

THE SUSSEX ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

BY F. BENTHAM STEVENS, F.S.A.

THE Sussex Archaeological Society, as related elsewhere in this volume, had only been in existence for about five years when it became the tenant of the southern Keep of Lewes Castle and the Barbican. The requirements of the Society in those early days were modest, and for many years the two towers of the Keep (converted into a summer residence by Thomas Read Kemp) and the two rooms of the Barbican provided sufficient accommodation for the Society's headquarters and its small collection of exhibits as well as living-rooms for the Warder, as he was then called. In 1885, primarily to afford room for housing the growing library, the Society became tenants of the adjoining house known as Castle Lodge. Both these tenancies were merely yearly ones, and it was the sudden and unexpected determination of the tenancy of Castle Lodge in 1904 which caused the Society, more than sixty years after its foundation, to consider for the first time the purchase of a house as a permanent home.

After various alternatives had been considered Barbican House was purchased from Mr. Henry Willett and was on 1 June 1908 conveyed to three individual trustees nominated by the Society, namely Mr. Gerald Walter Erskine Loder (then a member of the Council and afterwards Lord Wakehurst), Major Harold Parmenter Molyneux (also a member of the Council and for many years Treasurer of the Society), and Mr. Henry Harrison Pownall of Ades, Chailey.

It is significant of the change of feeling which has taken place during the present century that when Barbican House was purchased, while emphasis was naturally and properly laid on its convenient situation in regard to the Castle, comparatively little was said of the architectural and other features of the house. In fact it was not until thirty-three years later that an

article on Barbican House was written by Mr. W. H. Godfrey, F.S.A., and published in *S.A.C.*, vol. LXXXII, pp. 2-19.

After the Society's unfortunate experience in regard to Castle Lodge some anxiety was not unnaturally felt that its tenure of the Castle afforded no more security than a yearly tenancy—albeit one that had endured for more than sixty years. However, shortly after the end of the first European war the owners of the copyhold interest in the Castle agreed to sell it to the Society on the basis of the value for probate purposes of the moiety of the 1st Marquis of Abergavenny (who had died on 12 December 1915): and, as is also related elsewhere, Mr. Charles Thomas-Stanford, M.P. (as he then was), came forward and provided the purchase money. At the same time the Lords of the Castle agreed to sell their freehold lordship: and on 24 November 1921 Lewes Castle changed hands by purchase for the first time in its history. Recourse was again had to individual trustees, and the Castle was conveyed to William Simon Campion, Henry Rainald Viscount Gage, Sir Henry Burrows Shiffner (Baronet), and Frank Bentham Stevens.

A few years later Mr. Frank Verrall of Southover gave Anne of Cleves House, Southover, to the Society; and it was on 21 November 1923 conveyed to the trustees who already held the Castle. This was the first occasion on which the Society accepted, definitely for preservation, a building with which it had at that time no other concern. The new departure was justified at the time by the intrinsic interest and importance of the house, a full architectural account of which was written by Mr. W. H. Godfrey, F.S.A., and printed in vol. LXV of the Society's *Collections*, pp. 1-19. Subsequently when it was possible to obtain possession the house proved extremely valuable as a folk museum; and now it houses not only a wide range of exhibits but also the Every collection. In fact if this house had not been available the Society would have had to face the difficult task of obtaining accommodation elsewhere.

By this time it was becoming clear that the new



ANNE OF CLEVES: THE HALL

responsibilities in regard to the preservation of ancient buildings, which the Society, in accordance with the trend of informed opinion, was now prepared to assume, would involve the ownership of various properties: and that some form of legal ownership at once more flexible and more permanent than private trusteeship would be required.

The Council accordingly after investigating the matter suggested the formation, under the provisions of the Companies Acts, of a corporate body to be known as the Sussex Archaeological Trust, the main object of which would be to hold properties of antiquarian interest upon trust for their permanent preservation.

This proposal was endorsed by the Society at the Annual Meeting held on 19 March 1924; and the Trust was on 1 January 1925 incorporated as an association not for profit under the Companies Acts, 1908 to 1917. The signatories of the Memorandum and Articles of Association were Charles Thomas-Stanford, F.S.A., R. Garraway Rice, F.S.A., J. Edwin Couchman, F.S.A., J. Godwin King, Arthur F. Griffith, F. Bentham Stevens, and Eliot Curwen, F.S.A. The Articles provided that the first chairman of the Council of the Trust should be Charles Thomas-Stanford, Esquire, F.S.A., a fitting honour in view of the part which he had played in initiating the new policy, both by his gift of Lewes Castle to the Society and by his subsequent advocacy of the formation of the Trust.

