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NEWSLETTER – SEPTEMBER 2024

Before starting this newsletter, I looked back at what I had written to you in September of last year. Here were my opening words. "Well, I would say that I have known better summers than we have had this year". Well, we have just had one of the worst summers that I can remember, although we have just had a glorious weekend – was that weekend summer? And now there is a forecast of snow on the hills!

All of this means that Helensburgh Heritage Trust will shortly be resuming its winter programme, and so here is the schedule that has been arranged

Winter Programme

25 September 2024 – Stewart Noble: Helensburgh's Railway History
30 October 2024 – AGM, then Elizabeth Davidson: The Renovations at The Hill House
27 November 2024 – Bruce Keith: Scotland Beneath the Surface
29 January 2025 – Alasdair Jamison: subject to be confirmed
26 February 2025 – Jeremy Watson: Mysteries of Dumbarton
26 March 2025 – Michael Davis: Victorian Villas of Helensburgh

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

New board member. I am very pleased to say that Debs Hamilton has been co-opted to the board of the Heritage Trust, and members will be asked to ratify her co-option at the Annual General Meeting.

Debs is yet another board member who worked for the Helensburgh Advertiser and County Reporter in a previous life. However, unlike the others, she was not a journalist. Instead she was involved in advertising sales – and she even persuaded Robert Ryan to place an advertisement for his pet shop in the newspaper!

Debs and her husband have moved back to Helensburgh fairly recently, having lived in Cumbria, and I am sure that she will become a valued member of the board.

Annual General Meeting. You will probably already have noticed that the AGM will be taking place at the start of the October meeting. Full details of the agenda will be sent out in due course, but there are a few matters that I would like to draw to your attention just now for your consideration.

Firstly, the annual report and accounts for the year ended 31 March 2024 can be seen on our website at https://www.helensburgh-heritage.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1749:2022-23-chairmans-annual-report-accounts&catid=10014&Itemid=113

Secondly, the board will be recommending that subscriptions be increased by 50%, and that the preferred means of paying subscriptions will be by direct debit to GoCardless, rather than by standing order.

Proposed Subscription Increase. Subscription levels have remained the same since 1999, and possibly since the Heritage Trust was set up in 1996.

Meantime prices have increased by 120% since the year 2000. The Heritage Trust has not been immune to increases in its expenses.

1. The ordinary cost of running our website has increased by about 25% in the last year; there were also some one-off costs.
2. The cost of insurance last year was £747, a rise of £483 from the previous year. It is hoped that there will be a substantial reduction in this in due course, but at the moment we cannot say when or by how much.
3. It is looking as if we may be on the brink of solving the perennial problem of storage. At the moment we are paying £100 a year, but it would be sensible to budget for a future storage cost of £1000 a year.

The Proposed Move to Direct Debits. If subscriptions were to be increased, members would have to alter their standing orders every time that an increase took place. With a direct debit, a rise in subscriptions can be handled seamlessly – provided of course that the membership agrees to this.

GoCardless is a business which (amongst other activities) handles the payment of subscriptions by direct debit, and we know of one other local organisation who use them.

At the moment the preferred method of paying subscriptions is by standing order, and the great bulk of the membership thankfully does so. However members are not obliged to pay by standing order now, and they will not be obliged to pay by direct debit in the future. Nevertheless the board would prefer that all members started to pay their subscriptions by direct debit in the future.

The Wreck of HMS Hawke and the Helensburgh Connection. HMS Hawke was torpedoed and sunk in October 1914 near the start of the First World War off the coast of Aberdeenshire; she is believed to have been the first British warship to be sunk

during the War. The wreck was only discovered in August.

Sadly, of its crew of 594 only 70 survived the sinking of HMS Hawke, and one of the victims was the ship's surgeon, Dr James Henry Digby Watson, who was known as Digby. He had been born in England in 1890, but at the time of his death his family were living at Westwood, 17 Glasgow Street in Helensburgh.

Digby was also an excellent athlete, as well as receiving 3 caps as an English rugby international in 1914. The war broke out at the end of July that year and, newly qualified as a doctor, Digby followed in his father's footsteps and joined the Royal Navy.

His death is commemorated in various locations, including locally by a plaque in St Michael and all Angels Church and on the War Memorial in Hermitage Park.



Save The Tower! Some months ago the Tower Digital Arts Centre (formerly the St Columba Church) closed down, and the building is now up for sale. The Save the Tower group are positive that the building has a future as a community-owned cinema and arts venue, and at the moment they really need to hear **your view** on plans to buy the building and help shape a new creative hub for Helensburgh.

For this they are undertaking a Community Survey which should be completed by **30th September**. You can complete the survey online at bit.ly/TowerSurvey. Alternatively you could pick up a paper copy of the survey from the Submarine Centre in West King Street which is open daily (except Wednesdays) from 10 AM to 4 PM (Sundays 11 AM to 4 PM).



Please help to save what has proved to be an important asset for the community.

Separating Myth from Reality – John Logie Baird and Hydroelectricity. I was recently given a number of newspaper cuttings, including an undated one from an unknown paper, which told this story.

"When he was a boy, television pioneer John Logie Baird fixed up a miniature hydro-electric plant in his home, working its dynamo from a tap at the kitchen sink!"

The Baird family home at The Lodge, 121 West Argyle Street was definitely the first house in Helensburgh to have electric lighting, and it was installed by the young John Logie Baird while still at school.

I asked the Heritage Trust's Honorary President, Malcolm Baird, for his comments on the story of hydroelectricity. Malcolm believes that his father used a small oil engine to generate the electricity for the lighting.



Malcolm added that "on the logistics of hydro, a very large flow of water would have been needed – and if the unit had been built, where on earth would the water have gone? Down the drain? A hydro unit would have drawn heavily on the water supply to the house and I cannot see JLB's father agreeing to it. Perhaps the idea was considered and then rejected."

Visitors Always Welcome – and they might become Members! As you have read already, our programme of winter talks will be starting on Wednesday 25th September. As always, visitors will be very welcome – and you can play a part in this by bringing friends and relatives to the meetings. And we hope of course that they will decide to become members!

Here is a teaser for the first meeting – did Helensburgh's trains ever look like this?

