



James Burton
1761-1837



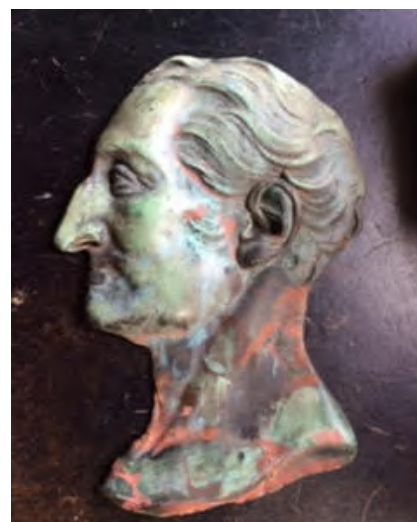
Decimus Burton
1800-1881

Newsletter Spring 2019

The granite memorial to James Burton was erected in the mid 19th century in what was then the Subscriptions Gardens. It was embellished with a plaque of his head and a fountain at its base. When the Gardens were taken over by Hastings Borough Council and became St Leonards Gardens, the memorial was left within the grounds of Gloucester Lodge and was viewable from the Gardens. The fountain was immobilised at that time.



About 10 years ago a vandal wrenched the plaque off its base. Fortunately it was recovered but seriously buckled as shown in the first of the two photographs below. The Society has obtained expert advice on replacing it with a bronze replica to be attached to the base in a “vandal-proof” way. The estimate for costs is £2,000 and a fund has been started for the necessary works. To date £300 had been pledged. We are now seeking further donations. These can be made to The Secretary of the Society at South Lodge (West), St Leonards-on-Sea, TN38 0BA or by email to admin@burtonsstleonardssociety.co.uk





The Temperate House at Kew designed by Decimus Burton and Richard Turner (opened in 1863)

The Society has organised a visit by coach to the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew on Tuesday 30 April. Members £30 inclusive of entrance charge of £13.60; non-members £35.

In addition to the recently restored Temperate House the day will include visits to the famous Palm House (1844-48) also by Burton (with Nicole Burton) and Turner and to the Marianne North Gallery of Botanical Illustrations (below). Marianne was born in Hastings in 1830, daughter of Frederick North, a Liberal MP for the constituency for several periods between 1831 and 1869. She travelled extensively overseas, especially in remote areas, making hundreds of botanical drawings and paintings of great accuracy and beauty.



To book or for further information, please contact Christopher Maxwell-Stewart at:
christopher.ms@icloud.com



The title page of *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) by Daniel Defoe (1660-1731)

Defoe's famous work, sometimes considered our first novel, will be the subject of this year's '**A Town Explores a Book**'. 2019 marks the third centenary of the publication of this, the most well known of all Defoe's many works. Now an annual event, the festival will take place in St Leonards Gardens and South Lodge (West) from 4 to 14 April. Casts of children's footprints in the Gardens will lead to scattered wooden plaques containing quotations from the text. Other features will include a re-imagining of the maze which lay at the northern end of the Gardens, and an interactive message in a bottle, with camera equipment provided for people to leave their own message. An exhibition of themed artworks will be installed in the Lodge including photographs, textiles, paintings and mixed media works.

St Leonards did not of course exist in Defoe's day but we know that he passed this way (without being much impressed) from the following record in his *A tour thro' the whole island of Great Britain* (1724-1727):

"Here [at Dungeness], or rather a little farther, we saw the bones of one of the Dutch men of war, which was burnt and stranded by the French ...; the towns of Rye, Winchelsea, and Hastings, have little in them to deserve more than a bare mention; Rye would flourish again, if her harbour, which was once able to receive the royal navy, cou'd be restor'd; ...

From a little beyond Hastings to Bourn, we ride upon the sands in a straight line for eighteen miles, all upon the coast of Sussex, passing by Pemsey, or Pevensy Haven, and the mouth of the river, which cometh from Battle, without so much as knowing that there was a river, the tide being out, and all the water of the ordinary chanel of the river sinking away in the sands. This is that famous strand where William the Norman landed with his whole army; and near to which, namely, at the town of Battle ... which is about nine miles off, he fought that memorable fight with Harold, then King of England; in which the fate of this nation was determined."