The constitution of the Trust was framed so as to secure that it should be the legal representative and agent of the Society and not in any sense an independent or rival body. Thus every member of the Society can become a member of the Trust on payment of £1 as a qualifying subscription: and no annual subscription is then payable. The Trust has power to elect anyone who is not a member of the Society as a member of the Trust, but in that case an annual subscription would be payable. The power, however, has never been exercised. It follows that the Trust consists exclusively of members of the Society and has no regular annual

income from subscriptions. It is therefore controlled and financed by the Society. Further, though technically it has its own Council, this is composed of those members of the Council of the Society who are themselves members of the Trust, so that in effect the Council of the Trust is elected by the Society.

The properties vested in the Trust may be classified according to the means whereby they were acquired.

The first group consists of the properties which had, as already described, been acquired by the Society prior to the formation of the Trust and were already vested in trustees, namely Lewes Castle, Barbican House, and Anne of Cleves House. These trustees were not superseded, but the Trust was appointed as an additional trustee. In the case of Barbican House Mr. Henry Harrison Pownall had died on 26 June 1913 and Major Harold Parmenter Molyneux on 6 February 1923, leaving Mr. G. W. E. Loder as sole surviving trustee. On 3 May 1927 he appointed the Trust to act with him, and since his death on 30 April 1936 the Trust alone has held the property. No further appointment of individual trustees will be made.

Lewes Castle and Anne of Cleves House were dealt with by Orders of the Charity Commission dated respectively 20 August 1926 and 29 September 1925 appointing the Trust to act with the existing trustees. This arrangement still continues, but the individual trustees have been reduced to three, Sir Henry Burrows Shiffner having been killed in action in North Africa in 1941.

Additions to these properties have been dealt with on the same lines. When Mr. Frank Verrall added to his previous gift additional land and buildings to the north of Anne of Cleves House these were (on 30 March 1928) conveyed to the individual trustees and the Trust, as were additions to the Castle property consisting of a garden on the west side (purchased 28 January 1930) and the northern keep, usually known as the Brack Mount, purchased through the good offices of Mrs. Henry Dudeney (14 July 1937).

The next group of properties consists of ancient houses and the sites of antiquities which have at various times been given to the Trust. These are, for convenience, set out in order of date:

10 October 1925. Wilmington Priory and the Long Man of Wilmington. These two antiquities were conveyed to the Trust by the 9th Duke of Devonshire with the concurrence of the Marquess of Hartington (now the 10th Duke). The gift included an area of 2 acres of downland surrounding the Giant.

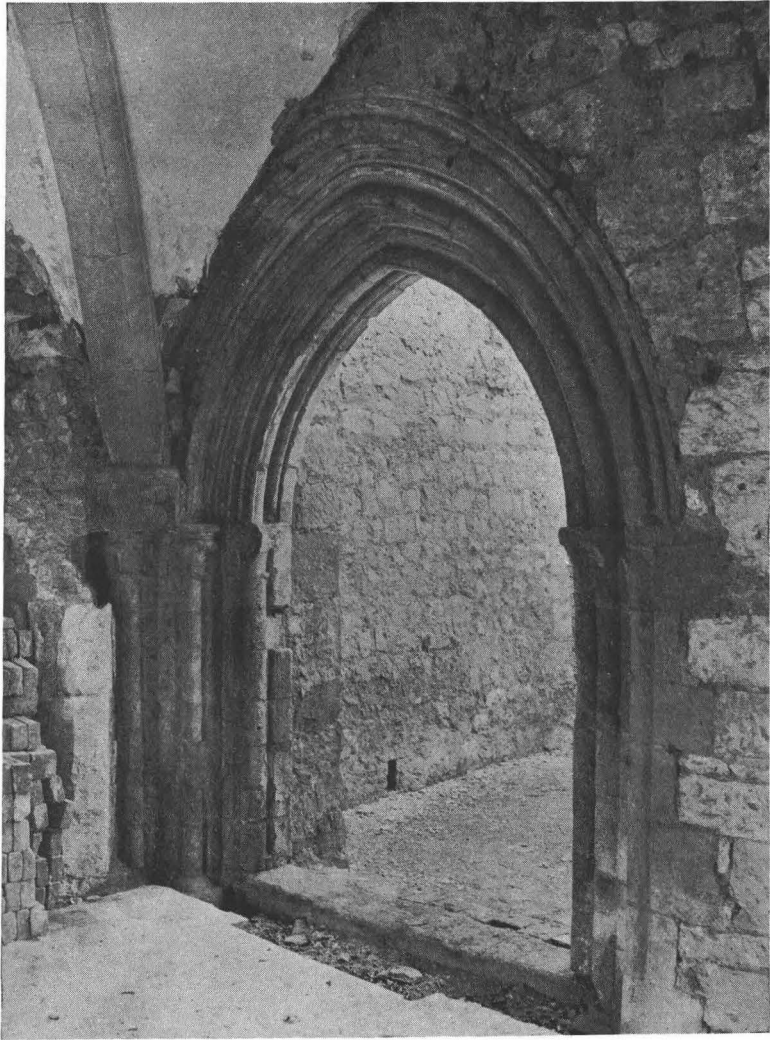
Wilmington Priory was restored at considerable expense by the Trust. There is a resident custodian, and the Priory is always open to the public. A full account of the Priory appeared in *S.A.C.*, vol. LIX, which contains an architectural description by Mr. W. H. Godfrey, F.S.A. (pp. 1-27), and historical notes by the Rev. W. Budgen, F.S.A. (pp. 28-52).

