

# The Genealogical Society of Victoria Inc

## Annual Report for 2023

We seem to have finally emerged from the worst of the Covid-19 pandemic and have successfully returned to regular operations at our Research and Education Centre at 10 Queen Street. Members are using our 'on-site' resources and help, but still in fairly low numbers. We would love to see more members coming in.

The Treasurer noted in last year's annual report that we were facing significant rising cost pressures and those pressures continued, resulting in a loss for the year. There are more details in the Finances section of this report.

Our Treasurer, Library Managers and the many volunteers who manage the operations of GSV and our services to members have provided their reports below, which detail the society's activities and new developments over the last year. As you will see, a number of the reports include pleas for more volunteers to assist in the teams' activities; the assistance of more volunteers will help ensure these activities (and more) can continue into the future.

It has been another very productive year for the society and some of the highlights from the last year were:

- the commencement of the GSV/UTAS Family History Diploma scholarship;
- the new Digital Journal Search function available in the GSV library;
- the completion of the IT system upgrade which was an incredibly time consuming task for our IT and DMCT teams and librarians;
- the expansion of our discussion circles and the growing number of webcasts of presentations;
- the extensive use of our online Notice Boards;
- the continuing high standard and fascinating content of our *Ancestor* journal; and
- the growing engagement with the general community and other societies through our Facebook and Instagram pages.

And moving into the current year, I'm excited that GSV is relaunching major seminars, with planning well underway for a major Irish Family History seminar to be held in February.

We have had a couple of staff changes over the last 12 months. After more than 40 years of service as a volunteer and member of staff, our Library Manager, Linley Hooper FGSV, retired in November. Although Linley retired as Library Manager, she is still a regular visitor to Queen St as she is continuing as an active GSV volunteer. We sincerely thank Linley for all her years of service, all her work in developing the resources in our library, the assistance provided to countless numbers of members and for her continuing work as a volunteer – Linley has a truly outstanding record of service to GSV.

We welcomed our new Library Resources Manager, Rebecca Landy, in February. Rebecca has settled in well, working with our volunteers and members, including providing a very popular and informative new discussion circle, Family History Tips and Tools.

Jenny Redman is retiring from Council at the AGM and I thank Jenny for her great service to GSV. Jenny was President from 2018 to 2021 and faced the challenges of keeping GSV functioning through the uncharted waters of the pandemic lockdowns and the move to 10 Queen Street (in a gap between lockdowns), all the while encouraging development of new ways to provide services to our members. And after all the hard work and stress of those times, Jenny can now enjoy a very well-deserved retirement and focus on her own research.

Claire Johnson is continuing as a Councillor, but retiring as GSV Secretary and I thank Claire for her great support as Secretary over the last two years. We look forward to soon finding a new candidate to step into the role.

On behalf of our members, I thank all our volunteers who contribute so much to the society. Our volunteers are the bedrock of the society and GSV could not continue without their generous ongoing support. This year I'd like to give special mention to a number of them:

Ann-Maree Richardson worked with Linley on the research team for many years prior to Linley's retirement, following which, Ann-Maree stepped up into the role of Research Team Leader and is doing an excellent job. Research is a core function of the society, helping members with their research (in particular, through the 2 hours of complimentary research available annually for our more distant members) and paid research on generally larger projects for both members and non-members.

One of our Councillors, Cherilyn Tillman, has been working on some important (and time consuming) tasks for the society. The first is an intensive review and revision of the society's rules and by-laws and the second is the management of the roster for our Library Research Assistants (LRAs). Cherilyn is doing an outstanding job, working methodically through the complexities of the rules and by-laws while managing the constant juggling act of ensuring we have LRAs on site to assist members visiting our Library.

Jacqui Brown has been labouring away managing our scanning projects to ensure as much as possible of GSV's paper-based collections are digitised, making them much more readily available to members for their research. A huge number of documents, photos, articles etc. have been digitised and we all owe Jacqui and her team a vote of thanks for the incredible progress they've made.

