



British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa

2025-2026 Annual Reports
THIRTY-FIRST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
13 JUNE 2026

Annual Report – President, Duncan Monkhouse

Overview

The 2025-2026 year was another interesting year for the British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa (BIFHSGO). The year was filled with highlights, a great conference and monthly meetings. The lowlights were the continuing struggle to find Directors, and other volunteers to assist with the operations of the Society. The result of this was the shifting of Dianne Brydon from President to Program Director, and Past President, while continuing with her work as Communications Director. I returned to the President position from Past President. There was also some shuffling at Secretary as the director could not continue due to personal reasons, leading to that directorship being split between Laurie Dougherty and Susan Smart. Paul Cripwell transferred from the First Director at Large to the Vice President position.

The following are some of the key achievements of the Board:

- Figuring out a way to keep BIFHSGO alive with the lack of key volunteers
- Continuing the excellent program and member communications
- Starting new research projects

Board

The 2025-2026 BIFHSGO Board had the following directors:

Name	Position	First Year on the Board	Term Ends
Duncan Monkhouse	President	2018	2026
Dianne Brydon	Past President (appointed)	2019	2026
Paul Cripwell	Vice President	2025	2027
Susan Smart	Secretary	2025	2027
Dianne Brydon	Program	2019	2026
Caroline Smallman	Treasurer	2024	2026
Dianne Brydon	Communications	2019	2026
Anne Coulter	Membership	2022	2026
Laurie Dougherty	Outreach	2023	2027
Susan Lambeth	Research and Projects	2023	2027
Laurie Dougherty	Director at Large	2023	2027
Kathryn Potter	Director at Large	2025	2027

We are grateful that members have come forward to fill some positions: Paul Cripwell and Kathryn Potter as Directors-at-large. Paul Cripwell also continued as Managing Editor of the *Anglo-Celtic Roots* quarterly publication.

Partnerships

BIFHSGO engages with several organizations.

Perhaps the most important is BIFHSGO's long-standing memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Library and Archives Canada which was renewed this year.

As BIFHSGO is an organizational member of Ontario Ancestors, our members can join for a slightly discounted fee, and we are grateful to the OGS for promoting our monthly meetings and annual conference through their weekly newsletter. BIFHSGO is a member of the Irish Communities of Ottawa, the informal network of Irish groups and societies in Ottawa, the Family History Federation (based in the UK) and the Scottish Association of Family History Societies.

Volunteers

We continue to be blessed with a core group who volunteer to bring to all members the many benefits we have enjoyed over the years. Sometimes that is as simple as helping with logistics at in-person events or helping to index archival documents for our databases.

Many Society activities require volunteers, with varying time commitments. Please consider joining our team where you will meet friendly people, learn new things, and help your Society continue to thrive. Watch for calls for interest in helping with specific projects or activities. Your contributions can be large or small, every bit helps.

To those of you who already voluntarily serve our Society, we are immensely grateful for all the time and effort that you contribute. Perhaps you will inspire others to step up in some capacity.

Directors' Reports

Vice President's Report (Paul Cripwell)

As there has not been a vice president for some time, I tailored the role to help the Society where I thought best. In this regard I took on the task of finding new members.

I have tried to communicate with several organizations in the Ottawa area that are in our target market. I was successful in delivering a talk to the Good Companions Centre in March, and with the help of Dianne Brydon, Anne Coulter did a similar presentation, online, to the National Association of Federal Retirees.

There was considerable interest in the topic at both presentations and to date there have been a few new members because of these efforts.

I also contacted the history departments of both universities and had a meeting with the head of the Carleton University History Department in April. There is definite overlap in activities, and the possibility exists for future collaboration. Exactly what form this will take is unclear.

Further contact efforts are being considered.

A second aspect of the VP position was to get a better understanding of the Society. In this role, I attended as many operational meetings as possible, including all Program and Communications meetings.

At the June AGM I will allow my name to be put forward for President, as Duncan Monkhouse will have reached his term limits, as set out in the by-laws. If the election/appointment goes as expected I will become President for the 2026-2027 year. At which point I plan to resign as the *ACR* Editor, due to the increased workload commitments, as soon as a replacement can be found.

