

HASTINGS & ST. LEONARDS SOCIETY

Promoting Our Heritage and Civic Pride

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Newsletter: Issue 22 (2nd April 2021)

Delay in Setting Date for Annual General Meeting

According to the Society's constitution, we should hold our Annual General Meeting in or around April. Last year we had set the date a little earlier, mid-March, but had to cancel due to the coronavirus pandemic. Eventually we held the AGM by way of e-mail in September – it sufficed. At the latest committee meeting (also conducted by e-mail) in February, we optimistically agreed a date for the 2021 AGM as Monday 26 April, 6pm start, at the White Rock Hotel. At the moment, it seems unlikely that will be possible, and if this proves so, rather than rush into another e-mail AGM, we will wait to see if a physical meeting can be held sometime in the next few months. However, pencil in the date of 26 April just in case we can go ahead. Confirmation of the meeting and the Agenda will be circulated to all members about fourteen days before the date of the meeting.

Committee members whose two-year term ends at this year's AGM are Chris (vice-chair), Steven (secretary), and John (executive committee). All three are standing for re-election to the committee and Chris and Steven also for their posts as officers of the Society.

Open Meeting Report

Another disappointment due to the pandemic restrictions is that we have been unable to hold an Open Meeting since last January (2020). These meetings are an important part of our work, so we decided to conduct an e-mail version of our Open Meeting recently. We invited some of the people who have given presentations on various topics of local heritage and community interest to provide updates on their projects. We had a willing response, with very comprehensive reports for circulation. It was pleasing to read of the progress made towards restoration at Holy Trinity Church and the former United Reformed Church in Hastings Town Centre, and of the very successful year for the Observer Building project. The report on the new Heritage Action Zone project for Trinity Triangle in the town centre is very encouraging too. However, the subsidence problem on the cliff near St. Leonard's Church and below the

Burtons' graveyard is a big worry, and Burtons' St. Leonards Society are working hard to find a means to remedy this.

We invited questions from our members, but so thorough were the majority of the contributions that there were just a few questions relating to the matter of concern about the future of the town centre. The report of the Open Meeting is circulated separately.

Approach to College for Student Involvement with Society

Our Chair, Dr Deborah Madden, engaged in discussion with administration at the College over the winter in the hope of getting students involved with our work. We are aware that the College is desperate to find placements for students as part of their courses, and we can offer duties such as working on our website, maintaining our 'Facebook' facility, involvement with newsletters, and local history research work. Deborah was given cause for optimism by the placement officer at the College, but has been unable to further our proposal in recent months, while the pandemic restrictions were heightened once again. She will be pursuing the matter again before too long, with hopes of getting something in place for the next academic year.

It has been said many times before that it is very difficult – some may say “impossible” – to get the younger generations interested in local heritage, especially in protecting the future of this. So if you have younger relatives or friends who seem to have at least a little interest and concern in local heritage and general civic matters, please put them in touch with us.

Local Heritage Information Boards

Mention has been made in newsletters over the past year, of the two local heritage information boards the Society has produced in association with Hastings Borough Council, and we have suggested you look out for them at Pelham Place and West Hill (Hastings). So when will they appear? That is something we have been asking HBC for a long time now. As advised in the last newsletter (December 2020), the problem at 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 – and the Perspex has to be replaced. We thought this would have been done by now, so asked HBC for explanation. The response reads:

We have had to order specialist Perspex sheets for the noticeboards (4 others are awaiting replacement). The existing Perspex goes milky colour when graffiti is removed. We now have a new cleaning fluid and will fit a new type of Perspex that allows clear cleaning soon after the Easter period. Graffiti is a major problem to us at present, and is on a huge scale.

It is very worrying to hear of the extent of the graffiti problem in the borough. Here's hoping when our West Hill 'points of interest' panel is inserted into the existing noticeboard, it will not be vandalized.

But we are getting nowhere with progressing the installation of the board at Pelham Parade/Crescent. It is about three years now since H & St. L Society met with officers from HBC and the board was agreed. And still we hear comments on what a disgrace that conservation area, in such a prominent position for tourism 'footfall', is due to the boarded-up premises and line of large refuse bins. A re-site of the bins was agreed over a year ago, so we have asked why this has not yet been actioned. It is the present position of the bins that is preventing the heritage information board being installed.

Local Plan Consultation

We are informed by HBC that there was a tremendous input from public and local organisations to the recent 'Local Plan Consultation'. The message from HBC (Planning Policy Team reads:

The draft Hastings Local Plan (Regulation 18) consultation closed on 24 March 2021. Thank you to everyone who viewed and commented on the draft Plan. We are working through all the information we have received, and currently it looks as though we have about 1,000 comments.

Our group member, Burtons' St. Leonards Society, put in extensive comments, and we know some of our members put in submissions too, especially because HBC's current attitude to the promotion and conservation of local heritage is a major concern to all of us. It will be interesting to see the outcome of the consultation.

Sale of Queens Arcade

The recent sale, by auction, of Queens Arcade in Hastings town centre by the Went Tree Trust was a sudden surprise, and a big concern to the traders there. Our committee member and town centre manager, John Bownas, worked hard to try to bring the matter to a satisfactory conclusion. His comment to other committee members read:

We made serious enquiries about buying the arcade ourselves [Love Hastings Ltd – Business Improvement District]. I found finance through the charity bank and another niche lender who deals with heritage buildings – however, neither wanted to get involved in an auction, and both required a lot more time to do surveys etc. I did a lot of the investigation work into the finances of the charity [Went Tree Trust], but stayed behind the scenes and worked with the traders to get them to put in complaints to the charity

commission and try to get it listed as an asset of community value – but again, there wasn't enough time before the sale.

This is hopefully going to see a new future for the arcade as long as the new owner doesn't try pushing rents up. It is the start of a long death for the Trust, as they now have no assets generating income...

Website Improvements

Our website manager, Alan, has made some improvements he thought necessary to the website. This was mainly so that we can give full support to the organisations that pay an annual subscription fee for group membership with H & St. L Society, by including their contact details, newsletters and publications. Our main group members are Burtons' St. Leonards Society and Hastings Local History Group. We include the very interesting Burtons' St. Leonards Society newsletters on our website, and you can find a list of Hastings Local History Group's publications on our website too. When those organisations, and H & St. L Society itself of course, are able to hold physical meetings and events again, these will be promoted on the website.

Members who regularly look at the website will know that it is very useful for keeping up to date with local heritage and other civic matters, and we remind you that you can receive e-mail notifications of new postings on the website by becoming a subscriber. We make no charge for this. You can subscribe using the facility on the website, or by e-mailing info@hastingsandstleonardssociety.org.uk Two recent items posted on the website are a feature on artist Oswald Couldrey, which includes paintings of Hastings, and a paper on the threat to the Burtons' Tomb and St. Leonard's Church by Christopher Maxwell-Stewart (Chair, Burtons' St. Leonards Society).

Hastings & St. Leonards Society Committee

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