

# Corsham Spotlight

March, 2004

Volume 2, Issue 1

*Newsletter of the Corsham Civic Society*



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## Editorial

We have been so lucky to avoid the worst of the weather in this part of the country, deep snow, hail, and flooding seem to miss us thankfully, but lets hope we have plenty of sunshine soon because we have a lot to do and see during the coming months. Apart from an excellent programme of speakers, we have a walk to take part in (see page 2), Eric is stoking up a BBQ for July, and Les is in the process of arranging a ½ day trip during August (details for these items to be revealed later).

Did you get to see the exhibition "In Living Memory" staged at St Bartholomew's Church 18-21<sup>st</sup> March? It was a superb trip down memory lane, many exhibits were loaned by our members, and served to entertain and amuse many, and we applaud the efforts of the team who staged this event.

During early June the local Scout Group will be in celebration mood, it will be their 95<sup>th</sup> birthday. Organisers have asked us for photographs, stories, and names of young men who may have belonged to the troop in the past, and we have been able to help a little. It is intended to hold the celebration on Saturday 17 July, in the park, near the boathouse. Do you know anyone who was in the Scouts in this timescale who may have a photo to share or a story to tell, if so, please contact Margaret Heath, Pickwick Rd. Tel: 01249 715112

If you were a Sea Scout – do apply for a FREE invitation!

### **A note for your diaries please:**

**Our meeting 25<sup>th</sup> June has had to be re-located, because of the Corsham Festival programme. Please therefore join us to hear about "Waggons, Wains & Carts "at Church House, Church Street (off High St) at 8pm as usual.**

We are in the course of arranging our contribution to the Corsham Festival 2004. Members will doubtless recall that the Society made a major contribution to the 2003 Corsham Festival. We "delivered" two of the best-attended events – the presentation by Nick McCamley of his book, "Secret Underground Cities", and the introduction to "Stické Tennis", staged at Hartham Park.

The problem with doing it once is that you want to



keep doing it. The Executive is giving the matter serious thought. We are in discussion with the Festival Team on an appropriate subject. Our next edition of Spotlight is due for release during Festival Week itself – so you will need to read the Programme's fine print to see which event we are sponsoring this year. At this stage, we can only urge you to attend it when you spot it.

It is always good to report progress on the various activities we undertake on behalf of the local community. Just recently, two matters have gone the way we would have wished.

Firstly, the exterior of 1 High Street (opp. Methuen Arms) has been extensively refurbished. It had been a designated "Building at Risk" and blot on our town centre for far too long. The owners have acted responsibly and put the necessary work in hand. We congratulate them on their action. The result is most attractive. We feel very pleased that our work behind the scenes with the Built Environment Team at NWDC and Wiltshire Historic Buildings Trust Ltd has paid off.

Secondly, we were delighted to see that the appeal against the refusal to allow the erection of a mobile phone mast on a site adjacent to Newlands Road has, in February, been rejected. We played our part in expressing the view that the installation would be detrimental to the street scene and inappropriate to the circumstances whereby the Golden Path originally come into existence. We congratulate the residents of Alexander Terrace and Meriton Avenue for their tenacity in fighting the application from the outset. It was a pleasure to add our weight to their campaign.



## Welcome to New members

Currently our membership stands at 144!

The Executive Committee extends a very warm welcome to all those who have joined us in recent months. It was good to meet some of you at the January Mulled Wine and Nibbles night, and at February's meeting for the eagerly-awaited talk by Las Davis on the history of our local roads

We have every expectation that we may continue this growth, with an excellent programme of talks and other activities.

Hopefully we can enlist the active support of some of our new

members towards this objective.

We do recognise however that new members may need a little time to find their feet. But it occurs to us that the timing of the AGM 28 May 2004 – is just about perfect!

We would ask all members, new and old to please consider whether you could make some, however small, contributions to the successful running of the Society – in this case “more cooks may enhance the cooking”!!

## The Society Takes to its Feet

It is several years since the Corsham Civic Society organised a walk for its members and guests. We thought it was high time we reintroduced this opportunity to combine learning, exercise and social contact. Nothing too strenuous you understand, and with the added incentive (for those who need it) of a visit to a local hostelry at its conclusion. You will not find this event in the current issue of the 2004 programme – so please make a note of it on your ‘kitchen calendars’. We will of course announce it through our normal poster displays, nearer the time.

