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The Leamington Society Newsletter

August 2007

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Willes Family Archive. Warwickshire County Record Office has bought the archive to the great benefit of local researchers. Many of our members have made very generous donations towards saving this archive for Warwickshire. More information is below.

Protection of open spaces in Warwick district. With the ever growing threat to the green spaces in our towns it is very welcome news that Warwick District Council is preparing a Supplementary Planning Document on the open spaces in the district. We look forward to being consulted on it.

New Station Area brief. Warwick District Council is asking Advantage West Midlands for money to help prepare a new outline plan (known as a planning brief) for the site extending from Lower Avenue to the Ford Foundry and from Old Warwick Road to Station Approach. This area amounts to 46 acres in all – a large area that is economically important to the town and particularly to Old Town.

We hope this brief produces an integrated plan for the whole area – something the Society, along with CLARA and others, has been urging for some time.

Decrim. It is too early to draw any real conclusions on the new parking regime in Warwick district. As far as central Leamington is concerned it seems that

- all day street parkers are finding somewhere else to go; WDC reports a marked increase in the usage of their off-street car parks;
- parking on double yellow lines, even for very short periods, is likely to result in a parking ticket;
- residential parking zones near the town centre are seeing a turn over of vehicles during the day, in place of the previous all day parking by commuters.

In the first few weeks of the new scheme the streets in the town centre were deserted during the day; it is possible that as shoppers see that they can now park there conveniently (20p for up to 30 minutes) they will return, to the benefit of the shops where customers want to make a quick purchase.

WDC is still in the process of appointing its full complement of wardens.

Dates for your Diary

Meetings to Christmas 2007

The Lunar Society.

Midlands philosophers and industrialists in the 18th century

Diana Perowne

Thurs 13th Sept, 7.45

Clarence Suite, Oddfellows Hall

Protecting our built environment

Oliver Brock, RIBA

Thurs 11th Oct, 7.45

Clarence Suite, Oddfellows Hall

The evolution of the Grand Union Canal in and around Leamington

Ian Fletcher

Thurs 8th Nov, 7.45

Clarence Suite, Oddfellows Hall

Chiltern Railways, 19th century to the present

Adrian Shooter, Chief Executive Chiltern Railways

Monday, 19th Nov

St Peter's Church,

Dormer Place, 6.30

£5 to include wine

Charming Siddons

Gillian Andrews

Thurs 13th Dec, 7.45

Clarence Suite, Oddfellows Hall

The full programme for the year is included with this Newsletter

When most of us have returned from Summer holidays by September and schools have returned, the new regime will settle down and we will see the net effects. WDC and WCC have promised a review at the beginning of November.

Heritage week. As usual we shall be mounting a public display in the Royal Priors all day on Saturday September 1st, and leading a walk around the Historic Buildings of Leamington on Sunday, September 8th, starting at 2.00 pm outside the library next to the Pump Rooms; the walk lasts about an hour.

The station gardens. These have again been short listed for the *Best Station Garden* award. This achievement is very much a community effort with gardeners coming from outside the society as much as inside. Soroptimists tend the tubs on the Platforms, school children grow on all the geraniums for the model train on Platform 2. The final results are announced at a national railway event at the end of September. Well done to all the gardeners who have worked so hard to achieve this.

Remembrance Day Service at Leamington Station. This will be held on Platform 2 on Friday November 9th at 2 pm. The start of the service may be delayed very slightly to avoid the arrival of any busy train on the same platform. The service is organised by the Friends of Leamington Station which is part of the Society. All members of the Society are welcome to attend.

Loss of two special members. We were very saddened to hear of the death of two long standing members, both on July 18th – Rex Adams and Dorothy Gabbitas. These were strong and active supporters; Rex was Chairman in the 1990s.

Archie Pitts

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Willes Archive

Warwickshire County Record Office took the plunge and bought the Willes archive at the end of July for £72,000 trusting that the missing few thousand pounds would be forthcoming from individual supporters.

The Record Office hopes the archives can be seen by researchers from September for about seven months. After that it plans to do a full cataloguing and packing job, when parts of the collection will be unavailable from time to time.

