

Wetherby Civic Society

Autumn Newsletter

October 2004

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT - Ruth Wheeler

This has been my first year as Chairman and it has proved to be an enjoyable and interesting rôle. Needless to say the Society could not exist without its committee, the most stalwart person being our incomparable Secretary cum Treasurer who is the lynchpin of all our activities.

We have been pleased to welcome Chris Welby, as a co-opted member of the committee where she is already showing her mettle - a worthy successor to her late husband, Mike.

The working parties, whose reports are included in this Newsletter, do sterling work in monitoring planning applications, the buildings and environment of the town as well as promoting publicity for our organisation.

This year Peter Maun, who arranges our tree planting, has been exceptionally busy. Firstly with the inception of the Lime Tree Walk across Hudson Park, then contending with the vandalism of half of the young trees and more recently the injudicious use of a weedkiller around the base of each tree. Peter's report will give more details.

We have been saddened by the serious illness and subsequent

The working party has endeavoured to keep track of, and where applicable, comment on planning proposals in Wetherby. Consideration is generally limited to proposals within the town centre Conservation Area, but on occasion comment is submitted to Leeds City Council on plans that are believed

surgery suffered by John Williams. We send him and his family our sincerest good wishes for a speedy recovery.

Just before John went into hospital he saw through the printers a new edition of our Town Trail. Elizabeth Johnson helped him in this task and I should like to express our most grateful thanks to them both.

This little booklet is excellent

*Annual General Meeting
7.30pm Monday 22nd November 2004
Ramada Jarvis Hotel, Wetherby
Followed by a presentation by the
Yorkshire Air Ambulance*

value at just 50 pence giving as it does a succinct history of the town as well as being a guide to the most interesting parts of the town centre.

One of our most successful events this year was the Heritage Open Day at the Georgian Bathhouse in Wharfedale Lawn. Our thanks again to Elizabeth Johnson who provided the historical commentary and to Nic Sheppard who converted this using his IT skills into an attractive display. 104 people came through the gates - which I understand was one of the

PLANNING - Nic Sheppard

to have wider affect on the whole or particular areas the town.

Whilst for most of the year it has been impossible to travel into town without passing building sites highlighted by the development at Micklethwaite Farm, cranes towering above Westgate, the major

largest attendances over the weekend in the Leeds City area. For those of you who did not manage to visit the bathhouse we have persuaded Elizabeth and Clifford to contribute an article on the bathhouse for this Newsletter.

We have now finalised next year's social programme with an extra outing compared with previous years. It is varied in style with visits to prisons and a workhouse in Ripon, a steam railway, a garden and two stately homes. Full details will be given on your membership card, which will be distributed as confirmation of your subscription renewal.

Your comments on the programme plus suggestions for future visits and events are always welcome.

The Society does need to increase its membership to involve a more representative cross section of Wetherby residents. Perhaps each present member could introduce just one other person to the Wetherby Civic Society this year. This would help to make our ideas and opinions stronger, more relevant, though provoking and even lively!

Let us look forward to another successful year.

development of Morrisons Supermarket, and the building of flats in North Street, these are the result of plans initially discussed in previous years.

This year the group has particularly considered: -

A number of proposals mostly out of public sight for small extensions to the back of buildings- Building of a new veterinary surgery in Hallfield Lane. - Residential development alongside the Old Drovers Inn on Boston Road. - The demolition of Bridge House. - An application to cover the High Street entrance to the Horsefair Shopping Centre (originally suggested by the Civic Society) - Plans to renew the Tennis Club in Scott Lane. - Building of

flats in Deighton Road. - The addition of one terraced house in Caxton Street. - A Review of the Leeds Unitary Development Plan, updating overall plans for this area of Leeds.

At the present time there is much commercial incentive to build up to 24 flats on any available site and in the coming year such developments are likely to appear at Bridge End, Castle Garth and possibly the Cattle Market.

TREES Peter Maun

Little did I think that by the conclusion of last year's Annual Meeting I should go away with a promise of an anonymous donation which would ensure that all the trees for our proposed Lime Tree Avenue across Hudson Park would be planted by the end of the winter. We were also fortunate in obtaining donations from many other members of the Society and residents of Wetherby and the surrounding villages. In the event all the funds raised were put into service since, as we have already reported, we had to replace almost half the trees which were the subject of an attack by vandals.

We did manage to plant the replacement trees by the end of the

planting season but as anybody who uses the footpath will know their growth has not been so vigorous as the survivors of the first planting.

