



with Oliver Farley

# Horsham Society

## Bad luck with public statuary

About 25 years ago the sun was revealed here in Horsham. More particularly, it was the sun god who came to rest in Park House garden, with a gleaming golden eye and garlanded with the admonition to enumerate only happy hours.

The gold eye attracted the evil attention of ill-disposed persons who took some glee and considerable effort in removing it, not once or twice, but three times and that despite the best efforts of Horsham District Council to concrete the eye in place.

After the third removal the sun god was left in his blindness, like a minor Cyclops after an Odyssean visit. And so he stayed until last November when his tormentors returned and broke the bearded figure in half.

There are two reinforcing bars through the body of the statue so the labour involved in his destruction was not casual. Dismayed, HDC are left puzzled what to do next. Repairs seem improbable, the restoration of the eye impossible and the vandalised site a disgrace to sculptor and public alike.

'Sun God' was the work of John Skelton,



The statue of Mr Pirie and his donkey cart.

the nephew of the better known Eric Gill, with whom he worked as an apprentice briefly before Gill's demise. While Skelton may be classed as the lesser artist of the

two, his work is nevertheless pleasing, and his life did not attract the posthumous opprobrium of the elder man.

Horsham certainly has bad luck with public statuary.

The travails of the Rising Universe, otherwise known as the Shelley Fountain, are familiar to all and its site now bears a bower of birches while awaiting some transition to an altered state once the surrounding area has been redeveloped. Pirie and his donkey cart recently sat forlornly amid the rubble of the former Waitrose and his plight attracted the attention of HDC to order his better protection.

The Tree of Light stands at the Park Surgery without a description or dedication, and the swans of Swan Walk glide now on glass, absent the rushing water under their outstretched feet.

Horsham's Year of Culture, 2019, is getting closer and some thought is being given to celebrate our famous poet Percy Bysshe Shelley in permanent form, which will we hope be proof against the hammers of vandals and the burden of costly maintenance.

The cycle forum is planning an improved

cycle path from Warnham to Horsham, from Shelley's birthplace to his local town through many sites of his boyhood circumstances. We're thinking of sign posting the route with plaques of PBS, his contemporaries and his intellectual posterity.

There could be room for citations and references to him and Mary Shelley, as well as the many who admit the influence of PBS on their own works, literary and political, long after the demise of Sussex's greatest Romantic. We need ideas for content and form, so do please, readers, make a suggestion or two.

We think a standard overall shape, each with varied text, would allow us to install more elements in future years and help shed some light, even if not from the Sun God, on the memory and influence of PBS.

*The Horsham Society is concerned about the past, present and future of the town. It seeks to promote good planning and design for the built environment and open spaces. Membership of the Horsham Society is open to anyone who shares these concerns. For more information, visit the website [www.horshamsociety.org](http://www.horshamsociety.org) or phone 01403 259038.*