



NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2020

Ruth O’Keeffe – Chair of Friends of Lewes

It has been a strange and difficult year, and I am both honoured and surprised to be writing to you as the Chair of the Friends of Lewes.

Our excellent and hardworking Chair of many years Robert Cheesman took a well-earned retirement earlier this year, and my first duty in this address has to be to thank him for everything he has done for Friends of Lewes. It was very good to hear that he has been honoured with a British Empire Medal for his service to the Friends and other local groups. Thanks must also go to Marcus Taylor for his long service as the Secretary.

It is a great honour to find myself as your Chair. I have to thank all the members of the Executive Committee and also members of the Friends for the help and support I have received; it is very much appreciated. Special thanks to Diana Freestone our new secretary, Mike Stepney our Treasurer and Neil Merchant, Chair of the Succession Planning Committee for helping make sure I do everything I should!

During the year we have welcomed new members to the Friends and new members to the Executive Committee. Sadly, a longstanding member of the Friends who had contributed much to campaigns over the years, David Tufnell, died recently and will be missed by many.

It has been a year in which many of us have had to gain great deal of computer technology expertise in order to get to meet online, with committee meetings by “Zoom” and other platforms such as “Teams”. Everyone is learning a new vocabulary; “you’re muted!” for example is certainly a new essential meeting phrase. It has been good to be able to meet many members at the virtual online “Coffee Time Talks” ably arranged by Jane Slater, and surprisingly easy to get used to talking to a screen all day if also surprisingly exhausting. Many of you will have spoken to Jane during her heroic phone round of every single member of Friends of Lewes earlier in the year.

The Executive Committee has been working to the new Goals for the Friends of Lewes all year and regular reports back show the progress that has been made even in lockdown, with regular visits by committee members to virtual events from organisations such as Civic Voice, continuing with submissions to many important consultations including to the District Council Recovery Forum, looking at ways forward from the pandemic, with all of the usual Planning Committee events online. Thanks are due to all those who have made submissions, and to Chris Kneale for his chairing of this very important committee. The Trees Committee has led the way in “real world” activity managing some socially distanced tree planting whenever it was possible over the last few months and Audrey Jarvis has continued to be an inspirational leader of this committee.

As I said at the beginning of this piece, it has been a strange and difficult year, and we have to look forward to better times. With the news of the various vaccines and the hope that they will provide much needed resistance to Covid 19 and a way out into a more familiar way of life there should be much to look forward to in 2021.

Wishing everyone a happy Christmas and a peaceful and (eventually) social New Year.

Ruth

Keeping you in the 'Loop' from Jane Slater

As we come to the close of the year 2020 - the year of COVID-19 - we should reflect on how difficult this year has been for every one of us.

Friends of Lewes Civic Society has through our regular Coffee Time Talks tried to keep our Members informed, from the moment we had our first national COVID-19 lockdown in March, until now 9 months later, when we have hope that a vaccine will be available to all by the Spring.

However, life may never quite be the same again, but I imagine that the meetings that we have introduced such as our Zoom Coffee Time Talks which are free to all Members, will be still be a useful way of keeping us up to date.

Our last Coffee Time Talk of the year took place on Tuesday the 8th December and had a Christmas theme. Local hôtelier Neil Kirby who has the 4-star Langham Hotel in Eastbourne told us how he had started off working at 15 in the basement in the Grosvenor House Hotel and ended up buying a hotel of his own in Eastbourne. The theme of the Talk was Christmas in the various hotels that he had worked in and was both an amusing and a fascinating talk.

Marcus Taylor, a long-standing Member of Friends of Lewes and Chairman of the Membership Committee then told us all about the many books published by the Friends about the Town which are available at a great discount to Members especially during the month of December.

These Coffee time Talks are freely available to the Members of the Friends of Lewes. If you would like to join in and attend our talks you can find details on our Membership page on the website and we will send you a Zoom link a few days before each talk. More information is available from the membership secretary via email

Look out for some exciting Coffee Time Talks from January onwards such as a COVID update - a talk on local Birds by Vivien Yule and a report on Cruising.

