

BstLS Pending Meetings

Sunday 27 November 2022 at 3 p.m., Royal Victoria Hotel, St Leonards seafront (Burton Suite):

Sheila Kaye-Smith - St Leonards Author

A Talk by Philip Streeter, Chair of the Sheila Kaye-Smith Society

Members: Free Non-members: £5

Sheila Kaye-Smith was born in St Leonards in 1887, and died in Northiam in 1956. A daughter of an eminent St Leonards physician, she became a narrator of the social transitions of England, from the agricultural depression of the late Victorian era through to the social revolutions consequent to two world wars. In 44 years she wrote nearly 50 books, ranging from elegies about the Weald of Sussex and Kent to novels with feminist themes. Her 1932 novel *Joanna Godden* was made into a film by Sir Michael Balcon (screenplay by H E Bates, music by R Vaughan Williams). In 1924, aged 37, she married a curate of Christ Church, St Leonards. After a few years in London they converted to Roman Catholicism and moved to Northiam.

Friday 9th December, from 6 p.m.

6 The Uplands (Music Room), Maze Hill, SLoS, 6 p.m. - 8 p.m.

54th Annual General Meeting, and Christmas Social (Agenda p6).

A Social will be held following the Meeting, with drinks and nibbles donated by the two of the Trustees.

Burtons' St Leonards Society (BstLS)

Website: <https://www.burtonsstleonardssociety.co.uk/>

Postal address: 1 West Ascent, SLoS TN38 0BB

Email: info@burtonsstleonardssociety.co.uk

Annual membership fees:

Singles – £20.00

Couples – £35.00

Charity Number 258719, Company Number 00982237

BURTONS' ST LEONARDS SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2022

Spencerville

The history of St Leonards-on-Sea is full of the unexpected. One such detail is that in Victorian times, the 4th Earl Spencer (1798-1857) had a house built here for himself and his family, on a sea corner of Sussex Road and known as Spencer House.

His first wife was his second cousin, Georgiana Elizabeth Poyntz, who died in St Leonards on 10 April 1851.



Along the sea front at Verulam Place, their son the 5th Earl had a *carte de visite* made in the 1860s by the great Robert Boning, which is now on the National Portrait Gallery website.

From his beard he was known as 'the Red Earl'. His great-great-grand-daughter was Lady Diana Spencer, who married the future King Charles.

Spencer House was rebuilt in 1889 as the Sussex Hotel, with an elaborate French pavilion roof and an ironwork dome.

The yard of the former Spencer House | Sussex Hotel is threatened by application **HS/FA/19/00887** for 15

dwelling with associated parking, which is at present the subject of an appeal. The Council refused the application under delegated powers – *i.e.* made by planning officers not elected members.

AGM Agenda (see also p 8)

The 54th Annual General Meeting, for the year ending 31 March 2022 will be held at 6 The Uplands, Maze Hill, on Friday 9 December 2022 at 6 p.m., followed by a social meeting.

The Agenda is the usual formal *shtik* (including – it is hoped – the appointment of an Hon Secretary, and Events Organiser).

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Dr Chris Joyce

On completion of nearly 30 years on the Board, six as its Chair, Chris Joyce resigns with effect from this AGM. He has the marked thanks of the Society for his strenuous efforts over many years, such as the attempt to save the Marlborough Hotel in Warrior Square. Thank you, Dr Joyce.

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An unusual history of 6 Maze Hill

On Sunday 30 October, Stephen van Dulken gave a highly original and effective talk at the Royal Victoria Hotel on the history of James Burton's 6 Maze Hill (G2 listed). Since 1832 it has had a rich cast of characters, from Charles Hayward Southall who ran the 'Royal Library' on the South Colonnade, to John Bath (1915-2004), the composer and conductor (whose extensive work included the score for *A Yank at Oxford* (1938), and beyond. The key was the use of sources: from (say) the *Brighton Gazette* as a record of Fashionable Arrivals, through the official and unofficial sources, electoral rolls, probate records, decennial census returns, and even advertisements for furniture auctions (a forgotten tradition of leaving property) . The connexions and occasional inconsistencies were engagingly anatomised and brought the Maze Hill of previous centuries surging back to life. Fortunately for the BStLS, a statement by Stephen van Dulken on those sources and methods is on pages 2 and 7.