Joanne Horsley is the society's Archivist and Joanne has taken on the review of the society's extensive archival holdings, which need to be brought back into good order after the disruptions of our last two changes of premises. Joanne will also bring new insights into the best ways to manage and retain our archive records.

Many thanks to Ann-Maree, Cherilyn, Jacqui and Joanne.

And, of course, thank you to our Councillors, staff and volunteers who make GSV an active, member-focused organisation. I am proud of the services and assistance GSV provides in supporting our members with their research and the following sections of this report provide details on the society's financial results and the growing range of activities and services provided through the hard work of our staff and volunteers for our members' benefit.

Stephen Hawke  
*President*

## FINANCES

Audited financial reports for the financial year ending 30 June 2023 are made available for the information of members and have been published separately on the GSV website. The P&L Statement shows a loss for the year of \$11,366. While this result is disappointing it is not unexpected in a turbulent year at the end of a period of change and disruption. Like most businesses and the world at large we are learning some new lessons in this post-COVID era. The GSV business that operated only a few years ago is now a different business to the one we see today and is likely different again to the business that will present itself in the future.

Our membership continues its trend of slow decline. This is an ongoing concern. We know this trend is the experience of many other organisations like ours both here in Australia and around the world. It demands a focus that we continue to understand as we meet the needs of both existing and intending members. This year subscription revenue fell by almost 7% and donations income was down by 17%. No doubt both outcomes have been affected to some extent by the general economic malaise that has driven inflation skywards and forced many people to make hard and uncomfortable decisions about their activities and their spending. The whole GSV family are thankful to those wonderful members who continue to generously support the work we do by donating extra funds to keep our work going strongly.

On the income side of the ledger we have taken action to improve income flows from our membership and *Ancestor* subscriptions. We trust that donations will remain healthy and we are now working on identifying discrete projects that will provide an impetus for growth in this important area of our finances. Importantly we are a nett saver and with more than \$250,000 on deposit we will enjoy far better income returns in the next 2-3 years than we have had in recent years from the interest payable on these funds.

We know that our business is driven by a limited number of critical levers. On the income side we have subscription income and donations accounting for 94% of total income and on the expense side we have four critical expense categories accounting for 92% of total expenses. These four categories are Staff; Accommodation; Internet/Web/IT; and *Ancestor* printing and distribution. Total expenses increased in 2023 by 3.3% compared to 2022. This result was aided by staff cost savings mid-year due to the delayed replacement of a retiring staff member.

The four key driver cost performances in FY2023 compared to FY2022 were:

- Staff costs + 1.7% (higher in the future given recent wage decisions)
- Accommodation + 3.8% (unsurprising given our lease has a 4% annual escalator)
- Internet/Web/IT + 10.7% (partly driven by growing online member activity)
- *Ancestor* costs - 2.5% (recent changes will accelerate this reduction over time)

For the rest of FY2024 we will bed down changes to member and *Ancestor* subscriptions, review *Ancestor* printing and distribution costs, continue our medium term planning process that looks ahead past our lease renewal date to ensure our business is appropriately set up to best meet member needs most efficiently and economically.

Tony Swain  
*Treasurer*

## IT TEAM

IT has spent the year supporting members of the GSV by making our considerable collection of digital-based information easily available to members at home via the catalogue on the website, and at the GSV via the catalogue and library computer menus. Between IT and members stand the cataloguers, indexers, project and research crew, scanners and web content editors adding to our collection, all organised by our Library and Digital Resources Manager, Meg Bate. The information available only on the library computers is there either because it requires special software to run/access it or due to copyright compliance. There is a project awaiting volunteers – to check the copyright status of 2,000 plus CDs!

As the platform that our website and membership software runs on was coming to the end of its life (no more security patches/updates!) a major project was undertaken along with our outside support, Audienceware, to upgrade the platform. This was completed in April after 13 months of hard work. This led on to another project, to upgrade the web server itself which has just been completed successfully.