31 August 1932. Site of Roman Villa, Southwick. The site of the Roman Villa at Southwick, which had been excavated by Mr. S. E. Winbolt and other members of the Society, was purchased by an anonymous member in order to prevent its being developed as part of a building estate and was presented to the Trust.

An account of the site by Mr. Winbolt was printed in *S.A.C.*, vol. LXXIII, pp. 10-32.

7 November 1935. Legh Manor, Cuckfield. Lady Chance, on the death of her husband Sir William Chance, Baronet, and in pursuance of an arrangement previously made by him, gave to the Trust a small Manor House at Cuckfield known as Legh Manor together with the valuable furniture of the house, a farm of 140 acres and other houses and buildings, and a substantial endowment fund. This is the largest and most valuable property which has come into the hands of the Trust. An account of the house by W. H. Godfrey, F.R.I.B.A., F.S.A., was published in *S.A.C.*, vol. LXXVIII, pp. 160-76.

There is a resident custodian, and the house and garden (which was designed by Miss Gertrude Jekyll and Lady Chance) are open to the public at the usual



WILMINGTON PRIORY: DOOR TO THE OLD HALL



LEGH MANOR, CUCKFIELD

hours. The management of the estate has been placed by the Council in the hands of a firm of land agents.

12 November 1935. *Priest House, West Hoathly*. Mr. J. Godwin King of West Hoathly, who has for many years been a member of the Council of the Society, made over to the Trust the ancient Clergy House at West Hoathly, which he had purchased nearly thirty years earlier. The gift included a small endowment fund and also the museum which he and Mrs. Godwin King had formed in the house.

In this case also there is a resident custodian and the house and museum are open to the public.

Mr. Ian C. Hannah described the architectural features of the Priest House in his article on 'Mediaeval Timber Houses' in *S.A.C.*, vol. LXXI, pp. 128-33.

27 May 1936. *Bull House, No. 92 High Street, Lewes*. This was given to the Trust by Mr. John H. Every of Lewes, another old member of the Council of the Society. This interesting house, sometimes known as Tom Paine's House or, from the figure over one of the doors, the Monkey House, adjoined the West Gate and was for many years part of the town house of the Goring family. When this came into the hands of the Rev. Thomas Barnard, a Unitarian minister, part of it was converted into and still is a chapel.

In the part which remained a dwelling-house Thomas Paine lived while employed as an exciseman in Lewes. When Mr. Every acquired the house he spent a large sum in restoring it, and in doing so was advised by Mr. W. H. Godfrey, who for a time himself lived in the house and has published an account of its history and architectural features: *At the Sign of the Bull, Lewes* (Eyre and Spottiswood Ltd., 1924).

The house is let on lease and the ground-floor is used as a café. Portions of the house are open to inspection by the public on three days in each week.

