



www.leamingtonsociety.org

The Leamington Society Newsletter

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

May 2023

Chairman's Notes

Since the last newsletter another important Creative Quarter project has been announced. The presentation in March in All Saints' Church showed plans for the redevelopment of the Stoneleigh Arms in Clements Street and of the Old Schoolhouse, to be linked by a pocket park. These should have a major impact on the Old Town, bringing visitors and providing much-needed green space.

We can look forward to many exciting events in the next few months. The bandstand will provide the perfect location for a series of May concerts organised by OAF, the Open Arts Festival, whether classical or folk and featuring local bands. The family-friendly Good Times festival, with live music and food, returns to Mill Gardens on June 10, followed by Cars at the Spa on June 11 and the Canal Festival on June 24, 25.

More good news was the recent announcement of yet another award for Leamington Spa station! The improvements to the station forecourt and underpass, completed before the Commonwealth Games, received a highly commended award from the West Midlands Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation.

Some time ago members were reminded that the Leamington Society would welcome volunteers to help us in carrying out some of the important activities on which we rely. Any volunteers would be welcome but, in particular, assistance with the organisation of events would be much appreciated, as would help with the audio-visual support for our talks or with the production of the newsletter. Let us know what interests you or ask any questions at contact@leamingtonsociety.org. We hope to hear from you.

The AGM brought our 2022/3 series of talks to an end. Plans for events in 2023/4, when we look forward to meeting members again, will be announced in due course.

Barbara Lynn

Autumn talks

ALL in Oddfellows at 19:30

Thursday September 14

Leamington Transformation

Kevin McGreal

Thursday October 12

Spencers Yard

WDC leader TBA

Tuesday November 7

Joint with Literary Society

Celia Rees, Local Author

Thursday December 14

Frank Muir and Dennis Norden

David Howe

More details in August

AGM May 18 2023

Officers elected for 2023-2024 are:

Chairman: Barbara Lynn; Vice-Chairman: Paul Dickins;
Hon. Secretary and Membership Secretary: Margaret Begg; Hon. Treasurer: Chris Davis;
Executive Committee member: Ignaty Dyakov-Richmond.

After the formal business of the AGM was quickly completed, generous tributes with donations were given to Archie and Marianne Pitts by Chris and Margaret Begg in recognition of both their 20+ years on the committee.

Excellent refreshments and Bruno Eurich's very entertaining talk with its unforgettable final slide followed: "How to make the Mill Bridge great again". His summary of the material covered is below.

What is the Leamington Society for?

The Society should be a campaigning force, and not try to be fashionable or populist.

The Society (LS) is different from specific interest groups like Leamington Music, Leamington Literary Society, Café Scientific, The Arts Society, Leamington History Group, WIAS, These are all worthy causes but are unlike the Leamington Society, which is a civic society. LS should not compete but cooperate with these groups if and whenever there is a common cause.

LS gains public support and members when we focus on campaigns that concern the public.

Examples are this Society's opposition to the original plans for Quick's site immediately north of the station; the WDC proposal for a shopping precinct on the Chandos Street car park that, if built, would have loomed over homes in adjacent streets; the WDC proposal to convert the Christchurch Gardens tennis courts into a permanent carpark. In each case the Society's vigorous opposition brought us new members, many of whom still belong to the LS.

The Society's first and foremost duty is to its members, just like any other organisation. When it forgets this, it will have lost its *raison d'être* and all else will be window dressing.

Archie Pitts

Membership Subscriptions for 2023-4

The Society's year runs from April to April, so subscriptions for 2023-4 are due. Those members who pay subscriptions by standing order need take no action. However members who decide to renew on an annual basis, should make their payment now using the website leamingtonsociety.org and clicking on Join Us. Please, if you use PayPal or Stripe for repeated subscriptions, would you arrange for your payment to arrive in April.

We would be grateful if you would pay over the summer rather than waiting for an email reminder. The cost of subscription is £10 for a single person and £15 for a family living at the same address. Thank you for your support.

Margaret Begg (Membership Secretary)

Born and Bred in Leamington - Steven Holland 10 Feb and our last in Dormer Place

Many of us have chosen to live in Leamington and moved here attracted by the architecture and the lively character of the town. Steven is one of a rarer breed – someone who was born and brought up in Leamington, then left to explore the wider world and finally returned with his family to live here.

