ILFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

CHAIRMAN’S REPORT 2014-15   An Outstanding Year.

It’s been an outstanding, very successful, and busy year for the Society. Our membership of 58 has recovered and finances are good reversing years of losses after winning a Vision grant to put on two talks. With an aging membership morale is good which is so important. We are in a good place at the moment after a long time in the doldrums, and recently, after great work again by John Sharrock, we received another grant from Glyn Hopkins Ltd (you wait years for one grant and two come along together) to support the publication of our excellent Newsletter edited by Georgina Green.

Vision Arts Development Officer Jane Leighton approached us (excellent networking from John) to put on two summer talks in 2014 on the historical themes of Ilford’s entertainment and shopping. I asked Vivyan Ellacott (previously the Kenneth More Theatre manager) to give one talk on ‘That’s Entertainment’ and I was to give the other but as I fell ill Ilford HS committee member Roger Backhouse brilliantly stepped in to give his talk on ‘Retail Therapy’. These excellent talks were a great success. Vivyan’s, based around his KMT memories, was given to a packed Valentines Mansion audience in September while Roger’s was held in the Chapel. Your committee all turned out to support and brilliantly organise the events and with the grant, ticket sales, donations and raffle we have been able to erase our losses and more.

This income means that we’ve been able end our large losses of many years and so Treasurer John Sharrock recommends no rise in subs’: just £12pa which is very good news for everyone. This year we introduced a rolling annual membership scheme administered by Carol Franklin which is working well. This has been a fantastic and exceptional year. Membership has risen, though (sadly for us) Roger and his wife Margaret have moved north to Upper Poppleton near York- we wish them well in their new home- whilst our visitor figures have been good also bringing in a little extra income. Attendance per talk averaged around 40, 12 being visitors. Three Society members gave talks: Janet Plimmer (Harrison Gibson), Roger (provocatively titled Bloody Foreigners or Welcome Visitors to Ilford?) and Georgina Green (Explorers & Traders: the Essex Connections) which saves on outside speaker fees ensuring that local interest topics are always given. Our most popular and best attended talks were: Janet’s, Roger’s, author Bridget O’Donnell on “When Minahan met Mary” about her book on child trafficking and prostitution in 1880s London, and retired Ilford Hospital Chapel Chaplain Rev John Barnes recounting his childhood memories of World War II wartime Britain and the blitz.

We took part in the Chadwell Heath history fair, Valence House and Barkingside fairs and a WWI meeting at Newbury Park. Attendances weren’t always good but Secretary Janet Seward stoicly manned stalls at each one. Aside from attending these events we will also have a table at this year’s Valentines May Fair. Great Thanks to all the committee members for leading the Society: Janet Seward, John, Roger, Martin Fairhurst, (along with Doreen and David Weller) excellently looks after the Chapel and our equipment, Carol is our Membership Secretary and Harold Moth. Editor Georgina Green has published three superb issues of the best historical Society Newsletter around and has just received an anonymous donation towards publication.  All of them will continue but with Roger’s departure there is a vacancy for a new member to help out on meeting nights/events and attend a few meetings each year. Thanks to Christine Black for creating and continually updating our website, Alan Banner for providing photos for it, Richard Beckford more regularly making the tea, and Pam Williams for donating books to the Society which when sold raised £14. All books and donations are gratefully received.

In October Janet and I took part in a Redbridge library event: “Who’s the Greatest? Shakespeare v Dickens” with Janet extolling the Bard. Whilst I expected a heavy defeat, in fact Dickens won easily. I also attended the unveiling of a new anti-war memorial in Woodford in memory of Suffragette Sylvia Pankhurst. Sadly we lost past members Lorna Roots, Dorothy Titley and Pat Waddle.

As our publicity needs improving we will double the number of programme leaflets we print, buy display boards and we must produce library flyers/posters to advertise our talks as we are badly missing publicity opportunities. The number of Newsletters we print will remain the same as printing costs are high: copies can be still be picked up at meetings (April’s has just been published) and issues will be emailed out. There are many walks and talks this summer organised by Redbridge Central Library, and our new 2015-16 programme is ready. We lead off with talks on a World War I front line nurse; Agincourt; What did Ilford council ever do for us?; Ferris Wheels; and Christmas traditions. Roger’s talk on Ilford council is linked to the Mayor’s Appeal and on that November night we will make a donation to the charity of the Mayor’s choice.

Jef Page Chairman, Ilford HS.

May 2015.