



www.leamingtonsociety.org

The Leamington Society Newsletter

February 2018

Chairman's notes

Parking Diversions

While concentrating on the re-development plans for Covent Garden, WDC seemed to have left the question of alternative parking provision as an afterthought. Only with the plans safely through committee did we learn that their parking plans involved Parks, as in Victoria and Christchurch Gardens. Worse, in the report for the Executive agenda it became clear that this was no temporary scheme for the re-building period but set to be a permanent colonisation of parks for parking.

Such was the public protest that, within days, the portfolio holder hastily announced a withdrawal of the scheme for 80 spaces on Christchurch Gardens (but not of the extra parking in Victoria Park).

The Executive meeting discussed the situation at considerable length, witnessed by unusual numbers of the public. Clearly this is not an issue with simple or obvious solutions. It was noted that transport and parking trends, 20 and more years ahead, are uncertain and will need new initiatives. Should retail needs outweigh green

Talks and Events

Garden Judging

Robin Russell

RHS Judge

Thursday, March 8th

7.30pm

Conference Centre,
Dormer Place

Lord Leycester Hospital

Heidi Meyer

Master

Thursday, April 12th,

7.30

Conference Centre,
Dormer Place

AGM

Formal business,
followed by open
discussion with wine,
soft drinks, and light
refreshments

Thursday, May 10th,

7:00 pm

Christchurch, Priory
Terrace, CV31 1BA

spaces or would that blight Leamington's prime attraction for visitors? Business groups seem unimpressed with parking proposals so far and now the Executive have approved a scheme with 80 fewer spaces.

Executive members spoke of past work and consultation or alternately urged that this was only the beginning of a journey. It was a muddled picture. Summing up, the Leader noted that the public had listened patiently while councillors pontificated.

This is not the first time that Council has had to back track on policy, as soon as the public get wind of it. (Remember the plan a few years back to squeeze a new HQ building onto the open space next to the Spa Centre and opposite the Jephson Gardens?) One can but hope that when it comes to the future of Newbold Comyn the public will be consulted sooner rather than so very late in the day.

Leamington's Green Spaces

With major developments growing apace to the south of Leamington and Warwick, our green margins are of special value. In this Newsletter, Jef Tuyn writes about the recent sudden closure of Newbold Comyn golf course. With a bare minimum of on-going maintenance, any future as a golf course seems unlikely.

As the Town Council works towards a Neighbourhood Plan, it is proposing the designation of Local Green Spaces including the Comyn along with the sports fields and meadows beside the River Leam. While preventing any development, designating Green Spaces still leaves the question – how are they to be maintained?

All of this land is owned by the District Council, which is feeling the cold winds of austerity. The Green Spaces are a vital asset for the town, but financially a potential burden. Warwickshire Wildlife Trust manages Welch's Meadow and the Leam Park – with very tight WDC funding and the help of volunteers. What is to be the future of Newbold Comyn?

Richard Ashworth

Forthcoming talks and events: For venues, dates and times see front page of this Newsletter

Garden Judging, Robin Russell

How is Horticulture judged? There are many factors such as the design of the hard landscaping (paths, fences, stairs) and the planting (colour, variety, interest). How much does the general maintenance and tidiness matter? Is it always the biggest onion that wins? The only judges most of us ever see “in action” are at the Chelsea Flower show or your local flower and vegetable show. How do they decide such things? We want to find out how a judge’s mind works.

Robin Russell, a Royal Horticultural judge working in the Midlands with many years of experience, will come and tell us.

Project Unlock: The Lord Leycester Hospital, Heidi Meyer

Joint Annual talk with Warwick Society to be held at Dormer Place

The new Master, Heidi Meyer, will brief us about Robert Dudley’s Hospital, which has sheltered wounded, poor and infirm soldiers since Elizabethan times.

This unique example of Warwick philanthropy requires an infusion of energy and resources to unlock its full potential as it celebrates its 450th anniversary in 2021. Heidi has started a four year campaign with a vital role for the local community and explains how the Lord Leycester will take its rightful place as a local and national gem in the history of England.

It is our treasure too.

AGM

The formal business of the AGM will be followed by open discussion with wine, soft drinks, and light refreshments.

There will then be a presentation on the latest news about the restoration of the Pump Room Gardens.

