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NEWSLETTER - JUNE 2021

Little did I think when I sent a newsletter to you in July of last year that we would still be facing an uncertain future because of Covid 19 in June 2021. But at least it does look as if good progress is being made in this country, although sadly not in others. Meantime of course I really do hope that you have all been keeping safe and well.

Annual Subscriptions. These were due on 1st April, and I am delighted to say that, as most members pay by standing order, the great majority of subscriptions have now been paid. I shall shortly be sending out a reminder to those of you who do not use standing orders. Wearing my treasurer's hat, I am pleased to say that the sum received by way of subscriptions on 1st April this year was exactly the same as it was on 1st April last year – so many thanks to you all!

Housekeeping. Could you please let me know if I need to change any of your personal details, such as your address, phone number, or email address? Could you please also let me know if you are no longer a UK taxpayer, so that my records for gift aid are kept in order?

We Have a Birthday! Helensburgh Heritage Trust is now 25 years old. Our founder Betty Humphrey who now lives in England laid the foundations for the Heritage Trust in 1996. It would have been nice to have had some form of celebration but, until the coronavirus situation becomes clearer, no plans are being made.

New RAF Helensburgh Display Board at Kidston Park. Many of you will remember that in 2017 a stone pillar was erected by the Heritage Trust at Kidston Park in collaboration with the Airfields of Britain Conservation Trust to commemorate the activities of RAF Helensburgh in the Second World War. It was also known as the Marine Aviation Experimental Establishment (MAEE). This pillar is in a style which the Airfields of Britain Conservation Trust uses for all British wartime airfields but unfortunately it gives no detail about the very special work which the brave people at the MAEE actually carried out. The new display board which has been installed just last month remedies this situation, as well as giving information about Ardencaple Castle, the Kidston family and Bonar Law, and Rosneath Castle.



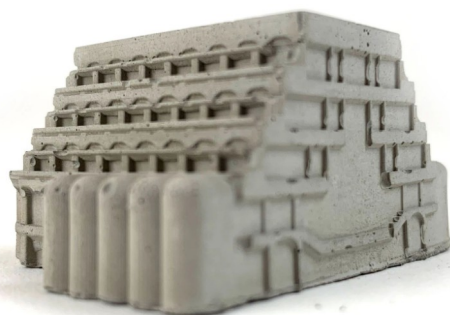
..... Donations Welcome! This display board has been costly to produce at just over £4300. An anonymous member has very kindly already given us £1000 towards this project but, if you wish to make a donation towards it as well, that would be very much appreciated. There are 2 alternative ways of doing so. Firstly, you could send a cheque made payable to Helensburgh Heritage Trust to me (Stewart Noble) at 28 East Abercromby Street, Helensburgh G84 7SQ. Alternatively you could pay by credit transfer direct into the Heritage Trust's bank account; the account number is 90361739 and the sort code is 82-65-08 – if using this method, it would be helpful if you could send me an email to tell me.

.... And Another Display Board! It is always said that, if you wait a long time for a bus, two will come along together! This second display board is being erected on the pier and will give the history of both the pier and the swimming pools. Both display boards are in the style of the Clyde Sea Lochs Trail, and you can see other examples on the West Esplanade at the foot of John Street, on the East Bay Esplanade, in Rhu, at Ardmore Point and in Cardross, as well as further afield. This display board at the pier is being paid for by Argyll & Bute Council, who are also producing a new leaflet about them all; it is due to appear shortly.



Amazon Smile. Did you know that, when you do shopping on Amazon, you can nominate a charity to receive a percentage of what you spend? Many thanks to those of you who are already using Amazon Smile to benefit Helensburgh Heritage Trust. You can now also do this when you are using the Amazon Shopping app on your mobile phone. Here's how you set it up:

1. Open the Amazon app on your phone
2. Select the main menu (=) & tap on "AmazonSmile" within Programmes & Features
3. Select Helensburgh Heritage Trust as your charity
4. Follow the on-screen instructions to activate AmazonSmile in the mobile app



A Present for the Person who has Everything!

