

CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT 1995

As Chester USA enters its third year, it seems an appropriate time to reflect on our past achievements and to look ahead to the future.

MEMBERSHIP

At the end of our first year, in August 1994, we had a membership of 250. Of these 139 rejoined, and these plus 37 new members gave us a total of 176 at the start of our second year. Since then there has been a steady trickle of people joining and at the end of August this year membership stood at 208.

There are a variety of reasons - some known and some unknown - why we initially lost members. We know that despite the high cost of hiring premises in Chester some members objected to an increased subscription, and some moved from the locality, while one study group having established itself through USA has continued independently. Other reasons are more obscure. Unfortunately, whilst the committee would have welcomed feedback in the form of constructive criticism from those who felt that their needs were not being met, none was forthcoming.

In the last mailing members received a questionnaire inviting comment and suggestions for the way ahead. We are grateful to those who have responded and assure them that the results have been carefully analysed for presentation at our AGM. Please understand that unless members make their views known the committee can only work in the dark.

VENUE

After two years of trial and error, hopes raised and dashed, we now have a permanent home. From December of this year we have secured the use of the Wesley Chapel in St John Street both for our monthly meetings and as a drop-in centre. In addition, rooms there are available for hire by groups who require them. Non-availability of the hall on the second Tuesday of the month has meant changing our meetings to the first Tuesday but otherwise the chapel seems to satisfy our needs at a reasonable cost.

GROUPS

The number of study groups has remained fairly static at around twenty. As a self-help organisation, the responsibility for forming and running groups lies with the members, and we are grateful to our group leaders and hosts who do such sterling work throughout the year. It cannot be emphasised too strongly that it is enthusiasm which drives the most successful groups; expertise is not essential, while any sense of elitism goes against the intrinsic aims of USA and is to be deplored.

It is to be hoped that a new committee post of Group Liaison Officer, with the remit to encourage the formation of new groups and provide assistance to established groups, will help to realise the wealth of potential which undoubtedly exists within our membership.

CHARITY STATUS

The Charity Commissioners have now vested Chester USA with charity status. Our

registration number is 1048416. We are currently analysing the potential benefits and responsibilities and will report in the December Newsletter.

CONTACT WITH SENS

On the occasion of the visit to Chester in August of veterans from our twin town, the opportunity was taken of establishing contact with members of the French party who were also the President and members of the Sens equivalent of USA. They are eager to develop this relationship and it is hoped to arrange exchange visits during 1996.

Finally, I am sure you would wish me to thank all the members of the committee for their hard work throughout the year. Several members are standing down at this AGM who have all contributed significantly to the development of Chester USA, and we are indeed grateful to them. It is to be hoped that others will come forward to fill the places that they leave vacant and help to manage and develop our growing organisation.

For myself, now that my term of chairmanship draws to a close, I should like to thank you all for your support and to close with the hope that Chester USA goes from strength to strength.

Pat Pulford September 1995

