

West Blacket Association

NEWSLETTER AUTUMN 2020



Lockdown pictures by: Alice, Cathie W, Charles, Chrissie H, Chrissie S, Jackie, Lise, Louise, Morag, Philip & Val. Montage by Lucy

Who are we?

The WBA is an amenity association for part of the Blacket Conservation Area, from Salisbury Place to West Mayfield and from Upper and South Gray Streets to Minto Street. Our main purpose is the preservation and improvement of the general amenity of the West Blacket area. This includes consultation with the Council on their plans for parking, traffic and recycling, and on Planning Applications under consideration. We also hope to encourage good neighbour relations through Neighbourhood Watch and by organising some social events for our members. If you are not already a member, please join us.

During lockdown from March, and continuing restrictions since, we have continued to function with appropriate social distancing. Committee meetings have been held by Zoom, allowing us to monitor, discuss and comment on Planning matters. Early in lockdown, we offered a “WBA Zoom Cafe”, with technical help from Bruce, as a social contact point for residents in isolation. But planned social events which would not allow social distancing have inevitably been postponed until restrictions are lifted.

WBA WhatsApp Group

The advent of Covid prompted us to set up the a WhatsApp group to promote neighbourly contact and mutual support. We have been delighted to see how much sharing & exchange has taken place from Covid updates, plants and produce, jigsaws to jokes.... also occasional errands to the local pharmacy or shops. The Easter bunny trail, WBA Chelsea ...and social media funnies, brightened our days in the Spring lockdown. Getting to know a bit more about each other has been great in these different times!!

Please stay involved, stay positive. **Maggie Stevenson, Chair WBA**

Some views on the value of the WBA WhatsApp Group

“At the start of lockdown we had already been isolating for a few days because our children, then 10 months and 2 1/2, had been sent home from nursery coughing. Although we had an online food order booked, supermarket shortages at that time meant that several things didn't arrive and we became the first family in the area to reach out for help on the WBA WhatsApp group. Soon after, we had to ask for more help in the collection and delivery of prescriptions. We are very lucky to live in a community committed to keeping its neighbours safe, where people are genuinely concerned for one another's welfare. We are extremely grateful for the help. Moreover, the WhatsApp group has given us the opportunity to get to know one another better, which has been a wonderful thing during these strange times.” **Louise, Minto St**

“The WBA WhatsApp group has been invaluable to us as a family as it allowed us to feel help and support were literally at hand during the lockdown. It seemed to bring everyone together and the banter was also good for morale.” **Lise, Minto St**

Planning Matters

Three significant sites within our area continue to be of interest or concern this year, the most significant or contentious being the corner site at Duncan St and Upper Gray St where there is approval for three houses. There has been no on-site activity since July 2019 when the foundations were completed. The developer would appear to have avoided communications with all concerned and is reported to deny liability for damage to the Upper Gray St pavement or the party wall of a neighbouring property. The emergency working arrangements introduced in March in relation to planning among everything else have certainly delayed and interfered with normal activity which has been most frustrating. We think however that our complaint to the Council about this situation is now being taken seriously.

The former Hendry and Macdonald workshop in Duncan St was the focus of a series of applications, refusals and appeals, and finally approval as student accommodation with retention of the complex wooden roof structure. A survey identified damage to some timber joints, and also sections of perimeter walls, and approval was given for careful dismantling and repair. This has been going on steadily since earlier in the year and reconstruction of the walls is well advanced and will be followed by the return and re-erection of the roof timbers with appropriate strengthening.

The third significant proposal is for a 10-bedroom extension at the Thrums Hotel at 14-15 Minto St. An earlier 'modern style' proposal in 2019 was withdrawn following objections and a different architect has been working on a more traditional alternative. This current proposal is therefore at an early stage as revised applications have just been submitted, involving a separate bedroom wing within the rear car park off Blacket Avenue. Being at the rear of this Listed building there would be no impact on the view of the property from Minto St.

History Group Report

Our annual get-together (theme: putting the clock back on West Blacket) was on 9 March so we just made it (very just) before lockdown. A well attended and successful meeting (one of the most successful and certainly the most varied) as some residents gave talks about previous occupants of their homes, a highly welcome development in building up an understanding of our area. Ron Hill set the scene with historical maps. We took a look at how Middleby Street changed over time (Rosemary Wake). We ventured into Upper Gray Street with Laura Bradley and the families who had lived at number 22. A couple of forays onto Minto Street: Louise Robertson talked about her boredom-relieving research into the Mekies and Melvilles of 11 Minto Street; Tim Barnes had searched old newspapers (eg items for sale and collection lists) to shed light on the inhabitants of number 39. Ensuing chat and follow-up had us going home to search behind our shutters for wee cubbie nooks for chanties and seeking a video on the sad case of Elizabeth Dyer murdered by Eugene Chantrelle (Elizabeth's family lived in South Gray Street). Many thanks to all who contributed and to our hosts. We must find a way to make sure such material is not lost, and indeed grows through more small focussed studies. I expect our next meeting will be by zoom – a pity but at least 'new media' means that we can still share and explore. Please keep researching, folks!

WEST BLACKET ASSOCIATION – Please join to support your local area

New members welcome

Subscriptions are annual, until 31st October each year.

£8 for a household or £5 for an individual.

Please pay by Bank transfer or Standing order.

WBA bank details are: Sort Code **83-19-19**; A/C No **10056031**:

Once you've joined, just send your name, postal and email address to kate.obrien@hotmail.co.uk to let Kate, our Membership Secretary, know.

By giving us your email address, WBA will let you know about amenity issues, including planning, Neighbourhood Watch and any social activities we organise, eg History Group meetings, walks or visits of interest.

If you are already a member, no action is required.

Annual General Meeting November 23rd 2020

The West Blacket Association AGM will be held by Zoom, beginning 730pm – an email with the Zoom link will be sent out nearer the time.

The formal agenda, as required by our articles of association, will consist of:

Record of those attending

Minute of previous AGM

Chair's Report

Treasurer's Report

Election of Office Bearers and Committee

There will also be an opportunity to discuss matters of WBA interest.

Present committee members are: Maggie Stevenson (Chair), Nigel Cumming (Treasurer), Mike Hunter (Hon Sec), Kate O'Brien (Membership Secretary), Ian Carter, Alice Foster, Evelynne Hill, Rosemary Wake (not standing for re-election), Charles Warlow & Cathie Wright.

Nominations to the committee. All WBA members are eligible to stand for election and new members are very welcome. Nominations in writing please to Mike Hunter, Hon Sec, 40 Upper Gray Street, or by email to dr.m.j.hunter@gmail.com