

Chris then asked us if we'd like to visit the observatory. It reminded me very much of the Lockyer Observatory in Devon. Patrick is no longer able to get to it but amazingly he still appears on "The Sky at Night". Every month the BBC come down to Selsey and Patrick talks about current aspects. His one complaint is that the programme appears late at night, so I determined to record the next one.

Ptolemy, one of Patrick's beloved cats, had joined us. Sadly, Jeannie, his favourite, had been put down the previous week, and Patrick said, "I am heartbroken." On the wall there is an old wooden signboard with the words 'Commanding Officer', taken, I imagine, from a disused World War II building. It refers to Jeannie in the adjoining photo. In fact, at the front door there is a plaque saying that this house is ruled by a cat, or words to that effect.

An hour and a half had slipped by (punctuated charmingly by Mr Cuckoo!) and it was time for Patrick's light lunch, which he takes in some style in a very large dining room. We shook hands and I felt moved to kiss his cheek as with a favourite uncle, saying, "It's been a joy." He responded, "You must stay for lunch next time." What a gentleman!

Adrienne and I drove away on a high. The next day all I could think of was that extraordinary afternoon, and I have to admit I shed a tear of respect for his amazing intellect, his life's achievements and his place in the nation's heart. Here's to your century, Patrick! Cheers!

Open Doors - Heritage Open Days 2012

I can't recommend too strongly the amazing variety of places open to the public nationwide every September. In Brighton and Hove the weekend is organised by Nick Tyson at the Regency Town House, and is known as Open Doors. The dates this year are Thursday 6th to Sunday 9th September inclusive, so make a note now as the most popular places, such as the BBC studios, get booked up quickly!

The Heritage Open Days are organised by a partnership of the Heritage Alliance, the National Trust and Civic Voice (of which our Society is a member). The properties should be of architectural, cultural, historic or social interest. Admission is free and sometimes there are guided tours or special activities. In the past I've joined in tours of Roedean, Brighton College, talks at Marlborough House, walks with Sue Berry and John Cooper, a tumulus dig on the cliffs at Peacehaven, a visit to Neil England's workshop at Portslade where he and his team make award-winning plaster-work for stately homes and the like - a real treasure trove of places to visit. Can't wait!

Elaine Evans

Blue Plaques

With the 200th anniversary of Charles Dickens' birth falling in February 2012, and several BBC productions on TV, it has been the perfect time to reinstate his Blue Plaque. It had originally been placed on the Bedford Hotel, that beautiful Georgian building where Dickens had stayed on a number of occasions and had written "Dombey & Son" there. However, it was lost when the hotel was destroyed in a controversial fire in 1964.

It was an honour to have Ian Dickens, his great great grandson, to give a most interesting speech and perform the unveiling. At the reception afterwards I had the chance of talking to him, as I was very struck by his allusion to the fact that Dickens would walk for miles in the streets of London or the country, unable to sleep. Ian explained that the characters in his stories were real people to him. As the tales were published in serial form, Dickens was always having to wrestle with what would happen to his characters, even facing up to their deaths.

Ian also revealed that Dickens had had a dreadful childhood when his father had been committed to a debtors' prison, a fact that Dickens kept secret. My ancestor, John Gibbons, had been sent to Devon County Prison for Debtors at the same time. It was unbelievably harsh. Prisoners had to pay for their own food, so stories of catching rats and mice to eat are not apocryphal. There is a drawing "A Debtor Catching Mice for his Sustenance" dated 1691. I recently learnt that they sometimes lowered their shoes by their laces out of the window, and kind townfolk would place money in them. Hence the expression "living on a shoestring". Even when the debt was paid off, sometimes by means of a public appeal (in the "Exeter Flying Post" in my ancestor's case), the creditor had the final word and would not allow the prisoner to be released - incredibly vindictive.

The classical blue plaque looks somewhat incongruous on the modern façade of the Holiday Inn, but its restoration to the public gaze is long overdue, and makes a happy pairing with the plaque installed last year in Hove for one of his illustrators, Hablot Knight Browne (Phiz). Dickens' work has never been out of print - I believe that says it all.

Elaine Evans

Could you Volunteer with us?