Members of the Leamington Society (helped by Gift Aid) have contributed nearly £4,000 to this – we should be both proud and very grateful to all who have contributed so very generously. £500 came from our reserves and the following made individual donations:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Robin and Shirley Adams | David Palmer |
| Ruth Bennion | Archie and Marianne Pitts |
| Roger and Terry Cadbury | Carolyn Renison |
| Toby Cave | Tony Ison and Judy Ross |
| Roger and Bridget Charters | Peter and Janet Storrie |
| Gordon and Christine Fyfe | Robin Taylor |
| Jan and Penny Gillett | Mark and Jane Thompson |
| David and Daphne Hayes | Ralph Tredwell |
| Peter Lewis | Sydney Tyrrell |
| Brenda Mullin | Jack and Margaret Watkins |
| John and Jeannette Oubridge | Malcolm Welsh |
| Bridget Winn | |

and an anonymous donor.

The Waller collection has also been purchased – WCRO will soon need bigger premises.

Marianne Pitts

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Chandos Street car park development

WDC issued a press release on August 1st in which they announced plans for a major new shopping centre to be built on the Chandos Street car park, building on Guys Street and extending towards the Parade.



Artist's impression of view from Warwick Street entrance to Royal Priors

It will be much like the Royal Priors, but with about 175,000 sq feet of retail space it will be much larger than the Priors. It will have a new 500 space shopper's car park and a few flats. There will be a major national department store and other smaller units.

WDC hope that Wilson Bowden (now owned by Barratt Developments), who previously developed the Regent Court area and refurbished the Regent Hotel

will be the developers.

A shopping centre encompassing a major department store is envisaged in the new Local Plan. The idea arises from the findings of a 2004 study commissioned by WDC from consultants DTZ.

But

- Will this new complex be any more of a success than Regent's Court where years after completion there are still vacant premises? With the growth of internet sales everywhere, with the convenience of out-of-town shopping complexes and their convenient and free parking facilities, do we need this facility?
- What is the financial position of this development? Is WDC selling the site outright, or will it keep a stake and, if so, how much? If this development fails financially, who will bear the cost? Will WDC and hence local tax payers bear any risk? Certainly the people of Leamington will have lost an open air car park and yet more mature trees.

Archie Pitts

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More progress at Leamington station by the Friends

On June 30, in pouring rain, Friends of Leamington Station and their supporters cleared up tons of debris – broken concrete, rubble and coal slack a metre deep, tangled with ivy and tree roots – which had accumulated in the old coal compound since diesel replaced steam engines. Thwaites Ltd. of Cubbington generously provided a 1 Tonne Hi Tip dumper, straight off the production line, free for the day to carry the rubble down to skips on the car park. The driver, Rob Kempsey of Thwaites, gave more than eight hours of hard work for free, as did father and son Russell and Martin Burrows, who operated a narrow base mini-digger in the tight enclosure.

The compound is an awkward shape so much of the digging was done by hand by Russell and Rob with



Clean up in progress

Friends: Robin Adams, Ken Alexander, and Roger Charters. By the end of the day all the debris had been cleared revealing a solid brick floor and three skips were full. Many other Friends came to support the exercise. A generous grant from the Town Council covered the cost of the skips and the digger.

The day's strenuous clear-up exercise completed work started more than a year ago with the help of a team of Barclays Bank volunteers. All of this was achieved with great skill despite the weather.

The next stage will be to rebuild the curved wall of the compound which has major cracks and to provide a new door way into the compound area. The gardeners will have somewhere to keep compost and store wheel barrows and the like.



Compound early 2005



Clean up finished

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Threatening clouds over leafy Leamington

Recently I was looking through *Leamington Spa (Town & City Memories)* by Frances Frith and Graham Sutherlands (Frith 2006) where I saw an aerial photograph of our town centre taken in 1952. I can hardly believe how much of 'Leafy Leamington' has been lost.

We all know how much more attractive tree lined streets are than those without. I remember seeing TV pictures of Ulster which frequently showed Falls Road. It always looked so bleak without a single tree and the bleakness seemed to underline the troubles.

There is such pressure on space within our town where gardens are classified as brown field sites suitable for development. There is pressure for higher density housing with more dwellings per acre, leaving no gardens and buildings covering every inch of plot with no lawns or small gardens to soften the impact of roads and streets. The new justice centre will be built up to the pavement.

The proposed student accommodation on the corner of Old Warwick Road and Tachbrook Road opposite the railway station will remove the trees and cover the grass verge which this spring was full of daffodils. Every proposal strives to take away a little more of the natural world.

Recent studies show that the natural world does have a measurable value. A study compared the recovery times of patients after surgery between those who had a view of trees from a window and those who could only see a brick wall. The tree group had quicker recovery time with fewer complications.

