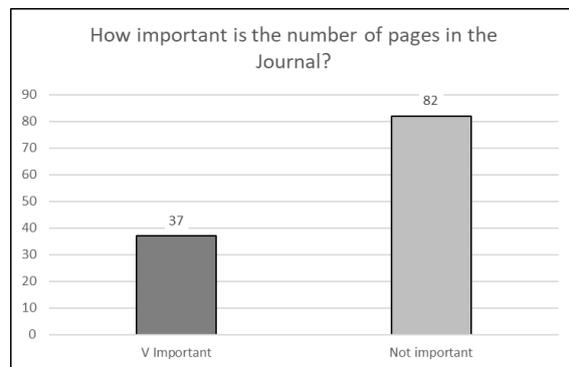
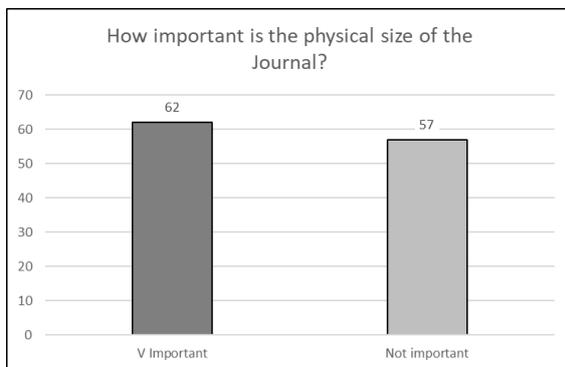


LRFHS Journal Survey 2019

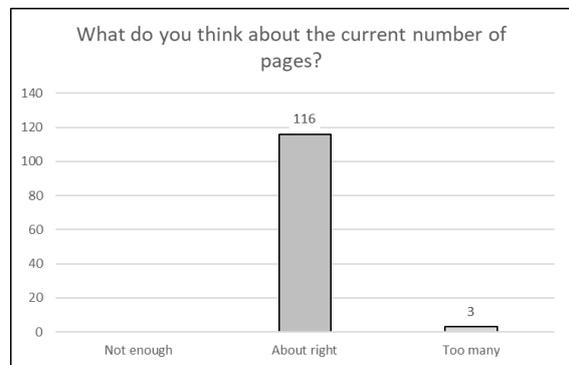
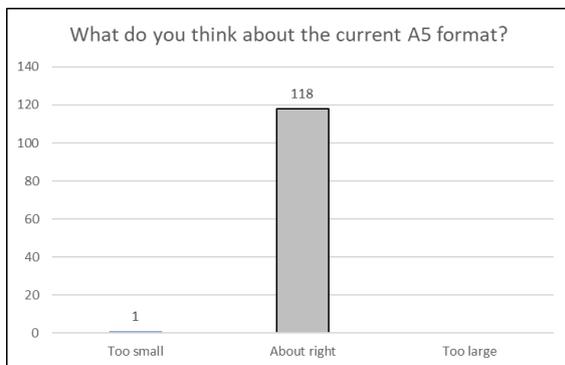
Journal physical size

The Journal is produced in an A5 format. Many magazines and newsletters have other formats. The purpose of this section was to determine whether the A5 format was a significant factor to our members.

It is also produced at, typically, 72 pages. This is a cost-based value, determined by the physical characteristics of the printing process and the standard paper sizes available to the printer. For example, a move to 76 pages causes an additional sheet of paper to be consumed in the printing process – which has to be costed for and thus increases costs to the Society.



Members seem to be ambivalent about the physical size of the Journal and the number of pages contained within it.

