

HASTINGS
EST & 2017
ST. LEONARDS
SOCIETY

Promoting Our Heritage and Civic Pride

www.hastingsandstleonardssociety.org.uk

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Newsletter: Issue 24 - December 2021

Seasonal Message from the Chair

It has been another difficult year for all of us due to the continuing coronavirus situation. Once again I find myself repeating what I said in my seasonal message last year: I hope you have all kept safe and well during these troubled times.

We had to hold our AGM by e-mail again in April, but during the second half of 2021 it was much more like 'business as usual', with a busy programme of events for Heritage Open Days and Hastings Week. Naturally, we are hoping to see more of our members during 2022. We will resume our popular open meetings early next year, if possible, and hold an in-person AGM in the spring. I look forward to seeing you soon at one of our meetings.

Wishing you all a Merry Christmas and a happy and healthy 2022

Dr Deborah Madden (Chair)

West Hill Hastings—Local Heritage Project Completed



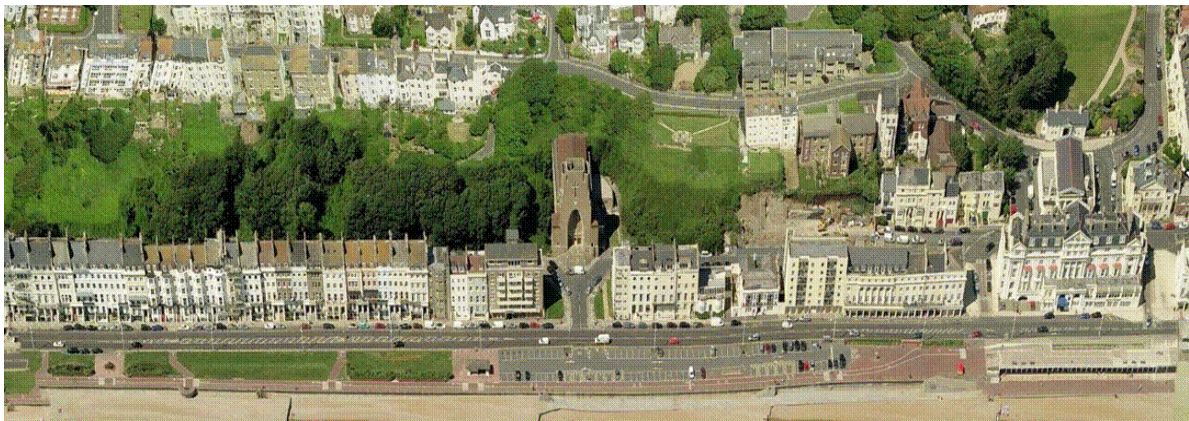
The Mayor of Hastings, Cllr. James Bacon, installed a new 'points of interest' panel into the existing West Hill (Hastings) information board, located close to the café and upper station of the West Hill lift, on Saturday 9th October. A map showing the location of the many points of local heritage interest on the West Hill is provided, along with a short note on each item and a brief history of the West Hill area. With the Mayor: David Robinson, who led the research for the West Hill of Hastings local history project, and H & St. L Society member Marilyn Saklatvala.

The information for the new panel was compiled by the Hastings & St. Leonards Society as part of the Society's 'West Hill of Hastings Local Heritage and Community Festival Project', for which the Society received a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund in 2019. Hastings Borough Council did the production work for the panel.

The additional information at this busy tourist spot will, we hope, be of great benefit in promoting the considerable heritage of the area. The installation by the Mayor also marked the start of the Society's 'Local History Festival', arranged for Hastings Week this year.

A booklet, *The West Hill of Hastings*, was also produced as part of the lottery funded project, and a limited number of copies are available free of charge. To request a copy, please e-mail: hstlsoc@gmail.com

St Leonards Parish Church



Many of our members will know of the issues surrounding the now disused parish church in St Leonards (Adrian Gilbert Scott, completed 1961, Grade II listed). In January 2021 the Burton Tomb in the graveyard above the church on West Hill Road and the church itself were 'Group Listed', meaning that their conservations were to be pursued jointly inclusive of their surrounding lands. This was a significant move by Historic England because it formally recognised that conserving the buildings was dependent on conserving and stabilising their adjoining cliff lands. At present, the graveyard and the adjacent pathway leading down to the church are closed as a result of subsidence. The church itself, now deconsecrated, is unable to be put to alternative uses until it and the surrounding lands are stabilised. The costs involved will be considerable.

