

Newsletter

May 2021

Hon. Sec. Sue Glencross on the Trustees' necessary decision not to plan to re-open yet.

The Trustees met in the garden of Stuart House on 12th April. The meeting lasted for 1½ hours after which the elements took their toll.

After careful consideration it has been decided not to make any immediate plans in relation to re-opening of the House/Garden. The reasoning for this decision can be summarised as follows:

- (i) the Government's plans for staged easing of lockdown are not (and cannot be) set down in tablets of stone
- (ii) the effect of immediate easing to include opening shops and pubs (albeit in a limited way) cannot yet be determined
- (iii) the possibility of a Covid variant cannot be ruled out
- (iv) although the majority have had their first vaccination, only a minority have had their second and
- (v) were the House/Garden to be opened at this point in time, a great deal of 'policing' would be necessary to ensure social distancing and to control the number of visitors.

The onus of re-opening a Grade II* listed building, operating as an Arts & Heritage Centre whilst in a global pandemic cannot be underestimated. We have waited this long – we want everyone (ourselves included!) to remain safe. We will continue to closely monitor the situation and hope it will not be too long before we can announce a grand opening event for Friends with a fanfare.

In the meantime the House is undergoing a thorough clean and, where necessary, redecoration. We hope the supply problem with the new automatic doors will soon be resolved.

Tribute once again is paid to Sioux, Gaby, Rachel, Tim, Malcolm and Jeff for everything they continue to do to keep the wheels of the House and Garden moving. It is interesting to see that during the lockdown period every person involved in the House has been capable of maintaining their own individual role whilst at the same time networking with others and working as a team. True Stuart House spirit!



An eagle (well, pigeon) eye is being kept on the House and Garden – see p.5.

On behalf of all Friends, the editor thanks Trustees Bob, Sue, Tony, John and Dave for everything that they too do to 'keep the wheels of the House and Garden moving'. It is a very difficult time for them.

Stuart House is not alone among the Museums and Heritage Centres of SE Cornwall in feeling that it just cannot think of re-opening yet. See p. 3.



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CHANGES IN THE COVED ROOM

The Coved Room, on the top floor of Stuart House, accessed through the Trussed Room, has seen several changes of use since the Trust took on the House, when the Room was in a sorry state.

For many years, our **Artist in Residence**, Linda Maynard,

has been based in the room, running much appreciated art classes from there and using it as a studio for her own work.

The '**Students of the Coved Room**' have mounted several exhibitions in the Max Lock Gallery, and Linda's own work has

been on exhibition too. However, the past year of enforced House closure has seen Linda's decision to move out. She will be much missed, and we thank her for all that she has brought to the House – her students, her work, her ideas, exhibitions, friendship, support, help with keeping an eye on things, and more. She will be much missed, and we wish her well and look forward to keeping in touch with her and her work.

We hope now to welcome *The Coved Room Stitchery*

The new incumbent, Gaby Johns, known to many of us at Stuart House, writes

When we finally emerge from under this pandemic, after the party's over, the hangover receded, when we are happy to mingle again there will be a new sewing studio opening in the Coved Room, right at the top of Stuart House.



I am largely self-taught with years of experience of sewing and dressmaking and am also interested in many areas of crafting. I achieved a B.T.E.C. National Diploma in Craft Design at Plymouth College of Art and a Higher College Diploma in Theatre Studies at Northbrook Technical College, Worthing.



After working in theatre costume and props departments, including the Royal College of Music, London, and a summer working for American rug designer Meg Little in Rhode Island, I set up my first sewing studio in my home in West Sussex. After moving to Cornwall, 20+ years ago, I opened a dressmaking and alteration business from a purpose-built studio in the garden. Having outgrown the space, or to be more accurate, having been forced to move as my fabric stash has somehow, inexplicably, expanded over the years, I needed somewhere local but central to continue working.



I am offering tuition, guidance and help with all your sewing projects. Initially I will be on hand all day Mondays and Fridays, 9.30am-3.30pm and Wednesday afternoons 12.30-3.30pm when term-time finishes. Please feel free to drop in for a chat and to discuss your on-going projects.

