



Corsham Spotlight

Journal of the Corsham Civic Society
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Contributions to Spotlight are very welcome. Please contact the editor, John Maloney, at: johnmaloney2003@aol.com

Corsham's Mansion House ~ part 2



Work begins on improving the setting of Corsham's Mansion House!?

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From the Chairman

Today is October 25th, just two months from Christmas Day, doesn't time fly!! 2017 has been another successful year for the Society with a wide range of interesting talks and two visits, one to Wadworth's Brewery and the second to the Westonbirt Arboretum. The programme for 2018 looks to be another winner and you'll find details of the programme on the last page of this magazine.

This will be, for me, my last November piece entitled 'From the Chairman' as I intend to stand down at next May's Annual General Meeting. Nine years is time enough for one person to be Chairman and I've enjoyed every moment of it, but it's time for someone else to step forward and take the Society forward. There's plenty of work to do and I hope to remain on the Committee for several more years, as long as they will have me!!

We have been experiencing some difficulty in distributing copies of the 'Spotlight' magazine after publication day. Members have collected their copies while attending the March, July and November meetings and a number of kind people have offered to take other members' magazines and deliver them. There remains quite a number of magazines to be delivered or collected. From the next issue in March, any 'Spotlight' magazine remaining after the meeting will be taken to Barnett Brothers, the newsagents in the High Street, from where they can be collected. Mrs Garcha, of Barnett Bros, has kindly offered to hold the box of magazines until they've all been collected by yourselves. Those members who receive their copies by post, can still receive them in this manner unless they wish to view the magazine online on the Society's website. Your help in this matter will be greatly appreciated.

All that remains for me to do is to wish everyone a very Happy Christmas and a prosperous and healthy New Year.

Michael Rumsey

*With all best wishes for this festive season from the Officers
and Executive Committee Members*



Membership News

I'm pleased to announce that Larry St Croix has become a member of the committee and would like to extend our commiserations on the recent death of his sister. Our editor, John Maloney, hasn't been too well of late, a short spell at the RUH has been sadly coupled with the passing of his mother and on behalf of the committee and members I expressed our sincere sympathies to John and family.

David Taylor, Chairman of the Pickwick Association and Larry Porges, Washington DC, have applied to join the society.

The Mansion House and the Secretary of State's decision and Localism

I make no apologies for the amount of space taken up in this issue by matters concerning planning, archaeology, heritage and conservation areas. Corsham's Mansion House and the Bath Road development in Pickwick both invoke key issues about the effectiveness of the concept of 'Localism'. Planning decisions about Corsham Mansion House are also an important test of the significance attached to Conservation Areas [this year is the 50th anniversary of the creation of the legislation - see article, pps. 10-11]. Fundamentally, at issue is how planning matters impacting on Corsham are dealt with by Wiltshire Council.

As you will know from the last issue, just as we went to press, the Secretary of State announced that Listed Building Consent had been granted, subject to conditions.

The Planning Casework Manager for the Department for Communities and Local Government, wrote to Wiltshire Council on 19th July, as follows:

*Paragraph 134 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states that where a development proposal will lead to **less than substantial harm** to the significance of the heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the benefits of the proposal including securing its optimum viable use. The Secretary of State has considered carefully the proposal, including the objections submitted by the Ancient Monument Society and the Georgian Group, but has concluded that the benefits of the proposal outweigh the harm to the heritage asset. [the underlined and bold fonts are mine]*

The conditions were standard and a separate Note was attached setting out the circumstances in which the validity of the Secretary of State's decision might be challenged in the High Court.

