



www.leamingtonsociety.org.uk

The Leamington Society Newsletter

February 2005

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Demolition developers. At our meeting in the Town Hall last November John Archer (Head of Planning and Engineering) promised that WDC would hasten to produce a *Supplementary Planning Guidance* document, setting out what was, and what was not, acceptable in terms of redevelopment, particularly of houses with large gardens – and that this would be discussed at a follow up public meeting early in 2005. A date for this has yet to be announced. Of course the Planning Department are very much tied up at the moment with the Coventry Airport appeal.

Priory Terrace Post Office. At the end of November the Post Office announced that they will be franchising the main PO in Priory Terrace, and it will cease to be a Crown Post Office. They promise that the franchisee (MM Perry Ltd) will provide all the counter services currently available and there will be some extra facilities to speed up services. Perry is committed to the lease for seven years to start with. If Perry fails or withdraws, it is very unlikely that PO Ltd will take back the running of this PO, which has been the main Post Office of Leamington since March 1870. After the closure of so many local POs, the people of Leamington are very anxious.

Our local Physiotherapy service is under major review. After leaving the Pump Rooms it moved several times within the town, ending up in a prefab in Station Approach (off Avenue Road). This is due to close in the next few months. Where next? Leamingtonians are anxious that the service should not be moved to the Warwick Hospital, with its inadequate parking and bus services, a difficult journey for those who are relatively immobile. We are promised a public consultation meeting about the changes, probably next month – to be announced in the local press.

Friends of Leamington Station. A suggestion by Ian Baxter of Chiltern Rail, at his October talk, has taken root. A group of a dozen or so interested people have assembled as "Friends of Leamington Station". They have met several times and identified specific areas where they could improve the station in ways that Chiltern cannot justify on commercial grounds. The aim is to make Leamington Station a nicer place to start or finish a rail journey. Work is being planned for the garden areas, both at platform level and on the terraced slope facing the car park. The platform flower tubs are being maintained by the Soroptomists. The group is investigating how to obtain replicas of the original booking hall clock and railway posters for the waiting rooms. All the money for the work has, so far, come from voluntary organisations and donations, and not from Leamington Society funds.

Licensing laws. Leamington faces the changes in the licensing laws and the future of all day drinking with much trepidation. WDC is planning to adopt a saturation policy for central Leamington so it should be able to prevent more bars and nightclubs in those areas. We shall see.

There will be an additional meeting, on June 16th. Toby Cave will speak on the history of our society as it enters its 50th year, and Alan Mayes will talk about preserving Leamington's buildings.

Archie Pitts

Dates for your Diary

Meetings up to AGM

**Protecting Regency Town
Architecture,
Timothy Mowl**
March 10th 7.45pm
Clarence Suite, Oddfellows Hall

Joint meeting with The Warwick Society:

**Slow Cities,
Mr Geoff Andrews**
April 14th 7.30pm for 7.45
St Nicholas Church, Warwick

AGM, May 12th 7.45pm
Clarence Suite, Oddfellows Hall

followed by
**Recent developments on the
Leam Valley Nature Reserve**
Jack Watkins

*Please note the various venues
and times*

**More information on each of
these talks is on the back page
of this newsletter**

An Appreciation and Memories of W.G. (Bill) Gibbons 1921-2004

Bill was born in Leamington and lived here for most of his life. At various times he mentioned living in Heath Terrace; near the Parish Church, and on the Upper Parade. His father had a cooked meat business with shops in Leamington and Warwick, and used to provide the catering for weddings and Leamington functions such as the Tennis Tournaments in Jephson Gardens.



Bill Gibbons in 2002
(*The Courier*)

For most of his life Bill lived in Granville Street, apart from his call-up in 1942. He was in Class 19 at HMS *Royal Arthur* at Butlins' holiday camp at Skegness which had been taken over by the Admiralty in 1939. Bill vividly remembered the paper-thin chalet billets heated for only two hours a day by a small one-bar electric fire. He served on HMS *Unicorn* in the Pacific for three years and received his service medals. Bill worked for some time in the drawing office at Automotive Products although judging by his stories of practical jokes one wonders how much constructive work was done.

For over 50 years he had an interest in the history of the town – in collecting engravings and photographs, and in research and writing books. Bill had definite likes and dislikes and views about Leamington but overall found the town very attractive. He mourned the loss of interesting buildings in the 1950s, 1960s and later years. He was a long-standing member of the Leamington Society and gave many talks to the Society. He also distributed the Newsletter for many years. He did valuable research and donated the Bill Gibbons Cup for the Biennial Society Award.

