



Tudor Grange, Solihull

BIRMINGHAM & WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL REPORT 2025

8th February 2025



The
Victorian
Society

Stephen Hartland

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2025

West Midlands Regional Executive Committee

Chairman	Stephen Hartland
Vice Chairman	Joe Holyoak
Honorary Treasurer	James Fletcher
Honorary Secretary	Akil Dowe
Programme Secretary	Nina Hatch
Committee:	Matthew Bannister
	Mark Bench
	Andy Foster
	Jasna Jaksic
	Eva Ling
	Helene Pursey
	Gill Sockett

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The Victorian Society is the charity championing Victorian and Edwardian buildings in England and Wales. Our Conservation Advisers help local planning authorities and churches to make better decisions about adapting Victorian and Edwardian buildings to the way we live now, while keeping what is special about them. We also seek to engage the public in our campaigns to help increase the likelihood of conserving buildings.

The Society's formal objects are to:

- Awaken public interest in and appreciation of the best of Victorian and Edwardian arts, architecture, crafts and design;
- Encourage the study of these and related social history and advise owners and public authorities on the preservation and repair of Victorian and Edwardian buildings and the uses to which they can, if necessary, be adapted;
- Save from needless destruction or disfigurement Victorian and Edwardian buildings or groups of buildings of special architectural merit including promoting the inherent sustainability of the repair and reuse of historic buildings.

Our period is defined as 1837 to 1914 and our casework area covers the West Midlands Metropolitan Area: Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall, Wolverhampton; Warwick District including Leamington; Redditch; and Bromsgrove - although our membership base takes in parts of Staffordshire, Shropshire, Worcestershire, Warwickshire and Herefordshire; which is more akin to the Government's West Midlands region.

The Birmingham and West Midlands Group was 57 years old on 19th January 2024 and so we will soon start to look at how we will celebrate our 60th anniversary in 2027.

REGIONAL EXECUTIVE

I would like to thank the Executive Committee for all their work in 2024. They are Joe Holyoak (Vice Chairman); James Fletcher (Treasurer & Minutes Secretary); Akil Dowe (Honorary Secretary); Nina Hatch (Programme Secretary); Matthew Bannister, Mark Bench, Andy Foster, Eva Ling, Helene Pursey and Gill Sockett. I would also like to thank Jasna Jaksic for her contributions to the Society over many years, and who standing down at this AGM.

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CASEWORK

Our Conservation Adviser, Tim Bridges, is paid for by the Mary Heath Trust, a bequest made to the Society for the benefit of the Birmingham & West Midlands Group. The Regional Group Executive decided a few years ago to recommend to the Trustees that we focus funds from the Trust on this important area.

Tim receives notifications from Local Authorities and Ecclesiastical organisations on works to listed buildings and those in Conservation Areas, although this is more consistent in some authorities than others: nonetheless Tim strives to improve this in those areas. This means that he sometimes discovers these matters himself, in the absence of any notifications, and he is assisted by an able team of voluntary caseworkers. Tim has done very well in expanding our influence and now has regular meetings with many of the Conservation Officers across the West Midlands, and Inspectors from Historic England.

Joe Holyoak chairs the Casework Committee and along with Tim they are assisted by the voluntary caseworkers, who are Rob Allan (Sandwell); Andy Foster (churches); Barbara Shackley (Solihull); David Low, Gillian Roberts (Wolverhampton), and Mary Worsfold (Bromsgrove). This year we were lucky to have two new members of the committee, both architects, Lewis Hobbs (SPAB Scholar 2023) and Sinéad Scullion (SPAB Scholar 2022). A big warm welcome to Lewis and Sinéad who are already making valuable contributions to the work of the Society.

We also bid farewell to Jasna Jaksic, Matthew Vaughan and Angus Kaye who have stepped down from the committee. I would like to record my particular thanks to them for their work on behalf of the Society, and, of course, to all those members of the committee who continue to give their time to the Society.

Looking at a few cases during 2024, some significant cases are as follows:

Some Positives

Listing successes this year have included St Margaret's Church Olton, Solihull (1879-80) by J. G. Bland, with work by Benjamin Corser including the beautiful chancel furnishings of 1895-6, which was listed Grade II.