12 July 1939. *Roman Road, Holtye*. Mr. I. D. Margary, F.S.A., whose work on Roman roads is so well known, transferred to the Trust land at Holtye on which he had himself discovered a strip of the Roman Road from

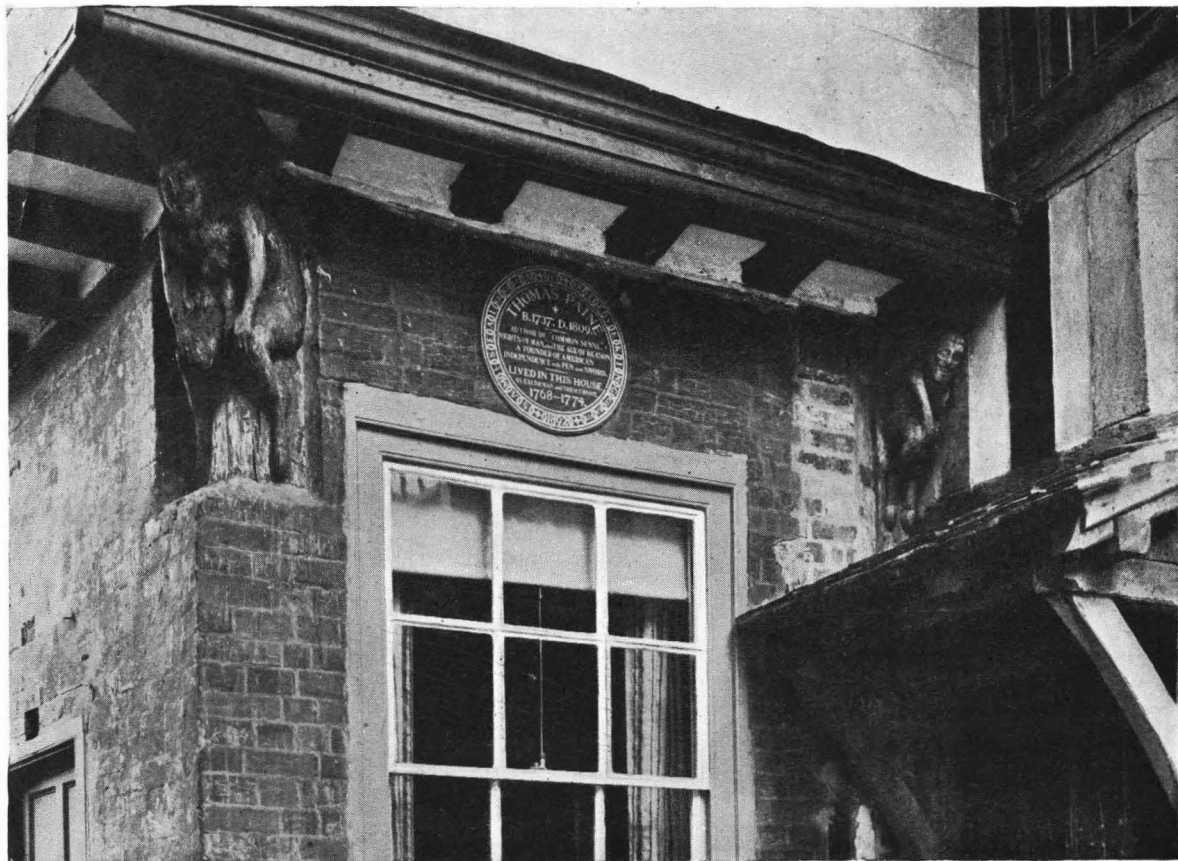


PRIEST HOUSE, WEST HOATHLY

H. Connold photo.



JOHN HENRY EVERY
Member of the Council 1921-1935
(He gave Bull House and bequeathed his Collections to the Society)



BULL HOUSE, LEWES

London to Maresfield. The overlying soil has been carefully removed and the actual metalling of the road disclosed. A public footpath follows much the same course as the road, so that the uncovered portion is always open to inspection. Mr. Margary's gift included an endowment fund to provide for upkeep and renewal of fencing.

This piece of the road is dealt with by Mr. Margary in *S.A.C.*, vol. LXXIII, p. 46 (with map on p. 42).

23 November 1939. *Pigeon House, Angmering*. On this day Lieutenant-Commander Gerald Hildred Elsdale Molson, R.N., lost his life when, after a most gallant struggle against heavy odds, H.M.S. *Rawalpindi* was sunk in northern waters by the *Deutschland*. By his will, made a day or two before he sailed on what proved to be his last voyage, Lieutenant-Commander Molson left to the Trust the medieval house at Angmering known as Pigeon House, which he had restored and in which he had lived for some years before the outbreak of the war. A short account of the house, written by Lieutenant-Commander Molson in preparation for a visit paid to the house by the Society, was printed in *Sussex Notes and Queries*, vol. VIII, pp. 113, 114.

Pigeon House is let as a private house, but the lease reserves the right for visits by members of the Society and of the National Trust on two afternoons in each week.