Anybody wanting to know anything about the history of the town would go to Bill who would help with family histories, students' theses, research for books and articles and provide prints, photographs and engravings. In his

last year he helped an American descendant, David Toone, of the mid 1800s Leamington Jones builders with his family research, and another US enquirer, Scott Tomkins, with information about his great grandfather Dr. Tomkins, one of the four pioneers who formed the world's first lawn tennis club on the lawns of the Manor House Hotel in 1872. Bill suggested the name Kinmond House in Kenilworth Street after the mineral water firm Kinmond & Co who had been based on this site. He also supplied historical background for the developers of the old Total Petrol station in Willes Road for the building of luxury flats (William Thomas House), and with research for *The Courier* on Woodward's store. The Bill Gibbons calendar for which he provided both the pictures and the text was first published in 1993 and he provided some of the material for the current 2005 calendar.

Bill had been presenting slide talks illustrated with engravings and photographs on Leamington since the early 1970s. They were hugely enjoyed by him and his audiences in Leamington, Warwick, Kenilworth and other towns and villages. He presented his talks (around 25 a year) to most clubs, societies and care homes in the local area. He had many return bookings. The titles of Bill's Slide Talks were

1. 1800-1850;
2. 1860-1900;
3. 1905-1925;
4. 1930-1980;
5. Modern Leamington;
6. History of Jephson Gardens;
7. Lillington and Cubbington

The most popular were 1800-1850, 1930-1980 and History of Jephson Gardens. "Modern Leamington" was incomplete and he was working to extend the Leamington story up to 2000. Bill had a large slide collection in addition to the talk slides. Bill also presented a "Ghost" and a "Leamington Curios" talk, without slides. Due to ill-health and immobility, in July 2004 he decided to give up his talks. However he very kindly gave me his slides and talks in August so I will try to continue his talks – although his will be a difficult act to follow.

Bill was a private man who liked to keep you at arm's length and not get too close. But this did not mean he was unfriendly; rather the opposite – he always enjoyed a joke. I first met Bill at a Heart of England Post Card Club function during the mid 1980s. He was still attending these meetings in 2004. Our mutual interests were the history of Leamington Spa and many post cards, books, newspapers, magazines and pieces of Leamington history passed between us over the years. Other shared interests included organ and keyboard concerts, the Leamington Society and enjoying local eating establishments.

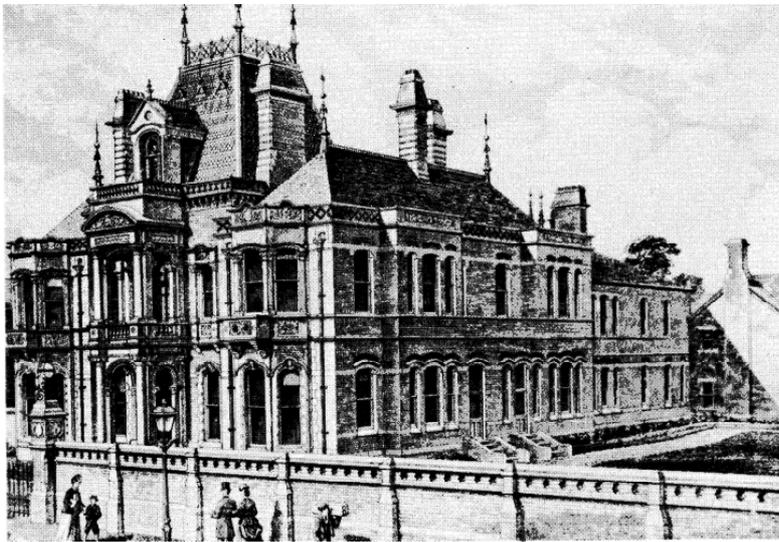
Since the mid 1990s about once a month we went out into the countryside for coffee and a meal. Inevitably, no matter where we were, he would bump into somebody he knew or who knew him. In his early days Bill was a keen motorcyclist and used to go on regular trips to the South Coast. In his more mobile days he enjoyed our

THOSE WE HAVE LOST: HARRINGTON HOUSE

For various reasons, over the course of time, Leamington has lost some interesting buildings. One such was Harrington House, Newbold Terrace, demolished in 1967 to make way for the Royal Spa Centre.