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The former Market Hotel, Station Street of 1883 by Plevins and Norrington was also listed at Grade II. This is a fine example of a commercial hotel with warehouse and a plethora of terracotta decoration. In the context of a potential threat of redevelopment of Station Street we now await the outcome of listing applications for other buildings in the street including the celebrated Electric Cinema, but we were pleased to support an application for the Crown Hotel which has also been listed at Grade II.

The listing, at Grade II, of the student houses of 1912-15 by Harvey and Wicks at 3, 4-5 and 10-11 The Close, Selly Oak following a successful application by a local friends group was also welcome news which we are pleased to endorse. We will be looking at listing applications for other contemporary buildings, notably Westhill College, by Harvey and Wicks in Selly Oak next year.

The proposals for a radical reordering at the Grade II listed St Stephen's Church Redditch of 1853-5 by Henry Woodyer and of 1893-4 by Temple Moore were withdrawn following our strong objection. We understand the need for this town centre church to have a sustainable future, but we now await revised and hopefully more moderate and less intrusive plans.

We objected to plans which were refused for the alteration of Grade II listed former Methodist Training College (also known as Handsworth Hall) of 1881 by Goddard and Ball to provide extensive residential accommodation. These plans would have involved some demolition of service buildings and seen the construction of new buildings over much of the site. An inappropriate treatment of the listed building and massive overdevelopment of the site has so far been avoided.

Land at Bristol Street, Bromsgrove Street and Essex Street. We objected to plans to build a 40-storey tower on the corner of Bromsgrove Street opposite the Wellington Hotel mainly of 1890 by James and Lister Lea, which was listed in 2020 further to an application from ourselves. We were pleased that this planning application has been refused, though we await the next steps.

Some Negatives

It was disappointing that our applications to list the Cambridge Buildings in John Bright Street, of 1884-5 by Alfred Dickens Perry and the Arts and Crafts house at 109 St Bernard's Road, Olton of 1904 by a little-known architect, W.H.Horton, were both unsuccessful.

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The very notable Arts and Crafts house at 22 Ladywood Road, of by W.H.Bidlake has been a long standing case of the Society. After years of reviewing applications for alterations and other works at the site, we were dismayed when the building was severely damaged by fire in 2015. Since then, there has been further demolition of parts of the ruins for safety reasons, followed by an application to delist the building. We objected but the application was successful, unsurprisingly given the extent of loss of historic fabric. However, the site is at the heart of the Four Oaks Conservation Area, and we still hope the house can be rebuilt.

We objected to a major application for the Birmingham Botanical Gardens, which will mean the demolition of several historic structures by entrance, including the original villa of 1822, Holly Bank, to create a large courtyard in the middle of the site leaving the smoke tower of 1884 by F.B.Osborn in splendid isolation, yet without the context of its surrounding buildings. Although the palm house and lily house will be restored, we regret that this application has been granted consent. Birmingham can ill afford to lose such significant historical buildings.

We submitted a listing application for Kingsmere, 18 Gravelly Hill North, a substantial early 19th century which was extended by J.J. Bateman in 1855, and which also has notable later 19th and early 20th century work mainly from its time as a convent and children's home. A Building Preservation Notice was served whilst the listing application was determined, but sadly it was not successful. Unfortunately, it looks as if we shall now lose this notable building to redevelopment on the road from the city to Erdington.

The locally listed former Clifton Road School in Balsall Heath of 1883-5 by Ingall and Hughes had been seriously damaged by fire, and we hoped it could be repaired. However, a notice of demolition to which we objected was granted consent, so this seems to be the end of the line for this characterful building.

Finally, we have received an offer from Historic England to work on a funded project in 2025, to identify buildings for possible addition to the statutory list of listed buildings. This is part of Historic England's Midlands' Strategic Priority Area programme, in which it is focussing attention on under-listed parts of the metropolitan West Midlands. It follows on from a successful funded project we did for Historic England in 2022, in which we examined the completeness and accessibility of the list descriptions of listed buildings. We did this in parts of Walsall and Sandwell. We have decided to relate the 2025 project to the 2022 project, by basing it in Walsall.

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We already have the beginnings of a team, formed from members of our Casework Committee, but we are extending an invitation to join the team to members more widely. The skills required are not extraordinary: it requires a methodical mind, able to research documents and record information. We already have a list of potentially listable buildings in Walsall, drawn up by Tim, and we shall be using this as our guide. We shall start by organising a training session on where to find the necessary information, and how to employ the appropriate research methodology.

