

Haverfordwest Civic Society Annual General Meeting 2016 Chairman's Report

This is my first report as Chairman of your society and I think I can safely say we have had a good year.

Our first event took place in June when Mark Muller gave a very interesting talk on General Sir Thomas Picton who was a gallant hero certainly, but with a dark side to his nature.



This was followed in July by a trip to visit the newly restored Cardigan Castle and St Dogmael's Abbey.

We were blessed with a fine day and interesting talks at both venues although it is fair to say we swamped the café at Cardigan Castle and some members had to go into town to find something to eat.

Also in July, Mark Muller led the annual town walk which this year was focused on Prendergast and I must confess that although I lived on Prendergast Hill for several years there was much information that was new to me.



Again we were very fortunate to have a fine evening and this was evident from the very large turnout for the walk, we estimate more than a hundred people – and what I thought was especially nice was that a number of Prendergast residents spontaneously joined us eager to learn more about their part of town. I would like to take the opportunity to thank everyone who helped organise the event and especially those who acted as marshals on the night.

September's European Heritage Day/Open Doors event held at the old Haverfordwest Gaol was a spectacular success with literally hundreds of people attending. Haverfordwest Museum also opened specially for the occasion and I'd like to thank members of the Civic Society committee and museum volunteers who worked wonders making sure the flow of tea and cakes never faltered.



While the lower part of the old gaol was extensively altered to house the records office it is still possible to make out some of the original building. The upstairs is a time capsule of 1960's museum design and I believe it could serve a similar purpose today with relatively little effort. Again I would like to thank everyone who helped out on the day but especially our prisoners– Terry and Anne Dobson, Emma Lewis and Julie Davies, and also to the gaoler Glyn Davies who really looked the part jangling his keys.

In October our speaker was Keith Johnson, the editor of Pembrokeshire Life who gave a very well received talk on public houses past and present in Haverfordwest.



The annual building award was made at the November meeting and went to St David's Church, Prendergast for the exceptional work carried out to repair and preserve the tower, the award was accepted by the Reverend Geoffrey Gwyther and following the ceremony the project architect Frans Nicholas gave a very interesting talk on the methods used to carry out the preservation.

Guy Norman of Space to Create also gave a talk on the work of Confluence and their efforts to promote the regeneration of the town centre through the medium of art.

There were no entries for the best kept garden this year and St David's Church, although a very worthy winner, was the only contender for the buildings award; indeed it has proved increasingly difficult to identify suitable works for consideration so it has been decided to end the current scheme and to make awards on an ad hoc basis as and when building projects are identified. This may mean no awards some years or more than one award in others.



In January we were given a guided tour of the Pembroke Archives facility in Prendergast; the event was tinged with sadness when we learnt that staff jobs were under threat and sadly we have learned since then that two of the three archivists have been made redundant and that other positions are also under threat.

In February we had an excellent talk from Ted Goddard about some of the shipwrecks to be found off our coast; I certainly hope that Ted might be persuaded to give another talk on our maritime heritage in the future.



Unfortunately due to unforeseen circumstances the March talk which was to be on the Gallipoli campaign during the Great War was not able to go ahead.

Looking forward we have what I hope you will agree is another interesting series of talks and events planned.

In June Sue Lewis will give a talk on the Cardigan Castle project. As one of the original trustees who worked tirelessly to get the project off the ground and who is now facilities manager at the castle I am sure her talk will give us much food for thought.

On 9th July the annual trip will visit the Pembroke Dock Heritage in the morning and Lamphey Bishop's Palace in the afternoon. The town walk is on 29th July this year and is timed to take place in Haverfordwest Festival Week.

By the kind permission of Pembrokeshire County Council the European Heritage Day/ Open Doors event in September this year will visit Foley House in Goat Street, I am sure that like me many of you have always wanted to look around what is one of the most iconic buildings in Haverfordwest.

In October Frans Nicholas has agreed to talk to us about the preservation and restoration of our built heritage and particularly churches, while the following month Ray Burgess will talk about the Welsh Spitfire and the work of the Welsh Spitfire Museum.

The New Year takes a look at some of the grimmer pages of our history as Simon Hancock tells us about local witchcraft at our January meeting while in February Mark Muller reveals the details of the Pembrokeshire slave owners.

A change of pace in March when Richard Blacklaw-Jones will explain why so many Welsh people including some of his ancestors left Wales for a new life in Patagonia.

Four committee members (George Yeomans, Mary John, Barbara Shone and Derek Rees) have stood down or have not stood for re-election since the last AGM either because of health issues or other pressing commitments. I would like to record my personal thanks for their support and I'm sure you'll join me in wishing them well for the future.

