



[www.leamingtonsociety.org](http://www.leamingtonsociety.org)

# The Leamington Society Newsletter

August 2019

## Chairman's Notes

Leafy Leamington in the summer is at its best with the floral displays in our parks and gardens in full bloom. No surprise that In April the Sunday Times rated Royal Leamington Spa as one of the top 5 Best Places to live in the Midlands, describing the town as "An affluent old spa town that conceals a caffeinated cutting edge behind its elegant Regency facades". We are affluent but let us not forget that Lillington East is ranked in the 10% most deprived areas of England. We are a town of contrasts which should challenge us all.

An example is air pollution. Earlier this year Leamington registered the worst air quality in the country, a shocking fact revealed in this Newsletter which brings together some of Leamington's many environmental initiatives. We need to challenge our transport habits, public and personal, and as the newsletter reminds us, other habits too, including picking up those annoying bits of litter.

As a brilliant example of how people can change things, we warmly congratulate Foundry Wood, in Princes Drive, on gaining a Green Flag Award. This is a wonderful example of community involvement, led by ARC, Achieving Results in Communities.

## Talks and Events

### Queen Victoria in Portraits

Dr Gill White

Thursday, September 12th, 7.30

### A year as a reporter in Afghanistan

David Heathfield

Thursday, October 10th, 7.30

### Photographing railway architecture

Paul Childs

Thursday, October 24th, 6.30

### Kit de Waal

Interviewed by Carole Sleight

Thursday, November 14th, 7.30

All above meetings will be held at  
Dormer Place Conference Centre  
CV32 4AA

Previously railway sidings, abandoned for over 50 years, it has been transformed since early 2012 into a community woodland with thriving wildlife, and a host of family activities. It shows what can be done by the community and volunteers prepared to do a bit to help.

Congratulations too, to the Council's Green Spaces team on Jephson Gardens receiving its 13th successive Green Flag award. We now look forward to the completion of the Pump Room Gardens restoration project, and eagerly await the final touches to the Bandstand.

Leamington LAMP, formed in 2013 to provide an alternative education for young people with autism and/or high anxiety who struggle in mainstream education, won the National Autistic Society Autism Professionals Award for Inspirational Education Provider. This is LAMP's second national prize this year. Well done.

The bowls competitors and spectators have now arrived from all over England, and we must look further ahead to welcoming them from all over the Commonwealth in 2022. You are our eyes, spotting what we may not have noticed; how do you think Royal Leamington Spa could be made even more welcoming for this special occasion, and indeed for all its residents? Meanwhile we hope to see you on one of our free Heritage walks in September.

***Sidney Syson***

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

### **Queen Victoria in Portraits**

Dr Gill White specialises in the visual arts of late medieval and sixteenth-century England. She worked for the National Trust as Curator and Collections Manager at Hardwick Hall; this led to her PhD at Warwick University. She now lectures part-time at Leicester and at Oxford Universities. We will be welcoming her in her role as a freelance speaker on art history.

### **A year as a reporter in Afghanistan**

After graduating with a Masters' degree in journalism, David Heathfield became a video journalist for six years, three with NATO in Afghanistan. Since then he has been

with Chiltern Railways where he is now head of Corporate Affairs. David lives in Leamington and campaigns for safety for cyclists.

### **Photographing railway architecture**

Paul Childs started his career working as a railway architect for BR. He has always been an expert photographer, with a liking for railway architecture. For many years he was the official photographer for the Railway Heritage Trust. For examples of his work, in high resolution, see [www.spheroview.com](http://www.spheroview.com); the website is slow to open but well worth the wait.

Admission: £5; profits to work of Friends of Leamington Station

### **Kit de Waal**

Kit de Waal is the daughter of an Irish mother and Caribbean father. She has worked for fifteen years in criminal and family law; has been a magistrate and sits on adoption panels. With this rich background she is also an award-winning author and became well known for her first book *My Name is Leon* (Penguin 2016). Since then she has published other books and numerous short stories. Kit will talk to Carole Sleight about her experiences and writing.

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### **Clean air for Leamington**

Judging by the Chairman's 'Notes' about air pollution and desire for better cycleways, and Richard Ashworth's comments about the high environmental impact of low-density housing, both in May's newsletter, Leamington Society members are interested in what **Clean Air for Leamington** aims to achieve.

