

BRANCH LIAISON SECRETARY

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Officers' Newsletter 180

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Dear All

The newsletter is solely to circulate the Regional Meetings Summary in advance of the Officers' Conference to be held on Sunday 20 October 2019 at the Holiday Inn Leicester, 129 St Nicholas Circle, Leicester LE1 5LX in the hotel's Leicestershire, Loughborough and Harborough suite and you should all have received the necessary information including a map showing the hotel's location in Newsletter 179 a few days ago. If anyone has missed it for any reason please ask me before next Wednesday so that I can send you another copy by email.

The format for the Regional Meetings Summary has been changed due to the number of complaints about difficulties with reading and printing out the previous format. I hope you find the new format easier and would welcome feedback if you have any suggestions for improvement.

See some of you in Leicester and I wish the rest of you well.

Kind regards

Irene

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A Charitable Incorporated Organisation registered with The Charity Commission. Registered number 1169995

2019 REGIONAL MEETINGS SUMMARY

1 Present and Apologies

EMNESH - branches represented: East Midlands; Humberside; North East; Scottish; West Riding; apologies from Sheffield Branch. MC representative: Gordon Davies

Great Western – branches represented: Bristol; Cheltenham; South Wales; Thames Valley. West of England did not attend but sent in extensive notes on the agenda and accompanying notes instead. MC representative: Andy Davies

London & South – branches represented: Chichester; Croydon & South London; Solent; South East; Surrey; Windsor & Maidenhead. Sussex Branch has now closed and members have been reassigned, so all branches were represented. MC representative – Reg Wood

Midland & North West – branches represented: Furness, Lakes and Lune; Lancashire & North West; Merseyside, Chester & North Wales; West Midlands. MC representative: Irene Rabbitts

Northern Home Counties – branches represented: Cambridge; Hitchin; Ipswich; Milton Keynes; Northampton; Peterborough; South Essex; apologies from Watford Branch. MC representative: Bob Green

MC comments/Action Points:

It was pleasing to note that nearly all branches were represented and those who were not present either gave apologies or provided extensive and constructive comments covering the agenda and the accompanying notes.

2 Matters Arising from Local Minutes not covered by the Agenda

EMNESH none.

Great Western previous Action Points were reviewed with all matters arising covered.

London & South minor typing corrections; query over Society's public liability insurance cover – now £5m; updates to branch membership lists can be requested at any time but GDPR considerations mean that lists cannot be sent to everyone.

Midland & North Western two minor corrections to minutes agreed. All branches agreed to advertise each other's meetings; some branches have a reciprocal arrangement to exchange branch programmes and advertise each other's meetings with other local organisations.

Northern Home Counties minutes agreed with some minor corrections. No matters arising not covered elsewhere.

MC comments/Action Points:

All minutes agreed with only minor corrections required. It appears that some branches have not been receiving updated branch members lists when expected so this needs to be looked at.

3 Action Points from 2018 Regional Meetings

EMNESH the format of the summary document – the text is too small for comfortable reading and a better format would be welcome.

Great Western The GDPR legislation applies to the whole of the Society including the branches. Minutes of MC meetings are now available in the members section of the website. The policy excess on Society insurance claims was noted.

London & South It was raised again that the Society should have a formal complaints procedure. It was agreed that the Society AGM this year was a much more cordial meeting and a number of areas of activity within the Society were noted - not least some duplication with Trustee and MC meetings - Trustees should cover strategy and CIO compliance and MC should cover operational activities. The duplication is less efficient and one of the reasons for the Trustee training in February 2019. A need to look at Governance was identified but with not enough information, and too late for considering any rule changes for the Society's 2019 AGM.

Midland & North Western AVR (Active Volunteer Recognition) is the successor to the previous AHL (Annual Honorary Life) and is set at £5.00 per year. The system has been approved by the membership at the 2019 Society AGM and is allowed under CIO rules. Two members per branch can be nominated, they do not have to be branch committee members but must be active volunteers. All nominations should be with the Branch Liaison Secretary before the September MC meeting to allow for inclusion in the renewals process for 2020 memberships.

