

Hastings & St. Leonards Society: Chair's Annual Report for Society Year ending 31 December 2018

The Hastings and St. Leonards Society's main function is to serve as an 'umbrella' organisation for the various groups and societies in the Borough concerned with heritage and civic matters. It has been proving beneficial for that purpose to hold Open Meetings at which representatives from those groups, individual members of the H & St. L Society and members of the public can meet to discuss topics of concern and interest.

There were three Open Meetings during 2018. Topics covered were: the proposed developments at the former bathing pool site at West Marina; the future of the Harold and Edith statue at West Marina; trading at Queens Road; proposed campaign to bring the Bayeux Tapestry to Hastings; and the possibility of an application for UNESCO World heritage Site status for an area of Hastings or St. Leonards.

We were especially pleased to facilitate a discussion of the UNESCO proposal at our Open Meeting in October. That meeting was very well attended, including our MP, Amber Rudd, and the High Sheriff of East Sussex, John Moore-Blick. Julia Hilton gave a presentation on the proposal and it was agreed that some 'scoping' sessions would be held (hosted by Hastings Voluntary Action) to see if the proposal could be furthered. Scoping Group meetings are continuing, with the support of HVA. Also at that meeting, Cllr Margi O'Callaghan introduced her campaign to bring the Bayeux Tapestry to Hastings, as it had been announced that the Tapestry is being offered on loan to a suitable venue in this country.

It is apparent that the Open Meetings are seen as very useful in bringing people with local heritage and planning knowledge together for presentations and discussions. We will continue to organise these events, and hopefully increase the number we hold during the year.

Until recently, the Society had been able to hold meetings at the Hastings campus of the University of Brighton. However, with the campus due to close later this year, we have had to find another venue for our meetings. We are pleased that we have recently struck

up an arrangement with the White Rock Hotel on the seafront for our meetings. This has the added benefit of people being able to purchase drinks from the bar to bring into the meetings.

Further to the work we do as an 'umbrella organisation', the Society organises some of the local events for Heritage Open Days. Last year we had an Open Day at Emmanuel Church (West Hill, Hastings), guided tours of St. Mary-in-the-Castle and Hastings Town Hall, and a Heritage Walk around Hastings Town Centre. We are grateful to Robin Fahie at Emmanuel Church, Brion Purdey, who led the tour of St. Mary, and Kevin Boorman who led the tour of the Town Hall, for supporting us and for sharing their extensive knowledge.

During 'Hastings Week' in October we held a 'Georgian Weekend' in association with Burton's St. Leonards Society. There was a lecture by Elizabeth Nathaniels on the Georgian Architecture in Hastings and St. Leonards, and guided walks around the two towns to look at examples of this architecture. Our vice-chair, Dr Chris Joyce (also vice-chair of B St. L S) led the walks, which were very well attended.

The Society was also pleased to provide the prize money for the National Town Criers Championships, held during 'Hastings Week'. That great heritage event has been held in Hastings or St. Leonards since 1952, but has been struggling through lack of financial support in recent years. We provided £200 in prize money, which was raised through sales of our booklet 'A Bellow of Criers'. We are hoping to continue this support of the National Town Criers Championship, in order to keep the popular event here in Hastings. The booklet is on sale (£4) at the Tourist Information Centre on Hastings seafront.

Also during 2018, with the support of Hastings Borough Council, the Society had a Local Heritage Information Board installed at Castle Down. The board gives added interest for people walking up the hill to visit the Castle. A Local Heritage Board for Pelham Crescent has been approved by HBC, but the installation has been delayed due to planning consent being required.

Dr. Deborah Madden (Chair, Hastings & St. Leonards Society)
(Note: This report will not be read out at the AGM. Comments and questions will be invited at the meeting.)