

Newsletter

June 2020

The House in Lockdown

Trustee Dave Howard writes:

As a sometime Receptionist in Stuart House, it is not unusual for me to be in the house alone. Now, while the house is shut down because of Covid19, I am coming in regularly to check the security. But I find one big difference –there is no noise, no activity going on around.

No peoples voices, few passers-by in the street outside, just the odd car cruising by.

No activity in Wetherspoons, no chatter from their beer garden, no crash and clang of beer kegs on the path.

No squawking from seagulls. No comforting tic-toc from the unwound grandfather clock....

Roughly weekly at the moment I arrange with the gardeners, Malcolm and Jeff, for them to come in and they spend a few hours keeping the garden up and together. It is looking quite magnificent at the moment –a shame that nobody gets to see it. Hurrah for Malcolm's newsletter articles.



The two fountains in the garden have not been switched on for some time since damage to the underground electricity cables supplying them meant they continually tripped the circuit breakers.

Our electrician, Neil, came in and replaced these cables with heavy duty armour-shielded ones. The new cables run always underground; for a short distance up against the walls of the house, but mostly buried under the gravel paths. There has been very little disturbance to the garden itself.

During my long periods in the house while this maintenance is going on, I have been studying the Emily Hobhouse exhibition in the Gallery. Emily, our local world-class heroine, is best known for her social and political work in South Africa during the Boer War. This touring exhibition was put together by Leeds-Beckett University with information from Emily's own diaries, the Anglo-Boer War museum and other sources. It features her political and humanitarian work in Germany during and after the First World War, and her rehabilitation efforts in South Africa.

(ed's. note: as the April Newsletter said, the Hobhouse exhibition found a temporary home in Stuart House after several months in the Museum, and its future home in Liskeard is under discussion).

A Brave New World?

from our Chairman, Bob Hollingdale

The silent, invisible and deadly enemy which has swept across our country and the rest of the world is seemingly, social distancing provided, on the wane. In just a few months we have become accustomed to a way of life we probably had never anticipated – shut down quickly followed by lock down; social distancing has become the norm for the majority and shopping is carried out with a degree of trepidation or by going online. We admire the carers and key workers, particularly those in “the front line”, who are saving lives as well as coping with the stress of losing so many. Our values are changing; we appreciate much more readily things which hitherto we may have taken for granted, we keep a watchful eye on those who are vulnerable or in need. We have had wonderful examples of acts of support and care in a community which is bonded by a common threat. Separation from family and friends has been difficult but partly overcome by Zoom, Whatsapp, Skype and so forth.

And so to Stuart House; in last December’s newsletter I wrote about challenge and optimism; in April’s newsletter I again wrote about challenge and optimism and now in this issue I am saying that even with the challenges we face we must be optimistic that we can succeed. Please don’t think me wrong! Even with the economic downturn, the reality of a deep recession and the long wait before the House will be fully open we, as trustees, friends and supporters, can ensure as individuals and as a group that Stuart House as an Arts and Heritage centre will continue to flourish.

Covid19 will be overcome and it will be a brave new world for us all at Stuart House – not the brave new world of Aldous Huxley’s dystopian novel but rather the utopian vision of a wonderful hidden garden, art and heritage exhibitions par excellence, craft displays and sales of the highest quality, the best cup of tea in town (and possibly the cheapest!) and as warm a welcome as you would want. That will be our brave new world!

(Postscript: I have warned the editor this item may be seen as being rather OTT – apologies if it is!) *(make up your own minds! ed.)*

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from our House Manager Sioux, on furlough ...

Over the last month I have kept the production line of knitted shrugs up of an evening. Idle hands and all that!



I decided to “sort through” my books and categorise them. Oops! - That could have been a mistake: I had not realised quite how many craft books there were, and then came across all these relating to the Celts. So my attention for June will be focused on the mythology, art, craft and illuminations of the Celtic peoples.



I hope you are all keeping safe and look forward seeing you again when we come out of this strange time.

(Sioux is also making cards, as well as textiles, linked with the planned ‘Spotlight on Celtic Art’ exhibition, originally planned for August, and to be re-scheduled. Maybe other crafters are also working towards this? ed.)

June's Thoughts from our Garden's Overseer

The garden has continued its spectacular display through late Spring and into summer, constantly full of colour and profoundly peaceful. (Jeff and I tend it every Tuesday.) Seeing a garden just once a week is rather like those books where you flick the pages to create moving images. The tulips and bluebells suddenly came and went, as did the flowering racemes of the Wisteria. Clematis Montana "Elizabeth" against the library wall was submerged in 4-petalled slightly scented pink flowers all of which have quickly disappeared: it is now hopelessly entwined with the summer flowering jasmine as both try to claim the same space. Also in bloom for only a day or two was a single large white ragged (though striking)



flower of the tulip tree near the shed. This was donated to the garden two seasons ago and judging from the growth it has



made is greatly liking its position in that shaded area. Overhead, thousands of small blue blooms of the climbing solanum are riotously clambering over every available support. The over-wintered Calendula grown from seed sown last August have burst into flower: the cultivar Princess is an

excellent sort. Returning to vigorous growth and filling the lawn borders at the moment are the hardy geraniums, soon to be decked with their pink-purple flowers, always attractive to insects.