Northern Home Counties The current Chairman - Robert Warburton is willing to carry on for one more year. But a new chair will need to be selected at the 2020 RM to take over in 2021. The airing of grievances that appeared in the RO should be diverted directly to the Branch Liaison Officer.

MC comments/Action Points

The excel spreadsheet format for this summary is unpopular and needs to be improved. This has now been done and we hope that this new format is acceptable to all. GDPR applies to the whole Society. Some would like to see a formal complaints procedure although it is unclear why Northern Home Counties feel that grievances should come to the Branch Liaison Officer. There is clearly a need to look at the Society structure with regards to Trustees/MC and a working group to look at Society governance has been set up. AVR is generally welcomed and has been rolled out since the Regional Meetings with all branches responding.

4 MC representative presentation

EMNESH The Trustee training day raised issues about the relationship between Trustees and Management Committee (MC) so a working party is to look at Governance, and report back to the Trustees/MC then the Society AGM in 2020. The 2018 special membership offer was very successful. The Archive/Library at Leatherhead is an excellent facility and thanks go to the volunteers. Issues with the Society bank account re the Society name in full. Society public liability insurance cover has increased to £5m. The Patriot book is selling well and is to be followed by The Royal Scots (2020?) and a photographic book using images from the Michael Mensing collection. AVR - the replacement for the former AHL will be published in the near future via an Officers Newsletter.

Great Western There have been no adverse comments from the Charity Commission which indicates that the correct procedures are in place. After the Trustee training day it was apparent that having separate Trustees and MC was a duplication of effort. Action will be taken to streamline the structure which will be formalised by a rule change at the 2020 AGM. The issues with the Society's bank over the requirement for the Society name in full were raised. The 2018 special membership offer campaign had been very successful with a good renewal rate amongst those recruited. Branches do not seem to be receiving their branch membership lists in a timely manner so that they know who has/has not renewed. This is important for branches who ask for different door donations from members and non-members so an updated list would be appreciated. The new Archive/Library at Leatherhead is open for business with dates and times advertised in the RO and on the website - members and non-members welcome. The new patriot book is selling well. The next book for publication is The Royal Scots, followed by a book of Mike Mensing photographs. The aim is to have them available by the end of the year.

London & South There has been no feedback from the Charity Commission who tend only to respond if there is a problem. The Trustee training day provided greater understanding particularly with regards to Society governance. The 2018 recruitment drive was very successful with a good renewal rate for those members recruited under this initiative. The opening of the new Archive/Library at Leatherhead has been a highlight of 2018 and a visit there is highly recommended. Opening times are advertised on the website and in the RO. The wrong financial report had appeared in the RO AGM supplement and further explanation of the differences between Oct 2017 and Oct 2018 were explained in more detail. Becoming a CIO has raised over £6500 in gift aid over the two years. The bank promised no changes with CIO status but the Society has had to set up new accounts and it is now important for all cheques to be written out with the Society name in full. Public liability cover has been increased and there was a short discussion on Society insurance cover. The Patriots book came out last year and it is hoped to have two more books in time for Christmas 2019 - The Royal Scots and one using Michael Mensing photographs. There was some discussion leading to recognising the need to formalise and clarify the process of the use of photographs and having proper documentation to record what has been agreed. Additional background on the ending of AHL membership was discussed. The replacement AVR was outlined briefly and guidance would be coming out in an Officers Newsletter.

Midland & North West There has been no adverse feedback from the Charity Commission since gaining CIO status in November 2016. Trustee training in February has identified a duplication between MC and Trustees and a governance review is being undertaken to simplify the Society management with any necessary rule changes being anticipated for next year at the Society's AGM in April 2020. Safeguarding vulnerable people has been raised with more information to come. Accessible meeting venues are desirable. The 2018 recruitment campaign was very successful with a good retention on renewal for 2019 although most seem to be 50+. The new Archive/Library at Leatherhead is now open and excellent. A visit is recommended and the possibility of a subsidy from central funds for more remote branches to visit was raised. Public Liability Insurance cover has

been increased to £5m. The Patriots book has been published and is selling well, to be followed by The Royal Scots and a Michael Mensing picture book - both in preparation. There was some criticism of the lack of a photographer's name in the Patriots book with only a generic attribution appearing. MC rep to pass this on. GDPR was not intended to be overly restrictive but advice was given that a renewal of permission is usually expected every two years. This will not require a mail shot but some form of positive agreement will be required so suggestions on the best and simplest way to achieve this would be welcomed - please let Branch Liaison have any ideas. Positive reconfirmation is required. All branches were reminded that Branch Liaison needs a copy of all branch AGM minutes. Branch committees are expected to have 4 meetings a year but this can include the Branch AGM. Some branches conduct their committee business meetings by email and these are acceptable if properly recorded.

