

Helensburgh Heritage Trust

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NEWSLETTER - MAY 2023

Well, I hesitate to tempt providence, but I do feel that, although Covid is definitely not all past, it is generally no longer impacting as much on our lives as it did. Consequently it was great to see so many members attending the public meetings which have just come to an end, and this newsletter will give you information about next winter's programme.

However, firstly, let me give you the good news and the bad news!

The good news! Thanks to the generosity of members, we have been able to raise enough money to buy the very rare Baird Type A Receiver, which dates back to the early days of television history. I still have to make arrangements for collecting it from the two ladies who currently own it but, once I have collected it, it will be put on display in Helensburgh Library alongside the television which is already there. Thoughts are now turning as to how these two items can be better displayed.



The bad news. The Heritage Trust is once again going to have to look for a store for the various items which it owns. Our current store is in the tower of Helensburgh Parish Church in Colquhoun Square and we were hopeful that this might prove a long-term solution to our storage problems. Unfortunately that was not to be. Not only has the tower had major electrical problems, but a couple of months ago there was also damp penetration through a wall; fortunately it caused no major damage to our possessions.

Because of these structural difficulties the Parish Church has asked us to move out. Finding a new store is very far from easy, and it may well be that we have to compromise and use more than one store.

Please, please, please let me know if you do have any ideas about somewhere that might be suitable.

Housekeeping 1. Firstly, very many thanks to all of you who paid your annual subscription

by standing order at the beginning of April. Not only does this give us a good bedrock of money for the forthcoming year, but it also makes administration of the Heritage Trust considerably easier when we receive your subscriptions by standing order.

If you are unsure whether you have actually paid your subscription, don't worry! I have already sent emails to those members who don't have standing orders.

Housekeeping 2. Please let me know if there have been any changes in your circumstances. In particular I need to know if

- you have moved house
- you have a new email address
- you have a new telephone number
- you have ceased to be or have become a UK taxpayer.

Your status as a taxpayer is particularly important for the Heritage Trust because, if you are a taxpayer, we can claim gift aid from His Majesty's Revenue and Customs on your subscription and on any donations that you have made to the Heritage Trust.

Board changes. I am delighted to say that Chris Packard has joined as a trustee. Chris was born in Newcastle upon Tyne and then qualified as a mechanical engineer. This led to a career in the development and sales of coal-fired power stations, which involved a lot of worldwide travel. Interesting people whom he met at this time included Indira Gandhi and Imelda Marcos. In 1986 a job with John Brown Engineering in Clydebank brought him to live in Scotland, where he has now lived for 37 years – all but one in Helensburgh! After becoming managing director and then president of the company, he retired from it, and one of the ways in which Helensburgh has benefited from his retirement is that he was the first Chairman of the Friends of Hermitage Park from its inception in 2011 until 2017. Unfortunately Chris's computer is currently not allowing him access to photos of himself, and so the absence of a photo is not down to discrimination on my part!

Unfortunately Calum McNicol has had to resign because of pressures of work.

Guided Walks. Now that summer is here, you may want to take advantage of the guided walks which Heritage Trust members offer on request. The first walk is through the town centre, and the second is from the Hill House down to the town centre.

Not only do we do these walks for members, but we will also perform them for other interested groups. So if you are part of any local organisation that might want to include a walk in its summer programme, just let me know. There is no charge to members, but we charge others £2 per head or £1 concession – in the hope that they might be persuaded to become members!

Winter programme. Having just told you that summer is here, your Board have already been busy arranging a programme for next winter! As usual our winter talks will be taking place in the marriage room of the Helensburgh and Lomond Civic Centre on East Clyde Street at 7:30 PM on the last Wednesday of every month from September to March (but excluding December).