Program (Dianne Brydon)

Highlights of the 2025-2026 season:

- Monthly meetings were hybrid from September to December and March to June; January and February were online only.
- Each meeting featured two types of talks – “Tips and Techniques” and a family history.
- Six Great Moments in Genealogical Research were presented in December and June.
- In September “Small Moments” were inaugurated – short family history talks inspired by an object or a document.
- At the December Social attendees, online and in-person, shared family recipe traditions.
- Including our upcoming June Great Moments – members gave 21 talks, some delivered two talks, and Ken McKinlay did three talks; non-members delivered two talks; and four members gave their very first BIFHSGO talk.
- About 1200 people attended our monthly meetings, in person and online, between September and May, an average of 130 per month. Some were new to BIFHSGO; many were regular, repeat attendees.
- In March, we held the Canadian event in the Irish Genealogical Research Society’s 90th Anniversary International Lecture Series. David A. Wilson presented an engaging and informative lecture on the importance of genealogical research to the understanding of the history of the Irish in Canada.

Speakers and topics are listed in the 2025-2026 program schedule below:

Date	Presentation	Speaker(s)	Title
SEPTEMBER 13	TIPS AND TECHNIQUES	Carol Annett	Using Google Lens: Unlocking the Mystery of Two Heirlooms
	STORY TIME	Multiple speakers: Carol Annett, Richard Annett, Paul Cripwell, Wendy Croome, and Marianne Rasmus	Small Moments
OCTOBER 11	STORY TIME	Barbara Tose	A Cautionary Tale Part II: The Importance of Fishing in the Biggest Pond
	TIPS AND TECHNIQUES	Ken McKinlay	Navigating the New Library and Archives Canada Website
NOVEMBER 8	TIPS AND TECHNIQUES	Ken McKinlay	Where are the Military Records?
	MILITARY MOMENTS	Sally Doherty, Carol Annett, and Susan Smart	(Lt.-Col. T.H. Carlisle) during WWII Finding Mount Ruppel: Remembering Uncle Bud Walter Preston: a Life Cut Short
DECEMBER 13	Holiday Social - favourite recipes		
	GREAT MOMENTS	Jeanette Logan	"The Logan Clan"
		Dianne Brydon	"To the time to find the stuff: A 1784 Ledger Entry Illuminates a PEI Ancestor's Lifestyle"
		Gloria Tubman	From a Great Problem to Great Moments
JANUARY 10	TIPS AND TECHNIQUES	Robert Urquhart	Who Pays the Piper? Wills and testaments of Scottish Musicians 1513-1800
	STORY TIME	Susan Iskra-Reany	It Started with a Button
FEBRUARY 14	TIPS AND TECHNIQUES	Paul Cripwell	Exploring Pictures with AI: the Good and the Bad
	STORY TIME	John Reid	Rain-Soaked Roots: Weather Shaped the Lives of Our British Isles Ancestors

MARCH 14	TIPS AND TECHNIQUES	Ken McKinlay	Tips for Using FamilySearch's Full Text Search
	STORY TIME	Wendy Jocko	Thistles and Cedar, Hearts Entwined in War
MARCH 30	GUEST LECTURE co-hosted with the Irish Genealogical Research Society	David Wilson, University of Toronto	Focusing on the Migrants: How Genealogy has Transformed our Understanding of the Irish in Canada
APRIL 11	TIPS AND TECHNIQUES	Content generated by members; convened with open discussion	The Travelling Genealogist: BIFHSGO members Top 10 tips for travelling to research your family history
	STORY TIME	Doug Loucks	The Rise and Fall of John Lowther Kemp Sr. 1793–1869
MAY 9	TIPS AND TECHNIQUES	Sue Lambeth	Spotlight on BIFHSGO Research and Projects
	STORY TIME	Veronica Scrimger	A Good and Faithful Servant: the life of Henry Arrowsmith Brogdon (1812-1883)
JUNE 13	Annual General Meeting		
	GREAT MOMENTS	Patty McGregor	Secrets: The Pullman Family Revisited
		Marianne Rasmus	Nottingham's Old General
		Carolyn Brown	Exploding Family Myths: William Wallace, Loyalist

