

Your Haslemere

The Newsletter of The Haslemere Society

Autumn 2020

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Chairman's Welcome



Welcome to our Autumn 2020 newsletter.

Most of our lives have been dominated over the past six months by the COVID-19 epidemic, but because of the extensive lockdown, it has often not been easy to find out what's been going on in the local area. We therefore start the newsletter with five contributions from important community figures sharing how each of the organisations that they represent has fared during the period of lockdown.

This is followed by an article by Sonja Dullaway, sharing what has happened to the local neighbourhood plan. Again, the original timetable for the plan has been disrupted by COVID-19, but the plan is still very much alive.

Howard Brown, who leads our Environment Group, shares some reflections on biodiversity and the importance of wildlife corridors for protecting our local environment. He includes some tips for us all!

Continuing with her series on the Lost Sons of Haslemere, my wife Shirley tells the story of Lieutenant Francis Bedford Marsh, one of four Haslemere men who lost their lives during the Battle of the Somme.

Early in the period of lockdown, I undertook the long overdue task of pulling together the minutes of the society throughout its history with a view to presenting these to The Haslemere Museum as a permanent archive. Inevitably, I found myself dipping into the minutes, and the thought occurred to me that there is enough there of interest to write a series of articles on different aspects of the society throughout its life. I begin this series by sharing the story of the origin of the society and reflecting on how similar its activities have remained throughout the years.

A couple of months ago, I wrote to you to encourage you to take the Haslemere Herald which has suffered during lockdown. Our editor, Gareth David, followed this up by interviewing editor Colin Channon in which he reflects on the purpose and future of the newspaper.

We continue to be proud partners in the local community rail partnership and Nikki Barton provides us with an update. Despite being closed for several months, there have been several significant developments which will enhance its impact as passengers return to the railway.

Margaret Hibbard, chairperson of the Haslemere natural history Society explains the society's activities and gives a brief account of its history.

We finish with another of Simon Mackie's cartoons reflecting on our town, which I hope you will enjoy.

Normally at this time of year we would be looking forward to seeing many members at our Annual General Meeting which is scheduled for 7.30 PM on the evening of Friday 20th November. Sadly, we will not be able to meet in person, so the meeting will be conducted on a barebones basis via Zoom. Nevertheless, we hope that many members will attend. Look out for a separate communication with the Annual Report and Notice of Meeting.

On 10th December at 6 PM, we are planning a Zoom conference call with a panel of local community leaders under the theme "Haslemere beyond COVID-19: learning lessons from lockdown". This meeting will be open to all members of the community. Do make a note in your diary and look out for a message with further details. For members who have not used Zoom before, we will be happy to provide guidance if requested.

I hope you enjoy the newsletter, and do please feedback any comments to help us plan future editions

Chris Harrison

October 2020

Coping with COVID-19 in Haslemere

Five leading figures in our local community describe their experiences in dealing with the pandemic, beginning with DR MARCUS PANCHAUD, Senior Partner at Haslemere Health Centre

Haslemere Health Centre

Good afternoon. Enter the practice by selecting a room.



General practice acts as the front door of the health service. Like many businesses COVID-19 and lockdown restrictions have significantly affected how we are able to operate and see patients. From the outset we agreed that a team based approach was imperative and instigated daily team briefings to discuss and implement changes to our service, protecting our staff and patients.

The impact started on 28th February when we were informed by Public Health England that a patient seen at the health centre had tested positive for COVID-19. The health centre was forced to close immediately for deep cleansing, reopening the following day. This created considerable media interest which the Practice had to deal with, having no experience or support in this area.

Following this we saw a drop in consultation rates and by the time lockdown measures were announced on 23rd March they had fallen significantly, but consultations were taking much longer as so many new procedures were in place. I am glad to report that over the past couple of months they have returned to pre- COVID-19 levels, but the process of seeing patients face to face remains much slower with the need to wear PPE.

Types of consultations have also changed. In February, and prior to this, face-to face consultations were the norm, outnumbering telephone consultations by at least five to one. Since then telephone consultations have completely outnumbered face-to-face, with an increase in video and online consultations as a direct result of the restrictions.

RCGP data for June revealed that seven in ten routine consultations were conducted remotely, a marked change from the past. Throughout the pandemic we have continued to offer face-to-face appointments and home visits when it was clinically necessary, and provided support to our Care and Nursing homes.

We used the initial period of reduced demand proactively providing check-up appointments for patients with long term conditions and redeploying our excellent Practice nurses to support the Community nurses with home visits for vulnerable patients. We look forward to the time when more face to face consultations can take place without the need for PPE.

Thanks to the dedication of our Practice team and the use of new arrangements including the introduction of Footfall to the Practice website utilising online consultations, patients concerns can now be dealt with more efficiently. We have recently noticed that the proportion of appointments booked in advance has dropped with an increase in the proportion of appointments booked and dealt with on the same day.

We have also experienced delays in getting staff and family tested if they develop coronavirus symptoms, we have secured a number of laptop computers enabling our staff to work from home whilst awaiting a test or self-isolating to minimise any disruption to our service.

Thinking positively and going forward we need to develop some understanding of what went well and what didn't go so well to help shape the future of GP through understanding the experience of our patients and staff.

KERRY MORREN-JEFFS, Manager of the Haslewey Community Centre



A Community Centre for Everyone!

