

The Seventy Fourth Annual Report

of

THE  
**HASLEMERE**  
SOCIETY



*FOR HASLEMERE  
past, present and future*

**1st July 2008 to 30th June 2009**

Registered charity number 0255287

*The Haslemere Society (registered charity number 0255287)  
is a member of the Civic Trust,  
the Federation of Sussex Amenity Societies  
and the Haslemere Initiative. It is affiliated to the  
Campaign for the Protection of Rural England and the  
Haslemere Educational Museum.*

Our membership grows steadily, and most of our two mailings a year are delivered by hand, courtesy of committee members and non-committee members, in order to cut down on postage costs. This is not an arduous task, as it is shared between many people, and can be an interesting and instructive way of getting to know what might be an otherwise unknown part of Haslemere and Hindhead - as well as including exercise and fresh air and therefore *a good thing*. Please let Diana (01428 654 681) know if you would be willing to help with deliveries - you would be given a bundle of between 4 and 15 envelopes, with plenty of notice and a few days to complete the task.

*POST FOR THE SOCIETY may be sent/delivered to  
Haslemere Educational Museum, for collection by  
committee members:*

*The Haslemere Society  
C/o Haslemere Educational Museum  
78 High Street, Haslemere  
Surrey GU27 2LA  
[www.haslemere.com/haslemeresociety](http://www.haslemere.com/haslemeresociety)*

# THE SEVENTY FOURTH ANNUAL REPORT

1st July 2008 to 30th June 2009

## **President**

ROBERT SERMAN FRICS\*

## **Chairman**

DAVID E SMITH BSc, FCA

## **Secretary**

JANE STOPFORD RUSSELL

## **Treasurer**

JOHN STARK

## **Membership Officer**

DIANA SERMAN

## **Committee**

CHRISTOPHER ASHTON-JONES

ANN FITCHETT

CHRISTOPHER HARRISON\*

DEBBIE PEET

MICHAEL DOVER

JOHN GREER\*

GORDON MUSK

NIGEL QUICK (co-opted)\*

## **Hon Auditor**

CLARE DAVID MA ACA

\*Planning Sub-committee

# ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 75th Annual General Meeting will be held on  
**Friday November 27th 2009 at 7.30** in the Haslemere Hall, Bridge Street

## AGENDA

1. Welcome by the President
2. Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of 28th November 2008
3. Report by the Chairman
4. Report by the Treasurer
5. Election of the Officers of the Committee
6. Talk by Kate Ashbrook, General Secretary of the Open Spaces Society.

Commons have existed since medieval times, but what are they and what do they mean to us today? What is a village green – and how can we make new ones?

The Open Spaces Society is the leading voluntary organisation concerned with all aspects of greens and commons. Here is your opportunity to quiz the Society's General Secretary, Kate Ashbrook at the AGM

### NAME BADGES WITH SOCIETY LOGO

Members would often like to know or be sure of other members' names and, as an improvement on the old sticky labels, those at the summer party and other events were issued with 'proper' name badges. These were well received and I hope everyone has kept theirs, as they are supposed to be permanent! Many people who have not received a badge will be at the AGM, so **if they could let me know if they will be there on 27<sup>th</sup>** November, I will make sure I bring a badge for them. (I will not be producing badges for the whole membership, as not all members come to events, so there is no need.)

Diana Serman (Tel: 01428-654681, email: r-d-serman@haslemere.com)

The subscriptions of many members who pay annually by cheque are due on 1st December and may be paid to Diana Serman at the AGM if convenient

## **THE CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 125 YEARS AND THE FUTURE**

In this our 125th anniversary year the committee organised an impressive series of events for the Society which culminate on 16th October on the occasion of the Anniversary Dinner. These events include the historic broadcast of Any Questions from the Haslemere Hall with a capacity audience. This event and the town walks were organised by our President who writes about them separately. The other major anniversary event was the staging of the exhibition at the Museum by Debbie Peet and Michael Lockwood, celebrating the history and achievements of the society over 125 years. Debbie also launched the exhibition with a highly impressive presentation and writes separately about the archive she amassed during her research.

My thanks this year to all the committee members are particularly well earned given the hard work and organisational effort involved in staging the extra events, the summer party and the outing.

As part of the exhibition, Debbie asked me to write a short piece giving my view of the future of the Society. I was pleased to do this because it compelled me to set out very clearly the purpose of the Society as I envisioned it. For those who were unable to visit the exhibition I thought it would be appropriate to reproduce it here in the annual report.

We are custodians of a place of great and diverse architectural heritage, of lovely countryside close to the town, of delightful walks and spectacular views. We have regular and high quality cultural events and benefit from lively retail and commercial activity in the town.