The IT Support Team consists of Peter Johnston, Rod Van Cooten, Tom O'Dea, Cecil Clark, David Webster and Stuart Minetti. In addition, for our weekly Zoom meetings Meg Bate and Rebecca Landy join from the library and Linda Farrow brings to the meeting any membership system niggles. The following is a brief overview of the range of tasks we have covered in the hope that more volunteers can be enticed to join the team.

Rod Van Cooten in addition to being a Councillor, supports the IT team in all areas, oversees our two Zoom licences which are used for the over 250 Zoom meetings held each year, and runs Zoom host training, along with being the blog master.

Tom O'Dea set up some 30+ Blogs, Forums, Notice Boards, and Discussion Circles and continues to improve their operation, making it easier for their administrators. Within the Membership system Tom implemented an automated process to ensure that members whose membership has expired or has been cancelled no longer receive email notifications for the GSV Forums and the GSV Notice Boards. However, these members can continue to receive emails about items published on the GSV Blog if they have chosen to subscribe to any of the Blog Categories. He also carried out extensive changes to the membership system to allow for the new subscription rates, and implemented a system to allow life members to purchase a printed copy of *Ancestor*.

Cecil Clark maintains the library computer menu system which keeps Digger available along with other databases which rely on outdated software. As light relief Cecil is continually improving our pdf searching capability whilst producing the flipping book versions of *Ancestor* each quarter.

David Webster has searched through some four million plus old Project files and backups, removing duplicates and comparing against existing master copies to ensure that all project files are complete.

Stuart Minetti has been assisting John Blackwood in entering events on the website and investigating the impact of using a password manager to store the hundreds of passwords that have been accumulated throughout the Society.

On behalf of all members I would like to thank the Volunteers and staff who keep our IT infrastructure running smoothly, allowing pdf files to be searched and web pages to be visible, readable and informative.

Peter Johnston

*IT Team Leader & GSV Vice President*

## **LIBRARY**

The Library has experienced significant change this year. Most important was the departure of Linley Hooper as Research Library Manager in November after 40 years of working in the library. Meg Bate, Library and Digital Resources Manager, held the fort alone until she was joined by Rebecca Landy as Library and Resources Manager in February.

The library collection continued to grow significantly this year. Between 1 July 2022 and 30 June 2023 the following were added to the collection:

- *GIN*: 41,188 records, this includes, hospital admissions, rate books, marine articles of agreement etc, school admissions and more;
- *Milestones*: 38,549 records, this includes death, burial, marriage, baptism and more records;
- *Catalogue*: 2366 records, this includes 1,971 indexed articles from journals and 161 digital documents (Intranet), 34 webcasts. and other items were books and webpages. 27,000 records were updated, which includes replacing a printed publication with a digital copy.

Members continued to access our online database subscriptions. For example, *The British Newspaper Archives* averaged 60 views per month and *My Heritage* averaged 154 sessions per month.

The Library holds over 500 digital 'E-journals' which are available for full text searching at our GSV premises. They can be searched across collections such as Africa, Asia, Australia (separate State searches are also available), Canada, Channel islands, England (separate counties searches are available), Europe, Family, Ireland, New Zealand, Scotland, United States of America and Wales. This collection continues to grow as new journals are added and digital copies of old editions are sourced.

These additions would not have been possible without the tireless work of the many volunteers who digitise, catalogue, and index items in our collection. Janne Bonnett catalogues items, which are then passed to the Scanning team led by Jacquie Brown. Many of these scans are then passed on to the Indexing team, led by Lucy Williams and Lea Beranek. Our Hospital indexers, led by Sue Wragg, are now working at the PROV. Linley Hooper continues to oversee the Journal Indexing team.

All visitors to the Library are ably assisted by the 25 LRAs who generously volunteer their time to help others research, which is made possible by the rostering magic of Cheryl Tillman.

Members can make the most of this great collection by logging in as member on the website to access the catalogues and most databases from home.