The warning signs of a possible shut down started the beginning of March and by 13th March we knew that as a community centre we would be shutting our doors the following week.

Although in shock, all of the staff focused on supporting our regulars in the café, many of whom come in everyday and were oblivious in many cases of what was happening. We offered to deliver a hot meal daily through our Community Meals Service (CMS) and around 12 regulars took this offer of help.

Shielding and Lockdown were then announced by the Government and on 20th March we closed the doors to all services within the centre, barring CMS, and we would now be relied upon to deliver meals to the most vulnerable people in the area.

At this point 90% of our volunteers had to stand down as they themselves needed or were asked to shield which threw up our next challenge...New Volunteers!!

A cry for help went out and we were immediately rewarded with lots of suitable support and as we went further into lockdown, many furloughed workers offered their services, with Domino's Pizza delivering a round daily.

Rounds went from five to eight overnight and numbers receiving CMS support rose from 35 to over 60 a day, so our days were very busy arranging rounds, meals and taking phone calls in those first few weeks.

The Haslewey Team were incredible and I have been amazed at their willingness to come into work every day and do whatever necessary to ensure hot meals were delivered. The Community Post Office also remained open as an essential service during those first few weeks and preparations then began on how and when we could re-open as a Community Centre and what would be needed to facilitate this.

On 6th July we opened our doors to the café and welcomed 10 of our regulars who had been receiving CMS on the first day who were delighted to come and visit us once more!

Much had changed: we take temperatures and contact details on arrival, tables are socially distanced and as something a little bit different our dividers are the most wonderful pictures of woodland scenes, animals and landscapes. These have been a great talking point and bring a smile to many.

Changes announced in late September mean a new app for venues and masks worn at all times, apart from activities and in the café.....we have learnt to be reactive to change and the one thing that keeps us all strong is the sense of family and being part of something vital and rewarding.

NARN McHUGH, Manager of the Haslemere Information Hub

Your first stop in our lovely town

During its closure throughout Lockdown the social media for the Information Hub was utilised to ensure that Haslemere and the surrounding communities were aware of the help that was on offer. Many of our regular volunteers became part of Haslemere Help - a community led, grassroots support system to help those who needed to shield get shopping, prescriptions and other errands.

The Hub's window and screen was also used to ensure that people knew who and how to contact Haslemere Help and other agencies such as Citizens Advice etc. We then had a giant bear in the window, to complement the National 'bear hunt' that younger children were doing with their parents while out doing their daily walks.

We became far more active on our social media channels, using them to help spread the word about what help was available locally in our community. As a result our follower numbers have steadily increased (the March 2020 follower numbers are in brackets). Twitter: 875 (788) Instagram: 685 (118) Facebook: 95 (78) followers.

After discussions with the committee and with our volunteers we worked hard to get the Information Hub open again in mid-August. We are now currently open 10am to 12noon on Thursday, Friday and Saturday - this is a drop from the previous opening from Monday to Saturday, but we need to be sure and the safety of volunteers is paramount.

We are now getting visitor numbers that are slightly below those of previous years at this time, but not as low as we expected! During our first week of opening, numbers were between 6 and 12 a day rather than 8-15 during the same period in 2019.

We have noticed that walkers are coming down from Guildford, Woking and further up the line all the way to Waterloo to walk and to visit Haslemere. Some are prepared but others are looking to come and have a wander about. Visitors come up the line also and we've had a couple of occasions where people have met in Haslemere as this is their 'midway' point.



I am delighted to say that Haslemere Station was nominated for a National Rail Award, thanks to the presence of Information Hub and the work of volunteers with the gardening on platforms 2/3, the defibrillator on the front wall, and flower tubs in the car park area. While we did not win, we were shortlisted in the 'medium station' category, which was quite a feat, given there are almost 2,500 stations on the national network, and we have once again been nominated for a Community Rail Award.

In late September we were visited by Mark Hopwood, Managing Director of SWR. He showed great interest in what the Information Hub is doing and was particularly impressed with the local knowledge and the encouragement for people to travel by train. He also made positive comments about our series of *Rail to Ramble* leaflets: walks from a station in a loop or to another station.

HOWARD BICKNELL, General Manager of Haslemere Hall



During the time since March that Haslemere Hall was closed, and all our favourite groups, clubs and societies had to stay away, we have maintained some weekly activity and we are the home of the Haslemere Community Store, which has been operating since the onset of COVID-19 and continues every Wednesday in the Annexe.

This was set up to help people who have been thrown into financial difficulty due to coronavirus, operated entirely by volunteers and recognising the need for social distancing. If you, or you know anyone who needs any help with supplying groceries Society members are welcome to contact the Haslemere Community Store on 07873 383954 or email haslemerehelp@gmail.com

Our monthly supporters were the NHS team of doctors and nurses, who continue with their much needed blood donating sessions and we were delighted to have had the Surrey Theatre Academy, who normally use the Hall six times per week during term time. They managed to produce two weeks of sensational workshops with a limited amount of children who were able to produce some magnificent film work and created trailers for promotions.

Whilst cinemas can now reopen, the issue that picture houses have all had, was that there were no new films available as most films were held back from release until later in the year, although these are now slowly coming through.

