

Newsletter

April 2020

A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

It was only a few months ago that I wrote in our newsletter of the challenges which faced Stuart House in 2020 and that I was optimistic they would be met. Since then so much has happened and is happening to present us with all manner of different challenges in our daily lives. Although at this moment of writing the COVID-19 crisis dominates our almost every move I remain optimistic. Why? Essentially because those who support Stuart House know how much time, energy and effort has been given to ensuring that the House has contributed fully to the community as an historical building and arts and heritage centre. The friends and supporters of today will not forget the contribution of the friends and supporters of yesterday (yes, I know some are both today and yesterday!). I firmly believe we can and will move on when this present ogre has left us. The challenge may be greater and the ways in which we contribute to the well-being of Stuart House may be different but I and my fellow trustees together with the unfaltering support of friends and supporters will ensure the future of the House.

As is reflected elsewhere in the newsletter please stay safe and well and I promise you that when life returns more or less to normality we shall celebrate in the House in style!

Bob Hollingdale



The magnolia in full bloom – beautiful, even if we cannot pop in and see it at the moment.

Do read Sue's News on pp.2 & 3 for information about the on-going life and hopes of the House.

Please pass on my regrets to any non-electronic Friend you're in contact with should it not be possible to get the copies of this Newsletter posted to those Friends who do not have the electronic version.



*Leaflet Sponsored by Coodes
Honorary Solicitors to Stuart House Trust*



You may have seen this planning notice posted on 18th March on the railings outside the House. A clear sliding door would make the House so much warmer for those who visit it and work in it, and reduce the wasted heat too. (ed.)

SUE'S NEWS *(which she wrote on 17th March, ed.)*

None of us could ever have envisaged being in the situation in which we now find ourselves. It was with considerable sadness and regret that the trustees made the decision to close Stuart House for the foreseeable future. No-one knows how long this pandemic is going to last and we all hope that our Friends and all their families stay safe.

I am able to give some glad tidings. We were told towards the end of last month (but too late for the newsletter) that Waitrose would include us in their green token scheme for March. We had asked to be included some months ago and were told then that they had accepted our request and that at some point we would reach the front of the queue. That time has come! This means we will get a share of their community fund which will be proportionate to the level of green counters in our plastic container as compared to the other two which will support other charities. We had to tell Waitrose what the money would be spent on and as we do not know how much we will get (a few hundred pounds maybe?) have said 'a much-needed fully adjustable and comfortable chair for reception'. The quality of the chair depends on the money awarded although we may have to top up if necessary.

Some more glad tidings: Malcolm had told us that we needed a new shed. Cornwall Council had been approached and I received confirmation that we will be awarded a total of £723 from the 'Community Chest' of both Councillor Sally Hawken and Councillor Nick Craker. Our heartfelt thanks to them. That leaves a shortfall of £585 but all is not yet lost as there is a possibility that further funds will be available and I am exploring that at the moment. In the meantime the Council has been told that irrespective of whether we can obtain grants for the total cost of the shed, the project will go ahead and we will fund the shortfall ourselves. We cannot take steps to purchase the shed until the amount of any further future funding is known as funds cannot be obtained from any grant source retrospectively.

We have told Liskeard in Bloom that we will support them again this year and are sponsoring one of their plant containers.

As you can see – we are being positive notwithstanding the gloomy outlook.

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My plea in last month's newsletter for donations did not fall upon deaf ears. Our grateful thanks to those who have responded (and they know who they are!) with donations over and above the minimum annual amount of £10. We also have a benefactor (not a Friend) who is transferring £100 to our Bank account for each month that we are closed.

That brings me to our current financial position and this part of my article is written in conjunction with our Treasurer Tony Britton.

At this point in time we have £14,380 in the Bank. Our monthly overheads are currently running at a little over £2,000. We now face a bleak time ahead in which we find ourselves having to eat into that healthy balance to pay overheads.

