

The Leamington Society

Registered Charity
516078



PROTECT OUR PAST AND IMPROVE OUR FUTURE



Power of Love - Heart Trail. Heart in Christchurch Gardens. Photo: Alison Chantrey

Hello and welcome to our March newsletter!

Spring is clearly in the air and with it a few more changes of which Barbara Lynn writes in her Chaiman's Notes.

The town is preparing for the new season with tidy ups (including one in Christchurch Gardens on 5th April), improved plans for No Mow May, and the Town Assembly to discuss the future of the town centre. South Warwickshire local plan consultation has just finished, so let's see what it results in around December.

Closer to home, Leamington Society's AGM is fast approaching on 14th May and we would really like to see more members involved in the work of the Committee, subgroups and on individual projects, some of which are mentioned in the newsletter. Email us to discuss what interests you personally.

The 2025-2026 events programme will be published soon.

Ignaty Dyakov-Richmond, Editor

**Events -
see page 7**

Chairman's Notes

February can be a dreary month, with grey skies and very little sunshine. However this year we were fortunate in that the Lights of Leamington exhibition brightened up the town. The original Leamington Lights festival, which ran from 1951 to 1961, was part of the Festival of Britain, intended to be an antidote to the prevailing greyness and depression of England in the years immediately after the Second World War. Times have changed but the current exhibition will give us much needed cheer in the grey days of February.

The stylish opening event set the tone – for those who remember the original Lights. The song book was straight out of the 1950s, as was the catering – coronation chicken, cubes of cheese and pineapple on sticks and other fashionable party food. Maybe not the prosecco, but that was still appreciated. In the audience were speakers whose original reminiscences were featured in the film – they are now considerably older but still remembered the magic. The exhibition remained open in All Saints' Church for a few weeks.

The Chairman's Notes a year ago, in February 2024, referred to changes which had been planned for the town centre. Now more changes are coming, but of a different order, affecting the structure of local government.

Warwickshire will become a unitary authority, providing all the services at present administered at county and district level. This will mean a farewell to Warwick District Council, formed over 50 years ago. It is hoped that this will save money, by simplifying the structure and streamlining services. However, as Warwickshire was not selected to be among the six authorities shortlisted to begin the process this year, local elections will still take place in May this year.

We are delighted that the saplings planted along Sayer Close have weathered their first fragile year of life and should soon begin to brighten up the neighbourhood. Now the Leamington Society has improved another treeless space, along Priory Terrace outside the Royal Mail Distribution Office. You might have noticed the two empty spaces covered by tree grates. We have obtained permission to plant trees there, and now there are two young saplings which local residents agreed to look after. We hope to bring more trees in the town in the coming years.

Our talk on 12th February was about changes which are going to have a real impact on Leamington: what is planned for the Riverside House site (houses, flats and small public green space) and also for the proposed new Elizabeth park, from Prince's Drive to Portobello. The talk was given by Ragu Sittambalan of Homes England.

The talk on 12th March, Energy Efficiency in Period Buildings, given by Matthew Rhodes, should be of interest to many in Leamington.

Barbara Lynn, Chair

Leamington Society: restoring Leafy Leamington

The Leamington Society have planted two trees in Priory Terrace in front of the Royal Mail distribution centre across the road from All Saints' Parish Church. Old trees there were felled almost twenty years ago. Ever since, two grid pits have stood bare with some 'temporary' tarmac fillings and have attracted cigarette butts and other small litter too difficult to remove from between the grills. Many residents commented how much they missed the trees there.

The Centre manager approved of the plans to beautify the area with enthusiasm and confirmed that they would be happy to see the trees there - the tree pits are located on their land. After consulting with a local nursery Bruno Eurich, chair of Friends of Mill Bridge, procured two trees. Prunus Amonagawa will hopefully have pale pink flowers in late spring and in autumn will have its leaves turn orange and red. Acer Platanoides (Norway maple) Crimson Sentry will bring joy with its clusters of small, yellow flowers tinged dark red in spring

followed by dark red and green, winged fruit in autumn, according to RHS website.

