

## HASTINGS & ST LEONARDS MUSEUM ASSOCIATION

### ANNUAL REPORT 2023

Another year has passed. It seems that each year passes faster than the one before or is that just a sign that we're getting older?

Your committee has met 5 times so far this year and will have met once more by the time you read this. We are pleased that one or more of the Museum's staff has attended each one to keep us up-to-date with what's happening at the Museum and seek our thoughts and suggestions.

As you will recall, Damian Etheraads left last December and his role as Senior Curator was taken by Alice Roberts-Pratt after a few months' delay. We'll leave Alice to cover the Museum's activities in her separate report.

In December, we learned of a bequest to the Association by a local man. We emailed the Council's Chief Legal Officer to be told that this was not true and it has been left to the Council for the benefit of the Museum. After 10 months of disputing the Legal Officer's view with fantastic pro bono support from Michael Foster (solicitor and former MP), we have finally reached the point where we have agreed that the funds from the bequest once realised will be placed in a discrete bank account held by the Council in its role as trustee which can only be used to the benefit of the Museum's collections. Our major concern was that, given the Council's well-publicised financial difficulties, they might use the money to help support their budget.

Early in the year, we agreed to purchase a card reader for the Association so that people could pay for events and membership and make donations using their bank card. This has proved very successful with a comparatively small fee being taken by the provider, SumUp. A similar machine for the museum that we paid for following last year's AGM has not yet been brought into use due to technical complications.

A proposal to diversify the membership of the HBC Museum Committee (which was mentioned at last year's AGM) by including community members as well as councillors and Association representatives to meet grant application requirements has made little progress following the staffing changes at the Museum.

We agreed to cover the £170 costs of restoring a damaged painting and also to pay towards the cost of purchasing the John Laing 1859 Hastings Council map for the Museum.

At the October meeting of the HBC Museum Committee, we were informed that all future meetings of the committee would be formal meetings bringing an end to the nonsense of having two of the four meetings a year as "informal" meetings with no minutes of official record made of discussions and any decisions having to wait three months for the next "formal" meeting to be implemented. Your representatives have been arguing for this for several years so it shows that persistence can work.

### **Secretary and Events Report 2023**

This year has been a very active one for our members and supporters with a number of well attended talks and visits to local places of interest.

In March we enjoyed a fascinating and well-attended talk at the museum by Haydon Luke, the Fairlight-based historian about the history of Fairlight Radar Station and the important part it played during WW2 and the Cold War.

At the end of April, we held an interesting talk at the Church of the Holy Spirit at Rye Harbour, given by Martin and KT Bruce from Rye Harbour RNLI. As part of our visit, we also learnt about the story behind the Mary Stanford Memorial in the cemetery and walked to the harbour afterwards to view the painted pebbles memorial next to the lifeboat station. Proceeds from the event were shared between the Museum Association and Rye Harbour RNLI.

In May, Trevor Hopper led an interesting Robert Tressell (Noonan) walk around Hastings, looking at the sites connected with Tressell and scenes from 'The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists'. This was very well attended and kept us all fit as we negotiated the many twittens and steps between Queens Road and the West Hill.

Brion and Marion Purdey gave us a fascinating tour of Rye, Rye Town Museum and the Ypres Tower Museum in June, on a very warm and busy day, mingling with many tourists and negotiating the cobbled streets.

For our July event we experienced very damp weather on a guided tour of St Andrews Church at Fairlight and its fascinating graveyard. Some climbed the tower though the views were rather restricted given the weather. Our expert guide, Paul Draper, and the Priest in Charge, Sandi Wickens, made us very welcome and provided hot drinks to help us to dry out in the church after getting soaked. Attendance was limited for understandable reasons but we were able to make a small donation to St Andrews Church Tower Fund.

On September 2nd we returned to the museum for an excellent talk about the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and their work, both locally and internationally, given by Dave Hatherall from the Commonwealth War Graves Foundation, the educational department of the CWGC. On 1st October we followed the talk by a well-attended and interesting guided visit to the CWGC graves and monuments in Hastings Cemetery, given by local CWGF guide, Martin Barry. As a result of these two events, we were able to make a generous donation to the CWGF and they have written us a thank you letter which we can be proud of.

### **Suggestions for 2024 events**

#### Talks

Haydon Luke on smuggling and/or Fairlight and its ancient history

Phil Hadland and Lynn Cornwell on 'Piltown and other hoaxes' and a 'hands on' session about interesting archaeological 'finds'

Stuart Conquest, Chess Grandmaster, on the Hasting International Chess Congress and its history

Kevin Boorman on the history of local railways

Hastings Bomb maps

The history of Hastings and St Leonards hospitals

#### Guided visits

Small-group tours of The Mermaid Inn, Rye

Talk and tour in Alexandra Park and a visit to the restored greenhouse

The Brede Giants and the nuclear bunker

The British Gypsum Mines  
Church in the Wood and cemetery  
Tressell Walk Part 2  
History of St Leonards guided walk

If you have other ideas, we would very much like to hear about them.

Finally, a thank you to your committee members and representatives on the HBC Committee who have all worked hard to ensure the Association continues to function and provide interesting, informative events as well as overseeing the work of the wonderful staff at Hastings Museum & Art Gallery.

Richard Street/Susannah Farley-Green November 2023