

HASTINGS & ST. LEONARDS SOCIETY

Promoting Our Heritage and Civic Pride

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Newsletter: Issue 21 (14th December 2020)

Seasonal message from the Chair

Here we are again, almost at the end of another year. But this has not been a normal year by far, due to the coronavirus pandemic. I hope you have all kept safe and well during these troubled times, and I am sure you join me in wishing for a return to something like 'business as usual' in 2021.

Hastings & St. Leonards Society has endeavoured to keep active with some projects for the benefit of the town and the community during these difficult times. We expect to see two additional local heritage information boards in place soon, at West Hill (Hastings) and Pelham Place/Crescent. These have been approved by HBC, but as with most projects in which the Council has to be involved, there has been a delay bringing these to fruition. We also completed the West Hill local heritage research project in the spring, and all members who requested the free booklet have by now have received their copy. Let our secretary, Steven, know if you want a copy, although not many remaining.

The Committee is looking forward to 2021 with optimism, and as soon as Covid-19 restrictions allow we will resume our Open Meetings, which are such an important part in our work as the borough's civic society. And all being well we will be able to hold a physical AGM next year, to which all members are invited – perhaps this will be a time for celebration as well as the usual agenda business!

Wishing you all a Merry Christmas and a happy and healthy 2021. Dr Deborah Madden (Chair, H & St. L Society)

Reminder: No membership renewal fees to pay for 2021 Society Year

As we have had a couple of members asking for details of how to pay subscription fees for 2021, here is a reminder that it was agreed in the e-mail AGM in September that the annual subscription fee for the 2021 Society Year is being waived for existing members. This action was proposed because the Society has been unable to offer the usual meetings, events and outings programme for our members during 2020, due to the enforced restrictions caused by Covid-19. There were no objections to this proposal, so all paid-up members for 2020 will have their annual memberships renewed on 1 January 2021 for free.

A reminder also that we are keen to recruit new members so that we can raise funds for local heritage projects and publications, and also continue to support the National Town Criers Championship by way of providing the prize money. Please spread the word. Fees for new members joining for the Society Year ending 31 December 2021 are: Individual: £6; Joint (2 persons at same address) £10; Student £5; Group membership rate on application.

Proposed Student Involvement

A topic which often crops up at meetings of organisations involved with local heritage and civic matters, is the problem of how to get the younger generation interested and involved with looking after the future of the town's heritage and planning. It is rare to find anybody under the age of forty taking an active role in this work. This is a big worry because we need younger people to join committees so that the organisations keep going once the older members have to stand down. With this in mind, H & St. L Society chair, Deborah, has entered into discussion with the College in Hastings to see if we can provide suitable placements for students who have to do voluntary work as part of their courses. We are optimistic that this will be achieved, especially for the students involved in IT courses at the College, as we need people to work on our website and Facebook outlets; also with making our newsletters more attractive and appealing to a wider audience.

Most likely students who do get placements with us will not have much (if any?) interest or knowledge of local history/heritage. But hopefully once they start to work on projects the interest and enthusiasm will be forthcoming. Perhaps they will even form a Local

History study group at the College? For now, though, this is a matter of 'watch this space' to see if our endeavour to reach out to the younger generations is successful.

Increase in Independent Local History Research

Judging from the number of inquiries we have received (including via our website) from non-members during the past six months or so, a significant number of persons have been putting their 'lockdown' time to use by turning to research. There have been inquiries from around the country on family history and heritage related matters. And a recent inquiry came from a gentleman in Holland, who is researching an air pilot. His inquiry read as follows (in broken English):

Hello,

My name is Erik Snijder from the Netherlands and I'm the historical of my town Eelde.

In 1943 has crashed a Lancaster in my town and the pilot was killed, also his grave is in Eelde. The name of the pilot was Theodore F. L. Simpson with number 157319. He came from the town Tiverton, Devon or from the town Hastings district Sussex, I'm not sure. His birth date was 12-2-1922 and he past away on Oktober 1943.

His parents came from Tiverton, Devon I think. Their names were Leonard and Emily Lucie Mackett Simpson.

I'm looking for information about this man. Pictures documents etc etc.

Can you please help me or do you know living relatives of him

I'm making a story about the crash and the airman

As usual, we passed this inquiry on to persons we thought would be able to assist. And as usual our member (and Chair of Hastings Local History Group) Brian Lawes came back with a prompt and satisfactory reply, which very much pleased Erik. This pilot was indeed from Hastings. Thanks also to our member, Marilyn Saklatvala, who provided some additional information on Theodore Simpson.