We have poor air quality in our town. The 2018 Air Quality Annual Status Report shows that the situation in WDC is deteriorating: 90% of monitoring locations within the district recording higher levels of pollutant concentrations in 2018 than in 2017. On May 5th this year Leamington registered the worst air quality *in the country*. Scientific evidence increases daily of the physical and mental harms associated with the gases and particulates in polluted air, not to mention the financial burden to society. Traffic is choking us as well as our streets.

Cleaner air also means fewer carbon emissions, which will help in the fight against climate change.

**Clean Air for Leamington** is a non-aligned group with representatives from local County, District and Town councils as well as activists and other interest groups. Our purpose is to influence decision-makers and encourage radical changes in the way that we travel to and around our town. The transport section of the draft Neighbourhood Plan for Leamington expresses the desire to prioritise pedestrians and cyclists, so there is strong evidence of public support. All current research shows that when towns are greener in every sense not only does personal health improve but the business environment benefits too.

Changing people's habits and expectations is harder than changing transport infrastructure, but physical changes and improvements to public transport will kickstart transformation. Did you know that a cyclist with only a modest level of fitness can comfortably get from Leamington to Warwick in 10 minutes? Priorities must shift. Money needs to be spent on making cycle route routes safe and enjoyable. Before spending £25m on dualling a section of the A452 north of Leamington to shave a few minutes off commuter journeys, priority should be given to initiatives like car sharing, differential parking charges, sufficient charging points for EVs, lower speed limits, school zones and preventing unnecessary HGVs from coming through the centre of town. The needs of the carless should be given more weight.

Our steering group has met Margaret Smith, Senior Transport Planner, Warwickshire, and Nadia Inglis, Public Health Consultant,



Does this HGV need to come through our town?

Warwickshire and Coventry. They agreed to gather all countywide projects that are designed to reduce air pollution directly or indirectly so that we can map our concerns and ideas onto what already exists. We will publish the results and solicit feedback – The Courier is keen to follow our campaign, which started with a demonstration on Clean Air Day at Milverton School.

Much else is in the pipeline. We are pressing for someone, possibly an elected County Councillor as well as an officer, to have responsibility for Air Quality, as local action is uncoordinated and attention dispersed; regrettably a bid by WDC for an Air Quality

officer failed. We will also have a public meeting in the autumn to draw together as many elements and interests as possible. In conjunction with the South Leamington Air Quality Group we are planning a day of action on 22 September. By becoming a member of the Steering Committee of the regional Air Quality Group, which includes representatives from academia and industry, I will ensure that Leamington remains in the forefront of regional and national developments.

Our website is coming soon; in the meantime, look at 'Friends of the Earth and the campaign for clean air' for things that we can all do to bring about positive change.

***Susan Rasmussen***

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### **The Future of Newbold Comyn**

After an initial public consultation any decision was put on hold by Warwick District Council until after the local elections. We now have a new Council, with different priorities. The new Executive meets in late August and hopes to hold a further public consultation in September/October to encourage more specific ideas for the area; beyond being retained as a green space, with part of it as a new nature reserve area linking with the Leam Valley nature reserve.



Newbold Comyn

The May edition of the Society Newsletter featured an article promoting Royal Leamington Spa as a Centre for Health and Wellbeing. This looked at the wider

opportunities for Newbold Comyn and throughout the town; building on our Spa heritage and linking the many elements that contribute to our general health and wellbeing. There has been a positive response to these ideas. The next consultation will enable interested parties to generate more detailed proposals for integrated developments to secure the future of Newbold Comyn and enhance the town

This year we have seen how many new activities are stimulated by making greater use of our parks and green spaces. Events in the restored Pump Room Gardens and especially the ever-expanding and vibrant Art in the Park Festival in Jephson Garden,

have attracted wide public support. We need to see a new range of ideas and activities that will include Newbold Comyn and boost the image of Royal Leamington Spa even further to bring new business to our town.

**Michael Bunney**

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### **Busting litter: Here and now**

**Now or Never** is a Behavioural Change Campaign, launched by Clean Up Britain <https://cleanupbritain.org>. The aim is to make both Leamington Spa and Warwick District leaders in litter busting through behavioural change.

Thousands of volunteers throughout the UK spend time and energy clearing litter. Nationally, Local Councils, Highways and Railways spend public money clearing litter and fly tipping. The task is endless. Our wildlife, green spaces and waterways are under threat from litter and single use plastics – locally and globally. This vicious circle of dropping it and clearing it up, or not, must stop.



