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NEWSLETTER - JULY 2020

Well, when I last wrote to you on behalf of Helensburgh Heritage Trust it was in January of this year, and little did I suspect then what was lying ahead of us. I hope of course that you are all keeping well and staying safe during these strange times that we have been experiencing.

We now of course have to start thinking about returning to “normal” – whatever “normal” might mean in current circumstances for the Heritage Trust. And there is of course the matter of time scale.

Subscriptions and Membership. Firstly, many thanks to those of you who paid your subscriptions by standing order in April; it makes life very much easier for me as treasurer not to have to write and ask for outstanding subscriptions, and of course it also gives the Heritage Trust a stable financial position. I shall of course shortly be writing to the very small number who have not yet paid.

I also need to know whether any of your personal details have changed – in particular:

- Your contact details – do you have a new address or telephone number?
- Your email address – have you changed it, or do you now have one for the first time?
- Gift aid – please let me know if you are no longer a taxpayer.

Chairmanship. As I hope you all already know, the Rev David Clark resigned as both chairman and a trustee at the end of March, as he no longer lives locally. Unfortunately so far we have been unable to find a replacement for him, but we would be delighted to have a volunteer! During his years in the chair he guided us forward with a steady hand, and helped us to reach some difficult decisions. He also arranged a good programme of speakers and found a new and very much needed store for us in Helensburgh Parish Church.

Directors' Report and Accounts. The Heritage Trust's financial year-end is 31st March. Our accounts for this year have been examined and then approved by the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator. They can be seen on the Heritage Trust website at <http://www.helensburgh-heritage.co.uk/index.php/78-trust/directors/1628-2019-20-annual-report-and-accounts>. For those of you without access to the Internet, please let me know if you wish me to send you a printed copy.

Winter programme. As you can imagine your trustees have been working on a programme of speakers for this winter, and in February we once again booked the marriage room in the Civic Centre as the venue for the coming winter. However the onset of Covid-19 means that it has all had to be reassessed.

We have therefore decided to hold no more public meetings until January 2021 at the earliest. We shall however be holding the September, October and November meetings as webinars on the Internet. These will include our AGM.

While we do already have a number of speakers lined up, we are always interested to know of others. Our preference is to have subjects of local interest, but if any of you are prepared to speak on other subjects, we will be delighted to hear from you. Details of speakers, dates and subjects will be sent to you in due course. In particular we shall be giving you detailed instructions on how to join in to these webinars.

Glen Fruin – A Strange Request! This email was received by the Heritage Trust on 1st June, and it concerns the Merit Golf Club from Libertyville, Illinois in the United States.

"By way of introduction, my name is John Vernasco, and I'm from the Chicago, IL area. I've been researching the Battle of Glen Fruin and wanted to try and connect with someone that could help me with a few questions. I belong to a golf club and every year, we have an intracub event called "The Battle of Glen Fruin" where we split up the club into two teams based on the two clans, Clan Colquhoun and Clan Gregor. One of our members came up with this theme about 15 years ago and it's the premier event of the year for our golf club.



"We are interested in building a replication of the Glen Fruin

Monument on the golf club property and hosting a dedication during our event this year in early October. I'm working with landscape architects to try and replicate the monument with rocks and stones from our area. I've been able to get a sense of the size and dimensions of the base and stone using photos where individuals are standing next to the monument. However, I was wondering if someone with knowledge of the monument might have the approximate size and dimension of the base and stone so we can try to find something very similar? Secondly, I was hoping to find out more about the stone that sits on top of the base. What is the type of stone and what is the font type used in the inscription?"

We were able to answer their queries and the Helensburgh Advertiser of 16th July carries a very thorough article by Leslie Maxwell in his "Eye on Millig" column about the Golf Club and its competition.

.... and a second request about Glen Fruin! This came from Like a Shot Entertainment, a London company which produces television programmes. They are planning a series called "World War Two by Drone" for UKTV.

They interviewed me firstly on the beach at Rhu where they asked me about the work of RAF Helensburgh, which was the public name of the Marine Aircraft Experimental Establishment, itself based at the hangars in Rhu.

We then moved up to the Admiralty Hydro-Ballistic Research Establishment in Glen Fruin where I was able for the first time to enter the building where a lot of experimental work was carried out. I found it absolutely fascinating and thought what an interesting visitor attraction it might make.

Although it appears superficially dilapidated, I got the impression that this B-listed building is still structurally sound. Although no longer used, it is still the property of the Ministry of Defence and is part of the Garelochhead Training Camp. If you want to know more about what went on there both during and after the Second World War, have a look at

<http://www.helensburgh-heritage.co.uk/index.php/heritage/military/799-a-short-history-of-ahbre-glen-fruin>

So far no date for broadcasting has been arranged, but I hope to be able to let you know in due course.



Display in the Civic Centre. When I last wrote to you in January I said that a display on scouting was being arranged for March in the Civic Centre. Sandy Kerr and his colleagues were in the midst of preparing this new exhibition when lockdown came in. At the moment I have no information as to when the old school hall section of the Civic Centre will be open to the public again.

Displays in the Library. Like the Civic Centre, the Library has been completely closed since the start of lockdown. However the Helensburgh Advertiser of 16th July says that "restricted physical reopening arrangements are scheduled for September for libraries and museums, with a return to full service in October."

