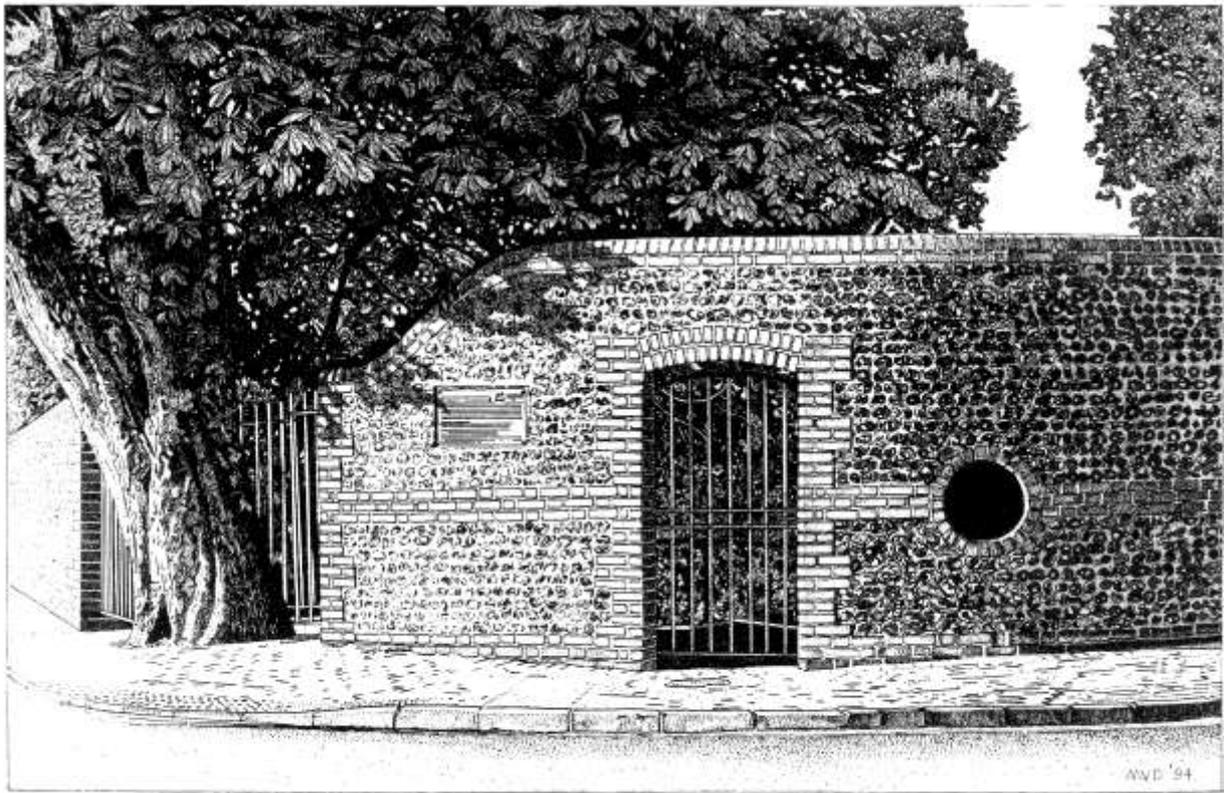


Friends of Lewes

the Lewes civic society



The gates to Southover Grange Gardens
Drawn by Marietta Van Dyck

Annual Report 2013

-THE FRIENDS OF LEWES - THE LEWES CIVIC SOCIETY

**Lewes Town Council Offices, Town Hall, High Street, Lewes,
East Sussex BN7 2QS (Registered Charity No 258756)**

Web site : www.friends-of-lewes.org.uk **E-mail address:** enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk

Personnel at 31st December 2013

President Phyllida Stewart-Roberts CVO, OBE
Vice-Presidents Norman Baker MP Jim Franks Peter Mettyear
Honorary Life Member John Davey

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Officers	Chairman	Robert Cheesman	(10/12)
	Vice-Chairman	David Hutchinson	(10/12)
	Secretary	Marcus Taylor	(10/12)
	Treasurer	Mike Stepney	(7/12)

Elected members	<u>At March 2013 AGM</u>	<u>At March 2012 AGM</u>	
	Roger Beasley (10/12)	Kim Clark (6/12)	
	Anthony Dicks (9/12)	Ruth O'Keeffe (4/12)	
	Jon Gunson (8/12)	Frances Tufnell (11/12)	
	Audrey Jarvis (11/12)	Neil Merchant (10/12)	
	Roger Maskew (9/10)	Micheal Turner (6/12)	

Co-opted in 2013 Chris Kneale (7/8)
Mat Homewood (1/4)

(The figures after each name above indicate the number of actual and possible attendances at Executive Committee meetings.)

