

# Wetherby Civic Society

## Autumn Newsletter

October 2005

### CHAIRMAN'S REPORT - RUTH WHEELER

Incredibly the year has turned full circle again as we come to Autumn and the end of our "Civic" year. Your Committee has met five times and to those members we say thank you. However, once again the loudest cheer is for our secretary - Derek Gulland. On the subject of the Committee we do need new dynamic (!) representatives and the AGM is the opportunity to poke your head above the parapet and join the happy band.

The working parties give enthusiasm and extra time to their particular topic and so inform and enthuse others. Their several reports are given below.

The issue which has exercised me this year (physically certainly!) and several other members, has been the restoration of the garden near the bathhouse at Wharfedale Lawn. It has been a joint effort with volunteers from the Wetherby in Bloom Wilderness Group led by Margaret Dabell. This project has entailed the clearing of numerous self-seeded elder tress, shrubs, ivy, ground elder, couch grass and old litter and debris. The volunteers have met most Tuesday mornings from the end of January and have filled four

skips. Kind male friends were inveigled to dig up tree roots and gradually the shape of the old garden began to appear. Paths and stone walls, which had been completely hidden by ivy, were uncovered and the garden seemed to grow in size.

John Tatterton and his colleagues kindly rebuilt one of the derelict walls and the Weir Preservation Trust funded the renewal of the wall in front of the Bathhouse.

*Annual General Meeting  
7.30pm Monday 21<sup>st</sup> November 2005  
Ramada Jarvis Hotel, Wetherby  
Followed by a talk by Nic Dyson describing some  
of the adventures of a Wetherby Solicitor!*

Weedkiller was applied on two occasions. Recently we began digging the whole area to remove any remaining pernicious roots. All being well, planting with shrubs and ground cover will begin this month. Much of the area is in partial and even deep shade and Margaret's expertise in selecting the best plants for the many different microclimates has been invaluable.

The planting scheme has been funded by a grant of £2000 from Wetherby Town but we have also

been fortunate in receiving many gifts of plants, ferns and bulbs. Next Spring and Summer the garden will be wearing a new set of clothes! We hope you will come to enjoy it and spend a little time sitting by the river.

The bathhouse was open again on the Heritage Open Days weekend in September. Very nearly 70 people came to view it, many of them from out of Wetherby. On the Saturday a guided walk round the town attracted 13 people.

Hilary Maun and I are putting the finishing touches to next year's programme of events. Our thanks to members who sent in suggestions. We shall be learning the secrets of cheese making, visiting a walled garden and a museum as well as hearing about the strange tale, which was the inspiration of a character in Jane Eyre. Please keep the ideas flowing.

Finally my plea last year has brought 14 new members into the Society and to them we say welcome. Keep spreading the word about us as we look forward to 2006.

### PLANNING - NIC SHEPPARD

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

This requires a constant surveillance of notices posted on lamp posts and in the Wetherby News, and of late, also on the Leeds City Council web site. The plans are then viewed in the public library, notes taken, and if necessary discussed by our small team.

This year the group has particularly considered:

- A small number of proposals - mostly out of public sight - for small extensions to the back of buildings.
- Amended plans for a new detached house alongside the Old Drovers Inn in Boston Road.
- Additional shops within the Horsefair Centre.
- Residential developments on Deighton Road and Spofforth Hill.

The biggest change taking place in the town centre is the construction of the commercial and residential development on the Cattle Market Site. This year we expect the completion of the long delayed river-side flats at the bottom of Spofforth Hill, most of the Micklethwaite Farm Estate and the

new flats at Castle Garth. Plans for these developments were considered by the committee when the applications were first made.

The Society continues to submit measured and constructive comment on various proposals and still sees a degree of success in

terms of amendment to final 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.

#### *TREES - PETER MAUN*

After the difficulties reported last year we are pleased that the majority of the lime trees in the Hudson's Field Avenue appear to be growing on well. One or two are showing signs of distress, however, and these will be replaced during the forthcoming planting season. We are grateful to Andrew Pullan for all his help and his generous assistance both on Hudson's Field and at the Ings where our planting programme continued with four new trees.

The memorial plaque on Hudson's Field was installed during the year and later this month the two nearby primary schools will be planting early spring bulbs alongside the walk.

If any member of the Society would like to assist with this project will they please contact the Secretary or myself as soon as possible.