But what are the challenges today, and how will we respond in the future? We face population growth and further development pressure in the town. There is continual increase in usage of the railway station and the concomitant requirement for parking provision. We also have the as yet unknown impacts of the recently agreed northern boundary of the South Downs National Park running right up to the town as well as the anticipated opening of the new A3 tunnel at Hindhead.

There are many in the town who deprecate change and yet others anxious to see progress and modernisation embraced. My own view is that it is the people who live in the town who make it what it is, and it is the people of the town whom we must think of first in deciding how we should attempt to shape the future.

My vision is to make the town somewhere people want to live and work, to feel part of and to have ownership of. If we can do this then we have set the

foundation stone for the town's future well being. What must we do? It means preserving that which gives the town its character, its heritage, its beauty, its quiriness, its fascination, its liveliness. But it also means making the town comfortable to live in, adapting to the railway and the commuters, welcoming new businesses and appropriate new developments and accepting change where it gives rise to improvements to the quality of life for the community.

There will always be a tension between preserving what we have and accepting change to our familiar circumstances, but this is what the Society must strive to mediate. Sometimes change is right, sometimes it is wrong and sometimes there is a reasonable compromise. I believe that as a Society, we must be guided by what is best for the town as a community and not what is good for an individual or a landowner or a developer. Thankfully we have a planning system to promote these ideals. It does not always give us the decision we see as just but we will continue to fight for the community and the town, now and in the future, just as our predecessors have done during the last 125 years.

*David Smith*

## **ANY QUESTIONS CAME TO HASLEMERE**

Having established that it was 125 years since the Haslemere Society was established by the great Sir Robert Hunter, the committee gave a lot of thought to the ways in which to mark the event.

Luckily among our large list of Haslemerians, we have some excellent contacts and one a PR man who is also an old friend, Christopher Wigdor, had the simple but clever idea of inviting Radio 4's "Any Questions?". I made contact last October and was given the brush off. "Too near another Surrey town we are visiting-unless you can make it January" January was not only impossible for the Haslemere Hall, it was also distinctly unattractive. After a haggle, the producer agreed to come in the spring and fortuitously the hall became unexpectedly free on Friday May 1st. Our luck was in.

The arrangements were extremely detailed and the BBC publicity and ticketing requirements most exacting (including that all tickets must be free). I read the 18 pages of instructions and noted that we would be given £100 to defray our expenses. However as "AQ" (as it was to be known) had not been to the town for many years, the committee felt that the expense was justified.

On the night the hall was full, with a good natured but restless audience as it waited nearly an hour for things to start. The Editor told me that she would speak to everyone at 7.30 to explain the proceedings. I said that I planned to welcome everyone. "A warm up man, that's a first!" she exclaimed. It was agreed that I

would have 5 minutes and amazingly it was exactly that. A kindly received few words (I even had a few appreciative letters) and the evening was under way and the panel duly appeared.

Despite the preoccupation with Afghanistan and Iraq, and mercifully before the full expenses scandal broke, we had a good range of questions. Twelve were selected in the knowledge that that only eight or so would be used. The panel was varied and interesting: two MPs (the local MP is never invited onto the panel, a fact that Jeremy Hunt did not know), one scientist and one QC. After the broadcast we provided drinks and canapés in the annexe before the seven black limos spirited the production team and panel away.

It was fun and a novel experience for us all. Richard Oldham, Haslemere Hall Manager was calm, confident and helpful as ever as, having fulfilled the BBC's technical requirements, he organised our 'front of house' team of the committee to manage the capacity crowd as it streamed expectantly into the hall.

***Robert Serman***

## **THE SPRING MEETING**

On 7th April, about 130 members of the Society were privileged that Sue Saville, Regional Director of the South East Region of the National Trust, was able to entertain and inform us so delightfully about our local area. As always, the refreshments and chance to meet other members afterwards were also valuable elements of the meeting.

## **THE HASLEMERE SOCIETY - THE FIRST 125 YEARS**

The Haslemere Society was conceived in the summer of 1884 when Stewart Hodgson of Lythe Hill House and Robert Hunter, the Solicitor General were concerned about commons enclosures in the area. On December 16<sup>th</sup> 1884 a meeting was held in the Swan Inn and the Haslemere Commons Committee was formed with the aim of preserving commons and waste lands round Haslemere in their present open condition. Almost all the local residents joined, and it was reported in the Times in 1885 to be set to be a most influential body. By 1902 the Society had added footpaths to its name and was known as the Haslemere Commons and Footpath Preservation Society. The Society supported the setting up of a fund to purchase Hindhead Commons in 1905 and were involved in the handover of the Commons after their purchase in 1906 to the newly formed National Trust. The Society was active around the town until the First World War. After the war housing was urgently needed and many new homes were built within the town. In 1934 the Lythe Hill Estate was put up for sale and the Haslemere Preservation Society was reformed to set up a fund to purchase land

along Tennyson's Lane. Successful again, the land then passed to the National Trust.

