

Bromsgrove Festive Markets planned for late November

For the last 5 years Friends of St John's have organised the Christmas Markets in Bromsgrove on the two days leading up to the Christmas Light Switch On.

This year, because of the restrictions in place around events and gatherings, local crafters and charities are encouraged to take a stall at the "Bromsgrove Festive Markets" which will be run in conjunction with the usual Council Markets on Friday 20th and Saturday 21st November. It is hoped that the town's Christmas lights will be on to create a festive atmosphere, and local residents are urged to pay a visit to the Festive Market to support local traders and our High Street.



As with so many events, it is hoped that the regular events will return in 2021. Keep an eye on www.facebook.com/FriendsStJohnsBromsgrove for updates and news on how to get involved.

Future of Artrix in hands of Holding Trust

Councillors have been told that the future of Artrix will be in the hands of the Holding Trust. Although the Council is the freeholder of the building, the future of the the building and its use is for the Holding Trust to resolve, and to make recommendations if necessary.

A small group representing BAA wrote to the Holding Trust on 5 August seeking to engage in consultation to explore how we can work with them to achieve the best outcome for both the organisations we represent and the residents of Bromsgrove. **The text of the letter is printed on page 3.**

We have not had any reply to the letter yet but BAA will continue to lobby councillors for updates on progress towards opening a revised Arts Centre for Bromsgrove.

A Heritage Corridor for North Worcestershire

The original group behind the Bromsgrove Arts and Cultural Consortium have assembled a much broader partnership base to take this exciting project forwards.

It is based on the proposal arising out of the 'Tell me what you want' consultation. North Worcestershire currently falls through the cracks between several major heritage offers in the region. This project aims to go some way towards remedying that by developing and connecting key heritage assets in North Worcestershire.

These include the Roman Saltway, the Lickey Incline, Tardebigge Locks and the Droitwich Masts – all encompassed by the royal medieval Forest of Feckenham – as well as the nail- and pin-making out of which Redditch springs and the Borough's global brand of Royal Enfield ultimately grew.



The long-term vision is to create a series of urban-rural heritage trails, resulting in a much stronger, more cohesive educational and tourist offer. Where appropriate, sites will be enhanced by high-quality resources and facilities – including a strong digital offer. The project group have raised substantial funding from The Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership Cultural Development Fund, Bromsgrove and Redditch councils and local charitable trusts and are now formulating a three phase project to to create an outline business case for the Corridor.

Housman Society discovers previously unseen letters

Standing tall in Bromsgrove High Street, A E Housman is a well-loved past resident of our town, and The Housman Society exists to promote knowledge and appreciation of the lives and works of AEH and other members of his family.

Today, over 80 years after the death of the poet and scholar, no one expects new material to come to light. However, whilst going through his recently deceased father's papers, Robert Semple from Harborne uncovered a parcel of very old letters.

Thirty letters dated between 1925 and 1936, handwritten and signed by A E Housman, had been sent to Mr Semple's grandfather William Hugh Semple. On finding the letters Mr Semple made contact with Housman Society Secretary Max Hunt who commented "it was one of those rare 'hairs on the back of the neck' moments!"

A E Housman was the Kennedy Professor of Latin and a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge and it was known to the Society that, in 1926, AEH had supervised a research student, W H Semple. Much of the content is mundane, but one gem in a 1932 letter stands out as Housman approves Semple's rejection of Harvard in favour of Aberrystwyth! Many of the letters covered details of Semple's supervision sessions in Trinity College,



Max Hunt meets Robert Semple (Photo by Linda Hart)

but the correspondence had continued after the successful Dr Semple gained his first teaching post at Reading University prior to becoming Professor of Latin at Manchester University. The letters from Housman had been kept by the family after the Professor's death in 1981 and now that they had been rediscovered the family wondered if the collection would be of interest to the Society. The quick answer was 'yes'! Society Secretary Max Hunt and Robert Semple met in August and the letters were handed over. After cataloguing the letters, the Society entrusted the letters to the safe keeping of Trinity College Cambridge where a collection of Housman's original work and letters is stored – and so the letters return to the college where Housman scribed them, all those many years ago.

Further details of the letters will be issued in the Housman Society Journal, printed towards the end of the year and distributed to members. Membership is £15 per year. For details see www.housman-society.co.uk

Severn Arts Ensembles meet online

Severn Arts' Bromsgrove Music Centre has now reopened for online instrumental lessons and weekly ensemble sessions.

Staff and members are having a fun and interactive Zoom meet-up on Monday evenings beginning with whole group musical activities then moving into separate Wind Band and String Orchestra ensemble rehearsals (for instrumentalists approx. Grade 1 - Grade 3+).