Minutes Secretaries Judith Davies & Angela Blyth

The Mayor of Lewes has the right to attend Executive Committee meetings.

PLANNING SUB-COMMITTEE

EVENTS SUB-COMMITTEE

* indicates member of Executive Committee

Frances Tufnell (Chairman) *
Natalia Baldizzoni
Aaron Curtis
John Kennett
Chris Kneale *
Bronagh Liddicoat
Nick Wiseman
Carolyn Beckingham (Minutes Secretary)

Marcus Taylor (Chairman) *
Marietta van Dyck
Audrey Jarvis *
Neil Merchant *
Howard Taylor

Membership Secretary
Distribution Organiser
Website Manager

Marietta Van Dyck
Michael Cotgrove
Barbara Merchant

STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The Friends of Lewes - the Lewes Civic Society - is an unincorporated association, the constitution of which was last amended in March 1997. It is a registered charity (No 258756) usually known as the Friends of Lewes, but referred to in this report as the Society. Communications to it should be addressed to Lewes Town Council Offices, High Street, Lewes, East Sussex BN7 2QS. Or by e-mail to enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk Membership is open to all, on payment of the relevant subscription.

Members of the Society's Executive Committee are the charity trustees. Officers are elected at an Annual General Meeting for one year whilst half of the other elected members retire each year but are eligible for re-election. In addition members can be co-opted to the Executive Committee during the year. The trustees in office on 31st December 2013, all of whom are members of the Society, are listed above.

The Executive Committee, which meets monthly, manages the Society's affairs but annually appoints a Sub-Committee to examine all planning applications affecting Lewes and the surrounding area and another to provide services and events for members. It also established a tree sub-committee towards the end of the year.

Departures and arrivals. At the end of 2013 both Kim Clark and Frances Tufnell decided not to stand for re-election at the forthcoming AGM. They have both given many years of service to the Society in a number of roles and their departure should be marked by the most sincere thanks to them both

New members to the Executive Committee are Chris Kneale and Roger Maskew, both with backgrounds in planning and Mat Homewood, a local historian.

The Society had a membership of 478 at 31st December 2013 (this figure was 492 at the end of 2012).

The Charities Aid Foundation holds the Society's liquid assets. Its accounts are examined by Clifton Page Wood of 11b Dyke Road Mews, 74 Dyke Road, Brighton, East Sussex BN1 3JD. The Society employs no staff and has not incurred fees from professional advisers during the year.

On 31st December 2013 the Society's representatives on external bodies were: -

Federation of Sussex Amenity Societies	David Hutchinson
Lewes Conservation Area Advisory Group	Anthony Dicks
Lewes District Council's Planning Service Users Group	Robert Cheesman
South Downs Network	Robert Cheesman

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

The Society's objectives are to stimulate public interest in the beauty, history and character of the town of Lewes and its surrounding area; to organise concerted action for protecting and enhancing the townscape of Lewes and the architectural, visual and historic interest of Lewes and the immediate surrounding area and to co-operate with similar civic societies. It does so by arranging meetings for members on conservation and heritage issues; lobbying relevant bodies to protect the historic environment of Lewes, whilst recognising that the town needs to remain an economically vibrant place, and by supporting projects that fall within its objectives. The

principal risks facing the Society are a failure to find sufficient volunteers to undertake these activities and a possible decline in income through lower membership, a lack of legacies and low interest rates: this would limit the projects the Society is able to fund.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE

The Executive Committee considers that during the year the Society's activities, projects and services to members, details of which follow, fulfil the Society's objectives and that they are beneficial to the town and its inhabitants. The Committee therefore considers that the Society has complied with the public benefit test that applies to all charities.

PLANNING POLICY ISSUES

The South Downs National Park Authority (NPA) is the planning authority for Lewes and it delegates all but the most controversial planning applications back to the District Council which considers them on its behalf. They are currently determined against the planning policies inherited from the District Council, alongside the purposes and duty of the NPA and the National Planning Policy Framework. A joint Local Plan is under consideration and the Society commented on its Core Strategy. It also put forward suggestions to the NPA as to how money collected under the Community Infrastructure Levy scheme that will be introduced in due course might be used to benefit the town.

The Conservation Area Management Plan was agreed by the NPA during 2013 and is now a 'live' document.

The Society intends to play a full part in the Neighbourhood Plan process initiated by the Town Council which, amongst other things, will be expected to recommend where new housing should be sited in Lewes. It has also responded to a consultation managed by the Environment Agency concerning possible flood risk and keeps the whole question of the effects of climate change under review.