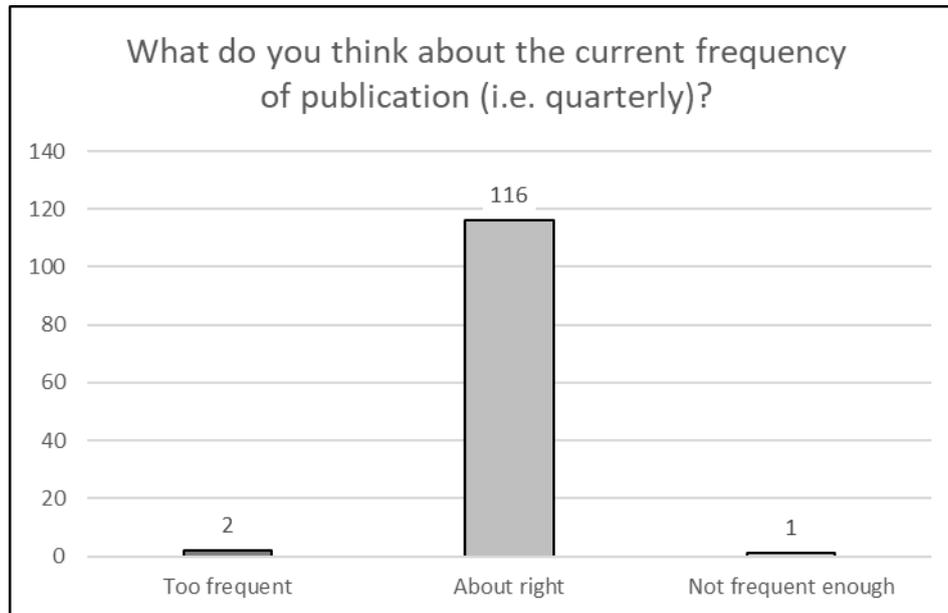


There is an overwhelming view that what we currently produce fits with members expectations of their Journal. There is no indication from this feedback that we need to consider any change.

There was almost no additional member comment relating to physical size in the forms returned:

(Physical size) Bigger than A5 - e.g. Genealogists Magazine from SoG is too big for the bookshelf and falls over without a binder.

Frequency of publication



An overwhelming majority felt that the current quarterly format was fine. The feedback comments received (shown below) suggested that, if it were deemed necessary, a reduction in frequency could be possible. But it has to be remembered that these are just six comments out of 119 replies from a membership exceeding 1300.

(Frequency) If financial issues become too great it could go down to 3 issues per year.

(Frequency) Possibly 5 or 6 per year if enough material available or occasional 'special' edition.

(Frequency) Reduce to every 4 months?

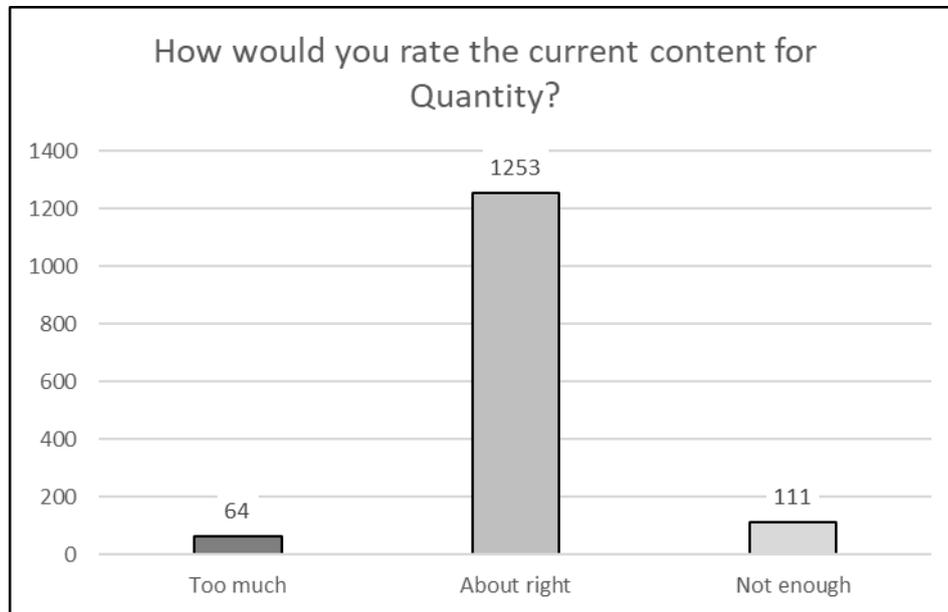
(Frequency) The W Surrey FHS has reduced to three issues a year.