Edward Welby Pugin, son of the more famous A. Welby Pugin, designed Harrington House. Beauty, it is said, lies in the eyes of the beholder. It has been described as "one of the most outstanding Victorian buildings in the town". It was also described by another as an "unrestrained gothic mansion, rampant and bristling with ugliness". Nikolaus Pevsner described it as "a symmetrical but dissolute Gothic-cum-Italian-cum-French building". Compared with its 'classical' style neighbours, Harrington House seemed intent on making a statement as it immodestly rose high above the surrounding brick wall built to provide privacy from passers by but allowing them nonetheless a good view of the house.

EWP showed an appreciation of Gothic ornament in the perpendicular style established by his father but perhaps not so successfully. An important contribution to the Gothic revival had been the use of colour (polychromy) in architecture. Most ancient monuments, churches and cathedrals had been painted in bright colours inside and out. In the 1850s, another use of colour emerged, achieved by use of contrasting building materials, such as coloured brick and stone. Harrington House was built substantially of Bath Stone and Suffolk bricks in what has been described as the modern Gothic style. Stained glass was used in the glass window surrounds of the front door and



Harrington House (*Building News* 1872)

in a large window at the head of a magnificent 10ft. wide staircase, constructed entirely of beautifully carved stone with handsome marble columns supporting the roof. The rooms were large and numerous. On the first floor was a chapel-cum-picture gallery, a fine billiard room, thirteen principal bedchambers, bathroom and offices (not sufficient one would have thought for the number of bedrooms), with seven bedrooms for servants above. All fireplaces were of marble or stone. The woodwork was unpainted and of polished pitched pine. The house must have seemed light and airy. Its surrounding conservatories and glasshouses, full of palms and peach trees, were all heated by hot water. The stabling yard and outbuildings were at

the rear of the house. The grounds were well laid out and contained flowerbeds and some magnificent trees. *Building News*, 1872 described Harrington House as a "noble detached mansion".

March 1869, Mrs. Emily Willis, sold land on the corner of Newbold Terrace and Newbold Street, to builder William Gascoyne and his trustee. In the same year it was sold on to Major Thomas Molyneux Seel, Herald at the College of Arms, who was living adjacently at Comyn House, No. 11. It was Major Seel who had the house designed by E.W. Pugin and built on the corner, No. 12. It cost him £27,000, an enormous sum in those days. However, through lack of funds he was unable to complete the furnishings. He never lived in the house, which didn't have an official name, but was known locally as Seel's Folly.

Mr. R.E.L. Naylor resided at Harrington House longer than any other occupant, from 1904/48. He was said to be an ex banker from Welshpool, owning a large house 'Langley Hall'. However, in the *Morning News*, 23rd July 1990, he was described as "owner and director of the P & O Shipping Line". An elderly lady, responding to an earlier letter, objected to Mr. Naylor being called an "elderly recluse". Recalling early childhood memories, she said he was "a very nice kind gentleman who was fond of music His coachman wore a uniform and a top hat with a cockade on the side." When the coachmen went to serve in Kitchener's Army, Mr. Naylor was a good friend to the man's wife and small daughter and had generously paid for the little girl to be taught music. It had been stated that Mr. Naylor had had the bandstand West of the clock tower in Jephson Gardens (opposite his house) removed to Victoria Park because he didn't like the noise. The *Morning News* Editor had commented at the foot of the reader's letter that he had been told the reason was because Mr. Naylor wished to prevent his maids flirting with the musicians. However, the former reason probably has more connection with the truth for Mrs. Naylor had been 'delicate in health with hypersensitive hearing'. The elderly lady in her letter recalls her father saying that the Harrington House bricks cost three farthings each and this probably led her to believe that

WILLIAM THOMAS HOUSE

The Leamington Society together with the late Bill Gibbons have been involved with the design and planning of William Thomas House. This new building replaces a genuine brownfield site, in this case a no longer wanted petrol filling station – a former eyesore in this prominent part of our town opposite Lansdowne Crescent.

The architect for Lansdowne Crescent was William Thomas and the new building is named after him. It was designed by the Leamington architect Peter Manning for Domus Estates whose managing director Bill Lloyd took a particular interest in the project. His first names are William Thomas as also are his fathers. He had promised his father he would name a building after him, and by an amazing coincidence his promise has now been fulfilled! Bill Lloyd says:



The old petrol station immediately prior to closure

"It is an important part of our ethos to work very closely with conservationists and other local interest groups to ensure their properties blend in with and enhance the environment and raise the status of the surrounding area. So we made contact with all groups who have an interest in the site, and the final result and with those people who we believed would be able to help us ensure we created the best possible building for the site.

