

WETHERBY CIVIC SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

September

2013

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS - ANDREW GORDON

Our AGM in November 2012 was the first to be held at our new venue, Wetherby & District Social Club on Sandbeck Way and after difficulty for some in locating it, the meeting was well attended and the general consensus was that the accommodation met our requirements very well. That being the case I am pleased to inform you that this year's 18th AGM will be held there on Monday the 11th of November at 7.30 pm. Our guest speaker on this occasion will be committee member Victor Hawkins who will be giving a talk about "Wetherby Through Time", the recently published book about Wetherby.

As you will recall last years speaker Ted Kilner gave us an intriguing insight into the origins of the Wetherby Festival from its very early days up until today, being able to draw on a vast amount of personal background knowledge, stemming from his involvement at the outset. It was very clear that the ongoing success of the Festival over the years was due to the hard work and enthusiasm of all those involved. His talk was peppered with numerous anecdotes about the various performers, one of whom was the late George Melly who we were told required a remarkable amount of "sustenance", (red wine by the bottle), prior to performing. So much in fact that he had to be helped bodily onto the stage, where he miraculously segued into a very professional performance. Other performers included Django Reinhardt and Humphrey Lyttelton the latter with a very dry sense of humour and also a great musician and entertainer. Sadly the current constrained financial times no longer stretched to the engagement of big stars but the Festival still continues to provide a varied but less ambitious programme of events.

For our Spring Lecture we welcomed Grace Dean who gave us a lively talk about the recent and still ongoing restoration of the Leeds City Varieties with historical anecdotes spanning the centuries from its heyday in the 1890s up until the present day. She referred to its descent into the seedy world of burlesque in the 1950s and 1960s and its subsequent revival as the venue for the very popular variety shows seen on BBC TV and hosted by Leonard Sachs, before again falling into disuse prior its current revival. Many very famous stars trod the boards on that stage and rose from humble beginnings to become household names, including Charlie Chaplin, Ken Dodd and many others. The talk was followed by a very animated question and answer session with many amusing revelations from the audience!

In January I was asked to provide details to promote the aims and endeavours of the Society for the Wetherby Town Council newsletter to bring our organisation to a wider audience with a view to the recruitment of new members. This was followed up in a March edition of the Wetherby News in an article about the Society by Roger Bealey in his regular column. Sadly neither of these initiatives has borne fruit.

Further efforts were made to promote the Society at the Country Fair held on the Ings in June where we had a stall manned by committee stalwarts Mary Barnett, Jean Chapman, Ruth Wheeler, Barbara Duncan, Barbara Mclean, Roger Taylor and Elaine Hawkins. Mary was interviewed about the Society by the local radio station Tempo FM during the course of the afternoon and some interest was also expressed by two potential members asking for information about the Society. In spite of their time and effort it was not a great success, so I would ask members to approach like minded friends,

acquaintances and colleagues and promote the Society and possibly recruit them as new members.

In April my wife and I attended the YAHCS meeting held at the Guildhall in York on behalf of the Society and it turned out to be very interesting due in no small part to the guest speaker Gary Verity, who is chairman of "Welcome to Yorkshire". He has been the driving force in bringing the Tour de France to Yorkshire, which is a major coup for the Region, not to say the whole country. He explained the behind the scenes political issues and also the huge economic benefit that the event would bring to Yorkshire. Kevin Trickett of YAHCS reported on the latest schools of thought with regard to various UDPs and their undoubted future impact on society and the investment in infrastructure necessary for their implementation. The overriding message was that more houses were needed and that whether we liked it or not, they would have to be built somewhere. In what form was also a matter of conjecture as land for building was in short supply and we might well see a mixture of domestic development together with the return of some high rise development.

In conclusion I would just like to add that the above is particularly relevant in the context of the Proposed Bellway development on Spofforth Hill and I attended the protest meeting on behalf of the Society. This was held in the Town Hall on Monday 16th of September and was attended by approximately 100 people. More detail will follow under the Planning Group Report.

EVENTS - MARY BARNETT

The programme of events organised and arranged by Mary for 2013 proved as interesting and diverse as ever with something to suit all tastes and most were well attended and the feedback from members has generally been good. The following reports on outings have been prepared by Mary for inclusion in this Newsletter.