Then, in mid-summer, both the first and second plantings had to survive a weedkiller sprayed round each tree. This was applied to kill off some thistles but without the Society's knowledge or approval. For the moment it looks as if the trees have come through that trauma with the exception of perhaps one or two. What will be a lasting result is that a year's growth will have been lost.

As you will see from the accounts, even after paying for a plaque recognising the contribution of the

The Society continues to submit measured and constructive comment on various proposals and has seen a degree of success in terms of amendment to plans. This helps to assure us of the value and importance of this ongoing piece of Civic Society work and continues to remind planners and developers of the wider interests of the community.

donors, we still have just over eleven hundred pounds available for expenditure on the avenue.

Some of this has already been spent on setting up the memorial and we may need to keep something in reserve to replace any trees which may not be thriving.

We have continued our tree planting programme on the Ings. If funds are available a further four will be planted there during the coming season. One of the oak trees on the Ings will have a plaque attached to the memory of Charles Martin who was the driving force behind the Society's tree planting programme in its first five years.

WETHERBY CIVIC SOCIETY
Registered Charity Number: 1039127 A Member of the Civic Trust

A COLD BATH IN WETHERBY

Elizabeth & Clifford Johnson

The unusual Georgian Bathhouse at Wharfedale Lawn was built over 200 years ago when cold water plunges were regarded as bringing relief to a variety of complaints.

At Wharfedale Lawn the lower floor contains a sunken bath fed by spring water. It is 1.5metres deep and measures 2.4 metres by 3.7 metres - in "old money" 5 feet by 12 feet by 8 feet. Access to the bath is by steps in one of the corners and it is surrounded by paved walkway with three alcoves.

After a series of plunges, each followed by a circuit of the bath, the bathers would climb up to the "warming room" above encased in thick flannel. Here they would socialise with friends in front of a roaring fire take food and wine and play cards most likely for relatively high stakes, gambling being one of the curses of Georgian England.

The first historical reference to the Wetherby bathhouse is in 1824 when the young 6th Duke of Devonshire the then owner of nearly all of the town, sold it off by auction in the space of four days. Part 15a of lot 37 was described as "A valuable Paddock or croft, in which is a bath and Dressing Room near the River." Sadly the Chatsworth archives concerning Wetherby before 1824 have perished. In spite of extensive

research we have been unable to identify the tenant at the time.

Casting around for information about other cold baths brought to light a surprising number in Yorkshire, Derbyshire and Durham. Some like St Mungo's Well at Copgrove near Knaresborough no longer exist, although Celia Fiennes describes it and its patrons in her diary "Through Yorkshire on a side saddle in the time of William and Mary".

A similar open bath of the late 17th century still exists in the Gledhow valley in Leeds with a warming room attached.

The 18th century brought a widespread development by the wealthy of pleasure grounds influenced by the classical periods of Greece and Rome. This produced an array of temples, gazebos and bathhouses. Bathhouses fell out of fashion in the next century and many are only remembered by an entry on a map - such as Bathing Well Wood in Stockeld Park.

There are references to forgotten cold baths at Studley Royal, Gibside in County Durham and Hardwick Park near Sedgfield. Kedleston Hall, near Derby, still has two- although the earlier one possibly by James Paine is not accessible to the public. The

second one by the lake is a stunning multi-purpose building with a cold bath, two boat houses and an elegant upper room which allowed fishing from its large window.

In Wetherby pressure to preserve the bathhouse was led by the Weir Preservation Trust. Through the initiative of Dr James Lodge in 1988 the bathhouse and the adjacent open-air oval pool was listed Grade II in 1990. This brought a certain measure of protection but did not prevent the roof pan-tiles being stolen with the result that the building rapidly deteriorated.

In the mid 1990s the newly formed Civic Society took up the cause of the bathhouse. The conversion of the main house and its lease to Cheshire Homes gave the opportunity to restore the bathhouse. Using funds provided through the Landfill Tax the adjoining garden was landscaped. This year the grounds and bathhouse were open for the first time on the Sunday of the Heritage Open Days weekend much to the huge enjoyment of the 104 people who came through the gates.

The bathhouse and garden are now valuable public amenities in the care of Wetherby Town Council. The garden still requires more work but in time it will provide a fitting background to "an unusual survival of an uncommon building type."

EVENTS - Derek Gulland

Our Autumn Newsletter is usually our first opportunity to sum up all the events of the previous year. This time we shall let pictures tell

the story. Our formal Annual Report, which we now have to include with the Society's accounts, will be available later this year and

will give details of this year's events.