The date set is Wednesday 2 June 2004, starting at 6.30pm from Newlands Road Car Park. The intended distance – approx 2½ miles, which we estimate will take about 1½ hours. (More of a stroll than a walk). The general route – South Street, The Cleeve, The Batters, Ladbrook Lane, Westrop (almost), Corsham Park, Town Centre.

The date has been selected to avoid conflict with two very worthy opportunities which already exist in the Corsham

calendar for those seeking some exercise outdoors. As in previous years, the Corsham Town Council is organising a series of six Sunday afternoon springtime walks. These began on 7<sup>th</sup> March and end on 16<sup>th</sup> May. A listing of these – with brief details – is available at the Town Hall. Secondly, the Greater Corsham and Lacock Team Ministry is organising a 12-mile walk on Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> April, taking in all of the churches in its group. Canon Roger Clifton advises readers to refer to the next edition of Three Crowns for further details.

So, established members and recent recruits alike, the Society's Summer Walk is not to be missed. The distance should not be a deterrent, evenings should be light, and walking conditions good – weather permitting. The route provides a chance to see bits of Corsham which some of you perhaps, have never seen before. Our stalwarts will be on hand to point out/explain some of the more unusual features

## Christmas & New Year Celebrations

Our Christmas Lunch at Cinnamon was hailed as a great success, the restaurant was almost filled to capacity with Society members, and after we had recuperated from our own family celebrations, we took the opportunity to indulge in ‘Mulled Wine and Nibbles’ – a late celebration of the New

Year, but it gave us another chance to get to know each other in social surroundings. We hope that you all enjoyed it, and are ready to indulge in more socialising as the year progresses!!

## Poll Tax – does nothing Change?

In 1334 the taxes were raised on the ‘fifteenths and tenths’ principle which was based on the value of a persons ‘moveable’ possessions. A Townsman contributed 1/10<sup>th</sup> and a countryman 1/15<sup>th</sup>. In 1377 a proposed Poll Tax would supplement this with a payment of 4d per head, for everyone

over the age of 14 who was not a professional beggar.

Opponents said “This tax took more in proportion from the poor than from the rich”.

Source: ‘The Ways of Corsham’ by John Poulson.



## The 2004 Corsham School Awards

This year's Awards were a great success. "Sponsored by the Corsham Civic Society" was engraved upon the Years 10 & 11 Outstanding Contribution shields, our sponsorship and major participation in the adjudication of the Special Award for English was announced and our association with all three awards was acknowledged in the opening pages of the Programme and in the Introductory Speech.

The first two (Years 10 & 11) were awarded using criteria set by the School. This recognised all round contribution to the School's progress and well-being. All aspects of scholastic endeavour are taken into account, not just academic. It was in the Special Award for English that we really made our contribution – and it is here we must thank Gale Curry for her professionalism and sheer effort. Gale developed a strong relationship with Corsham School's Head of English, Naomi Boulding. They proved a winning combination. Here we should hand over to Gale herself, who writes:

*"I recently attended the Corsham School's second Annual Prize Giving Ceremony, to award the Civic Society Special Prize for English. In a poetry competition, devised with the English department, 85 pupils from years 9 and 10 submitted sonnets, on the theme "Then and Now". The winner, Alex Turner, was to receive an inscribed copy of "Other Men's Flowers", Wavells inspirational anthology, generously donated by Peter French of the Corsham Bookshop.*

*When I taught at the school, it always worried me that, while sporting achievements were made much of, and colours presented with much pomp and ceremony, academic achievements were studiously underplayed, and certificates distributed almost surreptitiously. This was part of a well intentioned but misguided attempt at egalitarianism, on the grounds that not all the pupils were gifted intellectually and that it would be invidious to praise those who were. (Was it not equally invidious to single out those who were gifted athletically?)*

*I was delighted that at long last due recognition is being given to the academic achievements and endeavour of the pupils as well as to the athletic. However, I admit to finding the event a little disappointing. It was well attended (although not all the prize winners had chosen to be there) and the newly enlarged school hall was almost full.*

*On the rostrum was an enormous and glittering array of cups, shields and statuettes*

*We were informed by the organising deputy head that*

*some 290 awards were to be presented to 247 students. With the sole exception of the prize I was to award (and that was in my lap and not on display) there was not a book to be seen!*