Thanks to Joe, Tim and the casework team for their ongoing dedication and work.

PROGRAMME

Our Programme Committee, led by Programme Secretary Nina Hatch, comprises Mary Collins, Eva Ling, David Low, Celia Potts, Helene Pursey, Gill Sockett and Barbara Shackley.

Events organised during the year are listed as follows:

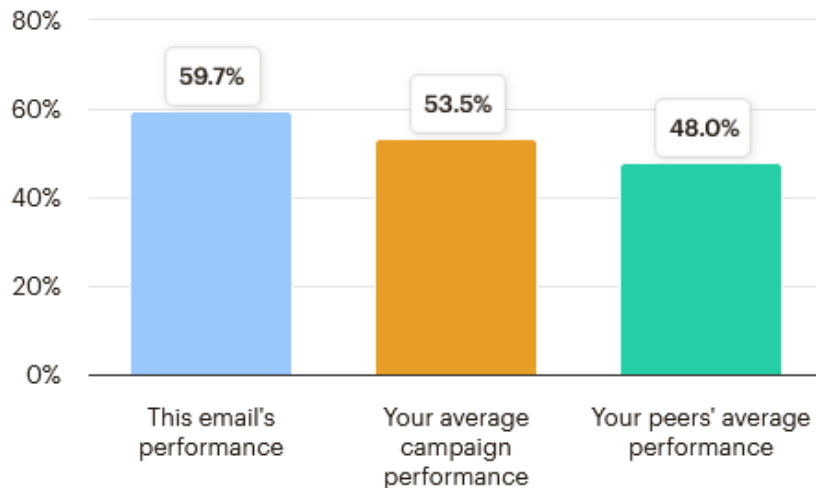
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|-----------------------------|--|
| ◆ 27 th January | New Year lunch at Bistrot Pierre |
| ◆ 10 th February | AGM & Casework Review |
| ◆ 8 th March | West Midlands Career Fair at BCLM |
| ◆ 16 th March | Divine Beauty Symposium |
| ◆ 9 th April | Visit to Great Malvern and Malvern College |
| ◆ 27 th April | Members' Afternoon at the Birmingham & Midland Institute |
| ◆ 6 th June | Day Visit to Stourbridge |
| ◆ 13 th July | Coach Visit to Shropshire |
| ◆ 26 th October | Day School on Public Utilities and Facilities |

The year provided an entertaining and educational variety of events. The West Midlands Career Fair at the Black Country Living Museum, which Nina and I attended, was a good opportunity for outreach to hundreds of young people at school or college who may be considering a career in the heritage sector.

Thanks to Nina and her team for such an interesting programme of events. Any members wishing to join the committee are most welcome, as many hands make light work.

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We have regular mailings to the members in the West Midlands, but only 53.5% of our members open these mailings which is alarming. This is the report on the AGM mailing:



REGIONAL GROUPS

In the past, Priory Gardens has organised regular regional groups days. This did not happen in 2024, although discussions with our Director, James Hughes, indicate that this will happen in 2025. It is a very useful forum, where the regions can share their ideas, problems and seek solutions from each other. As a result of this group, there is now a Regional Events Committee, which meets regularly online, to share experiences and help each other. Nina attends this.

MEMBERSHIP

Year on year our membership remains constant, with a net increase of five members in 2024. It is important that our members support our events.

As to actual membership figures, the current "memberships" in our region amount to 178 (173 in 2023) which is following a full report on paid-up memberships. These memberships are individual or household (2+), so that the total number of people is 208.

The Society has an initiative to welcome younger people to the organisation, called *Young Victorians*. They must be 35 or under and they enjoy reduced membership rates and the option to pay subscriptions monthly, rather than all in one. We also give them discounted fees for attendance at regional events.