LEEDS LIBRARY

Leeds Library on Commercial Street was our first visit and surprised most people who thought they knew Leeds, as this is a little known subscription library in the heart of Leeds shopping centre, hidden away above shops. We were given an illustrated talk by the librarians and then allowed to wander around the library with all its books, maps, magazines and reading areas.

NATIONAL COAL MINING MUSEUM

Our second visit involved wearing "hard" hats and lamps along with battery packs to power the lamps. The National Coal Mining Museum in Wakefield was well worth the drive. Our guide down the mine was an ex-miner who not only knew what it was like to work underground but knew how to keep us interested with his stories and the humour of underground happenings. However, none of us envied the miners their work but were fascinated to see the machinery they used. From the ground level museum we learnt how the miners lived through the good times and bad; how they cared for their pit ponies; shared their dressing and shower areas after a shift and how, when the mine closed, they made a very peaceful nature reserve from what were the spoilings of the pit.

ARCHBISHOP'S PALACE - BISHOPTHORPE

The outing to the Archbishop's Palace in Bishopthorpe was attended by 60 members on two separate visits. Once again, we were fortunate to have as our guide a very knowledgeable man who not only knew the premises intimately but also lived in the grounds with his family. The Palace is a beautiful building both inside and out with well tended gardens in which we were able to sit and enjoy the early sun.

THE THACKRAY MEDICAL MUSEUM -LEEDS

An evening visit to the Thackray Medical Museum was our next outing. This allowed those who attended to see behind the scenes where all the items of equipment not on display to the public are stored. An introductory talk was given by Roger Taylor and members were then allowed to wander round the museum.

LEEDS CITY VARIETIES

Our final visit for the season was to Leeds City Varieties Theatre. This followed the talk given to the Society by Grace Dean on the history of the theatre. During the visit we saw the refurbished theatre, looking very much as it did one hundred years ago. From the stage we had a feeling of what it was like to look out into the auditorium and learn how small and cramped the space was both on stage and behind the scenes.

Of the visits made most were well attended and feedback has generally been good. We hope that you will join us on any future visits planned by the Society.

PLANNING GROUP - NIC SHEPPARD

The Planning Group sub-committee continues to monitor the Leeds City Council website with regard to any applications which are within the Conservation area and particularly with regard to the built environment and historic core of Wetherby. In this respect the Society has recently lodged an objection with regard to an application by Bar THR3 for overhanging canopies outside their premises in the Market Place to allow outside tables on the pavement to establish a "café" style area. This was deemed totally unacceptable and inappropriate in that location, hence our objection. We await the outcome.

Now that any appeal by Sainsbury seems unlikely we await any further moves by Asda and will be watching closely. Meanwhile Morrisons proposed approved expansion is currently delayed due to "complications" possibly due to the difficulty in relocating the retail outlets which still remain in Horsefair, but we are pretty sure that it will still proceed.

We have our concerns with regard to the proposed development of 400 houses off Spofforth Hill by Bellway and I attended the Protest meeting held in the Town Hall on Monday the 16th of September chaired by Councillor Alan Lamb. Councillor John Proctor outlined the proposal and the various bureaucratic hurdles involved in the planning process. He indicated that Bellway's outline application was premature and had not been welcome at this time. Nevertheless it had now got to be considered and in this context Bellway had many questions to answer. The main stumbling block was concern over traffic flow as the inevitable increase that would be generated by the development did not satisfy the computer model used by Leeds City Council highways engineers, particularly with regard to the mini-roundabout junction at Bridgefoot. It would appear that Bellway would need to come up with a tenable solution to this problem and so far had not been able to do so.

TREES - RUTH WHEELER

We are pleased to report that the replacement Jubilee oak is now alive and kicking due in no small part to the attentions of Ruth and her husband David who have supplied copious amounts of water in buckets drawn from the Wharfe to ensure it's survival. Unfortunately four of the trees that were planted last year have died and another appears to be dying. All these were Alders and were planted in December last year. We are looking into the source of supply and have asked for these to be replaced free of charge but we will have to pay for the replanting. Vandalism has again unfortunately taken its toll but a degree of general pruning /tidying up of the more mature and surviving trees has been carried out.

We look forward to seeing you at the AGM.

Andrew Gordon
September 2013.