Ignaty Dyakov-Richmond, member of the Leamington Society Committee, and Bruno Eurich planted the trees and agreed on the plans to look after them with the help of local residents. They also conducted a blitz litter pick in Priory Terrace.

Barbara Lynn, Chair of the Leamington Society, says, 'We are delighted to have been given permission by the Post Office to plant these trees. We look forward to seeing them flourishing and hope that one day people will be able to refer once again to "leafy Leamington", as the town used to be known'.

Planting trees in Priory Terrace follows three birch trees which the Leamington Society paid for and arranged in Sayer Close next to the Leamington Station underpass last year.



Bruno Eurich and Ignaty Dyakov-Richmond with the newly planted tree in Priory Terrace

It's always great to see new trees being planted. I would like to thank the Leamington Society for arranging to get these trees planted and the Post Office for allowing them to be planted in such a prominent spot', says Cllr Will Roberts, WDC Cabinet member in charge of Green Spaces.

'We would like to plant more trees in our town in the next two years and are happy to work with local organisations, Councils and residents to make Leamington a greener and even more pleasant place to live and visit', says Ignaty Dyakov-Richmond, 'We welcome suggestions for future planting locations as well as support in buying saplings. Email us at contact@leamingtonsociety.org'.

Ignaty Dyakov-Richmond



LeamBookFest on 23rd March

The Leamington Soroptimists will hold their new Leam Bookfest event at The Fold, in Spencer Street, on Sunday 23rd of March.

It will be a vibrant celebration of books, ideas and the power of storytelling in the heart of the town.

Nine authors have donated their time and stories as all believe in the power and joy of books and support Own Books charity.

The festival's patron Kit de Waal, author of My Name is Leon, The Trick to Time explores identity, family, and belonging. Kit will launch her latest novel The Best of Everything and welcomes many friends and acclaimed authors for thought-provoking discussions and opportunities to connect with fellow book lovers.

There are nine authors, and tickets which include light lunch are £50 each. They can be purchased at leambookfest.uk

The organisers have said: "People can enjoy the event knowing that their ticket buys books for local children and foster a love of reading."

A view from the Gardens

It's wonderful to see the Gardens' value to the town recognised in recent weeks. Readers will have noticed, in late 2024, that the new Christmas Lights reached the North end of the Parade and extended to the Gardens for the first time. And, this February, the Gardens were the location of one of the artist-decorated, "Power of Love" hearts installed as part of the Lights of Leamington Spotlight exhibition. Each of the five hearts, which were positioned in key locations across the town centre, celebrated a unique aspect of Leamington's vibrant culture and community while carrying inspiring messages of love and connection. Thanks go to BID Leamington, Royal Leamington Spa Town Council and Warwick District Council for both of these great additions to our seasonal festivities.

Also at Christmas time, the Friends were delighted to take part in Leamington



Graham and Jane Smith, from FoCG Committee, decorating the Christmas tree.

Christmas Tree Festival at All Saints Church. What a fabulous display of creativity from community organisations, businesses and schools in the town. As a

result of our participation in the festival, we were delighted to be invited on to Vic Minett's BBC Coventry and Warwickshire Radio show, to speak about the Friends and our tree. We're looking forward to taking part again next year.



Allan Jennings and Michael Jeffs at the Art Box.
Photo: Alison Chantrey.

The Art Box's current exhibition is a wonderful display by Leamington History Group members Allan Jennings and Michael Jeffs. It's a mix of photography and sketches of scenes in the town. It's your last chance to catch this show, if you haven't already as a new exhibition will be installed soon.

Our **next tidy up in the Gardens**, to which all are welcome, takes place on **Saturday 5th April from 11am until noon**. Please do join us, if you are able.

As always, if you'd like to keep up-to-date with the Friends' work, you can follow us on Facebook at *Friends of Christchurch Gardens, Leamington Spa and Art Box, Leamington Spa*, or drop us an email to be added to our newsletter distribution (friendsofchristchurchgardens@gmail.com).