He originally lived with his mother, a single parent, on the fifth floor of the Charles Gardner flats in Brunswick Street. He was educated at Shrubland Street school and St Patrick's School. Coming from a catholic family he was an altar boy at St Peter's Church. Struggling with dyslexia he did not excel at school but took a job at the Windmill Inn on Tachbrook Road and found himself manager of the pub at the tender age of 17. Apparently he was so tall that nobody questioned his age.

He showed great talent for serving the public and was employed at the Manor House Hotel where he learned about catering and customer service. He realised the importance of business and financial skills and decided to take a course at Mid-Warwickshire College which gave him the confidence to branch out on his own. He travelled all over the UK, catering in high class venues such as Claridge's in London and covering major events such as the Cheltenham Festival and the Wembley stadium where he offered a la carte dining for as many as 600 guests.

When he decided to stop travelling and settle down to family life, he returned to his roots in Leamington. He took over the restaurant in the park with his firm "Just Inspire" and has organised 100 events there over the past year.

When asked for the secret of his success, he replied that the essential element was people, and he prides himself on treating his loyal staff well and retaining them despite the competition from other organisations. Steven's enthusiasm certainly charmed the members who attended this talk, and it is this warmth which must make him a good boss.

Margaret Begg

Recycling Historic Buildings – Michelle Hill 23 March and our first in Oddfellows

This was well-attended and the site has proved popular so we will book it for the next season.

Michelle's talk saved the best till last, when she discussed the criteria for allowing a change of use for a historic building, illustrated with examples from her practice as a planner specialising in conservation of the Historic Environment, and from our town centre. 21% of all buildings in England were built before 1919 and classified as Historic. Nearly all are thermally inefficient with single-layer glazing and walls and draughts. We have not yet mastered an efficient insulation technique and it is a huge problem for the UK's zero-carbon policy. 617,000 of Historic buildings are empty, mainly houses, and in great danger from wind and weather and vandals. They should be inhabited rather than left to decay.

About 40,000 of these pre-1919 buildings are also listed and even more are in conservation areas, protected by Planning law. Planners have to decide whether any proposed changes in use will damage the structure of a listed building and if it does, whether that is outweighed by the public benefit of the change. There are hierarchies within the listing process: Grade I listed building only have one "optimal viable use" – the original one – but grades II and II* are more

variable. Examples from her practice were a redbrick Victorian windmill which is now a home heated by an air pump, and Coventry's 12th century Christchurch steeple – now a Bar.



Local examples, illustrated with good slides, were the United Reform Church in Spencer Street – now a creative hub for computer games, and Leamington Town Hall, now housing Motionhouse in addition to its municipal functions. An interesting evening, with much local relevance.

WDC is moving (Part 2)

Since our last newsletter was published, we have had the chance to see what is planned for the Town Hall – and it is architecturally impressive. See W/23/0381 on WDC Planning and add a comment if you wish.

Starting at street level – the stairs in the grand portico at the front are being restored to their original risers and treads. A fine doorway is planned for the north side (onto Livery Street) for access to that end of the corridor, carefully planned to look as if it has always been there. On the back of the building a large buttress block is being built the full height of the building to house a big modern lift and new lavatories, also accommodating the disabled, replacing the existing ones halfway up the stairs.

The Town Council will stay in the Town Hall, at least until their lease runs out (2026?) and various ground floor rooms may become teaching areas for arts and crafts or WDC offices – the latter should have priority in that building. The ex-Post Office room on the ground floor is destined to be a craft shop, presumably replacing the popular Pump Room shop when that becomes the front face of the Housing Department – but let us hope WDC swaps them over. It makes more sense.



Motionhouse moved into the building in 2020 – see the photo above of their free-standing equipment in the Assembly Room. They want to share their dance with the town and the new lift will enable more than one wheelchair at a time to access their space.

The roof area is to become WDC offices. The higher up you go, the more “private” the space – so the ground floor is for the public. Let us hope that the new WDC will make these communal areas accessible to local groups with user-friendly prices, so they are not dark, empty and unused in the evenings and at weekends.

It all looks promising and will bring WDC back into the heart of the town.

Good news:

1. Rubbish Collection

WDC Contract Services Manager and Head of Neighbourhood & Assets have agreed to create a new Waste Education & Enforcement Officer for up to 2 years. This Officer will approach Rugby Borough Council to see whether their experienced staff can provide any help.

Warwick University have agreed to contribute to the salary of this post for the whole period as they recognise that some university students living in Leamington Spa town centre do create an issue with incorrect storage and presentation of waste.

