CHAIRMAN'S REPORT TO MEMBERS 2025

Michael Fox

During the past twelve months a main focus for the Society has been making progress to complete our long-standing project to create a new combined headquarters, archive store, library/research facility and meeting room at former commercial premises at Holly Bank in Greenfield. Although primarily for the use of our members, our aim is that the new centre will also serve as a hub for the wider community. An aspect of this that we are especially keen to pursue is the hiring out of the meeting room to local community groups, both to provide a source of revenue to cover a proportion of the running costs of Holly Bank and forge strong, mutually beneficial, links with the community.

During the past year difficulties surrounding the financing the Holly Bank project have eased considerably. In great part this has been due to the making of large donations by individual trustees of the Society, which has both allowed significant outstanding loans to be repaid and work on converting the premises to their new role to continue relatively uninterrupted. Major practical tasks completed over the past twelve months include the installing of a heat pump, underfloor heating and a disabled toilet, whilst high quality shelving for the library has very recently been put in. We are confident that Holly Bank will be ready for opening at some point in mid-2026. To prepare for this we have recently formed a sub-committee to plan launch events and generate ideas for how to make the most effective use of the centre once fully open.

As regards the Society as a whole, this is in a strong and stable condition. Membership has remained in the upper two hundreds and finances are sufficient to cover current and foreseeable needs. One clear indication that members are satisfied with what they receive in return for their subscription is the steadily increasing numbers that come to our regular monthly talks (provided free to members, non-members paying £4.00 - recently increased from £3.00). Attendances are now regularly in excess of fifty, with sixty or seventy not uncommon. Helping to achieve this has been the varied programme of Saddleworth-based and wider regional historical topics presented by good quality speakers that has been arranged by a member of the Society committee, and a new policy of placing regular advertisements in the 'Saddleworth Monthly' community magazine that is distributed free to a very large number of households in Saddleworth. Also a success has been a Study Day on the woollen industry in Saddleworth that was held in October, this being a revival of a type of event that had not been staged by the Society for several years past. Twenty five attended for the full-day programme which was built around five inter-linked talks. Feedback from participants was uniformly positive and we intend to hold a similar event in 2026, provisionally on the theme of family history.

Under the skilled editorship of Mike Buckley, we have continued to produce our quarterly 'Bulletin' of historical articles, this being now in the 55th year of publication. During the year a start has been made on reviving the Society 'Newsletter' which lapsed several years ago. Spurred by the strong feeling of several members of the Committee that we should be providing the membership with more for their subscription, the aim is to produce a regular digest of current local history-related developments in the local community, supplemented by short historical articles for which the 'Bulletin' would have insufficient room. We would very much welcome like to hear from members what they think about the 'Newsletter'.

Whilst no new publications have been produced by the Society during the past twelve months, a major work on sixteenth and seventeenth century wills and inventories is in preparation and we are confident that this will be finished by late 2026. Another priority for the Society during 2026 is to find new Committee members and trustees, a need that becomes ever more pressing. Anyone who possesses IT skills would be especially welcome.

2026 marks the 60th anniversary of our Society. With the aid of your continued support and participation in our lectures and other events, your Committee is determined to make it an exciting and memorable year.

Michael Fox
Chairman



Mike Buckley

Figure 1. The new library at Holly Bank takes shape