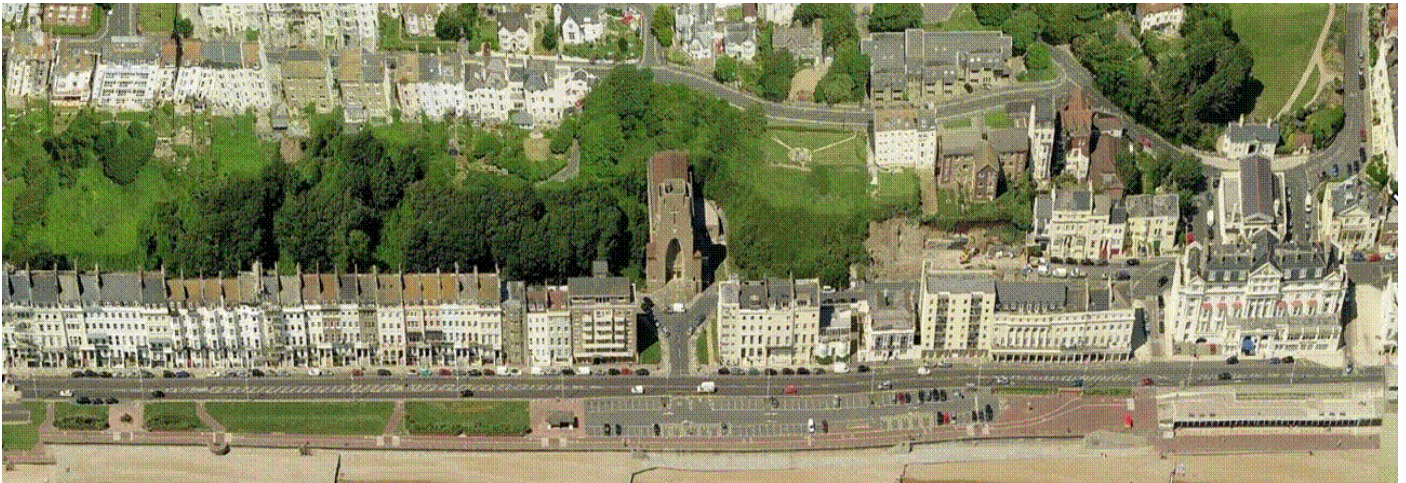
We hope that Society members and friends will enjoy exploring (or rediscovering) Defoe's famous book and St Leonards Gardens in springtime.



On 30th September last year eminent architectural historian Alan Powers spoke at a meeting arranged by the Society to address concerns over the future of the now redundant **St Leonards parish church**. The building by Adrian and Giles Gilbert Scott opened in 1961 replacing the original James Burton church destroyed by enemy action in World War II. The meeting led to a presentation by Chris Lewcock at a civic society open meeting on 25 February, the main points of which can be viewed here:

<http://hastingsandstleonardssociety.org.uk/further-notes-from-chris-lewcock-on-st-leonards-parish-church/>

Christopher Maxwell-Stewart provided an important contribution on the critical issues of the physical stability of the church and of the adjacent land and footpath (see next page). A recent development has been the application by the 20th Century Society to upgrade the listing of the building to Grade II*.



Sunday 31st March 2019 at the Royal Victoria Hotel commencing at 4 pm. £2.50 members; £5.00 non-members

“Recording the finds from the 1984-86 Anglo-Dutch archaeological excavation of the *VOC Amsterdam* in Bulverhythe Bay” A talk by Prue Theobalds, who trained at Guildford and the Central Art Schools and has illustrated a wide range of books since 1960.

The *Amsterdam* was a cargo ship of the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie; VOC). It started its maiden voyage in January 1749 en route from Texel in the Netherlands to Batavia in the Dutch East Indies (now Jakarta, Indonesia) but was blown off course and wrecked in a storm off the coast of Bulverhythe a few weeks later. The shipwreck was discovered in 1969 and is sometimes visible during low tides. Some of the findings from the site are in The Shipwreck Museum in Hastings. A replica of the ship (below) can be seen outside the National Maritime Museum in Amsterdam.