Alison Chantrey, Chair, Friends of Christchurch Gardens



Lighting up the February gloom

Over half-term week Leamington residents had their hearts lifted by the fantastic light displays in Jephson Gardens. The electronic music by the

lake was accompanied by coloured lights illuminating the fountains and the trees, changing in time with the sounds. The bare winter trees shone with different colours - adults and children alike were thrilled at the show.



The theme was "Love Leamington" to coincide with Valentine's Day. At the gates were the giant lit up letters L O V E, and throughout the town centre large hearts were placed describing the many different features of our lovely town. Local students from LAMP created another light spectacular at the veiled grandstand in the Pump Room Gardens. Artistic designs and music could be enjoyed, coming from behind the veiling. A memorable outdoor experience to match the exhibition in All Saints Church of the post-war lights displays.

Margaret Begg

Photos: Christopher Begg

Creative Quarter Update

Leamington's creative quarter is growing fast. Having completed the excellent conversion of the Spencer Street chapel into a business centre for music, recording and film the District Council has rebuilt the derelict pub, the Stoneleigh Arms, on Clemens Street to provide space for creative artists with a pocket park behind which will link to the Old School This building has also been lying derelict for many years, and has now been renovated and extended to offer more space for creative artists.

By the end of March, the Town Hall will be re-opened after modernisation funded by the government's Future High Streets Fund. Motionhouse, the international modern dance group based in Leamington, already use the Assembly room for rehearsals. In future the plan is to turn the Town Hall into a creative hub. Central

government intends to change all areas into Unitary Authorities, so the District Council will disappear, and there is a need to find new uses for our Victorian Town Hall.

Leamington has attracted large numbers of talented creative people to our town, and this leads to plenty of cultural activity for the rest of the community to enjoy. These new developments ensure that this cultural life will just get richer every year.

Margaret Begg



The Harmony of Difference by Annabel Rainbow. Photo courtesy of the artist

Future talks at the Oddfellows at 7.30pm on Wednesday evenings

March 12th Energy efficiency in period buildings: Matthew Rhodes, an expert in sustainable living, will talk about ways to adapt our homes to make them more energy efficient.

April 9th Campaign for cleaner air in Leamington: Susan Rasmussen will talk about the dangers of pollution and steps we can take to improve air quality in our town.

May 14th AGM followed by a talk on Post War architecture in Leamington. James MacKay will tell us about the interesting 20th century buildings in our town.

Members free, non-members £3. Everyone is welcome!



Thanks to the efforts of local community groups, schools, and volunteers, the space has flourished with native wildflowers, fruit trees, hedging, perennial flower beds, ferns, and bulbs. These improvements have not only boosted biodiversity but have also fostered a more welcoming environment for those who travel through, live and work nearby the churchyard. In recognition of this transformation, the Leamington Society awarded the project its 2024 accolade for enhancing a public green space.

Leamington's Living Labyrinth: A Wildlife-Friendly Community Garden in the heart of town

For over a decade, ARC (Achieving Results in Communities) has been transforming spaces across Leamington and Warwick, bringing people together to nurture nature, enhance wellbeing and form stronger communities. You may have spotted the signature mosaics at locations like Foundry Wood, the raised planters at Packington Place, and the New Street Burial Ground Garden. Since autumn 2022, their work has also extended to All Saints Parish Church, where a dedicated team of volunteers has been rejuvenating the churchyard.

Now, ARC is embarking on an exciting new phase: the creation of a Living Labyrinth. Inspired by the famous labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral in France and the bulb installation at Arundel Castle, this five-circuit pathway will weave through pollinator-



Photo supplied by Lucie Cox

friendly plants, offering a sanctuary for both wildlife and people.

Carefully selected perennials will provide a year-round food source and shelter for bees and butterflies, while bulbs planted this autumn will flower into next year. At its heart, a tranquil grass clearing will offer a space for quiet reflection, inviting visitors to immerse themselves in nature from the centre of town.

