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The Leamington Society Newsletter

February 2006

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Golden Anniversary. The Society was born on the evening of May 2nd, 1956 at the Art Gallery in Avenue Road. Four of our members from that first year half a century ago are still members: Kathleen Hanks, Rachel Chesterfield and Ellie & June Cranmer. Fantastic. On Friday, March 10th we are marking our jubilee year by "An evening with David Barby on *Images of the 50s*".

Licensing. Our profound thanks go to Goddard Goddard-Pickett and Dr Andrew Cave for their continued vigilance on licensing matters, and particularly the deluge of applications in the second half of 2005 due to the change of laws that came into effect last November.

For the last year or two we have been living in a state of trepidation about the effect of the extended drinking times. What effect would this have on the already boisterous night-life of Leamington that can descend into violence? It seems that, so far, the enhanced policing powers that were part of the changes have prevented any further deterioration of night-time behaviour, and produced some improvement. Of course we need to wait – particularly for the warmer nights of the summer – before relaxing.

Local Plan. It seems that the Local Plan will now acknowledge the desirability of a North side pedestrian entrance to the station. This is something that the Society, with many others, has been advocating for many years.

Arup Study. At last the Society has received a copy of the report on parking in Warwick District by the consultancy Ove Arup. Arup estimates there are nearly 500 vehicles parked illegally every week day in Leamington. Decriminalised Parking Enforcement (DPE) is now planned to start in October 2007.

With on-street parking charges, extended residents Parking Area and strict enforcement of the parking rules, Arup believe about 700 vehicles will move elsewhere. They estimate (based on experience of similar schemes in other towns) about 70% of these vehicles will move out to residential streets near the town centre, while 20% will move into off-street car parks. The remainder will leave their cars at home, or just not come to town. Is there space in your street for more parking by commuters, shoppers and visitors?

WCC have paid over £¼ million to Ove Arup for the preparation of a bid for about £14 million from central government sources to pay for a Park & Ride scheme. We do not yet know if that bid has been successful. If it is, and we get a P&R at Greys Mallory just off the M40, what effect will that have on parking in Leamington?

Warwick Hospital. When we were fighting the closure of the Physiotherapy centre in Station Approach by Warwick Hospital there was no hint of the massive financial deficit of £15 million of the Hospital Trust. Did they know it then?

Dates for your Diary

Meetings to May 2006:

**Early Spring Visit to
Wroxton Abbey
Conducted tour by
Paul Edwards
Saturday, 25th February, 2.30**

**Image of the 50s
David Barby
Town Hall,
Friday, 10th March, 7.45**

**The Future of the
Civic Trust Movement
Pump Room Annexe
Thursday, 13th April, 7.30**

**AGM
Progress of the Friends of
Leamington Station
Pump Room Annexe
Ian Baxter
Thursday, 11th May
AGM 7.15
Progress of the Friends ...
8.00**

**See back page for more
information on these events**

At the top of the Parade was England's Furniture Store (now Boots) and around the corner in Warwick Street Baileys Furniture Store (both supplying high quality furniture).

Although there were not the coffee shops and bars we have today, there were several excellent hotels where visitors could have lunch or dinner:

The Clarendon Hotel at the Top of the Parade	The Regent Hotel – lower Parade
Manor House Hotel in Avenue Road	Crown Hotel, in the High Street

How few of them remain now.

Perhaps some of our visitors stopped for a break in shopping tempted by the smell of roasting coffee at the Cadena or visited the Gaiety Café, in the Parade, or the café in Burgis & Colbourne or Bobby's. Those with more time to spare could relax in the Pump Rooms and listen to the string quartet while drinking their tea or coffee.

Health-minded visitors might have 'taken the waters' at the Pump Rooms or at the Aylesford Well outside the Parish Church (demolished 1960).

Walking back up the Parade visitors would see Christ Church on the skyline at the top of the Parade (demolished due to dry rot in 1957).

Another victim of dry rot was the charming Covent Garden Marker (demolished 1979).

Also lost was the Midland Oak at Lillington (reputed to be the centre of England) felled in 1960 – said to be because of old age!

Cinema lovers would have had plenty of choice with the Regal (in Augusta Place), the Regent in Regent Grove (demolished 1984), the Scala in Bedford Street (demolished 1954), the Clifton in Spencer Street (closed 1982). At these cinemas they would have enjoyed comedies such as The Lady Killers, Passport to Pimlico, Whisky Galore and watched their favourite film-stars – Diana Dors, Dennis Price, John Mills, Alec Guinness and many more.