Subscription increase 2018: Reminder

The Leamington Society subscription has been fixed at £10 per household and

£7 per single person for 20 years. Inflation over this period, particularly in printing and postage costs, has forced your society to increase the subscription to £15 per household and £10 for individual membership, provided payment is by standing order. Please adjust your payments before April 1st, 2018. For anyone paying by cheque (or cash) there is a surcharge of £2 to cover the extra administration.

Leamington Society Committee

Our new website

Out there on the web, look at our completely new website www.leamingtonsociety.org intended to keep members informed of what is happening and encourage new members. You can even look at it on your smartphone and other devices.

We hope that you find it interesting and informative; it's still being developed and depends for its ongoing appeal on contributions from you, our members. Send suggested text and pictures to jangillett@icloud.com

General Data Protection Regulation

In May 2018 the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) will become law in the UK. This will supersede the 1998 Data Protection Act, under which the Leamington Society currently operates. When you join this society you provide your name, address (postal and email, if available), telephone number(s). As a member, you can be assured that we protect this data carefully and take every practicable measure to ensure your information is safe and accurate at all times. We never sell your data or share it with anyone outside the Society except with individual member's written permission.

There is currently much debate about how charities keep in touch with their supporters, and some charities have decided to contact all their supporters and ask them to opt in to hearing from them.

Others, including the Leamington Society, have chosen to rely on what the

new legislation calls 'legitimate interest'. Put simply, we undertake to keep you, as a member of the Leamington Society, informed of our work via publications such as our newsletter and reminders of forthcoming talks and events (currently via MailChimp). We feel you would expect us to do this.

You can always contact us to change the way we communicate with you or to reduce the amount of communications you receive. Contact our Membership Secretary Margaret Begg mbegg@cbegg.com on 01926 423 822. You can read our Privacy Policy on our website www.leamingtonsociety.org.

Leamington Society Committee

Future of Newbold Comyn?

There is no question that Newbold Comyn is one of Leamington's most valuable and treasured resources. Situated at the Eastern end of the unique series of linked parks including Victoria Park, Pump Room Gardens and Jephson Gardens, the Comyn is much used for both formal and informal recreation as well as serving as a valuable wildlife resource.

The departure of Mack Golf, Managers of Newbold Comyn Golf Course, raises financial implications for the Comyn's future in that the Golf Course represents a considerable investment dependent upon income generation. The fact that Mack Golf have relinquished their tenancy despite a long lease indicates that golf might not be the commercial earner that it once was – at least at Newbold Comyn.



Glade on Newbold Comyn

© Robin Stott (CC)

What then are the implications of Mack Golf's departure on the Comyn now that the course is no longer generating income? Does this leave Warwick District Council (WDC) with a financial problem and if so, how might this impinge on the resource as a whole?

The Leamington Society would like to facilitate a public debate to consider the implications of the current situation, identify problems and give consideration to the best way in which this valuable resource can be preserved for future generations. This Society would be keen to hear from any other organisations that would like to be involved in organising such a debate.

Jef Tuyn

We are not alone

At their meeting in Bath, committee members of NORA – the National Association of Residents' Organisations – coming from towns and cities across England, discussed matters of concern familiar to Leamington residents.

Among these were the loss of family homes and the hollowing out of communities resulting from the growth of student housing in the form of HMOs or PBSAs – purpose-built student accommodation. This type of housing also deprives local authorities of significant amounts of council tax revenue.

Members of the committee felt strongly that universities should provide accommodation for their students on their own land, rather than leaving them to find private accommodation in neighbouring areas. In their opinion student housing should also be better controlled. All HMOs should be licensed, not just those which accommodate five or more residents. Landlords should be required to register with the local authority, rather than being given the option of applying for voluntary registration. Furthermore, as well as restrictions being applied to the number of HMOs in a given area, the number of students as a percentage of the population should also be limited. This was seen as important given the recent growth of large-scale PBSAs which could damage community cohesion.

Short-term lets were a growing concern, whether they are properties used as Party Houses or as Airbnb rentals. Party Houses – large properties let out for a few days to groups as a base for celebrations and festivities - seem to be a growing phenomenon in popular tourist areas. Airbnb rentals are now to be found everywhere, causing disruption through frequent changes of tenants and lack of controls on their behaviour. The committee was concerned that some HMO landlords were converting their properties to Airbnb rentals, these being seen as causing fewer problems than letting to groups of students. It was proposed that to combat this development, landlords should not be allowed to let residential properties for such purposes for more than 90 days a year, as is now the case in London. Above this limit properties would no longer be classified as being residential.