*When I was at school, prize winners were instructed to select books of their choice up to a specified value – depending on the sums that endowed the prize. These were then bought, their covers embossed with the school crest in gold, and the appropriately inscribed bookplate inserted, to be ceremonially bestowed by the invited luminary at the prize giving. True, the young people we saw receiving their cups that night had their moment of glory, but it was just a moment. In the preliminary speech before they were awarded, it was impressed upon them that they were not theirs to keep: they could display them at home for a mere three months – all had to be returned immediately after the Easter holiday. The cups did not look substantial enough for engraving, so their names will not be seen by subsequent winners. These were fleeting and ephemeral honours, soon to be forgotten. Perhaps they were also to receive commemorative certificates, but certificates tend to be lost or filed away and never looked at again.*

*I hope that Alex, the girl whose sonnet had so richly deserved her special prize, will treasure the book, and derive pleasure from it for the rest of her life – every time she opens it." - Gale Curry*

As Gale records, the only student to receive a prize they were entitled to retain was Alex Turner. She was a worthy winner and we are proud to have been able to sponsor her. We look forward to making this an annual event for the Corsham School and the Society. It was a pleasure to work with Martin Williams (the Headteacher) and his staff to make the evening the success it was. Peter French's donation of the prize was especially welcome. Thank you, Peter.



*Alex Turner, winner of the 2004 Corsham Civic Society Special Award for English, shown here with her prize*



## Questionnaire

We had an interesting response to the Questionnaire which we enclosed in the November issue of Corsham Spotlight. It has provided a valuable insight into your views on the functioning and future path for the Civic Society. We thank those who took the time to put pen to paper. We note that replies from members of our 14-strong Executive Committee were almost entirely absent. We can only assume that they felt disenfranchised on this occasion!

From the 15 replies it was clear that those members are satisfied with the number of talks we arrange for our Open Meetings and that the premises employed are satisfactory to all but 2. 11 out of 15 were happy with Friday evenings, but other suggestions included Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday as an alternative. We had one proposal that the meeting should start at 7.30pm rather than 8pm. Refreshments were considered satisfactory, although 2 deemed them unnecessary. The payment of £1 - members, £2 non-members was unanimously supported. Additional subjects for future talks were 'Local Archaeology', and an item on 'Displays and Presentations in Museums'.

Visits to other Civic Societies met the approval of 12 out of the 15, and suggestions of Chippenham, Bath, Bradford-on-Avon, Box, and Trowbridge were included.

The inclusion of more social gatherings in the summer evenings was met with majority approval, as was a 'day out' visit, with suggestions for visits to a Heritage or Historical site or property. 9 members considered that Corsham would benefit from having a Museum. Interestingly 3 were against the idea. 11 out of the 15 thought that HODS had been a success and should be repeated the need to work to increase our membership and introduce Corporate membership was supported by everyone.

Overall there was the opinion that the Chairman's Vision 'was realistic and achievable', and it is our intention to repeat the 'HODS experience', although perhaps on a slightly smaller scale in 2004.

As for the choice of day and time of our meetings, and their location, we take these on board very seriously. At the present time we are somewhat limited with respect to the availability of suitable venues. As ever, price is a major consideration - also convenience for some of our less mobile members, particularly in the winter months. For 2004 we hope that by extending our events to other days/evenings, if only in the summer, we will give people a better opportunity to make the most of their membership.

## Corsham Workhouse

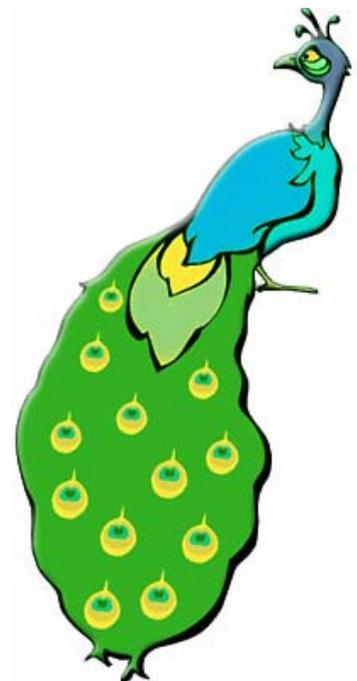
The Workhouse was situated behind what is now the E&S Electricity Showroom, next to the Royal Oak, in the High street. In 1728 four cottages on this site were converted to a workhouse, or poorhouse at a cost to the vestry of £400.

A private contractor ran the workhouse until 1798, and in 1800 a Master & Mistress were appointed at the salary of £12 per annum. Poorhouse children were put out to a trade and other inmates were employed in spinning and weaving. 2d of every 1/- earned was donated to the Master.