So here is the schedule that has been arranged:

27 September 2023: Iain Talman – Craigendoran and its Steamers

25 October 2023: Marion Maudsley – The Glasgow Boys - and Girls – in Helensburgh

29 November 2023: Bruce Keith - Are We Nearly There Yet?

31 January 2024: David Bruce: Mr William Kidston's Jaunt to Egypt and the Holy Land 1856-57

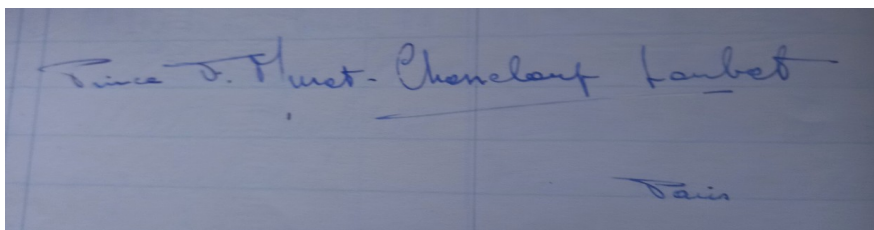
28 February 2024: Alasdair Jamison – Subject to be confirmed

27 March 2024: Stewart Noble – The History of Helensburgh's Railways

Town Council Visitors Book 1. This was in use from 1947 to 1975, and you will maybe remember that it was bought by the Heritage Trust 2 years ago. It is now on display in the link corridor in the Civic Centre, open at the page which records the visit of the Queen and Prince Philip to Helensburgh on 28 June 1965. As the visit only lasted for 15 minutes, signing the visitors book must have taken up a fair percentage of their time!



Town Council Visitors Book 2. One of the mystery signatures was that of a French Prince who came here in June 1966. Not only did I have difficulties in reading his signature, but I had no idea as to who he was and why he was here. However the mystery has now been solved!



Prince François Murat de Chasseloup Laubat was descended from Joachim Murat (1767 - 1815), who had been a right-hand man of Napoleon; furthermore,

he had married Napoleon's sister, and Napoleon had made him a Prince of the Empire in 1805, then King of Naples in 1808. The "de Chasseloup Laubat" part of his surname came from his mother's side (who were also French nobility) and was only added to the surname after the marriage of his parents in 1923.

The reason for his visit to Helensburgh was his attendance at the marriage on 25th June of Gordon Posnett and Elspeth Williamson, the niece of Provost J McLeod ("Cloudy") Williamson. According to the Helensburgh & Gareloch Times "the place of the groom's late

father was taken by Prince François, a boyhood friend of the groom.”

Town Council Visitors Book 3. On 27 October 1961 the bust of John Logie Baird (now on the West Esplanade) was unveiled in Hermitage Park by his sister Annie, and a civic reception was held afterwards. Two of the signatories remain a mystery. They were Len and Rita(?) Yates or Gates of 26 Millig Street. Does anyone know who they were?

Town Council Visitors Book 4. Not surprisingly many of the signatories were naval, but I don't really know much about the people involved. However I have made a list of their names (in so far as I could read their signatures) and, if any of you feel like providing information on them, I shall be happy to send the list to you.

Helensburgh's Other Charles Rennie Mackintosh Building. Thanks to the efforts of Bruce and Nicola Jamieson, we learnt a few years ago that the building at 38/40 Sinclair Street was also designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh, originally for the local branch of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Association. Bruce and Nicola have renamed the top floor of the building as the Mackintosh Club, and it serves in part as offices for their architectural practice.

Those of you who live locally will be aware that M & Co, who ran a shop on the ground floor, have recently gone bankrupt; consequently the shop has now closed, and hence the future of the property is unclear.

Meantime Bruce and Nicola have set up a community interest company called Mackintosh Club Renovation with the aim of turning the property into a community Arts and Cultural Institute.



Obviously, if this were to go ahead, this would be a major project for Helensburgh, and it would provide a new future for one of the most architecturally important buildings in the town. Consequently Bruce and Nicola are drawing up plans for this eventuality and, if you feel that you have skills which would be of use to them, they would be very pleased to hear from you. You can contact them by email to nicola@mackintosh.club or by phoning 07540 419532.



Bust of Bonar Law. All British prime ministers are commemorated by a painting or a photograph on the walls of 10 Downing Street – even Liz Truss! For a long time it was believed that Bonar Law, Helensburgh's Prime Minister, was commemorated only there, and by the window in Helensburgh Parish Church in memory of him, his wife and two of his sons.