Meg Bate and Rebecca Landy  
*Library & Digital Resources Manager*      *Library & Resources Manager*

## RESEARCH

Linley Hooper, the GSV's long standing Research Manager, retired during the financial year. The Research Team wishes her well in her retirement. Ann-Maree Richardson has assumed the role of Honorary Research Team Leader.

The Research Team has welcomed the assistance of Patsy Daly and Anita Payne, who have taken over the role of visiting the Public Record Office Victoria for the GSV, due to Vicki Montgomery becoming fully engaged on other matters. Shane Allan has also joined the team to assist with queries and consultations in the GSV Library.

The GSV saw a steady increase in the number of research queries after the lifting of the final Covid-19 restrictions. Especially encouraging is the increased number of non-member research requests and consultations. Some of the queries were referred to the GSV from the State Library of Victoria as well as the Australian Red Cross.

The Research Team has called on the assistance and expertise of the Scottish Ancestry Group. The Research Team has also called on the assistance of the International Settlers Group Discussion Circle to help with non-British queries regarding: Italian, German, Polish, Spanish, Swedish, and Ukrainian family research.

The Research Team has also overcome a few technical issues with the GSV website and the email system, in regards to the Research Team, which the IT Team have worked to resolve.

Ann-Maree Richardson  
*Hon. Research Team Leader*

## DIGITAL MEDIA and COMMUNICATIONS TEAM (DMCT)

The DMCT had a busy year dominated by the upgrade to Drupal9 (IT operating system).

The major projects and activities were: Drupal9 testing and updating information regarding the changes in fees and charges for membership. Tom O'Dea has been involved in both these labour intensive tasks – great job Tom!

Website:

- The Members Area of the website has been revamped. The Discussion Group area has been redesigned.
- The Member Research Interests Database is working well online with 622 interests listed.
- We continue to edit and add webcasts to the website. There are many webcasts available to members. The website area has been updated to make it easy to find a webcast, either by subject or by title.
- Online Notice Boards for Discussion Circles continue to be well utilised. It provides a great way to keep presentations and information from Zoom meetings for other

members to see. Members can sign up to a Notice Board and receive notification emails. Tom O'Dea has done a lot of work assisting Discussion Circles.

- Forums including Members Help Members and the Irish Ancestry Forum have been very active and have been set to notify members.

GSV Blog - Our blog: Family History Matters continues to go out to the members and others. The blogs are also published on GSV's Facebook and Instagram pages. They continue to be useful in alerting people to events and providing information.

Facebook - GSV's main Facebook site continues to be open to members and others. It advertises the events and material from the blog. We have over 3100 followers and many groups repost the information we have put up. There are several private Facebook Groups which are for members only. These are: GSV DNA Study Group, GSV Victoria & Tasmania Discussion Circle and the GSV Scottish Ancestry Group.

DMCT Members: Janne Bonnett, Meg Bate, Jackie Van Bergen, Peter Johnson, Anne Nolan, Tom O'Dea

Janne Bonnett  
*Convenor*

### **ANCESTOR JOURNAL TEAM**

The *Ancestor* team has continued to meet on Zoom this year and expects to do so in the foreseeable future. While we miss the 'in person' contact, Zoom has its benefits, particularly for the proof-reading sessions where editorial changes can be made on the spot.

New members Alison Dennison and Emma Hegarty, who joined us in 2022, have settled in well and brought their own areas of expertise to the group. Bill Barlow, editor of the 'Getting it Write' pages for several years, has moved on to pursue other interests. We wish Bill well and thank him for his valuable contributions to *Ancestor*. Thanks too to our council liaison, Jenny Redman who also leaves us this year.

The annual GSV Writing Prize continues to be an important feature of our year. We are delighted that guest judge Dr Cheryl Griffin, and president's nominee Ms Joy Roy FGSV, will again be joining us on the judging panel. Their continued support, and that of *Ancestry.com*, sponsors of the Writing Prize, is gratefully acknowledged. Thanks also to the entrants, without whom there would be no competition. The prize winner will be announced at the GSV AGM on 7 October.