The third group of properties vested in the Trust comprises premises purchased by public subscription organized independently of the Society, in respect of which the Trust's position is that of custodian, rather than managing trustee. These are as follows:

12 November 1925. *Marlipins, New Shoreham*. As the result of the efforts of a local Committee and mainly through the generosity of Mr. William John Burstow this interesting building—one of the few non-ecclesiastical public buildings of medieval date remaining in Sussex—was purchased for preservation, and the Trust agreed to accept the legal ownership.

The Marlipins is under the management of a local committee and its finances are separate from those of



PIGEON HOUSE, ANGMERING

A. Mann photo.



THE MARLPINS, NEW SHOREHAM

the Trust as a whole. It houses a small museum, and is open to the public.

An article on the building by Mr. A. B. Packham appeared in *S.A.C.*, vol. LXV, pp. 158-95.

27 May 1927. *Oldland Mill, Keymer*. This example of a Sussex post windmill was in danger of collapse when a fund was raised for its purchase and repair. The Trust accepted a conveyance of the Mill, although, having regard to the perishable nature of wooden mills, it expressly disclaimed financial responsibility for its permanent preservation.

9 December 1927. Nos. 6, 8, and 10 *Parsonage Row, West Tarring*. The Royal Society of Arts raised a fund for the purchase of these ancient cottages adjoining the reputed palace of Thomas à Becket at West Tarring and requested the Trust to accept a conveyance of the property, which it agreed to do.

A local committee on which the Trust is represented is responsible for the management. Two of the cottages are let to tenants, and the third is open to the public.

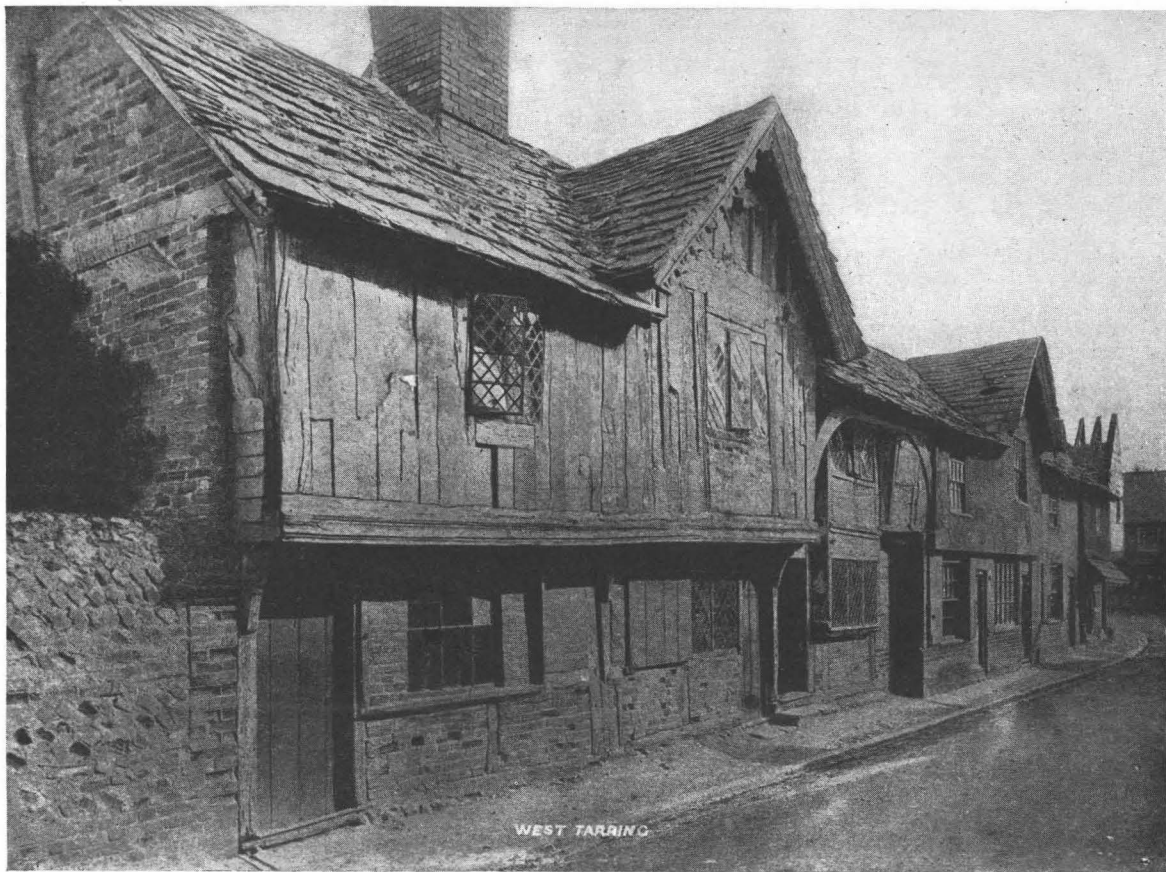
Mr. Ian C. Hannah contributed an article on the cottages to *S.A.C.*, vol. LXXIV, pp. 209-13.