St Leonards parish church

A description of the geotechnical issues involved in its stabilisation and that of the surrounding area

by Christopher Maxwell-Stewart

The cliffs of St Leonards are composed of the sand, silt and mudstones of the Wadhurst beds of the Lower Cretaceous. These vary in durability from lenses of extremely hard ironstone to thin strata of friable mudstones. At an upper level they are largely composed of fine sandstone which James Burton quarried as the major component of the buildings of his St Leonards New Town. His original intention was to site the church on West Hill Road adjacent to the graveyard in which the pyramidal Burton family tomb and memorial is now located. He was persuaded that it would be more accessible if were located nearer the principal houses on Marina. To do this he quarried into Undercliff creating a cleft in which he subsequently erected the sandstone church destroyed by a flying bomb in 1944.

Cliff faces vary greatly in their inherent stability depending on the geophysical characters of their geology. The local soft sandstones will stand up to 4 metres without support. The mudstones underlying the sandstones are by contrast, unstable. This instability is increased when subject to freeze/thaw cycles. In consequence the toes of the cliffs behind the seafront terraced housing of St Leonards have collapsed in several places from Eversfield Place to Caves Road. The inherent instability of the mudstones was exacerbated by the bombs which fell between the Church and Maze Hill.

Unfortunately, the War Damage Commission did not authorise funding for strengthening the cliffs surrounding the Burton church. An additional complication was (and remains) that some of the surrounding lands did not belong to the Diocese of Chichester - those on west flank are principally a freehold of Hastings Borough Council and those on its east flank are an extension of a closed graveyard and no longer a responsibility of the Diocese to maintain. Although the campaign to raise funds for the construction of the church was very successful, nothing was spent on stabilising the cliff faces on its west and east flanks. Some minor remedial works were undertaken on the brick retaining walls behind the church on Diocesan land. Part of the funds were also spent on acquiring the freeholds of the sites of the former Nos 64 and 65 Marina and creating a precinct. Whilst that much improved the aspect of the new church when viewed from Marina, it increased its exposure to gales—a downside in regard to subsequent weathering of materials used in its construction.

The slopes of the cliffs on the east and west flanks have significantly moved since the church was completed in 1961. The creep of those on the east was reduced by insertion of herring-bone drains in the 1960's and recently enhanced by the construction of a piled reinforced concrete retaining wall by the County Council in its role as local highway authority. On the west flank, although ESCC have undertaken some works to stabilise the retaining walls of the public footpath between Undercliff and 19 West Hill Road, the overall instability of that flank has resulted in significant slippages of this land owned by the Borough Council. These movements are major threats to the stepped public footpath and the church. A major slip of that land near its toe in the 1990's resulted in soil piling up against the west wall of the nave of the church. That cavity wall was not designed to be a retaining wall and it had to be strutted internally and externally to ensure its integrity. Resolving this threat is a prime challenge to saving the church.

Consulting engineers appointed by the Diocese estimate that the geotechnical problems can be resolved to achieve a further 120 years life of the surrounding cliffs at the cost of £0.7m. Given that this estimate is subject to some further geotechnical investigation it would be prudent to make a provision of £0.75m. Some of this could fall to the Borough Council as the freeholder of the land over which the stepped footpath is aligned. As Chris Lewcock observed, that public right of way will be the shortest route to the sea for the 200 plus new residents of the housing being constructed on the Archery Ground.

The report to the Diocese on the condition of the church by Eastbourne architect, Mark Anderson, assessed the costs of works to restore it to a state reflecting its national status as totalling £2.7m at 2017 prices. Much of this would be spent in replacing parts of the Clipsham Stone which has badly eroded because of gale damage.

Looking ahead to events in the autumn, readers may like to note that a visit will be made in Open House week to the Old Royal Naval College at Greenwich on **Saturday 21st September**. Details will be publicised later.

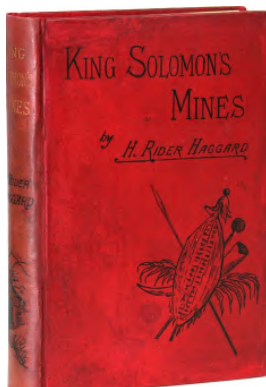


The Old Royal Naval College at Greenwich designed by Sir Christopher Wren and Nicholas Hawksmoor (began in 1696). Right, the Painted Hall: paintings Sir James Thornhill (1707-1726)

The trip will include a visit to the Cutty Sark and to the Queen's House by Inigo Jones (below). He began this in 1616 as a private garden house for Anne of Denmark, queen of James I. After her death in 1619, it remained unfinished until he completed it around 1635 for Queen Henrietta Maria, wife of Charles I. It is one of England's preminent examples of Palladian architecture.



