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# The Leamington Society Newsletter

March 2007

## CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Programme. We start with some apologies and changes.

The scheduled speaker, Diane Perowne, very sadly had to cancel her talk about the Lunar Society at the last moment. Personal circumstances combined with snow made it impossible for her to come. However we were saved by the willingness of Jo Clark to talk on a subject of interest to us all – our award winning Jephson Gardens. So again our apologies for the change of subject and huge thanks to Jo Clark.

There was an error in the last Newsletter regarding the location of our last two talks. Fortunately only a few of our members went to the wrong location, and to them we offer our most sincere apologies.

There is a change of speaker for the next meeting. Tony Forward is unable to speak to us; however we are delighted that Paul Edwards will take his place (details on the back page of this Newsletter).

Finally, the venue for our joint meeting with the Warwick Society on April 12th will now be Hill Close Gardens in Warwick. If you do not know how to find this, please contact me (01926 885532) or James Mackay (01926 498381, sec@warwicksociety.org.uk).

Car parking. Two distinct major parking changes are occurring in Warwick District.

*First* the enforcement on-street parking regulation is being transferred from the police to the county council (WCC) who will ask WDC to operate the system. The new system is called Decriminalised Parking Enforcement (DPE or decrim for short). Details of the new system are at [www.warwickshire.gov.uk/decrim](http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/decrim).

Subject to minor last minute alterations, it should start in August 2007. For the sake of local traders we all want to see the system settled well before Christmas.

The *second* change is WDC's recognition of the need for all new developments in the district to incorporate some off-street parking, rather than leaving this to the whim of developers whose choice would be determined by their profits. This is something that the Society has been urging for years, so we are glad that it is happening at last. WDC is drafting a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which will be put out for consultation over an eight week period, probably in April and May. Later this year it should be adopted as part of our new Local Plan, and be binding on developments from then on.

Chairmanship. By the next AGM I will have been chairman for three years and do not intend to stand for re-election. Members need to choose their next chairman.

Nominations must be submitted for all members of the committee by April 19th; nomination forms are available from me or from members of the current committee.

*Archie Pitts*

### *Dates for your Diary*

**Paul Edwards**

**Good manners in architecture**

March 8th, 7.45

Oddfellows Hall

**Joint meeting with the  
Warwick Society**

**Ben Hamilton-Baillie**

**Traffic management in  
historic towns**

April 12th, **7.30 for 7.45**

**Hill Close Gardens, Warwick**

**AGM**

**May 10th, 7.30**

Followed by a talk by

**Robin Taylor**

**Sir Edward Elgar: The Outsider**

Oddfellows Hall

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

## **Planning matters**

### Redevelopment of the Old library and Art Gallery, in Avenue Road

The Society welcomes the redevelopment of this listed building, but we have serious concerns about the details of the proposals – a mixture of flats and offices, with a restaurant/bar in the old Art Gallery.

There would be 33 flats, of average size 419 sq feet (39 sq metres), with the smallest two 258 and 265 sq ft. In most of the flats, the stated size includes a mezzanine balcony (a grand term for a shelf above the main room of the flat – possible because of the height of the rooms), so in reality the floor size of the flat is even smaller.

Apparently nothing in planning regulations stipulates how small a flat can be. However the smaller it is, the more constrained living in it becomes. Only two of the flats have baths, all the rest have showers; the door to the shower or bath room opens outwards – like a cupboard. Storage space is virtually non-existent; most of the flats will not have room for washing machines. Storage space and waste disposal facilities are scant. These flats are not for living, but are more like bed & breakfast accommodation.

There will be 34 parking places for 33 flats, a suite of offices of almost 10,000 sq feet and a restaurant/bar. This is not enough parking. The design brief refers to the availability of further public parking in Avenue Road outside the Old Library but these spaces will be removed according to current WCC Highways Plans.

Finally there is no mention of social housing; the building is very unlikely to be suitable for family housing. The district urgently needs this rather than yet more flats.

The Society welcomes the care taken to preserve the form of the original building – although we have not seen detailed drawings of the new windows and the effect of the removal of the interior glazed roof, so we are unable to comment on that.

Jeannette Oubridge tells us below about the history of the opening of the building at the start of the last century.

### Spencer Street Church

WDC has approved proposals to extend the rear of this church (known as the Reform Church) so that the building can be used as a new venue for the Loft Theatre.