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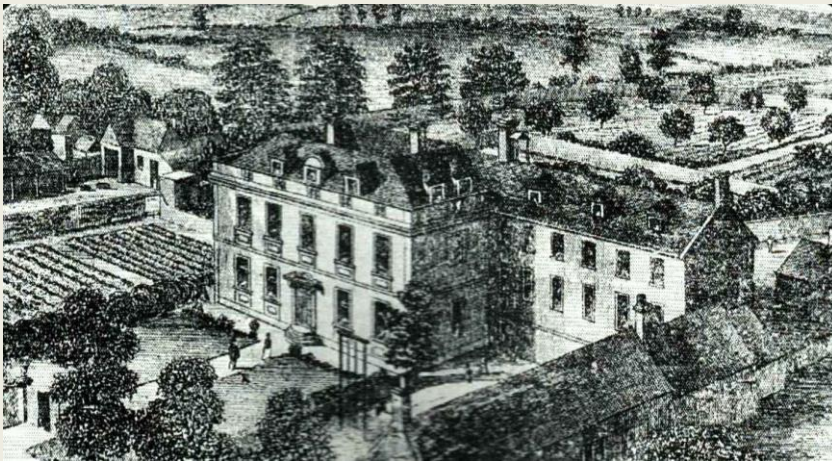
Of course, the phrase 'less than substantial harm' begs so many questions. Turning to 'the Framework', as noted by one of those in opposition to the scheme as presented by Wiltshire Council, various points were worthy of note and comment:

Paragraph 8 requires where there is a conflict between the proposed development and conservation of a heritage asset, decision-makers must consider whether there is an alternative means of delivery, before weighing those benefits against harm.

At the Wiltshire Strategic Planning Committee meeting, Wiltshire Council's Committee paper did not present any alternative options.

Paragraph 132 requires decision-makers to give "considerable importance and weight" to the preservation of the setting of listed buildings"

The strong advice from the amenity societies was that far from the over-assertive proposed extension having no adverse impact, it would cause substantial harm.



The Mansion House in 1897



Recently produced artists' impression of the Mansion House scheme ~ note how the extension is still very much to the fore with the Mansion House largely hidden behind large trees [the former artists' impression still features on the hoarding ~ see front cover of previous issue].

Paragraph 64 requires that "new development [should] make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness" and that "permission should be refused for development of poor design".

Article continues next page...

The Wiltshire Council planning officer reported that the demolition of the former library building would have a neutral impact on the conservation area and went on to assert that the proposal (which must, therefore, include the new building) would provide “direct enhancements”. It was difficult to conclude there was anything distinctive or enhancing in the proposal put before the Wiltshire Strategic Planning Committee. If councillors considered the application to be of poor design – or could have been better – or the design failed to take opportunities available for improving the public realm, then the NPPF unequivocally states the default position should be refusal of consent. Corsham had a once in a life-time opportunity to see the former library site and Mansion House brought back to life. Economic vicissitudes do not outweigh material considerations, especially when an alternative method of delivering the regeneration was available. In conclusion, members of the Committee were strongly urged to endorse the detailed exploration of developing the areas to the south (rear) of the Mansion House for an extension, which would deliver the economic benefits all wish to see, while not causing substantial harm to a remarkable building. It was the pragmatic way forward but that recommendation was ignored.

Localism

The Coalition government formed in Britain in May 2010 made localism a core part of its political programme. The Coalition Agreement promised **‘a fundamental shift of power from Westminster to people’ and said that the new government ‘would promote decentralisation and democratic engagement and end the era of top-down government by giving new powers to local councils, communities, neighbourhoods and individuals’** (Cabinet Office, 2010:11). In June 2010, Eric Pickles, Minister for Communities and Local Government, declared that his priorities were localism, localism and localism. In December 2010, the government introduced the Decentralisation and Localism Bill, as a key component of the government’s flagship ‘Big Society’ policy, with the assumption that localism and decentralisation have a positive effect on community empowerment.