Haslemere Hall could not reopen within the realms of a two metre social distancing rule as we just could not provide sufficient seats to make the screening viable. With the current social distancing rules in place however, we have created a new seating plan.

Downstairs in the auditorium we will have 120 stalled seats, consisting of 10 rows, each of 12 seats. Each row will consist of a block of three seats, followed by three pairs of seats and then another block of three seats on the far

side. There will be no tiered seating, but there be 30 seats available in the balcony.

Films originally to have been screened in April were scheduled for September, and we have been able to open our bar and serve sweets and ice creams from there, but will not be serving coffees and teas until further notice.

We will be opening 30 minutes prior to the start of each performance to allow everyone to come in and order their drinks for the interval and pay by card and then all drinks will need to be consumed sitting in the seats rather than in the Annexe. We will restrict numbers in the Annexe to ensure everyone is social distanced and at the end of each performance, customers will be guided to leave row by row to ensure a safe and uncrowded exit.

Looking to the future, we have applied to Waverley Borough Council for permission to replace our old signage with new ones, featuring a new logo. These are non-illuminated signs and will certainly brighten and kick the Hall into the 21st century, with its re-launch planned this autumn.

JUSTIN MANLEY-COOPER, Curate at St. Bartholomew's Church



There has been a busyness about the Church over recent months that one might not have expected to be the case given the churches were closed for so long and that, even now they are open, services are restricted in their numbers.

Our Pastoral care team has been extraordinarily active over recent times, particularly supporting and encouraging those who are vulnerable, shielding or isolating.

The workload of our dedicated volunteers has been astonishing and has really drawn members of the community together in some unexpected ways and has allowed us all to get to know one another much better than we did before. Beyond this, they have started regular services to care homes as well as garden visits to those who are comfortable to receive them.

September was harvest festival month, when instead of just having one harvest festival service the church has been taking in donations, both physical and financial, and has been passing them on to the food bank. That is something we had been doing throughout lockdown, and I would expect this to continue in the future.



We also organized a successful Macmillan coffee morning in September, which was held outside in the garden of St. Christopher's church, despite some challenging weather conditions at times!

As well as raising an extraordinary amount of almost £1,500, which given that most cake slices and biscuits were priced around £2-£3 each, is a quite remarkable achievement, and also provided a much need community event, which had been fully risk-assessed and followed all social distancing guidelines.

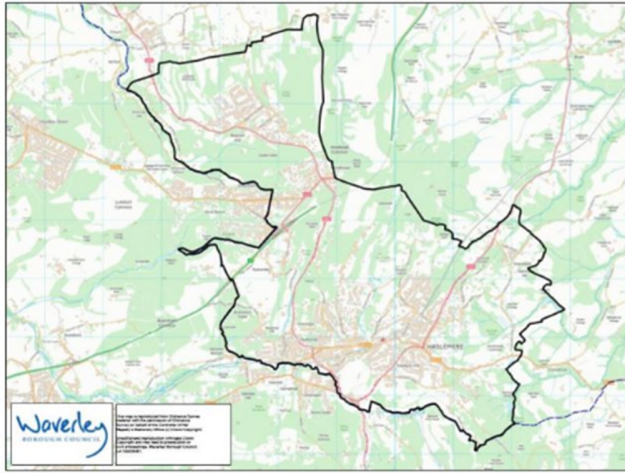
As a church we also recognize that many in the community and particularly the retailers have had a very tough time over recent months and are in need of as much local support as possible. To that end, the Church has decided to sponsor a Christmas windows competition for the retailers of the town and Wey Hill.

We will provide prizes for the most innovative and the most festive windows, as well as a prize for the window voted for by the community. The Church will also do all the marketing and advertising needed to try and increase footfall for shop keepers and, above all, to have some fun.

What has become of the Neighbourhood Plan?

Sonja Dullaway

The Plan Area



At the time of the Spring Newsletter, in April this year, the Neighbourhood Plan was out for consultation and we included a short article giving some of the background and explaining how members could give their views. In the event of course, the consultation was extended to take account of the lockdown.

By the time it closed at the end of May, a total of over 1,200 responses had been received and a number of local groups, including CPRE, The National Trust, Surrey Hills AONB, Thames Water and The Surrey Wildlife Trust gave detailed written feedback.

The Haslemere Society Planning Group drew up a comprehensive response which was agreed with Trustees before submission and we also held a zoom meeting with Haslemere Vision and John Robini, the Haslemere town mayor, to discuss our comments.

So what happens now?

A series of working parties made up of members of Haslemere Vision and the Town Council have been hard at work over the summer incorporating the survey responses into the Plan. The redrafted version has been reviewed by an external expert and further tweaks will be made following his report.

The Plan then goes back to Haslemere Town Council, who will consider it in full council session. This is expected to happen towards the end of October, and if the Council is satisfied, it will adopt the Plan.

Haslemere Town Council then submits the Plan to Waverley Borough Council, our local planning authority, whose role is to check that the proper legal process has been followed in drawing up the Plan. WBC also has to publicise the Plan for a six-week period, during which time further representation can be made by local residents and companies – a second consultation in effect.

Once that is done, WBC will appoint an Independent Examiner to look at the Plan. The Examiner will also consider all the representations received during the second consultation.

