



The Leamington Society Newsletter

August 2004

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Our main event so far this year was the biennial Awards Scheme, culminating in a grand ceremony in the Town Hall last month; many thanks to our sponsors, including very generous financial support from Chiltern Railways. There were 34 nominations and a bumper number of Awards (25), many in Old Town. A full report with photographs appears later in this newsletter.

The great majority of our members were appalled at the proposal to open up the Leam and adjacent parts of the Avon in such a way that 14 foot wide boats could use our river through Leamington. They will be gratified to know that, at a meeting on July 19th, the Environment and Rural Affairs Overview and Scrutiny Committee of Warwickshire County Council resolved unanimously that

"Cabinet be recommended that the County Council does not support the principle of opening up the River Avon between Stratford upon Avon and the Grand Union Canal at Warwick or Leamington Spa to navigation".

Cabinet will consider the Committee's recommendation on 16th September 2004. Your Society is especially grateful to Jack Watkins for putting the case against this proposal at various consultation meetings over the last year.

WDC took Coventry airport to court over the new airport terminal but lost. However a subsequent decision by the Secretary of State states that there must be a full "environmental statement" on the effect of the expansion of this airport. Opponents to the increased use of the airport live in hope. Mark Sullivan explains below.

Leamington has recently appeared on a list of the top 77 hotspots for alcohol related problems: see

http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/n_story.asp?item_id=997

New powers will be available to the police to try to control the problem. But will they be effective, and when will we get back our fine town?

It seems inevitable that WCC will soon decriminalise street parking throughout our area, and introduce on-street parking charges enforced by traffic wardens. Our town centre traders are very worried that on street parking charges will be a strong deterrent to visitors from out of town and the consequential loss of business will drive many of our smaller shops out of business. And will our town centre be spoiled by numerous parking meters? The Courier is encouraging the public to write to the paper to express their views. Please do so. **Archie Pitts**

Dates for your Diary

Programme for the year is included with this Newsletter

Pre-Christmas Meetings

Royal Pump Rooms Restoration

Thurs. 9 Sept. 7.45 pm

Pump Rooms Annex

Illustrated talk by architect Jill Haran, who led the restoration. We will follow all the 'ups and downs' from the beginning of the project, including the Flood, during the reconstruction of this fascinating historic building. (We shall see parts not normally open to the public).

Railway through Leamington – from the Great Western to its future with Chiltern Railways

Thurs. 14 Oct. 7.45 pm

Clarence Suite, Oddfellows Hall

Ian Baxter, Business Development Manager, joined Laing Rail/Chiltern Railways in 2000 to work on joint franchise bids with Swiss Federal Railways and Chiltern Railways franchise development projects. He is now working on a wide range of new station and infrastructure development projects across the UK within Laing Rail Projects.

High Density Development in Leamington?

Thurs. 11 Nov. 7.45 pm.

Assembly Room, Town Hall

Panel Discussion

John Archer, Head of Planning and Engineering at WDC
Eithne Goode, Town Mayor 2003/4
Councillor at County, District and Town levels.

James Plaskitt MP

Peter Storrie, experienced consultant town-planner who lives in Leamington. *The panel will outline the issues and difficulties arising from the recent rush of applications to redevelop existing properties. Then the discussion will be opened to questions from the audience.*

Please note the various venues!

COVENTRY AIRPORT: FACT IS STRANGER THAN FICTION

By Mark Sullivan

In the 1930s, when Antoine de Saint-Exupery's *Vol de Nuit* captured the heroic days of flying, every town, including Leamington, thought it should have an airport. So a grass strip was made from fields along Harbury Lane, and was used for a few years. It is marked on old maps; now it is in part a scrapyard.

Coventry acquired its airport, long known as Baginton, in the same era. It has largely been a local airport for private and business flying, but in the 1960s and 70s there were attempts at commercial flights, which failed to make money. In those days cheap travel was by charter airline.

Until this year, Coventry's main business has been freight. It has the unusual advantage of a 24-hour operating licence and no planning controls that restrict flying hours. Airfreight tends to operate at night. The parcels firms DHL and Parcelforce have distribution centres there.

