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The Leamington Society

Newsletter

November 2016

Chairman's notes

Leamington: Looking Back and Looking Forward

It's almost a century since William Louis de Normanville retired after 35 years as Borough Engineer and Surveyor of Leamington (1882-1917). His impressive career is celebrated in Janet Storrie's excellent account, now reprinted thanks to the Friends of the Pump Room Gardens. As their name suggests, the de Normanville family were immigrants to Britain back in the 18th century.

In 1885 the parliamentary constituency of Warwick and Leamington was created: bringing together ancient Warwick and the "new town" of Leamington, as our neighbours often describe us. Now, under government edict to reduce the number of MPs, the Boundary Commission is proposing to tear us apart. In a notable display of local cross-party unity the "1885" campaign opposes that separation, on the principle that we are geographic and economically linked communities.

Currently the draft Local Plan is being examined in great detail week after week, but elsewhere there is also much crystal ball gazing and conjuring of visions for the future of Leamington. Deep within the draft Local Plan, is a commitment to preparing an Area Action Plan for Leamington Spa town centre during the lifetime of the plan (policy TC10). In this Newsletter, Barbara Lynn describes the work of a Town Centre Forum. Meantime Royal Leamington Spa Town Council is embarking on a Neighbourhood Plan for Leamington. A major player in this locality is Warwick University, with over 5000 students resident in Leamington, especially in old town where community feelings are distinctly mixed.

The District is also pursuing its plans for a Creative or Cultural Quarter in south Leamington.

Although the country voted narrowly to exit the EU, in Warwick District we voted to remain, by nearly 59%. That might suggest wider horizons, but our District Council has so far been reluctant to contemplate consolidation with the County administration or indeed engagement with a West Midlands authority.

Talks and events

The British Motor Museum –

Then and Now

Vince Hall

Thursday, December 8th, 7.30
Conference Centre, Dormer Place

Bridges and Tunnels of

Royal Leamington Spa

Nigel Briggs

Thursday, January 12th, 7.30
Conference Centre, Dormer Place

Rough Guide to Cuba

Fiona MacAuslan

Thursday, February 9th, 7.30
Conference Centre, Dormer Place

Windsor Chairs

Jim Steel

Thursday, March 9th, 7.30
Conference Centre, Dormer Place

We live in a geographic and administrative mix, for historical reasons. Leamington Spa Retail Park lies within Warwick boundaries. Warwick University is on the outskirts of Coventry. The current Royal Leamington Spa Town Council was established as late as 2002; but much of its core chain of parks and bridges are the legacy of borough surveyor de Normanville from over a century ago. Nowadays maintenance of those parks is by the District and the bridges by the County Council.

Richard Ashworth

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

The British Motor Museum – Then and Now; Vince Hall

This year the Museum reopened its doors after a major refurbishment including the new displays of classic British cars and the stories of iconic cars such as the Mini and Land Rover. There is a 'Time Road' showing the design and development of cars through the decades.

A new Collections Centre was also opened and you will hear how classic cars in the collection are conserved and restored, and much more about what the Museum does 'behind the scenes'.

Bridges and Tunnels of Royal Leamington Spa; Nigel Briggs

Nigel Briggs, retired Civil Engineer, will talk about the 50 or so bridges, tunnels and passageways in Leamington and its immediate vicinity.

Rough Guide to Cuba; Fiona MacAuslan

Fiona MacAuslan, daughter of Dorrette and the late Patrick MacAuslan, went to Cuba as part of her language degree in the 1980s and insisted on mixing with local people in a country which was then very isolated, thanks to the USA. She was commissioned to write the first "Rough Guide" and is the joint author of the sixth edition.

Windsor Chairs; Jim Steel

Mr Steele is a professional Windsor chair-maker who will explain all aspects of his craft, with samples, from bodging, pole and bobbin lathe turning, through to assembling the final chair.

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Newsletter costs

Over the last 10 years the cost of producing and distributing the society newsletter has risen nearly threefold from under 13% to over 35% of our annual subscription income. Paper and printing costs are expected to rise further. Your committee has decided that non-members, such as the local press, our local authorities and others who receive our newsletter will be sent it in digital (pdf) format from 2017. The digital version shows photographs in colour.

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Vitsø

As Vitsø's business has continued to grow worldwide the Vitsø management team decided late last year to commission a larger building than originally planned; this would use our full site at Old Warwick Road. In August 2016 we secured planning permission for a 3600m² building – into which we will move during the summer of 2017.