The Society has responded to a recent draft list of listed buildings deemed to be at risk, prepared by the NPA, by deciding to initiate in 2014 a review of buildings 'at risk' in Lewes, together with the Town Council and the Conservation Area Advisory Group.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

Plans to develop two significant sites in Lewes have continued to evolve throughout 2013: proposals from the Santon Group for the Phoenix site (also known as the North Street Quarter) and for the site on South Downs Road opposite Sackville House.

The Executive Committee has met with representatives of the Santon Group twice in the year; it is represented on the sounding board and has appointed members to serve on other groups set up by Santon mainly to consider design issues. A member also went on a tour of comparable locations in other towns, organised by Santon. Contributions were made to the formal consultations in January and September.

The application for the South Downs Road site was recommended for approval by NPA officers, but the Society spoke against both the design proposed and the balance of housing types at the Planning Committee meeting in April. The application was rejected but the developer has now appealed, with a hearing due in March 2014, at which the Society intends to be represented.

Early in 2013 a third location joined this list – and most contentious it has proved to be. Plans by developers Quora to demolish the now-abandoned Magistrates Court building in Friars' Walk were discussed with the Society at on-site meetings in January and March and subsequently in correspondence. The Society eventually opposed the planning application on design grounds, though it has no objection to the proposed use of the site as a budget hotel and retail units. Though suggestions were made to the developer at several points on alterations that would make the design more acceptable, the changes offered were slight. In December, the NPA Planning Committee again rejected its Officers' recommendation and unanimously rejected it on design grounds. Whether the developer will appeal against the NPA's decision, submit a revised planning application, hopefully after discussion with the Society, or withdraw from the site is unclear.

PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORT

The Planning Committee considered 315 applications in 2013, an increase of 2.6% on the previous year. They commented on 47, objecting to 30 and commending 1. It was disappointing that so many of those to which the committee had objected were approved. Seven of these were for dormer windows. The committee had been following guidelines formulated by the District Council, but there is no formal policy, so it was decided to draft a policy for the National Park Authority and the District Council. Work has continued with this and there have been several drafts in consultation with other bodies. A meeting was held with Chris Morris, the District Council's Conservation Officer, and the policy is progressing.

The Planning Inspector supported the NPA's refusal of the application for 2 houses in the chalk pit off Mill Road, where the Society had objected.

The Planning Committee continues to have difficulties in viewing some planning applications. The District Council no longer produce hard copies for the public to inspect although they will now provide limited access to some if requested in advance. This is not very helpful to the Committee which needs to view an average of 27 per month. Members do not find it easy to view all the applications on line and not all the associated documents are scanned in time. They are also concerned at the delay between validation and publication in a weekly list for some applications. This reduces the time for public consultation which is already short. However, the Committee are grateful to Lewes Town Council for providing access to hard copies of the applications.

Betty Lewis retired from the Committee in March after many years' service for which she was thanked. Neil McWalter has also left but we welcomed Natalia Baldazzoni. We still need new members and anyone interested in joining should contact the Society.

TRANSPORT ISSUES

The implementation of the long-awaited 20mph speed limit on roads in the town centre was a key feature of the year and plans to extend these arrangements to the estates are well-advanced. The Society has indicated its marked preference for ‘chicanes’ rather than “speed bumps” where there is deemed to be the need for physical features to keep speed down. It was also pleased when the County Council implemented the change in priority at the Fisher Street/West Street junction as that had been suggested by the Society some time ago as a way of reducing congestion and, as a result, air pollution in both Fisher Street and Station Street.

Members of the Society have continued to meet with County Council officials as part of the consultation phase of their proposed Sustainable Transport Projects. The introduction of RTPI (Real-Time Passenger Information) displays at selected bus stops on the 28/29 route through the town was expected in mid-2013, but is still awaited.

The urgency of repairing the bridge on the railway station approach road was stressed, as a key part of improvements for pedestrians around the railway station and to Station Street . Contributions to the autumn consultation were made on these topics, improving pedestrian signing and information and the routes to be taken by cycle routes through the town.

The Society corresponded with the County Council about parking on pavements, especially by vans and lorries delivering to the High Street, Station Street and Fisher Street.

The possibility of an improvement being made to the Earwig Corner junction seems distant as yet, but it will be pursued.

Representations continue to be made to the County Council on the inappropriate use of ‘black-top’ in repairs to paved areas in the conservation area, especially by utility companies and individual cases are followed up: members are encouraged to report further examples.