BIFHSGO continues to receive positive feedback from members and non-members about the quality of our speakers and meeting production. Many people make that happen. I would like to thank:

- all of our speakers (see their names in the chart above) for their time and work researching and writing their talk, and designing their PowerPoint;

- the program committee (Bruce Beanlands, Paul Cripwell, Nancy Higgins, Kathryn Potter, Marianne Rasmus, John Reid and Veronica Scrimger) for their help in building this years and next year’s programs;
- the technical team (David Jeanes, Ken McKinlay, Marianne Rasmus and Barbara Tose) who ensure the hybrid meetings run smoothly; and
- Veronica Scrimger and her hospitality team (Susan Kilbank, Sally Doherty and Ann Good) for the monthly tea, coffee and delicious goodies. Veronica and Susan created a tasty and attractive spread for the special March lecture.
- Andy Desjardins, who helped with a host of tasks when required.

2025 Conference (Co-chairs: Duncan Monkhouse (Program) and Brian LeConte (Admin))

2025 featured another successful BIFHSGO conference with the theme of ***Researching the Disadvantaged of England and Wales***. The conference was held on the 18th and 19th of October and featured nine speakers, Clare O’Grady, Peter Higginbotham, Dr. Mark Carroll, Dr. Judith Hill, Gloria Tubman, Sarah Wise, Denise Bates Dr. Angela Buckley and Nathan Dylan Goodwin. Each of the speakers had an hour and 15 minutes session. In addition to the speakers there was an Expert Connect session where the attendees could ask the speakers questions.

Membership (Anne Coulter)

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	Difference from 2025
Memberships by type						
Individual	337	309	325	291	286	-5
Family	47	25	20	18	15	-3
Organization	7	5	3	3	5	2
Lifetime	6	7	8	8	9	1
Total Members	397	346	356	320	315	-5
Individual Memberships						
#members Ottawa	230	198	201	183	205	

# members outside Ottawa	90	78	91	95	81
# members outside Canada	17	17	15	13	18
% members Ottawa	68%	64%	62%	63%	72%
% members outside Ottawa	27%	25%	28%	33%	28%
% members outside Canada	5%	6%	5%	4%	6%

Memberships with Paper ACR	144	115	90	98	88
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(Membership numbers for 2026 up to April 24, 2026)

The number of Individual Memberships in 2026 is five less than in 2025. The proportion of members located in the Ottawa area (72%) is higher in 2026 than in 2025 (63%). The proportion of members located outside of Ottawa (28%) and outside of Canada (6%) is about the same as in 2025.

The membership fees did not change for 2026. The discount period for buying new memberships was reduced from 60 days in 2025 to 19 days in 2026. The more focused approach resulted in a greater uptake for the discount (150 in 2026 compared to 79 in 2025).

The majority of people made their payment using VISA/ PayPal (78%), followed by e-transfer (19%) and cheque (2.5%). This is the same proportion as reported for the 2025 membership year.

The Membership Departure Survey was sent out again this year to 53 members who had not renewed by the end of February 2026. This is the third year that the survey has been sent out, and the results are very similar to the previous two years. Although the response rate was low, those who did respond said that they did not renew because they had changed their interests, preferred an in-person conference or were no longer able to participate for financial reasons.

Looking at the survey results for each of the last three years, people responding to the survey were reasonably satisfied with BIFHSGO. There were no negative comments.

Communications (Dianne Brydon)

Communications activities follow the protocol developed in 2025. In 2025-2026 they included:

- Monthly invitations to upcoming events; newsletters; social media posts; and meeting announcements on screen and at the podium;
- Inserts in the Ontario Genealogical Society weekly newsletter;
- Updates to information on the BIFHSGO website, to which all these communication activities link back for more detail;
- The quarterly *Anglo-Celtic Roots*;
- For the March lecture, targeted communication to family history groups focussed on Irish ancestry and Ottawa area groups focussed on Irish culture.
- Communication activities for the 2025 conference were integrated into regular BIFHSGO activities.

