

Burgess Hill Heritage and History Association

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Dear Mr Cridland and Councillors,

An important role of this Association is to identify and to work to preserve the material assets of our heritage. I am writing on behalf of the Burgess Hill Heritage and History Association, requesting your future help in the matter of the storage of and access to our museum and archive collections. The Committee is appreciative and grateful for the assistance you have given us in the past and which you continue to give. We realise that solutions to problems cannot usually be found overnight but we do feel that it is time we flagged up what we see as an important need.

The current storage arrangements for the artefacts and the documents at Cyprus Hall do not guarantee their long-term survival in good condition. Our own access to the collections has been severely compromised by the crowding of the storage area with other hall users' 'stuff'. There is not room to store all the precious artefacts which Fred Avery has collected over his life time. We have no dedicated space to accommodate local residents and other interested persons for study purposes. The atmospheric conditions at the lower level of Cyprus Hall seem to me to be potentially lethal for the paper material, including the original photographs, maps, original documents and copies, that are currently stored there. I speak as a professional who was engaged in and responsible for the well-being of the tens of thousands of documents, dating from the 12th century to the present day, stored in the Duke of Norfolk's archives at Arundel Castle. There was no adequate storage when I arrived at the Castle as a contract archivist in 1991 and I had to educate everyone, from the Duke down to my immediate boss, as to the measures we should take.

It may seem counter-intuitive, but private owners of archives are often less ready to 'do the right thing' by archives and objects they perceive as of low market value, because they are debarred from using any public money. However, by time I retired in December 2021 we had become one of the few private archives whose storage conditions were the envy of most of the other 'country house' archivists. Between us, we had eventually managed to do the 'right thing' at Arundel and my successor, Roz Williamson, will carry the task on. I see the preservation of Burgess Hill's artefacts and archives as a similar project and one which I could perhaps advise along the way as I did throughout my career but, in Burgess Hill's case I would be acting voluntarily.

We believe that we and yourselves are both 'on the same page' in wanting to help Burgess Hill to thrive and its unique place in the history to be recognised. Unlike Arundel and its ducal history, the Sussex historians of the past chose to ignore our existence because we were an industrial area and therefore, *de facto*, of no interest whatsoever. Fortunately, the world has moved on in its opinions and our Association now wishes to flag up two important truths, first that our industrial history is **unique** in Sussex* and second that we **did** have an interesting early history from Saxon times onwards, just like any of the 'pretty' villages of Sussex.

One critical point is that **the storage of Burgess Hill's main collections of terracotta artefacts, for which we currently enjoy free storage and display at the South Downs Heritage Centre** will shortly be terminated. The owners of the nurseries have decided to limit their heritage displays solely to garden artefacts and garden history. They are currently proceeding with this plan.

I will not in this letter clarify the exact problems of the present storage arrangements in Cyprus Hall for artefacts and documents except to say that at present they are not fulfilling their potential role as vital part of the Town's heritage. We, and Fred Avery especially as the main motivator, have actively been campaigning for proper 'museum' premises since the old Local History Society was formed in 1969. The purpose of keeping these things in the town centre is that they can allow the people of the town, especially our school-age children, affordable and easy access to the pleasure of seeing, touching, reading and learning about our earlier history. That is impossible at the moment.

We are therefore asking that you will consider, in any current or future plans you have for the Park Centre, the possibility of providing at least two rooms of an adequate size there, one for the storage of documents and artefacts and the other for changing displays selected from both groups. We would also need work desk space for at two persons (a voluntary supervisor and the researcher/s) which the second room could provide. In locating such rooms, the risk of fire and flood should be minimised. During my free-lance career** I have advised private firms, institutions and local authorities on the viability of their current storage arrangements for archives. I have frequently found that they are stored at a low level with several obvious flood risks. This is not desirable.

Our committee sincerely hope that you will be able to give these matters your sincere consideration and we would be very happy to meet with yourselves to discuss them further.

Yours sincerely,

Heather Warne
Hon. Secretary, BHHHA

* Unique in the sense that no other Sussex town was so dedicated to brick and tile manufacture as a main industry. The rural area of The Dicker (on the A22 north of Eastbourne) was of equal importance with St John's Common in early brick and tile (down to the 18th century), but it failed to develop as a town. Our own Keymer Brick and Tile Co. later filled the gap by supplying brick and tile for the newly developing resort of Eastbourne. We also supplied to building projects in London and in the northern cities of Manchester, Liverpool and Newcastle as well as overseas.

** Following a degree in Classics at Bristol University in 1964, I chose Archives as a career and qualified in 1966 after: a) a postgraduate year at University College London at the School of Librarianship and Archives and b) the publication of a 'thesis' catalogue in my role of Junior Assistant Archivist at the Clerks Dept, E. Sussex County Council, in Lewes. After raising our three children through their early years I returned to my profession but concentrated on part-time work as a free-lance archivist. I am a registered member of my professional society, the *Archives and Records Association*.