The shortage of social housing, despite growing need, and failure to ensure adequate provision of affordable housing, were other problems discussed. Councils should also be allowed to borrow to finance housing developments.

Among other topics discussed were the effects of increasing traffic, air pollution, congestion and parking problems, and the damaging growth of tourism in popular areas.

This was a very informative meeting, fulfilling the Chairman's instructions that the committee should focus on reaching useful conclusions rather than simply discussing familiar problems. The conclusions of the committee will be discussed at the NORA AGM after which they will be passed on to the relevant Ministry for further consideration and, it is hoped, action.

Barbara Lynn

Leamington Society Awards 2018

Every other year the Leamington Society recognises projects which have made a positive contribution to the environment of the town and 2018 is an Awards year.

Surely one of the reasons that Leamington Spa is considered the 'Happiest Town in England' is that it is visually attractive and our Awards scheme helps

to maintain this aspect of the quality of life. A special prize, the Bill Gibbons Trophy, is given for the best private dwelling.

Anyone can nominate a scheme, whether a member of the Society or not, and the rules are simple:

- The work has to have been completed within the last two years.
- The work has to be readily visible to the general public.
- Nominations are to be received by Sunday 15 April 2018.

Restoration or new build, domestic or commercial, landscaping or a work of art – all of these qualify.



Recent awards

You can make a nomination via the Society website www.leafingtonsociety.org. Alternatively Nomination Forms are also available from the Town Hall reception, Riverside House reception and the Visitors Centre in the Royal Pump Rooms. Please let us have your nominations.

Richard Ward

Conserving our War Memorials

Civic Voice, the national organisation for conservation, is encouraging everyone to carry out surveys of the condition of their local memorials with a view to registering them on the war memorials website www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk.

The War Memorials Trust has been given funding from the government to spend on restoring memorials and the funding ends in November 2018. So how does our war memorial in Euston Place rate? It is not as pristine as you might imagine, as I discovered when I carried out a preliminary examination with the Civic Voice tick sheet.

There is rusting on the statue, open joints in the stonework, a considerable amount of surface dirt and some of the leaded lettering is missing. Nonetheless it would probably rate as “fair” in survey terms and is therefore unlikely to attract funding. Memorials rated poor or very bad will be targeted by the trust.



War memorial, Euston Place
© Ian Capper (CC)



Roll of honour at Leamington Station,
© Roger Charters

The local History Group has offered to carry out a detailed survey of the Euston Place memorial and register it on the website with photos. Apparently there are 25 war memorials in Leamington. Many of these must be in churches and other buildings. The trust would be glad to see all these registered and updated.

Members who are concerned about any war memorials in Leamington should contact the Society so that we can see if funding can be obtained.

These memorials not only commemorate the sacrifices made in the past, they also make a valuable contribution to our streetscape and provide a focal point for the local community.

Margaret Begg

Czechoslovak Memorial Fountain

The Czechoslovak Memorial Fountain in Jephson Gardens was inaugurated in October 1968 as a freedom fountain in recognition of Operation Anthropoid carried out in 1942 to pay a tribute to the men who took part in the Operation and to all the Czechoslovaks who lost their life in the fight against Nazism.

Operation Anthropoid was a successful mission to assassinate SS General Reinhard Heydrich (“butcher of Prague”) by Czechoslovak paratroopers, who had been based in Leamington Spa. The fountain recognises their sacrifice and that of their families, the resistance and their families and the people of the village of Lidice and hamlet of Lezaky, which included all ages and both sexes, who all perished in the terrible aftermath brought about in retribution.



Czech Memorial Fountain

© David Dixon (CC)

In recent years the fountain has suffered similar problems to many other

fountains, such as water ingress into joints, drainage, etc. and several only partially successful repairs have been attempted. The Friends of the Czechoslovak Memorial Fountain was formed in 2015 to highlight the importance of the fountain and to bring about its restoration. A conservation surveyor, who has worked on fountains as well as large monuments, including The Cenotaph, has carried out an exhaustive survey and made recommendations for its repair.

The Friends have raised the necessary funds to enable the work to begin in 2018 starting with the hard landscaping in early spring before the birds start to nest. Our target was achieved with the generous support of Warwick District Council, descendants of Czechoslovak soldiers and airmen, members of the group and the public at large in Leamington, England and the Czech Republic, a Czech charity and the Town Council.