(Frequency) Would a reduction in frequency of publication be appropriate? Say twice a year instead of quarterly?

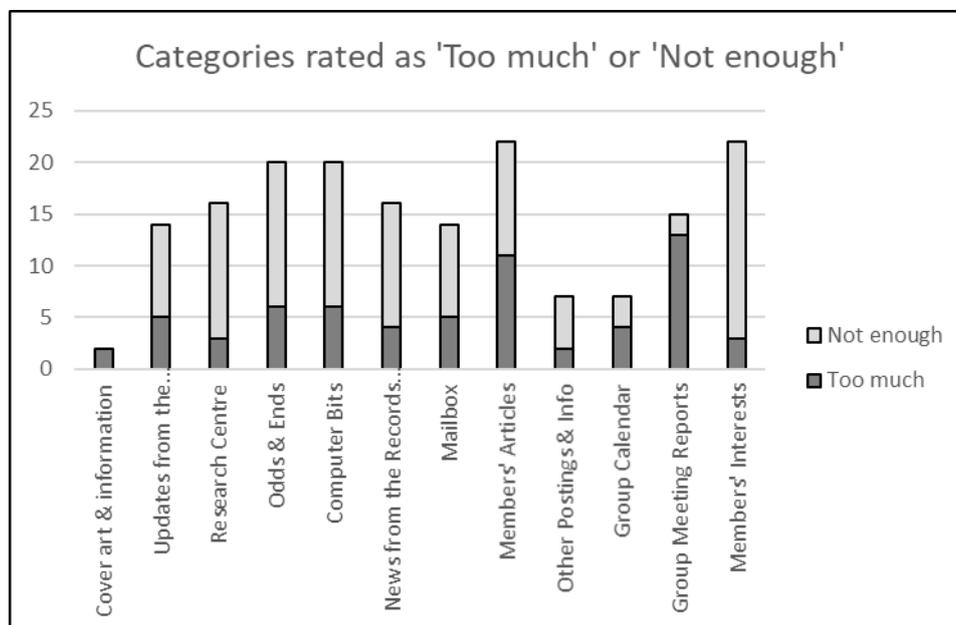
(Frequency) Would accept 3 copies a year if you were looking at reducing costs.

Quantity of content

The purpose of this section was to see if we had got the balance of the Journal content right. It has changed slightly over the years but, in general, has remained unchanged for some considerable time.



Not surprisingly, as most felt that the physical size of the Journal was about right, the vast majority (88%) rated the overall quantity of material as 'about right'.



Where we didn't score so well, it was generally a case of 'not enough'. Only the Meeting Notes received more votes for 'too much'. You need to look at the scale of these votes however – only 4.5% of replies scored any category as 'too much' and only 7.8% scored anything as 'not enough'.

Here are the feedback comments across the categories:

(Group information) As I live in Cornwall, I can never get to Group meetings but I really enjoy (and get a lot from) the Group Meeting Reports. They have lots of interesting pieces of information in them.

(Group information) Group details, meetings, etc. email save those magazine pages. Group reports - make them into full articles or delete them. This 50/50 approach is neither one thing or another.

(Members' Articles) Articles are sometimes too long and boring if they are no interest to you.

(Members' Articles) I have ticked Members' Articles 'too much' because for me the stories are too long.

(Members' Articles) I love the journal but sometimes the articles are too long.

(Members' Articles) I think some of these could be more concise.

(Members' Articles) Of course, some articles are of more interest to me than others but, on the whole, they are varied and balanced.

(Members' Articles) Some of these are too long. 4 pages maximum would be preferred.

(Members' Articles) The journal committing to source articles of local interest as the members don't seem interested in submitting articles.

