

AGM 2024-25 Season – Chairman's Report

This has been an interesting season regarding the fortunes of Severn Valley.

At the beginning of our season, many members had not realised that our Society had been running at a small loss since before Covid and that we had been dipping into reserves to keep the Society going. After Covid, that downward trend had continued, which situation needed to be addressed, but how?

In a few words, we analysed the problem and shared it. There was a groundswell of support from members and, with all hands on deck, the problems began to be addressed.

We had more volunteers to help manage Severn Valley so that work, crucial to the ethos of our Society, could continue. Although, sadly, we had to accept Linda Griffith's resignation as our Community Arts volunteer, Barbara Hooker stepped into her place. Barbara spearheaded work with young people at Mangotsfield School who engaged in graffiti-artwork at the end of last term and will start crotchet handicraft classes this autumn. Tony Sarafian volunteered to be our Assistant Secretary, and we have all benefitted from having him as a member of the team. Following the resignation, due to ill-health, of Margaret Goff, our Honorary Secretary of several years' standing, Tony has agreed to take on the role of Honorary Secretary. A sincere thank you to both Linda and Margaret for their contributions to our Society. Jane Symons is helping to organise social events for us. These are informal gatherings open to all members, at a local venue, where we can get to know other members of our Society.

Equally, members understood the importance of recruiting new members and, as a result, new members' fees have helped us to stabilise our finances. I can say that we ended our 2024-25 season with a small surplus. This is a fantastic outcome! Very many thanks to those of you who contributed towards it.

Of course, we are not out of the woods yet, but we are aiming for a membership of 400 by April of next season. Some members have already started – what stars they are! We'll keep you updated on member numbers as the new season progresses.

Before closing, I have to thank all members of my lovely team: Helen Cooper, our Membership Secretary; Cherry Hollyhead, our Treasurer; Tony Sarafian, our Honorary Secretary; Siân Rogers and Barbara Hooker, our Heritage and Community Arts volunteers respectively; Anne Colbourne and Margaret Jones, who organise our tours (home and abroad) and visits; Martin Farrell, who battles with Mailchimp on a monthly basis to keep you in the loop with bulletins; Tracey Dodge, Jane Symons and Margaret Jones (again!) who organise social events, and a special thanks to Jane who has agreed to be Vice Chair in our 2025-26 season and Chair in the following year. It has been an enormous pleasure working with and for you all.

Many thanks too to all our non-Committee members who help out in lots of different ways: Christine Burn and Trish Gailey, who have raised our public profile considerably, and to all who help sign in, who write lecture reviews, who switch lights on and off at lectures and who generally contribute to the positive buzz and ambience I frequently feel at our lectures.

I hope we can continue working together to make Severn Valley even better next season.

Mariette Farrell.