Our 'How to' articles continue to be a main feature of our journal, with an increasing focus on areas outside the British Isles and Australia. We have trialled the use of shortened URLs in the regular feature 'Blogging with Meg', followed by a member survey, the results of which are presented in the September 2023 issue. With the assistance of Cherilyn Tillman, the *Ancestor* By-laws, now termed Procedures, have also been reviewed and updated.

As always, we thank the authors who submit articles, GSV president Stephen Hawke, Rebecca Landy and Meg Bate (GSV library), Linley Hooper, PROV and RHSV, for their regular contributions. Finally, a special thankyou to our creative editor, Jay Wickham. Together they all ensure that *Ancestor* continues as a quality, informative family history publication.

Team members for 2023: Barbara Beaumont, Sue Blackwood, Alison Dennison, Emma Hegarty, Tina Hocking (Chairperson), Martin Playne, Margaret Vines, Jay Wickham (Creative).

Tina Hocking  
*Chairperson – Editorial Team*

## **EDUCATION TEAM**

The GSV Education program provides information and instruction to members to assist them to research and document their family history.

The Society's Education programs over the last year have been conducted digitally. We now hold two Zoom Professional licences which have enabled us to continue to provide our talks, classes, Discussion Circles and other events on a regular basis. Many members have received training in the use of Zoom and are actively assisting with Zoom events.

Digital meetings have been very popular with members with attendances at events greatly exceeding the numbers who previously attended events in person at the Centre. It has proved a bonus for many members who, because of distance or mobility issues, have never been able to attend our events and activities. All our online events have proved popular especially the Discussion Circles.

A new Discussion Circle, Family History Tips and Tools, was introduced this year. The sessions will focus on how to access and use family history resources, especially those generated by GSV Members like those available in the GSV Index of Names (GIN) and Milestone databases.

Towards the end of this reporting period, the London Discussion Circle members agreed to expand the geographic coverage of the Circle to include the South-East English Counties. The first meeting of this expanded Circle will be held in August 2023.

The majority of our Zoom events have been recorded and, with the permission of the speaker, the presentations have been converted to webcasts which are catalogued. The GSV now has a collection of almost 275 webcasts covering a very wide range of topics and more are being added regularly. These files may be streamed and provide a valuable resource to members. The most recent webcasts are also featured on a webpage which is accessible through the Members Area of our website.

Our collaboration with the Royal Historical Society of Victoria has continued with many joint talks and seminars open to members of both Societies.

David Down  
*Convenor*

## **THE GOOD OIL CIRCLE (TGO)**

At the monthly meetings we discuss and further our research by considering topics closely allied to family history research.

The Good Oil sessions are designed to enable members to share their tips and tricks about a wide range of topics. We have discussed topics such as methods of handling and filing digital documents and images, how to care for family ephemera, how to use the items to enhance



our family stories, copyright issues and the possible impact and use of Artificial Intelligence on family history research.

The sessions are structured to ensure that all attendees who wish are able to contribute to the discussion.

David Down

*On behalf of the Convenors*

### **FAMILY HISTORY TIPS AND TOOLS DISCUSSION CIRCLE**

Family History Tips and Tools (FHTT) was launched on Wednesday, 19 April 2023. Inspired by the success of The Good Oil, it was formed to help address the reduced number of people available to run classes, to ease the burden on those still running classes and to offer a different type of discussion circle for members.

Sessions aim to provide guidance on researching using different types of information sources (e.g. Hospital Records – April, Journals – July) or providers of information sources (PROV – May, FamilySearch – June) or other topics as desired by attendees.

Each of the Zoom sessions has drawn over 50 attendees, many being members who do not participate in other discussion circles.

Many thanks are given to Meg Bate, David Down and Cheryl Griffin for presenting numerous times so far and to Peter Collins for hosting.

Rebecca Landy

*Convenor*

### **IRISH ANCESTRY DISCUSSION CIRCLE (IADC)**

The IADC committee's vision over the past twelve months has been to actively engage members with a wide range of research topics to facilitate discussion and ongoing conversation, and encourage deeper participation in the group's activities.