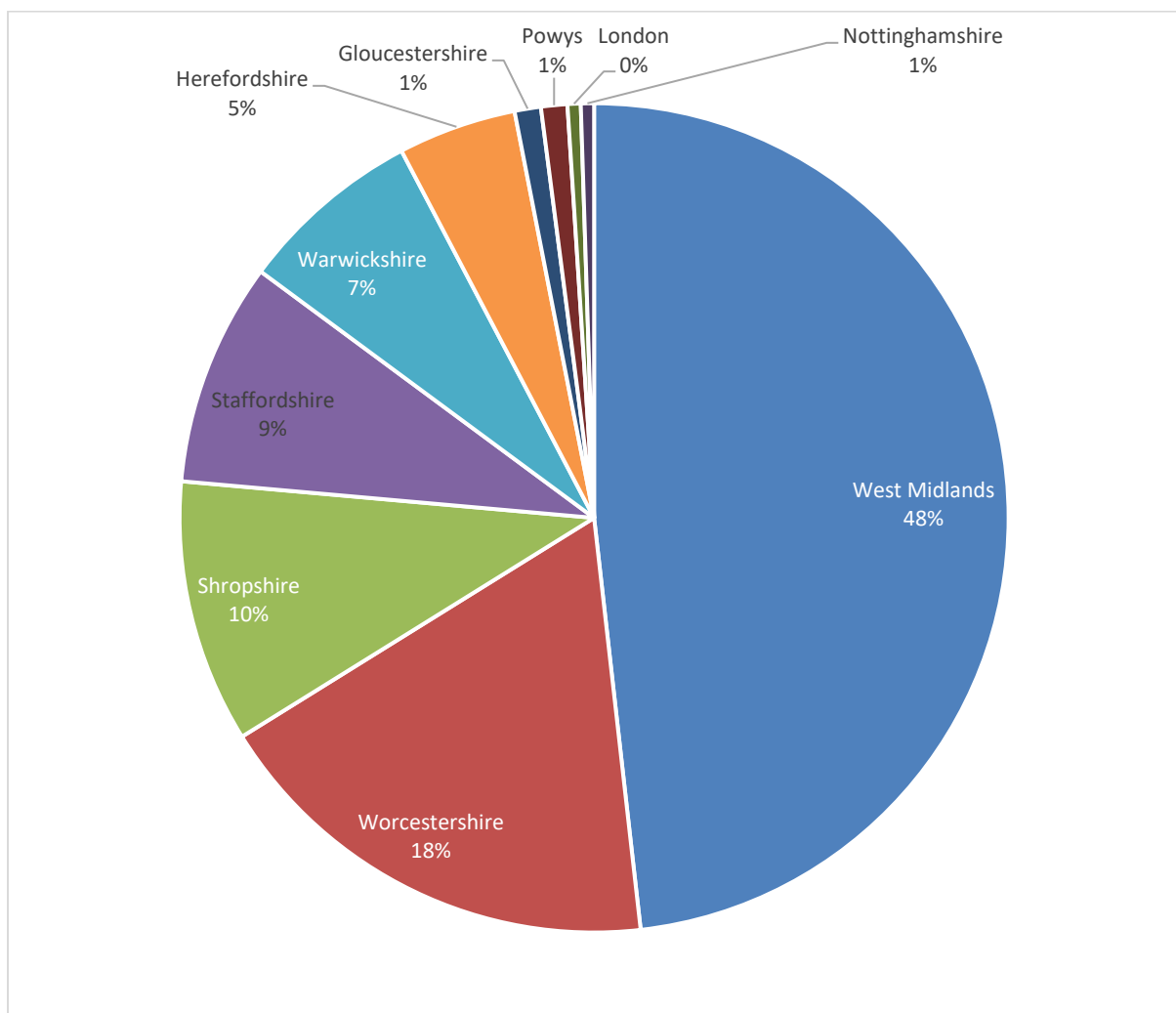
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Membership categories are as follows:

Membership Type	Number
Household	12
Individual	120
Life	3
Non-Profit Organisation	1
Senior	26
Senior Life	2
Young Victorians	14

In the West Midlands we have 14 Young Victorians (12 in 2023). It is refreshing to note this, as I have mentioned before that there is evidence that younger people do not tend to subscribe to societies, but rather follow them on Twitter or Facebook (see Social Media Section on page 10).