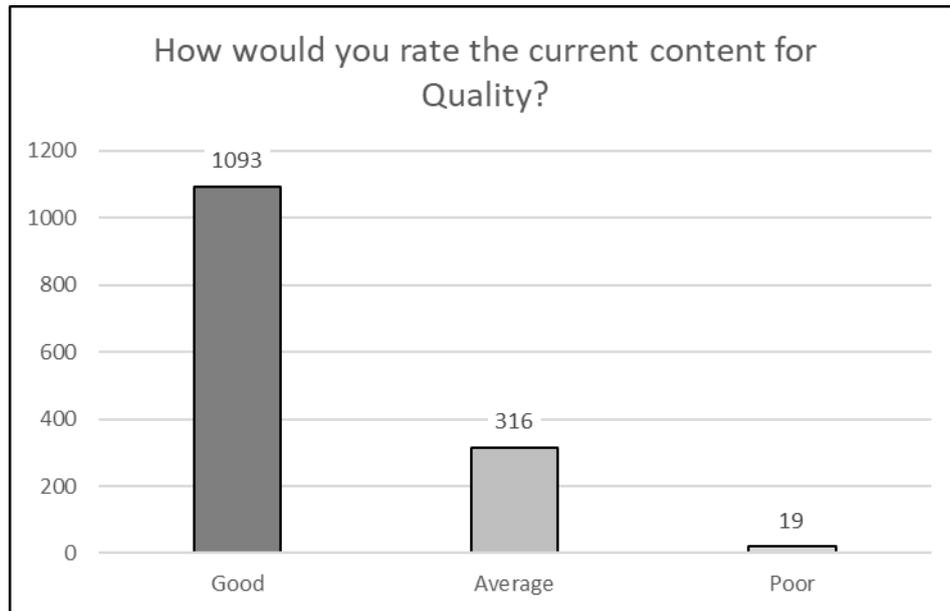
(Members' Articles) Too long.

(Members' Articles) Too many and too long - boring.

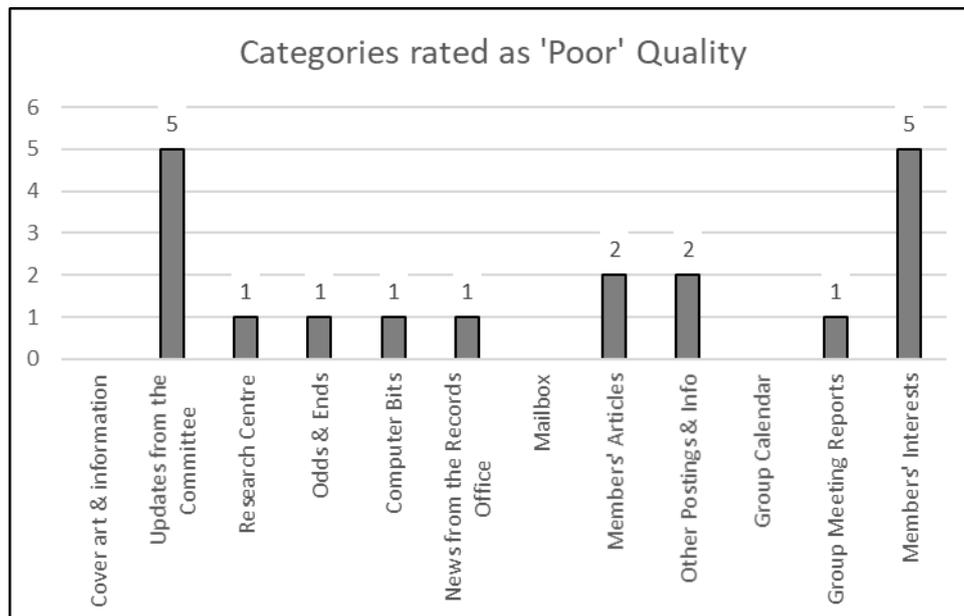
(Research Centre) I find the Research Centre very useful.

Getting the balance right with Members' Articles is difficult. Running them shorter will, by definition, restrict the depth and quality of the information presented, and there is the risk of them simply becoming 'space fillers'. Clearly, there are problems for some if they are too long – but it has to be remembered that this was the sum total of commentary from 119 replies received.

Quality of content



Overall, members seem satisfied with the quality of the content of the Journal (77% rated it as Good, 22% as Average, 1% as Poor).



Of the categories rated as Poor, 'Updates from the Committee' and 'Members Interests' stand out as perceived as weak. These two also scored poorly in the Quantity analysis.