Regional planners have been happy to list Birmingham as the West Midlands' passenger airport and Coventry the centre for airfreight. But economics does not respect planning. Airfreight loses money. Coventry has lost out to the bigger East Midlands Airport near the M1 at Kegworth. Now it needs passenger flights to make profits. Flying schools do not, so are dispensable, however valuable they are to local would-be pilots.

Long before the eruption of the Rugby mega-airport, all thought of which was formally dropped by the Transport Secretary, Alastair Darling, in 2003, Coventry Airport had permission for a new passenger terminal. That permission was never used. After a long wrangle between Warwick District Council and the airport's freehold owner, the City of Coventry, it was agreed to make a new application. This was made in spring 2003 to WDC and has never been determined.

This 'official' proposal is for a terminal to cater for up to 2 million passengers a year (Birmingham handles some 8 million a year currently). It has been strongly opposed by the Parish Councils around the airport, who already suffer from night noise – as do Warwick and Leamington at times. The then airport leaseholder (Air Atlantique) has not appealed to force a public inquiry into this plan – suggesting it did not expect to win.

Instead, we have seen unregulated capitalism at work. The Airport is now leased to TUI, a German-owned travel industry group. It has taken advantage of the 24-hour operating licence and the lack of planning controls to begin a low-cost set of air services to destinations in Europe. This began suddenly on 30 March 2004 and is run from a prefabricated building, which is more than the 500 square metres floor area below which 'permitted development rights' would allow a building for aviation use without planning permission.

TUI, operating a miniature version of the type of services offered by the well-known low-cost airline Ryanair, depends on quick exploitation of assets and a minimum of regulation by bureaucracy. If planning difficulties become serious, and hamper growth of their business, such companies move elsewhere to minimise the restrictive controls.

There have been two moves to bring the airport under control. When TUI announced the new passenger services, Warwick District Council sought a Planning Injunction to prevent them using the terminal building, which it argued is larger than 500 sq. metres. In scenes of some confusion at the High Court in March, the Council's application was refused. So TUI could begin services, while the enforcement notice served on it will take some months to reach an Inquiry, for which there is as yet still no date. Meanwhile, the airline can go on operating and making money.

But the Council also told TUI that an environmental impact assessment (EIA) of the current use (the new passenger flights and the use of the makeshift terminal) was required. This was upheld by the Secretary of State who has directed that TUI submit an EIA. Thus the dubious success won by the airline in the High Court in March has been reversed. Once a full EIA is produced, the entire nuisance that Coventry Airport is now creating will have to be reported on and analysed. So more public inquiries into Coventry Airport are likely!

The Leamington Society's position on Coventry Airport is that it opposes making it a passenger airport, and would wish to see existing noisy night freight and parcels traffic transferred to daytime.

But the story of Coventry Airport, like that of 'No Frills' airlines, has been stranger than fiction so far. Anything could happen next, and probably will.

Awards 2004, by Archie and Marianne Pitts

There is room for hope – in spite of the loss of a third of the Regent Hotel and the current threat to our leafy suburbs. This year’s Awards scheme and ceremony were a success; thirty-five nominations yielded twenty-five winners. Photographs of all the nominations were displayed at the ceremony on July 7th in the Town Hall at which the winners were announced; the display continued in the Library until the end of the month. *The Courier* reported the occasion with enthusiasm in the issue of July 9 (pages 20-21) under the headline “Beautiful buildings that are the real award-winners”. *The Observer* also covered the ceremony in its edition of July 15th.

We were extremely fortunate in our independent Judge, Mr Dhiran Vagdia, Chairman of the Coventry and Warwickshire Society of Chartered Architects. He had a real understanding and sympathy for the architecture of the 19th century as well as for good modern architecture; Dhiran was able to explain clearly to the audience of 150 why each winner had been honoured, while the electronic display gave us the image. Certificates were ceremoniously given to the owners, builders and architects by the Mayor of the town, Councillor Mota Singh, who added dignity to the occasion with his robes and chain.

Among the winners were a number of shop-fronts, mainly small businesses and generally (but not exclusively) from Old Town – including hairdressers, restaurants, food shops and estate agents. Of one shopfront award winner, S&S Londis in Tachbrook Road, Dhiran said that “if you could imagine a couple of shoppers in period dress, this shop looked as if it hadn’t aged at all. This was definitely worth an award for its true-to-purpose appearance and street presence. The overall rustic feel of an aged and established presence really set this elevation apart from the rest of the street.”