Bryan Fisher of the West St Leonards Neighbourhood Forum agreed to coordinate initial collaborative efforts to take matters forward, in conjunction with the Burtons' St Leonards Society (in whose conservation area the church is situated), representatives of the diocese and other interested parties. It was recognised that both the borough and the county council must be centrally involved. A meeting was held at the Masonic Hall on 21st October. Speakers included several with knowledge of surveying and architectural conservation matters, particularly geo-technical. Several proposals were presented for possible uses of the church if or when the problems are resolved. A group of 'stakeholders' has been formed in order to push ahead with discussions to ensure that substantive progress is made.

Success of our first Local History Festival

'Hastings Week' returned, having been cancelled last year due to the pandemic, and in an endeavour to 'beef up' the programme, the Society organised several events with a local history theme. Due to the success of the festival, we may extend it next year.

There were guided walks, talks and workshops. Alan Jeffries led another town centre walk, which this time included visits to Holy Trinity Church and 'His Place' (the former United Reformed Church); our secretary, Steven, led a history walk in Alexandra Park, and our Vice Chair, Dr Chris Joyce (also Vice Chair of the Burtons' St. Leonards Society), gave a tour of the Burtons' St. Leonards area.



Interior of Holy Trinity Church, Hastings (1850s), architect Samuel Sanders Teulon



James Burton's South Lodge, St Leonards (1829)
The home of the Burtons' St Leonards Society

Our two main group members, the Burtons' St Leonards Society (BSLS) and Hastings Local History Group (HLHG), gave fascinating talks at a double-header event held at Hastings Museum. Heather Grief, from HLHG, spoke on 'Crotleslei Manor to Summerfields and White Rock: a Landscape History', outlining the history of the land use of the area, and the surviving signs of this that can be seen today. Chris Joyce, representing BSLS, spoke about St Leonards-on-Sea's literary connections from Keats to Sinclair. We were grateful to Hastings Museum and Art Gallery for giving us use of the Durbar Hall free of charge for this event.

The Museum put on a workshop for researching 'the history of your house' as part of the local history festival. And there were workshops at Hastings Library for finding out what resources are available there for doing local history research. It is very encouraging that these venues are so supportive of H & St. L Society, enabling us to promote interest in local history and the extensive heritage of the two towns.

Members with further ideas or information concerning local history topics and sources are invited to contact us at:

e-mail: hstlsoc@gmail.com

Heritage Open Days Report

Having been unable to put on any events for the national Heritage Open Days (HODs) festival in 2020, we were pleased to have some events in the programme this year. All were well attended, with favourable feedback from attendees.

Our committee member and website manager, Alan Jeffries, gave a guided walk in Hastings town centre, looking at the many fine examples of Victorian and early twentieth-century architecture. This event included a tour of the former Debenhams building, which was fascinating. We were grateful to the new owners of the building for allowing us to add this one-off tour to the town centre walk, and to the caretaker, Martin, who led the tour. Thanks must also go to our committee member, John Bownas, who was able to arrange the tour of the building through his position as town centre (BID) manager.

We were also fortunate to have the support of the team at the 'Observer Building' for tours of that iconic building. Due to the major works going on inside the building, hard hats and suitable footwear had to be worn, but this did not put people off booking for the tour, and several people asking to book had to be disappointed.

Both the 'Debenhams Building' and the 'Observer Building' were designed by local architect Henry Ward, and a third Ward building was also visited as one of our HODs events.



This was Hastings Town Hall (1881) (interior view above of the former Council Chamber) and we thank the very knowledgeable and enthusiastic Kevin Boorman, from Hastings Borough Council, for leading this tour.

