

Combe Reading Room – Chairman’s Report 2023

2023 could be described as something of a settled year, the recent past periods having being disrupted by the effects of the pandemic and its aftermath. It was a considerable relief to have most of our activities return to normal. As ever life has had its challenges, some met and others ongoing.

Our financial performance was pleasingly robust. Income was £11700, which, not unexpectedly was a significant improvement on 2022, up by £3300. Our main sources of income remain: hire of premises £4900, coffee mornings £3100, the 100 Club £1200 and Cream Teas £750. There were a couple of smaller events which also contributed; the screening of the Coronation and our first undertaking of an Art event. Overall a healthy improvement on the previous period with hiring income being the star performer with an increase of some £1200. It is undoubtedly true that the rise in the use of electronic payments has played its part in these upturns.

Our expenditure increased, fuelled amongst other things by higher energy costs. With a more stable income we were able to undertake a number of improvements to enhance the effectiveness of our offer and at a total cost of £2200. The principal component being £1800 in preparation for the installation of improved sound absorption in the main room. Prudent financial management, notably by our hard working treasurer Jean Richards, has kept outgoings at a sustainable level.

As a consequence of the above we were able to improve our balance sheet to the tune of some £3700. We now have funds of a little over £26k. Whilst this may seem a very healthy amount it does little to meet our outstanding challenge of the roof refurbishment, which might well cost in the region of £115k. We are finding it particularly difficult to meet the qualifying requirements of grant funders. At present we are continuing to make do with make do and mend.

The trustees are at the heart of all that happens with the Reading Room. We, and particularly myself as Chair, are deeply indebted to them for their staunch support and great commitment to the cause. The year enjoyed a full complement of board members with the newer ones getting their feet under the table and the more established ones continuing to serve with enthusiasm and exemplary professionalism. As a group we are only able to operate as effectively as we do with the backing of our wonderfully reliable caretaker Sue Golder. We are, of course, forever grateful for the support we receive from our community without whom we simply couldn’t function.

Finally we are looking forward to meeting the challenges which lie ahead. The roof of course, but some which have already been met in 2024; soundproofing in the main room and the replacement of the diseased tree in the garden.

8th May 2024