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The Leamington Society Newsletter

August 2009

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Portobello Bridge The sorry state of the Portobello Bridge joining Leamington to Warwick has resurfaced on the agenda of Warwickshire County Council. The difficulties of simultaneously keeping motor traffic flowing, making the area safe for pedestrians and cyclists while preserving the integrity of this fine listed bridge are great. If WCC can produce a satisfactory solution they will do extremely well for our two towns.

Pump Room Gardens CLARA and the Royal Leamington Spa Building Conservation Trust have joined the Leamington Society to create the *Friends of the Royal Pump Room Gardens*. The Friends are working to restore these listed gardens in the centre of the town to their former glory. We have three targets: improving the river-banks within these gardens; repair of the drains, especially for the grass area towards the Law Society headquarters; and reinstatement of the arches.

Street names Can we suggest good names for the new roads serving the 10,000 new homes wished on Warwick District? Suggestions welcome.

Loss of member We are very sorry to report the death, in July, of John Oubridge who has supported us well over many years.

Archie Pitts

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Loft theatre

A planning application for the redevelopment of the Loft Theatre site, after the theatre has moved to the Spencer United Reformed Church, was submitted at the end of July.

The present Colonnade will extend along the river in front of the new Riverside Business Centre, and pedestrians will be able to walk along the building to the square behind the United Reform Church (which is to be the new Loft Theatre) and out to Spencer Street. Will this redevelopment, overlooking the Leam and the Pump Rooms, be an asset to the town and complement the other buildings in the area?

Dates for your Diary

Note that, in the coming year, none of our meetings will be held at Oddfellows and the starting time is usually 7.30. Note also that not all are on the second Thursday of the month.

There are still a few vacancies on the luxury Pullman coach for Lunch at the Brunel Day at Didcot Railway Museum
Saturday, September 26
Apply to Marianne Pitts for details

Lord Leycester Hospital
Colonel Gerald Lesinski
Thursday, 10 September, 7.30
Pump Room Annexe

Regency Design: Sources, influences and new technologies
Dr Steven Parissien
Thursday, 8 October, 7.30
Pump Room Annexe

Fire and Steam, a History of the Railway
Christian Wolmar
Wednesday, 21 October, 6.30
Conference Centre, Dormer Place

Canaletto in England
Graham White
Thursday, 12 November, 7.30
Pump Room Annexe

The full programme for the year is included with this Newsletter

are falling. Compared with the regional competition there has been little development in the town centre: Livery Street opened in 2005 and Royal Priors was extended in 2002. (The latter is a success, the former is not.) Leamington “is slipping in the sub-regional retail hierarchy”.

Future competition is expected from Coventry’s Tesco at Cannon Park and also locally: “the Shires Retail Park has open A1 planning permission and would emerge as a major competitor once current leases expire”. These dates should be known and incorporated in plans for the Town Centre. Why aren’t they stated?

The previous negotiations of WDC with Wilson Bowden are presented as an *advantage* in maintaining the town’s retail status (which it may have been in the boom time when negotiations began): “Leamington Spa is uniquely placed through the Council’s engagement with a development partner for the Chandos Street car park site to potentially fulfil this objective” combined with Compulsory Purchase Order powers.

It is not, therefore, surprising that this survey ends up by recommending the development of the Chandos Street car park after considering various alternatives, most of which are red herrings: the BT telephone exchange, Tesco’s or the Midland Auto Garage site together with the Covent Garden car park, Court Street, the Station Area. Their plan for Chandos Street outlines just the car-park and the authors do not acknowledge that the proposed development would cover three of the four “good access” roads and more than three times the car park area.

On what assumptions were these recommendations based?

The first is the growth in demand for shops based on government requirements for extra houses in the district. They do not discuss whether these houses will ever be built or whether future households will be as spendthrift as we have been recently. The growth of internet shopping is assumed to be negligible between 2011 and 2026, except for groceries where a local store may be needed to assemble the orders. The assumptions are, therefore, that WDC has a fast-growing population with broadly the same shopping habits in the 21st century as in the 20th.

A telephone survey of 1,000 households was conducted in Dec 2008- Jan 2009 asking questions (which excluded Christmas shopping) and a further pedestrian survey in February 2009. Leamington was by far the most popular local centre for clothing and footwear, twice as popular as Coventry (40% compared with 20%) and was much the best for music and bicycles too. In fact Leamington Spa was the most popular retail centre for all categories of comparison (as opposed to convenience) shopping other than “DIY, hardware and gardening”. The chief competition is in Coventry, Stratford and Solihull.

There are errors and anomalies in the report: apparently we have “dual representation by Marks and Spencer’s”, rather than one rather cramped store on two sites; there are no office suppliers or business goods and services (how did they miss Rymans on the Parade and Osborne’s on Kenilworth Street?); no photo processing shops (Boots and Jessops are on the Parade and the Mailbox on Warwick Street); only one lawyer (look at the Yellow pages). They found only two “Discos, Dance and Nightclubs” (if only...!). The Shires retail park was assumed to be Leamington rather than Warwick, which for shopping purposes is probably true enough, though in a report costing £43,000 we might expect more accuracy.

Their surveys and researches also revealed several interesting points:

- More than half of the shoppers could find *nothing* to criticise about the town!
- Most visitors come by car.
- Cheaper (16.4%) and easier (13.8%) car-parking are almost as important as better shops (17.9%)
- 19% feel unsafe in the town in the evening and almost half said they *never* go.
- In July 2008 there were 75 vacant retail units of approximately 12,000 sq m area. (How many are there now?)

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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.

EVENTS to November 2009

None of our talks are at Oddfellows

The Lord Leycester, Colonel Gerald Lesinski

Thursday, September 10th, 7.30; Pump Room Annexe

Colonel Lesinski, Master of the Lord Leycester, will discuss the history of the Lord Leycester Hospital, its splendid gardens and the Hospital's future

Regency Design: Sources, influences and new technologies, Dr Steven Parissien

Thursday, October 8th, 7.30; Pump Room Annexe

Dr Parissien examines the sources for Regency Design in the late Georgian era, looking at style, colour and crucially, technology; the role of the Prince Regent himself in inspiring the domestic interiors of the period; and at the Crisis of Style that the advances of the time provoked in the 1840s and 50s. Steven Parissien is Director of Compton Verney and a cultural historian whose most recent book is *Interiors: The Home Since 1700*, (published by Lawrence King)

Fire and Steam, a History of the railway, Christian Wolmar

Wednesday, October 21st, 6.15 for 6.30; Conference Centre, St Peter's Church, Dormer Place

Christian Wolmar, eminent railway writer and journalist, examines the history of the railways to the present day. He will talk about the development of the railway system, its highs and lows, its crucial role for the UK in both world wars and current government policy.

There will be a charge of £7 to include a glass of wine or soft drink

Tickets by post with SAE from Marianne Pitts, or at the door.

Cheques payable to "Friends of Leamington Station"

Canaletto in England, Graham White

Thursday, November 12th, 7.30; Pump Room Annexe

Georgian gentlemen on the Grand Tour bought Canaletto's paintings but when war reduced the number of visitors to Venice he followed his market here to paint Warwick Castle, Westminster Bridge, the Thames embankment, Graham White, the popular local lecturer on Italian art, will be talking about his English work.

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New members

We welcome to the Society:

David Twiddy

Dr. Audrey Cook

Dennis McWilliams

James McCormack and Nicola Stokar von Neuforn