Emmanuel Church, on the West Hill of Hastings, again held an open day for HODs, and this year our extensive 'West Hill of Hastings' exhibition was on display in the church. David Robinson represented the Society at the event, as he led on the research for the West Hill local heritage project in 2019-20 (see pages 1-2), and he reported that the day was very well attended, with considerable interest in the exhibition.

National Town Criers Championship

The Society again provided the prize money (£200 in total) for the annual National Town Criers Championship (NTCC), held during the daytime on Saturday 16th October – the bonfire and fireworks being in the evening. The NTCC made its home in Hastings and St. Leonards in 1952, and since 1998 the colourful contest has been a feature of ‘Hastings Week’ in October. Having been held at the Priory Meadow shopping centre outdoor area for many years, this year the competition took place at Butler’s Gap on George Street in the Old Town. Registering a record-equalling eleventh win, the £100 first prize and prestigious trophy (donated in 1947 by the then sponsors of the event, the *News of the World*) went to Alistair Chisholm, the Dorchester town crier.

Our secretary, Steven, sent an e-mail of congratulations on behalf of the Society to Alistair, and received the following reply:

Steven, thank you for your email and the congratulations contained therein. I was truly delighted to win, against some serious competition, and to have equalled Ben Johnson’s [Fowey Town Crier] record in the competition. May I, through you, thank Hastings & St. Leonards Society for its ongoing support of this event and, of course, for the handsome prize money.

I thought the venue in the old town was excellent and better suited to a crying competition with a constant stream of pedestrian traffic. Many of my colleagues commented favourably on the acoustic quality of Butler’s Gap, not to mention its proximity to a plethora of first class hostelryes !

Thank you and the Society for all you do to keep Hastings and St. Leonards as singular, special and, to quote the Mayor, “weird” as it is.

Cheers and Oyez, Alistair

A BELLOW OF CRIERS



The Town Crier
Tradition in Hastings

We greatly look forward to having Alistair return next year to bid for the record outright.

We expect to continue our sponsorship of this important and colourful national heritage event.

Left: A booklet published by the H & St. L Society in 2018 giving information on the history of this tradition and the part played in it by Hastings over the centuries.

Hastings Philharmonic Orchestra events

We recently circulated an e-bulletin announcing the forthcoming events by Hastings Philharmonic Orchestra (HPO). These include a very special **concert at the White Rock Theatre on 28th January (7.30pm start)**, which is being put on to celebrate the HPO's link with the former Hastings Municipal Orchestra (HMO). Guest of Honour at the concert is Dr Frankie Williams, a direct blood relative of Julian Clifford, the first music director of note of the HMO.

One of the pieces of music in the concert is *Bredon Hill* (named after the famous poem by A. E. Housman) by Julius Harrison, a work commissioned by the BBC for the war effort and first performed in 1941.

Julius Harrison became conductor of the Hastings Municipal Orchestra in 1930. Harrison ran an annual music festival in Hastings, and during the summer season conducted up to twelve concerts a week. He is credited with raising the standard of the HMO to challenge that of its south-coast rival, the Bournemouth Municipal Orchestra. When the HMO was disbanded after the outbreak of the Second World War, Harrison became director of music at Malvern College (1940-42). *Bredon Hill* was composed just after Harrison left his Hastings post.

Christopher Cormack, our contact at HPO, informs us, from his recent research, that Harrison remained active in Hastings for some of the time after he had taken the post at Malvern College. In that period, the Hastings and Eastbourne Councils agreed to merge their orchestras to save on costs; thus the HMO had not disbanded completely. Wartime propaganda or not, the BBC liked the Harrison commission well enough to continue playing it into the first two decades of the 21st century on Radio 3.

The H & St. L Society was approached by HPO to help with organising a talk about the HMO and its history on the afternoon of the concert, and two other talks on local music history in the week leading up to the concert.

