

Report on the survey of the BAS personal membership. January 2021

This survey was carried during the Covid19 pandemic with the primary intention of discovering how the membership felt about the way the Society was implementing changes to mitigate the effects of the ongoing lockdowns.

The opportunity was taken to gain an up-to-date view of the profile of the membership and of their interests and current areas of research. Because the Society is so dependent on volunteers to achieve any results we again asked if anyone willing to help would come forward.

The context is that we sent the Questionnaire to 366 members, 36 by post and the remainder via email. We had 16 postal responses and 127 email responses which is a 39% return rate. Less than hoped but fairly typical for this sort of survey.

It should be noted that a number of people have email addresses but may not have read the email either because they rely on visits to local libraries to read them, or because they use mobile phones and this was a complex message.

An interesting comparison is with the last survey carried out solely by post in 2011 when we had 400 members and 57 % had email addresses whereas we now have 366 members and 90% have an email.

The Results are presented here as percentages of the total responses to each question rather than absolute numbers so that they are easier to interpret. The postal returns are added to the email returns in each case unless there is a significant difference when it is stated. Each question listed below is as asked in the questionnaire and is shown in bold followed by an analysis of the results and then some interpretive comments. 87% gave their names and 13% were anonymous.

THE MEMBERSHIP PROFILE was covered through the following questions.

Please provide your age range.

Over 70 53% 49-70 42% 31-49 2% 18-30 0.7% Not given 2%

(81% of the postal returns are aged over 70.) A number of people mention they are over 90.

These returns confirm our suspicion and reinforce our need to attract younger new members.

I think BAS is good value for money.

Yes 98% No 0% Left blank 2%

Very good to see but the overwhelming positive response must bring into question the level of the subscription and our pricing policies

The main reason I am a member of BAS is:-

I enjoy taking part. 44%

To support its aims. 29%

To get Records of Bucks. 17%

To access its resources. 9%

To promote my career. 1%

Left blank. 3%

Of the postal returns 63% selected "To get Records of Bucks" whereas in the email return only 10% did. From comments the more elderly or those at some distance from Aylesbury look forward to the arrival of the Annual Records of Bucks.

Is your social interaction within BAS an important element for you?

Yes 53% No 47% Blank 1%.

A surprisingly even split

Are you a member of the Active Archaeology Group?

Yes and active 15% Yes but inactive 5% No 79% Blank 1%

More or less as expected. As we have found the large number of non-AAG members are an audience for the evening lectures if given by zoom.

Which category best describes your attitude to digital technology

Active and Positive 62% Occasional but increasing 23% Reluctant and avoid 11%
Blank 4%

This is encouraging and consistent with the low number of postal questionnaires we sent out. We need to try to assess how many emails we send out to all members are actually being seen, and read.

Do you use a mobile phone often?

Yes 62% No 36% Blank 2%

Do you use social media?

Yes 39% No 59% Blank 2%

Almost two thirds of mobile phone users also use social media.

Would you be willing to take Records of Bucks as an online document?

Yes 31% No 45% Perhaps 23% Blank 1%

This is clearly not a binary issue. How the online version of Records is displayed, what summary info is also displayed and what is in a print version of the newsletter, and what financial inducements are offered are amongst the factors people will need to consider.

Would you be willing to volunteer to help BAS improve?

Yes 12% No 37% Perhaps 35% Already volunteer 14%
Blank 2%

If one applies the YES result percentage to our total personal membership, 43 people should come forward. The commonest reasons for saying NO were that they were too busy already or were too old.

Please give any broad areas in which you could assist. Eg: helping in the switch to digital, handling publicity, distributing Records, etc

In the actual returns 22 people said they would be willing to help distribute Records.

7 people were willing to help but do not know what is needed. It was said we do not ask .

4 people mentioned helping in publicity and social media.

Only 2 mentioned helping in digitisation.

2 mentioned Transcribing documents .