Progress towards our 2020 goals

One of the goals of Friends of Lewes is to collaborate with other Lewes-based groups which share our aims of improving our environment, increasing biodiversity and mitigating the risks resulting from climate change.

We were pleased to be able to support Lewes Swift Supporters with matched funding to enable them to buy and install free Swift boxes and callers to more homes near existing colonies of Swifts. They have already delivered postcard invitations to homeowners in their chosen areas, focusing on places where they have previously recorded repeated visits by young prospecting Swifts. Some of these will be looking for a nest site next year - and our funding will ensure that extra accommodation is ready and waiting!

One of the ten boxes installed in Western Road in October



If you would like to find out more about the work of Lewes Swift Supporters you may join their Facebook group, "Lewes Swift Supporters" or contact them by e-mail: lewesswifts@gmail.com



Mount Pleasant flint wall update from Peter Earl



On the south side of Mount Pleasant there is a flint wall which extends from its junction with Mount Place and Commercial Square approximately 25m westwards. The wall is slightly unusual in that it extends partly over the footway to Mount Pleasant and supports an elevated footway serving a terrace of 6 properties, numbers 7 to 12 Mount Place. For all of the 20th century the wall had a rendered finish which it seems may have been related to its use for a series of advertising hoardings which were attached to it from Victorian times until the late 1960's (see pictures on page 61 of Lewes Through Time book by Bob Cairns).

Concerns were raised about the condition of the wall in the early 2010's, initially by Anthony Dicks (now chair of the Lewes Conservation Area Advisory Group) and subsequently by Robert Cheesman, the then chair of The Friends of Lewes. The ownership of the wall was uncertain, with neither the owners of the Mount Place cottages or the County Council accepting responsibility. This led to investigations, focussed on the reason behind the wall's existence, undertaken by Graham Mayhew (former mayor of Lewes). The construction of an embankment across the Paddock valley from White Hill, to what is now The Avenue to form Offham Road was found to be the reason for its existence, so that a path could still serve the cottages whilst Mount Pleasant was lowered to ease the gradients to the new embankment.

Colin Brent's Georgian Lewes book refers to a decision to lower the road in White Hill in 1821 which postdates the building of the Mount Place cottages by some years. This lowering appeared to be partly the responsibility of the Lewes Borough Commissioners and partly the Quarter Sessions (court records relating to the creation and maintenance of the main roads and bridges) to form a Turnpike Road from Landport to Lewes by White Hill.

The research concluded that lowering the road was a highway decision and therefore the retaining wall was constructed to provide a means of access to the front doors of the cottages in Mount Place, which are at the original street level. It was therefore possible to confirm to the County Council that the wall was their responsibility as they inherited the highway rights and obligations of the Quarter Sessions when they were formed. In 2018 County Council lawyers eventually accepted this assessment and referred it to their Highway Authority engineers as the condition of the wall was deteriorating. At that time parts of the render to the wall were starting to crack and fall away, but it was unclear the extent to which that was linked to the poor state of the wall behind the render. The collapse of a small section of the western end of the wall earlier this year, hastened their exploratory programme to the current financial year.

In October the careful removal of discrete areas of the cementitious render commenced to determine the structure and condition of the wall, and to address the structural collapse at the western end. The contractors have been presently surprised that the render came away cleanly and that the bands of flint making up the structure of the wall were generally sound.

Work has continued throughout November to repoint sections of the wall with matching lime mortar and to recap the wall reusing the recovered bricks. In addition, works have taken place to rebuild the collapsed section and to ensure surface water drainage of the elevated footway to the cottages is effective and drains away from the wall, preventing long term future damage.

The restoration of the wall to its original appearance ensures that this part of the conservation area is returned to its former character and put in a good state of repair. It vindicates the FoL concern and persistence over its welfare. We will continue to monitor the condition of other flint walls and challenge the need for repairs, as we see fit, to ensure that the important contribution they make to town continues. Vigilant members have already highlighted issues with walls in Paddock Road, which are to be repaired next year.



