

THE HASLEMERE SOCIETY



Spring Meeting
Summer Party
Annual Outing
AGM

Friday 18th April
Friday 4th July
Tuesday 2nd September
Friday 28th November

Haslemere Hall
Haslemere Museum
Eton College, Beaconsfield / Bekonscot
Haslemere Hall

Spring Newsletter 2008

The Chairman writes

It is not often that one becomes the unwitting agent of good fortune for two worthy local institutions. Nevertheless, this is what happened following a series of irritatingly misguided letters in the Haslemere Herald from Mr John Gibson of Leatherhead, targeting the Society. For those members unfamiliar with this correspondence, it will suffice to relate that on a number of occasions during 2007, Mr Gibson wrote letters to the Herald attacking the stance of the Society on various matters. This culminated in a letter implying that the number of Society members had been grossly overstated.

I would not normally wish to elevate the status of such bizarre correspondence by responding in the Letters Page of The Herald. However, Mr Gibson's insinuations about membership needed to be rebutted, particularly as he offered to pay for an independent audit and to make an associated payment to the Society of up to £900. Diana Serman, our membership officer, maintains a meticulous, accurate and up-to-date record of all our members, so I knew her figures to be correct. I was not prepared for the Society to be bullied or bought by Mr Gibson so I did not accede to his request for what would have been a demeaning and entirely unnecessary second audit. However, Diana was able to provide a precise explanation for his misunderstanding, which we learned through The Herald, he eventually accepted.

Rather than have the grace to admit that our figures were correct from the beginning and adhere to the spirit of his offer to make a donation of £900 to the Society, Mr Gibson found a pretext not to do so. Instead, he staged an event which was covered by The Herald in which he made a donation of £900 to each of two local schools. I am delighted that the schools benefited from this affair. However, I am unhappy about Mr Gibson's attempt to besmirch the good name of the Society, an action for which we still have no explanation.

One spin-off from this rather public spat has been an associated increase in membership and also an increased level of interest in and attendance at our events. Members who were at the Museum for our AGM will be aware that there was standing room only for many. For this reason, **we have decided to hold both our Spring Meeting and our AGM later in the year at the Haslemere Hall, and not at the Museum.** This will ensure that there will be plenty of room for all, but please make a note and remember not to turn up at the Museum.

I am delighted to report on the successful unveiling of The Haslemere Society's first Blue Plaque on 28th December 2007. This great new initiative for the Society is explained in more detail by Chris Harrison later in this newsletter.

Members may be aware of the sad state of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's house 'Undershaw' in Hindhead. Purchased in 2002 by a property developer, the house has fallen into a ruinous state compounded by theft and vandalism. Waverley has exercised its statutory duty to protect this grade II listed building by erecting a roof and sheeting to prevent the further ingress of water. A sub-group of your committee is currently engaged in trying to formulate a possible rescue plan for this important piece of our local heritage. I will keep members informed of progress.

David Smith