2-hour tuition slots are £10 or £8 per slot if booked in a block of 5 or more. Please email me gabyjohns67@gmail.com to book or if you have any questions or queries. Alternatively, you can leave a message with Sioux in reception.

I look forward to seeing you soon! Gaby



Hon. Sec. Sue Glencross' 'Memories from the Minutes'.

10th September 1997 meeting continued ... The Trust had received a bequest of £200 from Mrs Beatrice Palmer and Maudie Crouch was due to celebrate her 90th birthday on 20th September at the House and had requested donations be made to the Trust in lieu of presents. In each case it was agreed that the sums be directed to a specific item. The District Council had paid a grant of £2500 to the Trust and – wait for it – an 'Instant Gold Savings Account' had been opened which paid a higher rate of interest than previously. What we would not all give for that luxury nowadays! It was suggested that if pressures of use in the House became sufficient then a caretaker/cleaner might be necessary. Eileen had undertaken further planning for the Celtic Art Exhibition and she would be assisted by Tula Brown. She calculated that it might cost £1000 to £1500 to stage the exhibition properly and raised ideas of sponsorship and a membership appeal.

In the Minutes of the 8th October meeting it was recorded that Eileen felt the question of a cleaner for the House would be essential rather than just 'thought about'. It was therefore resolved that a cleaner would be employed as soon as it was clear that funds would permit and if necessary rents should be raised. An overdraft facility had been arranged with the Bank to accommodate pre-payment of bills pending reimbursement by HLF. Tony Wood would obtain quotations for a four-poster bed for the King's Room.

It was particularly interesting to note in the November Minutes the paragraph concerning remedial measures to paintwork proving to be unsuitable in the Dining Room and adjacent front room. I quote verbatim from those Minutes 'The question of wall decoration appeared to require a complete review following the failures and Mr Pearce would take this issue up with Dulux and inform the architect'. Those problems have prevailed throughout the years and have never been solved. Phyllis continued with her proposals for next year including – visits to Hole Farm, Cornwall Record Office, and the Astronomy facility at Plymouth Aquarium. Talks by Mrs Chanter (a Krypton Factor Winner) on her time working as a pharmacist in Nepal and Peru and by others on a Baltic States and Finland visit were also suggested.

I am wondering whether any Friend would like to volunteer to organize 'in House' talks and events in future? Do any Friends feel able to give a talk or to make any recommendations?

Eileen had written to the District Council and Chamber of Commerce seeking support for the Celtic Exhibition banners.

Building work had temporarily stopped on site by December due to the contractor having withdrawn due to late payment and inclement weather. Work had commenced on the granite mullioned windows. Instructions had been given for the installation of the central heating. The subject of cleaning contracts was being investigated. Once again the question of heat loss was under discussion and it was suggested that a purpose made self-closing door might be installed into the existing door frame (containing the Georgian fanlight) at the foot of the stairs if that became a problem. Rents would be raised. The large Edwardian fire surround relocated on the second floor was out of scale.

to be continued



The four-poster bed is now in the Tudor Room on the top floor

May's Thoughts from our Garden's Overseer

What a dry Spring it has been so far. No proverbial April showers apart from a few meagre splashes that hardly wet the surface. Many days of constant cold Arctic air, too, and night frosts. It's just the sort of weather that causes daffodils to quickly finish flowering: the petals shrivel in the low humidity and drying soil. A local store that reopened after the recent long Covid-19 lockdown still had some dwarf daffodils for sale, hopeful of a good home, so I bought twenty. We are advised to plant these in early Autumn, but I can report that they're doing fine, sending forth eager shoots that will probably open in May.

