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NEWSLETTER – NOVEMBER 2020

So, it looks as if we may be approaching some kind of "normal"! Where would be without the scientists who have worked so hard to produce vaccines to combat Covid 19! More later on what the Heritage Trust is thinking of doing as "normal" begins to appear.

Chairmanship. When I wrote to you in July we were still hunting for a chairman to replace David Clark who had resigned at the end of March. I am delighted to say that we got a volunteer from within the ranks of board members, in the shape of Robert Ryan.

Many of you may know Robert as the owner of the Brae Shop in Rhu, and many may remember the talk which he gave to the Heritage Trust about canoeing on Loch Lomond. As well as being a speaker at Burns Suppers he is also a funeral celebrant. Perhaps one of his best-known achievements has been the setting up of the Helensburgh Memories Facebook page. I have recommended this in past newsletters, and just a few days ago it passed the milestone of having 8000 members.



....and other Board changes. Sadly Geoff Tompson has decided to resign as a trustee, although we do hope that he might be persuaded to rejoin sometime in the future. We have to thank him and his late wife Trudi for the work which they did in organising the RAF Helensburgh stone pillar at Kidston Park.



On the plus side at the AGM the membership ratified the appointment of Alison Gildea as a trustee. Alison has worked in the Charity Sector locally for the past 12 years and is also the driving force behind the highly successful Grey Matters Active Ageing Charity.

Lastly, members will be sorry to hear of the death of Joe Craig OBE. He served as vice-chairman of the Heritage Trust for a number of years, and he wrote a very sympathetic article on Bonar Law for "200 Years of Helensburgh".

Winter programme. Your Board has been holding occasional meetings online, and at one held earlier this month we decided to cancel the bookings which we still had for our winter meetings in the Helensburgh and Lomond Civic Centre. However we have also decided as an experiment to try to hold at least one Winter

session by way of a webinar. As at this moment, we have to admit that we are perhaps not quite as "au fait" with the technology as we should be, but the hope is that we should be able to do something before the end of January or, failing which, before the end of February. More news in due course!

War Memorial Families Project. In previous newsletters I have given you updates about this, along with requests for information and artefacts relating to those who died during the First World War.

The first stage of the project was completed in time for this year's Remembrance Sunday, and it takes the form of a website which you can see at www.helensburghwarmemorial.co.uk. The second stage will see the production of a book, a DVD and a booklet guide, and the hope is that they will be produced in time for Remembrance Sunday 2021.

This is proving to be a truly remarkable piece of work and many congratulations are due to Fiona Baker and her team of Jim Chestnut, Moira Cunningham and Ann Stewart. They have produced a very worthwhile work which includes many poignant stories and photographs, and I am sure that the whole town will very much appreciate what they have achieved.

So, if you do have any stories or artefacts relating to the people on the war memorial, and if you have not yet been in touch with Fiona and her team about their project, they will still be very interested to hear from you, as will the Heritage Trust. You can contact Fiona by email at fiona@scottish-archaeology.com or by phone to 01436 820334.

Please remember of course that the Heritage Trust is always happy to hear from you if you have any items which you think would be of interest for our collections, or any photos or stories which could go on our website or in a future newsletter.



Private James McGhie and his son

British Army Troop Locations in Scotland 1745 - 56. The Stennis Historical Society, whose slogan is Saor Alba (which translates as Free Scotland), have presented to the Heritage Trust several copies of a map which they have produced showing British Army locations in Scotland during and after the 1745 Jacobite Rebellion.

One side of the map is in English and the other is in Gaelic, and it is a remarkable and detailed piece of work. It is based on hand-written British Army documents most of which are stored at the National War Museum at Edinburgh Castle. If you wish to find out more about their work you can go to <https://sites.google.com/site/stennishs/home>

The map is A3 size and, if you would like a copy, please let me know.

John Logie Baird coin. The life of Helensburgh's most prominent son is deservedly being commemorated on a 50p piece next year, which will be the 75th anniversary of his death. So far I

have been unable to find out on which date in 2021 the coin will be issued.

It is great to see him getting some of the attention which he so richly deserves, but personally I am disappointed to see that the inscription on the coin refers to him as "television pioneer" rather than "television inventor".