Each year there is a wreath laying at the fountain at 11 o'clock on the Sunday closest to the 18th June, the anniversary of the death of the paratroopers involved in Operation Anthropoid. We hope the work will be finished by this date.

Georgina Pavel

The cyclist – a threat to pedestrians

I am a motorist, cyclist and walker and enjoy all three activities. However, as owner of a Jack Russell, walking has become my prime activity and has confronted me with cyclists and specifically the many who believe that pedestrian facilities are there for their benefit even where by-laws and Road Traffic Acts prohibit cycling. They are a growing minority and a matter of concern.

So why has this become such an issue for me? At 74, being hit by a bicycle at even moderate speed may result in severe injury. In contrast to joggers, whose laboured breathing can be heard at some distance, the first I know of the cyclist's presence is the rush of air passing me within inches followed by the view of their retreating backside. While I have been dog walking there has only been **one** occasion when a cyclist sounded his bell, slowed down and

actually thanked me for letting him pass. For most, I am simply a nuisance and an inconvenience. This attitude and total lack of consideration has fuelled my frustration and I am not alone.

Walking should be a relaxing, enjoyable experience but constantly checking whether a cyclist is approaching spoils it. The cyclist may find the safety and freedom of a pedestrian facility appealing but at the expense of the pedestrian who no longer feels safe. The erosion of pedestrianisation by bicycles is even evident in formal parks such as Jephson Gardens. Recently, I was intrigued to see a family of four on bikes weave their way through a busy park entrance ignoring a "No Cycling" notice within inches of their noses. York Bridge is another place where bikes speed down ramps also used by wheelchairs, pushchairs and toddlers. A notice informing cyclists to dismount would probably have little effect judging by their current disregard for notices.

There is a wealth of evidence showing the benefits of cycling to health and environment. Despite all the rhetoric from central Government, I am dismayed by the lack of dedicated cycle provision by Local Authorities and developers such as exists in the Netherlands. However, this does not allow me, as a cyclist, to use pedestrian provision as an alternative. It would help if the Local Authority would advertise and implement existing by-laws. This, at least, would give clear priority to the walker and put responsibility firmly on the cyclist.

Jef Tuyn

Food, Energy and the Environment: Future Challenges

David Gardner, Royal Agricultural Society of England

Those of us with a farming background and those entirely without were entertained and stimulated by David's presentation. He works at Stoneleigh and has been a farmer all his life. He began by pointing out that he (born 1958) was of a lucky generation, with no wars or want to spoil his life. Since his birth, world population has trebled (from 2½ to 7½ billion) – but thanks to the much maligned agribusiness and with the help of pesticides and herbicides

and fertilisers and innovation, food output has more than kept pace with this increase and is as clean and safe as it has ever been. The problem (as we all know) is that this “progress” is achieved at the expense of wildlife, the environment and irreplaceable resources.

This cannot go on for many more generations and we will have to change our ways. All over the world the birth-rate is falling – even in Africa – so there is hope. Small changes in domestic rules (5p on carrier bags) can produce big changes in behaviour. It is already possible for houses to be built so that they do not require external energy for heating. Robots are more accurate in their ploughing than any man and can be programmed to protect the soil structure. Genetic engineering is becoming ever more sophisticated and developing new features for traditional crops: rice with better CO₂ conversion and Vitamin A, for example.

The long term future of meat consumption was questioned with the prospect of laboratory grown meat replacing sirloin steak (though not yet – from any I have tasted so far). This statement was his most controversial and aroused actual hostility in the audience. The prospect of insects and algae becoming protein sources is also a future possibility. We all left with much to think about. I would love to have a copy of his profiles of humans – ranging from skinny to seriously obese.

Marianne Pitts

Cultural or Creative Quarter?

Alan Heap is a master of improvisation and creative thinking – he makes his living by it. He strives to elicit a response from the audience and succeeds – sometimes too well.

Leamington’s creative genius is hidden. His first example was the camouflours of WWII painting factories and ships to make them disappear. Their work was secret. The computer games industry which permeates the region is also secret – in fear of piracy. Some more visible artists are seen just once a year during the annual Peace Festival and / or Art in the Park and then vanish from view. Spencers Yard, which has been designated for some

decades as the hub of our Cultural Quarter, already shelters some creative industries, but it is blank and unknown to most local people, let alone visitors. Its hidden location and obscure entrance does not help.

