

# St GEORGE FOR ENGLAND

April 2024

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THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF St GEORGE – The Premier Patriotic Society of England  
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## The RSSG gains much support across the Pond

Mark Lanyon



**H**AVING BEEN APPOINTED The Royal Society of St George Representative for the US and Canadian Branches, I have been reaching out to them through Zoom calls, phone calls, emails, and in-person to learn about each branch.

At the beginning of each conversation, I shared my three short term goals for the Branches:

1. To have more events that will highlight each Branch – this could include co-hosting with other societies and organizations such as the English-Speaking Union and the St Andrew’s Society;
2. To increase membership of each Branch – especially young people; and
3. To work on the retention of members.

The following is what I have learned so far:

### RSSG South Florida Branch:

President Roy Yates said 2023 was a tough year. Two of their board members passed away and Covid knocked the wind out of their momentum which they are working to gain back.

My three short term goals were reviewed with Roy. Roy said they definitely need to work on obtaining younger members as they currently have none. Roy liked hearing about Toronto and their “George” program for younger members. I suggested Roy reach out to current members to see if their children and/or grandchildren would consider joining.

Roy has a good working relationship with the British Consulate General in Miami. I told him that could be a resource for members and a source for speakers at future events.

I suggested to Roy they rebuild by beginning small – not necessarily a big event, which takes a lot of time, effort and money, but rather start with a picnic which many members could attend and invite friends and family.

Prior to submission of this article, Roy emailed to say the Society is joining with the Gold Coast British Sports Club and the British Chamber for the twenty-ninth Annual All British Car Show on 18 February. He also said they will be having a picnic for StGeorge’s Day on 9 April. Good job Roy.

Roy is to be commended for his dedication to rebuilding the Society. It is great that he is open to suggestions that will help him accomplish the rebuilding.



### St George’s Society Toronto

Zoom calls were held with immediate past President Jennifer (Jennie) Green and one with Executive Director Idalia Obregon. The Society does an outstanding job with charity work. They fund charities in four areas: education, social and community services, health, and the arts. In spite of the Covid disruption, the Society was able to continue with the charitable work.

The Society works closely with St James Cathedral and hold an annual event at the Cathedral. Even though no one from the Society is a member, it shows how the Society integrates into various places.

I was able to fly to Toronto to attend the Holiday Event on 12 February. In attendance was a great mixture of young and old members and their guests. In order to attract younger members, the Society has created a subset of membership called “George” which caters to younger people. Had the pleasure of meeting Adwet Sharma, who heads up “George”. Adwet is incredibly passionate about rebuilding the membership of “George”. He said they hold events that appeal to the younger

crowd. Current young members invite friends to attend events with the hopes of having them join.

It was also my pleasure to meet Aaron Bains, past president, and Idalia Obregon. Unfortunately, Christie Yu, the new president, was unable to be there. She and I will be holding a Zoom call early in 2024.

St George’s Society Toronto was founded in 1834 on St George’s Day and members were agents of change. Today, members continue to be agents of change through the amazing charitable work they are involved with.

### RSSG British Columbia

President Shawn Wade and I had a great discussion about his branch. One way they get to co-host events is members are asked to share their affiliations with other societies and organizations so events can be developed around these.

Shawn is a member and president of the RSSG BC, but also a member of the Royal Commonwealth Society and the Order of St George. There was a St George’s Day Church Parade and reception in Burnaby (an annual event) and Shawn said there was a great turn out for all three groups.

Shawn is an Officer in the Royal Canadian Army Cadets and will work with them on co-hosting events. There is the St George’s School (Vancouver’s answer to Eton) with which the Society is going to try to develop stronger ties.

Some of Shawn’s friends in the Royal Commonwealth Society belong to the Royal Yacht Club and hold joint events there. Shawn hopes by holding events, inviting people to attend, “doing them well and sort of recruiting that way will help refresh the membership rolls which do need to be rebuilt.”