We're aiming to put together our performances of Mars, Star Wars and Arabian Nights by the end of the autumn term whilst keeping the friendships and enjoyment of music making alive. All the Severn Arts ensembles, from jazz bands to youth orchestras, are now meeting weekly online, offering young people continuation of musical development and social interaction.

Younger children have been able to resume instrumental lessons at schools across Bromsgrove and throughout the county with additional safety measures, allowing a feeling of normality, whilst the older age group temporarily continue with their online lessons after school hours where they welcome the opportunity for musical focus and a sense of progression.

For more information about all Severn Arts activities see <https://www.severnarts.org.uk/> and <https://thearchesworcestercfestivals.co.uk/>

Follow us on Twitter and Facebook @SevernArts for more news and updates.

Letter to the Artrix Holding Trust from BAA

This is the text of a letter sent to Cllr Margaret Sherrey as Chair of the Trust, and copied in to other trustees

Dear Margaret,

We write to you on behalf of the Core Working Group of Bromsgrove Arts Alive (BAA) which represents the forty-nine Arts organisations who operate in Bromsgrove and District. Let us immediately tell you that we are united and keen to help work with the Bromsgrove Arts Development Trust (Artrix Holding Trust) towards facilitating a new 21st Century Community Arts Centre replacement for Artrix.

In writing to you again we must emphasise that we have no wish to prejudice the independence of the Artrix Holding Trust (AHT) in making its decisions on the future of Artrix. Nor are we prospective operators of the re-opened facility. Rather, we are anxious to share the combined experience of the members of BAA in organising and delivering a wide range of arts activities in Bromsgrove and to share some fresh thinking as to how Artrix can be re-modelled as a sustainable arts centre for the people of Bromsgrove.

Clearly, the Council takes the view that the AHT which you Chair is pivotal in deciding the future of the building. Two indications as to what consultation the AHT might seek with local Arts organisations have been reported during lockdown. Councillor Karen May has said *"when the full picture was known interested parties, groups and residents would be consulted about the findings and the options available"*. Dave Cove later said that the AHT would be looking at management options and *"..I believe a key part of that will be to both engage with the local community and to harness the local support and expertise so as to give any new arrangements the best chance of a sustainable future"*

As to how those indications sit now is not clear to us. We hope you will confirm to us that the AHT is happy to engage with us in a preliminary consultation meeting to explore how we can work with you to achieve the best outcome for both the organisations we represent and the residents of Bromsgrove. We are ready and willing to meet in person (socially distanced) or digitally on Zoom whichever/whenever is convenient to you and the other Trustees.

Lastly may we record our gratitude to you personally for the efforts you and your colleagues are making to secure a sustainable future for a new 'Artrix'. The impact of COVID 19 has been devastating for the Arts but let's seize the space in time that it has provided to plan carefully and thoughtfully and put in place a Community Arts Centre fit for the 21st century and the benefit of future generations.

All best wishes,

Steve Cowperthwaite (Chairman – Bromsgrove Arts Alive)
 Bob Bignell (Bromsgrove Festival; Bromsgrove Folk Club)
 Graham Mackenzie (Festive Classics; Bromsgrove Arts and Culture Consortium)
 His Honour Ian Morris (The Bromsgrove International Musicians' Competition)
 Alastair Moseley (The Orchestra of St John; Bromsgrove Concerts)
 Jo Slade (Friends of St John; The Bromsgrove Society)

WORDS

Bringing the best of the Spoken and Written Word to Bromsgrove for more than 40 Years

As with so many arts organisations, WORDS came to a shuddering halt in mid March with the advent of the first lockdown.

It was a great shame, as the Ann Cleaves sell-out event at Artrix in February had proved a great success, further events had been scheduled for the whole of 2020 (which we hope to stage in 2021) and ambitious plans were being put in place to bring more high profile speakers to Bromsgrove in the following years.

Since the start of Lockdown, our Chair, Kate Shaw, has been emailing to our Supporters poems (a total of 125 to date !!), many of which were written by poets who have been guests of WORDS previously.

We will be considering the feasibility of staging "Zoom" Events in the future, once the Committee can get to grips with the technology! All offers of assistance in this area will be gratefully received.

So WORDS is very much alive and kicking and hoping very much that we will be able to stage live events in 2021.

We trust also the District Council will engage in constructive discussions with BAA as to how the sorely missed Artrix can re-open and be financially viable in the future – it was such an asset to the Town and District and so many people have told us since its closure how much they miss it.

