

## Burgess Hill Heritage and History Association

Founded 1979; registered charity 800607

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Dear Mr Cridland and Burgess Hill Town Councillors,

### Further info re. our current Museum and Archive storage.

I am sending some further information as a follow up to our previous letter requesting improved storage arrangement for our (the Town's) documents and artefacts, hopefully at the Park Centre. Discussing this at our subsequent committee meeting, we realised that it was only Fred Avery who understood the details of the changes that were thrust upon us at Cyprus Hall. He has now kindly supplied them, as our Museum Hon. Curator and as our representative on the Cyprus Hall Committee.

I have retyped here the hand-written account he has passed to me. It demonstrates that we (and the Town) not only need better storage of, and access to our (its) collections but that we and perhaps the Town Council together need **appropriate control** of the storage arrangements. Additionally, of course, we need to house the larger artefacts that are about to be removed from the Sussex Garden Centre 'Heritage' displays. Fred is happy to have them transferred to his back garden, but this is not an ideal long-term solution on a number of counts, not only liability and insurance.

The opening of the Museum in Cyprus Hall in 1993 came after 14 years of committee meetings of the BH Local History Soc. (formed in 1979), in which the lion's share of the business related to procuring several successive buildings in the town as a museum. They had each been tentatively offered as a potential museum, subject to funding and other contingencies. The funding fell through every time and the other contingencies won. Fred and I are both founding members of the BHLH Soc., as we were then named, and I was chairman for many of those years and I can still feel the pain of frustration when our hopes continued to come to nothing. Fred eventually jumped in, when the Cyprus Hall was being revamped, and he became a member of the Community Association on our Society's behalf, in order to plead for museum space. He was successful and the museum was opened in 1993.

Continuing in Fred's words (italics): .....*The rear basement room was fitted with cabinets by the Town Council and the Local History Society [at joint expense]. A further storage area (with restricted height) was used to house our filing cabinets [for docs., photos etc.] but the damp atmosphere was not ideal for storing photographs and documents. [resulting in much being stored in committee members' own homes as it still is] Three years ago we were told by the Community Association to vacate our museum room and remove all of our fitted display cabinets, so that the room could be let, in order to increase their income. An alternative venue, in the room above, was offered to us in order to house all of our artefacts, but another set of display cabinets had to be fitted. [...mainly at Fred's personal expense I think, with the LH Soc. also contributing]. Our collection of artefacts has grown over the past 30 years and we now need to increase accommodation.*

I should mention that the alternative room, leading off the main hall, is ridiculously poky and, in moving around, one is in danger of knocking items off their shelf. Only about 3-4 visitors can get in at a time. He has not mentioned the archive storage at the Hall, which continues in a damp atmosphere in the lower part of the building. This town has been lucky to have had a person Fred,

single-mindedly determined and active, since 1977, in rescuing the visible evidence of Burgess Hill's former glory as a leading brick, tile town and pottery. Without him this precious heritage would either have been smashed to pieces as buildings were demolished, or recycled elsewhere without its provenance being noted. Its significance for the town that made it would have been lost. As it is, thanks to his efforts, we can now effectively promote it among townsfolk and others, including the youngsters – and encourage them to cherish it - if only we had suitable premises with public access.

The question has been raised whether we, as an organization and a charity, could seek funding towards some of the costs in establishing a new repository. We believe the answer would be, 'Yes'. Also, if the rooms offered were basically sound and not liable to damp from internal sources, the extra costs in removal and setting up we believe would be modest. We imagine that an application would need to be properly costed on premises actually proposed, before we could apply for a grant.

Finally, I would like to pass on to you the text of another letter written in 1977 to the Editor of the Middy, for publication., viz:

*Dear Sir,*

*Herewith an article for favour of publication in the Mid Sussex Times to be issued on 28<sup>th</sup> July.  
Local History Exhibition at Burgess Hill*

*For the past fortnight, a 'Jubilee Year Exhibition of Local History' has been displayed at the Haywards Heath Building Society's premises in the Martlets, Burgess Hill [now the shoe repair shop in Church Walk].*

*There are many items of interest including fine examples of terra cotta pottery dating from 1715 and a Day Book of accounts dating from 1857, kindly loaned by Messrs. Hoadleys Ltd. Also included is a collection of armorial or created china, earing early coats of arms of Burgess Hill and items of glazed pottery which were sold from the 'Victoria Pleasure Gardens' before the last war.*

*The purpose of this exhibition is to stimulate interest and an awareness that if a permanent collection is not established soon, there will be nothing left of local history for future generations to enjoy. In this respect, Mr. Avery of 38 Junction Road, Burgess Hill will endeavour to gain support from the Town Council and ultimately the West Sussex County Council, with a view to establishing permanent exhibition facilities in the Town.*

*The present display only contains a small proportion of available items and many local people have their own private collections, including old photographs, which could be incorporated on a permanent loan basis into a future exhibition for all to appreciate.*

*The present exhibition will continue for another two weeks and My Avery would like to hear from anyone who has any items of local interest that they would be prepared to loan or to give, should a local exhibition be established in the not too distant future'.*

*Yours faithfully,*

*Frederic M. Avery*

Since 1977 Fred has been tireless in his mission, and from the same date I have researched and promoted awareness of our earlier, rural history, including our brick and tile manufacture which started in the 1500s in what is now the town centre. Jean Poulson, a former Oakmeeds English teacher, is our President and a long-standing supporter of our goals. She is 92. Fred is in his 80s and I will join him in April this year, while our Chairman Stephanie is not far behind. Each of us would dearly like to see the improved facilities that we want for our town's artefacts, documents and photos, to be achieved in our life time.

Yours sincerely,

*Heather Warne,*

Hon Sec., Burgess Hill Heritage and History Association