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In what has been an extraordinary year, the Society AGM was held for the first time as a zoom meeting on June 25th. Our president, Graeme Charles chaired the meeting.

President's report from Graeme Charles



Graeme Charles at a pre-pandemic event

2019 was quite a busy year for the Society. Perhaps slightly busier than usual.

As always the Society's year of events started with the annual picnic tea at Lake View on January 3.

Hot on its heels was the arrival of the Welz family from Germany. After spending a short time with Clive and Meg Probyn in Mittagong, the family arrived in Melbourne to accommodation that had been arranged for them through the Society.

During their time in Melbourne, Stefan Welz delivered our annual oration, at PLC Burwood, in March, and later that week also spoke at a function that had been arranged by the Queenscliff Museum. A number of our members were able to attend both these wonderful events.

In August we, for the second time, participated in the Trentham “Words in Winter” program. Presentations at this event were given by Janey Runci, Rachel Solomon, and Richard O'Sullivan.

Shortly thereafter, five members made their way to England, Wales and Germany, visiting HHR sites as well as the burial place in Llanfairfechan, Wales, of HHR's sister, Lil. It was wonderful to meet and enjoy the company of some of our English members. In Germany, one of a number of highlights was an evening launch of the Stefan Welz and Fabien Dellemann German translation of Maurice Guest.

As 2019 drew to a close, the committee turned its mind to just how HHR's sesquicentenary year, 2020, could be especially celebrated. Little were we to know that all our plans would be thwarted by the arrival of the coronavirus threat.

Membership numbers remained fairly stable, but it was good to welcome several new members during the year.

I will not be nominating for the position of President in 2020. It is time that we, quite fittingly, have a female president, and the sesquicentenary year makes that even more appropriate. It has been a privilege to serve as president, following Rex Fuge and Clive Probyn. And, finally, I would like to acknowledge the work done by all my fellow committee members over my years as President, especially to Janey Runci who has done, and continues to do, a wonderful job producing all those interesting and informative newsletters.

(Graeme Charles – June 2020)

Janey Runci thanked Graeme for the outstanding job he has done as President. He has been indefatigable in his enthusiastic pursuit of ways to foster interest and enjoyment in HHR's work. He has been a wonderful international correspondent with Society members in Germany and Britain. In many cases these members initially became aware of the Society through Graeme. His warm personality and inclusive approach have ensured that the Society has grown and prospered during his time as president.

Election of committee members:

Graeme Charles stood down as president and Janey Runci was elected to that position. All other committee members were re-elected.

President:	Janey Runci
Vice President:	Graeme Charles
Secretary:	Helen Macrae
Treasurer:	Carolyn Mooney
Ordinary members:	
	Gloria Banks
	Dot Charles
	Brigid Magner
	Ric Pawsey
	Di Parsons
	Rachel Solomon

HHR Sesquicentenary plans thwarted by the corona virus

As Graeme stated in his report, the plans we made for this sesquicentenary year were thwarted first by the bush fires in January which prevented many from attending the birthday celebrations at Lake View, and then by the arrival of the corona virus. Our two major events - the Annual Oration and the HHR Forum – will still go ahead at a later date.

Annual Oration:

Clive Probyn has prepared an oration - *HHR goes to the Movies and comes home with the Pianist* - originally to be delivered at PLC in June, 2020, but now postponed until restrictions are eased and it is safe for us to gather. We will advise the date as soon as we can. Meanwhile if you're catching up on old movies at home during these constrained times (especially Victorians at the moment) you can look forward to Clive's oration which will be a treat for HHR fans and film buffs alike.



Clive Probyn speaking at Lake View in Chiltern in 2013

HHR Forum:

Brenda Niall, biographer, and author of *Friends and Rivals*, and Angela Neustatter, HHR's great niece and currently writing a book on HHR and her sister, Lil, were to meet in conversation at the Wheeler Centre in Melbourne in October this year. Angela, who lives in London, still plans to travel to Australia when the lifting of travel restrictions makes that possible. Both Brenda and Angela are still keen to meet in the forum. We will advise asap.

Other HHR events

Fiona Morrison on HHR at ASAL Conference:

At the Association for the Study of Australian Literature (ASAL) Conference, held online this year, Fiona Morrison presented a paper on HHR: 'Upsetting the Allegory Cart: The Work of Mourning in Henry Handel Richardson's *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*'.