ARC welcomes support to turn this vision into reality. Whether you can help with planting, spread the word, contribute to fundraising, or assist with the ongoing restoration of the churchyard, your involvement will make a real difference.

For more details about this project, visit www.allsaintschurchleamington.org

To learn more about ARC and our community projects, and to see how you can get involved visit www.arccic.co.uk

Lucie Cox, Community Gardening Facilitator



Teddy Bear Picnic. Painting by Kevin Parrish, Leamington Spa based artist.

Talk by Friends of the Shakespeare Line

Fraser Pithie of was booked for our fund-raising talk in 2020, and proved well worth the wait, with an unexpectedly happy ending.

The Shakespeare Line – as it is now called – starts at Birmingham Moor Street and ends at Stratford upon Avon, serving about 18 small suburban and country stations in between. Until August 1976 it linked to the Cotswolds, Cheltenham, the South West and South Wales. It was the last mainline built by the Great Western Railway in the first decade of the 20th century.

Interestingly, when the transport fashions moved from trains to cars, and Beeching was asked to "rationalise" the rail network in 1962, this line was not on the primary list of closures but on a secondary list to be considered.

Consequently, in 1966, British Railways announced it would close the Shakespeare Line. The transport body appointed to consider and comment on proposed closures, known as the Tucc, found that alternative bus routes were impracticable and would cause severe hardship to residents and recommended that it stay open. However, in 1968, Richard Marsh, a newly appointed Minister of Transport, decided to ignore the Tucc's recommendations and approve the closure of the line.

What saved the line was a remarkable display of local action in 1969. Michael Brockington, Financial Director of the

Stratford Herald, was alerted by the Herald's classified advertising staff that British Rail was due to publish a notice of closure in his paper, bypassing the proper procedures. Michael Brockington immediately contacted the solicitor involved in the campaign to save the line.

Douglas King rushed to the High Court in Birmingham with just two days before the line was due to be closed. Three Judges, under Lord Denning, later Master of the Rolls, judged the British Railways Board to have displayed "singularly unattractive conduct" and the Court of Appeal applied an injunction on the British Railways Board preventing them from closing the line – a unique event.

A plaque to Douglas King is now in place at Wilmcote, his local station, where his daughter still lives and befriends the line. A further proposal to close the line was made in 1984 but was defeated and Mark Sullivan told those present about his involvement in the 1984 closure attempt as he was a member of the TUCC.

Recently, communities living near the stations have tended their local station gardens, restored running in boards and waiting rooms and even supplied volunteer gardeners, planters, soil and plants to celebrate the Queen's 2022 Platinum Jubilee at Moor Street. Students from a local secondary school have adopted Wythall station. They are the first UK students to gain a City

and Guilds NVQ 2 vocational qualification in Horticulture based on railway volunteering.

The unexpected happy ending is the triumphant restoration of Henley in Arden Station – from boarded-up dereliction to a thriving Community Centre and micro-brewery, which was completed in February this year. This success is a testament to the local community's dedication and hard work, and it is already so popular and successful that a full-time Manager has been appointed to run it.

This was a local effort by local people using local firms as suppliers and builders and gaining much advantage and goodwill. The estimated cost for renovation, repurposing, and reopening was between £1.5 to £2 million; the Friends of Henley Railway Station accomplished it for around £400,000.

More information is available at www.friendsl.org.uk and <https://thestationhenley.co.uk/>

Marianne Pitts, Friends of Leamington



King George V visits Platform 2.
Painting by Kevin Parrish.

Friends of Leamington Spa Art Gallery and Museum (FLAG)

FLAG was founded in 1967. The aim then, and still today, is to support and promote Leamington Spa Art Gallery & Museum.

Our financial support assists with purchases for the art collection. We have been able to contribute to purchases of works by Terry Frost, Edmund de Waal and Simon Lewty among others in the past and, most recently, to help acquire a work by John Piper.