Update from Bromsgrove District Council Arts Development

Throughout the pandemic we've been working closely with our partners across the District and wider region to make sure that Bromsgrove is represented in conversations about cultural recovery and emergency response.

We're always happy to talk to anyone in the area who is interested in applying for funding from, for example, the Arts Council – and encourage anyone who might be thinking of doing so to get in touch.

Over the last few months we've continued to engage with and support residents online, with themed activity prompts and resources regularly going up on our website, which you can access at [the link here](#). For example, in connection with our ongoing 'A Heritage Corridor for North Worcestershire' project, we were delighted to highlight some of the District's fascinating history, with the support of the Bromsgrove Society (find out more [at the link here](#)).

We've also commissioned some great content, including the tutorial video [at the link here](#) from artist Keith Ashford, made for our 'Connecting Across Generations' week. Alongside this, we're excited to be working with artist Andy Decomyn to develop new public artwork to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Sanders Park. We're keen to highlight and connect with what local groups and individuals are doing, so if you've been trying out a new creative activity or project during the pandemic then we'd love to hear about it.

It's really important to us that our work is driven by a solid understanding of what residents need from us. As such, we recently conducted our online 'Keep Active Survey', the results of which will help shape our offer as we move forwards into autumn and winter. We now have much stronger data about some of the challenges many of us are facing right now, which make it harder to get the benefits which engagement with the arts and related activity can bring. More hearteningly, we saw a real increase in the numbers of people who are passing on details of our work to friends and family – and signs that we are increasing our digital reach, particularly via our newsletter.

You can sign up for our Bromsgrove newsletter [at the link here](#). The Redditch sign up page [is here](#). If you've already signed up, we'd be really grateful if you could pass the sign-up links on to anyone you know who might be interested. The bigger our network the more we can all do together!

St John's Church Choir resume singing

A number of singers from St John's church choir resumed singing at services at the start of October.

Following guidance from the RSCM (Royal School of Church Music) a risk assessment was completed and thirteen members of the choir are spaced 2m apart in all directions to sing.



It is an unusual experience to sing in this way, but the choir are hoping that they will get used to it!

Virtual Coffee Concert

This year's series of Cake and Coffee concerts at St John's is not taking place at the moment, but there is a Virtual Coffee concert available to watch [here](#)

It features two original pieces for Bass Clarinet and Piano by Rob Porter, solo flute music from Janine Porter, a song from Dave Coulson and an organ piece played by Steve Cowperthwaite. We hope to upload another one before Christmas.



South Birmingham Guild of Silk Painters

I have to confess that virtually all of my time during this period has been spent isolating in the garden as the weather has been so good (writes Kay Morris).

However, the need to provide birthday gifts and no shopping possible meant that on any dull days I was happy to paint some scarves and other items to parcel up and send off in the post. One now very topical new item was a mask which I made with matching necklace together with a little bag to contain them; these are now with a cousin in Luxembourg. I was pleased to see the necklace being worn when I joined in a birthday Zoom get together, another sign of the times. Another member sent me a photograph of a silk painted scarf and matching cards which she had created.

Meanwhile I was pleased to receive an email from a member who had embarked on a Pandemic Project to complete several unfinished silk painting bits that she had collected over the years and which she then turned into shopping bags. The question remains of course, as to how safe it is to venture out shopping?

We recently set up a Zoom meeting, thinking that this will be the way forward for some time. During our get together we heard that some members hadn't been that busy with silk painting as they had diversified to sew masks, scrubs and laundry bags for the NHS.

Our plans earlier in the year to hold a morning meeting on the third Wednesday of the month has been shelved in favour of a Zoom meeting for the time being. We have yet to test it, but very much hope it will keep our group together.

Bromsgrove Society Local History Talks Online

On Tuesday 20th October at 7.30pm, Douglas M Smith will give a talk based on his book "Cheer Boys It's Hartlebury!".



The story of the World War One Hartlebury Voluntary Aid Detachment hospital as told from the seven visitor's books left by the soldiers. Douglas has researched the history of this hospital set up for the rehabilitation of wounded soldiers and the 430 men who are recorded as staying at the VAD Hospital. His presentation draws on poems, drawings and photographs found in the visitor's books and is the story of calm amongst carnage.

The irrepressible and ever popular Max Keen will be the speaker on Tuesday 17th November with his portrayal of one of Britain's most famous naval commanders. *Lord Horatio Nelson: Britain's Greatest Hero?* is certain to be an excellent, and enjoyable talk.

