



www.leamingtonsociety.org.uk

The Leamington Society Newsletter

May 2011

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

After a year as chairman, a good moment to reflect on the last twelve months. I hope those who came to the recent AGM will bear with me in some repetition. But first, my thanks for the support of the committee, also for the efforts of many individual members, not least the team who distribute this newsletter.

The Clarendon Arcade application, to build on Chandos Street car park plus several surrounding streets, continues to loom ominously over the town. In previous newsletters and in the local press the arguments have been well rehearsed; the Society has lodged strong objections on various grounds and with the benefit of expert advice. It remains uncertain how long it may be before this finally reaches the Planning Committee. But in view of the District Council's long involvement with the scheme, it will not be easy to refuse the application.

So far, so negative. But on other matters the story is much more positive. Last June the Awards Evening was well attended and recognised a very diverse range of high quality building and renovation in the town, with a good report in *The Courier*. The Friends of Leamington Station continue their thriving relationship with Chiltern Rail and the refurbished waiting rooms are now looking splendid. Meantime the Friends of the Pump Room gardens are within sight of the finishing line, with a contract for the reinstatement of the Linden Arches.

On the planning front also, there are some welcome signs. Proposals for the old Ford Foundry site, by Trilogy Developments, were generally well received although there must be genuine concern about whether the later phases will necessarily materialize as projected. Finally, and most welcome, is the prospect of renewed life for the Regency Arcade. Premier Inns' recent application to adapt the interior for a hotel could soon bring a considerable boost to the Lower Parade.

Richard Ashworth

XX

David Lewis picture

This vibrant watercolour painting, by Leamington Society member David Lewis, is available as a Signed Limited Edition Print from Gallery 150 (in Regent's Court) at £35 each. This print is a real bargain – the original recently sold for £750.

The proceeds will be donated to the restoration of the Linden Arches in the Pump Room Gardens.

Dates for your Diary

*The new programme starts with a talk
by*

John Lowry on Admiral Popham,

September 14th, 7.30

Pump Room Annexe

*The full programme will be published
with the August Newsletter*



Now Waitrose want to come to town – some questions

How many supermarkets do we need in Leamington?

In Leamington or right next to it, there are: Sainsbury's, Asda, small and large Tescos, Lidl, Cooperative, Costcutters, and an Aldi has just been approved. There are proposals for Morrison's on the Ford Foundry site, a small Waitrose or other food shop on the ground floor of a potential Regency Arcade Hotel and now a bid for a big Waitrose on the Fire Station site. Unless we are all competing in an obesity race, the competition may drive out the excellent small shops that serve us so well: Aubrey Allan, Richard Clark, the Regency Butcher and Fishmonger, Country Bumpkin, as well as various bakeries.

The news that the Fire Service site was available for redevelopment was announced together with the Waitrose's bid. How come John Lewis knew about this possibility before local councillors? Well before, as the plans were ready for exhibition almost immediately.

Do we need so many food shops? Wouldn't housing be better and quieter? Local residents would exchange the racket of fire engines for the persistent traffic from both customers and suppliers of Waitrose.

The Fire Station is on a prime site to tempt housing developers. Judging from the success of Newbold Terrace, there is demand for quality housing in the town and here is an opportunity for a modern equivalent to Lansdowne Terrace or Clarendon Square. The pressing requirement for social housing does not have to lead to an ugly, overcrowded site. There are good architects in town. Why not use them?

From another angle: how come Waitrose thinks the Fire Station site of 1¼ acres worth developing (with all the expense of an underground car-park) whereas Wilson Bowden insists that the Chandos Street car-park (1 acre) is not commercially viable? WB requires more than *three* times that area for their development, with a sweetener of nominal rent for the big "landmark anchor store". Waitrose and Wilson Bowden take very different views of what is potentially profitable: who is right?

Town, District and County planners and councillors should have strategies for the town as a whole, so that applications are not dealt with on an individual basis but in an integrated fashion, considering the welfare of the town as a whole. When unsuccessful businesses fail, this can mean years of dereliction before new trades move in. This is evident in Old Town, Regency Arcade and at the bottom of The Parade. Brand new buildings that never have tenants are even more depressing and this is likely to happen on the Chandos Street development due to the current economic climate combined with the permanent change in shopping habits. What is the point of planners if they do not plan?