Unfortunately, all too often in recent years the debate and narrative around community empowerment, Big Society, localism and the future of local government and public services has overlooked or merely scratched the surface of the role of local (parish and town) councils. Wiltshire Council should take heed and rather than take the view that ‘nanny knows best’ engage with local councils, not least, where there are issues concerning their heritage ~ see <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/documents/project-reports-and-reviews/connected-communities/connecting-localism-and-community-empowerment/>

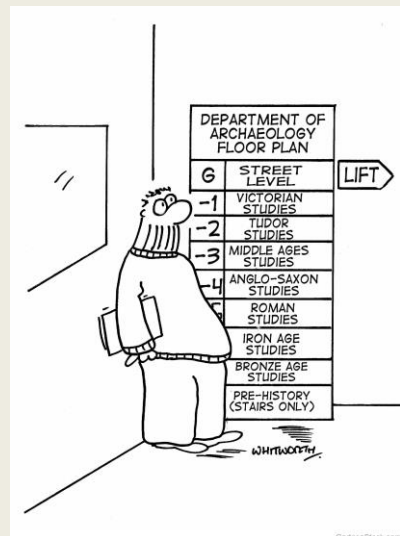
John Maloney

Corsham's Mansion House and Archaeology

Another particularly disappointing aspect of Wiltshire Council officers' reaction to heritage matters concerning the site was in respect of archaeological potential. In correspondence, the planning case officer made clear his 'view' that "if there is any archaeology, it is likely to have been thoroughly disturbed, consequently no archaeological assessment was prepared for the application". Belatedly, this position was formally supported by the county archaeologist. Without any physical evidence such a position is unreliable, as anyone who has worked on archaeological sites knows: the library is a single story building built on four foundation walls encompassing a large area and doesn't have a basement or cellars. From my experience of hundreds of urban and numerous rural sites I can provide innumerable examples where archaeological remains survived within much, much smaller footprints.



Indeed, as recently as July, the antiques Roadshow presenter, Marc Allum digging in his back garden in Chippenham, unexpectedly came across a Roman site! With acknowledgement to firenewsfeed.com



In addition, the county archaeologist asserted that the application site lies outside 'what is regarded' as the core of the medieval settlement of Corsham, without citing any evidence or being able – as I had requested – to provide any plan or map representing that core area. Corsham is a classic 'linear' settlement centred along the High Street which to the south joins the junction with the road which - to the northwest - goes towards Bath and, to the southeast, to Laycock, and on to Melksham etc. On the other side of the junction is the site of The Mansion House and it is most likely that the site would have been within the southern boundary of the medieval town [similarly, as with a number of nearby buildings of perhaps 17th century date or earlier ~ 1 Station Road, Horsefair Cottages, the 1668 Almshouses etc.]. Also, why just cite the medieval period and ignore the potential that exists for archaeology of other periods, namely, prehistoric, Roman [see p. 17], Saxon and Post-Medieval/Modern. In the latter respect, the 1720's mansion and grounds undoubtedly have archaeological potential which should be treated seriously and archaeologically investigated.

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Historical Archaeology is the study of relatively recent documented periods, from the end of the Middle Ages to the 21st century and is one of the most dynamic areas of archaeology, examining compelling issues such as modernity and capitalism on a global scale through artefacts, landscapes and documents. Many 18th century buildings and their estates have contributed to significant advances in such knowledge. For instance, during an archaeological investigation that I organised at The Grove, on the edge of Watford, Hertfordshire, in 2002 - the main mansion building was constructed in 1720 - significant remains from all the main periods of human cultural development in this country were encountered, not least the 18th .

Unfortunately, there is no published archaeological research framework for Corsham, despite its significant history; indeed, Corsham was excluded from *The Archaeology of Wiltshire's Towns, an Extensive Urban Survey*. In short, there is virtually no empirical evidence for the archaeological potential of Corsham. So, no-one knows (or can know) the actual archaeological potential of the site unless at least some minimal investigations are carried out.

At the least, an Archaeological Watching Brief [at least one person with archaeological knowledge **watching** the contractors works - rather than digging - with the possibility of doing limited recording] combined with **the proposed** contractor's geotechnical/ground investigations would provide a relatively cheap, time-limited and effective operation. It's an incontrovertible fact that archaeological remains can survive between foundation walls and an integrated programme of geo-technical and archaeological test pits have long been a means of establishing actual physical evidence. In that respect, the status of what are variously referred to as 'gardens' and also - more accurately at present - as grass lawns at the back of the mansion, would be resolved.