The Independent Examiner's role is to determine whether the Plan meets the various legal requirements that apply to it and to decide whether the voting area for the referendum should be the area covered by the Plan or a wider area, if the Plan is likely to have wider impacts.

A referendum on the Plan

Finally, if the Plan is passed by the Inspector, it goes out to referendum. People on the electoral register and local businesses (non-domestic ratepayers) will be entitled to vote to accept or reject the Plan, but it can no longer be amended.

At least 50% of the votes cast in the referendum by both businesses and individuals must be in favour for the Plan to pass. If the outcome from these two groups is different, Waverley Borough Council will decide whether or not to bring the Plan into force.

As you can see, this is a long and rather tortuous process. It has taken seven years to get this far and there is still a lot to do. But if we can get over all these hurdles, the Neighbourhood Plan will become a formal part of the planning process for the Plan area, including Haslemere town, Hindhead, Beacon Hill, Critchmere, Shottermill and Grayswood, giving a voice to local concerns when planning decisions are made and helping to maintain and improve all that we most love about our area.

Environmental Group Update

Howard Brown



As activity around the large planning developments looks set to dominate Haslemere's news over the next year, we must all remain conscious of the effect developments have on our wildlife, particularly in the light of Government strategy for a 'positive biodiversity gain'.

This idea, centred on town locations and previously developed sites, is to allow wildlife to thrive through the generation of corridors by allowing it to move around when building houses. One reason fences are not always permitted, for example, is because a solid fence restricts wildlife movement, whereas a hedge can provide a safe haven, a nest and a corridor all in one.

A major issue which may become apparent in Haslemere will be the cumulative effect of any housing on the south side of the town. If developments are permitted on green land, the biodiversity issue is exponentially exacerbated, with wildlife unable to find a suitable habitat and the likely eradication of some species in a swathe of land extending from Red Court to Longdene, Marley Common and beyond.

To play your part in safeguarding wildlife, do not cut your hedges in the spring, in order to preserve any nests, which may not be obvious. Secondly, do think before wiring up hedges or blocking fences in your garden to keep your pets in – and ask yourself when was the last time you saw a hedgehog in your garden?

A decade ago, they were quite common, but now they are a rarity, yet they are still to be found in our town. This autumn/winter while tending the garden, bear a thought for the hedgehogs, dormice, field mice, slow worms and make passageways through your garden. The long-term effects are amazing and your children and grandchildren will thank you for leaving a legacy that money cannot buy.

Lost Sons of Haslemere:

2nd Lieutenant Francis Bedford Marsh (22 Nov 1896–5 Oct 1916)

Shirley Harrison



Francis as a child, seated right, with his parents, brother and sister in about 1906. He was the last of four soldiers on our war memorial to die during the Battle of the Somme.

Francis was born on 22nd November 1896 in Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey to Sarah (nee Marriage) known as Lillie, and Ernest Marsh. Both his parents came from Quaker families. His father was a wealthy flour miller, corn merchant, and J.P. who had taken over the family business, J & B Marsh in Kingston-upon-Thames. Ernest was also a connoisseur of contemporary fine arts and a skilled photographer.

The family lived at Coombe Bury Cottage on Kingston Hill, which wasn't a cottage at all, but a substantial house with 14 rooms, stables, greenhouses and space for three live-in servants. Photographs of the interior show every surface covered with "objects d'art" that Ernest had collected, and it is difficult to believe that three children also lived in the house. Discipline was obviously stricter in that era! Francis had an expensive education, first at Kingston Grammar School, then Bilton Grange Preparatory School near Rugby, followed by Uppingham.

In 1913, Francis's mother Lillie bought "Hatch Hill" in Kingsley Green, near Haslemere, looking towards Blackdown. Ernest had run into serious financial difficulties, and when the corn mill failed, Lillie, who was independently wealthy, had cycled about the countryside looking for a suitable new home. Hatch Hill was soon filled with Ernest's extensive, exquisite fine arts collection, and the interior paid homage to the Arts and Crafts movement. Haslemere might have been chosen because of its links to the Peasant Arts Society.



Hatch Hill, in about 1914

Francis left school in the summer of 1914 and started to study for the Civil Service exams. He was too young to enlist when war broke out, but joined the Inns of Court Officer Training Corps in June 1915. After a childhood surrounded by fragile objects, and no doubt being exhorted not to break anything, maybe the rifle range and

bayonet practice offered a peculiar catharsis. He received a commission in the 4/4th Battalion, Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regiment, on 21st November 1915, the day before his 19th birthday. The 4th Queen's was a Territorial Battalion. The 4/4th battalion was raised in July 1915 as a reserve and was based at Purfleet.

Francis did not stay long in his home-based battalion, but became a machine gun specialist, attached to the 69th Company of the Machine Gun Corps. The MGC was formed in February 1916. Prior to this all infantry battalions had contained their own machine gun section of two guns.

After the first Battle of Ypres in October 1914 it became obvious that more machine guns were needed, and that they needed specialist units to use them to their best advantage. A training centre was set up at Belton Park, Grantham, and in October 1915 a Machine Gun Corps (MGC) was created, withdrawing the guns and teams from battalions, and forming them into Machine Gun Companies, one to each Brigade.