View from Dale Street



View from Grove Street

Courtesy Waitrose and Deeley Properties

The Fire Station site is in public ownership and therefore *must* be offered on the open market according to EU rules. Would it be possible to sell it with outline planning permission for residential development? That would speed up the sale to any potential builder of houses and flats and make the site more valuable.

Marianne Pitts

XX

AGM 2011

The AGM this year was held in the Pump Room Annexe on Thursday 12th May. Your Chairman, Richard Ashworth, welcomed over 40 members.

Apologies were received; the minutes of the previous AGM were accepted and signed.

The Chairman’s Report and Sub-Committee Reports, which had been circulated at the meeting, were then presented. The Chairman warmly thanked the executive committee members and the sub-committees for all their support and hard work during the year, as well as numerous other members, such as our newsletter deliverers.

The Treasurer reported a healthy financial position.

The Chairman’s Report and Committee Reports were introduced and adopted. Copies are available from Archie Pitts.

Officers for 2011-12 were proposed:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Chairman: Richard Ashworth | Vice-Chairmen: Paul Edwards, Archie Pitts |
| Hon. Secretary: Robin Adams | Hon. Treasurer: Robin Richmond |

Executive Committee for 2011-2012:

- Margaret Begg, Ruth Bennion, Rodney King, Marianne Pitts

As there were no other nominations, these were unanimously declared elected.

Paul Edwards has agreed to continue to serve as our Planning Representative.

It was proposed that Malcolm Welsh be re-appointed as Independent Examiner. A unanimous vote of thanks was carried for his meticulous work in examining the accounts for 2010-11.

Life members. The chairman proposed that life membership should be awarded to Archie and Marianne Pitts, for their contributions to the society and the welfare of Leamington. The proposal was accepted unanimously and with acclaim by those present.

There was a short break to enjoy the light refreshments prepared so excellently, as ever, by Ruth Bennion.

After the break Antony Flint, manager at the Royal Spa Centre and Town Hall, told the meeting about his considerable success in turning around the Spa Centre in his first year and future plans – see next item.

XX

What has happened to the Spa Centre?

Antony Flint, the “new” manager of the Spa Centre, spoke to us again at the end of our very busy AGM. The mood was very different to last year’s talk (see newsletter for May 2010). He has managed such a transformation that his original two year contract (now half run) has been extended to 2015 with an immediate grant of £40,000 from WDC to spend on the Spa Centre: internal stairs linking the levels in the main hall; new seating (raked, retractable and comfortable) and a new and faster ticketing system. WDC have also given him authority over the Town Hall and he has plans for its development and use as offices to

release space in the Spa Centre, the new box office and even for weddings. We all hope he can cure the acoustics in the Assembly room.

This is a remarkable vote of confidence in these austere times.

Last year's grant was well-spent and the building was transformed from shabbiness to a modern, smart and airy venue. Staff morale is high and the pre-theatre "Grab Bowls" are tempting and tasty. The Studio is thriving: instead of tame copying mainstream cinema we are offered solo comedians, fringe theatre, classic films and live relays from Paris and London ballets and opera houses. Our Andrew Davies talk there was a sell-out and everyone enjoyed it. Antony has plans to link the main theatre to other local amateur theatre groups for drama and opera, especially Gilbert and Sullivan – "there must be a market for this". Yes indeed. Something good has happened to the Spa Centre – and we are grateful.

Marianne Pitts

XX

Progress of Friends of Pump Room Gardens

Restoration of the Linden Arches. This project is now well underway with fund raising nearly complete.

In May, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Youth Association held their annual charity run, this year in Leamington, starting and finishing in the Pump Room Gardens. More than 1,000 started on the 10 km run, ranging in age from 4 to 84. The whole event was extremely well organised and an enormous success, due to Zaf Bhatti and his AMYA colleagues. The work of the AMYA is an enormous testament to the good of Muslims in this country.

Each year the association raises money for national and local charities (Barnados, British Legion, Great Ormand Street Hospital, NSPCC, RNIB, ...). The previous year AMYA had raised £175,000 for charities across the country, and their target is even higher in 2011.

This year the Linden Arches project was one of the local charities to benefit – we received a cheque for £1,000 on the day from AMYA.