Over the last year the quarterly meeting schedule offered two particularly special events.

In November 2022, our first overseas presenter gave a very interesting talk via zoom on the social, political and economic effects of garrison barracks in towns in Ireland. Although relevant particularly to a town in county Tipperary, the arguments and effects of a military barracks in a town environment had implications for all other geographic areas across the island of Ireland.

In February 2023, we held our first hybrid meeting at the Kathleen Syme library in Faraday Street Carlton. A panel consisting of Val Noone, Carmel McEvey, Anne Bladeni (daughter of IAG founding member, Des Regan), Maureen Doyle and Linley Hooper celebrated and acknowledged the achievements of the Irish Ancestry Group, the precursor to the IADC. This meeting drew approximately 40 members in person, with 15 joining online. Members and panellists were able to spend time together face-to-face which is something we all missed during our long lockdowns here in Melbourne.

The IADC continues to advertise forthcoming meetings and other relevant Irish talks or conferences via regular email newsletters. The use of the GSV Irish Forums hasn't attracted a lot of interest yet, but it is hoped that over the next year, members will use this resource.

Topics and events scheduled for the coming next twelve months include;

- hybrid meeting on the 1872 Victorian Education Act and its implications for Catholic schools;
- all-day conference in Ballarat jointly organised with the GSV affiliated Ballarat and District Genealogical Society;
- online presentation on the Early Land Selections in Bullengarook and the local Irish community;
- discussion on the involvement of the Irish in the legal profession in Victoria;
- regular Irish assistance day in the GSV library to support member research;
- further input from members about their Irish ancestors for the Member Research Interest Database; and
- lunch and visit to the Immigration Museum, Royal Historical Society and the State Library of Victoria.

The 2022/2023 year has been a busy period for the IADC and it is hoped that during this next twelve months, we will not only meet our members needs, but will support and enlist their further engagement with interesting and relevant meetings and research information.

Carmel McEvey, Claire Dunlop & Paul Harris  
*IADC Committee*

#### **INTERNATIONAL SETTLERS GROUP DISCUSSION CIRCLE**

The International Settlers Group Discussion Circle has continued its work over this past year, with quarterly meetings and four Newsletters. The meetings and Newsletter are distributed in February, May, August, and November, and meetings are still being held via Zoom. Our meetings have featured talks by Lyn Johnson, Maria Picyk and Robert Nash - and the talk by Robert Nash on the Huguenots has been added to the GSV collection of webcasts.

Members of the Discussion Circle are kept updated by regular postings on the Notice Board, and I understand we have over 140 members currently participating. I would encourage any GSV member with non-British ancestry to enrol on the Notice Board.

The Discussion Circle will once again be enjoying a Christmas luncheon to be held at a city hotel in November, which will give members an opportunity for personal contact.

The Discussion Circle has a steering committee of six, including our Newsletter editor, John Cherubin.

Michael Rumpff  
*Convenor*

## **SCOTTISH ANCESTRY GROUP**

We continue to meet via Zoom with meeting attendances being between 20 – 40 members.

Discussions are lively once the ball gets rolling with many members contributing.

Jenny Harkness and Joy Roy gave the main talks at our November and June meetings respectively. Jenny gave us an update on FamilySearch and looked at what Scottish records are available, and Joy spoke on Sickness and Death in Scotland prior to Civil Registration.

Members presented on varying subjects at the March and September meetings including the Scottish poor, the 1921 Scottish census and emigration.

Membership has remained steady this year with 125 paid members and nearly 30 nonfinancial. We are holding on to the nonfinancial members as we are conducting a vote to move from a Service Group to a discussion circle. Results of the vote will be announced at our AGM on 16 September.

Anne Nolan  
*Chairperson*

## **VIC TAS DISCUSSION CIRCLE**

The Vic Tas Discussion circle has gained more life with the addition of Janine Marshall Wood as co-convenor.