In 1951 there was great excitement in Leamington when the local boy Randolph Turpin became World Middleweight Boxing Champion; there is a statue of him in Warwick Market Place, and a plaque to him in our Town Hall.

A great sadness of the 1950s was the death of King George VI in 1952 but this was followed by rejoicing when Elizabeth II was crowned in 1953. Not everyone had a TV at this time and families often 'teamed up' to watch the Coronation. Many Leamington streets held Coronation parties.

A group of people in Leamington, concerned about the future of the town, used to meet to walk around the town and study the buildings. From this small group, the Leamington Society was formed in May 1956, and so this year we celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the Leamington Society

Margaret Watkins

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THE PARADE

One of the joys of Royal Leamington Spa is the elegant sweep of the Parade as it descends from Christchurch Gardens to the Parish Church. I have found it best seen from the front seat of a double decker bus where height and centrality give the best view. The tall elegant buildings are matched by the width of the road and on the buildings there is a wealth of architectural detail – particularly the celebrated Leamington ironwork.

Everyone has been frustrated by the chaos caused by the recent improvements, known to Warwickshire District Council as the "Mixed Priority Road Safety Demonstration Project". But now we can stand back and admire the expensive results as the first phase has been completed. It looks light, bright and clean. We have acres of "Marshall's Buff Perfecta" paving slabs providing generous pavements which residents and visitors who come to shop will appreciate. I am sad that we have lost the large pink granite kerbstones which were so distinctive and have instead narrow rough textured kerbing which already shows some damage.

Marshall’s Buff Perfecta paving slabs are in danger of cracking as delivery vehicles park on the new wide pavements but perhaps they can be easily and inexpensively replaced. It would not improve the Parade visually if the pavement had to be protected with bollards. The new wide pavements also mean that there is no parking on the Parade except for the disabled and loading. This can be seen as a benefit or a loss!

We have lots of new benches which will be a great asset plus new bike racks. I am concerned that some bike racks are no longer securely attached to the pavement.

Many local people volunteered their time over the last three years discussing and advising on the proposed “Mixed Priority Road Safety Demonstration Project” and representatives of WCC assured them that they would reduce street signs and clutter but I hate to count how many black poles now stand at the junctions of Warwick Street and Regent Street. Each time I count, the number is bigger.

A little bit of history has remained in place. Do you remember that there was a gold line (actually brass) running parallel to the frontages of Accessorise and MacDonald’s? This indicated the boundary of these properties, probably indicating where the railings fronting the buildings used to be. Recently this line has been marked with a row of steel studs.

The traditional central lighting has also been kept. The new lights match throughout the Parade – before they had been assorted types and it is fantastic that we have maintained the white – not sodium – lighting, thanks to the generosity of member and past Chairman David Hayes. Sadly, several of the lights between the Regent Hotel and Jephson Gardens currently are not working.



Junction of Parade and Warwick St. How many posts can you see?

The WCC engineers must be relieved to have completed Phase 1 and are of course eager for us all to be delighted with the improvements so far. The main aim was safety for pedestrians and they have also focussed on traffic management with less interest in managing the ambience of such a fine street. Many people look ahead when crossing the road so the positioning of the new pedestrian signals is a puzzle. Today I watched, bemused, as a group of young mothers with pushchairs pushed the button and stood waiting patiently, looking forwards and failing to see the green light lit up behind them.

I am concerned that Marshall’s Buff Perfecta paving slabs will be used to set off the Parish Church in Phase 2.

Ruth Bennion

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FEUDAL FORM OF PROPERTY OWNERSHIP

Recent studies show that we have an over-supply of flats in our towns and a serious shortage of family houses. Developers have been making much more money from building flats, and as they are nearly always sold leasehold, they have been onto a very good thing.

The title of this note comes from Ross Clarke's recent article in the Daily Telegraph (21st January) and he starts his case as follows:

“Rather than owning a property, how do you fancy renting one? The minimum rental term is 100 years and you must pay most of this up front. Not only that, you, the tenant, must agree to pay all the maintenance costs on the building – although it is your landlord who will decide which contractor – who might be an associate of his – gets the job.

lack of investment and decline in the core areas of the Birmingham/West Midlands conurbation. The time taken to approve this policy and the fact that it will not be adopted until March 2007 is also a concern. In December 2003, when the first draft of the WDC Local Plan was published, it was already clear that the target for the number of new dwellings would be exceeded well within the plan period. Yet the Housing Restraint policy was not approved until 2005!