OTHER ISSUES

Society Officers met with Jenny Rowlands, Chief Executive of the District Council, to discuss the Council’s Property Strategy and in particular the future use of the Maltings, ownership of and responsibility for which is now being exchanged for that of Southover Grange (buildings, not the Gardens) with East Sussex County Council. Having visited the almost empty Maltings building, the Society is supporting a proposal to consider using it in part as an interpretive centre, with space for groups such as the Priory Trust and Sussex Archaeological Society.

In these discussions the District Council’s wish to draw on the Society’s knowledge and experience of the town was again made clear. This respect is evident in our relations with other authorities and agencies.

Liaison meetings between the Society and members of the Town Council occur roughly twice a year, where matters of mutual interest can be raised and updated. The support and advice of the Town Council in several of the Society’s projects is much appreciated.

PROJECTS

Some of the projects mentioned in the last annual report made good progress:

Revised versions of Kim Clark's *Twittens* book and *The Inns of Lewes* are now available, with thanks to all who contributed to this process.

Plaques marking historic features in Lewes have been put up by the Town Council. A complete photographic record of these can now be found on the FoL website. The Society has researched and suggested wording for a further six, on which a decision will be taken by the Town Council in 2014.

The Society assumed the role of lead sponsor of the successful Heritage Open Days in September and plans to repeat its involvement in 2014. Around 2,500 people attended 16 venues over the long weekend. Thanks are due to those who made this go smoothly and to other sponsors.

Following the late Paul Millmore's research, and an application by the Society for listing, *English Heritage* has now scheduled the former industrial Offham tramway, tunnels, portals, parapets and retaining walls in the vicinity of the Chalk Pit pub. The *NPA* will provide information boards at the site

2013 saw another Awards Ceremony, with presentations made to six schemes, both new-build and renovations, which exhibited particularly good design and craftsmanship. A most enjoyable presentation evening in November was held at the offices of Axiom Architects.

While others are still on-going:

The "magic circle" above Castle Ditch Lane: Efforts to get the County Council to confirm a right of way through the circle area from Castle Precincts and down the steps to Castle Ditch Lane are on-going, but are slow going.

Restoration of the White Lion sign in Westgate Street by the Town Ranger is almost complete. However, its replacement by a replica is still under consideration in the light of recent metal thefts. This should be resolved in 2014.

Trees: With a view to spending wisely the legacy for tree planting received some years ago, the Society with the assistance of a grant from the NPA's Sustainable Communities Fund, commissioned a survey of trees in the town. The report by David Saunders was published last spring and is on the Society's website. It contains recommendations for planting and a sub-committee, chaired by Neil Merchant, has just been formed to carry this exciting work forward.

Only slow progress has been made in fulfilling the terms of the £5,000 legacy given by Paul Millmore in 2012 because the greater part of this was for tree maintenance and this must await the planting programmes, but it is a comfort to know that these crucial funds exist when work begins. Paul's other wish, to re-establish the post of Town Crier in Lewes, is proving more elusive, but we will persist.

The Society also pledged financial support to the projects of other groups – the 1264 Street Banners project and the restoration of the bronze helmet in the grounds of Lewes Priory, both of which are still in process at the time of writing.

It should be noted that the Society has received good coverage for several initiatives in the Sussex Express in recent months.

SERVICES FOR MEMBERS

Four lectures took place in 2013; in January Michael Blencowe entertained and informed his appreciative audience in equal measure, speaking with authority on The Wildlife of Lewes; in March Debby Matthews returned to share her researches on the history of St Mary's Lane – now known as Station Street. In October David Saunders gave a talk entitled “Time for Trees – Towards a Lewes Arboretum” and in November, Jim Etherington described the colourful historical background to Bonfire Night in Lewes.

Two general meetings were held in the year; at the AGM in March, there was a talk entitled “Lewes – embedded in the National Park” by Phil Belden , whilst at the Autumn General Meeting in September Tristan Bareham, CEO of the Sussex Archaeological Society/Sussex Past enthused about the fascination of churchyards and funereal imagery in Lewes..

A tour of the Middle Street synagogue in Brighton in July was not that well-attended, but those members who spent the morning at the Newhaven Energy Recovery Facility (“it’s a power station, not an incinerator....) had a fascinating time. A visit to Lamb House on Chapel Hill took place in September.

In June, a party from Friends of Lewes visited Rye as guests of the Rye Society and were given a very interesting day out. The visit will be reciprocated in May, 2014.

Participation in the town’s annual Societies Fair in the Town Hall in July provided another opportunity for the Society to explain to the public what it does. In June, a “drop-in” coffee morning at the Town Hall produced some interesting conversations, but no new members.

