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The Leamington Society Newsletter

August 2018

Chairman's notes

The weather has been kind to us this summer and we celebrated a splendid awards evening at Victoria House and their garden in July. It reminded us of the special place that is Leamington, with older buildings that have been cherished and restored, alongside innovative designs of the new that greatly enhance the street scene. Those receiving the awards each told us a little about their building which added to the interest.

Some of these award winners were featured a few weeks later in our competition at Art in The Park. Amidst the vibrancy, colour and bustle of Art in the Park we were cool in the South Lodge, welcoming over 200 visitors most of whom took part in our architectural competition to identify the four buildings that in their opinion had most improved the Leamington street scene in the last 2 years. Top of their choice was the new Vitsø building on the old Ford Foundry site. The winner, who identified the top four in the same order as the judges, was Andrew Thompson.

Looking ahead, we have the still present and pressing problem of where cars will park when Covent Garden Car Park closes in the New Year. The District Council is still working on that one – forward planning would have helped.

Talks and Events

Warwickshire Record Office: Skeletons In and Out of the Closet

Sam Collenette

Tuesday, September 11th,
19.30

Lord Leycester Hospital,
Warwick

Hill Close Gardens Tour and Tea

Thursday, October 11th,
14.00-16.00

From Spa town to York: The National Railway Museum

Anthony Coulls

Thursday, October 25th, 18.30
Conference Centre, Dormer
Place,

Philip Larkin

Sheila Woolf

Tuesday, November 13th,
19.30

Conference Centre, Dormer
Place

Note variety of venues and
times

A future plan you can be involved in is the canal-side consultation. Do take a look and make your opinion known. It is your Leamington. The work done on the history of this area by the District Council is informative and fascinating.

Taking a look is the theme of September's Heritage Open Days when many local buildings and grounds are open free of charge with tours or informative displays. Whether it is real tennis, the lives of fascinating forbears who now lie in Brunswick cemetery, the history of Binswood Hall or the architecture of local churches, there is plenty on offer.

As our contribution, the Leamington Society is offering a number of guided walks and tours: The Pump Room Gardens and Jephson Gardens on Thursday 13th September at 2pm from outside the Pump Rooms, and Leamington Spa's History in Buildings and Characters on Sunday 16th September at 2.30pm from opposite the Pump Rooms at Jephson Gardens entrance. We will also lead tours of Leamington Station, Saturday 8th September and Sunday 16th, both at 2pm, starting at the entrance to the station.

Sidney Syson

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

Warwickshire Record Office: Skeletons In and Out of the Close, Sam Collenette

Joint talk with the Warwick Society

After taking a Master's degree in *Archives and Records Management, Library and Information Science*, Sam Collenette has been Archive and Historic Environment Manager at Warwickshire County Record Office. No charge

Hill Close Gardens, Tour and Tea

These gardens are early allotments and rare survivals of Victorian gardens once used by Warwick townfolk living above their business to escape from the crowded town. Plot owners came after work or on Sundays to tend their land or just to relax. Our visit will coincide with the apple harvesting time. **Charge £6; pay on the day**

From Spa town to York: The National Railway Museum, Anthony Coulls

Annual fund-raising talk by Friends of Leamington Station

Anthony, born and brought up in Leamington, is now Senior Curator at the National Railway Museum at York and Shilton. He will speak about his passion for his work and for the NRM. **Charge £5; pay at the door**

Philip Larkin, Sheila Woolf

Joint talk with the Leamington Literary Society

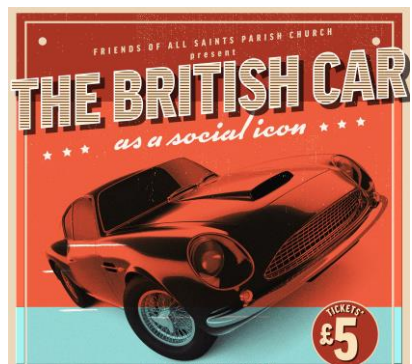
Philip Larkin attended King Henry VIII school in Coventry where, he claimed to be miserable as well as hating the town. Sheila Woolf, previously Head of English there, and knowledgeable on Larkin will speak about one of our foremost English poets. No charge.

A last chance to hear Steven Parissien talk in Leamington?

Professor Parissien has spoken to our society several times while Chief Executive and Art Director at Compton Verney Art Gallery. It is reported that he is leaving that post later this year although his next appointment is a closely guarded secret.