Northern Home Counties There has been no feedback from the Charity Commission suggesting that there have been no issues although they could call up information at any time. The MC are looking at their own structure as members of the MC should also be Trustees. A special committee has been set up to look at the structure of the Society and this will eventually require a change in the rules. The 2018 special membership offer has been very successful with a very good renewal rate for 2019. The new Archive/Library at Leatherhead is now open and all the old outlying stores are now closed. Banking issues were raised and all cheques payable to the Society should have the full name on. Under the new AVR, branches can nominate up to two members with their membership reduced to £5.00. The Society is currently in the process of producing a 'coffee table' style book of the Michael Mensing photographs but no fixed date for publication has been confirmed so far.

MC comments/Action Points

Under Governance, it is noted that the membership were promised that Trustees and MC would be one and the same when the proposals for change were put to the Society AGM in April 2016, but things do not always go according to plan. People are clearly looking forward to new Society publications becoming available. The new Society banking details are included in the Treasurers' Guidance Notes included in the new Officers Handbook – the new Officers Handbook has now been sent to the webmasters for publication. There appears to be a great interest in the Archive/Library at Leatherhead and visits are to be encouraged. If a volunteer is available and sufficient notice is given, it may be possible to open at a specific time that is not a regular opening day. The request to think about subsidising visits there from more remote branches will be considered but may not be feasible and there would have to be some limits to this. The membership secretary will look into non-receipt of branch membership lists but it is important that branches provide him with the correct contact details for the Branch Secretary. It has been noted that some branches do not have up to date contact details on their branch web pages. Contact details on the website need to be visited regularly by the branch committee and updated when branch officers change.

5 The New Website

EMNESH Branches should take advantage of the ability to add content directly and a branch web correspondent to be advised to David Jackman. Recent problems at North East branch are now reported as resolved. East Midlands have a new branch webmaster with some existing experience, but there are some issues on the website with East Midlands Branch not linking properly with the venue at Nottingham.

Great Western The new website is up and running and it is planned have training sessions for branch web coordinators to enable them to upload information on meetings, visits, exhibitions, meeting reports, photographs.

London & South The new website is now live but there is still a lot of work going on behind the scenes. Questions included how many per branch can access the new website. A limit has not been set but it is recommended that each branch has a web coordinator. The opportunity for a longer list of branch meetings/visits/activities on the branch home page was requested. All branches were advised to keep their pages up to date with details of meetings, other activities and reports. New photographs will have to be added to replace those on the old website. There is already some guidance available on request and training has been proposed for branch web coordinators. If all else fails, ask the webmasters for help.

Midland & North West LNW are currently unable to access the new website and training was requested as a priority. It was suggested that YouTube was useful in describing some of the techniques required for Concrete 5. MCNW have had a successful if limited start with the new website but have some issues over the last updated date which can be misleading and negative. WM - Bob Barby is the branch web coordinator but the WM representative was unsure of the exact position. FLL do not have a webmaster for the branch but training and guidance are urgently required. It was suggested by those present at the meeting that it might be useful to have an email alert or similar when pages are updated eg when the latest RO is uploaded which might be able to include information on other updates at the same time. This might help improve regular readership. There were queries on each branch's respective areas which nobody fully understood. The MC rep is to ask for a list of postcodes covered by each branch as this will be a help.

Northern Home Counties Jack Knights (assistant webmaster) confirmed that it was up and running but still required a lot of work to be completed with this version still in the experimental stage. It is hoped that each branch will appoint a web correspondent and be able to update its own information. Jack is still having problems with updating branch fixtures himself and there is no quick fix at the moment.