If members consider that there are other flint walls suffering from neglect, please contact the secretary so that we can seek the necessary redress, and hopefully succeed in initiating repairs, avoiding more expensive rebuilding works, or the complete loss of walls.

Trees Committee Update from Audrey Jarvis

Tree planting Winter 2020

This November members of the Trees Committee of Friends have made a fantastic start to the tree-planting season by planting thirty mature trees in Lewes!

On **Sunday 1st November** we planted nineteen trees in Lewes Cemetery: four Grey Alder, four Swedish Whitebeam, three Cut-leaf Beech, an English Holly, a Copper Beech, a Judas tree, two Field Maples and three Irish Yews. We had a great team and the willing helpers included neighbours James Power and Juliette Mitchell from Rotten Row and the family of Chris Bibb, who is an active member of the Trees Committee. Careful siting of the new trees will increase biodiversity without compromising the chalk grassland recovery on the areas of the Cemetery left unmown for wildflowers.

The trees were chosen for the interest they would add to the landscape and for their resilience to chalky soil conditions and climate change. Some of us have taken part in Wildflower Lewes surveys of the Cemetery over the Spring and Summer and observed a wide range of butterflies and bees there, including Long-tailed Blue, Wall Brown and Adonis Blue butterflies! The rare Brown-banded Carder Bee, *Bombus humilis*, and the Long-horned Nomad Bee, *Nomada hirtipes*, were also recorded at the Cemetery by James Power last June.

Knowing this, we considered how our tree planting might add to the food available for pollinators throughout the year. With the addition of the mixed native hedgerow that we plan to plant along the wall near the Winterbourne stream before the end of the year, the trees selected should provide a long season of flowering from February to October.



Nick Jarvis and Chris Bibb - LDC Specialist Adviser

On **Wednesday 4th November**, in a second working party organised at short notice once the new lockdown restrictions had become apparent, we planted a further eight trees: three small-leaved Lime, three Amelanchier and two Hybrid Larch. To celebrate that this was a collaborative project between Friends of Lewes and LDC, we invited several councillors to join us and were pleased to welcome Councillors Adrian Ross, Imogen Makepeace and Matt Bird. They all took an active part in digging, planting and staking the trees, as the photographs on our Facebook page, “Lewes Urban Arboretum”, will show you!

On **Saturday 7th November**, a small group of us met at Mount Harry Road to plant a Grey Alder and a native Crab Apple on the grass rectangle there – a project that had to be postponed from March. Last of all, we went back to Prince Edwards Road where we planted a Whitebeam to replace the Hawthorn which we had planted in November 2019 and which had suffered from fire blight.

A new Elm for Lewes!

Back in September, Tree Wardens were invited to apply for one of thirty trees offered by the Tree Council to celebrate thirty years of their Tree Warden Scheme. Our application was successful, and we will be taking delivery of a DED-resistant Elm, *Ulmus* “New Horizon” in January, to be planted at Lewes Cemetery. This is the same sort of Elm as the four we planted on St. Anne’s Hill, in collaboration with ESCC. It was developed by a Professor Eugene Smalley who began in 1957 with a determination to develop 100% DED-resistant Elms to “put a smile on the landscape”, to reflect his philosophy of smiling through hard or difficult times. It is believed that *Ulmus* “New Horizon” is the answer to providing mature Elms for the future and it is also key to the survival of the endangered White-letter Hairstreak butterfly.



