

## Report for the period Autumn 2020 to March 2022.

Looking back over the reporting period we can confirm excellent progress in so many areas. We have a thriving group of volunteers and between us we manage and operate the activities of the charity and help to achieve our objectives. The trustees have been able to hand over day-to-day running of the operation to our two co-managers and concentrate on finances, policies and future strategy. Tim and Ian have organised and trained volunteer teams to staff the SMH in shifts when open to the public, together with a library team to oversee the book stock. In addition to those working in the house we now have volunteers running the 200+ Club, Friends of the SMH, the online shop, our book store and organising publicity. The trustees receive regular feedback about operations from the co-managers at their regular Trustee Board meetings.

After a complex renovation process the Station Master's House received its certificate of occupation on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2020 from Merseyrail. Shortly afterwards the computer network was set up, the computer room furnished to a high standard, the online library system commissioned, and the final physical touches added to the building. These included renovating the outside spaces at front and back, installing safety equipment/signage and lighting fittings and renewing mains water and electricity supplies.

While this was happening in the autumn of 2020 the library teams were sorting through the many donated books, selecting and cataloguing those suitable for the library and, where possible, selling the surplus books. However, renewed Covid restrictions later in the autumn limited this cataloguing activity, although we were able to hire the Meeting Room for evening tuition for school children while regulations permitted. Covid-19 shutdown over Christmas 2020 meant that the planned Christmas story-reading and competitions had to be held online.

During 2020 we had been in discussion with Merseyrail about them applying for a grant from the Access for All (AfA) Fund to cover the costs of preparing the house for disabled access, even though we had already completed much of this work except for the lift. We received retrospective AfA funding of £34,600 in February 2021 for the cost of building work, and a second instalment of £21,800 to install a lift, making a total grant of £56,400. This unexpected funding has enabled us to complete the fitting out of the building and to put reserves aside for future projects. The lift is now the property of Network Rail who will maintain it on a regular basis.

From the early days of planning to use the SMH we recognised that the ground floor space was too small to store our complete bookstock. A solution was found in April 2021 when the Liverpool Road Methodist Church offered us a room. This was hired and renovated, and now forms a base for volunteers to process and store donated books, sell unwanted books and provide lending facilities on three half-days per week. A home-visiting and lending service is planned in the near future.

As Covid-19 restrictions eased in the late spring of 2021, book preparation and volunteer training went ahead and the library service started on a click-and-collect basis from May 2021. Finally in July 2021 the Station Master's House was fully open to the public all day Tuesday and Thursday and on Saturday mornings, and these opening hours were extended in the Autumn to include every day except Sunday and Monday. Plans are afoot to further extend the opening hours each week day.

A major challenge has been, and continues to be, raising awareness of the public to the SMH and the facilities it offers, particularly for meetings and online activities. We have started to rent out upstairs rooms to regular clients such as the U3A and several groups are using the rooms for socially beneficial purposes. A local nursery has sponsored us with funding for children's furniture and books. The location of the SMH is starting to make the hub an attractive venue for business meetings, and we are opening up relationships with pupils from local primary and secondary schools.

We held two Open Mornings last September and a Christmas Bric-à-brac morning in December, all of which helped spread the word and raise funds, and firm plans are afoot for more events in the spring, now that Covid is less of an issue. From a standing start in late spring 2021 we have now registered well over 700 reading members for the library, and visitor numbers to the SMH are increasing steadily.

The trajectory is clearly on the up and the recruitment of new trustees and volunteers is expected to add impetus to our approach to events organisation and marketing. Without doubt your BCHL charity has created a warm, bright, safe social space for local people to use and enjoy in the heart of Birkdale Village.

Finally, a word about finances. The charity is entirely self-supporting and relies heavily on three main income streams: proceeds from the 200+ Club lottery, from sales of unwanted books and from room hires/events. The third of these streams is the area that is most in need of development and success will bring not only greater funding but, much more importantly, greater social interactions - the focus of our charity.