Popular local historian and retired master at Bromsgrove School, Philip Bowen will be presenting a talk about a fondly remembered decade on Tuesday 1st December. Philip's *Britain in the 1950s* illustrated talk will rekindle memories for those of a 'certain age' and inform younger people of how things were before the era of colour TVs, computers and social media!

The season draws to a close with an additional talk to celebrate Bromsgrove's Ancient Court Leet. On Tuesday 15th December, Neil Beaumont, the current Reeve, will give us an authoritative and fully researched presentation *821 Years of History in our Town: The Bromsgrove Court Leet*.

All Local History Tuesday night talks will be held on the Zoom platform, start at 7.30pm and are free to view. To register to view the talks visit the Society's website www.bsoc.co.uk. Donations can be made to help cover costs and to support the Methodist Centre where the talks are traditionally held.



BAA members' online Activities

Bob Bignell takes a look at what some of our members are doing

A quick rundown of the web sites of the members of Arts Alive reveal that Covid 19 has severely affected the majority... as is to be expected. However, I note that....

- **The Blackwell Concert Band** have been rehearsing on line and have in fact produced a couple of videos featuring the training band...one of The Star Wars Theme and one of the Deep Purple classic hit, Smoke on the Water
- **The Bromsgrove Photographic Society** have been meeting on line via Zoom and have a winter season of talks and demonstrations and competitions
- **The Bromsgrove School of Dance** have been holding training sessions on line
- **The Bromsgrove Ukulele Club** is meeting and rehearsing on line every Friday...again via Zoom
- **The Court Leet**, our newest members (welcome!) have, I understand, held an ale tasting on line...this may have been unofficial, I hasten to add!
- **The Bromsgrove Society** continues to meet on line and has a number of interesting talks coming up including one recently by our own Alastair Moseley... the subject being Big Bertha the Bromsgrove Banking engine.
- **Theatre Train** – the national organisation has created an on line presence and is giving classes in singing, dancing and acting.

Bromsgrove Folk Club has found itself an online, virtual, presence. We recognised the need to (a) keep our community together and (b) find a way to get money to professional artists whose income has dried up completely.

We decided that a live presence was not only beyond our capabilities but from experience of others attempting it, very hit and miss. Accordingly we are paying artists to produce 25 minute videos of their work, making them "Bromsgrove specific" where possible (mentioning members names, birthdays, etc).

We join these together, with comments from a compere, into 90 minute shows that go out on our regular 2nd and last Thursday of the month dates and follow the format of a normal club night....we even have a raffle.

The broadcasts go out on a private channel on You Tube and we charge members, and outsiders, £5.00 for the link to the show. This has proved very successful. We have people watching from all over the country and we have even had viewers in Canada and the USA....additionally, people who would normally sit together at the club have started watching them at the same time and setting up small Zoom connections so they can watch them "together" as it were.

The Edwin Morgan Poetry Award

Stewart Sanderson was recently shortlisted for this prize at the Edinburgh Festival. He tells us about it

As an Arts Development Officer in Bromsgrove and Redditch, one of the best parts of my job is seeing the huge benefits which cultural participation of all kinds can bring, from trying something out for the first time at a community session, to spending years honing one's craft to a professional standard.

It was becoming interested in writing poems at school, through the agency of several inspirational teachers, which ultimately led me to pursue a career in the arts. As a teenager putting pen to paper, my motivation was to see what I could do with words, even if the right ones initially eluded me. Persevering, I was surprised when, some years later, my writing began to be published and, in a modest way, to attract the interest of readers beyond my immediate circle of family and friends

Edwin Morgan (1920-2010) was Scotland's first modern Makar, or national poet. An exceptionally gifted experimenter with language, his writing is often characterised in terms of its formal diversity. At home in a number of languages besides English (and Scots), he was also a committed translator from, among other tongues, French, Italian, Hungarian, Spanish and Russian.

As well as the literary distinctiveness of his work, Morgan was unusual in that he made money out of poetry. Among his widely publicised bequests has been the Edwin Morgan Poetry Award, Scotland's largest literary prize in cash terms, for which I was shortlisted this year.

While in the end the top prize went to another writer (the very fine poet Alycia Pirmohamed) it was an honour to be shortlisted in 2020 – and, having moved from Glasgow to Bromsgrove last year, truly heart-warming to receive the goodwill and support of so many members of the arts community in the District. In a place which is still relatively new to me, I'm heartened to find, already, so many friends – this year above all, when friendship and solidarity, virtual and otherwise, seem particularly important.

So, to those of you who tuned in to the online Edinburgh International Book Festival event on Saturday 15 August, thank you. And thank you, too, to everyone in the Bromsgrove arts community who has, directly and indirectly, made living and working here such an exciting and rewarding experience so far, amidst all the challenges of lockdown.