Henry Bell and the Comet. Now we turn to one of the other most important characters in the history of the town.

Tony Dalton has written an article entitled "The Final Weeks of Service and Wreck of PS Comet, 1820". An abstract states that "This article focuses on the last weeks of its service in December 1820, and examines the events leading up to its loss."

If you wish to read the whole article (which I can strongly recommend), it is available on the Heritage Trust website. Just go to "Downloads" and then scroll down until you see "Wreck of the Comet".

.... and unfortunately the news on the 1962 working replica of the Comet is not good either. It is on display out of doors in Port Glasgow near one of the entrances to the Tesco supermarket, close to where John Wood built the original in 1812. It has deteriorated to such an extent that it cannot be repaired, a new hull will be needed, and it would have to be stored in a climate-controlled building. You can read more about it on the Heritage Trust website at <http://www.helensburgh-heritage.co.uk/index.php/latest-news/1660-comet-replica-badly-damaged>

The Comet in disguise! A recent purchase which the Heritage Trust has made is of a supplement from the Illustrated London News of 1912 celebrating the centenary of Henry Bell's Comet. The Full supplement can be seen on the Heritage Trust website at http://www.helensburgh-heritage.org.uk/displayimage.php?album=25&pid=2251#top_display_media. However one photograph from it which I particularly like is of a Glasgow tram which has been disguised to look like the Comet. It travelled round the streets of Glasgow illuminated at night. If you look carefully at it, you will see a pole pointing upwards at 45° from near the stern – this was to make contact with the overhead electric wires.



The Greenock and Helensburgh Steamboat Company. "Valeman" has in recent years produced a number of very thoroughly researched articles on various aspects of the steamer services on the Firth of Clyde. His most recent work concerns the Greenock and Helensburgh Steamboat Company and it can be found on the internet at <https://www.dalmandan.com/?p=22166> Using reports and advertisements from newspapers, he pieces together a very detailed picture of life in the middle of the 19th century.

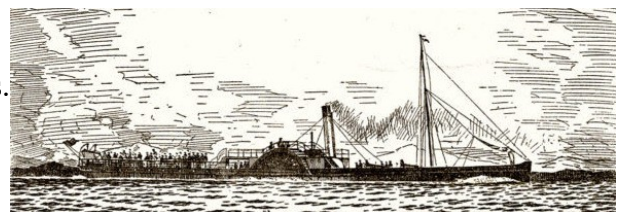
In the 1840s and 1850s railway lines were spreading out from Glasgow towards the Clyde coast, and the railway to Helensburgh opened in 1858. The American Civil War started in 1861 and lasted for 4 years. During that time the Confederate States bought a number of the faster Clyde steamers for use as blockade runners.



The combination of these events represented a business opportunity in some eyes, and resulted in the establishment of the Greenock and Helensburgh Steamboat Company in 1866. The shareholders and directors were an unusual combination of civic dignitaries, landed gentry, and successful businessmen from industry and commerce. Sir James Colquhoun was chairman of the company, and the provosts of Helensburgh and Greenock both played prominent roles. The Greenock representatives saw the company as an opportunity to cement Greenock's role as a major player in trade, while the Helensburgh representatives believed that it would help to encourage the development of the town, perhaps even with Greenock businessmen setting up home in the cleaner air of Helensburgh and commuting over the Clyde to their work.

The company ordered 4 new paddle steamers to be placed on services between Glasgow, Greenock, Helensburgh and the Gareloch. They were named Ardencaple, Roseneath (sic), Levan and Ardgowan. The launch of each steamer was the occasion for celebratory dinners at which many toasts were made.

However the new company was not by any means the only one providing a service between these ports. In 1866 the North British Railway Company placed a couple of steamers on services from Helensburgh. They lasted only for 5 months, their withdrawal being brought about by a railway financial crisis. By 1869 the Railway Company's financial affairs were in better order and they restarted steamer services on the Clyde.



Ardencaple (by Alasdair Macfarlane, Evening Citizen)

Just a couple of months earlier, however, in April 1869 the Greenock and Helensburgh Steamboat Company went out of business. The venture had not proved as lucrative as anticipated in the speeches which had been made to celebrate the launching of the four vessels. All of them were sold off, but they remained on the Clyde under their new owners until 1875 when they were sold to the Thames.