2 mentioned Leading walks.

2 mentioned Leading talks.

2 mentioned Copy editing and proofreading.

**Do you have particular research interests you would be willing to discuss with other members?
Please list very briefly.**

The returns to this question have almost all been unique but where similar they have been grouped together in the following list which includes all entries.

Local village history. Ancient parish boundaries. Chiltern village parish history. History and development of Princes Risborough. Archaeology around Princes Risborough. History of High Wycombe. History of Thornton. 8

Shards and ceramic remains. Roman and Saxon stamped pottery. Local prehistory. Prehistory up to the Neolithic. Pre-modern archaeology. 5

Building history. Historic buildings. Mediaeval buildings. Vernacular architecture. 4

Pre-Conquest Churches. Mediaeval architecture and archaeology especially churches. Churches with wall paintings. 3

18th century landscape gardens. Researching gardens. Garden history. 3

Any archaeology plus local history. Archaeology and landscape history. General history of Bucks. 3

Landscape evolution. Open fields and enclosure. 2

Each of the following was an isolated subject

Ancell Trust in Stony Stratford.

Anything pre-Norman.

Archaeological aspects of the planning system.

Archives and palaeography, how to present results of archival research to the public.

Bucks military history.

Civil War.

Economic history from 1660.

Geology of Bucks.

Geophysical and GIS techniques for use in Roman towns.

Gurney family history.

Historic overlap with Hertfordshire.

Narrow gauge railways.

Numismatics, especially Roman.

Paper mills of the Wye.

Royal forests in Bucks.

Stagecoach services.

Social history of Aylesbury in 19th and 20th centuries.

What are your general areas of interest? This will guide our program of activities.

Of the respondents 71% answered the question but often gave multiple categories. From these 22 categories were discerned and they are listed below in order of frequency.

29% of the respondents either did not answer the question or left the box blank.

Local history. (31 mentions of which 14 specified a local area.)

Archaeology. (30 mentions of just the generic term.)

Landscape evolution. (12 mentions.)

“Anything” and “everything”. (11 mentions.)

Socio-economic history. (11 mentions.)

Architecture. (8 mentions of which 4 were vernacular architecture.)

Pre-History. (8 mentions of that term plus anything Neolithic or before.)

General non-Bucks history. (8 mentions.)

Church history. (8 mentions.)

Building history. (8 mentions.)

Family history. (6 mentions.)

Roman period. (6 mentions.)

Garden history. (5 mentions.)

Natural history. (4 mentions.)

Transport. (4 mentions.)

Archives. (3 mentions.)

Geology. (3 mentions.)

Industrial archaeology. (3 mentions.)

Military history. (2 mentions.)

Stamped pottery. (1 mention.)

Cross county border studies. (1 mention.)

Numismatics. (1 mention.)

SATISFACTION RATING There followed a series of questions about the way the Society was implementing changes to mitigate the effects of the ongoing lockdowns and asking how people felt about each of our services. The questionnaire concluded with a free format area to make general comments and suggestion for improvements or new services. Where possible these have been included under each service in question. When there were many similar comments these have been summarised, where there is a specific comment which either illustrates a point or is a suggestion for an improvement, they have been quoted verbatim in italics.

How would you rate the way The Society is responding to the difficulties caused by the pandemic?

V Sat. 71% Sat. 26% Dissat. 0% V Dissat 0% Left Blank 3%

The numerous comments are all highly complementary, the following is a typical selection

Keep on doing what you're doing Thank you!

In general congratulations are in order for the way in which the Society and Records reacted so positively to a very adverse situation.

The Society appears very much alive and kicking - well done. The efforts of those who have contributed, however small, is much appreciated.

The way in which BAS responded to the pandemic has been an example to many. Whilst there are always minor changes that could be made, you should pat yourselves on the back for a magnificent response

BAS has worked a lot harder than the other societies I belong to, in keeping in touch with members, and providing many talks via Zoom.

