

Petworth Society

The Petworth Society was formed in 1974 "to preserve the character and amenities of the town and parish of Petworth including Byworth: to encourage interest in the history of the district and to foster a community spirit." It is a rubric at once ambitious and, in theory, challenging. A wider remit perhaps than that of some other societies.

Annual membership is £10, a little more for postal and overseas members. In recent years membership has remained fairly constant at around six hundred and fifty, a significant proportion being postal. Six hundred and fifty reflects single subscriptions and takes no account of husband and wife membership and the wide dissemination of the Society Magazine among non-members. Taking husband and wife subscriptions into account, membership will be well over a thousand, large for a town of Petworths' size.



The quarterly magazine, now in its one hundred and fortieth issue, averages some forty four pages, never less, sometimes more, plus eight pages of illustrative pictures either in colour or black and white. It monopolises subscription income and is subsidised by the Society's monthly Book

Sale held in the Leconfield Hall in Petworth's Market Square on the second Saturday. The sale attracts buyers from a very wide area, even outside the County, and stock is renewed every month.

While the distinguished Petworth photographer George Garland took little part in the Society's foundation (he died in 1978) he remains like the Society's founder Colonel Maude (who died in 1979), a presiding spirit. The Magazine has taken up Garland's pioneering attempts in the 1930s to recover the oral memory of Petworth and its rural hinterland. To date, the Magazine contains well over five hundred interviews spanning a period of thirty years and more, as well as significant articles on historical and contemporary issues.

Meetings are held once a month (not in Summer), featuring talks and live performances. There is an informal annual dinner at Petworth House and a Summer programme of walks and outings. The Society works closely with two other independent local charities - the very successful Cottage Museum at 346 High Street, a living recreation of the home of Mary Cummings, a seamstress to Lord Leconfield at Petworth house, in 1910, and the Coultershaw Beam Pump Trust. The Society has excellent relations with the National Trust at Petworth House.



The Society, under the same Chairmanship since 1978, is not known for being particularly militant. Its response to the contentious issue of a western bypass route was to offer a forum for discussion, given the divergent views of the membership. It will no doubt attempt a similar consensus on projected long term development in Petworth Town, striking a balance between protecting Petworth's distinctive character and providing affordable housing to give a younger generation the opportunity, if they so wish, to remain in their home town.

Peter Jerrome

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