In stark contrast to the lack of any archaeological provision for this important town centre site, the commercial developers of the Bath Road site [see reports in the previous and this issue] through the planning process, had to commission a professional archaeological unit to excavate some 20+ trenches on that site on which no former settlement or archaeology is known. As a programme of geotechnical/ground investigation test pits was proposed in advance of construction on the Mansion House site, the integration of an archaeological Watching Brief [involving limited expense and little or no delay] would be a means of physically ascertaining the actual potential of the site and might have possibly included some form of low level community involvement [for instance, at the very least, a site visit for all those many local people who are very interested].

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That is why the Corsham Town Council planning committee on 15th March, made clear its concerns that 'there had been no archaeological assessment carried out on the site' by resolving that '..... an archaeological watching brief be put in place on any geotechnical/ ground investigation test pits'. But as with representations made by Corsham Town Council and numerous of its inhabitants to Wiltshire Council about heritage issues regarding this project, it was not even discussed, it was in fact completely ignored. So much for Localism.

In all this, I'm not trying to 'teach my grandmother to suck eggs' but after a 40 year career in archaeology and having published numerous articles about the approaches, techniques and regulation of archaeology - <https://birbeck.academia.edu/JohnMaloney> - I know what I'm talking about. Even allowing for the fact that county archaeological services have generally been much reduced, I cannot understand such defensive, stonewalling responses as those that I received.

John Maloney

Proposed development of land north of the A4 - the Gladman/ Redrow [opposite St. Patrick Catholic Church]

The long running disputes over this planning application continue [see Summer 2017 issue, pps. 5-6] with Wiltshire Council planning officers.

Issues of fundamental importance continue to cause serious concern in this case in two areas - **Land Stability** and **Minerals Planning Consents** - that should have received close and careful attention from the outset five years ago. Errors and omissions by officers made then, despite having been drawn to their attention, are persistently ignored



In the July issue we noted - over-optimistically, with hindsight - that the legal and Geotech information commissioned and paid for by The Pickwick Association (TPA) and made available to Wiltshire Council's planning officials, "...*should certainly give the case officer cause to reconsider his stance when redrafting his report...*" to the planning committee that, at the time, was due to consider Redrow's two 'Reserved Matters' applications.

It didn't. All of the provided information, as well as five well-researched, accurate, relevant, professionally delivered personal statements (made by three residents, plus Ruth Hopkinson and Neville Farmer for the Town Council), to the planning committee when they met on 6 September was totally ignored. A token interest in a single WWII tree apart, not a nod of acknowledgement was shown by officers or the committee's chairman towards ANY of the points made in ANY of these statements (all were mailed individually and in advance to every member of the committee). The applications were approved by six votes to two; one member, so disinterested they couldn't be bothered to vote, even abstained!

Land Stability - In his January 2014 report recommending refusal of Gladman's initial application the case officer wrote "*It is apparent from the reports submitted that due consideration has been given to the NPPG guidance on assessing stability issues and by extension the relationship between the /former/current underground mining operations and the surface of the application site. The recommendations set out in the [developer's] report in relation to the structural implications of mining activity beneath (or in the vicinity of) the proposed housing are of course circumspect; however, for obvious reasons, this is to be expected. From a purely geotechnical perspective, it is found that the submitted reports appear to provide sufficient information upon which to reconcile site stability with the principle of development, [our emphasis] in accordance with paragraph 121 of the NPPF*".

