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# The Leamington Society Newsletter

August 2010

## CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Re-opening of Tourist Office. The sudden closure of this office – just at the time of the Easter holiday – was particularly unfortunate timing. So it is belated but very good news that from August 2nd this office has opened again at the Pump Rooms. Officially titled Leamington Spa Visitor Information Centre, the office is open seven days a week. (The opening & closing times vary slightly through the week; their number is 01926 742762.) The Centre is now run directly by Warwick District Council, instead of being an off-shoot of Stratford's tourist office, so we hope its future is more secure than under the previous arrangement.

New Justice Centre. The new, combined courts in Newbold Terrace were recently unveiled at an open day for the public. The Magistrates Courts are due to start sessions by the end of August, while the County and Crown Courts in the same building are scheduled to begin in December. (Presumably the idea is to iron out any teething troubles with the lesser clients, before the judges come on the scene.) The new building combines facilities for a whole range of supporting services for the various courts; it remains to be seen whether future budgets will cover the staffing of the very comprehensive operation originally envisaged.

Work on Listed Buildings. It's good to be able to report significant renovations of several listed buildings in Leamington.

In Kenilworth Street, the facade of what used to be the British Legion building has been restored, and is currently being offered for commercial use by ehB. In Bath Street, the Jug & Jester public house is undergoing a major renovation.

On Newbold Terrace, next to the Willes Road junction, the fine run of tall Regency terrace complete with original iron work had over several decades become quite badly run down. It is now being comprehensively restored by TAG properties, in a similar layout to its original internal format. They plan two modern houses to the rear of the main terrace.

*Richard Ashworth*

## *Dates for your Diary*

### **Sustainable building**

Conducted tour and presentation  
Wolseley Sustainability Center  
Tachbrook Road, CV31 3HH  
Thursday, September 9th, 2.00

### **Hope, Light and Brutality: An enthusiasm for 20th century architecture**

James Mackay  
Pump Room Annexe  
Thursday, October 14th, 7.30

### **Auctioning railway relics**

Mike Soden  
Conference Centre,  
St Peter's Church, Dormer Place  
Wednesday, October 20th, 6.30

### **John Cundall: Leamington's architect**

Edward Sargent  
Conference Centre,  
St Peter's Church, Dormer Place  
Friday, November 12th, 7.30

### **Warwickshire Regimental History**

David Baynham  
Monday, December 6th, 2.30  
Warwickshire Regiment Museum,  
St John's House, CV34 4NF  
25 places only

*For details see last page*

## **£77,000 raised so far for restoration of the Linden arches**

The project to restore the Pump Room Gardens is progressing well.

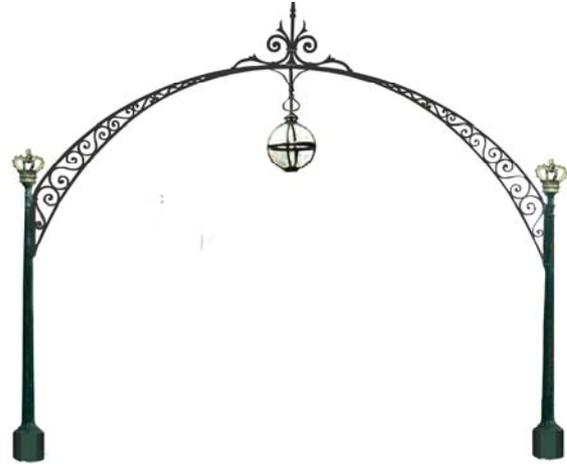
The next stage is to restore the eight Linden arches, first erected about 1880. The 1:500 Ordnance Survey maps of 1887 show their exact location. Restoration will cost a little over £100,000, plus some costs for making good the wall along the Parade.

The project is being led by the Friends of the Pump Room Gardens working with Warwick District Council. (The Friends are made up of the Leamington Society, CLARA, the Royal Leamington Society Buildings Conservation Trust and the Warwickshire Gardens Trust.) Over the last year we have raised £77,000 in pledges from WDC; Leamington Town Council; individual members of our four constituent amenity groups and from group reserves, and from various other bodies.

Many individuals have been very generous showing how popular this project is. The Friends can rightly boast that the whole effort is an excellent example of the Big Society in action.

The arches will be constructed and installed by local businesses, helping the neighbouring economy and employment. The arches will be made to a higher specification than the original ones, and should be more robust – with vandal-proof polycarbonate globes.

Last year quotations were sought from five potential contractors and we chose the best on price and quality. Fortunately they have not yet raised their price.



A restored arch with polycarbonate 20" globe and energy efficient electric light



Roosevelt and Churchill in Bond Street

dazzling.

There will be a permanent bronze plaque, placed near the arches naming every donor of £500 or more; the names of those giving £1,000 (or more) will have greater prominence, and those giving £2,500 (or more) the greatest prominence. The plan is to model our plaque on the one in New Bond Street listing the donors for the bronze statues of Roosevelt and Churchill seated on a bench discussing the joint war effort.