While this Society welcomes bringing back the building into public use, and a theatre would be a fitting use of it, we have serious concerns about the design of the alterations. We believe that the design and materials proposed for the extensions will seriously detract from the listed church (in the Palladian style) and the surrounding buildings that were so well restored before being reopened last summer. We believe that an opportunity has been lost.

### Protecting back gardens from development

Houses with large gardens and trees have long been vulnerable to developers who see these as places to build small blocks of flats which spoil the ambience of the nearby houses and reduce their values. Such redevelopment has happened in a number of places in Leamington over the last few years. Northumberland Road was particularly at risk until saved by the road being designated as part of the Conservation Area. This rape of spacious gardens is happening in prosperous areas all over the West Midlands and the rest of the country.

Caroline Spelman (Conservative MP for Meriden) introduced a back-benchers bill that would give Local Planning Authorities the power to prevent the redevelopment of back gardens of larger houses, if they thought such redevelopment was harmful. While supported by some Labour MPs it was opposed by the government. The junior minister for Communities and Local Government argued that local authorities already had that power, without giving details. This was the line of John Prescott (when speaking in Whitnash just before the last election), and of James Plaskitt when he was one of a panel of speakers at a meeting organised by the Society in the Town Hall in November 2004. Officers in planning authorities, including John Archer at WDC, do not agree that they have this power. The junior minister talked out the bill during the debate in early February, effectively killing it.







## The Old Library, Avenue Road

The old library building in Avenue Road, described by Warwick District Council as the 'York Road Centre' was officially opened in 1902 as the Free Library, Technical School & School of Art. It also housed the Leamington Municipal Secondary School for Girls & Boys. The Art Gallery extension at the east end was built in 1928. Both are Grade II listed buildings since February 2004. In 2000 the library and museum services were transferred to the new Pump Room complex where facilities were much improved. The Library building was occupied by Warwickshire College until 2006 as an 'Art & Design' annex to their main educational campus in New Warwick Road. The Art Gallery has been used by a number of community groups.

Speeches at the opening of the Free Library contained some interesting statements and comments.

In his address the Mayor, Alderman Davis told how in his early working days he had taken advantage of the Free Library to assist him in furthering his education and position in the world. There was no art or technical instruction until architect T. Robinson came to live in the town. He gave free geometrical drawing lessons once a week for artisans and others connected with industry in Leamington. Alderman Davis had himself attended. He studied for 2/3 years under George Charles Hart who had envisaged the setting up of a School of Art and a Philosophical Society, and he believed that Hart's vision had finally become reality.



The Old Library in 2007

The Mayor, a builder himself, had at heart the availability of technical instruction in Leamington. From his knowledge of the trade, Leamington had an excellent building, designed by one of the best architects, Mr. John Mitchell Bottomley RIBA and constructed by Mr. A.C. Bowen. Mr. Atkins for the Corporation had ensured the best

materials and the Buildings Committee was well satisfied. (Mr. Bottomley is to be found listed in the British Architects dictionary, but the only information given is that he died in 1935 and that his obituary is to be found in Builder v 148 1935, p. 1121, but neither the Warwick Records Office or Leamington Library were able to help further and no reference was found on the Internet).

Mr. Mellows of the Technology Department responded. The technical schools springing up all over the country aimed to give training for life. He believed that both theoretical and practical training could be pressed to unwise extremes, and that practical training aimed at immediate but small earnings was also unwise. Training should also include scientific methods. There was still a multitude of things in the universe of which there was ignorance and which remained for those of the present day and posterity to discover. Scientific knowledge was vital. Although ignorant men in middle life might attend popular lectures and semi scientific entertainment, they could only acquire a top dressing of superficial information that was never really assimilated. "A manuring" of science put down whilst young would have rendered the surface soil fertile".

Sir Oliver Lodge, described as one of the great scientists of the day, spoke of his admiration for the beautiful building, and of novels being an education in life to those whose own was often limited. "The servant class could achieve notions of honour and nobility by reading good novels". The Technical School had art, physics, cooking and laundry classes, the latter two having some connection with the former. "Cooking was an ancient and classical art. Socrates had much to say about good cooking and knowledge". He thought some science research should be done on the 'atmosphere' of Leamington, especially its 'electric condition'. Sir Oliver had given to the world the original wireless telegraphy. He commented that compared with Europe, whose attendance at universities and technical colleges was up by 8% in some cases, Britain was falling behind and in danger of falling behind in the race of industrial achievement.