Fig 1. Membership spread by Counties



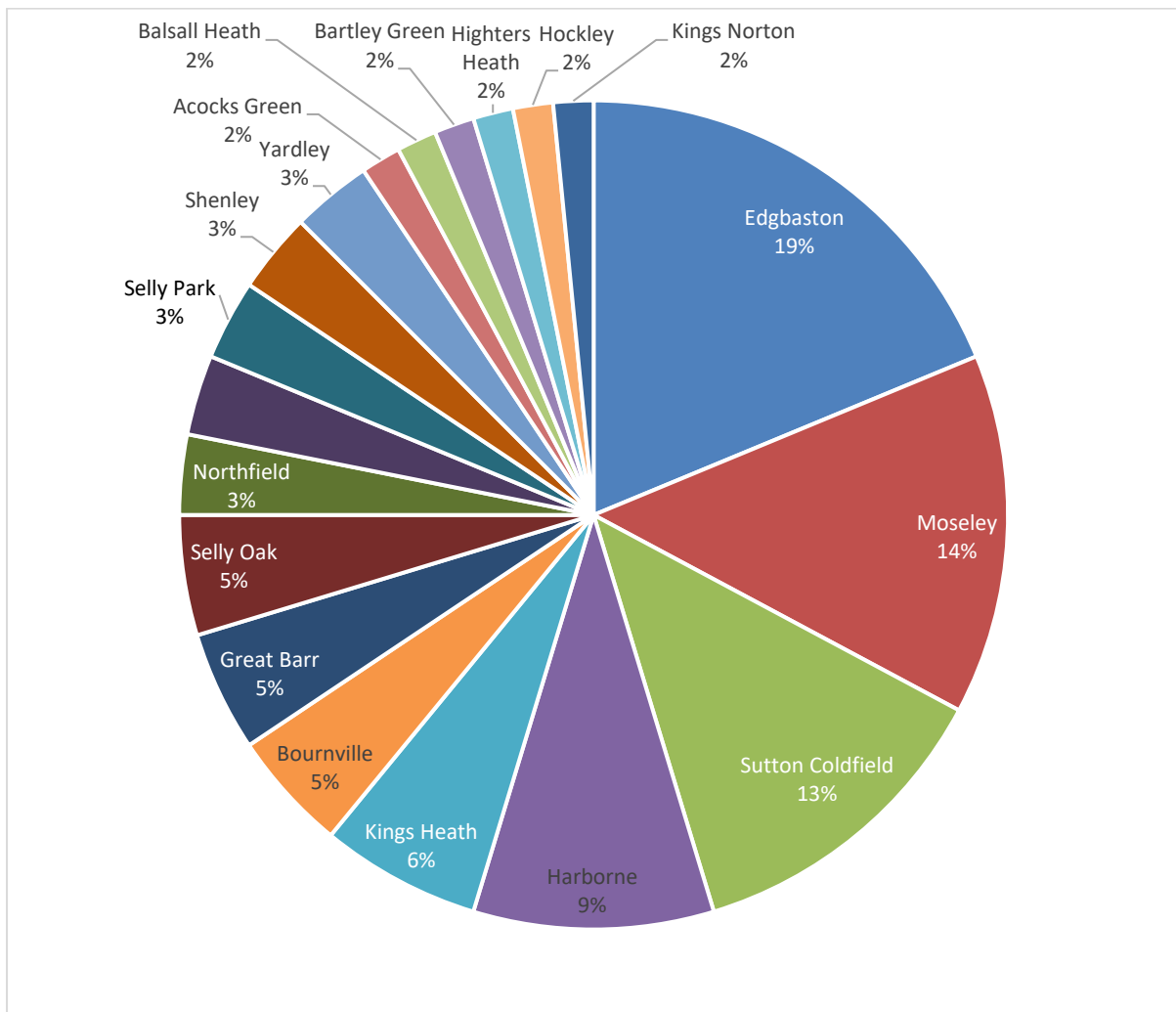
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Fig 1. Shows that the largest group of our membership is in the West Midlands county at 48%. Thereafter Worcestershire is 18% (2023, 17%), Shropshire 10% (no change) and Staffordshire 9% (2023, 11%).

Examination of Fig 2 reveals the split of members between suburbs in Birmingham. Edgbaston 19% (down from 23% in 2023), Moseley 14% (up from 11% in 2023), Harborne 9% (down from 11% in 2023), King's Heath is unchanged at 6%, Bournville 5% (down from 6% in 2023), Great Barr 5% (down from 6% in 2023) and Selly Oak 5% (up from 2% in 2023).

As members of the Society, I would encourage you to try to get your friends and family to join us, or even buy them Gift Membership, which is easily accessible on the Society's website.