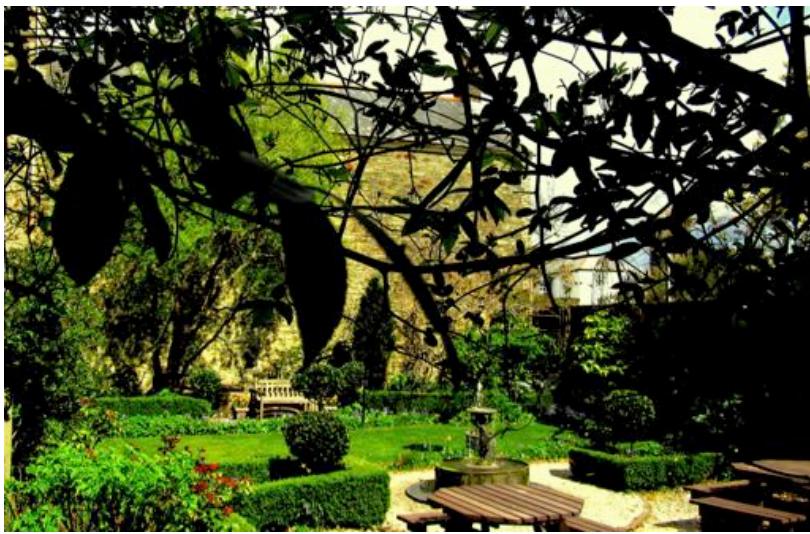
Primroses – the wild naturalised sort – have, by contrast, performed exceptionally well this year, magnificently clothing hedgerows and grassy banks. In the Stuart House garden, too, they appear to have multiplied in the lawn borders, strongly holding their own against the forceful bluebells. Primrose flowers have many interesting features. Petal size and shape can vary greatly, and their colours range from almost white to yellow, so who can say what "true primrose" is? Pinkish blooms often appear naturally, but whoever saw garish blue ones, the ghastly (in my opinion) colour that breeders have introduced in gaudy bedding mixtures. Don't dead-head primroses: let them seed naturally. You can collect the seeds from the swollen seed heads at the end of June / beginning of July and scatter them immediately on a tray of very gritty compost kept in cool shade. They will germinate quickly. Grow them on, transfer to a shady nursery bed, and plant them out in the autumn. They're very tough.



On either side of the Stuart House wall pond I've grown yellow wallflowers (*Erysimum*) in pots: they show up boldly from a distance and are deliciously scented. These came into bloom during a February warm spell and are still going strong. Wallflowers are plants of poor soils of course, especially liking the lime mortar in wall cracks. Traditionally they have been grown as biennials: the seed is sown in May / June in the garden, and the resulting plants bedded out in the autumn. I prefer to sow into a tray, pricking out say three seedlings into modules, then transferring these to a

nursery bed in August. This method gives good plants and spacings. Wallflowers will live for a further two or three years if they're happy: just give them a little trim over in the summer to help prevent them getting straggly, keeping some stems from the best plants for seed saving. Like so much of modern life, the wallflower world has become a little more complicated in recent times. Breeders have hybridised species (as usual, there are many) to form cultivars that don't set seed and so can flower for much longer. To propagate them it is necessary to take cuttings in the summer. A cultivar called "Bowles's Mauve" is held in high esteem. However as I have said before, dark colours are not very noticeable when cast into the shade by strong sunshine. To be triggered into flowering, wallflowers need a period of winter gloominess first. Those crafty breeders have recently been busy creating more F1 hybrid types which, they say, don't need this and will start flowering in the autumn. I have tried these, and yes, they can produce a few blooms in October, but these quickly disappear, the plants not flowering again until Springtime. There are now biennial seed strains that are shorter, around 8-10" high: I do like these as they fit well with primroses, violas and forget-me-nots in containers.





Fellow gardener Jeff is keen on a neat, well-manicured lawn. This time last year about a third of the Stuart House lawn had become very mossy and weedy. In the shed was an old cardboard box full of ferrous sulphate that promised to sort these problems. Alas, things didn't go quite to plan because the partly decayed box suddenly and unexpectedly crumpled

into bits, inappropriately pouring its contents onto the grass. Feverish brushing only made matters worse, and a large scorched brown patch was created. Later in the summer, fresh "very fast growing" seed was cast over the bare patches. New growth appeared quickly and lushly, far more vigorous in fact than the existing grass. Recently, Jeff has thoroughly fork-spiked the lawn, raked out piles of moss, and given it a good watering with lawn food. It's all looking good now!