How is this to be changed, and the change to be advertised? CPD (Complex Development Projects), the Coventry firm who promoted their home town to City of Culture, has been appointed as a partner to WDC and according to Alan, they are good at raising money from both public and private sources. If so, funding will at last be available to repair the handsome, dilapidated Congregational Chapel and adapt it for studios and performances, to decorate the courtyard, and make it a place where people want to linger – including the students who have chosen to live here. Good imaginative signposting from the railway station to the Town's attractions is essential and the traffic in Lower Avenue needs to be slowed for pedestrians. The Royal Pump Rooms, Town Hall and All Saints' Church could be included in the plans. WDC, CPD and the public need a vision and it is up to all of us to provide it.

A very interesting evening and much food for thought.

Marianne Pitts

Peter Chater

Peter Chater died in January aged 92. Born in Fenny Compton he was a true Warwickshire lad. He went to Leicester Street School, where on his first day he met Bill Gibbons. Their friendship lasted until Bill's death, visiting sites of local historical interest, industrial archaeology sites and railway stations, as keen photographers.

After school, Peter desperately wanted to join the railways, but his father insisted that he was apprenticed to a local building firm as a proper job. After his apprenticeship, he did join the railways, and worked on the footplate until health problems sent him into admin leading to Stationmaster at Hatton and Solihull.

For many years, Peter led a walking group, plotting the routes from his extensive collection of OS Maps. A few years ago he held an early 90th

birthday celebration – because he didn't think he would see 90!

He joined the Warwickshire Industrial Archaeology Society, both the Leamington and Lillington Local History Societies, the Leamington Society, the (now defunct) Warwickshire Steam Engine Society and others.

We will miss Peter and his knowledge of local history and allied subjects such as photography, railways and Industrial Archaeology. He was great company and intellectually active to the end. Our vision of Peter in a meeting, pen in one hand, notebook in the other, will endure.

Peter Coulls

New members

We are pleased to welcome to our society:

Francesca Certo

Giovanna Yanez

Officers and Committee

Chairman: Richard Ashworth, 32 Willes Road, CV31 1BN, 01926 316703

Vice Chairmen: Barbara Lynn, 53 Manor House, Avenue Road, CV31 3ND, 01926 831414

Richard Ward, 3 Bell Court, The Maltings, CV32 5FH, 01926 422750

Hon. Secretary: Margaret Begg, The Garden House, Clarendon Crescent, CV32 5NR, 01926 423822

Hon. Treasurer: Clive Engwell, Clarendon Cottage, Clarendon Square, CV32 5QT, 01926 420454

Other Committee Members:

Marianne Pitts 01926 885532 Sidney Syson 01926 423140

Archie Pitts 01926 885532 Jef Tuyn 01926 339085

Newsletter Distribution: Dorothy Clark

The Leamington Society is a registered charity. It is a member of the West Midlands Amenity Societies Association and the National Organisation of Residents' Associations. It exists to preserve the heritage and improve the character of Royal Leamington Spa and to encourage high standards of planning and architecture.

Charity No. 516078

Unless otherwise indicated, views expressed in these newsletters are the contributors' own and not necessarily the corporate view of the Society.



February 2018

Notice is hereby given that the **Annual General Meeting** of the Leafington Society for 2018 will be held on **Thursday, 10th May, starting at 7.00, in ChristChurch, Priory Terrace, Leafington Spa, CV31 1BA.**

Richard Ashworth, Chairman

AGENDA

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of the 2017 Annual General Meeting held on Thursday 11th of May 2017
3. Matters arising from the Minutes not included elsewhere
4. To receive reports from the Chairman and Sub Committees
5. To receive the independently examined Accounts of the Society for 2017-18
6. Election of Officers:
Chairman, Vice Chairmen, Hon. Secretary, Hon. Treasurer
7. Election of four Committee Members
8. Election of Independent Examiner for 2018-19
9. Any other Business

PLEASE NOTE: **Nominations** of candidates for Officers and Committee must be forwarded to the **Chairman not later than Thursday, 19th April 2018**. Any voting will be by Secret Ballot at the Meeting. **We would welcome more nominations for the committee.**

Any motions for consideration at the meeting should also be received by this date. Nominations or motions will **not** be accepted at the Meeting. Nomination forms may be obtained from the Chairman.

If there is to be an election or if any motion is received, notice will be sent to members seven days before the Annual General Meeting.

Following the formal business of the AGM we will break for refreshments after which there will be a presentation on the latest news on the Pump Room Gardens restoration.