To coordinate messaging and timing, a monthly meeting is held with BIFHSGO leaders involved in communication activities and a communication calendar plots messaging and dates. Thanks to the following:

- Our web site managers: Sheila Faure for her unflagging attention to website content and advice on communications overall until her retirement on April 1; and Kim Carson for stepping into the role;
- Sheila Faure and, since April 1, Marianne Rasmus for creating the monthly announcement slides;
- Kathryn Potter for writing the monthly invitations and newsletter;
- Paul Cripwell for delivering the ACR as managing editor;
- And Duncan Monkhouse for distributing regular and special mass emails.

Finally, thank you to Gail Dever and John Reid for highlighting BIFHSGO events on their blogs and social media posts. There is a jump in online registrations every time.

Online Registrations are tracked against communication activities and trends show us where our communication is most effective. In addition to the blogs mentioned above, an increase immediately follows the OGS weekly and especially the monthly BIFHSGO invitation and newsletter. Surveys consistently tell us that the BIFHSGO newsletter is the most common source of information about BIFHSGO events.

Newsletter (Kathryn Potter)

I have been in the role of 3rd Director at Large for one year. I live in Wellington Ontario, so this is a remote position. During that time, I have taken responsibility for:

- Gathering information and drafting monthly newsletter email
- Gathering information and drafting monthly meeting invite email
- Participating in monthly Communications meetings
- Participating in monthly program meetings
- Monitor Outreach email box for 6 months
- Facilitate online monthly meeting in January
- Joined the 2026 conference committee as Registrar
- Joined Laurie Dougherty in assessing past events in order to build bundles for membership
- Attended most monthly meetings online in order to understand the needs of the organization

Outreach (Laurie Dougherty)

In the absence of an Outreach Director, Laurie agreed to coordinate outreach activities for the first half of 2026. In February, Laurie arranged for BIFHSGO to have a table at Heritage Day, held at Ottawa City Hall. Paul Cripwell, Sue Lambeth and Dianne Brydon attended this event which was an excellent opportunity to showcase the Society's work to the general public and other heritage organizations. In March, several enthusiastic BIFHSGO members marched at the St. Patrick's Day Parade which resumed after several years hiatus.

You may have seen Laurie tending to the Irish Genealogical Research Society table during Professor David Wilson's lecture held on March 28th at Knox Presbyterian Church. His talk, "Focusing on the Migrants: How Genealogy has transformed our Understanding of the Irish in Canada" was the first in a series of lectures to celebrate the organization's 90th year.

The final outreach event occurred at the Ottawa Regional Heritage Fair held April 28th at the Canadian Museum of History. The judges awarded Julia Jacques, a grade 8 student at Ashbury College, the BIFHSGO award for her project about Irish Immigration to Canada. This is the first time that an award from BIFHSGO was presented to a student, and BIFHSGO plans to participate in this lively event again next year.

Research and Projects (Sue Lambeth)

By September 2025, many of the objectives outlined for research and project activities had been achieved or were substantially underway. With this in mind, new goals were developed and presented to the Board. These included:

- Ensuring continuity through a strong partnership with Library and Archives Canada (LAC) through renewal of our Memorandum of Understanding (MOU);
- Developing new projects, fostering opportunities for our members and volunteers; and
- Creating ways to widen the distribution of BIFHSGO's project information and research through the better use of new technology.

BIFHSGO-LAC MOU Renewed for a Five Year Term, April 2026

Last year, LAC initiated the process to renew the BIFHSGO-LAC MOU, which had been in place since 2006. Although this important partnership agreement was signed 20 years ago, transcription work undertaken by BIFHSGO volunteers for LAC started in 1995 and spans a 31-year period. Over three decades, our remarkable long-standing relationship with LAC has resulted in the creation of the Home Children database of 254,000 children's names. This database reaches a national and international audience and provides important information to family history researchers and historians alike.

The renewed MOU approved this April cements our partnership with LAC. In addition to the ongoing transcription of Immigration Branch records that our volunteers have been doing since 2016, the MOU itemizes three new transcription projects, and it also opens the door for BIFHSGO to pursue new projects and opportunities in the months and years to come.

Developing New Projects and Fostering Opportunities

Several new projects are underway.

Kirsten Perreault's "Cardex" (a provisional name) project, on Home Children, has integrated paper and electronic biographical information previously collected by John Sayers. This database provides verified information in addition to the usual life events associated with other databases. The "Cardex" is a very valuable resource because it ties together data that was previously not integrated and makes it accessible. It is very much a work in progress and currently has 18,581 names. Work is ongoing to launch the "Cardex" as a searchable online database. Content will be added as research on the children continues.