Do you struggle to have ideas to find presents for family and friends? If so, an unusual potential present is at hand! Spaceplay have produced a "hand cast concrete miniature showing a section through the iconic St Peter's Seminary" at Cardross. It is 2.5cm high x 3cm wide x 5cm deep approx (or 1 inch high x 1.25 ins wide x 3 ins deep) and costs £30 plus shipping. It is described on their website as being "perfect for lovers of brutalism". Cast in sold concrete, you can read all about it at <https://www.spaceplay.co.uk/collections/concrete-minis/products/st-peters-seminary-mini?fbclid=IwAR0C4He8nJ6-NQnNpSrDnLo8aSjx6PgEqKONhWF7aU8pn8DbzNpOjHAPfa8>

[play.co.uk/collections/concrete-minis/products/st-peters-seminary-mini?fbclid=IwAR0C4He8nJ6-NQnNpSrDnLo8aSjx6PgEqKONhWF7aU8pn8DbzNpOjHAPfa8](https://www.spaceplay.co.uk/collections/concrete-minis/products/st-peters-seminary-mini?fbclid=IwAR0C4He8nJ6-NQnNpSrDnLo8aSjx6PgEqKONhWF7aU8pn8DbzNpOjHAPfa8)

New Plans for St Peter's Seminary. In my last newsletter I related how the Kilmahew Education Trust had acquired the Kilmahew estate, including not only St Peter's Seminary but also Kilmahew Castle (see photo). They revealed their plans for the estate to a recent meeting of Cardross Community Council, and the primary objective is for the site to achieve UNESCO World Heritage status by 2030 – to put this in context, at the moment Scotland only has five UNESCO World Heritage sites.

There appear to be many different facets to the plans, and I do not intend to go into detail about them all here.

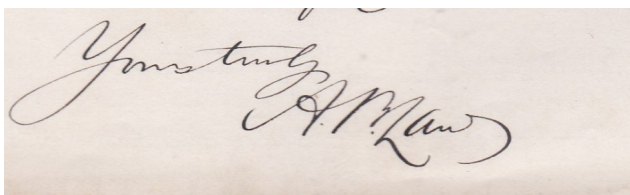
I leave the last word to former Heritage Trust treasurer Richard Trail who is also an Argyll & Bute councillor. He described the plans as "astonishing" and "a staggeringly ambitious project for two individuals." Needless to say, I await developments with interest.

A full report in the Helensburgh Advertiser can be seen online at

<https://www.helensburghadvertiser.co.uk/news/19270202.owners-kilmahew-estate-st-peters-seminary-aim-unesco-world-heritage-status/>



Letters signed by future Prime Ministers. While tidying through the Heritage Trust store I have discovered that we possess 3 letters from politicians all of whom went on to become Prime Ministers. They appear to have been sent to James Spalding who was an office bearer of the Helensburgh and Gareloch Conservative Association. He lived at Shantron near Luss. The 3 future prime ministers were the 3rd Marquess of Salisbury, Arthur Balfour (who was his nephew) and Bonar Law.



The letter from Bonar Law was written on 7 May 1885 and in it he gives his apologies for being unable to attend a meeting the following evening. At that time he was only 26 years old and was in the process of making himself wealthy through the iron trade in Glasgow. He did not become an

MP until 15 years later. The letter is written on the notepaper of William Kidston and Sons in Glasgow; they were his cousins in Helensburgh who had brought him up from the age of 12. He became Prime Minister in 1922 but 7 months later had to resign because of ill-health. He died in 1923. The only other Prime Minister to serve a shorter term was George Canning in 1827. Bonar Law had been born in Canada and, until Boris Johnson became Prime Minister, he was the only Prime Minister to have been born outside the United Kingdom.

Another Stone Animal! I hope that by now you are all familiar with the carved stone cat on the former municipal buildings in Sinclair Street. The excellent Helensburgh Memories Facebook page

recently pointed out that there is also a stone owl on the other side of the building; I for one was totally unaware of this, and I now wonder whether there is any other creature to be seen. The owl can most easily be spotted from the upper storey of the Co-op car park, from where there is also a good view of the tower that was built for drying fire hoses. The town's one and only fire engine was kept in what is now Gordon's pharmacy, and of course there are also the stone handcuffs above the door of the former police station in this same building.



Invented in Helensburgh? An Umbrella for Stargazers! Around 1978 Peter Purves demonstrated this device on an episode of the television programme *Blue Peter*. It is an umbrella with the night-time sky laid out on the underside. To use it, just open up the umbrella, point it at the North Star, and then twist it round until the stars marked on the inside of the umbrella match what can be seen in the sky – and in that way budding astronomers can identify the different galaxies!

At the time Peter Purves thought that it was a new invention, but shortly after the programme was broadcast the *Blue Peter* office received a letter from a Mrs Williamson of Helensburgh who said that "the original *Starry Umbrella* was patented by my father around the year 1910 to accompany a book published at the same time to teach astronomy." The book was called "*Guide to the Starry Heavens*" by Duncan McEwan. Can anyone fill in more details? For example, who exactly was Mrs Williamson, and did Duncan McEwan actually live in Helensburgh? Many thanks to John Stirling for informing me of this.