MC comments/Action Points

There still seem to be some difficulties with the new website and proper training is required as well as arranging the appropriate access. Work is on-going.

6 Branch Presentations

EMNESH

1 North East report was produced in brief written format and the meeting agreed that this would be a good format for the future for EMNESH Regional Meetings. **2 East Midlands** meeting attendances stable at around 37 including up to 3 visitors. Wide range of subjects inc. overseas, technical, out of area within UK. Wider distribution of tri-fold branch programme trialled with more copies printed for the new one. Exhibition programme extended to include new venues with income from this significantly subsidising the cost of meetings. **3 Scottish Branch** hold joint meetings with the SRPS with good attendance. The branch no longer attends exhibitions because the fees have become too expensive. **4 Humberside** report good and bad features including lower attendances linked with having two venues - Hull and Scunthorpe which did not encourage many to attend both. **5 West Riding** branch reported modest changes in their financial balance and an attendance of 30-40.

Great Western

1 Bristol - meetings continue to be well supported with an average of 50 and book sales of £400 on meeting evenings. Brian has an arrangement to buy up surplus RCTS publications which he can then offer at a discount. The summer programme of observation visits continues but is not well supported. The Pimms reception and dinner has proved successful and will be booked again for early August. The committee functions well but members are aging so new committee members need to be identified. **2 Cheltenham** - with only three committee members there is however a good spirit and the branch continues to function with a varied programme of speaker and a library box at meetings with attendances of 20-30. **3 Thames Valley** - the move to a better venue at Didcot has been a positive move with a regular audience now of 20+. There have been some good speakers including a number of civil engineering topics. Outside visits have been well supported. **4 South Wales** - thanks to book sales the branch is able to offer members free entry to meetings with average attendances of 52. The branch uses email and Facebook with much success to advertise meetings and events and is looking to expand activities with meetings now being held at Port Talbot as well. **5 West of England** - the branch has continued to function for another year with average attendance stabilising at 15-20 despite an ageing membership. For the coming season the less well supported September and May meetings will be dropped from the programme.

London & South

1 Chichester - strengths include a good mixed programme booked well in advance and including something of local interest. Outside visits are now going ahead and branch publicity has proven very successful. The alternative society set up locally after turbulent times for the branch is no longer required and has folded. There is a good committee and people to take over when the current chair steps down at the next branch AGM. The branch is doing well. **2 Croydon & South London** - face two main threats, the hall fee has gone up a lot in the last 2 years and requested donations have had to go up to cover the increase. Finding new committee members to replace those retiring is a problem. The branch did well from the 2018 recruitment campaign but it is not known how many renewed for 2019 as an up to date list has not been received yet.. Some former Sussex members have been allocated to Croydon and were already attending the afternoon meetings at Redhill. Meeting attendances had gone down a little but seem to be recovering now. **3 Solent** - the branch does well financially at exhibitions and with book sales. A new treasurer has been recruited but the branch badly needs new committee members to take over from the existing long serving members. Meetings are held jointly with the Mid Hants who do most of the arrangements. Meetings are generally poor with attendances down to 16/17 although a good speaker can attract double this, but few visitors attend. The Solent representative would very much like to be there to help with the Centenary of the Hythe Pier Railway in 2022. He would like the branch to look forward but the group with whom they share does not appear to be interested in trying to make changes to improve the outlook for the