Other studies show that the natural world helps to combat stress – with urban walks increasing angst and negativity – as opposed to a walk in a nature reserve.

Perhaps the most serious aspect is that the today's children have lost freedoms such as I remember from my childhood. I was able to explore woods, play in streams, walk in meadows and given my own flower

bed to plant. I liked to take my dog Tusk for a walk. He loved five bar gates. Not for him the chance to wriggle underneath where tractors had made deep ruts; instead he would pause, study the challenge, race towards that gate and fly over the top. The natural world can be fun. Today we treat children with drugs for Attention Seeking Hyperactivity Disorder when one study after another indicates that contact with nature gives such children huge benefits. A hard surfaced city playground is a harsh environment with all games seemingly based on physical competence.

So back to Leamington Spa. We no longer take the spa waters but we should be looking after the natural world within our town, resisting the need to build over gardens, cutting down trees and putting hard surfaces on front gardens for car parking. We are blessed with a beautiful town and have much to lose.

Ruth Bennion

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Leamington Station: the new Adelstrop or Chelsea flower show?

A group of volunteers were busy weeding, mowing and planting on platform 2, and yes, one hot Friday afternoon the Orient Express drew up. It was late Spring. No one left and no one came on the platform. Curious, and having seen the passengers raise their glasses in answer to our waves, we went over to the train and saw the passengers enjoying all the comforts of eating in a Pullman carriage. We smiled in at the windows and found the travellers eager to talk to us. In answer to our question wondering if the train had stopped so that they could look at the garden, they answered that they did not know but were glad they had the opportunity to see and admire the profusion of flowers and colours. They had been to see the Chelsea Flower Show that day but added that nothing they had seen there was as good as the station garden. Praise indeed.



Orient Express at Leamington Station earlier this year

We, the volunteer gardeners, meet every Friday (weather permitting) to work on the gardens for a couple of hours. We often receive compliments from those waiting to catch or meet a train. Gardening is enjoyable work and even better for being appreciated. We end each session with a cup of tea or coffee outside the lampman’s hut. Come down and have a look at the gardens if you haven’t yet done so. If you would like to join us you would be most welcome. No advanced gardening skills are necessary. Contact Ruth Bennion (01926 421862) for times and more details.

Bridget Winn

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Rex Adams

Rex became Chairman in 1994, serving for three years as a very popular and hard-working chairman. He was also an active committee member for a number of years.

Every few years the Society seems to face one fight or another and Rex was never to be found wanting (but in the most gentlemanly way). He strongly supported the Society’s aim to keep the Pump Rooms as a building for the use of the town people, and not as a private clinic. He was an active member of HOPPIT (hands off the Parade), the group formed in the town against the pedestrianisation of the Parade. An eloquent speaker, Rex was a powerful advocate for the Society.

When several committee members resigned at the same time (because of yet another battle – this time the Regent Hotel), Rex rejoined the committee as Programme Chairman. He remained a member of this sub-committee until a short time before his death on 18th July.

Our sympathy goes to Diana, who was a wonderful support to Rex and as a Society we have been very grateful for her hospitality.

Margaret Watkins

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Dorothy Gabbitas

Dorothy died on 18th July in a nursing home in Aylesbury, just three months short of her hundredth birthday. Dorothy joined the Leamington Society in 1981 and was a very keen and lively member and committee member. She was made an honorary Life Member in recognition of her services. Dorothy represented the Society on the Leamington Britain in Bloom Committee, and was Programme Secretary from 1983 to 1986. At that time there was **NO** programme committee; all the arrangements and organisation of speakers etc. being done by the Programme Secretary.

Dorothy never lost her love of Leamington where she had lived all life and her interest continued after moving for the last few years to be near to her family. Her son, John Gabbitas, has thanked the Society for sending copies of the Society Newsletter to Dorothy and has said how much pleasure she gained when she read the reports of the various projects.

Margaret Watkins

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Lewis’ Leamington 2: Leamington College for boys



Leamington College for boys

My old school is an architectural jewel dozing behind the pines of Binswood Avenue. Externally it is much the same as it was in the fifties, an extravagant trelliswork of brick and carved stone.

Inside the William Morris wall paper in the assembly hall has gone, the kitchen has reverted back to its original function as a chapel. The library was where the reception area now is, and where I unearthed ancient copies of the Complete Angler and a treatise of Alchemical potions.

