
Wetherby Civic Society

Autumn Newsletter

October 2001

The Way Forward - and a look back Mike Welby

I am pleased to have this opportunity as Chairman to report on the Society's activities over the year and to introduce reports from the working parties.

At the start of the year, I proposed a reorganisation and produced a discussion paper. This was considered by the Executive which, with some changes, was adopted. The main purposes of the reorganisation were:

To have a more logical structure for today's needs

To reduce the scope of the major working party to make its tasks more manageable

To improve publicity,

To commence active recruitment

To involve more members of the Society in the work of the working parties.

The first two of these have clearly been achieved. Decisions affecting planning and the programme of activities and events are now reported direct to the Executive Committee rather than through a working party. Our representatives on the Town Centre Forum and the Wetherby Environmental Enhancement Group (currently undertaking the improvement at the public open space at Wharfedale Lawn) are responsible to the Buildings and Environment Working Party. There has been some progress on publicity with more news of the Society's activities in the local press. This is largely thanks to Hilary Maun who volunteered at the start of the year to be our Press Officer. We are

also fortunate to have Marie Fox on the Executive, as she is able to mention us from time to time in her excellent column. Of course, she is only able to do this when there is something interesting to say. With regard to recruitment however, we have not yet made any real progress and this will need to be a priority in the coming year. The aim to involve more members in Society activity has had only a limited success. There are six members who are not on the Executive taking part in working parties but four of these are former executive members. It would be nice to have three or four more members involved.

It has been a busy year for the Buildings and Environment working party as you can see from the report by the convenor, Vice-chairman James Lodge. The Planning Applications working party has considered some important applications over the year and this is covered in my report as convenor.

There is also a report from Lis Stretton on the work of the Activities and Events Group. This has been a great success this year. I was fortunate to be at three of the events:

the excellent talk on Roundhay Park,

the enjoyable trip to the vineyard

and the tour of Saltaire with a guide that I shall not forget for a very long time to come.

Thanks to Lis for all her hard work on this, which is much appreciated by members.

The Trees working party, led by our Tree Warden Lynda Davis, has been active with four new trees planted and two trees which had died replaced. My thanks to Lynda who has found family commitments too time consuming to enable her to continue. Is there somebody out there who can take over this rewarding task?

In May, there was a visit to Wetherby by members of Leeds Civic Trust and they asked the Society for four guides. We had only two members of the Executive with the required level of knowledge to do this well, James Lodge and Elizabeth Johnson so two new recruits, Derek Gulland and myself, had to have some quick training. We approached the visit with some trepidation but it all went well and the visitors were kind enough to comment on the high quality of all four guides.

The Society also provided a guided tour for the ladies from the Champers group of Boston Spa.

Many thanks to both groups for their donations to the Society's funds.

One activity during the year, which consumed a lot of time, was preparing for the Community Design Workshop which was to be hosted by the Society at the request of the Town Centre Forum. A lot of work went into this both by John Williams in the initial stages and then later by an ad-hoc group consisting of the Officers and Ruth Wheeler. Despite achieving funding and a venue, and

agreeing the structure with Leeds Metropolitan University, the project foundered because so few wished to attend. It is considered that the problem was not lack of interest but the inability or unwillingness to give

up all day Saturday. This is something we shall look at again.

Despite the above, it has been a very positive year and I believe the Executive is well placed to

build on this in the coming year. I should like to thank everyone for all the support I received as Chairman during the year.

Events Programme 2001 Lis Stretton

History of Roundhay Park

Our winter lecture was by Stephen Burt on the history of Roundhay Park from the earliest records of it being a 'hay' or round enclosure created by members of the Norman aristocracy for the purposes of hunting, up to the opening of 'Tropical World' in 1983. It was interesting to hear of the uses made of the area during the centuries for iron extraction, charcoal burning and coal mining. The Park was leased by Henry VII to William Nettleton who abused his lease and set about stripping the area of trees thus removing the habitat of deer.

In the 18th Century the land passed to Thomas Nicholson who set about developing a country estate with a suitably elegant mansion. Many twists and turns in the Nicholson family and disreputable dealings by executors of the estate led to the sale of Roundhay Park to the City of Leeds.

The lecture was typical of Stephen Burt's enthusiastic and amusing style, and was enjoyed by the 70 members who were present.

