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NEWSLETTER – SEPTEMBER 2023

Well, I would say that I have known better summers than we have had this year and, as I write this newsletter, the chestnut tree at the corner of my street is already starting to show its autumn colours - and this of course means that our winter programme of talks will be starting shortly. More about this later.

Unpaid subscriptions. For the handful of you who have not yet paid your subscriptions, this will be the last newsletter that you receive from Helensburgh Heritage Trust. However in a few days time you will also receive a reminder for the subscription from Chris Sanders so, if you wish to know more about what we are doing, just pay up!

And, if you don't receive a reminder, this means that you have already paid your subscription, and so you don't need to worry!

We still don't have a store. The plea which I sent out in the last newsletter in May fell on stony ground. No-one has come back to me with ideas. Even if it means splitting our store between a couple of locations, **your board is really keen to hear from you.**

Baird TV Centenary Trust. 2025 is getting closer, and **we really do need more people to help with the organisation of the events** that will be taking place not only then but also in the nearer future. I hope to be inundated with volunteers!

Winter programme. 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 [to be preceded by the AGM]

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

"Snatched from Satan". That is the eye-catching title that Viki McDonnell has given to her recently published book on the Clyde Industrial Training Ships. The *Cumberland* and then the *Empress* were former naval ships moored in Rhu Bay for over 50 years until the 1920s. They provided both home and school for boys who were destitute and in danger of falling into a life of crime.

I am part of the way through reading this book, and am finding it fascinating. I was already aware that life on these training ships was hard, but what I had not appreciated was just how successful they were in providing career opportunities for the boys concerned. One of the boys even became a Member of Parliament in Australia!

This thoroughly researched book can be bought for £20 direct from Viki McDonnell by sending an email to her at vikimcd40@gmail.com using the title "Snatched from Satan" on your email.



1919 Peace Day Celebrations medal gifted to the Heritage Trust. The Peace Day Celebrations of 1919 commemorated the end of the First World War in the previous year. The main event took place in London on 19 July 1919, however in Helensburgh the Celebrations were held on 4 August 1919, perhaps to coincide with the anniversary of the declaration of war in 1914.

The events in Helensburgh took various forms. Medals were presented to war veterans, a dance was held in the evening, and there was a fireworks display.



In addition sports were held for children in the Public Park on East King Street, and the

Helensburgh and Gareloch Times recorded that the second prize in the 50 yards race for 5 to 7 year-old girls was won by Nannie Graham. In later life she married Geddes Troup, and so became the mother of Jock Troup, the donor of the medal to the Heritage Trust. One can only assume that she and her parents never got round to having her name engraved on the medal below where it says "won by".

Wreck of Henry Bell's *Comet* now a scheduled monument. Introduced in 1812 the *Comet* was Europe's first commercial steamship, introduced by Henry Bell to bring guests speedily and comfortably to his hotel in Helensburgh. However within a few years, it was facing growing competition from newer, bigger and faster paddle steamers.

Consequently in 1819 Henry Bell decided to lengthen her in order to put her on a new service through the Crinan Canal and up to Oban and Fort William. She was hauled up on the beach in Helensburgh, cut into two parts, and then a new middle section was inserted. It has, by the way, been suggested that Bell did not take her back to her builders in Port Glasgow because he had never paid them in full!

When she was wrecked at Craignish Point near Crinan at the end of 1820, the *Comet* split in two where she had been lengthened, and the stern section floated off towards the notorious Corrieveckan whirlpool. This is why the wreck which has been found is almost certainly only the bow section.

Dara Parsons of Historic Environment Scotland said "In September 2020 we were invited to assess the remains of the *Comet* for designation following its discovery by members of Dalriada Dive Club, Oban. There are very few examples of pre-1820 steamships known in the UK. As such the remains at the site of the *Comet* are extremely rare and merit further detailed study. Henry Bell's *Comet* is of international significance as Europe's first commercial steamship and occupies an important place in the history of steam-powered navigation.

"By designating the wreck with scheduled monument status, this means that visitors can dive on the wreck but must not disturb the wreck or remove artefacts without scheduled monument consent from Historic Environment Scotland, to help protect the remains of this significant vessel."

Sad Postscript. Unfortunately the 1962 working replica of the *Comet*, which was located on a plinth in Port Glasgow, has had to be demolished because of its poor condition. Taken there in happier times, this photo shows 2 people whom you might know!

"Villaville" (or "As We Used to See Ourselves?") I recently received this newspaper cutting, probably from the Helensburgh and Gareloch Times around the mid-1930s to early 1940s.

"Villaville is not the town's real name, but let it serve. The town is set upon a hill, at least the only noteworthy part is. There is another portion, where the shops and tenements are, which lies humbly at the foot of the hill as if conscious that its only function is to minister to society in the big houses up the hill. On this lower plane the tradespeople and other common folk dwell and conduct their business, and at any hour of the day may be witnessed the comings and goings of their small messengers wrestling with large baskets."

