

47th Annual General Meeting of the East Surrey Family History Society

held online by Zoom and in person on 5 April 2025 at 11:40 a.m. at The National Archives, Kew

President:	Paul Blake
Chairman:	Hilary Blanford
Treasurer:	Tamsin Abbey
Minutes secretary:	Christine Peel

1. Our President, Paul Blake, welcomed us to the 47th AGM. 34 members attended in person and 8 members attended by Zoom. Total attendance 42. Voting was possible in person and via the “raised hand” facility by those online.

2. **Apologies** About 40 apologies were received. A request was made to add Rita Russell, our Vice President, to the list.

3. The **Minutes of the last AGM** dated 23rd March 2024 were approved *nem con*.

4. **Committee Report.** Our Chairman, Hilary Blanford, opened the report by thanking members for attending. She said that the Society had had an interesting year, but she wanted to start by thanking the trustees who had supported her during the year, the research team at Lingfield, the people who do the bookstall, Lesley, who’s been the

Society’s examiner, the scribes for our Zoom meetings, the journal editor, Daryl who sends out the online journals and in particular the outgoing trustees.

2024 has been the first year that the whole Society is back running as normal since COVID. The Southwark group was the last to resume indoor meetings in February because of Southwark Council’s restrictions on the room we used. The group has continued with a mixture of talks and walks, one of which was in Camberwell where we had a bonus as St Giles Church, where we met, was open in preparation for a film shoot so we were able to have a quick tour with Len Reilly. The group also met at the George Inn, the only galleried inn in London, for another Christmas lunch. Hilary emphasised that these walks and visits are open to all members. Lingfield has continued its monthly programme of talks and transcribing, so we also need to thank all their transcribers.

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Zoom meetings across the Society have increased in average attendance from 39.2 in 2023 to 39.5 in 2024. It is not quite clear what 0.3 of a member looks like but we have maintained our Zoom attendance levels which is very pleasing as a number of Societies are losing numbers. Our highest single topic figure was 111 and our highest single attendance for a live Zoom meeting was 90.

We have held two Talks with Tea. The Society has attended six family history fairs. We trialled an online help desk at Lambeth Heritage Festival and have been invited to go back and do it again, with a request that we include a black family element. This is new ground for us but as our Society is open to all residents of Surrey we will be talking to the Afro-Caribbean Society to ask if they can help us. We may also try a talk with tea as part of the Lambeth Festival as it's good to try new things.

Our webmaster, Rob Cambridge, has rebuilt our website with some lovely pictures. The parishes section has been upgraded and other parts of the site are still being tweaked. Our journal may also change, as our editor Chris Green has announced

that he thinks it's time to hang up his hat. He will produce three more editions for us, so we are looking for a new editor, or editorial team.

And the last change is the departure of Rita Russell as the co-ordinator of members' interests. We thank Rita for this and her role will be taken on by our membership secretary, June Hayles, and our webmaster is hoping to automate the process. Calderdale FHS have offered to help us with this.

But towards the end of the year, Hilary said, things got really interesting for the Society when she was invited to do a podcast about East Surrey Family History Society by one of our members. That podcast was heard by somebody at the Society of Genealogists, which resulted in her being invited to take part in a panel discussion on the value of family history societies. Another of our members was present at that online meeting and she started talking about East Surrey's virtual family history fair, which had run again, very successfully, in January 2024. That had resulted in the Society being approached by three newcomers for the 2025 Fair. The Association of Professional Genealogists and

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GENUKI both applied and GENUKI were so taken by the concept that they put an advertisement for our 2025 fair on every page of their website. The third newcomer was Graham Bandy, known to many attendees for his military help desk at the Woking Fair.

And if that wasn't enough, the Society of Genealogists has asked East Surrey to be part of a series on 'Researching family history in (whichever your county is)'. They have invited 12 societies to participate and we will go live on 17 November, together with the Victoria County History, the Vision of Britain through Time and local archives, such as Surrey History Centre, Southwark Archives and possibly Lambeth Archives.

So those are the exciting things that the Society has been doing but we are still losing members. The Society dropped another 49 in the last year, 8 of whom were known to have died. Our membership secretary followed up these lapsed members and all those who replied said that they had enjoyed their time with the Society but felt they were now too old to continue researching or that they had achieved what they wanted to do. But we do have a flurry of

new members each January and we continue to attract new people. The challenge is to keep them so the more variety in our programme, the better, to find things that are of interest to more people.

A member commented that it was now possible to renew subscriptions directly by paying online. There were no questions about the committee report.

5. The Treasurer's Report. Our treasurer, Tamsin Abbey, started by saying that the accounts for the year had been published in the April Journal and are also on the website. These show a surplus of £2,162, very similar to the figure of £2,172 from last year, following adjustment. A discussion was held about subscriptions, which have dropped by £500 over the year from £7,500 to £7,000, which is still a reasonable figure. The drop was offset by an increase in the interest on the savings account, which has risen by £200 and by a fall in the cost of production of the Journal by £300. This means that the overall figures are very similar. Clearly the Society does have savings and will be considering special projects and donations during 2025. Suggestions

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will be welcome for ideas to achieve our charitable objectives, such as education in East Surrey, and looking to support as many of the members as possible with these.

The treasurer then asked for any questions. This prompted a discussion about finances and numbers in adjacent Societies. It seems that in several cases Societies have funds, but not the personnel to do the work.

A member suggested talks in libraries to spread information about the Society, as well as providing information leaflets. This would need input from members, not necessarily on the committee, who are willing to give some time to the Society.

The accounts were adopted unanimously.

6. Matters Arising not already covered in the reports. There were no matters arising.

7. **Appointment of Examiner.**

The meeting agreed that Lesley Barker continue as Examiner, with our grateful thanks.

8. **Change to the Constitution to enable the Trustees to extend their**

term of office in exceptional

circumstances. The object of this change is to future proof the Society as fewer people are offering to be on the committee. Three committee members will be lost next year as they will all have served for five years. Allowing committee members to extend their term of office could help in the short term. The chairman stressed that without a viable committee the Society will cease to exist and should this happen, the constitution provides for winding up the Society, with the agreement of the members. This would be very sad given how successful the new initiatives have been in recent years, hence the reason for the proposal. This alone will not solve the problem, however, and the request stands for members to come forward with offers of help, either with specific small jobs, or to fill certain roles. The change was adopted by a clear majority.

9. **Election of Officers and members of the Executive Committee.**

Because of technical difficulties, the officers and members were elected *en bloc*.

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Chairman	Hilary Blanford
Secretary	Monica Polley
Treasurer	Tamsin Abbey
Committee Members	Sue Adams
	Marda Dixon
	Geoff Fairbairn
	June Hayles
	Peter Heather

10. **Any other business.** The retiring committee members, Alan Essex and Anne Ramon, were presented with gifts to thank them for their hard work during their tenure and thanks were offered to other members of the committee.

The meeting concluded with thanks to the National Archives for providing the venue, but with apologies for difficulties with the sound system, and finished at 12:31 p.m.