Fig 2. Birmingham Membership by Suburb



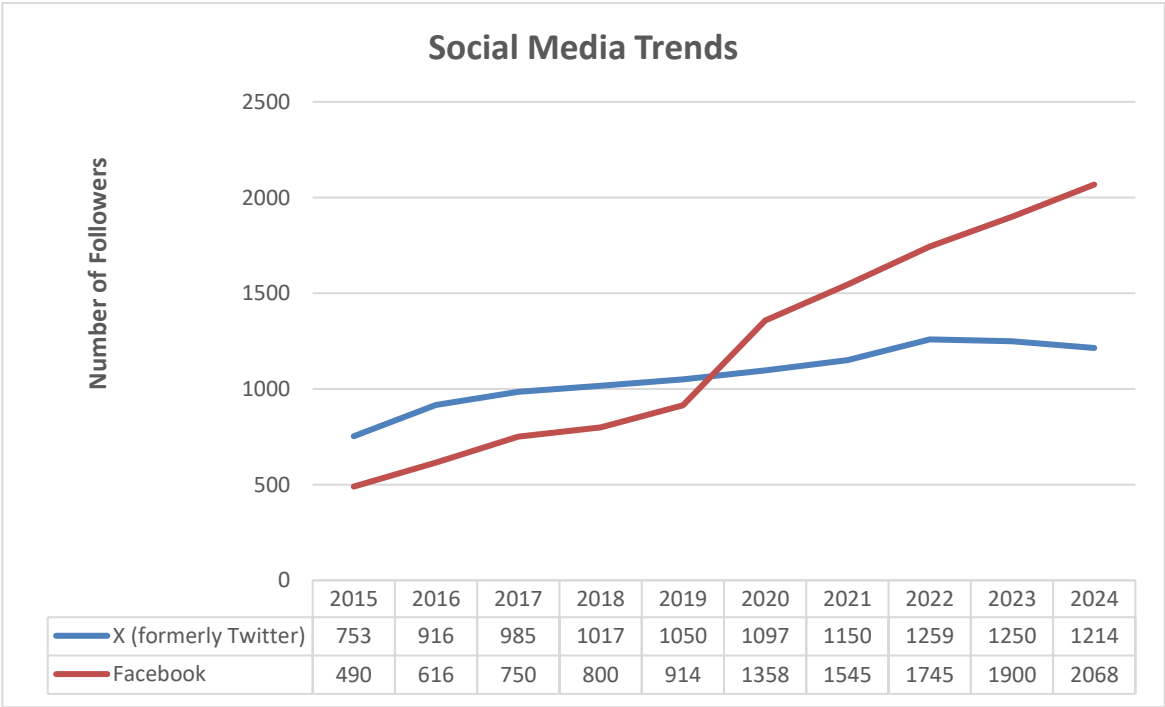
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SOCIAL MEDIA

Fewer people are joining societies, choosing instead to subscribe to feeds in Facebook, X and other social media. We often post updates on Facebook and X and, as can be seen from the chart below, followers have increased year on year on Facebook. It is therefore vital that we continue to share our message through these media.

Followers on X have declined steadily over the year, as some people leave the platform. We may consider adding Blue Sky to our armoury of social media, as this is becoming more popular with some of those previously using X.

Fig 3.



We also have an Instagram page, but the number of followers is not currently tracked.

TREASURY

Our Treasurer, James Fletcher, will discuss the accounts further, and as we did last year, the accounts are included within this report as Appendix A.

All our events made a healthy surplus, except for the Members’ Afternoon, which was intended as more of a social event.

Financially successful events are very important, as we receive no funding from Priory Gardens.

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CONSERVATION AWARD

The Group's Conservation Award was inaugurated at our 2015 AGM, so that the award this year is our tenth.

The purpose of the award is to draw attention to the high-quality conservation work of architects and other groups across the region.

Previous winners are:

- | | |
|------|---|
| 2015 | Hortons' Estate Limited for the restoration and conservation of the façade of The Grand Hotel, Birmingham |
| 2016 | Dudley Council for the restoration and conservation of the Dudley Fountain |
| 2017 | The Trustees of Green Lane Masjid & Community Centre for the restoration of Green Lane Masjid & Community Centre, Small Heath, Birmingham |
| 2018 | West Midlands Historic Buildings Trust for their restoration of the Thomas Pearson Building (formerly Lye & Wollescote Cemetery Chapels). |
| 2019 | Sandwell Council for the restoration of Smethwick Council House. |
| 2020 | Wedge Group Galvanizing Ltd for the restoration of the former Little London School, Willenhall. |
| 2021 | Midlands Industrial Association Ltd for conservation of the Argent Centre, Birmingham |
| 2022 | Birmingham City University for the conservation of the Eccles Building, Birmingham |
| 2023 | MACC Group for the conservation of Tudor Grange, Solihull |

On 20th July, the Society's Vice President, Professor Sir David Cannadine, came to Solihull to present the 2023 Award to MACC Group for the restoration of Tudor Grange and was joined by the Society's Chair, Professor Hilary Grainger OBE.