A Recommended Read from the Heritage

Trust Website. Patricia B Farley served as a Wren (a member of the Women's Royal Naval Service) at Portkil during the Second World War, and then married an American serviceman whom she had met there. 50 years later for the benefit of her children and grandchildren she wrote an extensive memoir of her time there; it was entitled "*Birds of a Feather*". It is a fascinating read and gives an excellent flavour of what life was like at

that time, and two articles based on her writing can be seen on the Heritage Trust website at <http://www.helensburgh-heritage.co.uk/index.php/heritage/military/1403-former-wrens-celebrate-centenary> and <http://www.helensburgh-heritage.co.uk/index.php/heritage/reminiscences/493-at-a-wrens-degaussing-station>. A full copy is available on request.

Where was Helensburgh's First Railway Station? When I wrote the chapter on transport in "200 Years of Helensburgh" I stated that the town's first railway station had been located at George Street. However as the years went on I became increasingly dubious about this assertion. Consequently I carried out some research which led me to conclude that the town's first railway station was actually where the present Helensburgh Central Station is. This then got me wondering what had been at George Street, and the answer appears to have been a ticketing platform which for a while doubled as an "unofficial" station. You can read all about it at <http://www.helensburgh-heritage.co.uk/index.php/heritage/business/1631-where-was-first-station>

As you have never before seen them! Our chairman Robert Ryan has a new toy! It is a computer program which enables him to animate portraits, and Lady Helen Colquhoun and Henry Bell have both been beneficiaries (or perhaps victims – depending on your taste) of his work. So here they are as you will probably already know them.



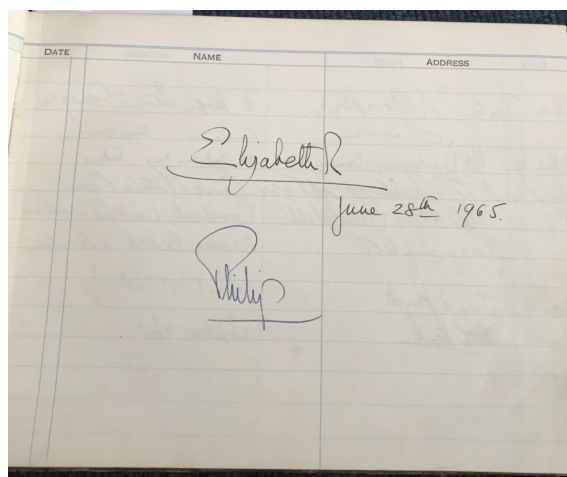
... and to see them as you have never seen them before, go to <https://vimeo.com/546959143> for Lady Helen and to <https://vimeo.com/546958774> for Henry Bell.

The tale of the Helensburgh Town Council visitors' book. A couple of weeks ago Heritage Trust member Penny Johnston and Phil Worms (of the now defunct Helensburgh Heroes project) alerted Robert Ryan and myself to the forthcoming sale of the Helensburgh Town Council visitors' book at an auction house in Folkestone in Kent.

Helensburgh lost its own Town Council in 1975, becoming part of Dumbarton District Council.

That in turn ceased to exist in 1996 when Helensburgh joined Argyll & Bute. How the visitors' book came to be in private hands is a mystery but, together with Norman Muir, the convener of Helensburgh Community Council, we decided to request that the visitors' book be removed from the auction – and this has now been done.

The visitors' book contains the signatures of the Queen, Prince Philip, Princess Margaret and Sir Anthony Eden amongst others. The guide price for the auction was £800, but the auctioneer said that there was a lot of interest in it, and he believed that it might have made £1500.



Later this month I shall be in Kent anyway, and so I shall try to visit the auction house in Folkestone. They had bought the visitors' book from a collector as part of a job lot, and so they were acting as both seller and auctioneer. We had indicated that we might be willing to buy it back for Helensburgh "at a reasonable price" – so fingers crossed! I shall keep you posted.

Memories of Hermitage School from Billy Petrie, one of our Honorary Members. When he attended the primary school in 1935 there were 37 pupils in his class. On a visit to today's Hermitage Primary School some years ago, he said that one of the biggest differences between now and then was the dreaded belt! He admitted to getting it quite often. He found it very sore and got it for talking in class and other things like that.

He described school lunches as not being terribly nice. "The potatoes were like golf balls and the custard was cold!"

Probably one of his happiest memories was meeting his future wife Jean while attending Hermitage School. He admitted that hair pulling was involved, but nevertheless this led down the path towards true love.

Finally – the Exciting Bit! The Annual Report and Accounts are now available. They can be seen online at <http://www.helensburgh-heritage.co.uk/index.php/10014-trust/1694-2020-21-chairman-s-annual-report> and <http://www.helensburgh-heritage.co.uk/index.php/10014-trust/1693-2021-annual-accounts> respectively. Alternatively, please let me know if you wish a hard copy.