Francis trained at Belton Park for nearly five months before joining the 69th MGC of the 69th Brigade, 23rd Division, in France on 17th July 1916. The first phase of the Battle of the Somme, which had started on July 1st was finishing. On the day he arrived the 69th MGC were in billets at Molliens-au-Bois, well away from the chaos of the frontline fighting.

On 25th July, the whole 23rd Division began relieving the 1st Division in the trenches east of Contalmaison, each Brigade in turn fighting along a trench called "Munster Alley" towards Martinpuich. The guns of the 69th MGC were deployed wherever they were needed by the battalions of the 69th Brigade.

The war diary is not very detailed, and the appendices are missing, but it reports that on 31st July they were on the receiving end of a gas attack, which injured nine men, and on 6th August they suffered under a heavy German bombardment in which five men were killed. On 8th August the Division was relieved, and sent to the relatively quiet sector of Ploegsteert (nickname "Plug Street") near Armentieres.

They returned to the Somme battlefield in mid-September, taking part in operations in the trenches near Martinpuich once more. After less than three months at the front, Francis was to be mortally wounded during the action at Le Sars on 5th October 1916, and died the same day at a nearby casualty clearing station. He was still only nineteen years old. He was buried at the Dernancourt Communal Cemetery.

An obituary to Francis appeared in *The Times* on 13th November 1916. It quoted from a letter from his commanding officer, Captain Roberts:

"He was a most gallant officer and invariably did his duty in every way. He was greatly liked by both officers and men, and the whole company feel his loss very much. Although he had only been with me, personally, for a couple of months, I had had opportunity to discover his powers, and I can say that in no case did he ever fail in the tasks assigned to him, and that in him I felt that I had an officer who could be thoroughly relied upon."

His father left an unusual memorial to his son. A founder member of the Contemporary Arts Society, he was a friend of the Martin brothers, makers of beautiful pottery in London. A voracious collector of contemporary ceramics, in 1919 he donated 60 outstanding pieces of Martinware to the Victoria and Albert Museum, in memory of Francis. Some are still on display in the British Gallery.



Vase in the Ceramics Room 139, V&A, donated in memory of Francis

Sources

The official war diaries of the 69th Machine Gun Company, National Archives, WO 95/2184/5

2/Lieutenant Francis Bedford Marsh service record, National Archives, WO 374/46156

The Times, 13th November 1916

Steering Taste: Ernest Marsh, a study of private collecting in England in the early 20th Century, Christopher Jordan, (Ph.D. thesis) online at http://ualresearchonline.arts.ac.uk/5253/1/Steering_Taste_Ernest_Marsh_442155.pdf

A look at the Society's history

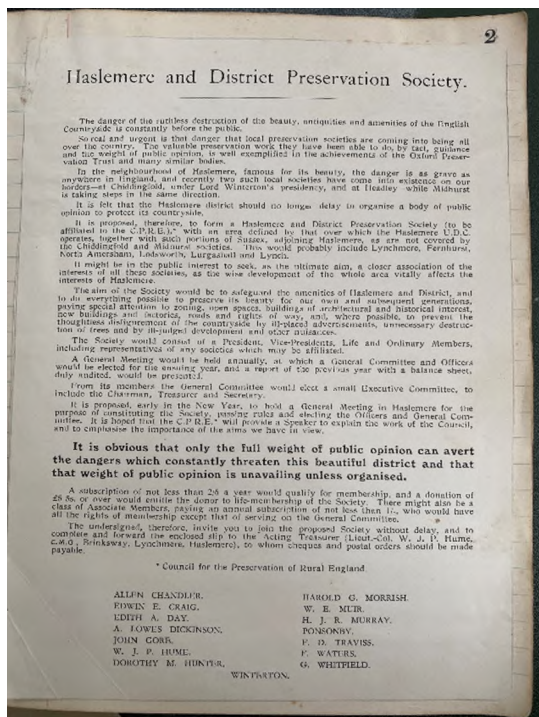
Chris Harrison

At the beginning of lockdown I set about the long planned task of bringing together the minutes of The Society with a view to creating an archive that can be gifted to The Haslemere Museum and which may be of interest to local historians in the future.

Inevitably I found myself dipping into the minutes and as I did so, I was struck by the recurrence of many themes and some interesting new discoveries: the thought occurred to me that the exercise could be the basis of a series of articles in the newsletter of which this is the first. I hope that readers will agree!!

Some members will recall an excellent talk given by Debbie Peat several years ago in which she charted the history of The Society and a copy of her presentation is still available on our website. Nonetheless, I hope that this series of articles will provide members with an opportunity to dive a little more into the detail.

The Society was inaugurated as the Haslemere & District Preservation Society at a public meeting in the Haslemere Hall on 22nd February 1935 and the practice of holding the AGM at the Hall seems to have continued from that day until this – sadly Covid means that we will be departing from this practice in 2020.



The first thing that struck me was how similar the original aims of The Society were to those we have today:

"to organise concerted action for the protection and preservation from disfigurement or injury of rural scenery or features of local interest and other towns and villages within its area and with that in view to promote cooperation between local authorities, town and regional planning committees, local societies, landowners and all other persons interested"

"To act as a local centre for giving or obtaining advice and information on all matters affecting the preservation of amenities"

While in recent years we have added a focus on heritage, these two original objects bear striking resemblance to our current focus on planning and the environment.