Professor Parissien will be speaking at All Saints' Church, Leamington on Friday October 5th, 7pm to 9pm. His topic will be **The British Car as a Social Icon**, the subject of his most

recent book. Tickets £5 from the Church café or the Temperance, 33 Bath Street. Talk arranged by the Friends of All Saints Parish Church.



Warwick District Council HQ: The view from Warwick

This is a complex problem. Some people oppose the scheme simply because of the lack of affordable housing, our biggest problem. The view is very different depending where you are looking from.

Could WDC simply stay where they are and sublet the empty space created by the cuts in services? This makes sense while the bigger picture becomes clear. What is the

bigger picture? The Government has halved the size of our District/County Council over the ten-year period from 2010 to 2020. In simple terms we need half the accommodation.

Our neighbouring County of Northamptonshire operates under the same financial regime as us and the Government have now taken control and appointed a Commissioner to force a merger of County and District Councils. We don't know if or when this will happen to us, but it may be inevitable.

In Warwickshire there are five District Councils who have all produced Local Plans with massive infrastructure costs falling on the County Council. For example, 63 new schools must be built. Half of these must be open within five years. And there are many other infrastructure costs. The cost savings of a unitary council could be the only way of achieving this.

Much has been made of the County saying that they have no available accommodation for the District Council, but this can only be true on the day it was said as accommodation is becoming free all the time. A planned coordinated approach to delivering public services would identify the best location for each department and space will always be found. I have been told that this is only being made difficult by people trying to frustrate joined up working.

I know that the Leamington Society will act in the interests of your town. I have supported your past campaigns, for example the Regent Hotel. In this case I suggest that we all argue that the WDC HQ stay in Riverside House until a clear joined up Local Government strategy is in place. And in the meantime, our biggest campaign is for affordable housing!

Councillor John Holland

Licensing of HMOs

Now that all HMOs for 5 or more tenants are required to have a licence, it is timely to ask how effective is this system of oversight by our Council, and what lessons may be learned from elsewhere.

According to Amy Starsmore of Wycombe District Council (housing University of Buckingham students and London commuters) officers there use the 'fit and proper person' element of the legislation to issue a 'one year only' licence to put poor landlords on notice to up their game – so good landlords have nothing to fear. This would be welcomed by many in south Leamington where persistent examples of poor management of some student properties leads neighbours repeatedly to ask the Council to intervene by requiring landlords to act on the terms of their licenses.

The criteria against which the performance of HMO landlords in Wycombe is judged includes the following points:

- the level and style of (in)active management on site adopted by the landlord;
- the number of problems like fire brigade visits, problems with the alarm systems, and complaints of any kind from tenants and neighbours;
- occasions where the landlord has changed the layout of the HMO after licensing, and not notified the Council as required;
- a landlord's management profile in other properties in her/his portfolio. Currently this can only be done within the District Council's area, although all London Councils now publish a public database of known rogue landlords under a new scheme introduced by the Mayor. Identifying landlords' portfolios of properties potentially exposes recurrent bad practices as well as the level of resources they have available to make improvements.

Amy points to the importance of the role of environmental health officers in maintaining acceptable standards of housing in the rented sector, suggesting that there should be strong links between Private Sector Housing staff and others with an environmental health brief elsewhere in the Council. She also stresses the importance of up-dating the enforcement policy to incorporate the fact that the new legislation allows local authorities to impose civil penalties for housing offences, and to use any fines to resource their activities. A successful prosecution makes refusal of a licence easier, but threats/use of fines are nevertheless potentially useful tools.

Implementation of this legislation requires resources and a commitment to protect the interests of tenants in the privately rented sector. Licensing is not a mechanism for issuing landlords with a passport to make money: it is a means of ensuring that

minimum housing standards are maintained, and the well-being and health of frequently vulnerable occupants are not compromised by their living conditions.

Meg Bond

Step into the Regency

Royal Leamington Spa is known today as a Regency inland resort built primarily in brick and stucco. Little stone was used during the boom building period of around 1800 - 1840 for domestic dwellings with the exception of paving and steps leading up to front doors. Stone required for this purpose was quarried in nearby Edmonstone on land owned by the Earl of Warwick. This resembled York stone in appearance but was less hard-wearing and there are now many examples in the town of original stone steps replaced or covered over crudely with concrete.

A typical example is in the illustration shown of a columned porch in Leam Terrace now part of a group of Grade II listed buildings in a Conservation area. The concrete had become discoloured, cracked and chipped. Consequently, an application was made in May 2018 to Warwick District Council for listed building consent to remove the steps



Before and after

and replace them with York stone. Consent was granted, and the work was carried out

in July 2018 to a high standard by the Northamptonshire firm of Weldon Stone Enterprises Ltd.

