

REPORT FOR WINTER 2019 – Jessamy Blanford

I hope everyone had a cheerful Christmas and is looking forward to an active and healthy New Year.

During the last quarter we have had a fairly quiet time except for the threatened flooding at Pig & Whistle Farm. Thanks to the prompt action by the Parish Council, Ashford B C and the KCC the worst prospects were prevented but it is still an unnerving situation and further action will be taken.

My year as Mayor progresses with many engagements. I have visited 10 Ashford primary schools which belong to the Care Foundation, with Amy Casey from ABC, and talked and listened to them on the environmental projects which the Eco Warriors are carrying out. I have found it very heart-warming to visit these schools and see the energy put in by the pupils generally, the bright classrooms and the keen questioning. This work will continue in 2019. I have also attended the Prizegiving Ceremonies at Highworth Girls Grammar School and the Norton Knatchbull school

Some of the other activities include the unveiling of Queen Marie of Romania's statue in Elwick Place. Queen Marie was a granddaughter of Queen Victoria and born and brought up at Eastwell. The Romanians wanted to celebrate her life and had presented Ashford with the 15ft high statue. Many Romanians attended the ceremony including the Cultural Attache from London, the Romanian Ambassador and Princess Helen of Romania. Queen Marie is remembered with affection by Romanians: she brought the country into WW1 on the side of the allies, she nursed and raised funds for the soldiers and their families and she attended negotiations for reparations at the end of the war. She was also very artistic. We may have forgotten her but the Romanians have not.

That same week In December we opened the new Picturehouse in Elwick Place and "unveiled" the engravings in the pavement outside the cinema. I hope the Picturehouse will add another dimension to the nightlife of the town. There is a 260 car park beside the cinema. The management company are also planning to run family and children's events at the Picturehouse.

On 6th January I attended the Blessing of the Seas at Margate. This is an annual event run by the Greek Orthodox community with the Mayor of Margate and attended by about 25 Kent and Cinque Port Mayors. We had been advised to dress warmly under our mayoral robes. Coaches took us to the Greek Orthodox church from where we progressed, led by a band, down to the sea front. As it was high tide we did not actually go on to the beach but a short service was held on the small quay taken by Archbishop Athanasios with a Greek patriarch and also Bishop Trevor of Dover. A young child was taken into the sea as part of the blessing. For anxious mothers let me assure you that it is considered a great honour to be selected and the child was dressed in a wet suit – or is it a dry suit – including his feet and kept warm.

Best wishes to all in 2019.

GtC&S Newsletter Jan 2019