

Note: the minutes of the 2017 AGM will appear here in due course.

**MINUTES of the 71st ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
Held in Hythe Town Hall on Tuesday, 10th May, 2016 at 7:00 pm.**

The Civic Society Chairman, Christopher Melchers, welcomed those present (about 39). The Chairman commented that as well as dealing with the usual formalities of an AGM, he would try to tell the members what the committee have been doing on their behalf during the last year and give them a chance to tell us on the committee what they would like us to do in the coming year.

The Chairman then presented one of the Society's Civic Awards in recognition of members of the community who have made a major contribution to Hythe. This year's award, a certificate that was skilfully executed by Frances Lyddiard, was proudly presented for outstanding achievement to Ashley Tanton and Andy McGuire. They and their team of dedicated supporters raised £27,500 to purchase the now famous "Triangle" in St. Leonards Road. English Heritage had recognised this site to be of historic significance, given its former use as a "sheepfold" by farmers bringing them to Hythe market. This effectively blocked the development idea.

The Chairman then announced the Society's decision to install one the "blue plaques" to commemorate the lives of important former residents. In this case the person concerned is Ronald Ward, an extremely distinguished architect working mainly in post-war London where he designed a number of now iconic buildings to replace those destroyed by enemy action. The Martello Tower in West Parade became Mr. Ward's home where he lived until 1973. The current owner, Mrs Ann Park, has kindly agreed to display the plaque which is to be installed with a brief ceremony later in the year.

The Chairman then introduced a talk by Freddie Gick of Civic Voice who told the audience about some of the work of this organisation. Civic Voice was formed in 2010 to take over and expand the role of the Civic Trust when that went into liquidation. Many Civic Societies, HCS included, are members and it is very proactive in representing us all in the corridors of power.

THE AGM

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

The minutes of the previous AGM were approved by a show of hands and signed by the Chairman.

MATTERS ARISING:

The Chairman asked if there were any matters not covered by the agenda that members would like to raise. There were none.

Reports for the Year to 31st March 2016:

TREASURER'S REPORT 2015/2016 - A. Joyce:

The treasurer stated that the balance sheet shows that our funds continue to be in a reasonably healthy state, with an excess of income over expenditure of £406.35 for the year. He explained the significant differences between this and last year's accounts.

Income:

General donations:

The largest donation of £213 was from our President, Doug Amans, for the purchase of John Holman's memorial plaque which was installed at a ceremony in July last year together with the official naming of the area on the south side of the Canal opposite Sainsbury's 'Holman's Field'.

In addition we received a donation from the Venetian Fete Committee of £150.

HCS continues to receive a generous donation of £100 from one of our members, with other smaller donations from other Members. Also received are 'Walks' donations.

Interest:

During the year the Virgin Charity Account decided to reduce its interest rate from 2% to 1%. This continued to represent a better than average rate for non-domestic accounts, although HCS has very recently been notified of a further reduction and will be seeking better alternatives.

Gift Aid:

Again there has been a slight reduction as a number of contributing members have died or moved away from the area. HCS would encourage members who are tax payers, and who have not yet completed the declaration, to do so.

Publications:

The increase is due mainly to the sales of *Echoes from the Sky* which was reprinted in 2014 with the assistance of Richard Scarth, the author, who added a chapter. So far HCS has sold 220 copies, including purchasers worldwide. HCS are receiving periodic orders of 20 books from the Light Railway. In July 2015 some 60 books were sold at the open day of the Listed Sound Mirrors at Denge organised by the Romney Marsh Countryside Project. The management of the Mirrors has recently been taken over by the RSPB, who have ordered a number of copies for reference purposes. HCS are in negotiations with them to sell the books again at the open day they have organised in July.

Expenditure:

Society Subscriptions:

Civic Voice & CPRE subscriptions for 2014/2015 were in fact paid in the previous year.

The Society joined BALH, British Association for Local History, following the resurrection of the Local History Group, but following a review by the Group it was decided that it did not reflect HCS's needs so the subscription was cancelled.

Talks Fees: continue to vary year in year out.

Rent / Hall Hire: The slight increase was due to the hire of the school hall for the Princes Parade Forum and also the hire of the Town Hall for the Festival week talk.