In 1832 £200 was raised and 16 men, 10 women and 27 children were selected for emigration. They were conveyed to Bristol in two covered wagons, where someone was appointed to meet them and purchase last minute requirements, and see them safely on board the ship, probably en route to Australia or Cleveland U.S.A.

In 1836 a new workhouse was built in Chippenham (now known as Chippenham Hospital) and the Corsham workhouse was closed and the building converted back to 3 cottages. In 1862 plans were passed to convert these three into five dwellings at a cost of £240.

Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the original building was fronted by a butchers shop, and above this addition the handsome pediment of the early building was visible for many years.



Source: Joe James



## Corsham Station Campaign

I need to recap on the previous update for the benefit of new members. In spring 2003 Keith Walton of the Rail Passenger Committee Western England, sent invitations to local authorities inviting them to an inaugural meeting of the Community Rail Partnership for Bristol. Following WCC Cabinet refusal of my request for WCC to meet with First Great Western re the inclusion of a local service in the next round of franchises, I was anxious that Wiltshire should not respond negatively to the latest opening. At first I was told they had not received an invitation; RPCWE, however, confirmed they had, plus 2 phone calls requesting their participation! When I wrote to WCC to express my disquiet I was told that "Bernard Lane attended on behalf of the Heart of Wessex Partnership. Informed us...the new rail partnership will probably focus on the Gloucester – Bristol - Taunton axis initially and may well not be involved with lines east of Bath....Although grateful for the opportunity to participate from the outset, the proposed Community Rail Partnership does not look particularly suitable as a vehicle for Wiltshire to pursue its rail aspirations at this time because of the decisions of the inaugural meeting mentioned above.!!! I attended the meeting for rail interested groups the following week and was dismayed to hear that WCC could be ignored in future- their non-attendance was not unreasonably interpreted as total lack of interest. A loud plea "Persevere with Wiltshire" was recorded. YOU CAN HELP by encouraging friends in West Wiltshire to lobby their councillors on this issue. Remember, a random 3,000 Wiltshire residents responded to a WCC "Peoples Voice" questionnaire, their stated preference was funding of public transport – new roads being the least popular. With that knowledge, contained in their first LTP report, it would be reasonable to expect that WCC Councillors and Officers would take every opportunity for dialogue and working with adjacent Councils to seek improvements to our local rail services.

Did you know that at the time our Station should have opened – one did – at Chandlers Ford in Hampshire? There

the County Council acted very differently, it was they who funded the building of the station, leaving the Strategic Rail Authority to contribute £3.4m for manning the new station and provision of the new service. Additionally, local authorities have formed a type of Passenger Transport Authority to take forward rail and other public transport schemes in the Bournemouth/Southampton area.

I recently travelled to Bristol by coach - due to a bridge bash and suicide - no 30 minute rail link! Instead I experienced a 1.45 hour journey with just one stop at Bath Spa Station en route to Temple Meads. Proof, if it were needed, that rail holds the key to our commuting problems. The meeting, at the invitation of London & Western who want to bid for the Greater Western Franchise in 2006, was to enable them to gain local knowledge Both the Portishead Group and I emphasised the large housing developments which had gained planning permission on the back of rail proposals, only to have the funding removed, without consultation, by the SRA. I was also pleased to hear that Ian Baxter of London & Western had visited our site and when I raised the question of the "chalk voids" with him - an oft repeated latter day SRA red herring - he was dismissive of this concern. However, a wider problem is caused by the target set by Government for the SRA - of increased passenger miles. Yet again - YOU CAN HELP – respond, (and encourage others to do the same) to the Government's recently announced Consultation on Rail and suggest a new target for year on year increased passenger journeys - otherwise investment will continue to flow to long-distance projects, and not the less commercially attractive provision of local rail schemes which are needed to overcome the problems of congestion into our cities".

Anne Lock

## Notes for your Diary

A date for your diary – July 4<sup>th</sup> at 12 noon when we shall be having a **CCS Summer Barbecue at the Royal Oak in Corsham**.

Although intended mainly for members, guests will be welcome however, please let Eric Mahy know approximate numbers nearer the time, so that we can arrange catering for the expected attendees, and also any special dietary requirements.

Fine weather has been ordered!