We have a number of volunteering opportunities in Hove Civic Society, and the more help we have, the more we can do. Could you spare a few hours to help? It could be helping out at an event or getting involved in one of our projects like restoring Hove's Victorian street tree heritage. If you want to get more involved, please contact us.

Newsletter - May 2012



CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

Dear Members,

Just after Easter I visited Copenhagen and one of the finest sculpture museums anywhere - Glyptoteket, founded by the art collector and Carlsberg Brewery magnate Carl Jacobsen. On the way we stumbled over a number of road works, which were the result of a major expansion of the Copenhagen district heating system. This is said to be the largest in the world and ensures that all available heat sources in the region are efficiently utilised. The heat is produced by four CHP plants, three waste incinerators and 40 back-up boiler plants. It is claimed that this system reduces CO2 emissions by a third compared to heat from traditional boilers only. Here is yet another city that is systematically preparing for the future.

Your committee has been arguing for a while now that Hove needs to take a number of bold steps to meet the challenges of the future. District heating, using waste heat from Shoreham power station and a network of other boilers is one such step. We have raised these issues with the Council through commenting on local plans and submitting papers, and also with our MP, Mike Weatherley, who has agreed to ask questions in parliament. All the relevant documents are available on our website, along with links to recent media interest received for the winter bathing activities of John Kapp, demonstrating the energy wasted at Shoreham Power station. If you are interested in these issues, our Renewables Infrastructure Group meets on the second Wednesday of every month from 6.30-8.30pm at 16 Nizells Avenue, and all members are welcome.

Regarding the Rampion Wind farm, we have now submitted our comments, which basically support the proposal, but question the way it is planned to land the electricity. We believe that existing electricity substations at Shoreham and Newhaven are sufficient, rather than laying a cable across the Downs. This is a highly technical matter of course, and E.on have agreed to meet us to discuss the issue.

We continue to receive considerable interest and publicity for our 'Hove plinth' idea. Our sculpture group has worked hard during the winter on this exciting concept, which I hope

will be the beginning of a substantial increase of public art in Hove for all our enjoyment.

Sadly our previous Treasurer, Louis Grabsky, has resigned, primarily because of the expanding workload of the committee. We owe Louis many thanks for his work over the last three years. I am pleased to report that Andrew Haicalis has agreed to take over as Honorable Treasurer. Andrew is finance director for a large international company and I am sure will be able to deal with our not (yet) so complicated finances. Since the AGM we have also seconded two members to the Committee: Ed Carr, who will deal with fundraising and related publicity matters; and Roshan Aucklah, who will take on membership functions from Sue Ellerton.

Our committee is getting younger and it shows in the ideas that are developing. I am particularly intrigued by Sarah Kirk-Browne's work on better communication with members, including creating a page for us on Facebook - please drop by and "Like" us at <http://www.facebook.com/hovecivicsociety>. I also look forward to being able to update members of events between newsletters, via e-mail.

New members are joining us, but we could do better. Can I suggest that members tell their friends and colleagues what we are trying to do, and attempt to recruit at least one more member each during this year? Enclosed you will find a couple of copies of our new leaflet - please pass them on to people who you think might be interested in our work.

We are now beginning to prepare the winter programme for next year, and there is plenty of scope for members' suggestions. We have had a very good and well-attended 2012 season, and we believe that there is room for an even bigger programme for next year. Please do contact us with your ideas.

Finally, enclosed is a brochure which shows the various Hove Arts venues during the May festival to help you plan your festival visits. Enjoy!

With best wishes

Helmut Lusser



If you want to join the society, please see our membership application form on our website or contact Sue Ellerton, 20 Vanbrugh Court, 9-11 Eaton Gardens, Hove BN3 3TN. Tel: 01273 746 745.

City Planning

There has been a noticeable reduction in applications for building developments in Hove and Portslade in 2012, probably due to a combination of lack of available space and financial restrictions. Lying between the South Downs and the sea means that there are few sites available for new buildings, so there is an emphasis on small extensions and conversions. We only make comments on proposals for six or more additional units of accommodation, and take into consideration several perspectives: architectural integrity with the surrounding area; environmental sustainability in terms of energy generation and conservation; living standards provided by the proposed accommodation; and public transport links. All details are published weekly on our website.