The formation of The Society followed a circular issued in 1934 highlighting” the *danger of the ruthless destruction of the beauty, antiquities and amenities of the English countryside..... So real and urgent is that danger that local preservation societies are coming into being all over the country*”. How little has changed!

Membership was initially set at 2/6d per annum with associate membership set at one shilling. It is not clear what additional privileges came with full membership! Life membership was available for 5 guineas, a rather greater multiple than our current life membership. By the date of the first Annual General Meeting on 28 February 1936, some 211 members had signed up.

At the outset, the primary motivation for the formation of the society was the opportunity to acquire land adjacent to Tennyson’s Lane to protect it from development. Mr GW Rhodes who was the developer of Wey Springs and Half Moon Hill was the seller. Mr Rhodes owned some 195 acres and was offering it for sale for £15,000 (£750,000 in today’s money). I have not been able to determine the precise location of this land, nor whether this price was the commercial value, or a price negotiated with the founders of The Society. Plan B was to acquire “three-fifths of Tennyson’s lane with some 39 acres adjoining” and it was this land that The Society eventually acquired having negotiated the price down from £7,000 to £5,000.

£5,792 18s 1d (£412,000 in today’s money) was raised in 1936, sufficient to complete the purchase, meet costs, pay for fencing and to provide an endowment of £350 for The Hindhead Committee of the National Trust, to whom the land was gifted. With justification, Lieut.-Colonel W.J.P.Hume, the Honorary Secretary reported that *“For a new society, we have reason to be satisfied with our achievements, and be sincerely grateful for the generous support we have received”*

This initial success was followed with further land acquisitions between 1936 and the outbreak of the Second World War. The society took some credit for the anonymous gift to the National trust of 33 acres at Boarden Door Bottom (adjacent to the Tennyson’s Lane land), and subsequently paid over to the Trust a sum of money for its upkeep and also asserted that it had inspired Mr Edward Hunter to gift the manorial rights of nearly 500 acres of Blackdown to The Trust.

Later, 46 acres of Marley wood, adjoining land already held by the National Trust on Marley Common was given to The Trust together with an endowment by one of The Society’s members while two further members donated Shottermill Ponds together with an endowment. As can be seen, in its early days, The Society was a major influence in helping the National Trust to acquire much of the land that it still owns today and which we all enjoy.

Other accomplishments in the early years, included a successful campaign to persuade the Haslemere Urban District Council not to pull down The Town Hall in favour of a roundabout, but that story must await a later article.

IN FUTURE ARTICLES

If the Society was constituted in 1935, why is the AGM in 2020 the 136th?
Saving the Town Hall and stopping the High St By-pass: when and where?
Recurring chestnuts: The Georgian Hotel and others



Safeguarding our local newspaper

Local newspapers have faced huge challenges in recent years, through the loss of advertising revenue, the switch from print to digital and, most recently, the consequences of COVID-19. But COLIN CHANNON, Editor of the Haslemere Herald, believes there is still a future for titles such as his, as he tells Newsletter Editor Gareth David



“When I arrived almost exactly two years ago we identified a number of changes to make the paper more relevant to the community. What the readers wanted was a tabloid paper, as they found the broadsheet format too clumsy. So we made lots of changes to the content and involved the community much more.

“We were one of the fortunate ones, because before the pandemic we were one of the few papers to be increasing sales and there were not many papers doing that. This year we were named Weekly Newspaper of the Year by the Society of Editors and were told that we were “a paper that roars” which we rather quite liked, and made plans to build on that success.

How has the pandemic affected the Herald series?

“When COVID-19 came along lot of local papers around the country lost 50% of their sales and are still struggling to win those lost readers back. We are doing far better than that, having lost around 20% of our readership during lockdown, but each week we are increasing our sale, so hope to be back where we were before the pandemic in the next few weeks.

“The problem is that people are still afraid to go out and go to shops, and are going to supermarkets less often, because it’s not much fun walking around in a mask. So that has hit our sales and newspaper delivery boys are no longer allowed to take money on doorsteps, so we haven’t got a good newspaper delivery service and there are less and less newsagents, so our biggest sales are through supermarkets.

“Our digital copies have gone up – we now do a digital paper which has increased sales during the pandemic – and we are looking at a subscription system, like other papers, where you can get a discount buy paying in advance for six months’ worth of papers. We should be doing our bit to thank regular readers who have stuck with us.

“The pandemic for us was a perfect storm in that we all had to work from home, we furloughed a lot of staff, but then there were no events to publicise, shops weren’t open, so advertising dropped right off. But we are now recovering and the Herald titles are the best performing newspapers in the Tindle Group [the 100+ local papers owned by Sir Ray Tindle].

What level of engagement do you have from people in Haslemere?

“We get a lot of letters from Haslemere and I am an old-fashioned journalist who thinks that the quality of the letters page is a reflection of how linked in you are with the community. This week [24 September] we have got four pages of letters, and increased the number of pages devoted to readers’ letters. We try to use every letter we get.

“Pre-COVID-19, when we had more staff, we had different letters pages for the Surrey [Farnham and Haslemere] and Hampshire [Alton, Bordon and Liphook] editions. But now, with fewer staff, we are letting letters run through all five editions. Inadvertently that has been a real positive because people like reading what’s going on in other parts of the Herald circulation area.