As always we are grateful for the generous donations received. It is our intention to continue planting on the Ings. One tree with protection costs about £175. Please contact our Secretary or me if you would like to make a contribution. Although most of our donations are to adopt a tree as a memorial, we are happy to accept donations for any other reason. The planting season ends in March and our policy is only to plant native deciduous species.

#### *BUILDINGS & ENVIRONMENT - JAMES LODGE*

Still waiting. How many times have we reported in these terms regarding the proposed traffic management scheme for Wetherby? We now have another reason to put it off. This time it is the upgrading of the A1 south of the town.

However, we are promised work to begin shortly on a partial pedestrianisation to the east of the

Town Hall. This has been received with mixed feelings but I do feel that the final result will be an improvement on the area as it stands at the moment.

Perhaps not strictly a Civic Society concern is how to deal with the low-grade vandalism besetting parts of the town. Most of this is home grown and it does seem a shame

that a tiny minority of our townspeople is so insensitive to their surroundings that they wish to destroy it for their own pleasure. What can be done to bring about such a change in attitudes that everybody believes that they share in the ownership of the community in which they live?

#### *EVENTS 2005 - DEREK GULLAND*

We usually have a round up of the year's programme in this Newsletter. Unfortunately we have no pictures this time and so words will have to do instead. Our Chairman's contacts introduced us to the world of the forensic archaeology when Dr Alan Ogden a research fellow in palaeopathology at Bradford University persuaded us at our March lecture that Bones really can talk.

Our summer outings followed much the same pattern as in past years. We took up Sir Thomas Ingleby's invitation and visited Ripley Castle. The tour of the three museums in Ripon introduced us to the forgotten

world of the workhouse, the old magistrate court system and the "low tech" police force, which many of us of us remember from our youth.

What a contrast was presented when we visited Hovingham Hall on a glorious June day. Again youthful memories were rekindled on our trip on the Embsay steam railway although perhaps the highlight of this trip for too many of us was consuming a cream tea at a Bolton Abbey tearoom!

Our event year ended with an evening visit to Temple Newsam House. We were shown round by

James Lomax one of the curators. We were all impressed by the marvellous work, which Leeds City Council has put in to making this house a true showpiece. If you haven't been since it re-opened following its refurbishment do go soon. It will be worth the trip.

May I say how much I appreciate the kind words which so many of our members express their appreciation when we disperse at the end of one of our trips. These should be addressed really to Ruth Wheeler and Hilary Maun who put together the programme and make all the arrangements with the many different venues.

## COMMUNITIES IN BLOOM

As we began to compile this newsletter, we heard that Wetherby had won the small communities section of the international competition organised by *Communities in Bloom*. Our congratulations to all who were responsible for this magnificent result. Our Society played its part by making a presentation on the town's heritage at the half day symposium in the Town Hall which formed part of the assessment. We were asked to pay special attention to the part played by local groups coming together to protect Wetherby's heritage.

What follows is an edited version of our secretary's presentation. His allotted time was just five minutes!

Wetherby Civic Society was established in 1994 by a group of concerned townspeople independent of local business and local government with one of its objectives being:

*The protection and preservation of the historic core of the town - a designated Conservation Area - where there are 22 listed buildings and One Ancient Monument - Wetherby Bridge.*

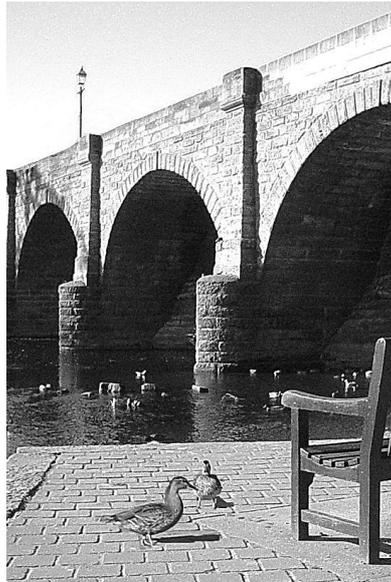
Apart from the Bridge the majority of the listed buildings and the other buildings within the Conservation Area date from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century when buildings displayed an elegance of line and a mastery of proportion which was lost as the century progressed.

So why do we have this unique assemblage of buildings?

### CROSSING

Wetherby is an ancient crossing point of the River Wharfe first as a ford and then as a bridge dating from 1233 subsequently widened and raised in 1773 and 1825.