Besides giving fascinating details about the launch dinners, the article also recounts tales of collisions which the vessels suffered. As a result of these skippers often appeared in court, and were sometimes even imprisoned. The Clyde was very different in those days!

The Battle of Glen Fruin - again! In my last newsletter I told you about the strange request which the Heritage Trust had received from the Merit Golf Club at Libertyville, Illinois in the United States. For the last 15 years they have held a competition for the Glen Fruin cup between two teams of members, one being named the Colquhouns and the other the McGregors.

The gist of this strange request was that they wanted to build a replica of the monument which celebrates the actual 1603 battle here in Scotland. We were able to send them photographs and measurements, and so they set to work.

The result was that they managed to produce a replica in time for this year's competition which was held on 2nd to 3rd October. So a little bit of Glen Fruin can now be found in the United States!



Our memorial ...



.... and theirs!

Destination Helensburgh. If you go to <https://destinationhelensburgh.org>, you will read there that you have reached "The online home for all things Helensburgh and Lomond, from Visitor Information and an Events Calendar, to Community pages, with details on neighbourhood organisations and a local business directory. All this will be backed up by [a] Visitor Information Centre, Gallery and Shop at 28 Sinclair Street, Helensburgh" (opposite Tesco and in the former Helensburgh Heroes premises).

I know that they will be looking for volunteers to run their Visitor Information Centre so, if you are interested, you should contact them direct through their website.

St Peter's Seminary and the Kilmahew Education Trust. It is sometimes easy to forget that Cardross is home to a grade A listed building which was named Scotland's greatest post--World War II building by the architecture magazine Prospect after it opened in 1966; it has also been called a "building of world significance". The seminary closed in 1980 and the building was vacated four years later owing to ongoing maintenance problems. Since then it has deteriorated further and been vandalised.



An attempt by NVA, a Glasgow-based arts organisation, to breathe new life into the building and its grounds fell by the wayside when Government funding was withdrawn.

This year however the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Glasgow bequeathed the Kilmahew Estate

to the newly established Kilmahew Education Trust. You can read more about this organisation and its aims at <https://www.kilmahew.org>

Controversially the Kilmahew Education Trust has also approached the National Trust for Scotland about the possibility of acquiring Geilston Gardens, a property which has not had its problems to seek in recent years. However this approach has been rejected by the National Trust for Scotland.

Health and Safety before the First World War. I recently came across this reminiscence amongst the papers in the Heritage Trust store. The premises in question were at that time Spy's wood yard, which was located at 110 West Princes Street, now home to Grasshopper Toys.

".... Another friend, whose father had a coal agency and some sideline in firewood, was playing in the stick yard along with myself and a few other kids after school hours. We discovered how to start the circular saw and in no time at all Jack's finger was among the sawdust. We accompanied him to his father's office, Jack bawling his head off, and were promptly sent back to the yard to look for the missing bit of finger. This we retrieved, sticking with sawdust, and father stuck it back on to Jack's finger and then took him to the doctor. The doctor did a bit of needlework, and the bit still sticks over 60 years later, albeit at an angle of 30° to the rest."

..... and finally, AGM minutes – held on Wednesday, 18 November 2020.

Because of the Covid 19 pandemic this meeting was held electronically using Zoom, with only the trustees invited to attend. However an agenda and voting papers had been circulated to the membership in advance of the meeting.

1. Present – Robert Ryan (chairman), Nigel Allan, Donald Fullarton, Alison Gildea, Stewart Noble and Chris Sanders. In addition voting papers were received either electronically or in the post from 19 members.
2. Apologies – Cecilia Dunlop, Alistair McIntyre
3. Minutes of the AGM held on Wednesday, 30 October 2019 – approved unanimously. There were no matters arising.
4. Chairman's report – approved unanimously.
5. Financial report – approved unanimously.
6. Trustees. The co-option of Alison Gildea was ratified unanimously, and the re-election of Alistair McIntyre was also approved unanimously.
7. Any other competent business. A member had requested that the full annual report and accounts be sent out with the papers calling the AGM, rather than just a link to the appropriate page on the Heritage Trust website. It was agreed to do so for the 2021 AGM.