Rhubarb Tour

This visit caught the imagination of the membership and 38 set off on a dark cold February night for the Rhubarb Farm near Rothwell not knowing what to expect. We were entertained by a talk on the history and uses of Rhubarb that lasted a full hour. Everyone was amazed at how much interesting information there was about such a humble plant. Its use down the centuries in the treatment of many ailments was described. The description of the culture of Rhubarb and the way it is forced in darkened sheds whetted our appetite for the tour of the shed. The sight of millions of stems of white/pink Rhubarb in the glimmer of a single bulb was fascinating. The

tour was followed by a meal at the Unicorn in Carlton that included an inevitable Rhubarb pudding!

Abbey House Museum, Kirkstall

After major difficulty with the City Museums Department a visit to the newly refurbished Abbey House Museum was arranged and 50 members went along. Following a talk from a member of staff on the background to Kirkstall Abbey and the development of a museum on the site of the Abbot's house, members were free to walk round the museum at their own pace, taking in the excellent exhibits of life in Leeds as it was in bygone times. The visit concluded with a very well presented buffet supper.

'Salts Walk'

Over 50 members and friends made their way to Saltaire for this visit to the 'model' Victorian village built between 1851 and 1876 by Sir Titus Salt for the workers at his adjacent mills. We were divided into two parties and conducted around the village by most excellent professional guides, both residents of the village. We were introduced to the various areas in the village that housed workers of differing grades from the basic, but well constructed houses for the most humble machinist to the grander houses for Foremen and Mill Managers.

The walk took in the Institute, School, Canteen, hospital and imposing Church. Salt provided underground tunnels to link the mills with hospital and canteen so that workers could get to facilities quickly and thus get back to work without wasting time! It became

obvious that Salt's village was not just a philanthropic gesture, but a means of attracting labour away from Bradford, and of keeping his workforce loyal and well disciplined – he ran his own security and did not allow the local Constabulary to police the village. Many corner houses had watchtowers built above them!

Nevertheless what was provided was no doubt much superior to the awful slum conditions of Bradford, and as long as people accepted the overbearing patronising style of the place, they had relatively good conditions in which to live and work.

Saltaire Village is now a Nominated World Heritage Site and protected by stringent conservation area status.

Leventhorpe Vineyard, Swillington

Good wine grown in Yorkshire near old collieries? – surely not! This fascinating visit was to prove the sceptics wrong. The maximum permitted number of 35 members were met at the Vineyard, South of Garforth by George and Janet Bowden, the owners of the business. George, who had until recently been a teacher at Wetherby High School as well as running the Vineyard, gave a talk on wine.

It became apparent that some of the best wines are grown at the 'margins' where the climate would be assumed to be too cold. England, we were told, has 4000 acres of vines and wins many international awards for its wines. George researched the site very closely for some years before purchasing the nine acres and planting vines. The land faces due South above the Aire Valley, and through temperature inversion avoids most if not all winter frosts. Leventhorpe produces both red and white wines, and we were escorted

on a walk through the Vineyard to see the various varieties of grapes beginning to swell and ripen. Following the walk members tasted three whites and one red wine and

between them purchased a good number of cases.

As more than twice as many who attended showed initial interest in this visit and for one reason or

another could not attend it is thought that another visit be arranged say for 2003. The Events Organiser (Lis Stretton 01937 520389) would be interested to know if another visit would be supported.

Buildings & Environment James Lodge

In an agreed bid to improve the efficiency of the Society, the Policy and Programme Committee passed away and the Buildings and Environment Working Party came into existence with new aims and held three meetings. We now have a convenor instead of a chairman which it is hoped will ensure that all members are always involved, and Derek Gulland takes the minutes.

We welcomed the return of Phillip Norris who had done such vital work

in getting Leeds to consider our views on street signs, furniture and lighting. He agreed to research the present position so that a more unified approach could be adopted.

Consideration of the Town Centre Traffic Management Exhibition held in the summer took up the greater part of one of our meetings. The Working Party believed that the exhibition gave a true and fair picture of the

current traffic problems in Wetherby.