We believe this is a worthwhile project and the final result will be stunning. If finances allow it, we will gild the crowns, making the effect even more

**If you are willing to pledge a contribution to a dramatic improvement to the Pump Room Gardens of Royal Leamington Spa, contact me**

**[ArchiePitts@gmail.com](mailto:ArchiePitts@gmail.com) or 01926 88 55 32**





### Clarendon Arcade (aka Chandos Street car park site)

It is over four months since the formal application for this scheme was lodged by the developers Wilson Bowden. By the official closing date for consultation, the end of May, the range of comment was overwhelmingly in the form of objections. Since then, initial objections have been formulated in greater detail, including the most recent from planning consultants representing the owners of the Royal Priors (the Coal Board Pension Fund). This was featured in the 13th August edition of the Courier.

While the proposals have been commonly referred to as the Chandos Street site, it is important to note that the actual plan covers three times the area of the existing car park. If the Arcade were built it would be roughly half as big again as the Royal Priors. So the owners of the Priors highlight the likelihood that space in the new shopping mall could only be let at the expense of closing down ever more shops in the rest of Leamington.



Existing car park (dashed) and area of proposed development

No doubt retailers and developers need to be perennial optimists – even in good times it is all too evident the frequency with which shops tend to come and go. Just look at Regent’s Court. But one might have thought over the last two or three years it had finally dawned on nearly everyone that the era of ever increasing retail therapy, funded by credit cards and property inflation, was at an end.

Marianne Pitts reported (Newsletter August 2009) on the latest retail survey commissioned by WDC. It was clear the survey had failed to explore the town adequately and on many matters of detail it had simply got the facts wrong. Meantime the Clarendon Arcade application insists there is a need for ever increasing retail space in Leamington. Specifically an extra 22,800 sq. metres by 2014, increasing to over 43,000 extra sq. metres by 2026. That corresponds to a Clarendon Arcade scheme almost straight away, then another similar sized monster to follow it roughly ten years later. (Located where? You might well ask.)

These figures emerge from hundreds of pages, filled with numerous tables and analysis. Such diffuse material is extremely hard to assess, its rationale almost impossible to examine critically, and its ultimate value is probably anyone's guess. After all – if you ask a retail consultant whether it would be a good idea to have more shops – what answer might you expect?

Other sections of the application are more susceptible to rigorous examination. The Leamington Society has recently invested modest funds in an appraisal by a local planning consultant. This has enabled us to direct specific queries to District and County officers. We have also received pledges of individual contributions which have enabled us, along with neighbours most affected by the plans, to take further expert advice. Predictions of increased traffic flows (probably an under estimate) are currently being looked at, as well as the impact of a flow of heavy delivery lorries and the effect on local road junctions.

At the same time, it is plainly evident that the existing multi storey car parks in Leamington are operating at nowhere near capacity. I have been monitoring the indicators on Willes Road. Week

after week on midday Saturday, the peak shopping day, there are typically 600 or more vacant spaces shown on the parking indicator board. (Although the Chandos Street surface park is usually full.)

This raises the simple question: why build a further two levels of multi storey parking on top of the Clarendon Arcade? Especially since it is the parking decks which add so much to the height of this massive proposal and which would so overwhelm neighbouring streets and properties. The answer, so the developers have told us, is simply because that is what the anchor store would demand. Never mind that the spaces will mostly be empty or will leave the other multi storey parking empty.



Willes Road board on July Saturday at 2 pm

vitality of the town centre.

No doubt it is arguable that some of the area around Chandos Street car park, notably the backs of the Parade, might benefit from some tidying up. But it is also notable that the area contains businesses, vets, auction rooms and so on, which provide services every bit as "needed" as yet more retailing clones. It is also of note that the Royal Priors is locked shut at six in the evening. This extra development would block off further streets and be a dead space in the evening, if not a white elephant by day. It would undoubtedly cause substantial damage to the fabric of the Conservation Area, but will not on balance add to the



Existing street scene (on the left), and proposed development superimposed (on the right); pictures from Wilson Bowden application documents

Even as I express these views, and we make our arguments as cogently as possible, it needs to be recognised that the odds are probably against us. Over the years the District Council has been closely involved with this idea. Of course we do not know what advice will be given to the Planning Committee in due course; but even if there are serious doubts expressed, it may not be easy to turn it down.

The timetable for this decision is still not clear. You may have read the recent Private Eye piece about the application (Issue 1268, 6th August, "Nooks & Corners" page 12). We have no idea who planted this story but it was not the Leamington Society. In one particular they were mistaken – the suspicion that the District would slip a decision through while many of us were on holiday. That was





Morrison's employ a higher proportion of staff at point-of-delivery than most other supermarkets; for example Morrison's typically carry out meat preparation and baking in the store. This would be good for local employment. The expectation is that £35 million of trade would be diverted away from other stores in the area. Of this, it is estimated that nearly 90% of this trade would come from Sainsbury's



Computer image of potential Morrison's supermarket set back from Old Warwick Road

(The Shires), Asda (Sydenham) and Tesco (Emscote Road). Virtually none would be drawn from small independents. And Morrison's would sell nearly all food, not electrical items and the like.