branch. It was agreed to put the newly formed Working Group for Branches in touch with Solent to see what help/support is needed and could be offered. **4 South East** - feel that they have slipped down the branch ratings a little but finding out how other branches are doing seems to be harder. Meeting attendances average around 30 with about 40 attending on and off on a regular basis. Some members cannot easily get to meetings so a second venue at Maidstone was trialled a few years ago and it may be time to consider this again. Moving the venue has been a big help financially, and there has been some success with recruiting new members although some regular visitors do not want to join. Good meetings are important and there is a positive feel for the future. **5 Surrey** - average meeting attendances for evenings are 50+ with mainly current and modern subjects and for afternoons around 40 concentrating more on heritage subjects. The indoor season starts with a speaker from the local TOC and this has worked well. The branch now has more volunteers helping out at meetings and the committee had increased to six. There have been difficulties with improving publicity locally and two branch committee members have too many other RCTS commitments. There is a regular core of attendees at meetings while the rest only attend for a subject that they are interested in. Several regular visitors have now joined as members and some people travel quite long distances to attend meetings which could be in part because of good local transport links as well as subject matter. **6 Windsor & Maidenhead** - held their 100th meeting in March this year with one of its youngest speakers - GWR's Mark Hopwood talking as a railway enthusiast rather than his job managing GWR (Great Western Railway). Attendances are increasing with a broad spectrum of subjects. The branch works closely with two other railway societies and has a joint meeting with Marlow in June each year with reciprocal arrangements for attending each other's meetings. Similar threats as at Surrey Branch. There is interest in doing more exhibitions and volunteers are in place but the limited opportunities are being pursued. Overall the branch is doing well. Discussion at this point covered exhibitions and book sales/advertising the Society and the branch.

Midland & North West

1 Furness, Lakes and Lune - the branch is financially sound with good attendances and good publicity/promotion using the specialist Railway Facebook pages - ie they provide the content and the current Facebook group upload the information for them. The committee functions well and they have an excellent venue for meetings. They could do with more committee members. They could do with more members in the branch but it is not in the branch interest to change that. There is the opportunity to look at a wider range of speakers/topics and having a better digital offering is a plus eg digital RO. The age profile could be a threat, and that the branch is widely dispersed covering a large geographical area. Is there less interest in railways generally? What about the greater impact of digital communications rather than face to face meetings. **2 Merseyside, Chester and North Wales** - good attendances and a good outdoor fixtures programme. There has been a general acceptance of donations for indoor meetings and a slight increase in new members at meetings. A limited start to advertising has been an achievement. It is becoming more difficult to attract good speakers, the branch has no social media presence and access to the Chester meeting room is poor. There is the opportunity to reach out to more enthusiasts but the current age profile of branch members shows an aging membership. **3 West Midlands** - the committee function well as a team with audiences of 20-25 at both branch venues. There are bigger audiences for steam subjects. The new venue at Coventry is better. The branch has bought two digital projectors one for each venue and this has been good. There is a loyal branch membership. There is a downside to having meetings at both venues in the afternoon making it impossible for working members to attend. There are currently no branch exhibition attendances. There are opportunities within the region. The branch has similar problems with the age profile of the membership, and the branch area is quite extensive including Aberystwyth. **4 Lancashire and North West** - the supply of speakers is not a problem with so many good branch photographers - and cheap. There was a successful outdoor fixture at Basford Hall. Attendances are low at 15-20 and the branch does not invest in publicity. There is the opportunity to start looking at using Facebook and a possible volunteer to do this for the branch has been identified. A change of venue had to be arranged due to a change in ownership and it has been difficult to attract new committee members. The meeting was advised that Roger Sandford - the Society's Publicity Officer and Chichester branch member might be able to discuss ideas that would help.

Northern Home Counties

1 Peterborough - gained 24 new members under the free membership scheme in 2018 increasing the branch membership by 50%. Normal meeting attendance is 17/18. **2 Hitchin** - has good attendance at both afternoon and evening meetings. A sound system has been bought to assist speakers. The branch continues to attend 5 or 6 exhibitions each year to help maintain branch funds is considerably solvent. Members on email receive a monthly newsletter for each of its two venues. **3 Northampton** - the branch gained a new Chairman - Graham Frost, mid-season. There are 17 meetings a year, half in the evening, half in the afternoons with approximately 30- 50 at each meeting. They also attend 3 quiz nights and arrange 6 outside visits each year. **4 Watford** - under the free membership offer several new members were gained but meeting numbers remain constant at around 30. The branch attends the G&W Railway annually and is financially sound. **5 Milton Keynes** - average meeting attendances of 25, the branch holds meetings between March and December with a wide variety of speakers. Branch membership is around 50. **6 Cambridge** - attendance averages around 25 including visitors. The donation system has been modified to make it more favourable for members. The branch has a new laptop and is solvent. **7 Ipswich** hold 13 meetings per year and have had a recent change of venue forced on them. The branch has 100+ members but many are in very rural areas, the branch did well out of the 2018 free membership drive. They are very solvent aided by attending 9 exhibitions most years. **8 South Essex** - has a branch membership of 120 managed by the same committee for some time and is finding it very difficult to recruit new volunteers to the committee. There is an average attendance of 40 over 11 meetings a year. The branch sends a monthly newsletter by email and attends one exhibition a year. The branches facing difficulties seem to be suffering with a common problem throughout - lack of volunteers to replace committee members and assist at meetings.