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**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.*

**MORE PLANNING MATTERS**

65 Willes Road. A second application for this modest family house (Regency style and Grade II listed) to be converted to multiple occupation was submitted just before Christmas. Such a change of use is contrary to the Local Plan and Government Planning Policy Guidance. The Town Council voted against it, as did CAAF; the Leamington Society, CLARA and many local residents were also opposed.

Right from the start, the Planning Officers said they would recommend approval and so it could not be decided by their delegated powers. On January 10 it went before the Planning Committee and I spoke on behalf of CAAF. I am pleased to say that the vote against the application was unanimous.

Victorian Cast Iron Ventilation Pipes: Update

No more sightings (or sitings) have been reported so I have asked the Conservation Architect if the two in Leam Terrace can be listed. English Heritage is now considering the case for this. When that has been approved we can think about getting them cleaned and painted.

*Paul Edwards*

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**TALKS TO MAY 2007**

**Good manners in architecture**

Paul Edwards is a landscape architect regularly commissioned by the National Trust and other stately homes; he has lived in Leamington for 50 years and is a long standing member of the Society. Paul will talk mainly about Leamington's conservation areas, and will also show us some of his own work in conservation areas and in historic gardens.

**Traffic management in historic towns: Joint meeting with Warwick Society**

Ben Hamilton-Baillie is an architect and leading consultant in transport, traffic and urban design; he will tell us about his experience in reconciling traffic with high quality public spaces in historic cities, towns and villages.

For more on Mr Hamilton-Baillies' work see [www.hamilton-baillie.co.uk](http://www.hamilton-baillie.co.uk).

**Sir Edward Elgar: The Outsider**

A talk, after our AGM, by Robin Taylor (also a member) on the 150th anniversary of Elgar's birth. Robin will tell us about the character of Sir Edward Elgar, O.M., Master of The King's Musick, Knight of the Realm, Baronet, Doctor of Music (Oxon., Cantab., Yale, et al.); the Land of Hope and Glory man. An obvious outsider.

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**SUBSCRIPTIONS**

We remind all members who do not pay by standing order that their subscriptions for next year will be due on April 1st.



# The Leamington Society

February 2007

Notice is hereby given that the Fifty-second **Annual General Meeting** of the Leamington Society will be held on **Thursday 10th of May 2007**, starting at 7.30, in the **Oddfellows Hall, Leamington Spa**. **Please note the start-time for the AGM.**

Light refreshments will follow the meeting.

Archie Pitts, Chairman

## AGENDA

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of the 51st Annual General Meeting held on Thursday 11th of May 2006
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 2006 – 2007
6. Election of Officers:  
Chairman, Vice Chairmen, Hon. Secretary, Hon. Treasurer
7. Election of four Committee Members
8. Election of Independent Examiner
9. To consider three motions (overleaf) relating to Corporate Membership
10. Any other Business.

At 8 pm, after the AGM, there will be a talk by Robin Taylor on

### **Sir Edward Elgar: The Outsider**

#### PLEASE NOTE:

1. **Nominations** of candidates for Officers and Committee must be forwarded to the Chairman, **not later than Thursday 19th, April 2007**. 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.

2. If item 9 leads to prolonged discussion it will be held over to a subsequent Extraordinary General Meeting.

Proposals for three amendments to the Constitution to enable the society to introduce a new class of member – Corporate Member. The substantive change is embodied in Motion one.

If the Society wishes to make these proposed changes they must be approved by a two-thirds majority of Members at a General Meeting (for which the quorum is twenty members).

**Motion one:** That the following paragraph be inserted at the end of Clause 3 of the Society’s Constitution:

*Corporate Membership may be conferred on companies and organizations which are based in the Royal Leamington Spa area and is subject to the approval of the Executive Committee. Corporate Members are not entitled to vote at meetings of the Society. They are entitled to the following privileges: [1] they may attend Meetings of the Society; [2] they are entitled to receive at least one copy of the Society’s Newsletter. A list of Corporate Members will appear on a regular basis in the Society’s Newsletter and on the Society’s internet website.*

**Motion two:** That the following words be inserted in Clause 3, to follow paragraph one of the Constitution:

*There shall be four types of membership: [1] Individual membership; [2] Household membership; [3] Honorary life membership and [4] Corporate membership. Membership is, with the exception of category [3] subject to payment of the appropriate annual subscription.*

**Motion three:** That the following words be inserted into Clause 3, line 4 of the Society’s Constitution:

*with the exception of Honorary Life Members*