



Please reply to:
Stewart Noble
Treasurer, Helensburgh Heritage Trust
28 East Abercromby Street
Helensburgh G84 7SQ

Tel 01436 675484
snoble84@gmail.com

NEWSLETTER - SEPTEMBER 2022

Although we have not held any public meetings since the start of Covid, much has been going on in the background. Consequently this newsletter is not going to contain as many historical anecdotes as you will have read in previous newsletters. So let's get started!

Public Meetings. I am delighted to say that these will resume shortly. We shall be returning to the marriage suite in the Helensburgh and Lomond Civic Centre at 38 East Clyde Street. The meetings will start at 7:30 PM and doors will be open 15 minutes earlier.

The dates for your diaries are

Wednesday, 28 September 2022 – Robert Ryan on Understanding Ancestry.

Wednesday, 26 October 2022 – Annual General Meeting, to be followed by Bryan Temple on the Forth and Clyde Canal.

Wednesday, 30 November 2022 – Tony Belk on Coast Defences of the Upper Clyde.

Wednesday, 25 January 2023 – to be confirmed

Wednesday, 22 February 2023 – to be confirmed

Wednesday 29th of March 2023 – to be confirmed

Minutes Secretary and Website Editor. The sad death of Donald Fullarton at the end of March meant that these two very important roles in the Heritage Trust became vacant. However I am delighted to say that we actually got a volunteer to take them on in the person of Fiona Howard. Like Donald, Fiona is a former editor of the Helensburgh Advertiser, and she was concerned that our website would continue to be maintained.



When Fiona volunteered, she had already announced that she would be standing for election to Argyll & Bute Council, and she was subsequently successful in being elected. Your chairman Robert Ryan and I were concerned that this might cause Fiona to withdraw her offer, but we were both delighted when she happily agreed to continue with it. So, a big welcome to Fiona!

Subscriptions. I am delighted to say that the vast majority of Heritage Trust members have renewed their membership by standing order. In addition a number of those who do not pay by standing order have also already renewed their subscriptions. This provides a firm financial base for

the future of the Heritage Trust.

There remains a small number who have not yet renewed, and they shall be receiving a reminder from me shortly – you know who you are!

Housekeeping. Can you please let me know if you plan to change your email address, home address or phone number? I also need to know if your financial circumstances have changed to make you a non-taxpayer – if you are still a taxpayer the Heritage Trust can claim Gift Aid on your subscription, and this is an important source of finance for us.

Annual Report and Accounts. And mentioning finance leads me to the subject of our annual report. This, together with the accounts for the year ended 31 March 2022, can be seen on the Heritage Trust website at <http://www.helensburgh-heritage.co.uk/index.php/10014-trust/1726-2021-22-chairman-s-annual-rpt>. For those members who do not have access to the Internet, a copy of the report and accounts is enclosed with this newsletter.

Resignation of Cecilia Dunlop. When the Heritage Trust was set up in 1996 Cecilia was one of the original trustees. Now, twenty-six years later, she has decided to resign from the board. Unfortunately problems with her eyesight had meant that she had been unable to participate as much in recent years as she had in the past. She still continues to take an active interest in Heritage Trust affairs, and we all have to thank her for her years of service.

Acquisitions. The Heritage Trust is continuing both to buy and to be given items which we consider to be significant for the heritage of Helensburgh. Recent donations have included the following:

- A fine model of the Waverley. This will probably be lent to Argyll & Bute Council for display in the new swimming pool, but quite when has yet to be decided. It is to be hoped that the presence of the model there might spur Argyll & Bute Council to repair the pier so that the Waverley can resume its visits!
- Two parts from the paddle steamer Lucy Ashton (1888 – 1949), namely its steam pressure gauge and an oil drip lubricator.
- A signed letter from actress Deborah Kerr.
- A Travelling Escritoire. Yes, I had to look up the meaning of this word! It is a portable writing desk which was presented to a member of the crew of the training ship Empress by his mess mates on the occasion of his wedding.
- A china model of a First World War Red Cross van, bearing the Helensburgh coat of arms. This has been bought by the Heritage Trust.