The clearance work should be finished within weeks of this newsletter.

Archie Pitts

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Royal Leamington Spa Town Centre Forum

Although the Town Centre Forum has been meeting every month since May, it is unlikely that many readers will have heard of it. The Neighbourhood Plan, covering the whole of Leamington Spa, will be a more familiar concept. In contrast to the scope of the Plan, the focus of the Forum is the town centre itself, bounded by Clarendon Avenue and the Grand Union Canal to the north and south, and Clarendon Street and Dale Street to the east and west. The town centre is considered to merit particular attention on account of its history, architecture and beautiful setting, and of course its local importance, both commercial and social.

The purpose of the Forum, which was initiated by Warwick District Council in 2015, is to develop a “vision “ of how Leamington town centre should develop in the future and to propose a strategy for achieving this. It is recognised that while the centre is diverse and lively, and its unique character must be protected, there are problems in some areas which give cause for concern. The 14 Forum members are representatives of key groups with an interest in success of the centre: local businesses, the three councils, voluntary societies (including the Leamington Society), the creative industry, the Chamber of Trade and Warwick University, among others.

The Forum began by discussing what makes Leamington special, its place in the local economy, and main priorities. Strategic development needs and opportunities were the focus of later meetings. Other important matters on the agenda will be stakeholder and public engagement. The range of interests represented means that, despite differences of opinion, issues can be considered in depth. Discussion has also been informed by reference to relevant data, for example the Warwick District Council District Retail and Leisure Study, produced in 2014, and the 2016 Nesta report “The Geography of Creativity in the UK”.

The document making the final recommendations of the Forum will be presented to Warwick District Council by May 2017. It is intended that these recommendations, although they have no statutory effect, will point to the direction in which the town centre should develop and give guidance as to how this can be achieved.

Barbara Lynn

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Leamington Spa Neighbourhood Plan

The Localism Act 2011 introduced a new community right: a Neighbourhood Plan (NP). This becomes a subsidiary part of the Local Plan (LP) and allows communities to shape developments in their area, *as long as the NP does not countermand the LP in any way – LP is boss*. Warwick District Council hopes that the LP will be approved by summer 2017. Then any NPs within the district that have been approved in a local referendum and by a Planning Inspector come into effect.

NPs have both bite and financial value. In a recent Planning Appeal for a development in nearby Kineton in Stratford district, the Inspector quoted the local NP as a reason to dismiss the appeal – an example of bite. At the moment successful developers have to pay a levy towards the cost of infrastructure affected by their development: roads and cycle ways; schools and community centres;

parks and play areas; doctors’ surgeries; hospital etc. – usually summarised as Section 106 payments. This is to be replaced by a “Community Infrastructure Levy” in 2017 (although the provision of affordable housing will remain under the old rules). If a NP is in place, 25% of the levy is paid to the local Council covering the NP area; if an NP does not exist, the Council’s share falls to 15% – hence the financial importance of a NP to local residents.

Leamington Town Council is leading local neighbourhood planning and is consulting the wider community and canvassing support. There is an active blog: [Leamington Neighbourhood Plan](#). WDC Planning is also involved and must approve the area covered; examine the plan independently and arrange for the final stage: a referendum of voters within the area to approve the plan. All registered voters in the area can vote and a simple 50% majority gives the NP authority. This is direct democracy.

Last year Whitnash community voted approved of its NP by 93% see

https://www.warwickdc.gov.uk/info/20444/neighbourhood_plans/964/whitnash

Earlier this year Frome community approved their NP by 85% majority and Stroud by 91%. To see any of these NP, google Neighbourhood Plan *town/parish name*.

Get involved in the preparation of Leamington’s NP and visit the Town Hall on Saturday January 14th (2017), 12 noon to 5 pm to learn more and give your views.

Barry Franklin

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Blue Plaques of Leamington

Some years ago Judy Ross had the idea of adding to the four plaques that over several decades had crept onto Leamington’s walls. I dare say it had occurred to her that in such a fashionable town there must surely have lived more than four people who were locally, nationally or internationally distinguished.

A committee was formed, made up of Robert Nash from Leamington Town Council (which has been consistently helpful) and representatives of interested bodies. The result has been another twenty-three plaques, probably with a few more to come. Judy and Robert have also created an excellent leaflet (“Blue Plaques Walk”) that even if followed for just a short distance will disclose the enormous variety of the people and the achievements commemorated. The most recent, to Frances Havergal, the hymn-writer, and Bernard Spilsbury, the pathologist, who made it impossible any longer to shrug off scientific evidence in Court, were erected last month.