Sunday September 29th—a talk on the literary works of Sir Henry Rider Haggard and his association with St Leonards. This will be held at the Kino Teatr in Norman Road, where it is hoped we shall enjoy a screening of excerpts from the 1925 production of Rider Haggard's *She* directed by Leander de Cordova and G. B. Samuelson (the latter having Hastings connections).



Sunday October 27th—a talk by Stephen Gray at the Royal Victoria Hotel:
Design of a Georgian House

A Panel Discussion on the future of the Harold & Edith Swan-Neck Statue was arranged by the Society at the Kino Teatr in Norman Road, St Leonards, on Sunday 24 February 2019

In June 2016 author Iain Sinclair and artist, writer and filmmaker Andrew Kötting, walked with their followers from Waltham Abbey in Essex to St Leonards-on-Sea as part of a pilgrimage in memory of Edith Swan-Neck. Edith was the high-born common-law wife of the Anglo-Saxon King Harold killed at the Battle of Hastings in 1066. The destination of the 5-day, 100 mile journey was the statue of Harold & Edith in West Marina Gardens: yards from the English Channel. The journey inspired Andrew Kötting's film 'Edith Walks'.

The important statue was created in 1875 by German sculptor Karl Augustus Heinrich Wilke and donated to the borough by Lord Brassey, MP for Hastings 1868-1886. The statue is open to the elements, including the corrosive sea air, and is in a sad state of disrepair.

A panel discussed whether the statue should be moved to a place less exposed to the elements- and if so, where. Panel members were Tim Craven, former Curator of Art at Southampton City Art Gallery and artists Claudia De Grandi, Matthew Radford and Alan Rankle. The event featured selected excerpts from Andrew Kötting's film and a statement from him (read out by the Chair, Society committee member Anthony Connerty) expressing his view that the statue should remain where it is and be allowed slowly to decay there. Claudia de Grandi proposed the grounds of Battle Abbey as the statue's most suitable final resting place. The other participants favoured its removal to a more suitable though as yet undetermined location. Tim Craven spoke about the great difficulty of carrying out successful restoration work on the badly eroded marble of the statue.

Two short presentations were made from the floor: one by Christopher Maxwell-Stewart, Chair of the Burtons' St Leonards Society, who argued forcefully for the statue's removal, for preference to Hastings Castle, and the other by Ian Jarman, founder of the Campaign for a Roof over Edith (CARE) - ie, a protective canopy of some description in its present location. He referred the audience to his book, *Edith's Last Embrace*, which sets out his researches into the statue and the historical background of Edith Swan-Neck.

The Society hopes to organise a follow-up event in the near future.





Membership of the Society

£15 per person per year or £25 per couple

Membership application details may be found on the Society's website:

www.burtonsstleonardssociety.co.uk

The Society was registered in 1970 but conservation efforts leading to its foundation began in the 1950s. Our campaign, backed by various organisations such as the Civic Trust and the Georgian Group, resulted in the designation of Burtons' St Leonards as a Conservation Area by the local authority in 1969. Our aims are to:

- encourage high standards of architecture and town planning in St Leonards on Sea and prevent unsympathetic development
- stimulate interest in and care for the beauty, history and character of the area of St Leonards on Sea and its surroundings
- encourage the preservation, development and improvement of features of general interest, in particular the contribution made by James and Decimus Burton to the architecture and town planning of St Leonards on Sea.

The Society keeps a vigilant eye on local planning applications, especially those affecting listed buildings, and on alterations to such buildings made without planning consent.

For more information, please visit our website at:

www.burtonsstleonardssociety.co.uk

For further information, eg on specific events or for advice on architectural or planning matters, please email: info@burtonsstleonardssociety.co.uk

Or contact the Society's Secretary, Christine Francis, on (01424) 421207

* * * * *

Note for existing members

If you are paying your membership subscription through your bank at an old subscription rate, we shall be very grateful if you would amend this to the current rate(s) shown above.

Email

If you have an email address which you think we may not hold, we shall be glad to have it. It will not be communicated to others except with your express consent. Use of email saves us a considerable amount of time and of money in printing and postage, and means that we can ensure that members receive communications as rapidly as possible.