

Helensburgh Heritage Trust

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Newsletter

The Newsletter is edited and published by Kenneth N Crawford 'Ardlamont' 3, Loch Drive, Helensburgh G84 8PY kn.crawford@virgin.net

Contributions and suggestions are urgently required and welcome!

HELENSBURGH HERITAGE ROOM OPENED

WITHIN HELENSBURGH LIBRARY

It was in February 1996 that a Public Meeting was held in the Court Suite of Municipal Buildings 'to inform the public about the objective of the Trust,' However, it was only on 1st May 2012 that its principal objective was achieved when we opened the Heritage Room within Helensburgh Library! Mrs Betty Humphrey Chaired the first and spoke at the second, having travelled specially from her home in Essex. One by one, we have honoured all of the original intentions of the Trust -

from running Educational projects, Exhibitions, Publications (from a hard-back book to this Newsletter) Public Lectures on history, arts, and architecture; Maintenance and restoration of objects of local historical interest. Also promoting a wider interest and indeed, international appreciation of Helensburgh and the Lomond area by the production of a site on the World-Wide Web which could not have been contemplated back in 1996. We are most grateful to Argyll and Bute Council and its Library staff for granting us the facility of exhibiting in the former Reference Room, where the Local History collection of books continues to be housed.



Councillor Billy Petrie opened the room, his last event as Provost and ending a 45 year career serving on authorities and bodies in this area. He has been enrolled as Freeman of the district and we have welcomed him as a Life Member of the Trust. For the record, our initial displays are: Steamers which frequented Helensburgh Pier; {*Marion Gillies*} Military connections; {*John Johnston*} Deborah Kerr; {*Donald Fullarton*} Local History through local bottles; {*Alistair McIntyre*} Mauchline Ware with Helensburgh illustrations; {*Patricia Wiseman*} John Logie Baird; {*Stewart Noble*} a digital photo frame rotating 100 (of the 1,350 available!) images from our web-site {*Donald again*} and nine banners each devoted to historical development of the town. {*The Trust*}

KNC

Notice is Hereby Given that the 14th Annual General Meeting of the Helensburgh Heritage Trust will be held on Wednesday 31st October 2012 at 7 p.m. At the Helensburgh Lawn Tennis Club, Suffolk Street, the Accounts and Report of the Directors will be circulated later [to be followed by the advertised talk]

200 YEARS SINCE COMET SAILED

Another bicentenary is well and truly celebrated! This was of the first sailing of the first passenger carrying steam powered ship, Comet which was the inspiration of Henry Bell the first Provost of Helensburgh. On 3 August, outside the Heritage Room and all along the balcony of the library we opened an exhibition devised by Mrs Doris Gentles - clearly an expert on the subject. With an added PowerPoint slide show an incredible amount of information about Bell and Comet will be there to study until October.

The Henry Bell trail leaflet was also introduced and this gives the reader a tour of Helensburgh from the Baths Inn (Queens Court) right through to Rhu and noting the 9 places associated with Bell's time in the town. The 3-fold A4 guide is available from the Heritage Room and the tourist information centre.

The following day started in the morning with Henry Bell himself arriving on the seafront to unveil the refurbished Clyde Sea Lochs Trail information panel, it is gratifying to see how many people since that day have been seen reading the contents.

Then in the afternoon, a full-size replica appeared at the Pier head of the silhouette of Comet we had hoped to permanently display near to Tower Place. This unfortunately did not happen due to intransigence of the Area Committee who may have been retaliating against officers who had granted the sign full planning permission! Many people approved of the display and we still hope that an

acceptable site can be found.

Later, a naval patrol boat and two steam powered miniature passenger ships circulated the Pier whilst the Modellers Club scale Comet took to the water to the delight of thousands of visitors thronging the Pier. Helensburgh Sailing Club provided a regatta in the background, whilst the Helensburgh lifeboat was discreetly in attendance, and also staged a rescue of a young man in a canoe. Throughout all these events the weather was exceptionally kind but a threatening cloud turned into very heavy rain and caused the cancellation of an intended barbecue at the Royal Northern Yacht Club.

P.S.Waverley, which is surely the direct successor of a steam-powered paddle-driven passenger vessel, sailing on the Firth of Clyde staged anniversary cruises on the following Friday. Another Mr and Mrs Bell joined at Greenock for the evening cruise to Glasgow, whilst earlier in the day, another, smaller, model of Comet had been demonstrating its propulsion system from a vantage point behind the forward funnel. A commentary on board located relevant sights.

Inverclyde and the Riverside Transport Museum both staged their own celebrations. But there does not seem to have been any national press coverage beyond a preliminary article in The Guardian, reviewing the 100th and 150th anniversaries. www.Comet-2012.co.uk may be the only source for research in 2062! KNC

Programme of Public Meetings

Wednesday September 26 7.30pm

Professor Malcolm Baird:

Print versus Television: –

From Baird to McLuhan

Wednesday October 31

7pm Annual General Meeting;

7.30 John Ransom:

How Bell's Comet Changed the Course of History

Wednesday November 28 7.30pm

Professor Eleanor Gordon and

Dr Gwyneth Nair:

Madeleine Smith

Our Bookstall will be open at each of the above meetings - New sales list enclosed.

Wanted:- a Clock Tower Hand shop!

In one of the gales earlier in the year, half of the Minute hand on the west face of the Town Clock was broken off! Now the casual observer or tourist may read the reverse time!!!

Sometimes amusing, but possibly a problem. 20 past 3 could be quarter past four!

THE SAGA OF HENRY BELL

(First Provost of Helensburgh and Inventor of the Steamship)

In the year of eighteen hundred and twelve, while Napoleon stood at Moscow,

The COMET paddled up the Clyde from Helensburgh to Glasgow.

Her builder's name was Henry Bell, a man with burning dream

To harness Watt's technology, and power a ship by steam.

To sail a ship head-into-wind was impossible to do,

But the power of steam could change all that,

- And that's what Henry knew.

A boiler and a piston, with a crankshaft made of steel,

Had the power of several horses

And could drive a paddle wheel.

On the new-built Forth and Clyde canal,

Where the horse had had its day,

William Symington's steam-powered tug

Had shown the world the way.

And, over in New York City, in eighteen hundred and seven,

Fulton launched a ferry boat which also was steam driven.

Bell sought the Navy's interest back in eighteen hundred and three,

But the Admiralty's eyes were shut - Nelson alone could see.

Henry, first Provost of Helensburgh, had built the Baths Hotel

And knew a steamship service had commercial use as well.

A horse-drawn coach from Glasgow town took six long hours and more,

Whilst two hours 'doon the watter' had guests knocking at his door.

This was a revolution.

The steamship age was born.

And Henry soon had COMET paddling up the Firth of Lorne.

A mighty industry now sprang, building steamships on the Clyde,

And 'Clyde built' set the standard which was recognised worldwide.

But, in eighteen twenty, disaster struck,

Off Craignish Point near Cuan,

For COMET hit the rocks and sank,

And Henry Bell faced ruin.

Despite his creative genius and entrepreneurial thrust,

Others made their fortunes while poor Henry Bell went bust.

And so, Helensburgh's first Provost,

Respected by so many,

Creator of the steamship,

Sadly, died without a penny.

Epilogue

The steamship age has come and gone

- But not here on the Clyde.

Here, steam powered nuclear submarines

Are now the Navy's pride.

Eric Thompson © May 2012
(Written for the Henry Bell bicentenary celebration)