"From my previous career in the petrochemical industry I realized that there are plenty of brownfield sites, particularly former petrol stations, which were likely to need specialist environmental attention to counteract the legacy of chemical and industrial pollution from the past and to develop the land primarily for residential use. The business is a costly and drawn out one, and many companies

do not yet have the necessary expertise to deal with such sites in a responsible manner.

"The Leamington Society and local historian Bill Gibbons have provided invaluable information about the town and its history. We were particularly fascinated by the fact that in 1981 the Ontario Foundation unveiled a plaque in memory of William Thomas, who emigrated to Canada in the 1840s, frustrated by the depression in the building industry in this country. Bill provided us with plenty of information about the unveiling, a biography of William Thomas and an article published in 1971 in Warwickshire and Worcestershire Life on the then recently restored Lansdowne Crescent."

William Thomas House is, I believe, a great success; it adds to the characteristic style of the town – a building vernacular that has remained popular for nearly 200 years. It fits in very well with this awkward site and turns the corner into Cross Street admirably. It uses all the right materials for Leamington, i.e. stucco, slate roofing, timber windows with glazing bars combined with some typical architectural details such as cornices, and string courses. I very much like the strong horizontal rustication of the plinth to the building which with its arched openings enclosing the partly underground car parking area. It also provides a platform for the first floor french windows which is protected with iron railings that give further visual interest.



William Thomas House February 2005

All in all, it shows how an earlier piece of urban design vandalism can in time be demolished and the continuity of the townscape re-made. We must trust and hope that the magnificent pair of plane trees that were lost as part of this redevelopment will soon be replaced.

Its location gives walking distance to all the many amenities of the town and our wonderful railway service. It has a lot going for it. Congratulations to Domus Estates and Peter Manning.

Paul Edwards

Jephson Garden – a discussion with Nigel Bishop

"Jephson Garden is the best and that is official" says the RHS. The David Welsh Award of the 'Best Park in Britain' was presented in Leeds as part of the National Award Ceremony for Britain in Bloom for the following reasons:

[Jephson Gardens were] *designed for horticultural excellence, giving delight to the visitor through appropriate planting, high standard of maintenance, including infrastructure, conserving wildlife, cleanliness and features of interest.*

The Jephson Garden project is one of the major achievements of Warwick District Council (WDC) in recent years and clearly indicates councillors' long-term support for the restoration of these historic listed gardens as an important civic park and tourist attraction.

The award was presented to the Chair of WDC, Chris Davis, and the Mayor of Royal Leamington Spa, Mota Singh. Nigel Bishop, as Project Manager, was delighted. He emphasised that it was a team effort. The Jephson and Mill Garden project started in 1989 when Nigel arrived at WDC. By 1991 the gardens had an approved 30 year management plan in place for the first time, with the aim of restoring the gardens. In 1996 the first (unsuccessful) application was made to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) by WDC. A better plan was prepared by consultants, which secured a £3.1 million award in March 1998.



The gardens with the fountains
in the style of those in Hampton Court

The total cost of the scheme so far has been £4.5 million including the money already received from HLF. The rest has come from partnership funding from Warwickshire County Council, Warwickshire College, and WDC. Without this support, the restoration in its present form might never have happened.

The Jephson Garden Heritage Lottery Project is not yet complete. Additional funding of just over £120,000 from HLF will enable the project to be completed; by September 2005 we hope to have finished:



The Hickman fountain
(winter of 2002-03)

- Refurbishment of both the North and South Lodge at the Pump Room gates
- Exhibition and display material inside the South Lodge
- Interpretation material in the Glasshouse
- Controlled irrigation in the Glasshouse
- Surface dressing to the Mill Gardens paths north east of the boathouse
- Rebedding of the granite setts on the Elephant Walk at the far end of the footbridge
- Completion of waterside and waterside planting
- Lighting of restored features
- CCTV coverage in the Glasshouse
- The completion of the replacement gates at the Willes Road entrance.

Nigel Bishop says, "Winning the Lottery does make dreams come true."

In the last few weeks the front of the Aviary has been completely glazed; this has been paid for by Redcliffe (the caterers for the Aviary, the Restaurant in the Park and the Pump Rooms). The glazing will make the Aviary usable all year round and remove the metal shutters which spoil the appearance of the building when it was closed. A welcome improvement.