[from p3]

Park Beck.

[page 6]

PLANNING NEWS

St Anne's, Hollington

The elegant little 1950s church designed by the Denman family of Brighton, with glasswork by Marjorie May Incedon (1891-1973), was saved by the Planning Committee in September when case **HS/FA/22/00028** was refused — or so it seemed. Under ref **HS/DM/22/00835**, the owner applied for and was given 'Prior Approval' for demolition in February 2023. Public involvement was entirely minimal. The building is listed in *Pevsner* but its non-designated heritage asset (NDHA) status was doggedly ignored by the Council. So too were the recommendations of the 20th Century Society and Historic Buildings and Places (HB&P) for the Council to adopt 'Article 4' protection. Additionally the defective application could have been paused and listing sought, but the Council pressed on regardless.

West Hill Road gap

A low-profile development is proposed for the site by the Sussex Steps at the scenic gap in West Hill Road. The case is **HS/FA/22/00621**. Most of the house will be tucked into the cliff, visible above ground level by 5' 3" (1.6 m). (The closely related case **HS/FA/20/00398** was approved in December 2020, subject to conditions.)

Foreshore Trust

Because Green Party councillors are no longer in the Council cabinet, Cllr Julia Hilton is no longer a member of the Foreshore Trust. Cllr Judy Rogers has replaced her as a Trustee and on the Charity Committee.

The Trust's AGM is on Monday 12 December, where the Trust's performance is likely to be raised, including its accounts being 300 days overdue, the restricted reopening of the Stade Pathway, and its silence about a new application concerning a building of 75 yards length on the beach (**HS/FA/22/00751** following **HS/FA/22/00005**, unsatisfactorily decided).

Park Beck, Upper Maze Hill

Park Beck in Upper Maze Hill has been under threat for some years. **HS/FA/22/00687** was the latest, again unsuccessful. Enforcement enquiry **ENF/21/00280** continues. and possible Enforcement action. Previous cases **HS/FA/16/00427** and **HS/FA/18/00006** were the subject of extensive public disquiet and comment in the *Hastings Online Times*. The site is prominent within Conservation Area 13. The damage to the front of the 1877 *cottage orné* has been considerable. It used to look like as on page 6 — now it doesn't. [p6] [page 3]

T H White (1906-64)

T H White was born in British Bombay, the son of a police official. Growing up he spent time in St Leonards with his maternal grandparents at 47 Carisbrooke Road. His reimagining of King Arthur's Court led on to JFK's 'Camelot' and J K Rowling's Dumbledore. His books included *The Sword in the Stone* (part of *The Once and Future King* series), *Mistress Masham's Repose*, *England Have My Bones*, *The Age of Scandal* and *The Goshawk*, and he also features in Helen Macdonald's *H is for Hawk* (2014).

In 1933 White published *Farewell Victoria* (available in the 1960s as a Penguin). The excerpt that follows was very slightly abridged by Hugh Bryant, and concerns a groom (Mundy) who lived and worked locally in Victorian & Edwardian times and reminisces on the changes, las we all do!



The Age of Watering-places was retreating before the Bank Holiday Era.

Once St Leonards had been the watering-place and Hastings the pleasure ground of the people. The society of St Leonards had

been conscious of its superiority, had been able to make pleasure trips into Hastings like white residents of Hastings driving into the bazaar. They had taken their grand-children there, to work the penny slot machines, or to listen to the band, or to see the pantomime at the Gaiety Theatre: or to visit the Cinema de Luxe (Charlie Chaplin in *Shoulder Arms*, Mary Pickford wearing pigtailed) and sample the clammy excitement of St Clement's Caves, and see the executions and the fire brigade and the ships at sea all working realistically in glass boxes, the full value of a penny.

Now everything was changing again. Mundy had lived from one revolution to another. The Town Council was building concert halls and titanic parking-places for motor-cars, was increasing the amenities of the Alexandra Park: amiable fusty park which had once been suitable for none but nursemaids with their prams. Respectable St Leonards was diffident before the new display of wealth. Like the family of an Edwardian civil servant brought face to face with that of Hatry or of Kreuger, it retreated vanquished and upset.