To change the public's attitude to litter we have invested locally in education; lobbying; community engagement; innovative behaviour-changing interventions; well researched signage and partnership working – to clear litter.

We have many local partners, including WDC. We are a not-for-profit organisation, raising all our funds, but not WDC money. Please look at our Blog on the **Now or Never** website [www.itsnowornever.org.uk](http://www.itsnowornever.org.uk) for our actions in Leamington Spa right now. We would welcome your help and support!

Facebook: @streetactivistsleam; Twitter: @NowOrNever\_UK

**Angela Owen** [ange.owen@cleanupbri](mailto:ange.owen@cleanupbri)

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### **Rotary Club's first Cars At The Spa success**

The Royal Leamington Spa Rotary Club held a classic car rally in the Pump Room Gardens on Sunday June 30th.

Following the demise of their long-running Raft Race down the river Leam from Leamington to Warwick in 2015 and despite the continued success of their Christmas Tree of Light at the town hall, the club had been conscious of the need to come up with a new attraction in the town's calendar.



And this was it. After a huge amount of planning and work, assisted by BID Leamington and supported by the Leamington Town Council, the event brought together over a hundred classic cars magnificently displayed in the Pump Room Gardens. This proved to be the

ideal town centre location to display over 50 years' worth of Midland motor manufacturing history, along with musical entertainment in the new Bandstand and food stalls providing an enjoyable day out for the hundreds who attended. Opened by the Mayor Cllr Bill Gifford, and sponsored by Kia of Warwick and the British Motor Museum from Gaydon, the event raised considerable funds for the Club's many local charities.



Lots of classic cars on display as well as visitors

The Club has already scheduled next year's show for Sunday 28th June when more classic cars will be invited to provide an even more enjoyable event.

***Mike Wilkinson, Royal Leamington Spa Rotary Club***

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### **Warwick District Council – doing our bit to reduce plastic use**

Plastic items such as bags, packaging, cups and much more, have become part of our everyday life. However plastics take years, even centuries, to degrade and there is increasing evidence to show how damaging plastic is for our environment and marine life.

At Warwick District Council, we have introduced a Plastics Policy to encourage the reduction of our own plastic use and that of the wider district. This policy encourages all the partners and organisations we work with to minimise and avoid single-use plastics and to ensure any plastics we have to use are made from recyclable plastic.

Our Plastics Register records all the plastics the council is avoiding, re-using and recycling. Some really good progress has been made with reducing plastics across our own venues, and in encouraging wider recycling in our office; we also recycle crisp packets and stationery / office consumables.

The council is supporting the Plastic Free Leamington and Warwick group to help achieve plastic free town status for Leamington later this year. This group has been working with local businesses, cafes, restaurants and bars to eliminate single-use plastic from their premises.

In addition, the Pump Rooms Cafe and Spa Centre are Refill Champions for the national Refill Scheme and will fill up water bottles for free. There are just under 50 refill stations in Leamington Spa alone and you can find them on the App which will help you to record your refills and monitor your own personal contribution to reducing single use plastic. We hope that by encouraging and supporting small changes, we can start to make a big difference.

[www.facebook.com/PlasticFreeLeamingtonandWarwick](https://www.facebook.com/PlasticFreeLeamingtonandWarwick)

***Nicki Curwood, Warwick District Council***

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## **Leamington's Blue Plaques**

When I first became aware of these plaques, probably because of Napoleon III in Clarendon Square, I at once became an enthusiast. There is plenty in the world to deplore. Therefore celebrate achievement.

In London at that time there were about 1800 plaques. In Leamington there were four: Napoleon III, John Ruskin, Henry Jephson and the Renshaw twins.

Now, because of the committee chaired by Judy Ross, with the support of Leamington Town Council, we have 29, from a boxer to an industrialist, an actor to a car-designer, an historian to two doctors, two engineers and two winners of the Victoria Cross. They are not there to browbeat or convert. They are just gentle reminders, combined with a quiet pride (pride, I suggest, being the greatest virtue).

Of course there is a limit to them, otherwise they will be devalued. I am inclined to believe we are very near that limit. Nevertheless, probably on Friday 20th September, we are expecting to unveil three more: to the builder William Gascoyne who erected the Town Hall and two churches, and to Major Harry Gem and his Spanish friend Augurio Perera who, between them, invented Lawn Tennis (there is one other claimant, but less convincing).

