

The Southwold Sailors' Reading Room

NEWSLETTER 2014/5

Dear Member,

Welcome to this second Newsletter, coming to you towards the end of our 150th Anniversary year. The Sailors' Reading Room was given to the town, as a shelter for local fishermen and mariners, by Francis Rayley in memory of her husband Captain Charles Rayley RN. It opened on 2nd June 1864, and this year your Committee arranged a variety of events to mark this significant Anniversary - details to follow.



Rev. Simon Pitcher takes the Founder's Day service.
Photo: Bill Hancock

2014 has also been our first year as a Company Limited by Guarantee. Our charitable status is not affected, but this legal change will safeguard, more securely, the future of The Sailors' Reading Room.

The Committee welcomed our new Treasurer Ken Waters, who is a Southwold businessman. Mr Waters took over from Mrs Rebecca Clegg, who we are sure you all wish to thank, most sincerely and warmly, for her diligence and care! But a Treasurer's lot is not a happy one. Last year our funds were diminishing and so were our donations, but this year we can report that the SSRR's financial resources have improved very slightly, due to active fundraising and many additional subscriptions, even though our visitors' 'box' donations continue to fall.

We have welcomed nearly seventy new Members to The SSRR this year, a most encouraging increase that brings our Membership to over two hundred and fifty. However to ensure our financial stability we must continue to attract

new Members, so please recommend or donate a Membership of The Sailors' Reading Room to your friends and family so that they too can support this unique historic landmark.

A number of substantial gifts have been received over the past year. The late Nettie, Lady de Montmorency, an unfailing supporter of The Sailors' Reading Room during her lifetime, left a generous legacy of £1000.

The previous Town Mayor, Mr Simon Tobin, who nominated the SSRR as one of his Civic Charities last year made a donation of over £1,400. Thank you! The gift helped to furnish some improvements to the original Billiards table in The Games Room, which has been in continual use since 1900. In order to upgrade the table to a full size Snooker facility, larger pockets were added, together with new cushions, to the great appreciation of our growing Snooker playing Membership.

Funding from Seafarers UK, formerly The King George's Fund for Sailors, also enabled us to carry out essential refurbishments to The Games Room, which included new toilet facilities, and a much needed storage cupboard. The Reading Room also benefitted from a new display case for the many large reference books that are on permanent display.

The Anniversary Year:

A notable service was held in The Sailors' Reading Room on Founder's Day 2nd June, presided over by The Rev. Simon Pitcher of The Sole Bay Ministry. The service included the seafarers' hymn '*Eternal Father, Strong to Save*', a reading specially written for the occasion called '*The North East Wind*', and The Choir of Saint Felix Preparatory School sang the celebrated pop cantata '*Jonah man Jazz*'. The service was concluded with prayers of remembrance and thanks offered by Rev. Simon, before a Peal of Bells rang out from St Edmund's Church. The 150th anniversary service was extremely well attended and The Red Lion provided a delicious buffet lunch. The Order of Service and more photos can be found on The Sailors' Reading Room website.

The SSRR also made a substantial contribution to the first Southwold Arts Festival in June. Committee Member Vince Austin staged a Children's Art Competition for schools, who were invited to contribute work in two different age categories. Over 100 entries were received and they were all displayed in The Reading Room. Lady Elizabeth Dales awarded first Prizes on 28th June, to Alice Greenacre in the Senior category (12-16) and Tessa Pike in the Junior category (7-11). Thanks to all who entered, and many congratulations to the winners.

On 31st July Anthea Marriner held her annual Cake Stall in The Market Place, which raised £260 for The Reading Room. Thanks to all who contributed, and manned the stall.



Southwold Town Crier, John Barber singing with 'The Harbour Lights' Photo: Keith Warren

Over the weekend of 4th – 7th September the SSRR played host to hundreds of people from all over East Anglia who came to visit The Sailors' Reading Room and enjoy the full programme of music and entertainment on Saturday 6th - the highlight of the weekend. This was specially organised for Heritage Open Days 2014 to mark the 150th Anniversary.

Each day The Reading Room was fully staffed and even guided tours were available! On Saturday 6th, the main programme of events began with an opening by the Town Mayor Ann Betts, followed by music from 'The Harbour Lights', making a welcome return to East Cliff after their great success at last year's Sail Past and Anniversary preview day.

Inside the Reading Room the afternoon began with the welcome return of 'Fishy Tales' - a collection of whimsical, spooky and tragic sea stories about Southwold and the East Coast, read superbly by Ben Cardwell, Donald Gee, Wendy Mantin, Pam Stewart, Caitríona Vulliamy and Caroline Way.

The distinguished maritime historian and author Robert Simper gave an excellent talk about life amongst the fishing communities in Southwold at the time when The Sailors' Reading Room was built. He talked about the infamous Beach Companies who not only controlled the fishing; they managed the piloting and salvage, which was extremely lucrative. To be fair, they did build their own prototype lifeboats, which were used on this coast until 1864 when the RNLI was established in Southwold.

For the finale of this year's Heritage Open Days 2014 The Reading Room staged two spine chilling 'Ghost Stories by Candlelight'. Specially adapted for performance from the original Edwardian tales by

M R James, these were set in uneasily 'familiar' places such as Dunwich, Blythburgh, and Covehithe. Donald Gee, Wendy Mantin and Caitríona Vulliamy performed to a packed house and spines were undoubtedly chilled on this murky cliff, that night.

Thank you to all the Committee members who staged the very successful Heritage Open Days, and to the many, many Friends of The Sailors' Reading Room who staffed the room, moved chairs and helped supply the wonderful catering. We raised hundreds of pounds including a record sum of £302 collected by Ian Denny for his remarkable Tombola!

Finally, to mark the end of this 150th Anniversary year, the Committee has commissioned a unique jigsaw puzzle. The colourful and intriguing subject is a photomontage, which uses modern and archive pictures to reflect every different aspect of the Sailors Reading Room, past and present.



Photomontage: Laurence Vulliamy

This attractive, original gift will be available for sale from 5th December. Prices are £13.50 for 500 pieces and £17.50 for 1000 pieces + £3.00 per puzzle for postage and packing. To order, please post or drop off your cheque to The Sailors' Reading Room, Southwold IP18 6EL. Collection in person can be arranged, and all profits will support the SSRR.

From us all here on East Cliff, may we wish you a very Happy Christmas and a healthy and prosperous New Year!