Those reports on behalf of the developer addressing the fundamental principle of putting a housing estate immediately on top of a working stone quarry should have been subjected to rigorous independent professional scrutiny before concluding that they "...*appear to provide sufficient information...*". They were not; the detailed independent scrutiny conducted for TPA by GWP Consultants LLP (see paragraph 2 above) was supplied in full to WC in June, but has been totally ignored. The fact remaining today is that the veracity of those "*submitted reports*" that "...*appear to provide sufficient information...*" has been clearly shown by the evidence submitted to WC in GWP's reports to be gravely misleading. WC have consistently ignored this in the past and obstinately continue to do so now.

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Minerals Planning Consents - Condition 8 of Wiltshire Council's current Mineral Planning Permissions relating to the site permission N98/1945 includes the following requirements pertinent to this application:

"Notwithstanding the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (or any Order amending, replacing or re-enacting that Order), no buildings or fixed plant shall be installed, erected, modified or placed within the surface area of the site without the prior written approval of the Mineral Planning Authority." [our emphasis]

In his proof of evidence dated 23 December 2014 to the planning inquiry The Council's Environmental Health Officer (EHO) stated: *"My reading of this condition would be that the development would not be able to proceed without the written approval of Wiltshire Council's Mineral Planning Authority which to my knowledge has not been sought nor is it likely to be agreed".* TPA have been unable to find any evidence in the public domain that the required written approval was subsequently sought or been given.

Council officers, asked if written approval was indeed given by the Mineral Planning Authority, and to provide copies of such approval for the proposed development, replied including the following: *"No written approval specifically under the terms of this condition has been sought....."*

The remaining conditions – numbers 22 & 23 - These are two inter-related conditions that must be satisfied – by September 2018 - before any development can commence. They require mitigation of the potential effects on residents of houses on the site of noise and vibration from underground mining underneath it. Gladman (note, the originator of this proposal, not Redrow) have made several attempts to discharge or amend them, all of which so far have failed. Wiltshire Council's latest information is *"With regard to the mining condition, we recently met with the Applicant's consultants to agree a way forward and it is likely they will need to go back to virtually the start of the process to ensure we are provided with robust data and modelling. We have agreed a considerable extension of time to allow for this, which will not be a quick exercise.*

David Taylor, Chairman, Pickwick Association

50 years of Conservation Areas

It is 50 years since the Civic Amenities Act 1967 introduced the concept of protecting the character of areas of historic and architectural interest by the designation of conservation areas. The concept of conservation areas was introduced in England, Wales and Scotland by the Civic Amenities Act 1967 through a private members bill led by Lord Duncan Sandys who was staunchly supported by the Civic Trust. The successor of the Civic Trust, Civic Voice, now holds the annual Sandys Lecture in his name.

Civic Voice – which CCS is in process of joining - writes:

When conservation areas legislation was introduced there was widespread public concern over the pace of redevelopment in our historic towns and cities. Today there are over 10,000 conservation areas in the UK (approximately 9,300 in England, 500 in Wales, 650 in Scotland and 60 in Northern Ireland) reflecting the popularity of this legislative tool in identifying and protecting our most valued historic places.

Conservation area designation essentially controls the demolition of unlisted buildings over a certain size and works to protect trees, restricts permitted development rights on dwelling houses and tightens regulations on advertising. It also places a statutory duty on local planning authorities to pay special attention to preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas while undertaking their planning duties.

To mark the 50th Anniversary, Historic England has been working with Civic Voice and the Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC) to build a picture of their members' attitudes towards conservation areas half a century on through two parallel surveys. A range of Civic Voice members from local civic societies across the UK and IHBC professionals from the public and private sector took part in the surveys.

The overall picture indicates that conservation areas have been effective at preserving areas of historic and architectural interest. The picture, however, is not all positive and respondents did identify a number of issues to be confronted in this anniversary year. The controls in conservation areas are not well understood. And of the respondents who did report significant change in their local conservation area in the last three years, more were likely to perceive a deterioration rather than an improvement.

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Street clutter, the loss of traditional paving materials, advertisements, a lack of maintenance and loss of historic details were the five most significant concerns identified by both groups. When the problem of the loss of historic detailing was examined in more detail the most frequently mentioned concerns were with doors and windows, signs and advertising, shopfronts and the deteriorating condition of front elevations generally.