RHSV Book Group on Brenda Niall's *Friends and Rivals*:

The Royal Historical Society of Victoria's Book Group will consider Brenda Niall's book (featured in our last newsletter) on Tuesday, July 14 at 5.30pm as a zoom meeting. Brenda will be attending. If you would like to join in here is the link:

<https://www.historyvictoria.org.au/event/zoom-bookclub-brenda-nialls-friends-and-rivals-four-great-australian-writers-barbara-baynton-ethel-turner-nettie-palmer-henry-handel-richardson/>

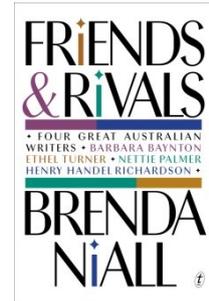
This is the zoom link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82515572588?pwd=ZlVMMTVFUUo5bGVZcXEwbW5xbW1rZz09>

Meeting ID: 825 1557 2588

Password: 540501

You don't have to be a member to join but you can RSVP to Rosemary Cameron via the website.



Translation of *Maurice Guest* into German on its way!

Society member, Sebastian Fink, from Leipzig has advised that the print edition of the German translation by Stefan Welz and Fabian Dellemann of *Maurice Guest* is expected to be ready in November or December this year on the 30th birthday of the publisher, Connewitzer Verlagsbuchhandlung. Originally the book was to be presented at the Frankfurt Book Fair, but that has been prevented by the corona virus.



This is an exciting event for all of us, particularly those of us who attended the event celebrating the book at the Literaturhaus in Leipzig on October 10, 2019. (Newsletter, November 2019).



Poster outside Literaturhaus



Stefan Welz and Fabien Dellemann
at the celebration



Actress, Noemi Krausz reading from the
translation accompanied by pianist, Graham
Welsh

HHR in Chiltern Walk app

Although you might not be able to travel to Chiltern at the moment you can take a virtual walk around HHR's Chiltern, pausing at spots of relevance, and listening to information about her as well as readings from her works by downloading the first of the Henry Handel Richardson Tour apps from the Apple or Google stores.

Tours around HHR's Maldon, Queenscliff and Koroit are also being prepared.



Lake View, Chiltern, HHR's home from 1876-77

Responses to HHR in Chiltern Walk app from Society members:

I have just "been" to Chiltern and enjoyed it very much – Barb Finlayson

Very nice - I have already installed it – Sebastian Fink

Really excellent thanks very much – John Barkla

I find the relationship between the images, the text and the readings very pleasing. Each complements and enhances the other. Good on you! - Delia Bradshaw

Henry Handel Richardson Fellowship at Varuna

Once again the Society will offer this fellowship in partnership with Varuna, the home of another significant Australian writer, Eleanor Dark, and now a Writers House.

In a quote from Varuna: *this award promotes the life and legacy of Henry Handel Richardson as a significant Australian author and encourages excellence in Australian short story writing. This award is offered every second year and will next be offered in the 2021 program.*

For more information about the fellowship and/or Varuna go to www.varuna.com.au



Varuna – the Writers House in Katoomba NSW

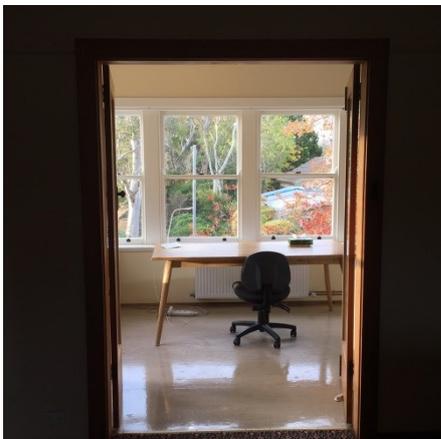
Imbi Neeme – winner of 2019 Henry Handel Richardson Fellowship

In the following message Imbi writes about her experience at Varuna:

The two weeks in Varuna were truly wonderful and I can't thank the HHR Society enough for the opportunity to truly immerse myself in my writing. I was lucky enough to be given the main bedroom, where I was visited by the ghost of Eleanor Dark at least twice (I'm convinced!). I wrote a number of short new stories and worked on the structural edit for 'The Spill'. When not writing, I walked and napped and dreamt and drank cups of tea. Please extend my heartfelt thanks to all at the HHR Society.



Imbi Neeme



Imbi's writing room at Varuna

Launch of *The Spill*

Shortly after Imbi was awarded the HHR Fellowship she was also awarded the 2019 Penguin Literary Prize for her unpublished novel, *The Spill*, which has since been published by Penguin in June this year. A number of our members had the pleasure of attending one or more of the various launch events held online for this remarkable book.