No changes are planned for the displays there, and so the display about Henry Bell and the Comet will still be at the entrance to the Library, while the Library's own televisior and the Heritage Trust's replica TV kit shall both be on display upstairs on the balcony. The balcony also contains displays on war hero René Taverne, old bottles, and china with the Helensburgh coat of arms. On various locations around the ground floor you will see displays about John Logie Baird, Jack Buchanan and Deborah Kerr.

John Logie Baird. His birthplace, "The Lodge" at 121 West Argyle Street, is currently up for sale. Some years ago Argyll & Bute Council put in a bid for it when it was on the market, largely as a holding operation to see whether it could be made into some form of visitor attraction. In the event they were outbid, but I suspect that it would have been very difficult to make it into a visitor attraction, simply because its location in a residential area would have been extremely awkward for

traffic and parking.

Our Honorary President, Malcolm Baird, spent some of his childhood in the house, and says " I was asked to tea there by the owners in 2013 and saw the alterations; later I provided them with a plan showing the uses of the various rooms in 1900, 1950 and 2013. My father was born in what is now the billiard room! My former bedroom in 1950 is now a bathroom."



Persuade friends to join the Heritage Trust!

Either bring them to one of our meetings (whenever they will resume) – visitors are always welcome – or direct them to the application form on our website - http://www.helensburgh-heritage.co.uk/pdfs/HHT_application_to_join.pdf

Helensburgh Memories – is a Facebook page which anyone with a Facebook account can join, and which does what it says! It is a place where people can share memories of life in the town, and of people who lived here. In addition members of the group can be good at answering queries from other members. Helensburgh Memories was set up by Helensburgh Heritage Trust trustee Robert Ryan, who still moderates it. Well worth joining!



A John Logie Baird Opportunity Missed. Beth Scott, a Helensburgh Memories member and a fairly new resident of the town, recently acquired a video tape designed to promote a new John Logie Baird Centre. She was somewhat baffled by this, but it triggered my memory of a proposal which was made in 1992 to construct a John Logie Baird Centre on the site of the old outdoor swimming pool, where the skateboard park now is.

This would have been a most imaginative project and it opened my eyes to the new opportunities which digital and interactive displays could give to a visitor centre. Sadly however the application for planning permission for the project was turned down by Dumbarton District Council on what appeared at the time to be decidedly spurious grounds. A few weeks later it emerged that the Co-op were interested in building a supermarket on the site.....! Definitely an opportunity missed!

“The Battle of Garelochhead”. In conclusion, to whet your appetites, here is a poem which appeared recently on Helensburgh Memories concerning the “Battle of Garelochhead”. This “battle” took place in 1853 when the paddle steamer “Emperor” attempted to make a call at Garelochhead Pier on a Sunday, one of the first vessels to break the peace of the Sabbath.

On one side were the crew and passengers of the “Emperor” while on the other side was Sir James Colquhoun of Luss, the owner of the pier, who together with some of his men tried to prevent the “Emperor” from tying up on the Sabbath. Meanwhile the villagers of Garelochhead were stuck inside the church, listening simultaneously to the service and to the noise from outside, but unable to get out and see how the “battle” was proceeding!

THE SUNDAY STEAMER, EMPEROR,
Tune — “Scotland yet.”

Arouse true friends to Freedom’s cause,
Ye working men arise!
Repel with scorn your sneaking foes,
Their lawless schemes despise
United stand! defend your cause—
Be faithful, firm, and true—
By sound and honest argument
The right will wrong subdue,
Then flourish long the Sunday boat,
The captain and the crew.

Some sycophantic fawning knaves
To wealth may bend the knee,
And yield with a submissive bow,
While we would fain be free.
Then rally round your standard, boys—
Again this pledge renew—
By sound and honest argument
The right will wrong subdue,
Then flourish long the Sunday boat,
The captain and the crew.

The unco guid may preach and pray
Your honest minds to shock;
They want nae sheep to gang astray,
But want to fleece the flock.
They term us a’ a reckless race—
A sair misguided few;
Poor working men, can they be right?
But right or wrong subdue,
Denounce them in the strongest terms,
The captain and the crew.

Wi’ mocking slang and vile harangue
The crush the poor man down,
And this to imitate the man
Who ne’er was seen to frown;
But dearest friends, still claim the right
That he bequeathed to you,
And plainly speak your sentiments
Like honest men and true,
And still support your Sunday boat,
The captain and the crew.

How sweet that great and glorious boon
Which some denounce and chide,
To scent the caller breeze that blows
Upon the banks of Clyde.
There, Nature, in its fairest form,
The working man can view;
’Twill add fresh vigour to his frame—
His mental powers renew,
Then still support your Sunday boat,
The captain and the crew.

That Scottish laird, Sir James Colquhoun,
A band o’ stirks had ’greed,
In fierce array last Sabbath day,
Arrang’d at Gareloch-head,
Weel arm’d wi’ cudgels thick and strong,
A warlike force to view,
With loud uproar they bawl’d and swore
The Emperor they’d subdue,
And send them hame the road they came,
The captain and the crew.

Regardless of their blustering foes,
The passengers did land,
And hurling down the barricades,
They fought them hand to hand;
Raw “spuds” went thundering through their ranks
Like balls at Waterloo,
Which made Colquhoun’s wild warriors flinch,
And from the ground they flew,
And left victorious on the field,
The captain and the crew.

Your hair-brain’d, empty-headed foes,
From Bowling pier to Kirn,
With battle-axe and wooden poles,
Would block you stem and stern.
But oh! let you, my worthy friends,
A milder course pursue,
Repay them with the golden rule
Which they refuse to you;
But still support your Sunday boat,
The captain and the crew.

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