The start of the AMYA run in the Pump Room Gardens

In April, the British Asian Business and Professional Association held their annual charity dinner jointly with the Royal Leamington Chamber of Trade; this dinner was also in aid of the project.

The Friends are extremely grateful to Parminder Birdi of BABPA and Norman Stevens of RLSCoT, with fellow members of their two organisations, for their support.

That so many organisations and businesses, local and national, together with over 70 individual citizens, have contributed, show how worthwhile the project is seen to be.

So while the Friends have not finished raising all the money needed for the project, we are close – about 95% of the way there. Conscious of economic uncertainty and the ever increasing threat of inflation, we decided that it was important to have a fixed price and binding contract agreed, and signed, as soon as possible. This has now been done. Worrall's Engineering, on the Heathcote Industrial Estate – a very local firm – will manufacture and install the replacement arches. In May, the remains of the last few arches were taken away to make copies for the new ones.

If the works by Severn Trent and their contractors (NMC Nomenca) continue to go according to plan the arches could be erected before Christmas (2011); all that remains is to finish the lighting, and celebrate.

Heritage Lottery Funded project. The HLF financed project about the history and conservation of the Pump Room Gardens as well as increasing public awareness of the heritage of the gardens is now well underway. Funds from HLF are £41,500. A team of 20+ volunteers from across the county – with a wide range of expertise – is working on all aspects of the project. This project is quite separate from the arches restoration.



The team includes two professional photographers recording how the gardens are being used over the span of a full year.

Archie Pitts

XX

“Some of the good was not interred with his bones for he left a lasting memorial in the form of trees.”

So wrote Alan Pedley the Director of Parks for Leamington, in 1973 in his foreword to ‘Trees in Royal Leamington Spa’. He was referring to John Hitchman.

One of the lesser known founding fathers of the Town, Hitchman took a special interest in trees and it is to him that we owe a great debt for our splendid tradition of street trees. In the early 1840s – a time of great unemployment – Hitchman proposed that through public subscription an avenue of trees might be planted along the ‘new’ Kenilworth road for the general betterment of the Town, and through which paid work could be provided for those in distress. It was better, he concluded “to pay them wages instead of giving them soup”. In response to this appeal, which he estimated “will not exceed £30.00”, over £500.00 was subscribed.

By 1843 trees had been planted not only along the ‘new’ Kenilworth Road, but on Tachbrook and Radford roads, on Holly Walk; Clarendon, Dale, Grove, Beauchamp and Spencer streets; Priors, Leam and Newbold terraces; Beauchamp Square and the South Parade.

In those times, it seems, townspeople were alive to the importance of making the Town as attractive as possible and this tradition continues.

In 1968 the Leamington Society proposed the idea of a comprehensive list of the trees to be seen in Leamington to bring to the notice of both the Council and the public, the importance of trees to the Town. This survey, extensively contributed to by Members of the Society, formed the basis for Alan Pedley’s publication.



Holly Walk

Colin Craig

During the 1973 ‘National Tree Planting Year’, as millions of native Elms were succumbing to Dutch Elm Disease, townspeople donated over 900 trees under the Council’s ‘Donate & Plant a Tree Campaign’.

There can be no more fitting tribute to John Hitchman than to continue this great tradition of valuing the trees that give us so much pleasure. We ignore the benefits of trees to our communities at our peril, and despite society’s growing awareness of their benefits, our tree stock is declining at a perilous rate.

Last year, to make a start, I helped plant some new trees on Newbold Terrace. It was far more difficult than it should have been and I got an unwelcome insight into local government. But, as Baldrick would say “I have a cunning plan”

Peter James

XX

Christchurch Gardens

These gardens are the gateway to the town for a good many visitors and provide the first impression they have of Royal Leamington Spa. As such the state of these gardens in recent years has been deplorable. The significance of these gardens has been overlooked for a number of years and overshadowed in this respect by the prestigious Jephson Gardens.

The Town Council has established a working group of five councillors and volunteers representing “Friends of Christchurch Gardens” with the objective of making this park safer and more attractive as a gateway to the town centre. A dialogue developed between this group and the District Council working together to achieve this.

