

FRIENDS OF EASTGATE HOUSE

Chairman's report for the year ending 31st March 2016

With the house out of bounds it has been a challenging year to provide events and activities for our gallant band of loyal members. However, we have had a couple of talks, both by David Carder. The first, on the first day of our new year, 1st April was entitled Unusual Kentish Buildings. A goodly number of friends and guests were well entertained by David's presentation and truly unusual buildings in Kent which held secrets or were, indeed hidden. His second talk was on 9th March 2016 and called Discovery and Innovation in the Stuart Period. The amount of research David must have done to produce such a presentation defies belief, but I am sure we all went home a lot wiser than when we came! If only we could remember it all! David is a true supporter of our cause and we thank him most sincerely for his talks.

In order to spread the word about the House and the Friends, we now have a regular stall at the summer and winter Dickens Festival. Located just inside the Rochester Library and Community Hub, it is a warm, dry spot on a busy corner. Plenty of visitors pass by and we even get donations from some. Thanks to the volunteers who give up their time to 'man' the stall.

Newsletters have been a bit thin on the ground, and that is because there has not been much progress to report on the House. At the last AGM we were pleased to announce that Fairhurst, Ward and Abbots had won the contract to do the work. Six months on and the firm went into liquidation. There was then several months' delay whilst new contactors were appointed. However, Buxtons won the new contract and are working on site. They are also working on Rochester Cathedral, so have some local knowledge. They are very keen, and we look forward to them finding new items of interest.

Your committee has been working hard, meeting on a monthly basis. We now have a very good website www.friendsofeastgatehouse.org, which is set up to take membership and event payments as well as donations online. It carries information on all our news and events as well as our latest awareness campaign, Memories of Eastgate House. Technically this is for next year's report, but it won't hurt to say a few words now. We are encouraging people to share their memories of Eastgate House when it was the City's museum, or the Dickens Centre. These will be collated for use on our website and possibly in the house when it re-opens, but that really is for the next report.

With plans for the House to be open in spring 2017, I have been working on establishing sewing volunteers. I have sourced patterns (easy ones), people and fabric, and started work on making costumes for the period 1600 – 1630, the early years of the House. Concentrating on gentry and servants to reflect the time when the house was occupied by Sir Peter Buck. If anyone wants to help duplicate the patterns by tracing them onto paper, rather than sewing, I would be most grateful. We will then have patterns for all sizes, which will be helpful.

Lastly to say that we will also be renewing calls for volunteers to help us to organise more events to raise awareness of the house, engage communities and increase our fundraising activities. In particular, we will be looking for volunteers in the following areas:

- Bookkeeping
- Fundraising
- Historical talks
- Organising events
- Storytelling
- Treasurer's duties (Committee member role)
- Volunteer recruitment

If you have skills in these, or other areas, have a few hours to spare and would like to volunteer your time, then please contact us by email info@friendsofeastgatehouse.org.