From the Penguin website:

In 1982, a car overturns on a remote West Australian road. Nobody is hurt, but the impact is felt for decades. Nicole and Samantha Cooper both remember the summer day when their mother, Tina, lost control of their car – but not in quite the same way. It is only after Tina's death, almost four decades later, that the sisters are forced to reckon with the repercussions of the crash. Nicole, after years of aimless drifting, has finally found love, and yet can't quite commit. And Samantha is hiding something that might just tear apart the life she's worked so hard to build for herself.

'The Spill' explores the cycles of love, loss and regret that can follow a family through the years – moments of joy, things left unsaid, and things misremembered. Above all, it is a deeply moving portrait of two sisters falling apart and finding a way to fit back together.



2019 HHR Society trip - Lyme Regis and Hastings

As part of our HHR trip in September/October, 2019 we had the good fortune to briefly immerse ourselves in the two towns on the south coast of England where HHR lived for the later part of her life – Lyme Regis and Hastings.

Lyme Regis

We arrived in Lyme Regis with a small store of knowledge about HHR's time in that town. We knew that she'd spent several holidays there before 1914, and that in May 1915 HHR and her husband, George Robertson rented the house, Westfield, in Cobb Road for three years, and then purchased it in 1922. HHR stayed there for at least part of every year until her husband's death in 1933. The house was an escape from the bombing in London during World War 1, and she was also able to indulge her passion for sea bathing, and the cinema.

Our accommodation was right in the centre of the old town, in the first storey of the old Post Office building on Broad Street that sloped steeply down to the large car park on the water's edge. Many of the old shops that line the street are the same as the ones that were there in HHR's time.



Looking down Broad Street to the water

We were delighted to meet again with Angela and Patrick Neustatter (great niece and nephew of HHR), and Patrick's wife, Paula, over dinner on the first night at the Royal Lion Hotel. Angela had travelled from London, and Patrick and Paula from the US to join us in our exploration of HHR's time in the town.



Patrick, Graeme Charles, Paula and Angela at Lyme Regis Museum

Our exploration began the next morning at the Museum, packed with excited noisy school children brought to study the wonders of palaeontology, especially the work of Mary Anning, whose name and image loomed large, as did those of the writers John Fowles (who contributed greatly to the development of the Museum – see HHR Newsletter, June 2019), and Jane Austen. Fowles' novel, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, and Austen's novel, *Persuasion* have crucial scenes set in the town and on the Cobb.

Our enquiries at the information desk about HHR in Lyme Regis were greeted with puzzled frowns and 'Never heard of him,' from one woman. We did find a small HHR display and also some information about Olga Roncoroni, pianist at the local cinema and restaurant run by Olga's family. HHR befriended the reclusive and nervy Olga after hearing and admiring her playing at the cinema, hence the title of Clive Probyn's forthcoming oration: *HHR goes to the movies and comes home with the pianist*.

The car park at the foot of Broad Street turned out to be the site of the establishment that was originally the Assembly Rooms - familiar from Austen's *Persuasion* – and in HHR's time was the Roncoroni cinema and restaurant. What a site for such an establishment with its view across Lyme Bay looking towards France.



Site of the Roncoroni establishment



Photos of the Roncoroni establishment in the Lyme Regis Museum

To the right of the car park is the promenade, lined with old hotels, houses and shops that eventually becomes the Cobb, the high stone walled structure that curves out into the bay, a protective arm for the many little boats that fill the harbour.

We walked along the promenade, reliving the walks made by HHR with Olga, after HHR persuaded her to venture past her self-imposed limit of the second lamppost.



Promenade at Lyme Regis in the early morning

At the end of the promenade we took Cobb Road up to the right and walked up to the house that was HHR's – Westfield - now available as holiday accommodation, and luckily empty while we visited.



Westfield on Cobb Road – the curve of the Cobb wall is just visible to the right of the house



Graeme Charles and Angela Neustatter at the front of Westfield

Olga Roncoroni writes of times in this house thus:

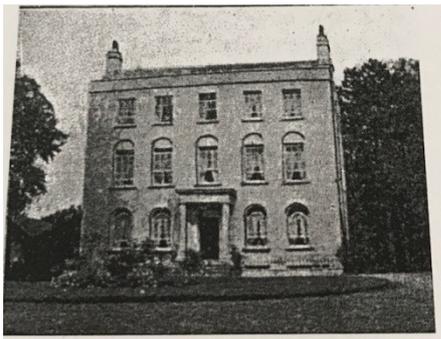
Our activities during these summer holidays in Lyme Regis consisted of early morning swims; a kind of homemade tennis on the too-small lawn at the bottom of the garden; walks on wet days when tennis was impossible; many drives (after the acquisition of a car) through the beautiful country around us; and occasional visits to the dances and cinema performances run by my parents. H.H. and J.G. were both fond of gardening, and the rich, almost black soil yielded abundant crops of fruit, vegetables and flowers.