Many of you come into our coffee shop and spend money – would you consider putting that money aside and making a donation to Stuart House once we are functioning again? Whatever anyone is able to give will help sustain us in the future. We cannot give up and it will be very much 'business as usual' just as soon as possible. We cannot allow all the hard work and dedication of past sponsors and supporters to simply fall by the wayside. We will do our bit and raise as much as we can – but do need your financial help even more than we have done in the past. This is about survival. Ignoring monthly overheads, there is the on-going maintenance/repair of the House which is always an unknown quantity. Tony has included a figure of £400 per month in his annual budget to cover this expenditure which is on top of the figure of just over £2,000 referred to above.

Difficult times ahead – but together we can sustain the on-going protection of this very valuable historic and community asset.

The trustees will not be holding their regular monthly meetings but we all communicate with each other by electronic means.

Take care everyone.

Sue Glencross, Hon. Sec.

In the first part of March, events at Stuart House continued as usual



Eileen Crouch ran another two Celtic Knot-work workshops, partly in preparation for the 'Spotlight on Celtic Art' exhibition planned for the Summer. Here, café volunteer Peter and musician Maggie (half of the duo Ilow Splann, with Carlton Crouch whose Stuart House concert planned for 19th April has had to be cancelled) try out different skills.



An exhibition on the work of Emily Hobhouse, (1860-1926). She was born in St Ives, outside Liskeard, and spoke at the infamously disrupted meeting at the Public Hall in 1900 in the context of the Boer War. This exhibition, already seen throughout the country and in South Africa, was previously at Liskeard Museum from November, and Stuart House was pleased to continue it.

April's Thoughts from our Garden's Overseer

Although the Stuart House garden is temporarily out of bounds because of the wretched virus, I can assure everyone that everything there is completely normal for this time of year. The magnolia is in full flower; the roses are sprouting; the hellebores (red and white sorts) are especially floriferous this year; the *Acanthus mollis* (Bear's breeches) have made glorious glossy growth and have completely taken over the space left vacant by the demise of the Kerrier. *Pentaglottis sempervirens* (Alkanet), with its attractive forget-me-knot type flowers but with leaves bristling with tiny needles and which has impossible-to-pull-out parsnip type roots has revealed itself all



over the place despite serious efforts these last few years to prevent its seeding; and of course *Cardamine hirsuta* (Hairy bittercress), forever makes really determined attempts to colonise the gravel paths. It flowers for most of the year, has a life-cycle of about six weeks, and even a measly plant can throw off many hundreds of seeds, bigger plants thousands.



These "weeds" were well-known to medieval gardeners, many of which were welcomed at this time of year because they filled "the hungry gap" between the end of winter crops and the start of summer ones. Dandelions, ox tongues, sow thistles, chickweed - all of which we try to eradicate today - are also among those most eager to get going in the Spring, and were all used in the cooking pot.

There has been much concern in recent years about the steep decline in insect populations worldwide, caused by climate change, modern farming practices, forest loss, pesticide use, and expanding urban settlements, with an annual global loss of 2.5%. This is very serious, and, we are told, could cause the collapse of vitally important interdependent eco-systems. There is also a recognition of the importance of the plants we call weeds in helping to safeguard insect species. The Weald and Downland Museum, near Chichester, says that there was no bare soil in a medieval garden. Every inch was covered with plants: the green mulch kept soil moist and provided insect larvae with protection during winter. Their Spring flowers offered nectar for early pollinators.

Visitors to Stuart House sometimes comment on the non-grass plants in the lawn. Well, I don't have a problem with this, and maybe this year if the garden has to be left to become a little wild and weedy and the lawn cannot be mowed, it will be very interesting to see what wildflowers suddenly spring up and flower. Gardening is always an experiment.



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For instance, one of the Duchess of Cornwall roses in the front flower bed has sent forth a long trailing stem. Is this a sudden “sport” which will produce a wonderful rambler, or just a shoot from the rootstock onto which the bush was grafted? To cut or to leave and see what happens? Mmm.