I have assumed that everyone knows what blue plaques are (not that they have to be blue, only that blue, quietly dignified I suppose, has become traditional). Like much else they originated in the nineteenth century. In 1863 William Ewart, a well-known Member of Parliament, asked the Commons if “it may be practicable to have inscribed, on those houses in London which have been inhabited by celebrated persons, the names of such persons”. The first plaque (not extant) was erected near St. James’s Square in 1867.

London now has over eighteen hundred plaques. Many other towns have been inspired by its example, initially under the aegis of the Royal Society of Arts, latterly under English Heritage acting not unlike the Monarch in our Constitution, chiefly advisory. In truth any organisation or individual can contribute independently. There are only four requirements: death (not yours, the dedicatee's); money (not a fortune); the consent of the building's owner; and planning permission, if relevant. There is room for eccentricity, though not for historical inaccuracy.

Robin Taylor

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Shop transformed

The Grade II listed shop in Abbotts (or Abbott) Street (off Bath Street) has been transformed from a tattoos salon and reopened as Miss Kat's Cabin, a boutique ladies dress and accessories shop. It has



Oldest shop front in Leamington and the interior

the oldest surviving shop front in Leamington and inside is an original cast iron stove. It is good to see this jewel so carefully preserved.

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Capability Brown and Compton Verney

Gary Webb opened our 2016-7 season of talks with an illuminating and well-attended talk on Compton Verney's parkland: one of a possible 250 estates in England which were designed, or at least strongly influenced, by Capability Brown. Born in Northumberland in 1716 and the youngest of a poor family, his intelligence must have been apparent as his education was sponsored by the local squire until he was 16 – a mature student for those times.

Brown began work in Compton Verney in 1769 for John Verney, 14th Baron Willoughby de Broke, after the house was remodelled to designs by Robert Adam. The formal gardens were dismantled; the lake, formed a century earlier by damming the stream, redesigned and the dam used as the base for the current elegant road bridge; the mediaeval village chapel was demolished and later replaced by the thatched ice house.

Brown laid out the park and garden both to hide the working parts (stables, kitchen gardens) and to embellish the views from the main rooms of the grand house and along the entrance drives. He used clumps of trees and grass: fine mown near the building, rougher and cruder and meadow further away. By this time he employed fewer temples and gazebos and arcades (perhaps they were too expensive) but the bridge with the sphinxes is probably his design and very fine.

Now the park is being restored under Gary’s leadership. His knowledge of and respect for Capability Brown was evident with every slide. We are lucky to have so fine a house and garden within easy



Compton Verney and Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown

reach and open all year round. We are grateful to Gary and wish him well.

Marianne Pitts

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An Englishman’s Castle is his Home

Keith Cattell explained that a castle is a fortified home. Anything larger and more aggressive is a fortress, such as the impressive ring of “Castles” built around the coast of Wales by Edward I and his Master Mason, James (of) St George. Head-hunted by King Edward, he demanded and got a massive 3 shillings per day, at a time when most masons earned just pennies. He must have been worth his wages as he worked for the King for 20+ years. His constructions include Aberystwyth, Conwy, Harlech, Beaumaris and the grandest: Caernarfon, modelled on Constantinople. These are now, deservedly, a World Heritage Site as masterpieces of mediaeval engineering and architecture.

Returning to castles as homes: the earliest survivor (950CE) is in Doue-La-Fontaine, Normandy, built as a single story stone structure in 900 AD, later heightened to two storeys and surrounded by a mound but now excavated and in its original form. Height gives an advantage for viewing, anticipating attack and for psychological dominance. In 1066 the Normans (as Vikings and anticipating IKEA?) arrived with ‘flat pack’ wooden palisades and on landing they immediately reinforced the Roman Castrum of Pevensey as a temporary defence for themselves and their precious horses. The Bayeux Tapestry has pictures of mounds being constructed in careful layers (to avoid subsidence) and stakes being driven in at the top for the keep and at the bottom as a defence. The first stone castle and best Norman keep in the country is the White Tower of London.