Shelby-Marie Lalonde has continued to develop the digital map she is generating from her ongoing transcription of a report in LAC's Catholic Emigration Association collection entitled "Father Berry's Roman Catholic Children".

Sophia Foglia has been experimenting with various online tools for narrative family history storytelling, including Substack.

After receiving a few tips on how to use AI tools, Sally Doherty has found a way to use ChatGPT to transcribe letters from LAC's Charlotte Alexander collection.

New volunteers have continued to come forward to help with research and related projects. Several of these are students or others looking for hands-on experience.

Sue Lambeth has started a strategic review of BIFHSGO's research and project content (both data and narrative) to develop a plan for improved dissemination with a focus on member engagement and our wider audience. Based on this review, BIFHSGO's narrative content will be refreshed and new information made available to genealogists.

At the May monthly meeting, "Documenting Lives: Spotlight on BIFHSGO's Partnership with Library and Archives Canada, 1994 to 2026 and Beyond" was presented by Sue Lambeth (Research Director) and Nicole Watier, Genealogy Consultant at Library and Archives Canada (LAC) along with Kirsten Perreault, Sophia Foglia, and Sally Doherty. The presentation covered information on our MOU with LAC (past present and future), and it also provided an overview of

some recently launched projects that involve new approaches to research and the dissemination of information.

Secretary (Susan Smart)

This report is of necessity a truncated report. From September to end of December 2025, there was no permanent Secretary; I was appointed in January 2026.

Since then, I've been supporting the Board through administrative activities such as minute taking and distributing Board communications. These communications include meeting minutes and general emails. Awards are also part of the Secretary's responsibilities and so I am now learning the ropes around Hall of Fame nominations.

In April the requested Annual Report was sent to Innovation, Science and Economic Development (ISED) Canada along with a separate form noting the change in Directors from the previous year.

These past few months, I am indebted to BIFHSGO's previous secretary, Laurie Dougherty. Her organization of the Board Drive and her personal assistance have been invaluable.

My hope for next year is to get more involved in Board business and perhaps to take on a particular project or two. One project recently initiated with Paul Cripwell is to document the outside organizations with which we have contact, and the reason for that contact. Any new project **should have the purpose of benefitting our membership.**

Treasurer (Caroline Smallman)

This was my second year as Treasurer for BIFHSGO.

2025 Financial Report

After the unanimous approval of the motion at the 2025 Annual General Meeting to dispense with the Public Accountant for 2025, I prepared the 2025 financial statements. These statements were then reviewed by a review committee of two BIFHSGO members, Marianne Rasmus and Sue Kilbank. Their review consisted of

examining the accounting records, supporting documentation, bank statements and invoices and making enquiries of other members as necessary.

I provided requested information and analysis to the review committee and consulted with them on financial presentation. Although their review was limited in scope and did not constitute an audit or review by a professional accountant, I found it a very thorough and useful process. They met with the Vice-President and me to discuss the results of their review and also provided a number of helpful suggestions for improvement in the accounting and reporting processes. The financial statements and the Report of Members on the Financial Statements are posted on the website.

Our net expenses (loss) for 2025 (\$3,300) were similar to 2024 (\$2,940). Reductions in accounting fees, promotion, and research and library funds were offset by increases in general, administrative and communications expenses and lower conference revenues.

Treasurer's activities in 2025-2026:

- Prepared the 2026 budget for Board approval.
- Recorded expenses and revenue.
- Accepted and deposited payments (membership and conference fees) and recorded in our financial records (QuickBooks).
- Prepared cheques and other payments to organizations providing goods and services to BIFHSGO and to reimburse Board members for payments made on behalf of BIFHISGO.
- Prepared monthly financial reports for the Board.
- Prepared and issued tax receipts for people who donated to BIFHSGO.
- Re-invested surplus cash in GICs over a three-year cycle.
- Prepared and filed the BIFHSGO Charity Tax Return
- Acted as Conference Treasurer, developing the budget, processing registration payments, and paying speakers and experts.
- Participated in strategic planning sessions.