The barriers were down, the arch which had separated the two towns had been taken away, and Hastings was invading. The impoverished respectable sister saw her parvenu relation creeping towards her and was hemmed in on both sides. She was an Edwardian, a Victorian watering-place. Westwards grew the spick Georgian residential area of Bexhill, eastwards advance the hordes of the bank Holiday. There were notices of Apartments now, written grievously across the doors.

(Contrariwise, H R F Keating (1926 - 2011) really was born in St Leonards. He invented the character of Inspector Ghote of the Bombay CID, who featured in many novels. Despite their great success it was many years before Keating actually travelled to India.)

The Boy Done Good

James Burton (1761-1837) was a Georgian builder and artificer who worked hard, counted his bricks and made money that enabled him to buy land from the Eversfield Estate and create SLoS. His son Decimus (1800-81) had a more gentlemanly inside track: designer (and member) of the Athenæum Club at 23 and some 'Nash' Terraces, founder member of RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects), and also a Fellow of the Royal Society (despite never having written a scientific paper) on the recommendation of Sir Marc Brunel, Michael Faraday, Sir Charles Lyell, Professor Buckland (whose widow moved to East Ascent), Adam Sedgwick, *et al*.

He was an all-round Victorian grandee. Now the Decimus Burton Society has been founded to promote interest in his life and work. The Society's smart and glossy journal is called *Decimus*. The first issue includes a scholarly piece by Christopher Maxwell-Stewart, current Chairman of the Burtons' St Leonard's Society. More on the Decimus Burton Society's structure and activities can be found here:

<https://www.thedecimusburtonsociety.org/>

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House history research: a guide by Stephen van Dulken

(See also page 6 for a report on the talk.)

Researching the people who lived in a house can be both easy and frustrating. Easy, as it is simple to make a list of names. Frustrating, as it can be hard to find much about them. Here are some suggestions.

Assuming that there are no old deeds from when you bought the house (the first port of call), try the top floor of the Hastings Public Library. It has local directories for most years from 1884 to 1974. These will have listings by street, and then the head of household. For example, in the 1911 *Pike's Directory*, for West Hill, Thomas A Grant lived at No 1 and J W Sutton lived at No 1a, which was also called Dundridge. They also hold electoral registers, again in street order, from 1927 to 2001.

They have the advantage of listing voters and not just the head of household. They often also show divisions into flats. For example, in 1939, 134 Marina had six voters living in four flats, with each floor a separate flat. [[>p7](#)] [page 2]

[from p2] The library also has a computer where research can be carried out for you on subscription databases by volunteers. See <https://www.escis.org.uk/event/family-history-session-athastings-library-copy/> for booking a session. The databases would contain censuses (1841 to 1921), marriage certificates, brief probate details and more. The *Hastings & St Leonards Observer* can be searched by keywords on the Find My Past database. For example, there are 92 hits for '1 The Uplands', such as the offer for sale of both 1 and 2 The Uplands in 1919, and a description of a wedding breakfast by the bride's brother-in-law in 1882. I have subscriptions to both *Find My Past* and to *Ancestry* (which contains the Anglican baptisms, marriages and burials for St Leonards until about the 1930s).

Planning applications can go back to 1950 or so. The amount of detail varies, but it's always worth a look.

<https://www.hastings.gov.uk/planning/searching/>

The Keep (near Falmer Station and the Universities of Brighton and Sussex) is the archive centre for East Sussex. It contains mainly deeds or building plans. There are for example 37 hits for 'West Ascent', including letters in 1857 from Elizabeth Davies of No 5 complaining about the roadway.

<https://www.thekeep.info/>

The London Gazette is England's official journal of record and contains many mentions of addresses. There are for example 41 mentions of 'Stanhope Place, St Leonards' up to 1950. A lot of these are bankruptcies!

<https://www.thegazette.co.uk/>

Google Books contains a vast number of books and some magazines. Often the addresses of subscribers to magazines or societies can be found.

https://books.google.co.uk/advanced_book_search

All this assumes that the number of the house has not changed. A good way to check this is to note the street numbers where the street meets another street — the top, the end, where another street crosses it. Then compare it with say the 1911 directory (which will note the same information) and see if the numbers are the same.

I am happy to provide some hints and help but suggest that first the directories and electoral registers be checked for (say) every decade to get an idea of who was living there.