S&S Londis, Tachbrook Road



Five Rivers, Victoria Terrace

Stanleybet, the Parkside practice and the bank of sash windows on the Angel Hotel improve the street appearance and style of “new town” Leamington Spa.

The Regenesi Award was given to Age Concern in Clement Street. In her presentation speech, Janet Alty regretted that we could not see pictures of this building as a derelict wreck before it was rebuilt and repainted in the late Georgian style. Some of these improvements were prompted by Regenesi, others by pride of ownership – and the whole area looks the better for them.

Just outside the Old Town boundary lies the SYDNI Centre, another winner. Only the outside in its bright primary colours was displayed but the interior is even more encouraging with large well-lit open spaces, giving room for community activities for all ages. The Healthy Living Centre in Shrubland Street is another example of good modern building.



Age Concern, Clemens St
Winner of Joint award with Regensis

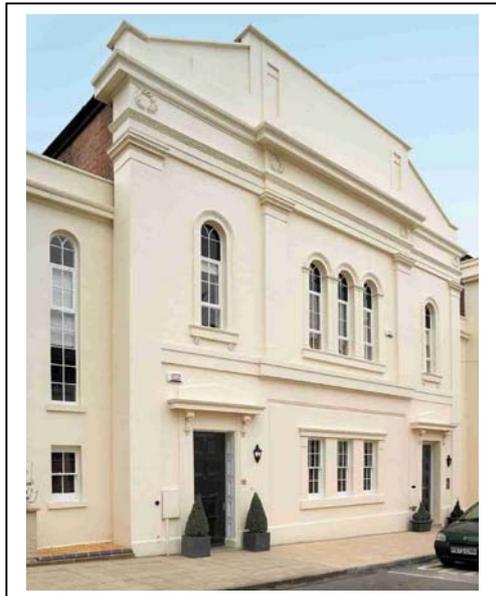


Healthy Living Centre, Shrubland St

Many of the town's handsome buildings which were once single residences are now in multiple occupation. This need not disfigure the building – as is apparent in the sensitive treatment of “The Three Graces” in Warwick New Road, previously used as WDC Offices; Chapel Court, and 19, 21 Avenue Road. 2a, 2b and 2c Morrell Street are a courtyard of charming brick houses converted from store rooms at the back of the ex-Clarendon Hotel. The picture of 24 Portland Place West from the road, sadly, did not show its best alteration – a graceful Victorian balcony at the back. It is difficult to decide whether the owner, the architect or the builder deserves the highest praise – the Leamington Society honours all of them, where it can.



Three Graces, Warwick New Road

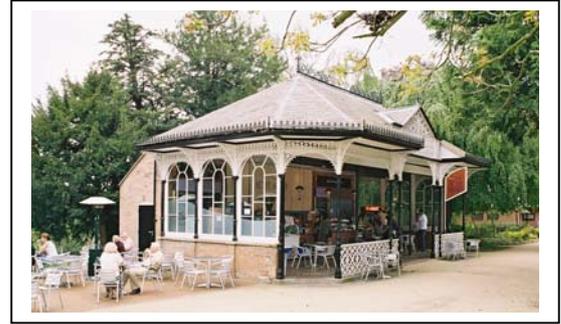


Chapel Court, Portland St

Warwick District Council collected a number of Awards for buildings in Jephson Gardens (the Aviary, the Temperate House) and for the Wetlands Nature Reserve on Newbold Comyn with its bird-watching hide. Of the the Wetlands Dhiran said “This award has really been in the making for some time now, and the judging panel have had their eyes on it for a number of years running. The wetland spaces have now begun to flourish and is establishing itself as a special place with the Leamington area. It can only be described as an asset to the area, and does without a doubt offer a positive contribution to the Towns built, or in this case, ‘unbuilt’ spaces. ... I am not sure whether the award should go to Mother Nature, but in any case, for the purposes of tonight’s activities, we shall offer it to her worthy representatives [from WDC and the Wildlife Trust]”.