MC comments/action points

Most branches are either stable or doing well although a common problem, as specifically recognised at Northern Home Counties, is getting members to volunteer to join the branch committees. The other common issue cited is an aging membership. This is particularly highlighted by West Midlands Branch who recognise the dilemma they face in that they only hold afternoon meetings thus excluding most of the (probably younger) working population. If less younger people attend meetings, it is harder to get younger people to join committees. While the hard work of branch committees must not be underestimated, it is recommended that branches try to have a mix of afternoon and evening meetings if at all possible – perhaps on a different day of the week to open up the possibilities of catering for both working and retired members/visitors. For those holding predominantly afternoon meetings, please consider at least one or two evening meetings per season, and for those holding predominantly evening meetings, please consider holding one or two afternoon meetings each season. The value of advertising has been shown for some branches – contact the Society's Publicity Officer Roger Sandford for advice. The dangers of too narrow a range of topics is hinted at with branches enjoying a wide range of topics appearing to attract better attendance where this is linked with advertising.

7 Officers Handbook

EMNESH - it was agreed that the handbook needed updating. The possible inclusion of speaker details was rejected as too easily out of date and because of GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) implications. It was suggested that there could be a section on data storage might be useful in view of GDPR.

Great Western - this will be available online with a similar handbook for MC members. It was felt that the Handbook should be published in sections as each is ready rather than waiting for a complete update.

London & South - the general consensus is to start publishing now as soon as each revised section is ready. A foreword at the front was requested highlighting which sections have been updated and what changes have been made. It was also suggested that updates could be advised in an Officers Newsletter.

Midland & North West - Many are ignorant of the current Officers Handbook so the relevance was questioned. Branch Liaison is currently working on a review and update with the new version being issued on the website to be advised in Newsletters when this has been done. It was agreed that it would be better to publish it in sections as each is updated rather than wait until the whole has been completed.

Northern Home Counties - no one knew or could confirm that the Handbook was going to be divided and certainly no new amendments had been received for a very long time. Some parts need revising as we are now a CIO. The MC rep confirmed that this would not happen until the current trustee situation had been resolved and the new committees set up. Steve Lacey asked if the new version could be circulated at the earliest opportunity.

MC comments/Action Points

The general view is that each section should be published as it is updated. The new Officers Handbook has been fully updated to include both Branch and National Officer information as well as other documents relating to how the Society works eg Constitution, Rules, Policies, etc. When it is published - imminent and awaiting approval of Safeguarding Policy so that this too can be included, an Officers Newsletter will be sent out advising that it is now available on the website. At the time of updating this summary, the newly updated and expanded Officers Handbook has been sent to the webmasters for uploading onto the Society website and an Officers Newsletter advising of this has been circulated. The Handbook will only be available online as it is too large and uneconomic to print out and send a hard copy to branches. Officers will be able to print out individual pages or the whole document as they see the need.

8 Long Service Awards

EMNESH - there had been criticism that long serving members never receive a discount exposed by the significant reductions offered to new members. A definition of long service should be 25,30 or 50 years continuous membership. The preferred format discussed would be either a certificate or a lapel badge. The meeting felt that the benefits of Life Membership should be more actively promoted.

Great Western - it was felt that this would be a pointless exercise and a waste of time and money.

London & South - this was not considered favourably. Most of those at the meeting could not see any point in having such an award especially as some people could fill a role for a long time but to little positive effect. Might it be better to consider something for special or exceptional efforts over and above the norm with some examples and guidance given? An alternative suggestion of a President's Award for an outstanding contribution to the Society - perhaps just one or two a year although some guidance for nominations would be required.