Recognising that the exhibition presented an opportunity to influence the development of the town for many years, the Working Party recommended, and the Executive Committee accepted, that the following response to the exhibition be made to the Leeds Highways Authority on behalf of the Society:

Any solution to traffic congestion must ensure that the centre of Wetherby retains its market town ambience - commercially busy, shopper and visitor friendly whether on foot, cycle or by motor vehicle. Any scheme, which prejudiced the character of the town, could not receive the support of the Society no matter how effective it might be in moving traffic through and round the town. Equally so any scheme which might reduce commercial activity within the town centre would have to be opposed.

The Society recognises that the problems and pressure points identified - congestion, limited parking spaces, limited and difficult cycle access, pedestrian hazards (i.e. narrow pavements, busy junctions, few protected crossing points etc), lack of public transport, existing and future links to the A1, access to the extended Morrisons superstore are all interlinked. None can be taken in isolation since a solution for one will have consequences for the others.

The Society is agreed that these will best be met by a judicious mix of: -

- *Junction improvements controlled where necessary by traffic lights such as at Bridgefoot and on York Road at the Hallfield Lane/Audby Lane junction.*
- *Pavement widening on the west side of the Market Place*
- *Pedestrianisation of the Market Place east of the Town Hall entrance thus preventing the Town Hall being used as a traffic roundabout*

- *Re-routing of the abnormal load route away from the present High Street/North Street route*
- *Improving public transport links to and from outlying areas of the town and surrounding villages*
- *Improving cycle access to the town centre using cycle lanes where necessary and providing adequate cycle parking facilities throughout the town centre*
- *Reducing long stay car parking within the town centre by introducing flexible waiting times for short term parking at:*

The Crossley Street, Council Offices and Morrisons car parks

On street car parking where permitted,

- *Introducing pay and display charges at long stay car parks such as the Wilderness and Hallfield Lane*
- *Making the Hallfield Mansion site available for long term parking on a pay and display basis*
- *Strictly enforcing parking and waiting restrictions*
- *Introducing a 20mph speed limit within the town centre and installing traffic calming gateways at the town boundaries*
- *Signing Harrogate from the south via the A59 and not the A661*

The Society believes that the imminent introduction of the heavy commercial vehicle ban and the

implementation of the above measures make it unnecessary to establish a one-way system to cope with the present and foreseeable volume of traffic. In the eyes of members a one way system would increase the speed of traffic flows, present a hostile aspect to car borne visitors and might reduce commercial activity within the town centre by discouraging passing trade.

A one way system would also be cycle unfriendly, which would defeat the objective of increasing cycle journeys in preference to car journeys.

It is also believed that the comings and goings typical of a busy market town would decline as a consequence of a one way system to the detriment of the character of Wetherby which the Society is pledged to protect.

No doubt we shall be returning to this for some time to come

Planning Applications Mike Welby

The Planning Applications Working Party consists of myself as Society Chairman, Derek Gulland Secretary/Treasurer, Elizabeth Johnson Executive member and member Nic Sheppard. The purpose of the working party is to monitor planning applications weekly, to consider any of interest to the Society and to submit comments to the planning authority.

Given the timescales involved, the response has to be made quickly and the working party reports to the Executive after the event. Consequently, if any member has a strong view on an application they should contact a member of the working party so that this can be taken into consideration. They

should also consider submitting comments to the planning authority as an individual. The working party is only concerned with planning applications which have been submitted. Other planning matters, such as one-way systems and dereliction at Micklethwaite Farm are the concern of the Buildings and Environment Working Party.

During the year, we have commented to the planning authority on three applications; the Cattle Market site, North Street flats and the former Rendezvous Café site. The last newsletter covered the Cattle Market application.

The application to build flats in North Street, immediately north of the Royal Oak, was broadly welcomed but we commented on aspects of detail in particularly the use of unsuitable materials.

The latest application for the former Rendezvous Café site was similar to the previous approved application for a prestigious restaurant except that this would be a much smaller restaurant plus offices. As the size of the restaurant was so small, we felt it would be likely to become a wine bar and it was opposed. We also commented on lack of parking for the offices and disabled toilets being only accessible from the offices.

It is anticipated that during the coming year there will be a full application for the new Morrisons supermarket which will be of interest to us.

Patron: Canon W W Powell

Corporate member: Collingham Catering Sales

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Registered Charity Number: 1039127 A Member of the Civic Trust