Historic England has noted that Conservation Areas exist to preserve the special architectural and historic interest of a place - in other words, the features that make it unique. Every local authority in England has at least one conservation area and there are now over 10,000 in England. Amongst other aspects reported on were:

- Wiltshire has the most conservation areas with 246 across the county. Followed by Cornwall, with 146, and the Cotswold district, with 145
- The top threats to conservation areas are: unsympathetic doors or windows; poorly maintained streets, walls, fences or hedges; satellite dishes; effects of traffic management; alterations to walls, roofs or chimneys; unsympathetic new extensions; impact of advertisements; neglected green spaces.
- research indicates that houses in conservation areas sell for a premium of 9% on average
- Estate agents were surveyed for their views on conservation areas and 75% agreed that a well-maintained conservation area added to property value, while 82% felt that original features added to a property's value.

Interesting food for thought given a number of misconceptions by some members of the public and some local authorities. In this year of the 50th anniversary celebrations of the creation of Conservation Areas and their impact on the architectural heritage, Corsham Civic Society is intent on playing its part with its Corsham High Street project [CHSP] [p. 13], Corsham Shop Frontages and Signage [CSFS] project [p. 14], and adding its voice to pressure for review of the nearly 20-year old Corsham Conservation Area Statement. Given all the above, 2018 should be a busy and productive year. Also, we look forward to the publication of the long awaited Corsham Neighbourhood Plan which will be a test of what 'Localism' will mean to the people of Corsham and its Town Council

John Maloney

This article is dedicated to the memory of Sally Fletcher who, just before her untimely death, offered to write about the 50th Anniversary of Conservation Areas.

THOUGHTS ON PLANNING MATTERS

A poem by John Betjeman ~

Inexpensive Progress

Encase your legs in nylons,
 Bestride your hills with pylons
 O age without a soul;
 Away with gentle willows
 And all the elmy billows
 That through your valleys roll.

Let's say goodbye to hedges
 And roads with grassy edges
 And winding country lanes;
 Let all things travel faster
 Where motor-car is master
 Till only speed remains.
 Destroy the ancient inn signs
 But strew the road with tin signs
 'Keep left', M4, 'Keep out'
 Command, instruction, warning'
 Repetative adorning
 The rockier roundabouts.

For every raw obscenity
 Must have it's small 'amenity'
 It's patch of shaven green,
 And hoardings look a wonder
 In banks of floribunda
 With floodlights in between.

Leave no village standing
 Which could provide a landing
 For aeroplanes to roar,
 But spare such cheap defacements
 As huts with shattered casements
 Unlived in since the war.

Let no provincial High St
 Which might be your or my street,
 Look as it used to do,
 But let the chain stores place here
 Their miles of plain glass fascia
 And traffic thunder through.

And if there is some scenery
 Some unpretentious greenery
 Surviving anywhere,
 it does not need protecting
 For soon we'll be erecting
 A Power Station there.

When all our roads are lighted
 By concrete monsters sited
 Like gallows overhead,
 Bathed in the yellow vomit
 Each monster belches from it
 We'll know that we are dead.

CORSHAM HIGH STREET PROJECT ~ an update

In the last issue it was reported that the Wiltshire Building Record [WBR] were intending to embark on an in depth survey of some of the houses in Corsham High Street, with a view to identifying their origins and usage throughout the ages.

Representatives of Corsham Civic Society [the society] met with WBR in September and their chair, Gerald Steer, proposed that the society lead the project and that WBR would provide as much help and guidance as possible, to bring the project to a satisfactory conclusion. On behalf of the society, I said that I thought the society would accept the challenge but the proposal would first need to be discussed by its executive committee. I also stated that any such involvement would need to be on the basis of no financial risk to the society. Given that the above points were formally agreed, it was proposed that one of the first steps would be to advertise for volunteers on the society website, in the Spotlight magazine and through other media. WBR will also put forward some suggestions of likely candidates who may be interested eg those who took part in the recent Lacock Archive project, including a number of society members [Pat Whalley has agreed to co-ordinate volunteers].

