

The Ipswich Society

Chairman's Annual Review 2020

It is difficult to review the year 2020 when the best part of it didn't happen, or at least normal life didn't happen, societies like ours didn't meet, celebrations (our 60th) passed us by and our usual get up and go was curtailed, more sit back and relax than winter talks and summer outings.

The Executive Committee did at least meet on nine occasions, four in person; three before the March lockdown and the fourth (September) in Mike Cook's garden, socially distanced around a table tennis table. To further demonstrate our adherence to lockdown rules we refused the offer of tea and did what might have been considered rude six months previously, drank our own bottled water.

We had one committee meeting by email, a tortuous process that lasted the best part of a week, and we also met using Zoom, a word we'd never heard of at the start of the year.

We constantly planned for the next Society event, a Garden Party in the summer, an exhibition of photographs in the University in October and our Annual Awards evening. We had talks planned and speakers organised, we had ideas for coach outings and local walks. Instead we, like everybody else, stayed home.

What we did do was prepare and distribute two extra Newsletters, one in May, one in August and we produced the Public Art booklet (distributed in January 2021). The photographic competition, which had been running for the first half of the year, came to a conclusion. The judges individually decided which photographs should go forward for exhibition and, as the University wasn't allowing any visitors into the building, I arranged for the final 15 to be displayed on the Cornhill Cubes.

Before the third lockdown this seemed to be an excellent idea, town centre exposure to a wide audience. We had the Cubes booked, mid-March to mid-April 2021 (Easter) but given the ongoing restrictions we are looking for alternative dates. It's all very disappointing but understandable.

The bigger picture across Ipswich is also concerning, the Tourist Information Centre closed for the first lockdown, the Borough Council taking a necessary financial decision to close the facility permanently. Lakeland Plastics announced that they would not reopen their retail outlet in the Ancient House which led to discussion as to the future use of the building.

As I'm sure you are aware Debenhams ceased trading across the country hence their Ipswich store (when the clearance sale is complete) will leave a big hole in the main shopping street. Yet another closure adding to the plethora of empty units in every UK town centre, the difference here is that this was a big shop, in the very heart of Ipswich. It is difficult to think of alternative uses to fill all of these prime properties.

My rationale for mentioning this is simply because these are the outward signs of a changing world, and the Ipswich Society will need to change, we just don't know yet in which direction?

John Norman