We are always happy to help with the purchase of items for the museum collection especially items connected with the Royal Pump Rooms and its history of water, swimming and medical treatments. Recent support has ranged from a modern ceramics vase featuring swimmers to the original Aylesford Well Basin.

An increasingly important aspect of our support is the funding of conservation and re-framing of works already in the collection. This allows items to be put on display that were previously unsuitable due to condition.

FLAG donate the People's Choice Award for the Open Exhibition and finance an annual School Award which allows children from a local

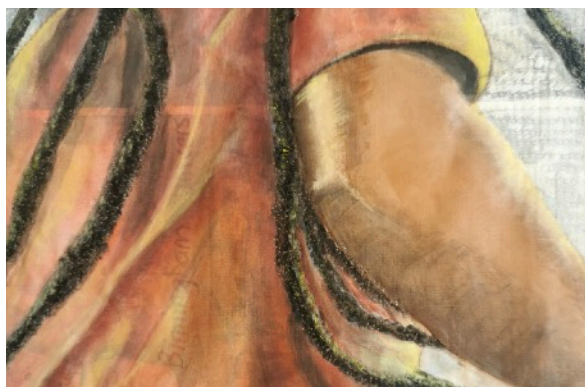
primary school to experience the Art Gallery & Museum with tours and a taught session about life in Victorian times. FLAG also provide refreshments at the children's Christmas event which is always enjoyable.

We have an independent programme of talks and excursions for members. Talks are held between October and April with speakers on a variety of subjects. This season we have learned about local sculptor John Bridgeman, the life of a potter, the British Civil War in Eight Paintings and plant-hunter 'Chinese' Wilson. Still to come are Stained Glass in Leamington and Beyond and An Introduction to Street Art. Meetings are held in the Dormer Conference Centre, admission £3 including coffee/tea/biscuits and visitors are very welcome.

Monthly excursions by coach are arranged during the summer months.

Coming up this summer we have Boughton House, Wollerton Old Hall Garden and Royal Holloway College among others. Membership of FLAG is £15 per person, new members are very welcome. See our website or Facebook page or

contact us on friendsofleamingtonartgallery@hotmail.co.uk



Benjamin Zephaniah Detail.
Photo courtesy of Annabel Rainbow

Of course, we are very proud of our local AG&M, we are very lucky to have such an excellent gallery in the centre of the town. As well as the Main Gallery collections the Temporary Exhibition Gallery showcases a wonderful variety of exhibitions. The current textile exhibition is well worth a visit, an introduction below.

Unravelling History: Unpicking the collections and reworking textile traditions

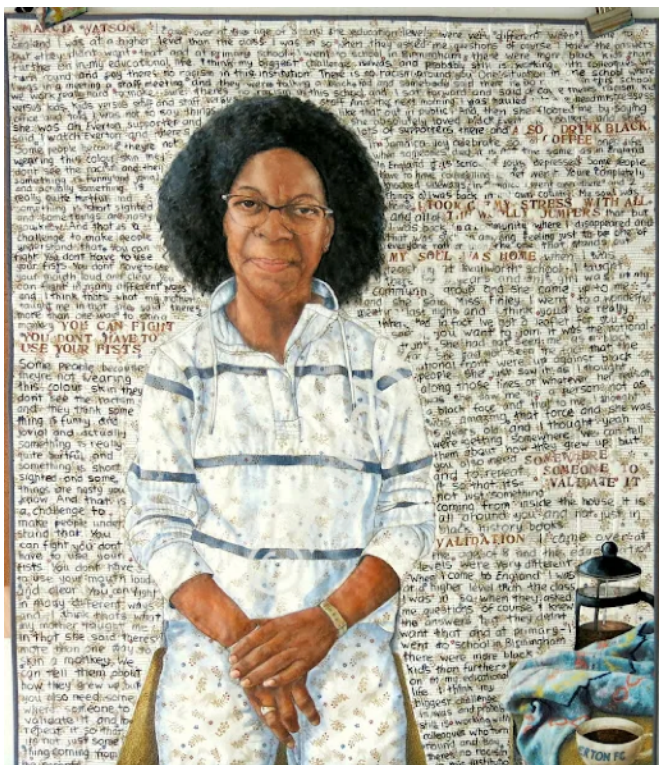
showcases the work of 6 internationally renowned textile artists: Daniel Lismore, Jennie Moncur, Laura Kemshall, Linda Kemshall and Stephanie Redfern, alongside the work of Annabel Rainbow who co-curated the exhibition with the gallery.