If there comes a point when the lawn grass is completely overwhelmed by other plants, we could: either leave it uncut (just cut once in the autumn) and enjoy the wildness, knowing that the wild life would approve; or (for one year maybe) dig it all up and try out the crops that medieval gardeners might have grown. For folk of those times, life was largely about survival. They knew full well how variable the seasons could be, but the kinds of foods eaten depended on wealth and status. We read that poorer people had simple diets consisting bread, porridge, stews, maybe chicken, a hare or a bird they could catch (usually pigeon), and fish from local water courses. Vegetables were grown, many of the sorts we have today: turnips, parsnips, carrots, cabbages, onions, garlic, and skirrit - a perennial crop with white sweet roots that look rather like clusters of thin dahlia tubers. (This is native to China and appeared in Britain courtesy of the Romans.) No doubt all these were all grown in the much larger garden that once belonged to Stuart House. Plus those hungry gap weeds, of course. (Potatoes and runner beans came later, discoveries from South America.)

Richer people liked richer foods – all sorts of meat - and looked down on vegetables, which were apparently associated with what the poor eked from the grubby soil. And yet, in their diets, the poorer were richer because they obtained vitamins. Diseases such as scurvy (lack of Vitamin C) and rickets (Vitamin D deficiency) were more common among the wealthy. Well, maybe one of the lessons of the current pandemic is that we’ll learn that communities will need to become far more self-sufficient in food supplies. Skirrit sounds interesting!

Just to say thank you to Eileen Crouch for providing the garden with a beautiful potted (some twenty years old) *Viburnum tinus* plant. This plant flowers every month which has an “r”, so from September to April. We’ll repot it and keep it in the developing plant area alongside the new “old” wall. *Malcolm Mort*

The beautiful photographs are again Malcolm’s: the garden view on p.1, the Hellebore, Grape Hyacinths and Viburnum tinis on p.4 and the pots by the porch on this page. ed.

HIDDEN NATURE

‘Liskeard Unlocked’ on 11-13th September (all being well)

The garden of Stuart House lends itself wonderfully to the national theme for this year’s Heritage Open Days, and a small exhibition about the history of the garden, together with an exhibition of photographs of hidden nature around Liskeard for you to try and identify, are planned.

Diary of Events

April 2020



In the current situation, none of the events planned for April are listed. Last month's Newsletter contained a list of all hoped for events for the rest of 2020.

A message from our House Manager, Sioux

Calling all Artists and crafters!

Although Stuart House is closed at present, we are still working towards the Summer events and onwards.

Why not use any enforced isolation period to work on projects for:-

The Spotlight on Celtic Art exhibition and sale. 17-29 August

Arts, Crafts and Gift Shop - August.

Craft Fair - 28th September- 10th October

Arts, Crafts and Gift Shop - November and December

Christmas Fayre 23rd November - 19th December

Although we have the above dates set in the diary, the timescale is, obviously, moveable, depending on the current situation. Please be assured that once we are through the other side of this uncertain time, we will be "Business as usual" and will look forward to seeing you back in the House.

This is an ideal time to work on any projects you have put to one side for a rainy day. I for one am looking forward to using the skills of Eileen's Celtic Art workshops. I also have a pile of cross stitch projects that keep calling to me, and knitting well....

Please take care everyone, and I look forward to seeing you all, when we come through the other side.

Hon. Sec. Sue G. has suggested that this might be an opportunity for Friends to write something of their memories of times and occasions at Stuart House. Do please send any contributions to the editor, who can use them in future Newsletters, or maybe even a supplement.

Articles, information, notices and photographs for the Stuart House Newsletter to the editor, please (who must reserve the right to edit as necessary), before 25th of the month for inclusion in the next newsletter. Send to Sioux in the Office or email to rachelpbennett59@gmail.com