Also present were representatives of PCPT Architects and DC Construction, who worked on the project.

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Presentation of the 2023 Conservation Award at Tudor Grange

(L-R: Durim Cekrezi, DC Construction; Dave Mahoney, PCPT Architects; Hilary Grainger; Stephen Hartland; Sir David Cannadine)

Hortons' Estate Limited has sponsored the awards for the past ten years and will sponsor the 2024 award. Hortons' has agreed to sponsor the award up to and including 2026. The value of the sponsorship is almost £10,000 for 2024-26 and I am extremely grateful to Hortons' Estate for their commitment over the past ten years and for the next two years.

The winner of the 2024 award will be announced at the end of the 2025 AGM.

SUMMARY & THANKS

The vibrancy of any organisation is down to those committed members who give up their time to make it a success. The Society is not a gargantuan charity, but thanks to the work of its volunteers, many of whom are experts in the field of conservation architecture, it makes us a formidable force for good whose aim is to protect our heritage assets for future generations.

A very big thank you to all of our many volunteers who gave their time and expertise during 2024, and who have helped to make our region such a strong and vibrant group. As a region I believe we faithfully adhere to the Society's objects to:

- Awaken public interest in and appreciation of the best of Victorian and Edwardian arts, architecture, crafts and design;

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- Encourage the study of these and related social history and advise owners and public authorities on the preservation and repair of Victorian and Edwardian buildings and the uses to which they can, if necessary, be adapted.
- Save from needless destruction or disfigurement Victorian and Edwardian buildings or groups of buildings of special architectural merit including promoting the inherent sustainability of the repair and reuse of historic buildings.



Stephen Hartland
Chairman
The Victorian Society
Birmingham & West Midlands

6th February 2025

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APPENDIX A

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT

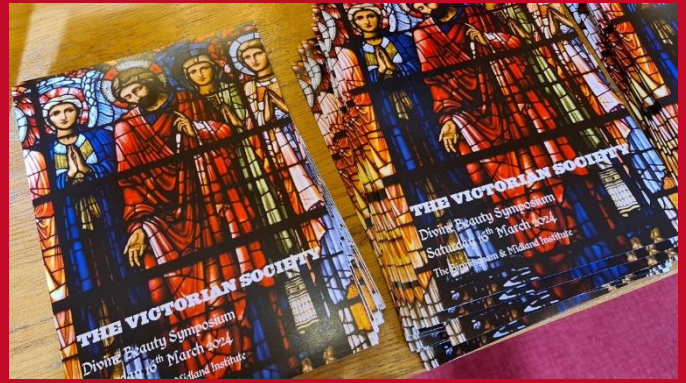
	2024 £	2023 £
<u>Income</u>		
<i>Social events & visits</i>		
New Year lunch	150	
Malvern visit	89	
Stourbridge visit	227	
Members' afternoon	(11)	
Divine Beauty symposium	956	
Shropshire trip	90	
Stourbridge churches visit	13	
Utilities Day School	593	
Victorian Radicals visit	109	
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	2,216	1,561
Sales of items	-	25
Interest	12	10
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	2,228	1,596
<u>Expenditure</u>		
Catering and room hire	230	254
Printing, stationery & postage	334	389
BMI affiliation fee	350	350
TourTalk headsets and hearing loops	-	1,375
Conservation Award	63	151
Sundry costs	169	159
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	1,146	2,678
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Net Surplus / (Deficit)	1,082	(1,082)

BALANCE SHEET

	2024 £	2023 £
Debtors	150	265
Bank balances	8,486	7,551
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	8,636	7,816
Creditors	(512)	(774)
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	8,125	7,043
Fund brought forward	7,043	8,125
(Deficit) / Surplus for the year	1,082	(1,082)
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	8,125	7,043



Lunch at Bistrot Pierre in January



Divine Beauty Symposium in March



Visit to Great Malvern in April



Members' Afternoon in April



Visit to Stourbridge in June



Day School in October