Michael Cotgrove continues to arrange distribution of newsletters and annual report four times a year, and also e-mails other information to members as appropriate. Barbara Merchant keeps our website up to date and it has become a valuable source of information on Lewes issues.. Marietta van Dyck as Membership Secretary keeps track of our members with meticulous care. We are very grateful to all three of them.

Thanks are due to all those who give their time organising and staffing events, providing services for members or carrying out other work for the Society. Additional offers of help to ensure that all our activities and work continues would be appreciated.

We have new stocks of tea towels in three colours, navy blue, maroon and green, at £3 each. These will be available, together with prints and cards and the Society’s publications, on our sales table at lectures in the Town Hall. Please call Marietta Van Dyck on 01273 474521 for orders (delivery within Lewes) at other times.

FINANCIAL REVIEW

Receipts and Payments

General Funds

On the Society's unrestricted funds, receipts in 2013 amounted to £8,442 (*£9,711 in 2012*) and total payments £4,765 (*£7,356*) which resulted in a surplus of £3,677 (*£2,355*).

The aggregate of receipts from voluntary sources has remained fairly stable (£6,460 in 2013 and £6,661 in 2012).

On Trading Activities, after a buoyant 2012 (assisted by publication of the Society's new book, "Twittens") there has, despite a vigorous sales drive, been a marked reduction in sales in 2013 with income falling from £2,856 to £1,614.

With no expenses being paid to trustees, the cost of running the Society in 2013 was £2,561 (£1,225 on Governance plus £1,336 on Other); a similar position to 2012 (*£2,520*). The recurring costs of running the Society remain below the 2013 ordinary membership subscription income of £3,169. It is nevertheless hoped that those who can afford to pay more than the minimum subscription will continue to do so in order that we are able to continue to support small enhancements to the town.

Expenditure on, and successful delivery of Projects has been relatively low in recent years, especially when compared with the plans and budgets made at the start of each year. Recognising this, new procedures have been introduced in 2014 to help bring greater rigour to their planning, approval, control and timely delivery.

Balance Sheet

General Funds

At the end of the financial year, the Society's total assets on its unrestricted funds account amounted to £39,138 of which £35,847 was cash and £3,291 stock of books, tea towels and cards. A reserve of £10,000 has historically been considered necessary and proposed unrestricted net project expenditure of some £5,000 is currently envisaged (including the Magic Circle, Greyfriars' Stone in St Anne's Churchyard, and "Public Face" review). Part of the residual balance of some £21,000 is conventionally held in order that the Society can provide funding for further small projects which meet the Society's overall objectives without firstly having to make an appeal. Currently, there are also a number of significant development proposals underway in Lewes on which the Society may need to seek specialist advice and representation. The higher than normal balance has been identified as a source of funding should this eventuality arise.

Restricted Funds

A further £10,856 of cash is held in restricted funds. Of this, £5,829 has to be spent on tree planting (Tree Planting Fund) and £5,027 on the maintenance of trees and getting the post of Town Crier re-instated (a generous legacy received in December 2012 from Paul Millmore's estate).

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

The Society will continue to take a professional and independent approach to the issues facing the town, while trying to explain more clearly to the public what it does and plans to do. Concerns about a slowly declining membership and a belief that we need to project the image and values of the Society more effectively have led to the recent decision to seek advice about the Society's public image through a mentored review process which we are calling '*Our Public Face*'. The first meeting of committee members with Tom Serpell, our Mentor in this process, was in December, followed by two more in January.

A re-vamped membership leaflet, launched in January, is the next step in attracting new members.

The Society would like to be more pro-active in pursuing its objectives in the future, but the extent to which it can do so will continue to be determined by both the human and financial resources available. In particular it would like to financially assist minor projects which enhance the townscape of Lewes and it will be considering whether its support for such projects could lever funds from bodies such as the NPA.

Approved by the Executive Committee on 16th January, 2014 and signed on their behalf by

Robert Cheesman Chairman

The Annual Report cover was drawn by Marietta Van Dyck, to whom grateful thanks are offered.

IMPORTANT. Wherever possible we would like to deliver this report and newsletters by e-mail. Not only will this provide faster and more effective communication, but it will enable us to inform you of meetings and local events by email. It will also help minimise our overheads and thereby maximise the benefit we can bring to members and the residents of Lewes.

If you not already done so and would be prepared to adopt this arrangement would you please e-mail mscotgrove@aol.com with your e-mail address. Would you also please e-mail mscotgrove@aol.com with any change of e-mail address.

Members are also encouraged to check out our website www.friends-of-lewes.org.uk for updates on many of the issues mentioned here and copies of the Society's contributions to consultations and press releases.