Since the middle of May, the main centres of attraction are the two large *Libertia grandiflora* plants, also in the lawn beds near the fountain. Grown from seed two years ago, I never expected they'd grow so large. It was intended to move and divide them last winter, but alas, this was a job never done. Never mind, the white arching blooms are stately and stunning, and ideally suited to a garden such as ours.

Also white - and

highly scented - are the blooms of the "Genuine Tudor Stock", a large pot of which was brought in by Robert Jupp in the autumn.



The roses have made a start, too. Over the porch roof rambler *Rosa lutea* is flowering, and a single white flower of a climbing rose, never seen before, has appeared against the wall near the Tulip tree. In the main rose bed, Birthday Girl has begun to bloom - this is always one of the first to get going, and one of the last to finish



After a gap of two years, the fountains are in action again: Neil Tucker has replaced the cables to both. In the wall pond, two irises have for the first time sent up pale yellow blooms which look just right in the dappled shade under the twisted willow tree. Nearby in the lawn bed is a small group of blue irises planted last year which



appear well settled. These grow from bulbs not rhizomes, and so are *not* the common “Bearded iris”, *Iris germanica*, (commonly called Flag iris). Indeed, I am not sure what sort they are because the description on the packet merely stated: Summer Flowering Iris. I have a fond spot for irises because as a (very young) child I was intrigued by the mass of tangled surface roots (rhizomes) that filled a narrow bed alongside the west wall of the cottage where we lived, and which would erupt into a mass of dazzling light blue flowers in early summer. The subject of irises is indeed complex. There are some 300 species which are divided into many sub-species and hybrids. Breeders have created some 14,000 cultivars of the Bearded irises alone. Well, to keep things simpler, let’s just say that most irises are found throughout northern temperate regions of the world, that for the most part they like dry sunny places and thrive on neglect (though it’s probably a good idea to thin out surface rhizomes occasionally). But then of course there are also the sorts that like to grow in mud and water. Irises are named after the Greek Goddess Iris who was a messenger of the gods and the personification of the rainbow. Egyptians, too, marvelled at the appearance and structure of the Iris flower and embellished the walls of their palaces with their images. Louise VII also took a delight in this flower, and in 1147 adopted the purple iris as his emblem. This was known as the Fleur de Louis, or, as we say, the Fleur-de-lis. (Very coincidentally, whilst writing this, I was distracted by a crossword clue: Flower taken from the Fair Isles (4). Answer at the end!)

In these lockdown times, cracks and crannies everywhere are being colonised by a huge variety of plants. During May, feathery seeds of the goat willow tree (*Salix caprea*) floated over the town, like snow. This is an excellent pioneer plant which made a spirited effort to claim the old garage site next door when it lay abandoned. One of the trees rescued before the builders moved in grows in a pot against our new brick wall. Willow tree bark contains salicylic acid, a precursor to aspirin, and people of cultures throughout the ages are reported to have been aware of its healing powers. Salicylic acid is now known to be used by many plants as a defence against invading pathogens. In a recent article in *The Observer*, plant scientist James Wong advised that as part of the hardening off process of tender indoor-raised plants, it’s a good idea to spray them with aspirin (a 300 mg soluble tablet in 1 litre of water). This improves the resilience of plants by causing them to react as if under threat and toughens up the leaves and stems. Brushing one’s fingers over the surface of seedlings also causes stronger, stockier growth, and commercial growers use robots and fans to do this. I wonder if this was also known to ancient cultures!

Malcolm Mort

(Crossword answer is **Iris**, **FaIR ISles**).

STUART HOUSE MEMORIES

While there is a shortage of news of coming events, Friends have been invited to contribute their memories of the House. More are welcome!



Many visitors to Stuart House in Spring will have memories of the wonderful Magnolia tree, seen from the garden or through a window. Once in the garden of the House, it is now actually on Wetherspoons' land, but is a dominant feature over our garden – this year just coming into flower as lockdown hit.

This is one of Jane Wood's iPad paintings. One of the editor's best exhibition-memories is of Jane's March 2015 'A New Way of Drawing' exhibition and the demonstrations she gave of how the drawings are built up.

Two (among many!) memories from Tony Wood, who, with Jane, was one of the key people in working to realise a dream of Stuart House being saved for Liskeard, and becoming its Arts & Heritage Centre.

1985 The Hog Roast

As a fund raiser we decided to do a hog roast in 'historic' style, i.e. turning on a spit in the garden. We soon found out that you have to do this over a period of many hours, so we cut corners and the butcher roasted a large part of it in his ovens and we just had a piece roasting in the garden itself. The garden, at that stage, was mostly gravel and an old concrete tennis court half broken up. The vegetables were all 'period' as were the Nell Gwynn oranges. It was a very jolly occasion and gave us good publicity in the local press.