The property owners are delighted with the result and it is hoped that this short article may encourage other Leamington Society members in a similar situation to follow suit.

Czech memorial in Jephson Gardens

The Free Czechoslovak Army (4,000 men) were based in and around Leamington during WWII. One of their most important missions was to assassinate Reinhard Heydrich, Hitler's right-hand man. Six of these soldiers were successful in this but died in their assignment.

The important memorial to their mission in Jephson Gardens has recently been listed Grade II. The memorial is currently undergoing restoration, thanks to the joint efforts of the Friends of the Czech Memorial and WDC.

Well done to all concerned.



Czechoslovak memorial,
Jephson Gardens

cc: David Dixon

Archie Pitts

Car Parking in Leamington Spa Town Centre: Part 2

As we said in May: 'our town is short of parking, and Covent Garden is 31% of the town's supply' with 468 spaces. This is due to be demolished next February well before any replacement is built. WDC and BID Leamington have appointed a specialist parking consultant to see whether a quart can be fitted into a pint pot by rearranging the existing parking provision. They wish to make it clear that "Leamington is open for business" particularly in next year's Christmas season.

- New spaces are to be provided at Princes Drive (50 spaces), Archery Road (60), Court Street (92), (total 202). The Station Approach car-park (100) will be

completed too late. These useful additions will cost £674,000 and will not compensate for the loss of Covent Garden.

- Parking arrangements in St Peter’s multi-storey are to be changed to encourage short-term parking by making the first 5 floors short-stay only with Pay & Display tickets. Long term parking will have to go further out of town.
- Riverside Road car parking (260 spaces) will be available to the public but only at weekends.
- WDC staff will lose their permits for St Peter’s and Chandos Street car parks and be encouraged to work “in a more agile way”: car-sharing, working from other Council sites or from home. This might free some 50 Riverside Road spaces during the week.

Four additional temporary Rangers and new sign-posting are needed and will cost us a one-off additional £385,000.

Let us hope it works.

Marianne Pitts

Leamington Society Awards 2018

Once again, the Leamington Society held a successful Awards Evening, filling Victoria House with over eighty attendees. These included Award winners, Society members and guests.

The Chairman of the Warwick District Council, Councillor Stephen Cross, introduced the evening and praised the quality of the Leamington Town environment, which this occasion celebrates.

There were 27 nominations and 14 awards given. This year many of the recipients of an Award spoke to thank the Society and to say a little about the background to their project, which added interest and more than a little humour to the evening.

The awards were for a whole range of projects, varying in size from cast iron railings to a garden in Russell Terrace to the new headquarters of two major companies, Tata Technologies and Vitsø.

Maintenance of the historic character of the town was represented by the restoration of a previous NHS clinic as apartments in Avenue Road; the Temperance café in Bath

Street; a coffee shop in Warwick Street; and the new Platform 3 refreshment room at Leamington station.

Sympathetically fitting new buildings into the urban structure was recognized for



Tata Technologies and Vitsoe

Oxford House in Oxford Street, an infill building, the Wellness Centre in Augusta Place, Phase II of the Binswood Hall retirement village facing Lillington Avenue and apartments and town houses on the Binswood Street/Rugby Road corner.

Stylishly catering for social and leisure needs were Sayer Court on Tachbrook Road, a



Sayer Court and HB Villages

local authority housing scheme for the over 55s, housing for those with severe learning or physical difficulties in Bath Place (HB Villages) and the new skateboard track in Victoria Park.

The awards were presented by the Mayor of Leamington Spa, Councillor Heather

Calver and the evening ended with a short address by Jonathan Holdcroft, Head of Corporate Affairs at Chiltern Railways, the Awards sponsors, who stressed the close links the company had with the Town and the Society.

The Chairman of the Leamington Society, Sidney Syson closed the evening by thanking everyone for coming and urged those not yet members of the Leamington Society to join.

Richard Ward

Centenary Fields

Fields in Trust is a national charity working to protect UK recreational spaces. The Trust has launched the Centenary Fields programme in partnership with the Royal British Legion to mark 100 years from the end of World War I and to protect open spaces across the country. Warwick District Council seeks to protect four such areas: St Nicholas Park and RAF Centenary Park, both in Warwick; Abbey Fields in Kenilworth; and the Pump Room Gardens in Leamington.