How would you rate the email communication from the Society over the past year?

V Sat. 71% Sat. 26% Dissat. 1% V Dissat 0% Left Blank 2%

The only dissatisfaction is from postal responses but with no comment.

How would you rate Records of Bucks?

V Sat. 67% Sat. 29% Dissat. 0% V Dissat 0% Left Blank 4%

The level of satisfaction is very high and people wait for it to be issued but there were almost no specific comments except as relating to the potential online version.

How would you rate the pre-pandemic PRINTED Newsletter?

V Sat. 45% Sat. 41% Dissat. 4% Left Blank 10%

The number of Very Satisfied is low and the 4% Dissatisfied is higher than for virtually any this other questions. See the individual comments for possible reasons.

The printed newsletter is sometimes over-coloured and hard to read, but the content makes it worth the effort. I cannot travel at the best of times and am very grateful to BAS for keeping me informed about fascinating research and discoveries in the county I love.

Newsletter was a crowded slightly overwhelming layout. The writers assumed that one could respond to their appeals but often no email addresses were given to respond to.

The small font size and poor quality control of the printed newsletter has caused problems in recent years. Whilst I appreciate that the newsletter is printed for BAS by pupils at Waddesdon School, there should be a bit more thought given to the needs of aging readers!

How would you rate our digital newsletter sent to you by email in August? (Not asked in postal version.)

Sat. 79% Needs Impr. 5% Dissat. 1% Not used. 10% Left Blank 5%.

The Needs Improvement 5% shows that people are looking for further change. The number of Not Used and Left Blank shows that the email version is not registering with a significant number of people.

Individual comments mentioning the email Newsletter are as follows.

I have no recollection or record of receiving the August digital newsletter. Please check if I am included in the listing.

The printed newsletter does have the effect of some permanence of presence in front of one, whereas e-mails are easily deleted and events maybe forgotten, especially given the more aged audience. If the printed newsletter is abandoned, e-newsletters would need to be more regular and cumulative within the year ahead to remain in the mind's eye.

Newsletter was very comprehensive and I'm afraid I printed it out so I could keep it physically to hand as opposed in digital format. I think BAS is excellent at disseminating information from other societies regarding talks, potential websites of interest etc. Thank you very much for this - I think the Committee work very hard and it is appreciated.

The digital newsletter is still in its infancy, and does need a bit of refinement - but it is nevertheless quite good - a bit of tweaking will make it as good as the printed version was.

Look forward to receiving a paper newsletter again, if this is to carry on for some time, think there may need to be considered a change in where/ how the newsletter is printed/ distributed, so this can continue.

How would you rate our new website and its evolution?

Sat. 63% Needs Impr. 6% Dissat. 0% Not used. 28% Left Blank 3%.

Majority of people are satisfied although there is recognition that it needs to evolve. More important is the number of responses saying they do not use it. We need to understand why.

There were quite a number of comments and suggestions for changes:

The new website is great - very easy to use and pretty comprehensive.

We think the website is very well set out but how do people find out it is there?

Having the library catalogue to research on-line would be excellent and would take some of the burden away from the volunteers in the library.

Having 2 websites is rather confusing at present.

Often links on the website have not been updated - For example the Winslow book was not available online for the first week it should have been available.

In order to attract those who find it difficult to get to Aylesbury why not put recordings of lectures on Zoom in the future even when we are back to normal. This has worked well for the British Museum and Historic Houses Association of which we are both members. You could then offer a lecture archive.

Getting the resources on line should be a higher priority than it is and has been in the past. this would have been of great benefit during the lockdown and pandemic. Many members now have the facilities to digitise documents, this is a resource that could be put to good use.

Resources on our old (archive) site are accessible from the new site. How do you rate this process?

Sat. 48% Needs Impr. 6% Dissat. 0% Not used. 10% Left Blank 36%.