Progress has been delayed by issues such as conservation and heritage. Christchurch Gardens is included on a local list of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest and as such is covered by policies within the District Local Plan. Any work undertaken must therefore respect the intrinsic character of the Gardens.

Before embarking upon the works, the District and Town Councils consulted various groups, local residents and the users of the gardens, including a survey during the summer of 2010. All views were taken into account before proposals were finalised and work commenced.

The works are being conducted in two phases. The first phase consists of the careful selection and removal of damaged and diseased trees, together with those situated in inappropriate locations. A number of new saplings have been planted. Phase 1 of the scheme has been largely implemented and will be completed with the planting of new herbaceous borders in the autumn.

The new planting scheme entails the remodelling of the footpaths and, in some cases removal, of desire lines (i.e. short cuts) across the gardens which have become established over the years. The scheme of work has reflected the original layout of the Gardens which is an important consideration in view of its listed status.

Phase two of the scheme is currently under consideration and will focus on developing the central area as a focal point of the Gardens. The time-scale for this phase is presently uncertain and subject to further consultation on the proposals. The overall aim of the project is to make the Gardens a more welcoming and pleasant place to use.

Robert Cunliffe

XX

The National Forest

It isn't a forest – it is an aspiration – in an area of 200 square miles; roughly centred on Ashby de la Zouch, north of Leicester and south of Derby, east of the M1 and west of Burton on Trent, where trees are being planted. Within its boundary are miles of rolling farmland and a former coalfield which was in urgent need of regeneration. Nearly eight million trees have been planted so far, but for a forest to be a forest that is what is needed. The area covered by trees has more than tripled: from a low 6% to more than 18%.

The National Forest Company was established by Government in April 1995, (though work began nearly 10 years earlier) and is sponsored by the government. Lincoln Allison, our speaker, was a founder director.

a former market town regeneration project manager and keen supporter of local civic pride, approached the Town and District Councils to set up a joint programme of refurbishment work with pooled funding, which has continued for the past three years. We are grateful to him for organising and overseeing all this work.

When the town's conservation societies sponsor a project with a small sum, it can multiply to have a big effect. Other examples the Leamington Society has helped with are the purchase of the Willes Archive, the reconstruction of the Linden Arches, and now the repainting of vintage lamp posts.

Marianne Pitts

XX

Bath, Somerset

In the 1960s I was a student at Bath Domestic Science College. I immediately recognized how lucky I was to be there. Even the weather always seemed balmy and I can only reflect back on happy times. Miss Neilson, the college principal, thought we should all learn how to live! Her ideas were to provide fine, elegant common rooms in the grand first floor rooms of our elegant Georgian terrace. They were furnished with breakfront bookcases, grand pianos, Stanley Spencer paintings and fine antiques. At the beginning and end of terms we had to attend services in Bath Abbey. Many students could hardly bear to leave at the end of their three year course.

More recently I've been back to see what treats are in store for a visitor today and to remember that it is an internationally famous spa and a World Heritage site.

Loving good architecture, one can only admire the style of its civic and private buildings, with fine squares, circuses, crescents and terraces. Each set piece looks like a fine stately building but with individual front doors. Bath stone is renowned for its warm colouring and fine quality. As you explore Bath you find more delightful buildings around every corner.



Pulteney Bridge

Courtesy Tourist Tracks

The town is in a beautiful setting, sloping down to the River Avon with its famous Grade I Pulteney Bridge. It is near the southern edge of the Cotswolds; a range of limestone hills designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The surrounding hills give Bath its steep streets and make its buildings appear to climb the slopes.

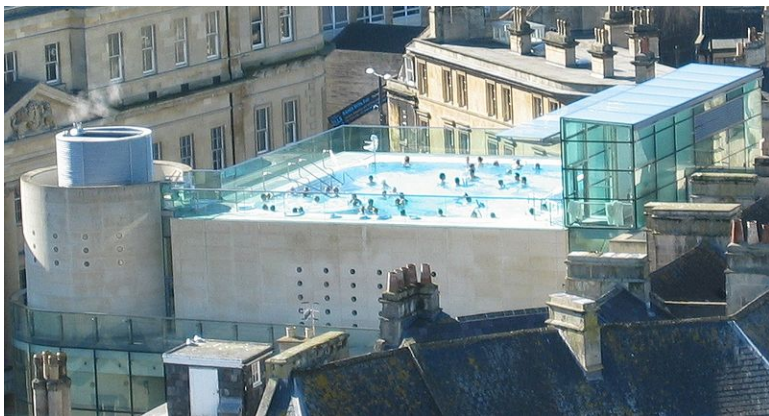
The Spa water which bubbles from the ground as geothermal springs previously fell as rain in the Mendip Hills. It was the Romans who built the first public baths here and those remains can be seen looking particularly spectacular after dark, lit up by flaming torches.