Since our last newsletter the PortZed application for Aldrington Basin has been refused and we await the revised proposal that will be on a smaller scale and without the wind turbines. We plan to keep abreast with proposals for the Shoreham harbour end of Kingsway as developers respond to the housing needs within the City Plan. We are working with other conservation societies to try to achieve some continuity and architectural integrity along the length of Kingsway. Our objections to the latest proposal for the site of the former Sackville Hotel supported the Council in its rejection of the plans. The proposals for the adjacent property are still under consideration by the Council planning team.

We have given our support to the proposal for 71 new flats at the junction of the Old Shoreham Road and Goldstone Crescent because we think that the design will support sustainable living in all respects and, despite being a new block, achieves continuity with the traditional housing in neighbouring streets. Landscaping will avoid a sharp contrast with the beauty of Hove Park and enhance spaces between flats; energy will be conserved to a high level and some will also be generated. The housing will provide a mixture of private and shared ownership, as well as housing association rentals. Facilities for sharing cars and parking bicycles will fit in well with transport policy.

We have also given our support for the plans to develop the Royal Sussex County Hospital. The restrictions imposed by the historical development of a hospital on this site, combined

with technological and other requirements in modern health care, have presented the authorities with many challenges. We consider that the design provides for buildings of fine appearance without compromising medical facilities. We have added our voice to the need for a more integrated transport plan, especially to increase the use of public transport and avoid further congestion on the approach roads. There are strong features for energy conservation within the new hospital buildings, but we would like to see an increase in energy generation on site and connection to a district heating system. Shortage of space at ground level has resulted in a helipad on top of a tower, with ingenious engineering infrastructure. This is very different to a new hospital that I visited this month, on the edge of a city, with low buildings and helipad, all extending over a wide area, and with a new road network. I think our planners and developers have done very well in the circumstances!

Clare Tikly

Public Sculpture Group

Hove Civic Society's proposal to install a specially commissioned 'Hove Plinth' on the King's Esplanade is gaining momentum. Initial discussions with Council officers and members have met with very positive reactions. Our proposal, inspired by the successful fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square, is now taking shape. We want to create the same excitement and interest for sculpture here in Hove, to inspire and delight residents and visitors alike. The Hove seafront promenade and its adjoining Lawns have been the focus of seaside leisure and recreation since the Victorian era. We think this is an ideal place to display artwork that relates to the vistas of sea, sky and leisure and to connect with the historic heritage of sculpture and monuments already in place.

There are lots of challenges ahead, not least in terms of achieving permissions, funding, design and so on. Our next step is to go through the planning application process with the Council. Let's hope for success so that the Society can play its part in a vibrant culture of the arts, which brings the very best of local and international talent to the city every year.

For more information about this initiative, or if you wish to donate funds, please contact Karin Janzon, email: karin.janzon1@gmail.com Tel: 07917 888997

Message from Mike Weatherley MP

One of my first tasks as Member of Parliament for Hove was to seek funding and ideas for a series of signs to welcome residents and visitors to our wonderful town. Those who know their local history well are already aware of the boundary stones on the Brighton border, but most have no idea of their existence.

I am keen to introduce at least one very visible sign, hopefully more, to celebrate the fact that Hove is an individual and unique town in its own right.

Perhaps one should be placed next to the boundary stone at the foot of Boundary Passage? Perhaps on the seafront? It's hard to know presently what form such signs would take but I envisage a competition and a public vote to decide.

Obtaining funding, and various permissions from the Council, is proving to be tricky. I will persevere though and hope to report back soon with some good news. If you have any ideas, please e-mail me on mike.weatherley.mp@parliament.uk

Elaine Evans meets . . . Sir Patrick Moore

A year ago I visited the Norman Lockyear Observatory at Sidmouth, Devon. It was an open afternoon and we were given demonstrations of how the three telescopes worked, and then an excellent night sky presentation in the planetarium: very impressive.

That started an unexpected chain of events, which led to my receiving a letter from Sir Patrick Moore which ended, "Hove and Selsey are quite close, if you are ever my way do look in to see me."