Make a note of another date - Friday 15<sup>th</sup> October 8pm at Church House, Church St. for a talk by Isobel Geddes of the Wiltshire Geology Group on "**Hidden Depths: Wiltshire's geology - the basis of our landscapes and buildings**". A pictorial tour across Wiltshire, showing how the landscape is inextricably bound up with the rocks hidden beneath the surface, which fundamentally affect the character of both countryside and town. Corsham, built of the Jurassic limestone beneath it, is a fine example of this link.



## Society Display Cabinet at the Corsham TIC

As, we hope, many of you will know, for some months now, we have been afforded the opportunity to display our notices and other materials in the left-hand window (as viewed from the High Street) of the Corsham Tourist Information and Heritage Centre (TIC). We have to be honest and say that we have not been particularly pleased with our efforts. In reality the cabinet we have been using does not lend itself to the purpose too readily. We have taken steps to correct this – in collaboration with Martin Yallop (the NWDC manager) – and hope you will see some

improvements shortly. Please look out for them.

We continue to display our posters in the Society's own glass-fronted notice board to be found adjacent to the pathway between the High Street and the long-term car park behind the Methuen Arms, on the (shiny new) glass-fronted "Community Notice board" which now graces the Martingate Centre, in the Library, and inside the Flemish Weaver public house. Who says we don't try to project ourselves to a wide audience?



## Martingate Centre

Our revamped shopping centre continues to improve, both in its appearance and in the occupancy of its units. It seems that not a month goes by without its developers, Martingate Development Ltd, submit a new planning application to add to, or enhance, the structure in some way. As a Civic Society we are bound to observe that the result is very pleasing on the eye, and has confounded our worst fears that "making a silk purse out of a sow's ear" would be a disaster for all involved. Some of those amongst us who were critical of the plan to extend forward the two units which face on to the

High Street now feel that the benefits outweigh the loss of a covered walkway. However there are still some dissenters!

With the extension to Wiltshire College and with Butfield Breach moving into its "kiosk", unit occupancy is approaching 100%. The construction company, Britannia, is now moving off-site, the old Cornford 's shop is ready for a new tenant, Peter French is almost able to expand into his new Corsham Bookshop space, new signage is being erected and the Centre has an air of completeness about it. We congratulate Bill Hall and his team on a job well done.

## Grants Secured by the Society

This is a brief description of the equipment and facilities we have been able to secure for the Corsham Civic Society through or successful applications for various grants.

The 'Awards for All' donation from the National Lottery for nearly £5,000 has been spent so far on: equipment for preparing and providing professional presentations; and a computer for administrative functions. We hope to buy in the near future, a small Public Address system and a projector screen so that we may fully enjoy our speakers in our very well-attended social events.

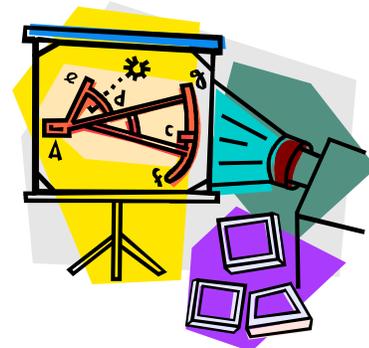
We have also been successful in obtaining a donation from Microsoft, who are providing software that will enhance our presentation capability.

For those who wish to prepare a presentation to CCS members, the presentation package is available for both preparation and provision of your presentation – see any Executive Committee member for details.

The specification for those interested is as follows:

- Dell DHS500M Laptop with CD-ROM, DVD and Floppy disc readers
- NEC LT220 Digital Projector
- Software capability comprising: MS XP Office Professional, MS Visio, and MS Presentation packages

Anyone interested in giving a presentation at our social evenings should speak in the first instance to Les Davis, Events Organiser.



## Did you know?

### **Sport in Corsham**

**Cricket** – Has been played here since 1848. In the early days the start of the season was dictated by the Hay Harvest. As soon as the hay was cut the cricket could commence. Early rivalry grew between the Corsham side and nearby Marshfield whose team was captained by the legendary W.G. Grace. The famous man played at Corsham in 1893. The original use of the field was for the Annual Horsefair, hence the name for the. Horsefair Cottages nearby.

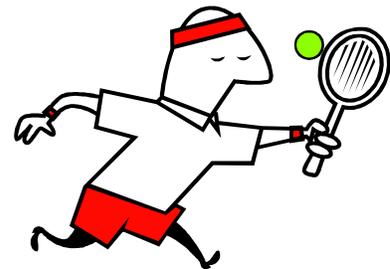
**Football and Tennis clubs**– were also established in the 1800's, and a Cycling Club – made its debut in 1890, opening with an illuminated procession, and attended by the Corsham Brass Band.