From the number who did not answer this question the assumption is this question was not clear to many people. From the number of "Needs Improvement" people are looking for change. As one comment put it : *Please tidy and merge the two websites.*

How would you rate our zoom talks?

Sat. 70% Needs Impr. 4% Dissat. 0% Not used. 23% Left Blank 3%.

Majority of people are satisfied but it is surprising how many responses say they do not use the Talks. We need to understand why. Is it a personal issue or a technology one?

There were a number of comments about the delivery of the talks and conferences which applied to all sessions including BLHN and HS2. Whilst there were no adverse comments about the knowledge of the speakers the professionalism of the preparation, presentation, and timing by some was criticised by a number of people.

There were also very many requests to continue using zoom even when we return to normal. This will enable all the members who live a long way from Aylesbury or who cannot physically attend for other reasons to participate.

Other suggestions were; hold summer talks in the museum garden and, charge for non-member Zoom attendance.

How would you rate the most recent BHLN Conference?

Sat. 38% Needs Impr. 3% Dissat. 1% Not used. 55% Left Blank 4%.

The number of Not Used is high but is not surprising as the events are attractive to a very specific subset of members. No comments apart from those referred to above.

How would you rate the HS2 Conferences?

Sat. 44% Needs Impr. 8% Dissat. 2% Not used. 39% Left Blank 7%.

The comment above under Zoom talks were felt to apply particularly to HS2. There was a feeling that their speakers were patronising and protective. However there were some positive comments:

I loved the HS2 conference - splendid detail.

We have enjoyed the historical information coming out of HS2 and further exploration of Roman Bucks would be good.

BAS uses Zoom, HS2 uses MS Team. Which do you prefer?

Zoom 60% MS Teams 6% No Preference 32% Left Blank 3%

Clearly our use of Zoom meets almost everyone's need.

How would you rate our Pre Covid Library Service?

Sat. 39% Needs Impr. 4% Dissat. 1% Not used. 54% Left Blank 3%.

Surprisingly over half the respondents have not used the library service. Unfortunately there are no comments to clarify the Needs Improvement and Dissatisfied responses.

There were comments suggesting we charge for information we provide to nonmembers or ask for donations.

How would you rate our Pre Covid Outings?

Sat. 36% Needs Impr. 6% Dissat. 0% Not used. 56% Left Blank 2%.

Again over half the respondents have not used our outings, the 6% Needs Improvement should be investigated. It should be noted that this was a question about pre -Covid outings.

There were the following comments and suggestions:

I was surprised to see that there is no coach pick ups from anywhere in the north of the county for trips that based in this area (MK in my case).

Perhaps we could give some thought to making the visits more appropriate for a wider age group? My kids would attend if they could learn some 'Horrible History' facts as well as seeing something interesting on the ground.

I like idea of virtual outings especially to Bucks villages and towns.

Please give us your comments or suggestions on any of the above services. If you have proposals or recommendations for additional services please add them.

57% people responded to this request but 43% people left it blank. The vast majority of the comments and all of the suggestions have been capture in the summaries above. However there are a few remaining comments that should be included

I live in Aberdeenshire so many of the Bucks-based activities are, obviously, not relevant. I love Records of Bucks and enjoy being a member of BAS. It is a fine way of keeping touch with what's happening, archaeologically, in 'the old country'(!).

Grateful for all information forwarded by Library team from other organisations, which led me to join Archaeology in Marlow, which is also easier for me to get to in person than Aylesbury.

Can say that I enjoyed an AGM for the first time! Relaxed to be at home for it!

The interesting question this experience raises is what next in the 'new normal'?

I hope that when things return to normal, a way can be found to continue providing the talks via Zoom as well as live - it would be a great pity if the distant members could no longer participate. I think this is the most important learning point from what has been achieved during the pandemic. - We must not lose the distant members - or those who are not distant but cannot attend in person for other reasons.

John Dodd. 16/2/2021