Lastly reference may be made to certain miscellaneous duties accepted by the Trust:

(a) *Thomas-Stanford Trust*. Sir Charles Thomas-Stanford, who as already stated was prominently associated with the formation of the Trust, by his will left a legacy of £1,000 to the Trust; the income of which is applicable first of all to the maintenance and repair of the Stanford monuments in the churchyard of West Dean and in the church and churchyard of Preston. The surplus income is available for the maintenance and repair of Lewes Castle. The monuments are inspected every year, but so far the expenditure on them has not been large and there has been a substantial annual surplus for repairs at the Castle.

Further details in regard to the bequest and the monuments will be found in *S.A.C.*, vol. LXXIV, pp. 226-41.

(b) *Ardingly Village Sign*. Viscountess Wolsey,



COTTAGES AT WEST TARRING

who did much to make known the beauties and interest of the smaller medieval houses in Surrey, lived for the last years of her life at Ardingly. After her death a fund was raised by some admirers of her work to provide a permanent memorial. This took the form of a village sign designed by Mr. W. H. Godfrey, F.R.I.B.A., and erected at the road junction close to Lady Wolseley's home. At the request of the subscribers the Trust has undertaken the future care of the sign, and a small endowment fund has been placed in the hands of the Trust for maintenance purposes.

(c) *East Lavington Barrow*. Mr. H. C. Visick, the owner of Great Bury Copse, East Lavington, in which there is a long barrow, on 7 February 1944 entered into a covenant with the Trust on behalf of himself and future owners to preserve the barrow.

While the legal position in regard to such covenants is not altogether satisfactory, there is no doubt that from the practical point of view they are a most useful deterrent, and it is hoped that Mr. Visick's example may be followed by other landowners.

From the foregoing summary it will be seen that the work undertaken by the Trust varies considerably to meet the needs of the different cases. Properties may come to the Trust by direct or indirect gift, or by purchase by the Society. They may be under the direct management of the Trust or the Trust may merely act as legal custodian. They may be either used as museums or for similar purposes, or they may be let to tenants, or they may consist merely of sites which it is desired to keep open.

Certain conditions, however, apply in every case. In particular the properties are held for preservation, as far as this is possible. In many cases there are specific directions to this effect in the instrument whereby the property is vested in the Trust. In all other cases the properties are by virtue of clause 4 of the Memorandum of Association held 'upon trust to preserve all or any of the features of the property which may

be of historical or archaeological or antiquarian interest or natural beauty'.

In several cases the specific trusts applicable provide that in the event of the Sussex Archaeological Trust's ceasing to exist the property shall pass to the National Trust: and where there is no such express provision the same result follows from clause 10 of the Memorandum of Association. As has been stated, the properties are for the most part open to the public. A fee is usually payable for admission, but members of the Society have a right of entry without charge.

Some discussion arose in the early days of the Trust as to the information which should be given in the accounts of the Trust. As it is in law a limited company (although excused from many of the regulations, including the obligation to use the word 'limited'), it is required to publish an Annual Balance Sheet. If this complied with the practice observed by commercial concerns it would include the value of all the properties; and it was argued that this was necessary and proper.

But the Trust is not a commercial concern, and its assets cannot be valued on a purely commercial basis. Any attempt at valuing antiquities is bound to be misleading, and is open to objection on other grounds. It was, therefore, decided that the Balance Sheet should be limited to summarizing the result of actual financial transactions: and should not attempt a complete statement of the value of all the property held by the Trust. This is in accordance with the procedure adopted by many similar bodies.

At the time when the Sussex Archaeological Trust was established, the National Trust had been in existence for thirty years, but the only similar county body was the Norfolk Archaeological Trust. So far as is known no other County Archaeological Societies have followed the examples of Norfolk and Sussex, although it is known from inquiries which have been received that the matter is being considered elsewhere. Somewhat similar objects are, however, promoted by such bodies as the Oxford Preservation Trust.