Society Donations:

A slight increase as the HCS Executive agreed that a donation of £150 be made to the Hythe Triangle Community Group to assist in the funding of the purchase of the Triangle, which is a Listed Monument, and is somewhat unique as an historic animal pound.

In addition it was agreed with Richard Scarth that for every copy of *Echoes from the Sky* sold HCS would donate £1 to the Romney Marsh Countryside Project, the first donation of £107 was made in May last. This in future will go to the RSPB.

General Purpose Fund:

Website: This is the annual website hosting fee.

Presentations: The bulk of the cost being for the preparation of the award scrolls presented to Cllr. John Schoner and Col. Mike Umbers at the 2015 AGM.

Reserve Accounts:

Both Accounts have been set up for specific purposes. HCS now seek occasional funding from HTC, SDC and KCC for these projects in addition to donations given by local businesses.

The Treasurer thanked David Carter who agreed to examine the Accounts, and who has given him valuable advice. The treasurer also thanked the Newsletter distributors for their efforts to collect the subscriptions early.

MEMBERSHIP - A. Joyce: This currently stands at 843, down by 3 from last year.

TREES – A. Joyce:

The planted hedgerows are continuing to thrive with little natural damage or vandalism. HCS has assisted in providing advice & organising the planting of 2 memorial trees, one in Oaklands and the other in Green Lane.

CYCLING – A. Joyce:

The funding for the first stage of improving the Folkestone to Sandgate section of the coastal Cinque Ports cycleway has been approved and includes the safety aspects. Although "respect and share" signs have been placed at various points along the seawall between Folkestone and Dymchurch, Mr Joyce has been approached by councillors concerning complaints about irresponsible cyclists along Princes Parade, and is in the process of designing a new series of notices reminding cyclists to take care etc.

ST LEONARDS CHURCHYARD – A. Joyce:

The joint Society / PCC team, as well as other volunteers, have continued throughout year to carry out the clearance work, including further tree work.

The hedgerow planted in November 2012 continues to thrive.

The work / maintenance is ongoing, and needs people to join the work force. Work days are advised well in advance.

EATON LANDS. – A. Joyce:

The regeneration of the wildflower meadow programme continues, with further seeds planted last November by Messrs. Joyce and Jupp (a wildlife expert). It is hoped to see a wider range of wildflowers. There has been a noticeable increase in the number of marble white butterflies during the year.

Further discussions between HCS, Transition Hythe and HTC re the Community Orchard are continuing to take place and this, together with a bee project, will be incorporated into the HTC Ward plan.

ARCHIVES – A. Joyce:

HCS are in the process of overhauling the Society archives and cataloguing our library of books and research material. The intention is to list the catalogued items on the History Group website, so that all Society members can access the material. HCS have started listing the material, but it will take some time for it to be completed.

PLANNING MATTERS 2015-16. - C. Davis:

In 2015/16, again, the membership has been at the forefront of the Society's concerns on planning issues in Hythe. Members were thanked for their contributions on the replacement of the Hythe swimming pool and proposals by Shepway District Council to develop its land holding at Princes Parade. HCS Committee will be asking for views again later this year when more details are expected from Shepway DC.

Planning Policies:

All planning authorities must have up to date policies. The last full Local Plan was in 2006 with a review and update in autumn 2013. At the same time a "Core Strategy" was adopted as the start of a brand new Local Plan. This Core Strategy set the broad overall planning strategy for Shepway with no major developments identified for Hythe unlike Folkestone. The next stage has been work towards more detailed policies by which planning applications, for example, are assessed. This work will formally designate specific areas (shown on a map) for development of various types. The first public consultation on this detailed work took place early in 2015 - the Places and Policies Local Plan "Issues and Options" Consultation. Members were invited to a specific presentation on this consultation document and, in particular, what the consultation said about Princes Parade. Based on membership views, HCS Committee responded to the policy options for Princes Parade. Such was the interest in Hythe on that topic that the Society was one of some 90 responses on that topic alone!

All comments received by Shepway DC have been considered and appropriate changes are being finalised. There will be another round of consultation by Shepway DC on its "preferred options" for 8 weeks in July

and August this year. Your Committee will ask Shepway DC to give a presentation to members during that consultation period.

Replacing Hythe Swimming Pool:

In the last 12 months your Committee's policy has been that the pool should be replaced on its present site and if that proves impossible then a site at Nickolls Quarry is the second choice. Your Committee is totally opposed to development on Princes Parade. This must remain as open space and with public access which is currently denied.