I have do have a soft spot for moss though - and all those other little non-flowering photosynthesising plants that most people never seem to notice. These include lowly liverworts that slither around in damp places, some of which look like miniature lettuces; and algae that show such great determination to green over road signs. Mosses and liverworts are grouped together as Bryophytes in the plant kingdom: there are thousands of different species which pre-date flowering plants, and which have survived a range of drastic climate changes events. Mosses are found everywhere, even on otherwise uninhabitable rocky mountain ledges, their tiny spores being distributed world-wide by winds. Instead of roots, they have small hair-like structures called rhizoids that anchor the plants, and which draw in moisture and minerals. They survive huge temperature ranges and tolerate drought by becoming shrivelled and dormant. We should be very thankful for them: they are colonisers of barren and disturbed sites, adding humus to enable other plants to grow, and creating new ecosystems and microhabitats for a multitude of insects and tiny creeping creatures. They are reliant on moisture for reproduction because the male cells need to move in a film of water to reach the female cells for fertilisation (just as happens in the first stage of fern reproduction). They can stabilise soils and prevent water run-off. Sphagnum moss is exceptionally good at this, decaying into spongy carpets of peat bogs, an important store of carbon. Therefore, inconvenient as it might be, we should all take steps to bid goodbye to peat-based potting habits.

At Stuart House garden, moss frequently grows on the stones under the tables. However, because of the long dry Spring, most of it has already become desiccated. So I have included a photo of soft furry Mouse-tail moss growing on a step outside my kitchen door at home which I regularly water. It's quite beautiful!



Malcolm Mort

a p.s. from Malcolm: When I walked into Stuart House garden on 20th April I was surprised to see an untidy collection of twigs from the twisted willow tree on the coir door mat in the rear porch. I thought that they must have blown there during the week, but later I found out the real reason. Under the porch roof tiles, on the wooden platform above the door in the corner, there is a similar untidy collection of these twigs piled into a nest by a pair of woodpigeons (proper woodpigeons, not the common town type). The twigs on the mat had obviously fallen off the edge. One pigeon was sitting there, and whilst I watched its mate came back and they swapped over nesting duties. Well! They seemed totally unfazed by Jeff and me in the garden. (photo. p. 1)

Diary of Events

May 2021



In the current situation, none of the events once planned for May 2021 are listed.

Greetings from Sioux, the House-Manager.

Sioux says that



..... she's continuing to make craft items for the 'Celtic Celebration' scheduled in the House from August 9th to 21st. There's a reminder from her and organiser Eileen that they would love to hear from anyone interested in contributing, or in finding out more.



..... some Friends of Stuart House have already volunteered items for an 'Our Wedding' exhibition, which was explained in the April Newsletter. More contributions are very welcome – please contact Sioux by email or letter, or by phone to her in the House on Tuesdays or Thursdays.

Another local snippet from Brian Oldham, President of the Liskeard Old Cornwall Society who have their base in the Trecarrel Room on the top floor of Stuart House. Although there is some cataloguing of the collections going on, it cannot currently be open to the public on Wednesdays as was usual.



The Grade II listed Prince of Wales Engine House above Minions village was opened by the then Prince and Princess of Wales, the present Queen's grandparents in June 1909. Huge crowds gathered to meet them on Bodmin Moor and in Liskeard the following day Mayor Huddy presented them with a Silver Casket containing an elaborate Scroll outside Webb's Hotel. The building contractor for the Engine House was Runnals & Son of Victoria Terrace, Liskeard. The one fatality during construction was 23 year old miner's labourer James Julian, who had become trapped between the pump rod and the side of the shaft, then fell to its bottom. It wasn't established whether he had fallen from a ladder or was riding the pump rod, a dangerous practice banned in all mines. The mine was an "ill-conceived and ill executed failure"; in its 5 years of operation a mere 99.7



tons of tin were produced. Closure came in 1914. There are plenty of mine building remains to be seen, but not the miners' dry which was photographed by John Rapson prior to its demolition.

We remember several exhibitions through the years at Stuart House on different aspects of the local mining history – indeed, there were some panels from our 'exhibition archive' on display in the Jane Room when we closed so suddenly in March 2020.

Articles (including memories of events or times at Stuart House), 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 preferably, at present, email to rachelpbennett59@gmail.com