- An original flat plate neon bulb for the Baird Televisor which is in the library. This is an extremely rare item, particularly as it is in working order, and it will make the televisor complete. It has been donated by the daughters of the late Peter Smith to LiveArgyll as owners of the televisor. This donation has been organised by the Heritage Trust with considerable help from Brandon Inglis (seen here), but it will probably be a few months before it will be on display.



Items Looking for a New Home. Because we do not have unlimited storage space, we sometimes have to say to donors that we will have to dispose of items which they are wanting to give to us. Consequently I now have a couple of books which are looking for a new home so, if you are interested, please let me know – otherwise they will probably be put up for sale on the Internet. The books are:

- A Nostalgic Look at Glasgow Trams since 1950 by GHE Twidale and RF Mack.
- Glasgow and the Clyde at War – a pictorial account 1939-45 by Paul Harris.
- In addition the videocassette tapes and other items which I mentioned in my January newsletter are still sitting forlorn on top of my filing cabinet!

Death of Billy Petrie. Helensburgh Heritage Trust lost one of its two Honorary Members at the end of last month when William Petrie OBE, JP, DL died at the age of 94. Known to everyone as Billy, he had had a lifetime of public service, and had the very unusual distinction of having served as provost of three different local authorities – Dunbartonshire County Council, Dumbarton District Council, and Argyll & Bute Council. During all this period he was ably assisted by his wife Jean, who died in 2014.



His retirement from local government in 2012 was brought about in part by the sad sudden death of his younger daughter Barbara. Not only did she and her family live next door to her parents, but she was also in Billy's words "my election agent and my right hand, and since then I haven't felt quite the same. I did not feel I would be able to give Council work 100%, and decided this was the right time to cut back."

At the time of his retirement he became only the second person to be made a Freeman of Argyll & Bute.

He also started to attend Heritage Trust meetings and at one of them he recalled how during the Second World War he had seen a German seaplane with swastikas on its wings landing in Rhu Bay, and how he subsequently learnt that it had been captured by Norwegian resistance fighters and flown by them to Rhu, where the Marine Aircraft Experimental Establishment (aka RAF Helensburgh) were keen to examine it.

Sadly an accident some years ago led to increasing immobility for Billy. Nevertheless the death of

"Mr Helensburgh" (as a fellow Argyll & Bute councillor once called him) will leave a gap in the town. You can read more about his life on the Heritage Trust website at http://helensburgh-heritage.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=948:lifetime-of-service-to-community&catid=39:people-&Itemid=399

Death of Tam Ward. Although he was a Heritage Trust member and Helensburgh area resident for only around 10 years, Tam Ward (seen here) had a very big impact. Love brought Tam from Biggar in Lanarkshire to this area, and his interest in archaeology led him to establish the North Clyde Archaeological Society here. An electrician to trade, his activities with the Biggar Archaeological Group were so significant that he had been awarded an MBE in 2001, and what our local society has discovered in their excavations under his leadership has been quite remarkable. You can read more about him at <http://biggararchaeology.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Tam-WardFebruary-2013.pdf>



Death of Frank Meehan. Although not a Helensburgh Heritage Trust member, the extraordinary life which Frank Meehan led is commemorated on the Heritage Trust website at <http://www.helensburgh-heritage.co.uk/index.php/heritage/people/1391-burgh-is-home-for-former-us-ambassador>

His parents had emigrated from Clydebank to the United States and he was born there in New Jersey in 1924. Crucially this gave him American citizenship. However his mother was homesick, and so the family returned to Dalmuir where Frank was brought up, and where he experienced the Clydebank Blitz.

He was called up for National Service in both the United States and the United Kingdom. Opting for the former changed the path of his life totally, as he became an American diplomat, ending his career as United States ambassador to East Germany.

However some 20 years earlier in the 1980s, while serving in Berlin, he played a key role in the swapping of a Soviet spy for the pilot of a U2 spy plane, Gary Powers. This was the basis for the Hollywood blockbuster 'Bridge of Spies' starring Tom Hanks.