Shepway DC has continually argued that a pool on its own will not be financially viable and therefore proposes a leisure centre incorporating the replacement Hythe swimming pool. The design chosen will not fit on the current site. Indeed the sale of the current site for housing will provide about 50% of the construction cost of the new leisure centre and pool.

Reluctantly your Committee now accepts that the South Road site cannot be the site of the new leisure centre and pool. Therefore it is backing Nickolls Quarry as the appropriate site as supported by Sports England.

In the last 3 months Shepway DC has recently rejected an offer from Hythe TC to use a corner of Hythe Green for the new site. The detailed reasoning for Shepway's decision is not in the public domain despite a formal request from your Committee.

In the last month Shepway DC has agreed to pursue the development of all its land holding at Princes Parade for a larger site for the Hythe and Saltwood Sailing Club, a new road adjacent to the canal, some 150 housing units, the leisure centre and pool and some public open space. If approved by Shepway DC, your Committee fears this will lead to planning applications for housing on the golf course. Hythe seafront will not be the same!

This is why HCS Committee believes the forthcoming public consultation on the Local Plan is so important to Hythe.

Planning Applications:

HCS Committee continues to monitor ALL planning applications in Hythe. The Society does not make many comments to Shepway DC as it is largely concerned about major and significant proposals and not minor changes to existing buildings – except in the Conservation Areas. For example - one notable success in the last 12 months has been the rejection of a petrol filling station at Sainsbury's in Military Road.

A Change in the Law?

Finally, the planning saga at Princes Parade has led your Committee to be concerned about planning procedures whereby a district council, as landowner, applies to itself, as planning authority, for planning consent on its land. It would be a more transparent process if another planning authority, or Government, made the decision. This may not alter the decision but the public would, I believe, feel happier.

Once again HCS Committee wants your views on these policy issues over the next 12 months and will be arranging meetings for members on the Local Plan and on the proposed development of Princes Parade. HCS will continue to value members' views on the future of Hythe.

THE NEWSLETTER and HCS WEBSITE - J. Carter (JC):

Newsletter: Since taking over the editorship of the newsletter, the past year has been a steep learning curve. It has been hugely encouraging to receive some very interesting and well informed articles from HCS members, some of which have generated such interest that JC has been able to include follow-up articles often giving us a fascinating insight into our town and its residents. As more of the research from the History Group is becoming available it has also been a pleasure to work with them on their articles. HCS is always looking for new contributions, whether they are articles, poems, or even photographs that members feel would be of interest to our members.

Website: In 2015 HCS website had just under 3,500 unique visitors, in statistical 'web speak'. The majority of our visitors are from the UK but it was surprising in that in 2015 HCS had, amongst others, 134 visitors from Brazil and 48 from Russia! HCS website also generates on average 18 enquiries to the Society every month, with topics ranging from requests from television production companies looking for 'local experts', comments and feedback on newsletter articles, requests for information from people looking to trace possible family connections to Hythe and even an enquiry from the National Music Museum who are trying to find the elusive Romney Trumpet. This figure doesn't include requests for our publications, particularly Richard Scarth's *Echoes from the Sky* which are received directly by Alan Joyce. Web technology is fast

moving and HCS are determined to keep their site as user friendly and welcoming as possible and we are working hard to bring about changes, hopefully to improve our visitors' experience.

GUIDED WALKS - S. Chesters:

A reasonable year for guided walks with 123 individual walkers, plus eight children, over the season. This was a year without the enhancement afforded by Hythe Festival Week.

Party numbers were down on last year – 67 compared to 178 last year – but there seems to be no reason for it. Parties included visits from Mersham Historical Society, Knole U3A Science Group and Kent Family History Society, Canterbury Branch. The total number amounted to 190.

Our group of guides continued to do a wonderful job in bringing our town to life and our thanks go to all of them. Sue Cox has decided to retire and a very special thank you goes to her for her enduring service.

HYTHE in BLOOM – S. Chesters:

Last summer was our first without the support of Shepway District Council. We found Longacre Nursery a suitable supplier for the railing planters in Prospect Road and, just as important, someone to water them.