**Bowls Club** – In 1913 a newspaper report tells us the following

“It has been decided to form a bowling club in the town, and for this year at any rate the cricket field is to be the site, that portion towards the south-eastern corner being

selected. It is to be opened on Monday evening at 6 o'clock, and the Vicar (The Rev H.B.Ellison) has been asked to become the president for this season. The subscription for the season shall be 7s.6d.”

Source: - “Corsham Illustrated History by CJ Hall.



## Our Quest for a Museum

Expressed succinctly, “our quest goes on”. Our every attempt to find a location in which to site a museum has been thwarted to date. What is sure is that we are not going to obtain suitable premises without having to pay for them. Furthermore, even if we were to find a site whose cost were truly “peppercorn”, it is most unlikely to be in a location convenient for Corsham folk to visit readily.

We have been bound to acknowledge the need to staff the facility, on a continuing basis, – and, generally to “manage” it. Frankly it all begins to look an impossible dream, a conclusion which is rather difficult to accept. Over the years the Society has attracted several donations of goods and chattels whose original owners (some of whom are now no longer with us) had bestowed them upon us in the fond expectation that we would both take good care of them, and make them visible to a wider audience. We also know that there are more such items “out there” which would come our way, if only we were to declare a willingness to receive them.

Reluctantly we have had to “duck” such situations of late. We just have not got the space to store and care properly for the items we already possess – still less to

catalogue them and prepare them for display.

Our investigations have led us into talks with those officers at Wilts County Council who have responsibility for assisting groups like our own to establish and run museums. WCC does not run museums itself – only support those who do. These talks have reinforced the notion that a Corsham Museum is a bridge too far. There is an alternative – albeit a lesser one, in our eyes – and we must now look at it. It would still afford visibility of our collection of artefacts and documents to the general public, but the method employed would be “virtual”, rather than “real”.

It all sounds rather “high-tech” but we cannot rule it out and will investigate further. Its merit is that it will require neither a permanent site nor continuous support staff. It does, however, mean that those members who have been storing our goods for more years than they care to remember will need to do so for some years to come, if that is not possible then we shall have to look for alternative homes, albeit on a temporary basis. We will keep all of you informed as our investigations proceed.



## Civic Society Officers

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We're on the Web!

See us at:

[www.Corsham-Civic-Society.co.uk](http://www.Corsham-Civic-Society.co.uk)

## Obituaries

### Bill Langley-Jones.

It is with great sadness that we report the death of Bill Langley – Jones. Bill had been a member of the Society for more years than most of us care to remember, and he was a stalwart of our Planning committee, where his knowledge as a civil engineer, and his long experience working with the NWDC enabled him to give us

sound advice regarding all aspects of new buildings and additions to properties. He will be very much missed.

We extend our sincere condolences to Mary and her family, and look forward to welcoming Mary back to our functions sometime as soon as she finds it possible

### David Yeatman.

We must also extend our sympathy to June on the loss of her husband. David had been ill for a long time, and had only been

able to attend one or two of our meetings, but we do hope that June will feel able to come to our meetings again soon.

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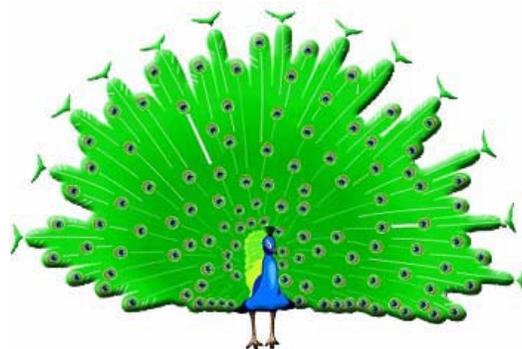
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### Corsham Civic Society

*Corsham Civic Society was founded in 1963 to represent the people of Corsham in all aspects of conservation, preservation and the promotion of this delightful Wiltshire town.*

*The Society is a registered Charity, a member of the Civic Trust and ASHTAV (Association of Small Historic Towns & Villages of the UK).*

*It is our aim to promote high standards of planning and architecture, to create a wider awareness amongst the local population of environmental issues, the geography, history, natural history and architecture of the area, and to secure the preservation, protection and improvement of features of public amenity and/or historical interest, both in Corsham and in the surrounding countryside.*



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