Bathing for the Romans was not merely to keep clean but a social occasion as it was to become when visiting Bath in the 18th century revival. Jane Austen's family were among the many visitors. One visitor,

Celia Fiennes, who came in 1687, noted the stiff canvas garments worn by both men and women in the baths to conceal their shape – a refinement on the earlier nude mixed bathing.

Very close to the Baths is the Grand Pump Room (Grade I listed). Here you can sit in the most elegant surroundings and take a delightful

tea. You can be lucky and enjoy music from the grand piano – or even a trio. You can collect a glass of water from the warm spring which fills the adjacent Roman Baths.



Modern rooftop thermal bath

Courtesy Grimshaw Architects

Having looked at the water, perhaps tasted it, you may like to submerge yourself in it, and today there is a wonderful opportunity. At vast expense a modern spa has been built to the design of Grimshaw Architects. There are thermal baths, a large steam room

with aromatic circular zones but best of all and tried out after dark there is an open roof bath. Here you can float in warm water admiring the night sky. No bleach, no chemicals, all fresh warm water from under the Mendip Hills and a fresh flow all the time.

Other treats are in store for visitors. There is a Jane Austen Museum, two fine art galleries, the Assembly Rooms, a costume museum, many fine restaurants and a lovely bridge called Pulteney Bridge on which there are little shops. This was designed by Robert Adam.

One famous place to eat is the Sally Lunn tea shop. The Sally Lunn bun is a sweet yeast bun, slightly flavoured with lemon, which comes to your table hot toasted with butter or whipped or clotted cream. They are delicious and can revive someone tired after exploring Bath.

In the evening, if not bathing under the night sky or out dining, there is an 18th century theatre, recently restored, where you can see some excellent productions.



Bath Station

Steve Daniels

How do you arrive? The best way, encouraged by the city, is to come by train. The station was built by Brunel in 1840 and is Grade II*listed.

Ruth Bennion

XXX

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

Other Committee Members

Margaret Begg 423822
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.

Blue plaques, June 2011

Two blue plaques will be unveiled on Friday 17th June. The first commemorates Norman Painting (1924 - 2009), who for 50 years played Phil Archer in the daily Radio 4 programme of episodes about the life in rural Ambridge. Painting was a strong believer in the importance of trees (and was Vice President of the Tree Council). He was a loyal supporter of Royal Leamington Spa and rallied to help the Leamington Society and CLARA when they incurred costs of £10,000 in the Regent Hotel case against WDC in 2003.

The second plaque will commemorate Robert Simpson (1921 – 1997). Of the composers of the second half of the last century Simpson was one of the most powerful, employing traditional forms (11 symphonies, 15 quartets), but in his own way, and intellectually and emotionally not unlike the more unsparing works of Beethoven and Sibelius.

Members of the Society are welcome at both unveilings. The first to Norman Painting at 28 Grove Street at 3.30, then at 21 Rosefield Street at 4 pm, followed by tea at the Town Hall. RSVP Town Clerk, Robert Nash, 01926 450906, RNash@towncouncil.spacomputers.com

At 7.30 in the evening, at the Royal Spa Centre, the Coull quartet will play Simpson's 7th string quartet and quartets by Haydn and Beethoven. Tickets from the Spa Centre, £12.50.

Robin Taylor

XX

New members

We welcome to the Society

- | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Graham & Marian White | Geoffrey Nicholls |
| Matt Western | Nora Connolly |
| Paul & Ann Akerman | Rod and Lorraine Harvey |
| Jack & Barbara Ingram | |

XX

Subscriptions

If you do not pay by Standing Order, and have yet to pay this year (which starts April 1st) please pay now – £7 for a single person and £10 for a household.