Louise, Virginia and Jack Bibb



James Power and Juliette Mitchell

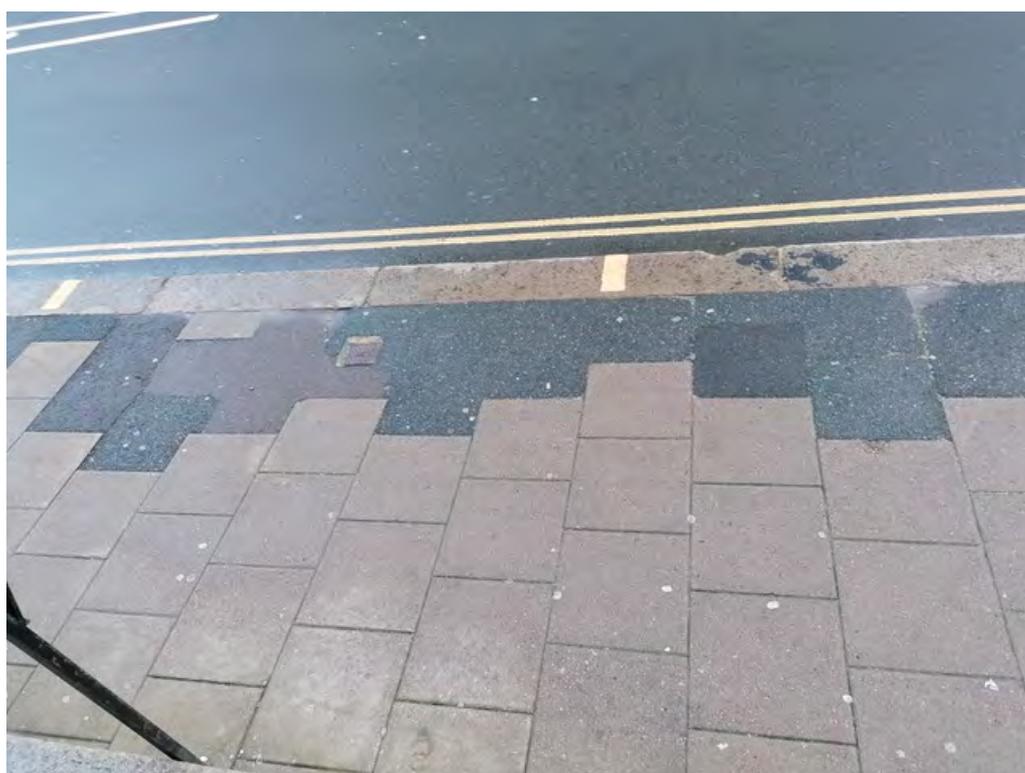
We continue to share daily posts showing Lewes trees on our Facebook page, Lewes Urban Arboretum, and on Twitter @LewesUrban.

You may contact us via: arboretum@friends-of-lewes.org.uk

Highway Maintenance -The Conservation of Character from Peter Earl

East Sussex County Council has proposed that future repairs to the footpaths within Lewes towns conservation area will be undertaken with a single use bituminous macadam, with the exception of the High Street from Cliffe Bridge to Irelands Lane, where the present paving slabs and brick paviers would be reinstated.

The result of this proposal will mean pavements outside of this designated area could look like this permanently.



The Executive Committee of the Friends of Lewes objects to the proposals which they feel would be detrimental to the character of the historic core of the town of Lewes. It is intended to set up a small working group within the Friends of Lewes, drawing on the different expertise that exists, to clarify the County Council proposals and understand more fully the degree of harm that could arise, particularly on streets where enhancement works have been undertaken. If there are any members willing to assist with this work or wish to identify streets and twittens that should be subject to special protection, they are encouraged to get in touch through the Secretary. A full report is available on the Friends of Lewes website: [friends-of-lewes.org.uk/resources/our-consultation-responses/](https://www.friends-of-lewes.org.uk/resources/our-consultation-responses/)

Help wanted

The pandemic is turning our thoughts to what our “new normal” might be, and that could well include putting our talks online. If you could help in any way with this, such as learning Zoom skills, do please get in touch via enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk.

Events

We have delayed the start of the Friends of Lewes winter talks series due to Covid-19, but are currently planning these talks, which are likely to take place on Zoom starting in the new year.

The next few Zoom talks by Lewes History Group are:

Monday December 2020	14	Chris Horlock	A Sussex Christmas followed by AGM
Monday January 2021	11	Chris Taylor	The Mill Road Street Story
Monday February 2021	8	Geoff Mead	Source to Sea: the River Ouse
Monday March 2021	8	David Rudling	Romano-British Settlements in the Lower Ouse Valley
Monday 12 April 2021		Sue Berry	The Influence of Country Estate Landowners on Georgian Lewes