By 1960, the group was called the Haslemere and District Preservation Society. In the 1970s another group, the Haslemere Environment Group, was formed which focussed on the practical action to improve the appearance of the town. Over the next few years the two groups increasingly worked together on a number of projects and in 1979 merged to form the Haslemere Society. The Society strives to maintain the spirit of its founders and current members in influencing the changing face of the town.

When the 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations were being discussed, Debbie Peet, a member of the Committee, suggested that the history of the Society could form part of these. Initial talks with the President, Robert Serman, led her to the Haslemere Museum library and a small archive of material. Further investigations had to be carried out at the Surrey History Centre where the Robert Hunter papers revealed a number of documents and articles relating to the inception of the Society as we know it today. With supplementary material from the Museum's photographic archives, the material was pulled together into a talk at the Museum on June 9<sup>th</sup> 2009 and an exhibition in the Waverley Room. Both were well received, somewhat to the surprise of Debbie who had never attempted anything like this before and was certainly never known for her skills as a historian at school. Discussions are currently being held with a view to publishing the talk on the Society's website.

*Debbie Peet*

## **THE 2009 SUMMER PARTY**

The annual summer party was held on the lawns of the Haslemere Educational Museum on Friday June 12<sup>th</sup>. The Chairman, David Smith, welcomed around 90 members of the Society along with our guests from Lynchmere and our MP Jeremy Hunt. The evening was fine and quantities of delicious canapes and wine were enjoyed while we were being entertained by the Haslemere Town Band.

*Jane Stopford Russell*

## **2009 OUTING TO LEWES AND BENTLEY**

Members and guests set off through beautiful countryside in the usual big blue bus on a September day like school children on a day out. Lewes Blue Badge Guides stimulated our senses with the town's controversial past and present, before we went our separate ways to find places for lunch, more sightseeing or,

perish the thought, shopping. We met again and were guided briefly in the coach around lower Lewes town. After that, it was a few miles drive to Bentley's extensive wildfowl wetlands, its gleaming motor museum, small Palladian style house, adventure playground and tearoom and of course the miniature steam train which took us to the ancient buildings trail in Glyndebourne woods. As one member said, 'This rather ridiculous railway journey appealed to the child in us all'. And so it did.

*Diana Serman*

## **BLUE PLAQUES SCHEME**

Since our last annual report, the society has unveiled three new plaques.

The first of these commemorated George Eliot's stay at Brookbank, in Liphook Road, in the summer of 1871. Over 30 people gathered at Brookbank on 25th October. The event was hosted by our President, Robert Serman, who welcomed the guests, who included town councillors, members of the Haslemere Society and a number of local residents. We were lucky to have the support of Michael Nyman, who gave an animated, knowledgeable and entertaining insight into George Eliot's life and her time in Shottersmill. The ceremony was rounded off by the Mayor of Haslemere, William King, who unveiled the plaque. The group enjoyed a Victorian afternoon tea with the owners Melanie and Bill Pitcairn and their three children who were dressed in Victorian costume for the occasion.

Our second plaque was unveiled in front of about 25 local people at the Hindhead Music Centre on 1<sup>st</sup> November this time commemorating William Cecil Marshall, architect and runner up in the first Wimbledon lawn tennis final. The ceremony was hosted by David Smith and the plaque was again unveiled by the Mayor, William King, before the group retired inside for an excellent spread provided by Ann Hughes-Chamberlain, the founder and principal of the Hindhead Music Centre. W.C.Marshall was a good all round athlete and played both real and lawn tennis, the latter for Cambridge against Oxford, three years running in 1870, 71 and 72. In addition he was an amateur figure skater and even wrote a book for figure skating. He lost the very first Wimbledon Lawn Tennis final in 1877 to Spencer Gore, 6-1, 6-2, 6-4, perhaps a classic case of being famous for what happened after the event, rather than at it. However Marshall was also an architect of some note (the Hindhead Music Centre was designed and built for his own use) and very active in the local community, becoming a member of Shottersmill Parish Council, chairman of the Hindhead and District Electric Light Company and a member of the Hindhead Commons Committee. He was very much part of the 19th Century intelligentsia who lived at Hindhead. Arthur Conan Doyle, Bernard Shaw and Alfred, Lord Tennyson all dined at the house. The occasion was made particularly special by the presence of Marshall's sprightly 98

year old daughter-in-law, Nadine Marshall, who had travelled from Cambridge for the event. Nadine had not previously visited the house, but had known the family well, and had been connected with the Bloomsbury group. When asked, she said that she knew Virginia Wolfe's sister better than the author herself.