To qualify as a Centenary Park, the area must have significant connections with WWI. In the case of the PRG, the link is through the special treatment provided for 7,000 wounded soldiers at the Pump Rooms during the war. The treatment was free, no mean consideration before the advent of the NHS.

Designation as a Centenary Park will legally protect parks and green spaces in perpetuity. In view of the 1980s proposal to convert the PRGs into a private health facility with associated car parking, the protection afforded by designation as a Centenary Park will be welcome.

Grand Union Canal Conservation Area

Warwick's canals date from 1800 and were a key element in the industrial revolution. The enterprise to build them, led by Warwick people, is an example of how ideas can transform places.

There is currently a major public consultation (see below) on the proposed designation of the Grand Union Canal as a Conservation Area (stretching 24 miles within WDC and 2 miles within Leamington Spa). It is hoped that community knowledge and values will inform professional judgment and be the best way to generate support for this plan, which should also encourage local people to explore this historic asset on their doorstep. The canal links Leamington and Warwick and the countryside beyond and provides open access to a landscape of character for the many residents who may not have their own garden and want to walk, jog or cycle along the Canal in Warwick District.

Designation of the Canal as a Conservation Area should ensure that its structures be sympathetically altered and restored; access and interpretation be improved and the opportunities for new development be enhanced. Historic England and London School of Economics research confirms that properties in conservation areas have greater value and designation can bring about environmental, economic and social benefits.



The Grand Union Canal in Old Town, Leamington

The Canal Conservation Area seeks to promote intelligent and inspired design, which is responsive to local distinctiveness and respects history and context. The conservation area appraisal and planning and design guidance will prevent piecemeal changes from gradually disfiguring the waterway heritage. Guidance on investment will

release the potential of the waterway environment to enhance quality of life for residents, visitors and businesses.

Your individual contributions are welcome, please contact the temporary Conservation Officer roger.beckett@warwickdc.gov.uk

A Public Consultation is in progress until September 24 via the WDC website: go to <https://www.warwickdc.gov.uk/> and click on the picture of the canal.

There will also be a public meeting in the Town Hall on September 20th at 19:00.

Roger Beckett and Marianne Pitts

Work in progress at Pump Room Gardens



Retaining wall along the Parade being rebuilt



Paths at east end of gardens almost finished



The miserable remnants of the base of the bandstand
Il faut souffrir pour être belle

Archie Pitts

Help the Lord Leycester Hospital (LLH)

Those of you who were moved by Heidi Meyer's talk on the plight of the Lord Leycester Hospital (and those who missed it) may wish to *pledge* money to help with her Heritage Lottery Fund bid: the more local support there is, the more likely that HLF will make a grant. We cannot circulate the LLH pledge form with our newsletter because it is not in Leamington, but pledge forms are available from members of our committee.

Many of you were very generous in your donations to the Pump Room Gardens and may feel that the LLH, as a local as well as a national treasure, is also worth supporting.

Leamington to the Grand Union by Bicycle

Across Mill Bridge at Jephson Gardens,
Past All Saints, our house of music,
By Pump Rooms and grassy spaces,
Past treasured bandstand, over Leam.

Through Victoria's pleasant parkland,
Then by bubbling river weir,
Past the field of sheep and magpies,
Now Grand Union is near.

Turning right I head through Warwick
By Kate Boats to Hatton Flight;
Turning left I make for Napton,
Stockton locks come into sight.

Narrowboats with names of beauty
Move gently on the placid water,
Or moor in places calm and tranquil,
Bikers, walkers, ride or saunter.

Glad to share this gift so peaceful,
Till, in early morning air,
With counterpoint from geese and mallards,
Welcoming a day so fair.

Robert Jackson, 29 July 2018

[Ed.: Bob and Rosemary Jackson, long-standing members of this Society, are leaving the town after 40 years here.]

Would you like to receive your newsletter in colour?

To do so, tell us and we will email your version as a pdf file. Unfortunately, the cost of printing hard copies in colour is currently beyond the finances of this society.

Archie Pitts

Please check your standing order

The membership subscriptions increased this year, for the first time in 20 years, but some members have not yet changed their standing orders. The payment for a single member is £10 and for a family at the same address is £15. Please make sure you pay the correct amount next April to help us cover rising costs. Change your standing order now. Thank you.

Margaret Begg (Membership Secretary)

New members

We are pleased to welcome to our society:

Chris and Val Davis

Mark Adams and Jennie Moncur

Graham and Tamara Cunningham

Ann and Graham Howe

Paul and Liane McCarthy

Mark Askew

Stas Librowski

John and Carolyn Pickering

Officers and Committee

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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.