Bromsgrove Court Leet Upholds Traditions Online

The current pandemic situation is having an impact on every organisation in Bromsgrove (and the rest of the world!) and our 821 year old Court Leet has adapted in line with restrictions to ensure that long standing traditions are upheld.

The Charter is Proclaimed

The Annual Fair Day, due to take place on 20th June 2020 had to be cancelled, but the Court were determined to keep the tradition of proclaiming the 1199 Charter. The Charter states that a Fair may be held in the town to celebrate the Feast of the Patron Saint of the Parish, St John the Baptist on Midsummer's Day.

Bailiff Joanne Slade along with the Bellman Kevin Ward met in the churchyard at St John's and the Charter was read aloud - the first time in the Court's history that the proclamation has been carried out by a woman. Bromsgrove's fabulous newspaper editor Tristan Harris and his colleague Marcus from The Bromsgrove Standard were on hand to record the occasion live on Facebook and take photos.

Quality of Ales tested via Zoom!

Before the pubs re-opened the Court organised a Virtual Ale Tasting using the Zoom platform. Four local breweries were invited to provide two bottles of their ales which were distributed to members of Bromsgrove, Alcester, Henley and Warwick Courts Leet ahead of the planned evening. On the evening representatives from Woodcote Manor, Fixed Wheel, Bewdley and Teme Valley breweries introduced their ales and an Ale Taster from each of the Courts pronounced on the quality from the comfort of their own homes! To accompany each ale taste a member of one of the Courts entertained the audience with either a story, a song or a poem. It was an excellent evening and a great way to support the local breweries at a difficult time.

The Ancient Court Leet and Court Baron of the Manor of Bromsgrove is proud to be a newly joined member of Bromsgrove Arts Alive



Photo courtesy of Bromsgrove Standard

Bromsgrove Court Leet: A History

with Neil Beaumont
Tuesday 15 December,
7.30pm

Hosted on Zoom
FREE talk all welcome
 Register at
www.bsoc.co.uk



LOCAL HISTORY
 ONLINE TALKS

#Creative Connections commission for Christine Harmer

It is difficult to know where to begin. 2020 has been, as we are all very aware, a year like no other. I began my last article for the Spring Newsletter with my first craft fair of the year, which was, as yet, the only such event I have attended. To a large extent most indoor events have been cancelled due to Covid-19 restrictions, as were markets for some considerable time. Even now some craft and other more specific or, themed markets are yet to return.

Following my recent interest in creating larger mixed media artworks, I have applied for opportunities to make further commissions. In April, I found success with a project called CreativeConnections organised by Severn Arts and Worcestershire County Council with a view to maintaining public interest in The Arts despite the 'lockdown'. The piece, which I named 'Close Affinity' being comprised of colourful and textured circles made in various styles and craft forms, obviously references my previous artwork 'Random Orbit, made last year.

Some of the parts are made of copper with kiln-fired enamel, others covered in hand-painted silk, some in aluminium, which I have imprinted with a pattern, and even one in hammered pewter. I felt that the variety of circles, with their different sizes and diverse materials mirrored our similarities and differences. The individual elements are joined together by either overlapping or intersecting reflecting our interaction. There are hidden, or more obvious connections in much the same way as we are connected, even if we are not always aware of it. 'Close Affinity' is not



flat, but 3-dimensional, the shape rises and falls as it twists and turns in a sinuous organic way creating an overall form similar to the symbol for infinity. I deliberately left a space for a final circle, suggesting that further connections between us are possible.

I have recently begun to teach the craft of enamelling once again to beginners, however space constraints at my Studio, and Coronavirus social distancing have restricted me to a maximum of two students per two hour session.

I hope to be part in Bromsgrove's 'Festive Weekend' on Friday 20th and Saturday 21st November by taking a stall in the High Street. On 5th and 6th of December I will be participating in an online craft fair, arranged by Folksy (the major UK website which brings together British craft makers) in conjunction with craft market organiser and promoter, Peddler.com (and yes, there are three 'd's in it –the one with two isn't the same thing at all).

For more information about my work, enamelling sessions and forthcoming shows –(if possible) please visit my website www.enamelledjewellery.co.uk. Or find me on facebook -facebook.com/Original.Kiln.Fired.Enamelled.Jewellery.

Next Newsletter

Thank you for contributions to this Newsletter, and as usual, apologies for errors or omissions.

The next Newsletter is for Spring 2021 and the deadline for contributions is 30th March.

If things are normal enough, we will have a Print edition.

Please send contributions to steve.cowperthwaite@gmail.com