There were no specific feedback comments about the 'Updates from the Committee' so maybe we could just take this as a prompt to try to improve the quality of the information we feed back to the members.

The feedback comments about 'Members Interests' were:

(Members' Interests) A bit vague now.

(Members' Interests) Poor. Please strongly urge people to give more data e.g. first name, place, date. Who is going to bother answering an appeal for "Carr in Yorkshire" - the IGI has 5,000 entries, and remember that even 'rare' surnames can be quite common in certain areas.

(Members' Interests) Why no dates next to the areas of the families?

If we can get the outstanding issues relating to Gift Aid resolved, the new website may be able to offer an improved Members Interests service and, from there, we might be able to revamp and revise the Journal content. It could even become redundant in the long term as we will be directing members to use the website service.

Other areas where there were comments about Quality were:

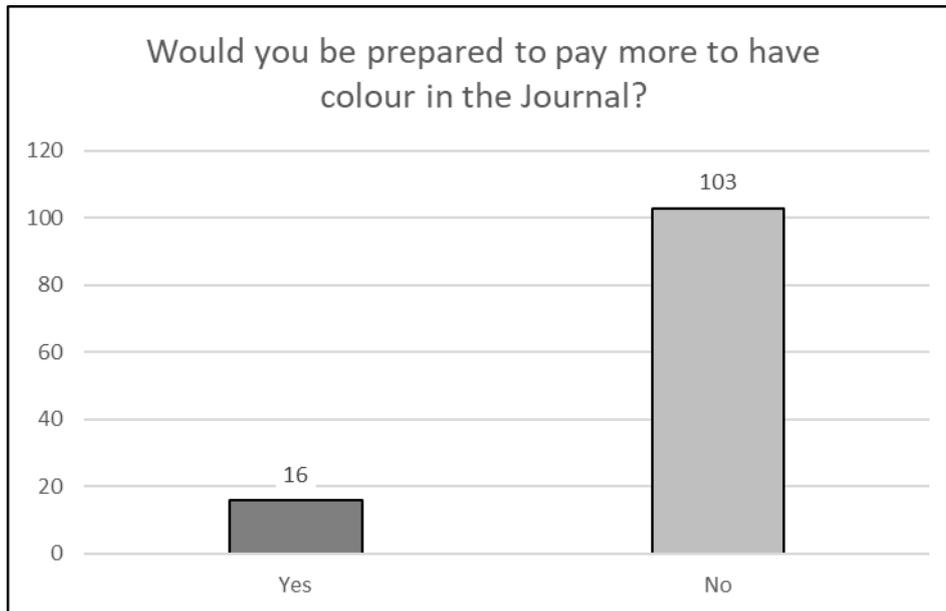
(Group information) As I live in Cornwall I can never get to Group meetings but I really enjoy (and get a lot from) the Group Meeting Reports. They have lots of interesting pieces of information in them.

(Members' Articles) Of course, some articles are of more interest to me than others but, on the whole, they are varied and balanced.

(News from the Record Office) Find 'News from the Record Office' usually quite wordy and not very informative about new collections, exhibitions, research help, etc. (This one is better in this magazine)

The Records Office comment was interesting as, for the June Journal, Robin was unavailable and an approach was used that was different from the normal free-form text. It did seem 'punchier' to me, and seems to have scored with at least one reader. This will be followed up on in future journals.

Introduction of colour



There was a pretty conclusive (87%) 'no' to this one, certainly for a paper journal. Here are the comments received:

(Introduce colour) As it is its great.

(Introduce colour) As many of the photos etc. are black/sepia & white anyway, why bother with colour?

(Introduce colour) Colour is not necessary; from my experience often print that is coloured is far more difficult to read.

(Introduce colour) Depends on the extra cost as I find black & white is still okay. Up to £20 single?

(Introduce colour) I think the balance of colour and black/white is perfect.

(Introduce colour) I would pay more even if it stayed mainly black & white.

(Introduce colour) It might be preferable to achieve better reproduction of illustrations within black & white text before moving on to colour - though that would be an enhancement.

(Introduce colour) Not enough cost benefit - looks good as it is.