The exhibition showcases the power and diversity of contemporary textile art, featuring new works alongside pieces from Leamington Spa Art Gallery & Museum collection. Through fabric, stitch and storytelling, it weaves a connection between past and present.

Each artist has a unique approach and they have responded to the collections in different ways, from Daniel Lismore's amazing gender-fluid piece, The Field Marshall, to the quilts of Linda Kemshall echoing the shapes and tones of Sir Terry Frost's painting Madrigal, and also the illustrated book by 17th century entomologist Maria

Sybilla Merian. Jennie Moncur's tapestries contain representation of flora in striking colour blocks, and Stephanie Redfern's work uses stitch and collage to create vibrant fairytale puppets inspired by Merian's Histoire generale des insectes de Surinam et de toute L'Europe, and ceramics in the collection.

Annabel Rainbow's striking quilt portraits showcase Windrush elders from the local community, alongside an African Caribbean community quilt titled 'Our Memories and First Impressions'. Additionally, her Memento Mori pieces, inspired by traditional samplers, complement the work of Laura Kemshall who highlights the transmission of knowledge, heritage, and skills through the generations of her family.



Marcia Watson. Photo: Annabel Rainbow

Thoughts on being the Mayor of Royal Leamington Spa

In my role as ambassador for the town, I have enjoyed a diverse range of activities, attending over one hundred events since May, when I became Mayor. They have included visiting charities, shops, concerts, dance productions, societies, businesses, participating in various town events like the switching-on of the Christmas lights and Remembrance Sunday services. I also visited Sceaux, our twinned town in France, where we were very well hosted and entertained.

All of these events have involved meeting



people, from business leaders to volunteers. I have been amazed and inspired by the dedication of so many of them, who work quietly, behind the scenes for the benefit of our community. They are proud of their organisations and

are pleased to have the opportunity to showcase them. I have been delighted to listen and learn from the people I have met and be the person asked to thank them and celebrate their achievements, on behalf of the town. I have learnt much about the different strands of the community from these visits, and how our different organisations intertwine to form a functioning and happy town. The experience has done much to mitigate the feelings of depression about human nature which I have felt recently, as I have watched the various global horrors unfolding.

As is customary, the Mayor of Leamington hopes to raise money for the charity of their choice. I have chosen BreakthroughType1D, an organisation which is researching a cure for diabetes, and also carries out treatment and prevention research. This is a charity which is very close to my heart, as two of my grandsons have contracted the disease, both when they were very young children. I have been so grateful to the people of Leamington who have supported my events and generously donated to this charity.

The mayoral chain plays an important part in the life of the Mayor. Leamington's chain is an impressive badge of office. In my view, it is the most magnificent chain in Warwickshire. I have been very proud of it, even though it is difficult to move when wearing it, and impossible to bend down.

Judith Clarke

Colourful Characters of Leamington Spa

Several spirited, bold and contradictory characters played a vital role in the success of Leamington as a fashionable Regency and Victorian health spa.

From the moment Benjamin Satchwell's enticing description of his friend's newly discovered mineral well appeared in one of the London periodicals, the privileged social classes began to travel to Leamington. It then became vital to develop the town with elegant Regency properties. Step forward Bertie Greathead of Guy's Cliffe, whose spendthrift ways had made it imperative he sell some of his land for development on what became the Parade.