Late in 2022, Gayle Nicholas organised a walk hosted by RHSV. The members who attended were made very welcome by the RHSV. They were happy to be able to meet up again and thoroughly enjoyed the day. The convenors decided we would try to meet to do a walk or a tour each year. A tour of PROV is planned for September 2023.

We finished 2022 with our inaugural quiz. An even mix of Tasmanian and Victorian related questions tested the attendees and was a fun way to finish the year.

Our program keeps a fairly even mix between Victorian and Tasmanian themes. We have consistently had around 25-30 members joining each month, with as many as 50 at times. Janine organised a number of guest speakers who generously gave their time to our group. We enjoyed interesting talks full of a huge amount of information. Topics covered have included Tasmanian convict research, Bendigo region resources, and the Port Phillip exiles.

We've continued the practice of holding two evening meetings each year to cater for members who can't attend during the day. These have been well attended. We had a few sessions where we encouraged members to share a story of about 350 words around a theme. These were really successful and we had some members who had previously been very quiet, now sharing stories and their knowledge. This has helped the Vic Tas circle become an active and fun group, sharing research tips and stimulating discussion.

We are looking forward to the next 12 months and another interesting program. Gayle Nicholas is taking a back seat, but will continue to support Jackie and Janine, and hopefully organise some more great tours. We thank her on behalf of the Vic Tas group for a great job over the last few years. We are grateful to David Down and Andrew Linden who help host our zoom meetings.

Jackie van Bergen & Janine Marshall Wood  
*Co-convenors*

### **COUNTIES OF NORTHERN ENGLAND DISCUSSION CIRCLE (CONE)**

The CONE Discussion Circle encompasses the counties of England northward from Cheshire, Lancashire and Yorkshire to the border with Scotland.

The discussion at the monthly meetings focuses on economic, health and work conditions and the social and familial customs that affected the lives of our ancestors living in the area over the last few centuries.

The participants help each another to overcome problems that are encountered when undertaking their family history research. There is also an emphasis on discovering what historical records exist and where they may be located.

Many members of the Circle have delivered presentations or written short stories about their ancestors and shared these at our meetings.

David Down  
*On behalf of the Convenors*

### **MIDLANDS & EAST ANGLIA DISCUSSION CIRCLE**

This year we have a new name for our discussion circle and have included four additional counties. Our circle now consists of the following: Shropshire, Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Warwickshire, Staffordshire, Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, Rutland, Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire, Norfolk, and Suffolk.

At our monthly meetings we have concentrated on identifying local digital sources from these counties. Our librarians contributed by making presentations about using the catalogue to find Midlands resources available at the GSV, and ways to search the digital journals from the various Midlands family history societies. Presentations included stories of convicts from the Midlands, the circumstances of their offending, transportation, and subsequent lives in Australia, as well as sessions on brick walls and ancestors' occupations. As with all recorded presentations, webcasts are made for future use by GSV members.

Jenny Redman & Samantha John  
*Convenors*

### **LONDON & SOUTH-EAST ENGLAND DISCUSSION CIRCLE**

All meetings of the Discussion Circle were again conducted via Zoom this year and a small but keen group, with Vicki Montgomery as the Convenor, continued to meet to share their finds and their ideas to assist members with their London research. A summary of resources

and websites discussed in the circle over the years were posted to the Notice Board and a summary of articles in the journals of the various London area family history societies available at the GSV were also circulated.

Each meeting began with a summary from Vicki Montgomery of the latest from the London message groups, an update of any records sets relating to London on the major sites and any new discoveries from members of the group, whether their own or items of interest they had come across. Discussions included the royal family, family history shows and members own research whether they needed help or had a discovery to share.

Towards the end of the year it was decided to expand the geographic coverage of the Circle to include the counties of the south-east of England. The Circle will now encompass the counties of Bedfordshire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire, Essex, Berkshire, London, Middlesex, Surrey, Kent, Hampshire, and East and West Sussex. The first meeting of the revised Circle will be conducted in August 2023.