Our third plaque was unveiled on 8th May at the Rats Castle to commemorate Robert Lochner. The ceremony was hosted by his daughter, Adrienne Blakey, who still lives at the house. Robert Lochner was a truly remarkable man. A trained engineer and keen amateur sailor, he volunteered immediately at the outbreak of the Second World War and was quickly assigned to research. Together with a team of fellow scientists he invented the de-gaussing girdle, a skirt fitted to the hulls of ships and energised with an electric current which countered the threat from mines, and secured the future of the North Atlantic convoys, on which Britain's war effort depended. As a reward for his efforts, he received the remarkable sum of £5000. However, it is as the inventor of the floating breakwater for the Mulberry Harbour that Lochner is best known. The big challenge was to create a breakwater to protect the concrete structures which were to be towed across the English Channel. Lochner led the group of scientists, known by the 'Boys Own' name of 'The Wheezers and Dodgers' to solve the challenge. Lying in bed at Rats Castle recovering from 'flu in the spring of 1943, Lochner realised from his holiday experiences that waves have little strength below the surface. After experiments all day with a Lilo in the pond in his garden, he had the basis of the solution and revolutionised the approach to the problem. Assembling two Mulberry harbours, which began on D Day+1, was one of the most remarkable engineering feats in history. In all one and a half tons of harbour equipment had to be brought across the Channel in an operation involving 150 Allied tugs. In Churchill's words 'This miraculous port played a most important part in the liberation of Europe'. Around 30 people, including old friends of Lochner's attended the ceremony, and the unveiling was again performed by William King in one of his last acts as Mayor. Adrienne Blakey provided a splendid tea for the guests, and an exhibition of Lochner's working drawings for the breakwaters.

*Chris Harrison*

## **2009 PLANNING SUB-COMMITTEE**

We continue to monitor applications which affect the heritage, amenity and character of Haslemere. Our comments to Waverley have been both supportive and critical.

### **Empty electrical shop, Lower Street**

Waverley BC refused permission last year for a large commercial and residential development and the appeal was dismissed by the government inspector. The

Society is very keen to see this run down area improved by development in keeping with its surroundings in the conservation area, and that commercial and retail space in the town centre is not lost to residential development.

### **Motorcycle shop and factory, Wey Hill**

An application for 43 flats and offices was refused by Waverley BC on the basis of overdevelopment. The Society is hopeful that a smaller scheme including retail and commercial space with visitor parking to avoid increasing congestion will be submitted soon. Demolition on existing buildings has begun.

### **Station car park**

A major scheme to provide additional parking and alleviate the problems of commuter parking in adjacent roads has been approved by Waverley BC. The Society has suggested that several aspects are examined during subsequent discussions to improve the visual and environmental impact of this large structure. SCC has been urged to have Controlled Parking Zone proposals ready for implementation when the car park is completed. Southwest Trains are unable to begin construction at present due to funding difficulties.

### **Wispers School redevelopment**

A planning application is being considered for a 45 bed care home with flats for assisted and independent elderly living. The Society has not raised any objection for the proposed change of use but has stated that the three storey scheme is too large and we have expressed our concern at the impact this will have locally due to increased traffic and poor access. The proposals retain the existing Victorian building, which accords with the Society's objectives.

*John Greer*

## **TREASURER'S REPORT**

The accounts are set out below. A signed copy, audited by our Honorary Auditor, Mrs Clare David, will be available to members attending the AGM. The accounts for the year show a deficit of £610 compared to a surplus of £509 for the previous year. The increase in expenditure is primarily due to events celebrating the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary, including the costs of publicising these.

*John Stark*

## THE HASLEMERE SOCIETY

Annual Statement of Account and balance sheet for the year ended  
30th June 2009

<b>2008</b>	<b>INCOME</b>	<b>2009</b>
£		£
3023	Subscriptions incl. Gift Aid	3199
4	Donations	10
319	Bank interest	376
Nil	Members' activities & events surplus	186
8	Book, photos etc revenue	0
<b>3354</b>	<b>Total Income</b>	<b>3771</b>
	<b>EXPENDITURE</b>	
509	Surplus for the year	-610
1068	Printing & stationery	1576
14	Postage & telephone	58
293	Amenities Societies	134
113	Projects e.g. planning, Cons Area etc	423
793	Meeting expenses, members & comm.	1430
370	Advertising, Charter Fair & marketing	151
190	Insurance	270
0	WBC Design Awards	150
4	Miscellaneous	190
<b>3354</b>	<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>3771</b>
	<b>BALANCE SHEET</b>	
12850	Opening balance	13359
509	Surplus	-610
13359		12749
	Total funds represented by balance at bank	
10954	Deposit account & bonds	11330
3588	Current account	1942
-1314	Sundry creditors	-1387
131	Sundry debtors/accrued income	864
<b>13359</b>		<b>12749</b>

**John Stark (Hon Treasurer)**