Temperate House, Jephson Gardens



The Aviary, Jephson Gardens

The event could not have taken place without the help of sponsors, members and friends. **Chiltern Rail** gave very generous financial help, which was equalled in value by the sponsorship in kind. **Warwick District Council** provided the free use of the Town Hall, where the Vice Chairman of WDC, David Shilton gave us a warm welcome. **Marks and Spencer** gave drink; **Aubrey Allen** gave food; **Insight** provided ‘state of the art’ electronic display equipment. We paid for a pianist (Mark Aspinall of Warwick) whose talent was such that many wished everyone would stop talking and we could listen properly. The photographer Ken Johnson took great care, going out when the light was right to photograph nominations at their best. Tim and Archie prepared the electronic show from his negatives. Jill Haran was one of our Judges. Mo Enright designed posters and displays. Alan Mayes’ knowledge of past events and local history was indispensable. Staff at the Town Hall prepared the Assembly Room with great care and skill, and smiles – even when it came to the washing-up. Tables of twelve were laid with flowers and with food; wine and fruit juice were served; the Assembly Room was cleared by other Leamington Society members. We owe thanks to many people – too many to list.

Stuart Yeatman, Business Planning Manager of Chiltern Rail, presented the Bill Gibbons Cup for the best private residence – Seaforth House on Warwick New Road, lovingly and intelligently restored to



Seaforth House, Warwick New Road
Winner of Bill Gibbons Trophy



7 Leam Terrace

its original style. This included taking out the 20th century monstrosity of a garage built into this early 19th century house and replacing the opening with a matching sash window correct in all detail. Of Seaforth House Dhiran said “The owners of this beautifully restored house knew full well what they wanted, and just how to deliver it. This House is a fantastic sight. ... Note the delicate carved

fascias, precise fenestration detailing, crispness of finish, and again we see the encroachment of early Victorian hoodmoulding. The elevation is well balanced and in proportion, an essential ingredient of successful period architecture.” This nomination clearly deserved the Bill Gibbons Cup for the private dwelling which most impressed the assessors.

When Stuart rose to speak about Chiltern’s plans for the Station in Leamington he was greeted with a spontaneous burst of applause and left the ceremony in no doubt that we are pleased with the listing of the Station and the improvements that have already taken place in the short time that it has been in the custody of Chiltern Rail – the cleaning, repainting and flowerbeds. He paid us the compliment of saying that we had set them a very high standard in this event. There is indeed room for hope.

Complete list of winners of Awards 2004

1	The Three Graces, 1 Warwick New Road	Extensive restoration and conversion into flats and new build
2	Chapel Court, Portland St/ Windsor St	Conversion to flats and offices (of chapel, and later electrical wholesaler)
3	19, 21 Avenue Road	Renovation of house & conversion to social housing
4	2a, 2b, 2c Morrell St	Renovation of old stores building and conversion to housing
5	24 Portland Place West	Restoration of balcony at back, and decorative detail at front
6	Seaforth House, 8 Warwick New Road	Major restoration and renovation of private house
7	The Parkside Practice, Basement, 63 Holly Walk	Front garden refurbishment, and basement consulting rooms
8	5 Leam Terrace	Railings and front garden upgrade
9	7 Leam Terrace	Railings and front garden upgrade
10	Stanleybet, 20/22 Lansdowne St	Shop front
11	S&S Londis, 143 Tachbrook Road	Shop front
12	Globe Supermarket (Oriental Foods), 23 High St	Shop front
13	TARA & Co (Estate Agents), 21 Clemens St	Shop front
14	Sakarya Kebab House, 19 Clemens St	Shop front
15	Five Rivers, 20-22 Victoria Terrace	Complete refurbishment of ground floor and basement, and new shop front
16	Headmasters, 26 Clemens St	Shop front & internal refurbishment as hairdressing salon
17	TJ’s Bar & Bistro, 45 Bath St	Shop front & internal refurbishment as bar and bistro
18	Alexander James, 1a Chandos St	New build – hairdressing salon and domestic living
19	Angel Hotel	Installation of 4.3 metre wide quadruple sash window
20	Age Concern, 8 Clemens St	Restoration and refurbishment
21	SYDNI Center, Cottage Close, Sydenham	Multiple use community centre
22	Healthy Living Centre, Shrubland St	Multiple use community centre
23	The Aviary, Jephson Gardens	Restoration and refurbishment to become tearoom
24	Temperate House, Jephson Gardens	New build
25	Nature Reserve, Leam Valley, Newbold Comyn	Woodland planting and wetlands; bird-watching hide and viewing screen