It was on his retirement from the US diplomatic service that he and his wife came to live in Helensburgh, dying here in May at the age of 98.

Baird TV Centenary. Work on preparing for the centenary of John Logie Baird's invention of television is well and truly underway. His grandson Iain paid a visit to the town in May, and a very short video featuring Iain and the centenary has been produced. You can see it at <https://vimeo.com/718490200/984b445454>

In addition Iain has reminded us that it was 90 years ago in August 1932 that the BBC started television broadcasts using the Baird system. Iain and his father, Heritage Trust president Malcolm,

look after a website commemorating John Logie Baird, and Iain has written an article for the website about this 90th anniversary. You can read it at <https://www.bairdtelevision.com/bbc-television.html>

West Dunbartonshire Doors Open Days. Once again a most impressive programme of venues and events has been organised, with the bulk of them taking place on Saturday 10th September. And it is worth noting that 2022 is the 800th anniversary of Dumbarton's burgh charter; by compaison Helensburgh's burgh charter was only granted 220 years ago! Full details of the programme can be seen online at <https://www.spanglefish.com/explorewestdunbartonshire/index.asp?pageid=726858>

I have to admit to a vested interest here, as I shall be taking a guided walk of the "Vanished Railways of West Dunbartonshire – Bowling and Old Kilpatrick" starting at 2:00pm on Saturday 10th September. The meeting point for the walk will be the bascule bridge at the start of the Forth and Clyde Canal in Bowling – and, if you don't know what a bascule bridge is and where to find this one, have a look at <https://canmore.org.uk/site/43315/forth-and-clyde-canal-bowling-basin-drawbridge>

The day before my walk at Bowling, Heritage Trust member and professional archaeologist Fiona Baker is also conducting a guided walk, this time of the Carman Hillfort, which is situated between Cardross and Renton and is described as being "large but almost invisible". This walk will also start at 2:00pm, but on Friday 9th September.

150th Anniversary Exhibition of Dumbarton Football Club – Possible Group Visits. This Exhibition will run in Dumbarton Library from 6th October through to December. Group visits would last around 45-60 minutes for a party of around 12/15 persons, and anyone interested should contact our chairman Robert Ryan by phone to [07853 142475](tel:07853142475) or by email to robertryan@gmx.com

Destination Helensburgh. This is the Visitor Information Centre, Gallery and Shop located at 28 Sinclair Street. Its website (which is <https://destinationhelensburgh.org/>) also includes an Events Calendar and Community Pages.

They have recently produced an app entitled "Discover Helensburgh" which contains a lot of information about the town and also includes a number of walking trails. These are richly illustrated, often using pictures from the Heritage Trust website and, as a "thank you" for these pictures, Destination Helensburgh has most kindly made a £300 donation to the Heritage Trust.

Friends of Hermitage Park website. As many of you will be aware, this charity has decided to disband, and they have asked the Heritage Trust to include their website within ours. We have agreed in principle to this and the technical experts from both sides are now involved in realising this. It will also include the website for the tremendous work which was done in bringing to life the people who are commemorated on the town's war memorial; if you have not already seen it, have a look at <https://helensburghwarmemorial.co.uk/>

The Helensburgh Advertiser – Past, Present and Future. On Thursday 15th September at 7:00pm Craig Borland, Deputy Managing Editor, Ayrshire & Clyde Weekly Press will be giving a webinar on the subject of "The Helensburgh Advertiser in a changing media landscape". This will be the first of this winter's series of webinars being arranged by Helensburgh Community Council, and anyone wishing to attend the webinar should contact Tariq Durrani of the Community Council at tsdurrani@gmail.com. He will then arrange to send you by email a Zoom link to the webinar nearer the time.

.... and lastly, have I misled you? In the newsletter which I produced in June of last year, I drew your attention to the stone owl at the back of the municipal buildings. Until last year I was totally unaware of its existence. Now however I have heard it suggested that the owl is in fact made out of plastic, and hence may be a recent addition! Does anyone know the truth? If so, please enlighten me!