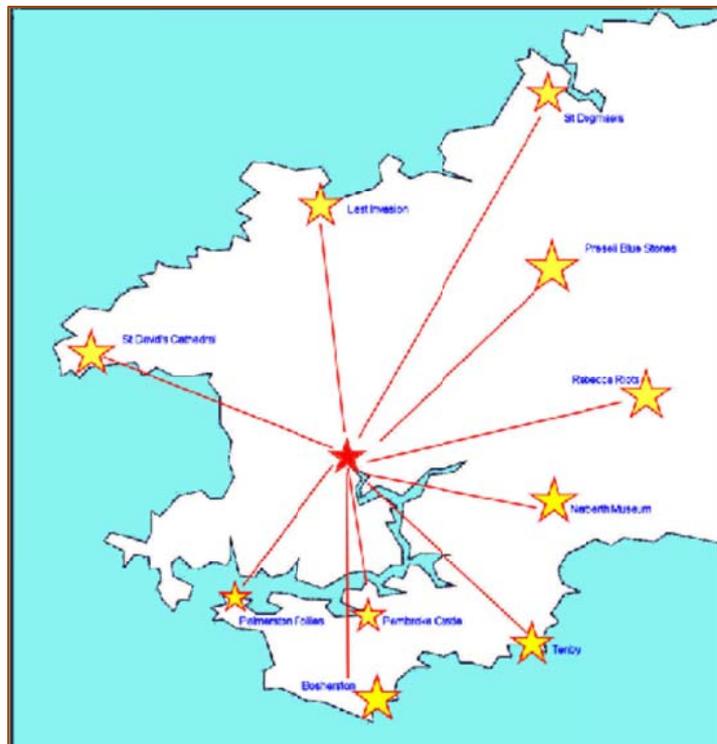
You may be aware that the Civic Society along with other organisations has been a key partner in working on the project to establish a flagship heritage centre for the County to be based in Haverfordwest; indeed our Secretary Lesley Turner is providing secretarial support for the project. This is an exciting prospect and its purpose would be to present the history of the county using the state of the art technology in the same manner as at Cardigan castle and Llanelly House, Llanelli. In summary the aim of the centre is:

- (i) To give a strong, cultural focus to the proposed town regeneration scheme for Haverfordwest.
- (ii) To tell the rich story of Pembrokeshire through the centuries for the very first time.
- (iii) To provide a hub which allows other centres in the county to expand the story as it applies to their individual areas.
- (iv) To deepen the tourism offer of the county by enriching the visitor experience.
- (v) To learn from the experience of other town regeneration schemes which have successfully used a cultural and arts approach to lead economic recovery.

Visitors could learn about different aspects of Pembrokeshire's rich culture and heritage at the centre and would then be encouraged to visit the different parts of the County to learn more about the issues and experience the historic locations first hand.

The project is at an early stage and currently a study is being arranged to determine if the project is feasible, which if any of several buildings are suitable to house the facility and how the centre should be developed. A number of empty buildings are being considered at this stage including The Shire Hall, Foley House, the empty warehouse on the quay, the former gaol and records office at the castle, and the former Post Office in Quay Street.

This is an ambitious project and we hope that it can be realised; it would give a much needed boost to Haverfordwest and the wider Pembrokeshire economy. As we learn more we will make sure that members are kept informed.



The other significant project being undertaken by the Civic Society is the production of a new Haverfordwest Heritage Trail booklet. The booklet which will be published later this year has been written by Mark Muller and will be lavishly illustrated by local artist *Paula Tynan*. We are very grateful to Pembrokeshire County Council for agreeing to fund its production as part of the Town Heritage Initiative and particularly to Steve Jardine and Barry Hughes who have been very helpful.



Members will be aware that it is six years since the fees were increased and in that time the cost of running the organisation has increased significantly – for example the cost of posting a letter to members has risen from 30p to 55p in that time so to send a letter to every member would cost about £108 just for the postage, that alone demonstrates how important it is that we send as much information as possible by email. And this year the cost of our insurance has risen by more than a quarter to £258, yet it is not an expense we can avoid. As a result we failed to break even during the last financial year and made a small loss.

These issues were discussed at the AGM and the resolution to simplify subscriptions and increase the rates was approved unanimously. From April 2017 there will only be one rate for single members (£7 per annum) and one rate for joint or family members (£11 per annum). It was also agreed to end the option for purchasing life memberships at the same time (**N.B. this will not affect existing life members**). Finally, the charge for non-members to attend events will rise from £2 to £3 *from June 2016*. These are modest increases but they should put us back in the black once they are introduced.

Finally, as I finish this report I would like to give my heartfelt thanks my fellow committee members for their support and hard work during the last year.