Lynda Collier & David Down  
*Convenors*

### **SOUTH-WEST ENGLAND RESEARCH & DISCUSSION CIRCLE (SWERD)**

Our SWERD area of interest was expanded during the year and now covers Cornwall (including the Isles of Scilly), up to Bristol and Gloucestershire, across to Wiltshire, and all counties in between.

We continued to have good attendances and participation from members at our monthly Zoom meetings over the course of the year, and more members are always welcome.

Members presented at several meetings on their research into their ancestors in the south-west and there was much to learn for us all, both on the range of resources used and the social history of the time and place. We also looked at books to aid your south-west research, including books in the GSV library and the many that are available on-line. Members referred us to many books that they have found useful. Funeral and burial practices in the south-west were another interesting focus over several meetings. Too often we note the bare facts from burial registers without thinking about what actually took place at the time and these meetings helped broaden our understanding of these important events in our ancestors' lives. These discussions were then expanded at a further meeting into looking at marriage, baptism and naming practices in the south-west.

These are just some of the interesting discussions held over the year and we do invite other members with south-west interests to join in our meetings and/or refer to the meeting notes and presentations posted on the SWERD Notice Board.

Stephen Hawke  
*Convenor*

### **EARLY ENGLISH DISCUSSION CIRCLE**

This year we resumed the Early English Discussion Circle (EEDC) with good attendances at our bi-monthly meetings. Our first meeting was dedicated to the founder of the GSV's original EEDC, the late Alan Fincher, and his enormous contribution to GSV members' Early

English research. The scope of the Circle was increased to include 18<sup>th</sup> century resources which are an important link to the more recent 19th century English Census and Civil Registration records.

The focus for the first three meetings was the English Civil War and Commonwealth period in the mid-1600s. Presentations included Finding your ancestors in the Royalist and Parliamentary armies, Records of the Civil War and Interregnum, and Women in the English Civil War. Members contributed stories of their families' experiences during the wars and ideas for background reading about this turbulent period. At subsequent meetings we examined the records of early English towns with presentations about Dudley, Worcestershire and Cambridge, Cambridgeshire.

Finally, as an aid to telling the stories of our distant English ancestors, we spent a meeting examining examples of family reconstruction techniques (FAN methodology) for solving research problems using information about our extended families, their acquaintances and neighbours.

Details of the many resources and printed copies of presentations from all EEDC meetings are available via the EEDC Notice Board. Presentations are also recorded and made available as webcasts via the GSV's catalogue.

Lynda Collier, Stephen Hawke & Jenny Redman  
*Convenors*

## **WRITERS DISCUSSION CIRCLE**

The GSV Writers group, now in its 20th year, continues to support members to transform their family history research into written or other shareable formats.

This year members have discussed a number of technical issues and skills including 'Oral history', 'Citations', 'Scrivenor' and 'Using Word styles' and 'Indexing using Word'.

A popular activity is our twice annual writing exercises where everyone is encouraged to write a short piece on a chosen topic. This year this has resulted in a diverse range of stories about a significant family event, and another great collection all based on the period 100 years ago.

The group provides a valuable reviewing service which new members have been keen to access.

Penny Mercer  
*Convenor*

## **DNA FOR FAMILY HISTORY PROGRAM**

There is now a ten-session course - *DNA For Family Historians* presented fortnightly on Zoom by GSV member Alan Rhodes, with accompanying emailed hand-outs. Many people have attended all sessions and others have attended specific topics of interest.

There have been over 250 attendances for the latest series.

Three webcasts introducing Genetic Genealogy remain available on the GSV website for those considering or having just completed a DNA test.

*DNA Study Group*, a self-help group for members with more advanced DNA analysis skills convened by Maureen Trotter, also meets by Zoom each month to keep members up to date with current understandings and techniques. Activities include members giving presentations about new developments and tools, sharing successes, and helping each other with 'brick walls'.

The DNA member support email, [dna@gsv.org.au](mailto:dna@gsv.org.au) has been helpful for attendees in the talks and study group.

Penny Wolf & Maureen Trotter  
*Coordinators*