Bertie was a creative man, a writer, traveller and architect; and he also took on a partnership role in the Royal Pump Rooms. Described as 'a child of the romantic era' but unable to let go of some of his double standards, he supported the abolition of slavery and described the family plantation as 'odious' but continued to own enslaved people. He also devised the lurid inscription on Gaveston's Cross, which grim monument commemorates the murder of Piers Gaveston in 1312. It manages to heap equal recrimination on everyone involved; Bertie would have enjoyed viewing the monument from the top of his gothic mansion. He overspent to fund his lavish lifestyle, and this

character flaw ultimately worked to the benefit of Leamington Spa.

Jane, Duchess of Gordon, another influence on the flourishing reputation of this town, excites my interest as a strong and resilient woman. Having started life in Edinburgh with a broken family, a wild childhood and a tragically unfulfilled love affair, she later rose above the unhappiness of her life with the Duke of Gordon to win advantageous marriages for her children and fame for her flamboyant hospitality. This was followed by separation from the duke to live in reduced circumstances. Her frequent presence in Leamington made the town a prime destination for social climbers in pursuit of auspicious matches for their own daughters.

The lofty interiors of the Bedford Hotel tempted daredevil John 'Mad Jack' Mytton, notable for squandering his Shropshire fortune in his pursuit of thrills. In 1826 he rode his horse into the lobby of said hotel, up the grand staircase, and onto the first floor balcony before jumping down into the street. His life was marked by near-suicidal exploits and profligate spending. Sadly, he died aged 37 in the debtors' prison in Southwark.

The only exception to this litany of fortunes depleted, lost or relinquished, is Dr Henry Jephson, whose twenty year career brought him high renown and a mansion in Warwick Street, where he lived and also practised his profession. Following his medical

advice to get plenty of exercise, his high-class patients would often have been seen promenading around town and along the riverside walks. He also devoted two hours each morning to free healthcare for the poor. I understand his diet sheet included plain meat, plain pudding, butter, and Madeira, (the only alcohol he allowed). I like to think those recommendations from this philanthropic doctor worked well for people in different economic circumstances. I imagine his opulent patients would have left Leamington Spa having enjoyed its many benefits, during that brief period before its popularity declined in favour of railway trips to the seaside.

To learn more colourful anecdotes of Leamington Spa, be sure to book onto one of the walking tours which take place in the summer. For further information, contact Sidney Syson.

SC Skilman, author of three highly illustrated local history books: Paranormal Warwickshire, Illustrated Tales of Warwickshire and A-Z of Warwick, all published by Amberley.



New statue in Jephson Gardens: An Unknown Refugee by John Bridgeman. Photo courtesy of Friends of Leamington Art Gallery and Museum. Read more about it in the FLAG blog on their website.



View of Parade. Photo: Jamie Robinson

Members are invited to stand for the Leamington Society Committee and encouraged to contact Chair Barbara Lynn via contact@leamingtonsociety.org to discuss their nominations further.
AGM is at 7.30pm on May 14th at The Oddfellows.



Unravelling History: Unpicking the collections and reworking textile traditions by Annabel Rainbow. In Leamington Art Gallery. Photo: courtesy of the artist.

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. Postal address: 11 Dormer Place, Leamington Spa CV32 5AA

Officers and Committee

Chairman: *Barbara Lynn*

Hon. Secretary and
Membership Secretary:

Committee Members:

Vice Chairman: *Margaret
Begg*

Margaret Begg

*Ignaty Dyakov-Richmond
(newsletter editor), Barry*

Treasurer: *Brian Wall*

Franklin, Gary Jones

We are pleased to
welcome to the Society:
*Naomi Bishop
Andy Davey & Partner
Chris & Kerrie Quirk*

Thank you to all our members for
your continued support!

To join the Society visit
www.leamingtonsociety.org/join-us

Why not to give a friend the year's
membership of the Leamington Society for
their pleasure and help the Society at the
same time?

Email the Society
membership@leamingtonsociety.org for
more information.

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