

Chairman's Report 2025 - John Hennessy

Firstly, may I wish you all, even though a little belatedly, a very Happy New Year. Once again, you have braved the January weather to attend an event which is not always thought of as a highlight of any Society's year, namely the Annual General Meeting.

Hopefully, you will be rewarded for your diligence by hearing from our two Speakers this evening our long-standing Committee member David Budge and Paul Skelton who will be informing us on the Maunsell Forts and on the stories surrounding our local 'Locals' respectively. After the Talks we will have our usual opportunity for some social mixing when I hope it will be possible for people to have a more leisurely chat with old friends and welcome new over a glass of something enjoyable and to sample the usual excellent 'nibbles' prepared for us by several of our committee's wonderful, better halves!

Before that though and following the Reports from our other Officers we will have our usual annual Elections and there will be some changes in personnel this year.

Our excellent Hon.Treasurer - Chris Hagerty - has decided to call it a day after several years in that position. Chris has done an excellent job of looking after the Society's finances and I would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank him (and Diannah) for all their hard work and especially for looking after the rather tricky area of Subscriptions and controlling the door on Lecture evenings. Our finances remain in excellent order as confirmed by our Auditor.

During the past year Dr Chris Day decided to move away to be nearer to family and to give themselves the space and time to create a garden. They have now found a property in the west country which awaits their horticultural wizardry! Chris will be popping back to Sandwich from time to time and he will always be welcome here.

This will be a rather poignant evening for me as I am standing down from the position of Chairman after well over a decade of 'gavel banging' I worked out the other day that I have 'stood in the corner' of this wonderful room on over 100 occasions so it is high time for a change. I am looking forward to becoming a member of the audience and hope to sit amongst you for a few more years and continue to enjoy the best Society in Sandwich.

My time as Chairman has been a wonderful privilege but adopting a stance of just ignoring the advancing years eventually becomes a non-starter as bodily abuse and the departure of brain cells start to take their toll. During the past year we have enjoyed another excellent programme of Lectures arranged initially by Dr Chris Day and now by Robert Pay so enjoy the rest of the year as I know I will.

I would like to thank all of you for your support over the years through your continued membership of our Society and for your friendship although the latter often adds more than a little to the time taken to complete a trip to the Co-op and makes that all the more pleasurable! I also hope that this Society of ours which has survived for more than sixty years will continue long into the future as it celebrates the story of our Town and Cinque port.

I was lucky enough to be tutored by and to follow in the footsteps of such excellent historians as Charles Wanostrocht, 'Bill' Chesterfield and the inestimable Dr Frank Andrews who introduced me, and many others, to the world of Local History Guiding. I believe that these three gentlemen were amongst a small group of friends who decided to set up our Society over sixty years ago. Their knowledge of Sandwich and its history built the very secure foundation of what has become a very successful and well-respected Sandwich institution. Additionally, we have been very fortunate in having as a member Dr Tom Richardson who has written so many of this Society's publications and who is, as I write this, currently working on something new to inform and entertain us. I would also like to thank Tony Trice who has looked after our publications both here and at Rose 'n' Tony's and has spent many evenings manning the book desk in this lovely room.

During my time we have commemorated Thomas Becket, the 'discovery' of our Magna Carta and Charter of the Forest and subsequent exhibition. These documents are now available to view in our museum - together with our unique Custumal. In this past year a group of members were able to visit Dover Museum and have an exclusive viewing of the Bronze Age Boat in the company of Keith Parfitt who excavated it and of Jon Iveson Head of Dover Museums with a bonus 'peep behind the scenes' at their conservation work.

In the coming year we have been invited to a private viewing of the refurbished and restored Maison Dieu so look out for details of that. I have just completed a total rewrite of our 26 History Panels with QR codes - a mammoth task. Finally, I want to thank my wonderfully patient wife Susan who has supported me throughout my tenure and has spent much of this last week cooking treats for later.