There are some photos of it taken from the top floor and it is fun but sad to pick out people we remember who are no longer with us.

1990 The Charter's 750th anniversary.

The house was still in its shabby state after 10 years of being empty and neglected, so it was difficult to know how best to play our part in the celebrations but we felt that we should contribute as we aimed to be a Heritage centre. In the end, after enormous decorating efforts by Geoff Wigham, our chairman, we were able to share a Flower Festival with the Parish church and the Methodist church. The displays were all co-ordinated to a theme and so people passed from one venue to another. It meant that the public could come into the house and see what we were proposing and trying to do, as we had just completed the purchase after a long struggle.



From trustee Dave Howard

Ten years ago in the June 2010 issue of this Newsletter we announced:

"The old Taylor's Garage site is now being tidied up by the owners. The ruined canopy has now been removed, and all the demolition debris is being taken away. Our outlook from that side of the house is greatly improved and the rooms are lighter".

A memory in verse from Eileen Crouch

OLYMPIC TORCH RELAY
Day 1, 19th May 2012

On the day the Olympic Torch came through
not only was Town dressed in red white and blue
but Cornwall's sports colours of black and gold
flew overhead pleasing young and old

Liskeard's Mayor opened events for the day
the Silver Band got the parade underway
all through the day music played sweet and loud
a great party atmosphere enlivened the crowd

Stuart House Art Centre opened all day
where refreshments were served so the people could stay
to visit the house with its craft sale downstairs
art in the gallery and heritage upstairs

Reflections and a memory from Sue Glencross, Hon. Sec.

It is a time for nostalgia, isn't it? At the time of print we do not know how the future is going to be, but at least can enjoy visiting the past.

I spent some time in my garage – the relevance being that all my archived Stuart House papers (including all the Minutes) are kept in a damp-proof cupboard in the garage. Sitting on the concrete floor surrounded by the latest delivery of logs, reading through my files, I was reminded of the vast projects which have been undertaken by Stuart House in the past.

Traditionally, each year we would mount an exhibition for National Science week and on many occasions Eileen and I joined force with ideas to make each annual exhibition more varied than the last. One such exhibition was 'et SET era'. The reproduced flier (*apologies for the quality – technical issues. ed.*) breaks down those three words by way of explanation as to what we sought to achieve. Nineteen years ago! Who could ever have thought at that time that we would be in the middle of a world pandemic, uncertain as to what was going to happen next.

We used the whole House for the exhibition. The Hall (now reception) had a display of motorcycles and memorabilia. An exhibition of gardening and garden equipment was located in the Surgery. The Max Lock Gallery held the collection of vintage medical equipment which had been loaned by Rosedean Surgery (currently in the Museum) and office technology and technology in the home. Liskeard School and Community College were exhibiting in the Jane Room and there were miscellaneous exhibits in the Trussed Room. The list of contributors and sponsors was magnificent and the exhibition was very well supported by all members of the community.



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Those of you who have presented exhibitions in the past will know the vast amount of work which has to be undertaken to see the projects through to fruition: starting with a series of 'begging' letters asking for the support of local businesses in providing items for the exhibition, with a sneaky request for a donation if they do not have anything to exhibit. With so many valuable items in the House, each room had to be fully stewarded at all times. A stewarding list was placed on the wall in the coffee room and we soon had all the slots filled.

Each exhibitor had to complete a slip where they had to define what was being exhibited and the opportunity was given to name the exhibitor or for the words 'loaned anonymously' to appear on the explanatory card. I can see that Eileen was exhibiting a 1960 portable typewriter, and a 1980s portable word processor – both of which have now been superseded by her Smartphone! I have notes of some amusing telephone conversations – one with a gentleman who was happy to exhibit his BMW motor cycle but needed to check first of all that it would fit through the front door and would be able to be manoeuvred into the Hall! I am pleased to say its grand entrance was successful! The Douglas Motor Cycle Club exhibited. A plea to Kivells produced some vintage auction posters, a donation, and the loan of exhibition boards. MacKays Stores loaned some mannequins. These are just examples of the support we received.

As with all exhibitions, there was to be an 'open evening' which was held on 21st March at 6:30. Members and several guests were invited and we had to be strict to make sure that the RSVP part of the invitation was returned to us as we were providing a buffet and did not want to over or under cater. What that meant in real terms was a phone-around to those who had not returned their slip! Things do not change do they?

It was important to ensure advance publicity and after-event reports were circulated to local Press and Media. The amount of Press coverage ensured an excellent attendance – well worth the effort!

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The not-so-often noticed south wall of the House – can you identify which room each of the windows serves? The passage way is currently quieter – and cleaner – than it is when our neighbours are open.

Diary of Events

June 2020



In the current situation, none of the events planned for June are listed.



Poppies in the front garden, trying to escape through the railings. This, and all the other garden and flower photographs, are by Malcolm and taken during May. Below are the rose 'Birthday Girl', calendula, and wisteria, all referred to on pp.3-4



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.

Please don't send copy to Stuart House at the moment, but email to rachelpbennett59@gmail.com