They did a magnificent job. SDC did help, however, by granting us a £500 award from the High Street Innovation Fund and we also received £2,000 from Sainsbury's S106 monies. These cash injections were a great help and we remain solvent for the moment.

The team of volunteer planters and waterers again did a wonderful job – and a big thank you to them - however, the number of volunteers is falling. If you can help we should be most grateful for your assistance. The job is not onerous, although you do need a car. Full details of the task will be provided if you would like to join us.

Thanks, too, go to Hythe Town Council, Gopak, Charlier Construction and Lawrence and Co Estate Agents and another special thank you to Waitrose who, once again, allowed us to participate in their Green Disc scheme. Thank you, also, to The Hythe Brasserie and Southern Spice Restaurant for their contributions in kind.

TOWN CENTRE PROJECTS - S. Chesters:

One year on, the work has indeed begun and has almost been completed on the re-furbishment of the part of Red Lion Square known as Mackeson Square. We think the project has been really worthwhile and has made a huge difference to the look of and ambience in the square which now presents a pleasant vista and welcoming entrance to the High Street.

Within the next few months we plan to install an information board on the site, highlighting the importance of the Mackeson Brewery to Hythe.

The signage in Hythe, directing visitors to the new Tourist Information Centre at the Romney, Hythe & Dymchurch railway station in Hythe: this is still ongoing.

The map board project, that was completed last year, has been put forward for consideration for the Civic Voice Design Award and we have been invited to attend the presentation of prizes at Portcullis House in London on 24th May.

TALKS - V. Mercer:

It has been another successful season of talks with attendances maintaining a steady average of about 65. Arrangements for next season's programme are proceeding well.

The Chairman would particularly like to thank Roger Neaves, a former mayor of Winchelsea, for his talk about the Queen's Jubilee celebrations at the Autumn Lunch.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT – C. MELCHERS:

The Chairman stated that he had the benefit of a fantastic team of really committed executives and a host of other volunteers so, apart from helping to manage the distribution of the Newsletter, his personal contribution has been very limited.

The Chairman did have the pleasure of representing HCS at our Patron, the Lord Warden's reception at Walmer Castle and also at last years' superb Venetian Fete

The Chairman mentioned the good cooperation between HCS and the PROTECT PRINCES PARADE group and we will continue to work with them to try to prevent the loss of this land from our rapidly shrinking list of potential public assets.

The Chairman thanked all our other members for their continuing support and encouragement, to note the unstinting work of your committee and our many volunteers and assure you that, if re-elected, we shall continue to do our best for Hythe. Thank-you.

The adoption of a revised constitution:

A revised constitution had been circulated to all members. After the need to revise the constitution had been explained, adoption of the revised constitution was proposed by M. O’Sullivan and seconded by the Chairman. The proposal was approved by a show of hands.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS FOR THE FORTHCOMING YEAR:

The Chairman announced the elections and stood aside. The President, Doug Amans, then took the chair.

CHAIRMAN: The President announced that **Christopher Melchers** had been proposed and seconded by the Committee. There were no other nominations and he was willing to serve. By a show of hands, **Christopher Melchers** was duly elected.

VICE CHAIRMAN, TREASURER AND SECRETARY: The Chairman announced that **Crispin Davies, Alan Joyce and Mary Hunter** respectively had been proposed by himself and seconded by the Executive Committee. There had been no other nominations for these offices and all were willing to serve. By a show of hands they were duly elected.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE: The Chairman thanked Tim Lawrence who has stood down and welcomed **Betty Black and Michael Tubman** to the Committee. The remainder of the previous committee, **Joyce Carter, Sally Chesters, Crispin Davies, Ian Hill, John Keeffe, Valerie Mercer, Anne Petrie and Jane Twist** were all willing to serve and had been proposed by the Chairman and seconded by Mary Hunter. There had been no other nominations so, by a show of hands, they were all duly elected.

The Chairman pointed out that there were 2 vacancies on the Executive Committee and he appealed to any member in the audience or otherwise to volunteer for what can be a very interesting role.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS:

There was no specific other business, just brief discussions about various topics. In bringing the meeting to a close the Chairman encouraged members to think about new ways in which the work of the Society could be advanced, ideas for talks and articles in the Newsletter and assuring them that suggestions would always be welcome.

The Chairman thanked those attending and closed the meeting.

Signed.....

Date.....

Christopher Melchers, Chairman