

SMARDEN CHARTER HALL

Annual General Meeting 2023

Report from the Chair of Trustees

My report last year stated that the Hall was under increased financial pressure as a result of the pandemic and the slow return to the normal, and indeed flourishing, business mentioned in earlier reports. As a result, hire charges were raised in January, although not by much, as we are very conscious of the need to remain competitive. Bookings this year are fewer in number. For the period January to May this year we had 78 bookings compared with 102 for the same time last year. Furthermore, there have been only 8 children's parties for the first 5 months of this year compared to 42 in the whole of 2022. Our Parish Clerk has her office here, and there are regular meetings of the History Society and the WI. Activities such as bowls, keep-fit, pilates and line dancing, as well as Toddlers, have remained stable. Baby Ballet has returned, but more lucrative one-off events, such as parties and weddings, are far less common.

The Hall became a polling station for the May local elections, and, mindful of possible inspections, Ashford Borough Council used the Hall itself instead of the Hop Pocket. This was more favourable for us financially, although regular activities had to be cancelled. We were grateful to those hirers affected, who were supportive.

The Hall was built in 2007, and still looks amazing. However changes are needed to take advantage of innovations and improvements. We are not unique in finding ourselves at the mercy of inflation, higher bills and a cost-of living crisis. We are confident we will weather the storm but are grateful for any help from individuals and groups.

We have changed our energy supplier, which has already lowered costs, and we are investigating changes to make the heating and hot water system more economical. I would like to thank Caroline, our Hall Administrator, for her efforts in analysing our energy usage in order to find the best energy company for us. Also Lea and Brian in conjunction with David Yarrow, our heating engineer, on the best way forward in reducing heating costs. I would also like to apologise to those Hall users who were affected when we reduced the heating in the Hall earlier than usual. We were grateful for their understanding and continued support.

We published a letter in the June edition of the Parish Magazine, and on the CH website, explaining our concerns to the community. We also suggested ways in which individuals or clubs and societies might help. So far, as a result of the letter, we have had donations from

Smarden WI, the Bowls Club and some from individual members of the community. We are delivering our letter and information on how to help us, to businesses and residents in the village, so that those who do not receive the PM or look at the CH website are aware.

Fund-raising is now our main focus and we have many ideas to increase revenue. I'd like to thank Mike Barkway for leading the marketing team, and for the many ideas generated by the group.

Having read our letter in the PM, a long-term resident, Barbara Marchant, contacted us to offer a talk by her son, who will take us behind the scenes at the coronation of King Charles III. James Marchant was instrumental in creating 'the theatre' for the coronation at Westminster Abbey, and a facsimile at the Palace. His presentation will be an insider's look at how this global event was produced. It will be a fascinating and unique experience which we think will be very popular. James grew up in Smarden and attended local schools.

An antiques roadshow is also planned, and, we intend to bring back the CH Quiz which offers a trophy to the winners from local groups who are regular hall users. We would like to establish 'Friends of the Charter Hall', although so far a name has eluded us. Any suggestions are welcome. Themed advertising of Hall facilities and activities will soon be frequent on social media.

I would like to thank -

- Mark Rogers, our Webmaster, who ensures that our website, reinvented last year, is active and up to date.
- Natalie, who joined us this year, and keeps the Hall looking clean and inviting.
- Luke who also joined us this year as our late-night caretaker.
- my fellow Trustees, Angela, Brian, Fran, Gill, Lea, Mark, Mike, Paul and Roger are the mainstay of the Hall. They have willingly and unstintingly given of their time and talents to support its management, upkeep and operation. Their efforts are very much appreciated, and the whole community has every reason to be grateful to them for keeping standards high in every area, inside and out.

And finally, my thanks go to all those people in the village who support the Hall in so many ways, who book the Hall, and who use the Hall. We hope you continue to enjoy its use for many years to come.

Geraldine Dyer
Chair, Charter Hall Management Committee