Here the River Wharfe crosses a narrow band of magnesian limestone which gives good support for the bridge piers and also provides an excellent building stone of which most of the town centre buildings are constructed. Although a bit bright and garish when newly quarried it weathers to a pleasant



light grey and being limestone it does not absorb dirt since the naturally, mildly acidic rainfall keeps the surface clean.

The stone is still quarried locally at Tadcaster and is perhaps better known as the building stone of York Minster and, of course, it is the aquifer providing pure water for the Tadcaster breweries.

But if Wetherby is an ancient crossing point we might expect to see some quite old buildings in the town.

This isn't so since the Great Fire of Wetherby in 1723 destroyed what is now the town centre

But why did so many of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings survive?

### SALE

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century most of what is the now town centre was owned by the Duke of Devonshire. In 1824 in need of money - he was building Chatsworth House at the time - he tried to find a buyer for his Wetherby properties but without success.

He then put the town up for auction in individual lots. This turned the town into a town of freeholders since most of the properties were bought by their sitting tenants.

Following the sale there was a spurt of new building at a time still influenced by the classical architecture of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### SELF HELP

I like to think that the 1824 sale created the culture of self-help and the incentive to preserve the best of our town's heritage.

But, of course, it began even earlier when the first bridge was built by public contributions although some might claim that there was an element of compulsion here since the funds were raised by the sale of indulgences by the Archbishop of York.

And then continued in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Parish Church was built through public subscriptions and the first

schools were funded by the Methodist and Parish Churches

Nearer our own times when the old mill weir fell into disrepair in the 1980's and no public authority accepted responsibility for its upkeep it was a group of ordinary Wetherby people who set up a preservation trust, raised the money and carried out the work to restore it.

The Civic Society has published a Town Trail and a Guide to the Conservation Area both of which should encourage townspeople and visitors to value their heritage as do the blue plaques placed on historic buildings and new noteworthy developments.

For the past three years Wetherby has participated in Heritage Open Days sponsored by the Civic Trust and English Heritage. These give a wider cross section of the population the opportunity to explore and learn something about their local towns and villages.

#### *WORKING TOGETHER*

The most recent example of the town's care for its heritage shows many groups working together to ensure that future



generations may enjoy its inheritance.

In the particulars for the 1824 sale one lot is described as follows:

“ A valuable Paddock or croft in which there is a bath and dressing room near the river”.

This was a small two-storey building with a cold water spring fed bath on the lower floor and a warming room with a fireplace on the upper floor.

In due course the bathhouse became incorporated in the

grounds of a small mansion house latterly owned by Leeds City Council. In 1990 the bathhouse obtained listed status on the grounds that “ it was an unusual survivor of an uncommon building type”.

When the City sold the mansion house, the bathhouse and adjacent grounds were retained by the City and leased to Wetherby Town Council but by then the bathhouse had fallen into disrepair and the grounds had become overgrown. Funds were made available to restore the bathhouse and landscape part of the grounds.

This left a substantial part of the grounds still needing restoration. Since the autumn of 2004 members of the Weir Preservation Trust, Wetherby in Bloom and Wetherby Civic Society have worked hard in this area. Weeds have been grubbed out, overgrown trees and shrubs cut back, old walls and terraces uncovered and rebuilt.

Our reward has been seeing a new public amenity created where before there was just dereliction and seeing what can be done when City, Town and amenity groups are united by a common purpose and objective.

Οφίχερος οφ της Σοχιετψ  
(Απποιντεδ Νοωεμβερ 2004)

Χηαιρμαν: Ρυτη Ωηελερ ζιχε Χηαιρμαν: Νιχ Σηεπαρδ

Σεχρεταρψ/Τρεασυρερ: Δερεκ Γυλλανδ

Χονωενορσ οφ Ωορκινγ Παρτιεσ: Τρεεσ Πετερ Μανν Βυιλδινγσ & Ενωιρονμεντ θαμεσ Λοδγε

Πλαννινγ Νιχ Σηεπαρδ

Εξεχυτιωε Χομμιττεε: Ρον Αιτκεν Μαριε Φοξ Ελιζαβετη θοηησον θαμεσ Λοδγε Δαωιδ Σηαω Χηρισ Ωελβψ

#### WETHERBY CIVIC SOCIETY

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