“Before COVID-19 I was getting out to meet people and some were saying that the papers were too local. There was talk of a six-screen cinema in Bordon, for example, and although we led the Bordon Herald with the story, I was giving talks in Farnham where people were asking why the story was not in their edition! So we had to look at whether we were editorialising too tightly and how we could give readers a flavour of news from across the whole circulation area, it’s a real balancing act!

How many pages of Haslemere news do you normally have in each edition?

“The number of pages will change week by week, and because we still have staff on furlough we cannot do as many change pages as we would like. Apart from dedicated pages, we will also have Haslemere stories dotted through the rest of the paper. We want people to read through the whole paper, not just the first three or four pages which they think is local to them.

“Giving talks to people pre-COVID-19 I was asked why there is not as much local news as there was in the broadsheet paper, but in those days pages 1 and 3 would be Haslemere news but the rest would be all Farnham news. What we try to do now is spread the news throughout the whole paper, so you might find the centre spread is on Haslemere.

What level of resources do you devote to coverage of Haslemere?

“When COVID-19 arrived we had let go of all our freelance writers, including Bea Phillpotts in Haslemere, which was a real shame. We now have an editorial staff of five covering all the editions, but what we found when we re-launched was that we got more involved with local communities and we now get a lot of material sent in.

“What we try to do, which is one of the reasons we won the award, is to try to make our papers open for the community. It is handy for us, because communities are helping us fill the paper, but it is also great for local communities, because we are giving them a platform, so it’s a partnership that works both ways and has been really successful.

Do you cover Waverley Borough and Haslemere Town Council meetings?

“We try to cover as many council meetings as we can. Pre-COVID-19 we would attend a lot of the meetings. We have quite a good relationship with most councils in our area, but are not afraid to upset them, as in the case of pollution in Farnham town centre, which was the springboard for action.

“I think we are quite robust, because holding local councils to account is the role of a local paper. We are not in bed with any councils and will support communities, as we were in Haslemere when the town was re-opening after lockdown and we did two front page stories.

Does the Herald ever take a stand on contentious local issues?

“We are prepared to take an editorial stance on major local issues, but have to do so sparingly, because if you do it every week you would turn into *The Sun* and would lose impact, so we will pick and choose what fights we think we should get involved in. Sometimes you can be just as effective by giving both sides a chance to put their cases and let readers make their minds up.

“The proposed Wey Incinerator at Alton is one issue where we have given both sides a fair crack of the whip and let readers make their own minds up. Equally, the Herald does not support any political party, so at election times we will simply let all the candidates have their say and let readers make up their own minds.

“Farnham is the most polluted town centre in Surrey and when I came to look at the history of this issue, people had been talking about doing something, but nothing had happened. I was at a meeting last year and was told that by October something would happen. But October came and nothing did, so we ran a front page telling the council

that they were all talk, but where's the action? Then we hosted a pollution summit chaired by Jeremy Hunt at the Tindle HQ and things are finally starting to happen.

What do you want to hear from your readers in Haslemere?

"Anything and everything, because if you're talking about it that is what we are interested in. We are looking at how we can engage with readers and want to go back to the old days when there were Wedding photos in the paper! If it's a 50th Wedding Anniversary then send us the details.

"Our clubs and societies pages exploded when we launched them, with so many clubs getting in touch. We are an old-style weekly paper interested in what is going on in the community, and that could be anything from dog mess on the pavement to major planning matters. We also want to hear from local businesses and any expansion of staff or new contracts they may have won.

When and how should stories and photos be submitted to the Herald?

"Pictures should be at least 1mb to ensure that they are suitable for publication, but words can be submitted on the back of an envelope if you like – that's what we've got journalists for! The biggest complaint we get is when I give a talk and someone says "you didn't write anything about such and such" – my response is to ask if we were told about the event, and it transpires that someone forgot to tell us.

"We start to work on features on a Thursday, so if someone has a really good idea about a feature they should get in touch and we can agree how to develop it. If we then get the copy on a Thursday or Friday then one consequence of the pandemic is that we don't have the staff to re-make pages, so we are not going to get back on Monday or Tuesday and decide that it is such a newsy week that the feature will be held over.

"Pages are sent to the presses on Wednesday morning, so by Tuesday night we are starting to finalise the content, and we are then doing the front page on Wednesday, when we have until midday to complete that week's edition.

How optimistic are you about the future of the Haslemere Herald?

"You might think I'm a dinosaur, but papers aren't dead yet, and the Herald has shown what can be done at a time other local papers are struggling, when we were still growing sales. I think there is an appetite for a good local paper and apart from Google or Facebook, who has actually made digital work and made loads of money from it?

"If you want to read what's going on locally, don't rely on the website, which just gives a flavour of what's in the paper. If we put all our content online for free, why would anyone buy the paper, so we just give a taste of its contents online. All the news should be in the paper, and that is clear view of our proprietor, Sir Ray [Tindle]."

Community Rail Partnership Update

Cllr. Nikki Barton, Chair, Surrey Hills to South Downs Community Rail Partnership (SH-SD CRP)



COVID-19 hit us hard this year and we had to close the Information Hub at Haslemere Station, as Narn McHugh has explained in her earlier comments. However, we continued working in the background and were able to move ahead on a number of fronts. Within Haslemere station, for example, you will see improvements to the waiting room on platforms 2&3, plus a new bench placed by the bus stop on the station forecourt.