(Introduce colour) Not needed.

(Introduce colour) Not sure it is necessary.

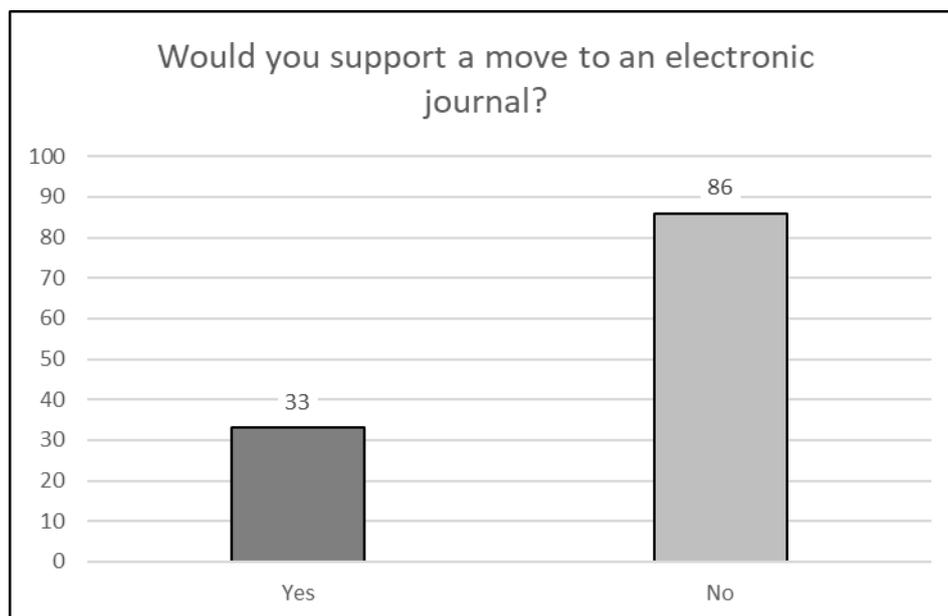
(Introduce colour) Print in colour is often difficult to read. I receive a magazine with some articles in colour and often do not read them.

(Introduce colour) The addition of colour covers has been great.

(Introduce colour) Wouldn't pay more for printed colour.

There is clearly no imperative here to look further at introducing colour within the body of the printed journal.

E-journal



There was a resounding 'no' (72%) to a move to an e-journal. This one topic also got the largest volume of feedback commentary:

(E-journal) Absolutely agree with move to an e-journal. Colour is too expensive for hard copy but OK for an e-journal. Copies of the e-journal could be held on the LRFHS website.

(E-journal) An electronic version would be good.

(E-journal) I am an older member and do not have a computer.

(E-journal) I am not online but I would be happy for you to have an OPTION of an e-journal. Members accepting that should have a lower subscription - could be the same wherever they lived in the world.

(E-journal) I enjoy a book over reading electronic articles.

(E-journal) I enjoy the journal - perfect bedtime reading. It is a treat when it comes through the letterbox.

(E-journal) I find the paper magazine very good, read a lot of it and share it with my mother.

(E-journal) I have had another FHS journal online & I find it much more difficult to read especially in A5 format. I am also old-fashioned in that I like something I can pick up whenever I want to.

(E-journal) I like sitting down to the printed journal (with a cuppa) - manageable with my tablet but not so satisfying! What about archiving copies? These would need to be the printed version as electronic versions may become inaccessible as technology changes.

(E-journal) I like the printed version because I can read it at leisure.

(E-journal) I look forward to receiving my journal through the post.

(E-journal) I said no [to the e-journal] because I spend a lot of my time in doctors' waiting rooms and I like to take the journal with me to read whilst waiting. I also take it to impart information and read articles to relatives whose eyesight is not good enough to read [for] themselves anymore. I could not do the same with an electronic version. Also I probably would not read it so avidly. However, technology moves on!

(E-journal) I subscribe to other counties journals. They have a choice of paper/post and electronic. They charge a little more for paper. I prefer paper as I can pick it up & put it down. I would pay a little more £2-3 for paper copy.