(from Henry Handel Richardson: some personal impressions, ed. Purdie, E & Roncoroni, O)

Details of the town are featured in the fictional town of Buddlecombe in the second volume of the Richard Mahony trilogy – *The Way Home* – as the site of another of Richard's failed attempts to establish a medical practice. One of the pleasures of our stay there was to read aloud passages from that work. Here is an example from the beginning of the book:

To get the best view of the town you must row out beyond harbour and mole, or, better still, swim out, on one of those dead-calm days that every summer brings – days when the yellow cliffs across the bay send down perfect golden shadows in the blue mirror of the sea. Then, lying pillowed on this saltiest, most buoyant water, glance back to where, grouped in that perfect symmetry that seems the lost secret of old town-builders, the little place on its gun-cliffs lies curved to the bay. Viewed thus, it looks like a handful of grey shells clustered on a silver shingle – pearl, not stone grey – for there is no dourness about Buddlecombe: light and graceful of aspect, it might have suffered bodily transport at the hands of some giant Ifrit, from the French coast over the way.

One further place we'd hoped to see was the house, Summerhill, found by HHR for her sister, Lil and A.S. Neill as premises for the progressive school they'd established in Germany and then Austria. The school occupied the Lyme Regis building from 1924-27 and then moved to its present site in Suffolk, and took the name 'Summerhill' with it. Our president, Graeme Charles, made contact with the Lyme Regis Historical Society, who kindly delivered to our accommodation an article, including photos of the original building, and the one that now occupies the site.



Summerhill as it was

In addition to the photos were some amusing comments from locals at the time about Neill: *He wasn't a very nice man at all – it wasn't a nice school by any means... They were a dreadful lot. Immoral. Both the staff and the children.*

Hastings

HHR's final home was in Tilekiln Lane, Fairlight, Hastings. Our small party from Australia – Graeme and Dot Charles, Maureen McCarthy, Helen Macrae and Janey Runci - were doubly fortunate in our visit to Hastings. Not only did we get an insider's view of the area from our tireless and warm-hearted host, Alex Cliff, but also to visit and have afternoon tea in the house where HHR lived from 1934 until her death there in 1946, thanks to the kind hospitality of the present owners – Julie Marriott and Susan Miller - and to Alex who made the connection and arranged the afternoon for us.



Alex Cliff

Alex is not only an HHR Society member, but is also the great-great niece of Marie Hansen, HHR's friend at PLC and in Leipzig, and subject of Rachel Solomon's oration in 2018. (See Newsletter November 2019)

Before we set off last year Rachel made contact with Alex who then made herself available and ensured that we saw as much as we could of HHR's world on our brief stay in Hastings.

We arrived about midday by train from London, to be greeted by Alex who ferried us in two trips to our accommodation in St Leonards-on-Sea, a short drive from Hastings, and the home of Olga Roncoroni after HHR's death.

In the afternoon Alex took us on a guided walk through the Old Town of Hastings. The Old Town sits facing the sea on a dish of land that rises quickly to hills behind, and a high hill on each side – East Hill and West Hill.



View from East Hill over the boatyards

We walked along George Street, imagining HHR and Olga on their errands here.



View along George Street

A building of particular interest in the Old Town was St Clement's Church. We had hoped to see one of the stained glass windows inside, made by local artist and good friend of HHR, Philip Cole. The window is said to be inspired by HHR's garden, but unfortunately the church was closed both times we went there.



St Clement's Church

Philip Coles' wife, Elsie, has a chapter in *Henry Handel Richardson: some personal impressions*, where she gives a vivid and heartfelt account of her knowledge of HHR over the last twelve years of her life. Elsie describes the experience of visiting HHR for tea, HHR's *reposeful* workroom, the garden laden with flowers, the elegant image and impact of HHR herself:

HH used to admit that she was very shy, but, if so, the sole effect was to make her seem quiet and kind.

Elsie writes further about HHR's activities – her brisk, purposeful walks which she liked to take uninterrupted as she reflected on her current writing; occasional tennis; motoring in her large open car; going to the cinema. Elsie details the curtailing impact of the war on these activities (not unlike our own current pandemic situation). She refers to the bombing over Fairlight and how close it was to them:

When bombs fell: sometimes it might be a mile or two away, or they shattered the glass chandelier in the study at Green Ridges, or landed in the next field.