HBC Regeneration Consultation

Having drawn members' attention to the results of the HBC 'Culture-led' Regeneration consultation in the last newsletter, we were pleased to receive some correspondence on this topic. Of particular interest was the comment that the substantial local heritage is not

made enough of, both for the benefit of tourism and for the 'education' of residents – especially the younger generation (see above on the matter of getting the young interested in local history/heritage). HBC's consultation report did refer to local heritage as being relevant, but how (and if?) this will be brought about is what needs knowing.

H & St. L Society has been encouraging HBC to incorporate a visitor centre at the café on West Hill. The location is ideal as many people arrive on the West Hill using the 'lift' (funicular railway), to visit the Caves and Castle. There is ample room inside the café for installing heritage information boards (the Society's comprehensive exhibition on the West Hill, produced as part of the West Hill local heritage project, would be ideal), and for stocking the usual tourism and 'what's on' leaflets.

HBC is the owner of the West Hill café, and it is leased to the operator: this has been David Pugh for many years now. The café has been closed throughout 2020 due to coronavirus, and while 'lift' was out of service and required a major repair. We contacted Kevin Boorman at HBC to ask if David will be continuing at the café, and when it will reopen. Kevin said that the lengthy closure is a mystery as the West Hill was busy over the summer, but he understands that David Pugh intends to remain as the operator. We have permission to approach him to discuss the inclusion of a visitor centre, and display of our exhibition. But when will he reappear?

Culture-led regeneration has been successful in other seaside towns, with local history and heritage playing a big part. One example is Southport in the north-west: a town very familiar to our secretary, Steven, as it was his hometown for over 20 years. A big attraction now in that town is The Atkinson, which provides a library, cafe, information centre, theatre and local history exhibitions. If only Hastings and St. Leonards had a single suitable building for such a venue!

University of Brighton PhD student, Alberto Forte (from Italy), made reference to Southport as a successful regeneration project in his 2009 thesis *Seaside Towns in Transition and the Discourse in Tourism in Urban Regeneration: The Case Study for Hastings*. Here is a quote from the thesis, making reference to a coastal-towns tourism report of 2003, which may be of interest to you:

...[report] emphasized the link between coastal towns, regeneration, heritage, and the creative and cultural industries...Collaboration between English Heritage and the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) suggests that a geography of seaside town regeneration had already been forming around the British coast. The joint report (2003) indicated that a number of seaside towns around the UK have already developed, changed and reinvented .

Alberto was engaged in his research at the University during Hastings' previous regeneration endeavour, which was focused mostly on education and improving business opportunities. Let's see if a culture-led regeneration proposal (including promoting the town's extensive local heritage) proves to be a better way forward for the town. It's a shame, perhaps, that HBC didn't adopt this approach twenty years ago, in line with several other coastal towns?

Hastings Town Centre Heritage Project

Following our successful West Hill (Hastings) Local Heritage research project, in which a 72-page booklet has been one of the outcomes, we are now focusing on Hastings Town Centre, with the intention of producing a booklet. A guided walk leaflet for the Town Centre area was produced a couple of years back, giving brief comments on various points of interest. The booklet project will be an extension of that work, giving more detailed information on the many buildings and locations of interest, and the local heritage value; also information on the architects and origin of street names. And if you attended Alan Jeffries' guided walk during Heritage Open Days a couple of years ago, you will know what a fascinating history Hastings town centre has, and how splendid the architecture.

If you would like to be involved in our Hastings Town Centre research project, or have any information or illustrations to contribute, please get in touch with us by e-mail: hstlsoc@gmail.com

Local Heritage Information Boards

We are still awaiting the installation of the two local heritage information boards we have supplied details for, and that have been approved by HBC. These are for Pelham Parade/Crescent and West Hill (Hastings). The delay at Pelham is due to the need for repositioning the waste bins so that the board can be installed against

the wall where the unsightly bins are clustered – a most inappropriate arrangement for this high-profile local heritage location.

The problem at the West Hill is that the existing information board, in which our panel is to be inserted, has been vandalised – as have several of the information boards in parks and gardens in the borough. The Perspex has to be replaced, and due to the huge demand for Perspex generated by the Covid-19 situation, HBC has been unable to source a supply as yet. Something to look out for early in the new year? And here's hoping 2021 will be more tolerable than this passing year. Meanwhile, enjoy your festivities the best you can under the present difficult circumstances.

Hastings & St. Leonards Society Committee

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