David Lewis

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The Trees of Jephson Gardens

This excellent booklet about the 170 (or so) trees in our splendid gardens has been written by Leamington tree enthusiast David Howells. In the introduction to his booklet he says:

“The Jephson Gardens contain a wonderful collection of trees, one of the best nationally in a public park of this size. This is the work of the many people who chose what to plant and who have then

maintained the planting. Those decisions were made by individuals and are largely undocumented. The people concerned knew what they were doing, at least for the most part. At some periods there was clearly a botanical approach – a desire to assemble a broad collection, with many species represented by just one example. Splendid one-upmanship!

“The collection consists of about 170 different trees.”

The trees are grouped so as to link with 15 different walks around the gardens.

The walks can be downloaded for free from <http://warkcom.net/Jephson> – either as booklet of all 15 walks, or each walk individually.



Jephson gardens

David Howells was helped by Steven Falk, Senior Keeper of Natural History at the Warwickshire Museum.

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PLANNING MATTERS

How many is too many?

More information on this question can be found out from the Optimum Population Trust (a Registered Charity) on www.optimumpopulation.org

One quote from their leaflet should give us all something to think about regarding our future planning

“We need to persuade people, and governments, of the risks of an overpopulated Earth. We need population policies aimed at reducing numbers to sustainable levels – 20 - 30 million in the UK and 2 - 3 billion globally.”

Paul Edwards

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Pole dancing comes to Leamington

As reported in the local press, there will soon be a pole dancing establishment above Pizza Hut in the ex Burton’s Art Deco building opposite the Town Hall. The venue faces Queen Victoria.

Not all Leamingtonians are enthusiastic with comments like “not in keeping with our spa town” and “salacious entertainment”,

Others feel it is just a sign of the times.

Archie Pitts

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New members

We welcome

Professor Gary Thomas & Dr Hilary Cremin
Mr Alan Beddow; Andrew & Caroline Sharp



We are not amused

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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.

TALKS TO DECEMBER 2007

The Lunar Society. Midlands philosophers and industrialists in the 18th century. September 13, Oddfellows

The Lunar Society was an informal club of men who met in the 1770s and 1780s in and around the Midlands to dine and discuss the latest advances in science and their application to industry. For safer travelling they met at the time of the full moon – hence their name. The group included manufacturers, instrument makers, doctors as well as men of independent means: people like Josiah Wedgwood, Matthew Boulton, James Watt and Erasmus Darwin. Diana Perowne, a Heart of England Blue Badge Guide, will describe how this society made a major contribution to the scientific and industrial development of 18th century Britain.

Protecting our built environment. October 11, Oddfellows

Oliver Brock (Chairman of the Coventry and Warwickshire Society of Chartered Architects and a member of Warwick District Council's Conservation Area Advisory Forum) will discuss the value of our historic buildings and the importance of their protection. In this talk he will identify ways in which Historic Buildings can be valued within a commercial context, looking at examples of successful developments based on sound conservation principles, and drawing lessons for the future growth of our towns and cities.

The evolution of the Grand Union Canal in and around Leamington, November 8, Oddfellows

From its inception in the late eighteenth century, our local canal – then called the Warwick & Napton Canal – was dug to create local benefits by being part of a larger entity. Ian Fletcher, of The Inland Waterways Association, discusses how its fortunes fluctuated over the last 200 years as it faced the challenges of both evolving competition and ownership. Yet today it continues to contribute to our local economy – but in ways inconceivable to its founding fathers.

Chiltern Railways, from 19th century to the present, Monday November 19, St Peter's Church, Dormer Place, 6.30

£5 charge to include first glass of wine or soft drink and light refreshments; tickets at the door

Adrian Shooter, Chief Executive of Chiltern, will talk about how the railway now run by Chiltern has developed from the 19th century to now, with illustrations.

Charming Siddons, December 13, Oddfellows

Gillian Andrews, a professional actress since the age of 12 and broadcaster on Children's Hour, will tell us about Sarah Siddons (1785 – 1831) who was regarded as the greatest tragic actress of her generation. Sarah Siddons was born in Wales but had many connections with Warwickshire. As a child she played Ariel in the Tempest in Warwick's Market Hall. She was maid/companion to Lady Mary Greatheed of Guy's Cliffe and married in Holy Trinity Church in Coventry. She continued to visit Leamington throughout her life and stayed many times at the Regent Hotel.

There will be mulled wine and mince pies.