Sometimes there was *the harrowing sight of rubble rising in the air from some house in the town (perhaps the house of a friend which had just been struck by a bomb).*



Guns lined ready along the Hastings shore

Later that afternoon we visited Hastings History House to see a small display of HHR material and enjoyed a brief talk on the history of the town.



Alex and our guide Anne at the HHR display

The highlight of our time in Hastings was the visit to HHR's home. We drove up The Bourne out of Hastings, and eventually turned into a very narrow, tree-lined lane with land sloping away to the right and rising up to the left. This was Tilekiln Lane. About half way along we pulled over to HHR's house.

We were greeted at the front door by our gracious hostesses – Julie Marriott and Susan Miller – and stepped through into an entrance hall, with stairs going up to the left and a door ahead on the right to a large room where we were treated to a substantial afternoon tea.



Susan Miller and Julie Marrriott at Green Ridges



Stairs to the left of the front door



View through to large main room



Afternoon tea in main room with French doors on right

During the afternoon tea we had a reading from *HHR: Some Personal Impressions* - Nettie Palmer's account of visiting HHR in 1935:

As we entered the front door the staircase was on the left; HHR was standing on the bottom step to receive. Formal, yet making her own rules; a slight and perhaps- as the press says – "diminutive" figure, yet commanding. She wore a velvet house coat and dark slacks, wore her clothes as if she meant them.

Tea was in the big room downstairs: grand piano: Bocklin prints – "Maurice Guest" period. The French window opened on the rather formal garden; beyond that, there were miles of empty green ridges to the Channel cliffs.



View from French windows across to English Channel



Green Ridges from the garden

Another feature of our visit to Green Ridges were the walks we enjoyed, both before and after afternoon tea, retracing HHR's steps. We began with the route of her daily walk along Tilekiln Lane out past the houses into open farmland.



Path from Tilekiln Lane



Alex Cliff, Maureen McCarthy, Dot and Graeme Charles, and Janey Runci

Our second walk was another one walk favoured by HHR – above the cliffs and through the heath at Firehills.



Firehills at Hastings Country Park



View to English Channel

We left Hastings the next morning with promises from Alex that she would visit Australia as soon as she could. We had fulfilled part of a task set by Graeme Charles – to visit the burial sites of each member of the Richardson family.

We've visited Walter's grave a number of times, and in 2017 we visited Mary's unmarked grave in Munich. On this trip we visited Lil's unmarked grave in Llanfairfechan, Wales. We spent a brief time in the house where HHR died and walked down the lane where her body was taken to be cremated in London as described by Elsie Cole: *we formed, with others, a sad little procession on foot along our lane as the funeral cortege passed out of sight of Green Ridges on its way to London.*



Tilekiln Lane

We stood looked out to the sea from Hastings, the place where the ashes of HHR and her husband were scattered as she had wished. Olga Roncoroni writes of that event:

On 6th April Major and Mrs Eves, Elsa, and I drove down to the shore opposite Old Hastings Town, bearing the two caskets. There one of the fishermen (William Joy) and his brother were waiting by their lugger. I wanted to go with them, but Major Eves thought it better not. So Elsa and I sat on the beach and watched the boat go out to sea for about a mile, and then stop. A few moments later it was just possible (in the clear April sunshine) to discern what looked like a tiny cloud of dust, which was quickly dispersed by a cold north-east wind.

New member

Jen Hetherington from South West Rocks, NSW



My interest in HHR was greatly stirred during my studies for a Bachelor Degree in Communications (majoring in Creative Writing and Screen Studies) which I have recently completed (averaging results of distinction, phew, it was a long and rewarding haul!).

And to finish - an 'Ettie' quote that truly resonates with me:

After all, there was something rather pleasant in knowing that you were misunderstood. It made you feel different from everyone else.

Membership

We ran an audit of members just before the AGM in June. It showed we have around 60 paid up members. Thanks everyone.

Around 80 paid a membership fee last year.

In our experience most of you who haven't renewed will be thinking you've paid already. If you've overlooked paying you can pay by direct deposit into our bank account.

BSB: 803070 Account No: 77605

Be sure to identify yourself by name when you make the payment.

If you'd like to become a member for the first time you need to fill out a membership application.

You can find a membership application form on the website:

www.henryhandelrichardsonsciety.org.au

Or you can email the membership secretary: helen.macrae@bigpond.com

She'll send a form to your email address.

Any questions about membership call Helen on **0401 901 558**