(E-journal) I think it is very important to retain a paper journal. It is much more accessible to pick up and read than going online.

(E-journal) I think the e-journal option should be offered in addition to the paper journal. I prefer paper but many people do not.

(E-journal) I would be happy to pay more for a paper copy journal - so people with e-journals pay less. Without the journal I wouldn't be a member.

(E-journal) I would most strongly support the continuation of a paper copy & readily pay more to support that. E-copies are far too hard to read on screen & printing out is a pain.

(E-journal) I would not be able to read the contents as I am not computer literate.

(E-journal) I would rather not.

(E-journal) I would urge the greatest caution with regard to any electronic replacement. Like many members I often annotate and put marks into the journal for reference. As a non-Leicester member the Journal is so important. I would be more than happy to pay 2x my existing subs to continue to receive a paper copy.

(E-journal) If people want an e-journal, I have no objection as long as those of us still using 'pigeon post' may receive a paper copy.

(E-journal) I'm definitely in favour of an e-journal. We're supposed to be saving the planet as well as money! Please do all you can to encourage this with members who have access to the internet.

(E-journal) It is a joy to hold the journal and read from a page, as with a book. Sorry but reading from a digital page is not as good.

(E-journal) It seems a no-brainer that the society must move away from a printed journal due to cost. The vast majority of members must surely have access to the internet and email.

(E-journal) Like having quarterly journal to read & pick up at leisure & take upstairs to relax with without sitting in front of a laptop. Paper is good, like it as it is.

(E-journal) Lincolnshire FHS offer a choice. You pay a higher subscription for a printed copy (about £1-£2 I think).

(E-journal) Moving to electronic would be a good idea. Notts FHS do this and it works well. It allows more flexibility in number of pages, use of colour, etc. Also hot links to the Society's website where relevant, and saves money too. Notts FHS charges more for membership which includes a printed journal.

(E-journal) No unless it is optional. I like the way the journal is at the moment.

(E-journal) OK as long as a paper version continues to be available for those without access to an electronic version.

(E-journal) Online publication would enable colour to be used and with a publishing program for layout and design to be more modern.

(E-journal) Personally I prefer a paper/post edition. Would be willing to pay postage on my copy if that would help.

(E-journal) To me a paper journal is important. It is far easier & more convenient to read and refer to (I have a complete set from issue 1). Being an 'out of area' member it is a tangible part of membership and not just another email. I appreciate the cost involved but for me it is now the most important part of being a member of LRFHS.

(E-journal) Whilst I find it easier to (1) read and (2) pick up/put down a paper journal, I think it is time to change to a pdf journal to (1) save costs (2) save the planet by reducing paper waste

(E-journal) Would be able to have colour with no additional cost.

(E-journal) Would it be possible to supply an electronic version but keep the paper version for those who are not computer friendly? Otherwise, I would have to review my membership.

(E-journal) Yes - but retain paper option too: essential.

(E-journal) Yes if it were optional.

(E-journal) Yes if optional.

Interestingly, looking at the comments, there is a suggestion that a move that made an e-journal an option to members might be feasible. An initial study has been done to investigate this, but there is quite a level of complexity with such a move. Management of information on individual member choices and the very rapid increase in both printing and postage costs with reduced paper journal circulations are just two of the factors that need to be considered. Investigation will continue to reach a considered conclusion.

Other feedback comments

Comments received that fall into other 'categories' or simply cannot be categorised are still important, and this is what came back:

(Cover art - quality) I particularly like the comments or explanations of the cover photographs.

(Cover art - quantity) Two societies I belong to have a plain cover with society logo on the front.

(Miscellaneous) Could do with a regular 'Getting started in family history' section for new starters.

(Miscellaneous) Having received many copies over many years, I think it is about right.

(Miscellaneous) Journal has improved both in quality of articles and information from the society.

(Miscellaneous) I have been a member of LRFHS for well over 20 years. All in all I find the journal very interesting. However I think you should think about sending out the journal in a paper package not a plastic one. As we know plastic is becoming a hazard to the environment.

(Miscellaneous) I have every journal since No. 31 (March 1983) and have seen it change and evolve over the years. I think that the current size and content is just right and would urge caution with any changes.