Anyone interested in Blue Plaques in general might care to read *London Plaques* by Derek Sumeray and John Sheppard (Shire publications).

***Robin Taylor***

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## **Leamington Station**

Much has been happening at our station recently.

The newly restructured ticket hall was formally opened on June 11th by our MP Matt Western and Leamington's Deputy Mayor Susan Rasmussen. It has carefully preserved the Art Deco style of the much-admired restoration of 2008 while removing the heavy glass screen between the public and the Chiltern staff.

The line from Leamington to Coventry stopping at Kenilworth, opened April 2018, has now been extended to Nuneaton and Bedworth. This line is operated by West Midlands Railway.



Ticket hall Leamington Station (Roger Charters)      Benches on Platform 3

The Friends of Leamington Station have raised funds for three new GWR benches for the station, two on Platform 3 and 4 for travellers waiting for West Midlands trains, and one to replace the missing one from the London end of Platform 2.

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### Trees and Leafy Leamington

We all like trees, for a variety of reasons. Trees have aesthetic and amenity value; most of us prefer to live in a well-treed area reflected in higher house prices. Supermarkets attract more customers if the car park is populated with trees, meaning higher profits. Hospital patients may recover faster if they can see trees from their ward bed. While some of these benefits may be only a few percentage points, cumulatively, the economic value of trees is significant.

In Leamington we rate the amenity value of trees highly. There was an outcry when WDC first announced plans to move its HQ from Riverside House to Covent Garden site. In doing so two 100+ year old copper beech trees on Milverton Hill would be lost together with about 70 mature trees, as well all the trees on Russell Street, behind the crumbling car park.

The role of trees in mitigating rain run-off has long been known; areas of the town along the Leam are subject to flooding and Welches Meadow is a flood plain. The all-important



Copper beech, Milverton Hill  
Teresa Halikowska

biodiversity and ecological value of trees has long been recognized. The over-riding value of trees in capturing CO<sub>2</sub> is likewise well-established.

The relevance of trees in mitigating air pollution is less certain. There are many forms of pollution, and the way trees can affect these depends on the type of tree, their location and age, and numerous other factors. In a thorough report by Defra (2018) the overall conclusion was that the net benefit was unproven and probably small.

The announcement in May by the leader of the new council, Andrew Day, that WDC would plant 160,000 trees in the next four years, one for every person living in the



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district by then, is extremely welcome. To put this figure into context, the council has over 19,000 individual trees in its parks, cemeteries and open spaces, together with the trees in various woodlands like Newbold Comyn. WDC has a Tree and Woodlands Strategy (1999) which explains its specific policies for trees.

Another comparator is the Heart of England forest of 30,000 acres (100 times the size of Newbold Comyn) in south Warwickshire, extending into Worcestershire, funded by

a £500,000 bequest by Felix Dennis. Before he died over 1 million trees had already been planted and the aim is to reach 10 million.

We are all interested to know more about the trees that WDC will plant: their distribution over the district; whether in towns or new woodlands. How much will the project cost? Will town and parish councils have any say? Four years is not long to evolve a plan and deliver it.

We still live in Leafy Leamington; we will fight to keep this tag.

**Archie Pitts**

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### **New members**

We are pleased to welcome to our society:

Alan Sharif

Meurig Hughes

Rachel Serban

Gary Jones

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#### **Officers and Committee**

**Chairman:** Sidney Syson, 11 Astley Close, CV32 6PT, 01926 423 140

**Vice Chairmen:** Barbara Lynn, Apt. 53 Manor House, Avenue Road, CV31 3ND  
01926 831 414

Richard Ward, 3 Bell Court, The Maltings, CV32 5FH, 01926 422 750

**Hon. Secretary and Membership Secretary:** Margaret Begg, The Garden House,  
Clarendon Crescent, CV32 5NR, 01926 423 822

**Hon. Treasurer:** Marianne Pitts, 7 Kineton Hall, Lillington Avenue, CV32 5DR,  
01926 885 532

#### **Other Committee Members:**

Richard Ashworth      01926 316 703      Clive Engwell      01926 420 454

Archie Pitts      01926 885 532      Carole Sleight      07768 617 081

Jef Tuyn      01926 339 085

*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.*