There is another planning ‘black hole’ that is adding to the woes of the local community. Government planning guidance recognises the legitimacy of residential off-street parking standards imposed by local planners. However, since 2001, WDC has not had any such standards and, on current plans, will not have any until October 2007 – a gap of nearly 6 years! If Wandsworth, an inner London borough with good public transport provision, can adopt a standard of 1.2 spaces for 1-3 bedroom dwellings and 1.5 for larger dwellings, why has WDC not done the same?

The delays in updating Local Plan guidance have created conditions in which some people with no alternative but to park their cars on the street or pavement (with consequential safety issues for pedestrians and emergency vehicles) and others without their own housing (due to a substantial shortfall in affordable housing starts). This is not the balance of economic growth and social/environmental quality that the government seeks through the policy coherence and recognition of conflicting pressures set out in its planning guidance.

Last year we made a substantial number of objections to the second draft of the WDC Local Plan, which are due to be discussed at the Public Enquiry starting in April this year: Fifty-five objections on the theme of *People First (Safety, Fairness and Sustaining Communities)*, 8 on *Design and Visual Issues* and 5 on *Development Opportunities and Specific Sites*.

Under *People First*, we measured the plan policies and paragraphs principally against the criteria:

- Government guidance that ‘*the need for economic growth has to be reconciled with social and environmental considerations, particularly those of enhancing the quality of the environment*’;
- Government guidance that ‘*the objective of reducing the need to travel also recognises that the car will continue to have an important part to play and for some journeys it will remain the only real option*’; and
- Customer focus, including a positive response to the pre-deposit consultation findings and the provision of ‘equality’ of community protection.

Our proposed alterations, which fit the criteria set by members, will, we believe, strengthen the case for WDC’s overriding policy objective and provide powerful support for the successful delivery of the Community Plan Vision.

WDC has an opportunity to demonstrate that it is in charge of a Local Plan which will put local people first and which makes full reference to external planning guidance for the achievement of that aim. The local community must be the Council’s prime customer.

P.S. In six very recent planning appeals the Planning Inspector has ruled that WDC’s Housing Restraint policy is worthless until it is adopted (due March 2007). How does this fit with the statement that ‘*The new Regional Spatial Strategy, established as a statutory planning policy and committed to by all authorities in the Region, is to ... seek regeneration of the core areas of the conurbation. This requires ... restriction on the scale of development that takes place elsewhere*’. It does not appear that the customer/supplier links in the planning process are working well! Surely WDC has to seek a judicial review of the Inspectors’ decisions?

Robin Richmond

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Posts on the Parade

There are 18 posts, excluding two central lamp-posts, at the junction of the Parade with Warwick Street – and the same number at the junction with Regent Street. Such a pity after the removal of so much street clutter.

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DEVELOPMENT ON BACK GARDENS: ODPM Statement on 2 February 2006

The following note appeared on the web page of the ODPM

"Back gardens have been designated as brownfield since 1985, but we have made clear in our planning policy that this does not mean that all gardens are up for grabs. Local planning authorities can already turn down applications for buildings in gardens if they are inappropriate or out of character with the local community. Well designed communities should involve high densities alongside attractive garden spaces as well."

It is worth noting that PPG3 (2000) explicitly states that "the need for economic growth has to be reconciled with social and environmental considerations, particularly those of enhancing the quality of the environment" (see para. 3).

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John Picking

Roger Copping tells us: "My first meeting with John was when he arrived at my home, beaming, but holding about a dozen large brown envelopes of minutes, agendas, constitutions, Local Plans, etc behind his back. It was May 1955 and I was a newly elected District Councillor. John explained that this was just the start of my paperwork, with a grin! He was an excellent chief executive and respected and liked by officers and members alike. We were sad when he left us for Northampton County Council.

"Latterly he retired on the ground of ill health and became active in the Leamington Society. John worked with Rex Adams, Roger Copping and Archie Pitts to try to save the Physiotherapy Department in Station Approach just last summer. Our memories of John are fond ones, a kind person with a great Love of Leamington, hard working and very astute."