Chairman

Archie Pitts
4 LeamTerrace
CV31 1BB 885532

Vice Chairman

W. Allan Jeffery
3 Rectory Close, Allesley,
Coventry CV5 9AE
02476 403797

**Hon. Secretary
Vacancy**

Hon. Treasurer

Marianne Pitts
4 Leam Terrace
CV31 1BB 885532

Planning Representative

Paul Edwards
423725

**Newsletter Editor &
Producer**

Jeannette Oubridge
55 Golf Lane, Whitnash
CV32 2QB 421321

Membership Secretary

Marianne Pitts
4 Leam Terrace
CV31 1BB 885532

Communications Officer

Tom Holloway
771772

Other Committee Members

Ruth Bennion 421862
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

In view of some uncertainty regarding the future of our main post office, we have asked WDC if the building can be listed. It is a fine Victorian building constructed in stone, and purpose built as a Post Office.

An application has been submitted for shops at levels 1 and 2 with flats above for the former Woodwards Store. The proposed redevelopment involves the demolition of the entire inside of the building on the grounds that there is no demand for the store in its current form. There will be improvements to the blank facade onto Regent Street, so we have raised no objection. Also worth noting, it is all shops and not more bars.

It is good to see some sympathetic development in the town, notably in George Street, and on the former petrol filling station in Willes Road. Whilst we regret the loss of so many of our hotels, it is pleasing to see the Georgian wing of the Manor House now exposed on its western side.

Paul Edwards

XX

TALKS UP TO AGM 2005

Protecting Regency Town Architecture, March 10th, Oddfellows, 7.45

Timothy Mowl will be telling us about Regency architecture up and down the country and wrestling with the problems of urban regeneration, renewal, conservation, and recreation. He will dish, once and for all, the meaningless word 'pastiche', as all revived architecture is pastiche. All of this will be related to Leamington and its recent problems with new developments.

Joint Meeting with The Warwick Society

Slow Cities, April 14th, St Nicholas Church, Warwick, 7.30 for 7.45

Geoff Andrews will tell us about the Slow Cities (CITTA) movement which has its origins in the Italian custom of spending time over a meal. This philosophy has been applied to the whole of life in many Italian towns, and now in towns all over the world including Ludlow in Shropshire. Our speaker, who divides his time between Italy and the Open University, will explain to us the advantages of living in a slow city.

AGM, May 12th, Oddfellows, 7.45

After the formal business of the AGM, Jack Watkins will talk to us about a year in the life of the Leam Valley Nature Reserve, where he works as a Volunteer Warden, showing the various flora and fauna and enabling us to see the work involved in maintaining and extending the biodiversity of the site.

Members will recall that last July the Wetlands at the Reserve won a Leamington Society award.

ADDITIONAL MEETING IN JUNE:

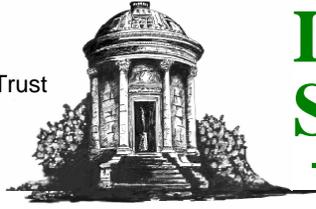
Toby Cave and Alan Mayes, June 16th, 2pm.

Further details of the talks, including the location, will appear in the next Newsletter.

XX

www.leamingtonsociety.org.uk

Formed in 1956 and a founder member of the Civic Trust
Reg Charity No 516078



The Leamington Society

Archie Pitts
Chairman
4 Leam Terrace
Leamington Spa
CV31 1BB
ArchiePitts@lycos.co.uk

February 2005

Notice is hereby given that the Fiftieth **Annual General Meeting** of the Leamington Society will be held on **Thursday 12th of May 2005**, starting at 7.45, in the **Clarence Suite, Oddfellows Hall, Clarence Terrace, Leamington Spa.**

Light refreshments will follow the meeting.

Archie Pitts, Chairman.

AGENDA

- 1 Apologies for absence
- 2 Minutes of the 49th Annual General Meeting held on Thursday 13th of May 2004
- 3 Matters arising from the Minutes not included elsewhere
- 4 To receive reports from the Chairman and Sub Committees
- 5 To receive the independently examined Accounts of the Society for 2004 – 2005
- 6 Election of Officers
Chairman
Vice Chairmen
Hon. Secretary
Hon. Treasurer
- 7 Election of four Committee Members
- 8 Election of Independent Examiner
- 9 Any other Business.

After the meeting there will be a talk by Jack Watkins entitled:

Recent developments on the Leam Valley Nature Reserve

PLEASE NOTE: **Nominations** of candidates for Officers and Committee must be forwarded to the Acting Secretary **not later than Thursday 21st of April 2005**. Any voting will be by Secret Ballot at the Meeting. Any motions for consideration at the meeting should also be received by this date. Nominations or motions will **not** be accepted at the Meeting.

If there is to be an election or any motion is received, notice will be sent to members seven days before the Annual General Meeting.