Congratulations are also due to Clarendon Residents for convincing the University of the problem. Fortnightly collection of the sheer bulk of the rubbish in HMOs remains an issue.

2. Leamington Station on national TV

Our fine Art Deco station featured on *The Architecture the Railways Built*, presented by Tim Dunn on the Yesterday Channel (#27) on May 2nd. It is available on Catchup. Ian Baxter pays tribute to the Friends (which he inspired) and there is even a very brief shot of four station gardeners drinking coffee. Aasia Begg's recent fine restoration of the Platform 2 refreshment room is rightly admired, as are the waiting rooms and booking office.

3. LSA Art Room

LSA have opened their LSA Art Room in Satchwell Street (opposite Carluccio's), selling their members' work, staging monthly exhibitions of individual artists and running courses. It is very attractive and a good source of presents for special people in your life. Go and see.

4. Foundry Wood is celebrating 10 years.

In that time, they have achieved a lot, in events and buildings and even digging a pond. We are all invited to the party – on June 28 from 2-6 on site. RSVP Kristie@arcic.co.uk.

Marianne Pitts

Ian Baxter on Chiltern Railways and Adrian Shooter; not to be taken for granted.

April 13 in the Pump Rooms

Newcomers to Leamington Spa may take for granted the train service and our station, each contributing to the town as a preferred place to live. But not so long ago it was very different, and Adrian Shooter was the vital leader.

Adrian, who died last December, was the ex-British Rail manager who made this privatisation work from 1996. His long-time colleague Ian Baxter entertained a substantial audience of Leamingtonians and railway people from around the country with his account of Adrian's life and achievements. A recording of the evening was made and is accessible on <https://www.baevents.co.uk/adrian-shooter/>.

Ian described some of the many improvements entirely due to Adrian on the Chiltern lines; re-doubling the line between Banbury, Bicester and Princes Risborough; new trains; vastly improved services; Kenilworth and Warwick Parkway station; the rejuvenation of Moor St; services to Oxford and many more. He gave Ian the encouragement to found and support the

Friends of Leamington Station. You can see the results for yourself. Please join their continuing work on the station garden if you can.



“The Chiltern Railways Story” by Hugh Jones tells the story really well.

The evening was a reminder that a decent, experienced, skilled and ambitious person is instrumental to the development of excellent, profitable companies.

Jan Gillett

More Information: 120+ people came, including Adrian’s widow Barbara and about 80 railway staff from all over England. BA Events ran the ticket sales and recorded the film. Ian Baxter’s company SRC Rail and Friends of Leamington Station subsidised the Pump Room hire. The Leamington Society could therefore not only halve the admission price but also send all the ticket revenues to the Motor Neurone Disease Association. With Gift Aid, to be claimed by MNDA, this totals £1,000.

Our thanks to all contributors for a great occasion.

Mill Bridge – our AGM topic

Mill Bridge is due to be entirely closed on May 15 for approx. three weeks (a rare occurrence), in order to renew footway service covers.

This is a good time to reflect on the bridge and its environs.

The bridge has survived many flooding events, and the surrounding land next to the “Elephant Wash” has remained without much guidance. The result of this is that the bridge structure looks a little tatty, lighting features have fallen into disrepair and the abutments have proved attractive to ivy. The rather neglected patch of land adjacent with the old public conveniences, has suffered from drug users dropping needles, riverside railings corroded and distorted and

the toilet block covered with graffiti. Thankfully the latter has been greatly improved with some quite stunning street art that respects the area and has survived intact.

Compared to the investment and attention given to Jephson Gardens, Mill Bridge is long overdue in receiving its share. Management of the area is complicated due to the mixed ownership by both the District and County Councils, and legal discussions are ongoing.

Friends of Mill Bridge would appreciate you and your ideas. Please join in with the “Make Mill Bridge Great Again” project at <https://linktr.ee/friendsofmillbridgeleamington>.

Mill Bridge is one of the jewels in Leamington’s crown, it just needs a bit of polishing!



Bruno Eurich

New Members

We are pleased to welcome to the society:

Jane Farrington; Laurie Day; Steven Parker; Caroline & Andrew Savage

Officers and Committee

Chairman: Barbara Lynn

Vice Chairman: Paul Dickins

Hon. Secretary and Membership Secretary: Margaret Begg

Hon. Treasurer: Chris Davis

Committee Member: Ignaty Dyakov-Richmond

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