Thanks to a generous grant from South Western Railway (SWR), we have hired a Line Officer, who is now looking after and managing a series of projects along the line from Haslemere to Farncombe. One of the most exciting of these has been working with SWR to place the old Station Master's House in Milford into community use, to bring life back into that station.

Perhaps our greatest achievement during Lockdown, was that the SH-SD CRP gained accreditation from the Department of Transport (DfT) which indicates excellence in all that we do. We are only the second CRP on the entire SWR network to achieve this status and perhaps the first in the country during its first year of operation. In its formal letter, the DfT states:

"Accreditation is formal recognition by the DfT that a community rail partnership (CRP) operates to a high standard and that its objectives and activities are supported by Government."

"Accreditation should provide assurance to others, including potential funders and partners, that the CRP operates to high standards of governance and financial propriety; adopts a collaborative approach; is worthy of trust by others; and is a suitable entity for receiving public funds. Further Government considers it a good representative of the local community".



Supporting the accreditation, and again displaying the excellence in what we do, Haslemere Station was nominated for a National Rail Award in the category of 'Best Station'. This is the Oscars of the Rail Industry and although unfortunately we did not win, to be considered within the national elite is no mean achievement.

However, we do have a second chance at gaining a national award, with the Community Rail Network awards taking place in December, where we have been nominated in two categories 'Most Enhanced Station' and 'Best Volunteer Contribution', so watch this space!

Promoting the visitor economy and particularly encouraging the use of the train to visit the market towns and countryside is going to be a priority for the rail franchises going forward, as due to COVID there has been a dramatic shift away from the daily commute to London. Haslemere, and the other four stations within the SH-SD CRP are particularly well placed to support this, as they are all "Gateway" stations to the Surrey Hills, South Downs and National Trust landscapes.

During lockdown, we continued exploring, mapping and writing up more Rail-to-Ramble walks, all of these will shortly be added to our website. As lockdown lifted, we made sure that popular walks in and around Haslemere were also in the window of the Information Hub so that people could see the maps, and find new walking routes.

We were also delighted to receive stocks of the Haslemere Society's excellent new blue plaque trail brochure, where the inclusion of QR codes to enable walkers to access the society's pamphlets on each of the plaques is a great innovation.

All in all it has been a difficult few months with very few people using the station(s), but as a voluntary organisation, we have made the most of a very difficult situation and believe we have achieved a tremendous amount- particularly in further establishing our very positive relationships with South Western Railway, Network Rail, Community Rail Network, Department of Transport and the local community as a whole.

We would also welcome any members of the Haslemere Society to come and talk to us about what we do and perhaps consider joining us as a volunteer.

Introducing Haslemere Natural History Society

Margaret Hibbard (Society Chairperson)



As a society, The Natural History Society has had a long association with Haslemere town, from its beginning in 1888 when, shortly after, it was named Haslemere Microscope and Natural History Society. There was a succession of eminent Presidents, with Jonathan Hutchinson being the second. (He also founded The Museum.)

The Society has continued its close ties with The Museum where, jointly, four Winter Talks are held on Saturday afternoons in winter months. Visiting expert speakers provide lively and colourful illustrated talks on worldwide wildlife or environmental topics. Guests are very welcome.

Throughout the year (at least once a month) Field Meetings are organised, led by friendly specialists and/or professional conservationists. Venues take in different habitats with an amazing variety of wildlife including: bird-watching inland and on the coast, bird-song in local woodlands, wildflower walks, a fungi ramble, identifying butterflies and moths and bat-watching.

In recent years the Society has financially enabled the creation of new local wildlife projects: two Common Tern Rafts at Frensham Little Pond; over 50 Dormouse boxes on a Haslemere farm; 72 Bird and Bat Boxes at Frensham Little Pond; two Swift Boxes at Fernhurst; a Viewing Telescope at The Devil's Punchbowl; and an in-depth Survey and Study on local Adders. The Dormouse boxes continue to be monitored by members and annual monitoring reports are received on all but the last two projects.

Over the weekend of 28-30th June 2019 the Society organised Haslemere's first BioBlitz, targeting the area within 1km of Haslemere Town Hall, with particular focus on the grounds of The Museum and the National Trust's Swan Barn Farm. Experts, HNHS members and the general public were involved.

The purpose was to establish a base-line of data (and potentially to discover species of conservation significance) and to involve and enthuse people in the study of the local biodiversity. More than 500 species were recorded and the list was sent to Surrey Biodiversity Information Centre who agreed to add the data to the national database.

Each year (in normal circumstances) members receive two attractive Newsletters, an Annual Report summarising all the past year's activities and calendars of Field Meetings and Winter Talks. An Annual General Meeting with a talk is held at The Museum in April.

The website can be found at www.haslemerenaturalhistorysociety.org.uk

This gives the programme of events and reports of the meetings are posted afterwards. It is frequently updated and members (and non-members) are encouraged to send in their local sightings. Members' photographs are linked to the Field Meetings and there is Society News and a gallery of photographs. Recently, The Society set up a Facebook page.

Haslemere, surrounded by woodland, heaths and meadows, possesses homes for exceptional wildlife. To explore these new members, with adult-accompanying children, are very welcome.

Shirt Mask

Simon MacKie