Midland & North West - the view of the meeting is that this would be pointless. The existing system of honorary life memberships provides some recognition for those members whose efforts have been extensive over many years/decades and no need was identified at the meeting to change this system as only exceptional contributions should be so rewarded.

Northern Home Counties - The general feeling was this should be awarded for 20 or 25 years' service. A certificate of appreciation was the preferred method of acknowledgement with the length of service for the award being no less than 20 years.

MC comments/Action Points

The idea has generally not been well received and potential difficulties envisaged if it were to go ahead. Due to unpopularity of the idea, this will not be taken forward. Alternative suggestions of a more limited nature have been noted and may be considered in the future. The idea of more actively promoting the benefits of Life Membership is under discussion. Branch committees can recommend to the MC that a long serving branch committee member is worthy of Honorary Life Membership (HLM). Recommendations for HLM should be forwarded to the Society secretary for MC consideration.

9 Speaker Costs

EMNESH - The costs incurred should be travel, accommodation (where necessary) and any fee should be agreed in advance when booking the speaker to avoid problems. The amounts available each year would be down to the financial viability of individual branches.

Great Western - Each branch has its own policy on paying speaker expenses. Normally, travel costs are paid and where a speaker has had to travel a distance, overnight accommodation is covered. Occasionally when a speaker declines expenses a book can be offered from the sales stand or a donation made to the speaker's preferred charity (NB the chosen charity MUST have at least some objectives in line with our own). Where overnight accommodation is paid by the branch, VAT can be reclaimed but this does not apply if the speaker makes the booking and is then refunded by the branch.

London & South - Each branch outlined their respective practices and the consensus was to avoid people who want fees especially if the speaker makes the approach and there is some wariness about where a speaker comes from and with what recommendation. There is often no fee/expenses so a charitable donation is made if appropriate or the same amount paid in speaker expenses for the speaker to donate as they wish. Reasonable travel costs are reimbursed and most branches will consider overnight accommodation perhaps once or twice a season with the booking done by the branch although it may be best to book longer distance speakers for the afternoon where there are regular afternoon meetings to avoid this cost if possible. Overnight speakers can sometimes be offered overnight accommodation with a committee member where appropriate. A light supper/meal is usually offered to the speaker before the meeting but this is not universal. Any expenses should be agreed in advance to avoid later issues. There was some discussion on how to highlight a poor speaker so other branches could avoid them - the recommendation was to speak to someone who had heard them for a true opinion.

Midlands & North West - There was no intention from the Trustees/MC/Branch Liaison to prescribe the rules for speakers' costs. It was agreed as desirable to agree fees/expenses with speakers at the earliest opportunity and certainly before the meeting? Generally speaking fees were not considered a good idea but they could be acceptable in some circumstances.

Northern Home Counties - It was felt amongst those present that branches are aware of costs by choosing their venues carefully, being selective as to where speakers have to travel from and their charges. It was highlighted that if branches pay for speaker's accommodation themselves, they can reclaim the VAT back even if the speaker books it him/herself, as long as the branch pays the bill. Geoff Plumb, a regular speaker throughout the country, has received forms from other organisations wishing him to talk to them, asking just what his requirements and costs are. This may be something that branches could consider.

MC comments/Action Points

The general consensus is that most branches are making arrangements in the right way. It is hoped that the proposed Best Practice Guide, when it is produced, will be useful in this context. This will be included in the Officers Handbook at a future date.

10 Branch Social Media

EMNESH - There were concerns over lack of security and GDPR considerations. It was felt that it was not a priority and the new website was the best method of promoting the Society.

Great Western - The South Wales branch has a successful Facebook page but this depends on having a competent person able to spend time monitoring the site which most branches do not have. Other branches use email to reach members with details of meetings and events but there are still a significant number of members without internet access. The RCTS website has a forum page which was little used, even more so now since it has disappeared from the new home page.

London & South - At least three RCTS branches have a social media presence - Chichester, South Wales and Bristol. It was agreed that a training programme might be helpful for other branches who would like to set up something similar. It was suggested that Roger Sandford from Chichester

Branch might be able to help put something together. Chichester Branch confirmed that the additional publicity from social media had been beneficial in widening their contact and might help to reach out to younger rail enthusiasts.