John was a visionary and in his capacity as CEO of WDC he saw the need to develop care for the built environment of the town through the creation of a local Conservation Trust. On the 1st of Feb. 1995 he joined with Councillor Peter Byrd who chaired the public meeting that led, with much support from John, to the formation of the Royal Leamington Spa Building Conservation Trust. The Trust is, of course, totally independent of the Council, but John as CEO of WDC, and later as a resident always gave his full support to the Trust's activities. In retirement, and just prior to his last illness John became the Chair of the Trust. His aims for Leamington and the district were always high.

We will all miss his professional skills, intelligence and humour. Our sympathies go to his wife Hazel and their family at their loss.

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Iron Railings

Alastair Graham Bryce (a member of this society) has some surplus railings, believed to be Victorian. Anyone interested should contact him on 01926 427201, or by email algebra@btinternet.com



Payment may be by donation to the society.

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We welcome our new member:

Ms Jennifer Lorch

Chairman

Archie Pitts
4 LeamTerrace
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Vice Chairman

W. Allan Jeffery
3 Rectory Close, Allesley,
Coventry CV5 9AE
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Hon. Secretary

Robin Richmond
38 Leam Terrace
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Hon. Treasurer & Membership Secretary

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Paul Edwards
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Other Committee Members

Ruth Bennion 421862
Gordon Fyfe 312150
Tim Griffiths 400537
Mark Sullivan 330104
Margaret Watkins 425733

Newsletter Distribution

Jo Clark

The Leamington Society is a registered charity. It is affiliated to the Civic Trust and to the West Midlands Amenity Societies Association. 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.

PLANNING MATTERS

Thanks to our Town Council. We continue to get excellent support from our Town Council on many matters concerning our lovely town.

An example. 65 Willes Road is a listed, small Regency villa with garden and garage, and as such, is highly desirable and saleable. The present owner has put in a *retrospective* planning application for a change of use from a single dwelling to multi-occupation (reportedly 16 mattresses were seen being unloaded). Planning Policy Guidance 15 advises that the best use for a Listed Building is the use for which the building was designed. The Local Plan also states "Changes of use of Listed Buildings from their original use will only be permitted where the original use has been demonstrated to be no longer appropriate or viable."

Despite this, the Planning Officer's recommendation was for the change of use to be granted approval! Fortunately, the Town Council's well-argued objections ensured that this application went to the Planning Committee, and was *not* decided by the officers under delegated powers. The result was that the Committee voted for a refusal and enforcement of the rules.

I sat through the first nine items of that meeting. Of that total, three recommendations of the officers were overturned by the Committee – including 65 Willes Road.

Paul Edwards

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TALKS TO MAY 2006

Early Spring visit to Wroxton Abbey, Saturday 25th February 2.30; meet at the gates.

Paul Edwards will lead a tour of the Abbey and gardens. Wroxton Abbey is a 17th century Grade I listed Jacobean manor house with great hall, minstrels' gallery, chapel. For our visit the naturalised snowdrops and winter aconites should be in full bloom. The early 18th century formal layout was designed by Tileman Bobart. Much of the formal gardens were landscaped in an early pastoral landscape style by Sanderson Miller.

Image of the 50s, Friday 10th March – A special event to commemorate our Golden Jubilee year with David Barby, antiques expert and TV personality of Flog It and other programmes. David will tell us how American, Scandinavian and especially Italian design influenced British style in the 1950s at a time we were still feeling the deprivations of wartime and believed that "things could only get better" – which came about for most of us.

The Future of the Civic Trust Movement, Thursday 13th April, 7.30.

Nigel Burton, Chairman of the Civic Trust, will talk about his vision to create a very positive but non-confrontational organisation that is the leader in making better places for people to live, work and play in.

He will tell us about his vision for the civic society movement which the civic trust is leading through a modernisation programme. Next year is the

50th anniversary of the founding of the civic trust; he believes it is just as relevant today as then although the challenges are very different.

Progress of the Friends of Leamington Station, Thursday, 11th May 8.00 (after AGM).

Ian Baxter, spoke to us in the Autumn of 2004 about our railway station and what Chiltern Railways was doing to improve it and rail services from Leamington. He suggested the formation of a group of Friends to help restore some of the previous splendour of the Grade II listed station. This suggestion was taken up with enthusiasm by our society. After the AGM Ian will report on progress since then and future possibilities.