Discussing the BC Society would not be



complete without mentioning Jean Boyer, the director and past president.. She recently received the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Medal presented by The Royal Commonwealth Society of the Mainland of British Columbia and Toronto. Jean is dedicated to the work of the branch and provides insight, input, and inspiration for the Shawn and the branch. A hearty thank you goes out to Jean.

### **The St George's Society of Baltimore Limited**

I had a wonderful phone call with Senior Vice President Harry Aycock, BEM. Found out that Harry took a floundering Society back in 2014 and through team work, dedication, passion, and determination they, in Harry's words, "rescued the Society".

The Society invites the Presidents of various Societies to their annual dinner, and in turn they invite them to theirs. These include the St Andrew's Society of Baltimore, the Hibernian Society of Baltimore, and the German Society of Maryland, something St George's has been doing for over one hundred years.

The Society has worked since 2014 to provide hospitality to visiting Royal Navy Warships, a tradition which goes back over one hundred years but according to Harry, "it may have been lacking in substance until ten years ago." The Society provides beer vouchers for the seaman and a bottle of whisky for the Captain along with additional bottles of spirits being provided to the Officers' Wardroom. Recent ship visits include *HMS Argyll* in 2014, *HMS Monmouth* in 2018, and *HMS Queen Elizabeth* in 2019.

In 2023, the Society events included the Prince of Wales Brunch, the Annual Dinner,

a Coronation Ball, the annual St George's Cup polo match, Trafalgar Night Dinner, and a Remembrance Sunday Service and British War Grave Marking.

The Society was able to raise money for Help for Heroes, the Invictus Games Foundation, the Royal British Legion, the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity, and the Prince's Trust USA.

It was great to hear the Society has some younger members and they have at least three sets of father/son members. Harry said he believes they have carved out a niche for St George's in Baltimore. Harry also said the Society has discovered through trial and error for them the best way to attract new members is through word of mouth.

As I told Harry on behalf of their Society – "well done".

In October 2023 Harry received the British Empire Medal for service to the St George's Society of Baltimore at an investiture at the British Embassy in Washington, DC.

### **The Society of St George, Philadelphia**

I was able to attend the event at Stoney's British Pub in September as well as the Holiday Event on 12 September. Both events provided me the opportunity to speak with President Richard Booker. During our conversations I complimented him on the Society holding joint events with the English-Speaking Union (one last year honoured Oliver St Clair Franklin for his being bestowed the CBE by Her Majesty). Also told Richard that the Stoney's Pub annual event can be a way to attract new members and younger members as well.

The Society marked its 250th anniversary in the year 2022. In April 2023, the Society held a gala to celebrate. In keeping with the tradition of providing charitable aid, the



Society provides scholarships for students studying in England as well as supporting the Philadelphia Outward Bound School. The Society also supports students who attend St James School. The Holiday Event was a fundraiser for the St James School.

As I have told Judith Francis on various occasions, her hard work and dedication to the Society has helped it remain strong. Many thanks go out to you Judith.

### **The British Consuls and Honorary British Consuls**

One of my goals was to become the liaison between the Societies and the British Consulate. Oliver St Clair Franklin, CBE – Honorary British Consul for the Greater Philadelphia Region – has begun to introduce me to the British Consuls and Honorary British Consuls beginning with the New York Consulate. These contacts can provide potential speakers as well as other resources.

### **Moving forward**

We will be holding Zoom calls for all the branches to provide the opportunity to share their best practices that other branches can benefit from:

- a. What events were successful and how did you promote them?
- b. What events were not successful and what could have been done differently?
- c. What media outlet works best for you – newspapers, Facebook or even word of mouth?
- d. What charities do you work with and how do you promote that work?
- e. How have you been able to build your membership rolls, including younger people, what has worked?

At the end of the day to fulfill the Society's Mission: "To promote the character and true diversity of England and its people."

Together each of you, myself, and the Society home office can work together to see each Branch and Affiliate Branch grow and thrive.