William I created Barons to control England and encouraged them to build castles with Saxon labour. Most of them began as wooden structures. None of these have survived and most were rebuilt as stone and restored more than once in their time – just think of Windsor Castle. Designs evolved; from square to round towers (most economical in materials and harder to undermine); with and without a central keep; with moats and gatehouses and multiple layers of defence. Dover Castle was adapted for war in the last century. Castle Drogo in Devon is probably the last great castle built in England, but more than 900 were originally built.

track.

What does any railway do well? It has high fixed costs so there needs to be a big volume of traffic to cover these. Stopping services delay the faster trains behind and reduce efficiency. The ISO shipping container developed from 1965 proved to be ideal for rail transport and has given rail freight a new lease of life and profit. Ten years later BR developed the *Intercity 125* for high speed passenger travel and changed the morale of the staff. Mistakes were made, but Beeching was always the scapegoat for policies pursued by the government and its (Labour) successor, both of whom followed his recommendations. He and his staff were a force for good and Brunel’s wide gauge engines ended up in the scrap yards.

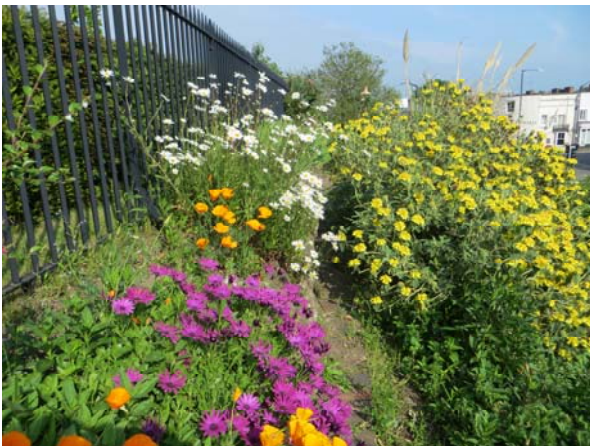
By the end many of us were persuaded.

Marianne Pitts

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Railway matters

Gardens at station judged outstanding again by Royal Horticultural Society Its Your Neighbourhood for fifth year in succession.



Leamington station gardens June 2016

Her Majesty replies. The August newsletter reported the celebrations at the station to mark Her Majesty’s 90th birthday. The article led to the correspondence reproduced opposite.

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New members

We welcome to the society

Andrew and Sarah Adams Green

Barbara Weed

Janet Ruane and William McGranra

Roger Male and Jean Young

Gareth King

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16th June 2016



BUCKINGHAM PALACE

Your Majesty,

Friends of mine have suggested that you would find the enclosed article and photographs entertaining. It was written for the next quarterly Leamington Society newsletter. I should explain that the Leamington Society has a 'Friends of the Station' sub-group to look after the railway station: the gardens, benches, posters and so on. [This is not the station which your great great grandmother Queen Victoria passed through on the way from Osborne to Balmoral, but an Art Deco building completed in 1939 just before the outbreak of World War II and handsome in its own right.] We work in close cooperation with Chiltern Railways and this is where the article begins.

Most of the Friends are long retired but still active. I am in my 70s and plump. To celebrate the official birthday as "Queen" I shared the platform for three hours with other attractions such as Guide Dogs for the Blind, our local charity. Chiltern Railways sponsor a puppy "Ivor" from collection boxes on the station. He came, with other Labradors, and was of course charming. Four Railway Police were also present, which gave the impression that your (true) Royal Highness needed their protection.

When it was over and I could return to my normal, almost invisible, elderly self, I was exhausted and slept most of the afternoon. How your Royal Highness has the stamina to undertake all your public engagements is a matter for wonder and admiration.

My apologies for sending this in print, but my handwriting is very poor. I hope you enjoy reading my article.

Yours sincerely,

Her Majesty the Queen
Buckingham Palace
London SW1A 1AA

November 3rd 2016

Dear Mrs Pitts,

The Queen wishes me to thank you for your letter telling Her Majesty about the Leamington Society and the Friends of the Station.

The Queen was interested to hear of the events organised to mark her ninetieth birthday and it was kind of you to tell Her Majesty of the care you took to find an outfit suitable for you to represent The Queen on that day. It was also kind of you to enclose photographs for Her Majesty to see and The Queen was glad to know everyone had an enjoyable day.

Her Majesty hopes you will understand that, because of the enormous number of letters and messages she has received in the last few months, it has not been possible to reply to you until now and I am to thank you, very much, for your thought for The Queen at this time.

Yours Sincerely
Jennifer Gardner Jones

Lady-in-Waiting

Mrs M Pitts

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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