What an opportunity! Sir Patrick must be one of the most famous people in Britain – just mention "The Sky at Night" to anyone – so I was absolutely delighted. Patrick is now 88 and not in very robust health, so a date was chosen and a friend drove me to his house, a lovely thatched residence with an extensive garden and – yes – an observatory.

We were led into his study by Chris, a family friend, and there was the great man sitting by his desk. No monocle, but unmistakably Sir Patrick. I have to admit I was in awe, but he has such a lovely personality that Adrienne and I felt at ease right away. Patrick is confined to a wheelchair and arthritis has curtailed the use of his hands, but mentally he's as bright as a button, with the most acute hearing. (He told me he can hear the squeak of a bat, and I don't think he was joking.)

His study is a very spacious room, with desk, manual typewriter, computer and a cuckoo clock that he was given at age 6, but what caught my attention were many many framed certificates and citations, hanging from the beams. There must have been twenty or thirty from various universities and institutions awarding him honorary doctorates and other honours – Fellow of the Royal Society, just too many to mention. On the mantelpiece was a BAFTA, in a glass case hung various decorations, OBE, CBE.

I was looking at the case and Chris was explaining these honours when Patrick said: "You see the row of miniature medals" and there was indeed a small decoration an inch or so long, "they came out of a Christmas cracker." It was so unexpected, so comical, it typifies Patrick's great personality.

I don't know much about astronomy but I told him of an incident in Canada last June. My brother-in-law Julian was driving me in the country, it was a cloudless sunny day, when in the sky ahead there were pastel tints, pink, green, yellow, so unusual that I asked him to stop the car to let me have a better view, then they quickly disappeared. Patrick said that they were "sundogs", rather like Northern Lights but in the sunshine. He added that they don't often happen, so I felt very glad to have experienced them.

I also mentioned a lecture I'd attended at Sussex University last summer, "Astronomy in the daytime". I must say at



the time the title sounded odd, but it transpired that it was about viewing the sun. It is extremely dangerous to attempt to look directly at the sun because it is quite literally blinding but our speaker had a special kind of telescope (Coronado solar) which allows the viewer to see the sun indirectly. The skies cleared a little, so we were able to have a go. The sun is an amazing blood red colour, glowing like red hot coals. Chris then warned us that it is possible to harm the eyes even using this instrument if the filters are damaged in any way.

I wasn't sure how long we could stay without tiring Patrick, but the

conversation flowed and I plucked up the courage to mention UFOs, asking if they could be of secret military provenance. Patrick does not believe that there is other life in our solar system. There are so many galaxies in the universe that who knows? Chris interjected that scientists had been sending signals into space for a hundred years now, signals which would get weaker with the distance. To attempt to come to terms with the immeasurable vastness of the universe is just over-whelming. I also mentioned corn circles, another phenomenon that had interested my husband. Undoubtedly some hoaxers are involved, but both Patrick and Chris have an open mind about crop circles.

Patrick mentioned that he is the only man to have met the first man on the moon (Neil Armstrong), the first man in space (Yuri Gagarin) and the first man to fly (Orville Wright). I replied that surely he'd written a book about his extraordinary life? Chris responded by withdrawing from the many books lining the study a volume entitled "80 – not out" – Patrick's autobiography and an allusion to his love for cricket. He'd played for Selsey Cricket Club until his seventies, as a spin bowler.

Patrick had met Orville Wright in Canada, where he received his training to fly as a navigator in RAF Bomber Command. Tragically, his fiancée, a nurse, was killed when a bomb hit her ambulance. Patrick never married.

During our visit Patrick's mobile rang, which he picked up and answered. I was surprised to be told that he's in the phone book. I said that left him open to all sorts of unwelcome calls, especially unsolicited sales calls. Patrick replied, "I just say 'Yes', put the phone down and carry on with what I was doing. When I pick up the phone later, it's dead. They're paying for the call." That made me think. My phone is registered with the Telephone Preference Service, but I still get pestered with unwelcome calls, which I dispatch as quickly as possible. However, the very next day I received an unsolicited call and employed Patrick's technique. Later, I replaced the receiver. Simple!