping down, but will continue his excellent work in leading the Walking Group.

Theo de Pencier has been working hard to ‘fill the slate’ and has been making progress. I entreat members to step up and into roles to maintain the effectiveness of the club.

Lastly, I must thank committee members for their work and support during the past year. To Richard, as past chairman, for his always welcome advice and nudging; to Graham, Paul, John, Allan, Terry, David and Theo for keeping the show on the road despite any lapses on my part.

I wish the new committee, led by Theo dePencier, and the club, every success in the future.

**Denis Cooke 25.07.24**