Midlands & North West - FLL use Facebook widely, particularly the Lancashire Railways Past and Present group pages where meetings are permitted to be posted. This has produced an associated positive response in attendances at meetings. These groups have 2700 members so publicity potential is huge and unequalled. LNW and MCNW (Liverpool) are desirous to partake of this facility. It was noted that Instagram was succeeding Facebook with the young but all at the meeting were ignorant of the differences and how these things work. It was noted that 3 branches currently use Facebook (South Wales, Chichester, Bristol) and it was felt that there a need for dissemination of expertise to other branches.

Northern Home Counties - Jack Knights advised that advertising branch activities on Facebook alone means nothing much as the news must be on the Society website as well. It was agreed that there was no objection to social media or uploading news on the Society's website as well but most at the meeting did not know how or what to do.

MC comments/Action Points

A mixed response. Without the resource of each branch having its own social media coordinator, it is unlikely to progress further. However, it has been suggested that some guidelines and sharing of expertise would be very useful. Roger Sandford's name has been put forward as someone with the right sort of expertise – he is currently the Society's Publicity Officer.

11 Confirmation of Chair and Secretary for the 2020 Regional Meetings

EMNESH - it was confirmed that Malcolm Hammond would be chair and Tony Skinner minute secretary for the 2020 EMNESH Regional Meeting.

Great Western – the Reverend Canon Brian Arman will continue as chair with Paul Udey as secretary.

London & South - it was suggested that Geoff May might be prepared to take on secretary for 2020 as he had had to give his apologies for 2019. Jeremy Harrison agreed to consider taking the chair for 2020. It was again agreed that a maximum term of two years for either role was a good idea.

Midlands & North West - this will be John Cowlshaw (MCNW) for 2020.

Northern Home Counties - Proposed Robert Warburton as Chair again. David Elsdon has agreed to continue as secretary.

MC comments/Action Points

Each Region has agreed their Chair/Secretary for 2020. If there are any changes nearer to next year's meetings, please advise the Branch Liaison Secretary. Thank you.

12 Any Other Business

EMNESH - Branch meeting programmes to be sent to Ronnie McAdam (by 1st July), Jack Knights (website), and Geoff Brockett (RO).

Great Western – none.

London & South - guidance on AVR was needed as soon as possible. There was a brief discussion about tickets for branch events and the distinction between donations and charge with a liability for VAT that comes with charges. Any VAT liability would have to be offset as a cost.

Midlands & North West – none.

Northern Home Counties - there was a poor opinion of speaker Matthew Hill who does not respond to communication and has failed to turn up at booked meetings. Branches were made aware of similar problems from speakers who do this for a living. Steve Lacey circulated a document with information he is gathering for the Society's Centenary.

MC comments/Action Points

Most items of AOB are covered in the new Officers Handbook including AVR, and who to contact about advertising branch meetings. Queries relating to donations or charges and VAT are covered in the Treasurers' Guidance note 2 on VAT - also in the new Handbook. Any additional queries or clarification required should be referred to the Society Treasurer. Please contact Steve Lacey about ideas for the Society's Centenary. Difficulties with poor speakers cannot be totally resolved but the proposed Best Practice Guide will cover the subject of speakers.

13 Date, time and place of next meeting

EMNESH - Proposed for Thursday 4 June 2020 at 11.00hrs in the Edmondson Room, NRM (National Railway Museum), York. The meeting closed at 15.00hrs.

Great Western - Proposed for Saturday 6 June 2020, provisionally at Manvers Street Baptist Church, Bath - same as this year.

London & South - Proposed similar arrangements as for this year ie around 16 May 2020 at the Maybury Centre, Woking starting at 11.00 hours depending on being able to book that date.

Midlands & North West - Proposed for the 29 May 2020 from 12noon to 16.00 hrs at the Waverley Hotel, Crewe at the same venue ie Waverley Hotel, Crewe.

Northern Home Counties - Proposed for 9 May 2020 at the same venue ie Digswell Village Church starting at 11.00hrs.

MC comments/Action Points

Please let the Branch Liaison Secretary know as soon as the meeting arrangements are confirmed or if existing arrangements are changed for any reason. Thank you.