We have booked rooms at the White Rock Hotel, adjacent to the concert venue, for the talks as follows: Thursday 20th January at 7 pm and Thursday 27th January at 7 pm (access to the room will be available earlier). The immediate pre-concert talk will take place on Friday 28th January at 4 pm, enabling time for those attending to take refreshments if wished at the hotel before going to the concert next door (see first paragraph above).

As mentioned in the e-bulletin, the White Rock Theatre has invited HPO to become 'Orchestra in Residence', and the management has spent considerable sums reinstating some of the original acoustic features of the White Rock Pavilion/Theatre that were removed in the 1980s when it was converted into the present theatre.

The HPO also has a **Christmas Gala Concert on 18th December (7.30pm start)**, and this is at Christ Church, Silchester Road, St. Leonards. Details of the concerts, with ticket prices, are on our website (see heading of newsletter) and the HPO's website: www.hastingsphilorchestra.co.uk

Open Meetings to resume in 2022?

As mentioned in the Christmas message from the Chair, we are hoping to resume our popular open meetings fairly soon. We welcome suggestions for topics of discussion, but we expect persons making the suggestions to be willing to speak on the topic at the meeting. One topic that is of interest at present, and therefore likely to feature at the next open meeting, is HBC's endeavour to resolve the problem of the site of the old West Marina bathing pool site. The Council made an announcement about a partnership venture, titled 'Re-imagining West Marina' a few weeks ago, and a link to this website information is: <https://www.hastings.gov.uk/news/latest/west-marina/>

As usual, an e-bulletin will be circulated announcing the date/time and topics for the next open meeting. We expect the venue to be the White Rock Hotel once again. We will also be setting the date for the Society's Annual General Meeting soon. This is due in or around April. It is intended to launch our 'Hastings Town Centre Heritage Trail' booklet at the AGM.

Hastings Local History Group update

We were informed a couple of months ago that Brian Lawes had decided to stand down as Chair of Hastings Local History Group. Brian has been a very active member of HLHG for about forty years, and its Chair for about twenty-five years, periodically, of that duration. He doesn't feel able to chair meetings any more, but he will continue to work hard for the group in other ways. One of our most knowledgeable and popular local historians, Brian is also a great asset to the H & St. L Society, assisting with our publications and answering many of the questions we receive via our website – almost immediately! We expect that, although no longer Chair of HLHG, Brian will be as busy and co-operative as ever researching and promoting local history.

Nobody has yet volunteered to take on the post of Chair. Meanwhile, David Renno has agreed to be the contact for further information about HLHG, and you can be put in touch with David via H & St. L Society.

We have also been informed that HLHG has decided to suspend their meetings until at least the start of March, due to an apparent surge in Covid cases locally. Nevertheless, the Group will continue to publish new books as they are completed, and to distribute their newsletters. A list of HLHG publications, and address for orders, is available on our website. Use the link: <http://hastingsandstleonardssociety.org.uk/hastings-local-history-group/>

Two additions soon to be published:

Mr Hastings: a biography of John Collier, which will retail at £10

Hastings Bygones 10, which will retail at £7

Subscription payments for the 2022 Society Year

A reminder that subscription fees for renewing membership for 2022 are **due on 1 January**. Fees remain at the amounts agreed at the 2018 AGM: Individual = £6; joint = £10; student = £5. Group membership fees remain as agreed previously.

Last year we waived fees for existing members (including groups), as the Society was unable to function as normal due to the pandemic. However, we are intending to resume open meetings early in 2022, if possible, and we hope there will be one or two outings during the year. And we have some overheads to cover. We very much hope that existing members will continue to support us by renewing memberships and will help us to attract new members.

You can post your payments (cheque payable to 'Hastings & St. Leonards Society') to our treasurer, Eve Montgomery, at:

4, St. Saviour's Road
St- Leonards-on-Sea
TN38 0AP

Or you can pay direct into our bank account:

Lloyds Bank
Sort Code: 30-98-90
Account Number: 17067760
Account name: Hastings & St. Leonards Society

Please ensure you are identified as payee on your payment. Also, please advise us by email (hstlsoc@gmail.com) that you have paid so that we can update our records and issue a receipt

Thank you for your continuing support.

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