However last year a third memorial to Bonar Law was unveiled,

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this being at Coleraine in Northern Ireland, a town with close family connections to him, and a place which he frequently visited after his father retired there from Canada. This new memorial takes the form of a life-size bust of Bonar Law and, thanks to the generosity of Provost Maurice Corry, the Heritage Trust has been given a miniature version of the bust. Maurice was presented with this when he attended the unveiling ceremony on behalf of Helensburgh.

Latest Addition to the Outdoor Museum in Colquhoun Square. Last year marked the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Arts Society Lomond and Argyll, and this has been commemorated by an installation on one of the plinths in the Square. Any individual or any local organisation could put forward a proposal for an installation on a plinth. In the past there was some funding from Argyll and Bute Council, and there may still be, but this would not be enough to cover the total cost. So, what about commemorating Helensburgh Heritage Trust? Any ideas.....?



Visit to Jupiter

Artland. On behalf of the Arts Society Lomond and Argyll, Heritage Trust member Marion Maudsley is organising a visit to this award-winning sculpture park, set in over 100 acres of woodland and meadows in West Lothian. The visit will take place on Thursday 21st September, leaving Helensburgh Leisure Centre at 9:30 AM, and

will cost £50 per person, which covers entrance to the park and exhibitions, transport, driver's gratuity and lunch. If you wish to go on this visit, please contact Marion direct on 01436 671282 or by email to marion.maudsley@btinternet.com

Liz Trueman's Reminiscences from Helensburgh Memories. In December 2021 Liz couldn't sleep, and so she started remembering the past. Fortunately her daughter recorded her memories, and here they are.

"Canny sleep. Who remembers going to the Christmas party that the Americans gave at Camis Eskan prisoner of war camp in 1945? Do you remember the prisoners of war marching up Athole Street with the American soldiers escorting the prisoners who made the paths and the wee walls in Buchanan Road and Kirkmichael Road and Stuckleckie Road. I remember Caroline McKechnie taking a load of us from Kirkmichael into town for the victory in Europe celebrations. The Italian cafes gave free ice cream cones. The bands and the Army and Navy marching along Clyde Street. Walking to school in 1947 in the snow when it was over the top of your wellies. No bus or mammy's car to take you to school. Going over the Tankards to cut branches to make bows and arrows. Catching bees with jelly jars. Going over the railway to gather coal that was thrown out from the steam trains when they passed Kirkmichael. Going down to Camis Eskan with the barrow to get logs from the

sawmill. The Bottlings going round with the future bride in a pram, everyone banging on pot lids and pans and singing. Getting tadpoles at the Merch Burn. Going up to McAuslan's farm with the tin can for fresh milk in the morning. Taking bread up to feed the chickens at the Lane at the back of Rathdownie. I hope that anyone who reads this has as many happy memories as I have. We were a big family; I was one of 13. Nobody ever said "I love you" in words but you knew you were loved by the way you were treated, not just by your parents but by your aunties and uncles. I have had a good life and have a lovely family of my own. Our family have lived in Helensburgh since the 1850s. They came from Ireland and settled here. My Granny Monaghan was born at 4 Colquhoun Street. Other addresses the family lived at were Seagull Pen, Sheep's Heid, the Barracks, Maitland buildings, Clyde Street, old Alma. So we go back quite a few years like other families in the town who fled from the famine in Ireland."

Helensburgh Football Club's Unsavoury Reputation, from Helensburgh Memories.

Robert Crerar put this amusing anecdote on the Helensburgh Memories Facebook page this month. He came across it whilst researching his great grandfather's time on the Committee of the Scottish Football Association, and found the following entry in the minutes.

"A meeting of the Business sub-committee was held in the rooms at No. 11 Carlton Place on Thursday 3rd September 1885 at 1 o'clock.

A letter was read from the Dumbarton Athletic requesting that their cup tie with Helensburgh be played on neutral ground, on account of the roughness of the latter club and the conduct indulged in by their spectators.

The Secretary was instructed to inform them that their request could not be entertained."

And if you haven't yet joined the excellent Helensburgh Memories Facebook page, just go to https://www.facebook.com/groups/helensburghmemories/?locale=en_GB and then follow the "join group" instructions. Helensburgh Memories was set up by a certain Robert Ryan!