As well as the corner office site and Morrison's, Trilogy hopes to have a moderate size hotel with conference facilities. In all the three developments – offices, supermarkets and hotel – would employ about 1200 people (some part time).

The hardest problem for this site is the traffic: movement around the site, the transport of employees, customers of the supermarket and delivery lorries to and from it. Any redevelopment will increase traffic in the area which is already congested at peak times. Employees need to be encouraged to use public transport; the railway station is only yards away, so that is a start. More importantly, good bus facilities to serve the area are crucial. A turning circle on site for employees to be set down and picked up would be useful. Trilogy is thinking about pedestrian and cycling routes to the station and towards the town through Victoria Park. These will depend on the installation of safe road crossing points on Old Warwick Road and Princes Drive.

Trilogy is conscious of the ecological value of the area of land between the railway tracks and aim to keep it as a wild life area.

Architects have been chosen for the proposed buildings: *Page\Park* for the office block (and associated multi-storey car park) and *Michael Aukett Architects* for the supermarket. The websites of both architects show the wide range of substantial projects with which they have been associated. *Page\Park* is responsible for new student residence blocks currently being built at the University of Warwick.

The architects and developers will need to give considerable thought to the energy efficiency of their buildings. Councillors, planning officers and the public will all be watching; there is an active green lobby in the town. With the national and high prestige Wolseley Sustainability Center only a mile away they can easily get advice.



Computer image for corner site with Homebase at forefront and new supermarket at centre

Trilogy is holding a public exhibition in Leamington Town Hall on September 17th - 18th and they hope to make an outline Planning Application soon after. These developers are genuinely trying to garner



**Chairman**

Richard Ashworth  
32 Willes Road  
CV31 1BN 316703

**Vice Chairmen**

Paul Edwards  
55 Leam Terrace  
CV31 1DG 423725

Archie Pitts  
4 Leam Terrace  
CV31 1BB 885532

**Hon. Secretary**

Robin Adams  
21 St Marks Road  
CV32 6DL 426616

**Hon. Treasurer**

Robin Richmond  
38 Leam Terrace  
CV31 1BQ 335952

**Planning Representative**

Paul Edwards 423725

**Membership secretary**

Margaret Begg 423822

**Other Committee Members**

Ruth Bennion 421862

Rodney King 334053

Marianne Pitts 885532

**Newsletter Distribution**

Jo Clark

*The Leamington Society is a registered charity. It is a member of 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 December 2010****Sustainable building**

Conducted tour and presentation at Wolseley Sustainability Center, Tachbrook Road, CV31 3HH. Thursday, September 9th, 2.00

Leamington is the UK headquarters of Wolseley, the world's number one distributor of heating, plumbing and building products.

Their award winning and unique Sustainable Building Center is attracting huge nationwide interest. Wolseley wants to tell everyone in construction, from architects to jobbing builders, about the latest technologies and wide range of sustainable, energy-efficient and recycled building products.

The visit will be an eye opener. [And yes, it is Center, not Centre.]

**Hope, Light and Brutality: An enthusiasm for 20th century architecture**

Pump Room Annexe, Thursday, October 14th, 7.30

Twentieth century architecture stretches from the Arts and Crafts Movement to High Tech, from Lutyens' bare Classicism to fussy post-Modernism. It was more diverse, as materials, technology and building types all broadened, than the architecture of any previous century. But it is often deprecated, especially if it can be labelled 'Sixties'.

James Mackay, however, has an enthusiasm for it, and especially for the post-war period. He will introduce us to the full range of Britain's C20 buildings, show many pictures, discuss your views, and – with a handsome prize for the winner – administer a quiz. Modern architecture can be fun!

**Auctioning railway relics**

Mike Soden

Conference Centre, St Peter's Church, Dormer Place, CV32 5AA

Wednesday, October 20th, 6.30.

£7 to include glass of wine; all profits to Friends of Leamington Station

Auctioneer Mike Soden of Great Central Railwayana Auctions will talk about his work. He is a lifelong railway fan, selling railway relics, from railway buttons, badges and teacups to historic engine nameplates, quarterly at Stoneleigh Agricultural Showground (and elsewhere) to eager collectors.

Mr Soden's wit and humour are well known – the halls are full with many standing in the aisles. Over 99% of lots are sold. There will be railway items for us to identify.

**John Cundall: Leamington's architect**

Conference Centre, St Peter's Church, Dormer Place, CV32 5AA

Friday, November 12th, 7.30

John Cundall (1830-89) was the architect of many of the finest buildings in Leamington – the Town Hall, several churches of which St John the Baptist is said to be his finest piece of work – as well as domestic houses and public landmarks like the Hitchman Fountain and Willes obelisk in Jephson Gardens.

His great-grandson Edward Sargent, a practicing architect himself, will tell us much more about John Cundall.

**Warwickshire Regimental History**

Royal Warwickshire Regiment Museum, St John's House, Warwick CV34 4NF

Monday, December 6th, 2.30

Conducted tour of the Museum and talk by David Baynham,

25 places only. Book in advance from Marianne Pitts