(Miscellaneous) I look forward to receiving the journal every time. I like it as it is! I also get the Northants journal - I think ours is better!

(Miscellaneous) I welcomed the explanation regarding subscriptions. I am not surprised that people often pay twice. The current practice of repeating the renewal form is very confusing.

(Miscellaneous) I would like to see members' recommendations as to places of interest one could visit to enhance their family history. For example, the Framework Knitters' Museum in Wigston, Workhouse at Southwell, etc. The websites and what they contain would also be useful. I'm sure there are many places that most of us haven't heard about.

(Miscellaneous) If it ain't broke don't fix it!

(Miscellaneous) Journal is excellent as it is.

(Miscellaneous) Love the new look journal. Much easier to read.

(Miscellaneous) The items spur me on to research more of my family tree.

(Miscellaneous) There are too many hanging sections breaking up articles e.g. in the current (June) issue pages 15-16, 16-17, 60-61, 61-62, 62-63 & 68-69. It makes it difficult to follow.

(Miscellaneous) There is not a lot to differentiate different sections of the journal. It has a 'samey' look throughout. Whilst I would not advocate the use of Clip Art, some artwork needs to be developed that can visually introduce sections of different interest.

(Miscellaneous) Try to avoid splitting mailbox letters over pages perhaps by adjusting line spacing to make them easier to read.

(Miscellaneous) Try to get the headings at the top of the page, not at the bottom of the previous page.

(Miscellaneous) We enjoy the journal as it is produced. No need for change - certainly NOT in electronic form.

(Miscellaneous) We used to have a page where people could post their 'brick walls' or ask if a certain person was in other member's trees. The journal needs to be of help to members and not so much on long stories.

(Miscellaneous) Well satisfied.

(Miscellaneous) We're in about 10 FHS's & this one is our latest. This is one of the best.

(Miscellaneous) When locally produced books are published on subject matter that would be of interest to family historians, it would be nice to have a book review published.

(Miscellaneous) Would just like to say how useful and informative the journals are. A pleasure to receive and explore. The journal has helped me feel I know the county and some articles covered places I needed to know more about. I give most of them to a cousin who grew up in Leics and he has got in touch with old friends & teachers through it.

(Packaging) Paper-wrapping excellent.

(Packaging) So pleased my journal arrived in a paper envelope.

Conclusions

I am not aware of any member survey being conducted for the Journal, certainly in recent years. There was anecdotal evidence that members viewed the Journal as a key part of their membership package, so it is essential that we at least make an effort to determine the views of members on the Journal that they currently receive.

The response to the survey was low – a total of 119 replies received, of which 50 were received at the 2019 AGM, out of a membership of 1300+ (so, about 9% response rate). However, remember that most satisfaction surveys achieve response rates of between 4% and 12% - so we're about in the middle!

In terms of the basic Journal, the vast majority seem satisfied with what we currently deliver as part of their membership package. There is no indication of any need to radically change the Journal format or content.

Having said that, some of the scoring and feedback has identified a few areas of possible improvement, and these will be picked up for future editions.

There have been some offline suggestions that the Journal should have a more 'academic' content and feel – there is nothing in the survey feedback that would support this view. Clearly, many must view the journal as simply a 'good read' with, on occasion, something that is of particular interest or use.

The whole area of moving to an electronic version is clearly very emotive among the members. Production and delivery of the paper journal is a major cost for the Society and, as Trustees, we are duty bound to investigate all methods to reduce costs and protect the Society in the future. However, it is clear that a simple sweeping move to an electronic Journal would not be popular among our wider membership. As mentioned above, there *are* other ways of tackling this but there are many complications with these other options. We owe it to the Society to investigate all possible methods, but this must be on the basis of factual information – and the results of this survey form an important part of such a consideration.

I believe that the survey has been worthwhile. It has provided an insight into how members view their Journal – indeed, even their membership. This is vital information to support the continued effective running of the Society. We will be repeating this exercise in the future.

Thank you to all members who took the time and trouble to reply. It is much appreciated.

Ian Phillpott

August 2019