I am pleased to be able to report that the society's Chairman has confirmed the key points are agreed and so a start can now be made on the project. Also, I'm pleased to report that Julian Orbach [editor, for the revised *The Buildings of England, Wiltshire* volume] has kindly agreed to be Hon. Chair saying, "Thank you for the offer and it would be an honour to accept" Concerning making a start, many thanks to Peter Tapscott for arranging the passing of £2500 from the former Corsham Area Heritage to the society for the CHSP. Amongst the first steps envisaged are ~

- as well as appearing in *Spotlight*, reports about the project will be placed in other local media **asking for more volunteers to contact us, including any who would like to be members of the CHSP project committee: we already have some but we will need more [in the first instance please contact johnmaloney2003@aol.com]**
- an ad hoc society project committee exists composed of those society members who attended the meeting with WBR. Once we have had responses from volunteers and those who are interested being on the committee, all the above to meet to discuss the project and matters such as the scope, governance, insurance, Health & Safety etc.
- following that, research to commence at WBR regarding the information available there about the buildings in the High Street which have been considered for potential inclusion.[Society members such as Pat Whalley and Negley Harte will take a lead].

Article continues next page...

- a meeting to be organised - perhaps at the Town Hall - to inform owners/occupiers about the project and sound them out about involvement, permissions etc. Also, to inquire whether any private house histories have been undertaken which could be made available
- I have begun to scope out an outline of the project and will get back in contact with the HLF and inform them of recent developments and note that we intend a follow up application for a grant.

John Maloney

Corsham Shops and Street Signage project

A discrete stand-alone project proposal on shop fronts and signage has been drafted by Paul Kefford. It is intended for it to result in a published document – envisaged in both printed form and dynamic searchable web resource on the society's webpage – which will examine all shop/former shop buildings from the Methuen Arms, along the High Street beyond the Post Office (to include the former bakers), returning via the Mayo Memorial up the High Street, incorporating the Martingate Centre and the shops along Pickwick Road.

It will bring together listing descriptions alongside photographs, record information on unlisted buildings and seek to capture information at historic chronological marking points. Information exists as to what the shops were selling in 1914; the Civic Society published in *Spotlight* previously what people remembered the shops to be in the 1950s; it could be easily recreated for the shopkeepers of 2000 and, obviously, the present day. It will describe the development of shop fronts – and how to read them – and be looking to draw out the good and not so good examples.

The project will draw on the photographic skills of a volunteer; memories of long-term residents; photographic archive material from the Civic Society etc., and desk-based research (probably, mainly at the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre). So the published document will be an historic record which will be of interest in and of itself, but will also be pointing to the gap in protection of Corsham's heritage and what the next steps might be. It will identify the 'heritage gap' and the need for external funding and, if joined up with other strands of work, should make the basis for an excellent HLF bid.

John Maloney

Sixty Years Ago, a disaster on Box Hill

For many years Box Hill had 2 public houses, the 'Quarryman's Arms', owned by Ushers Brewery of Trowbridge and the 'Rising Sun' owned by George's Brewery of Bristol. The 'Rising Sun' situated on the main A4 was a popular pub with a good skittles and darts team and every Christmas Bill & Joyce Griffin, the landlord and his wife, put on a superb party for the children of Box Hill and from the photographs taken over the years, you can see how much these parties were enjoyed. I can be seen with my mother in the 1946 photograph!



The Rising Sun in the 1940's



Rising Sun Christmas Party 1946 – the current chairman is in his mother's arms, 2nd person standing on the left.

In the 1920's the Bath Gas Light & Coke Company bought out the Chippenham Gas works and began laying new gas mains from Bathford to Chippenham and these cast iron pipes were situated either side of the main road on Box Hill. Wednesday, December 4th 1957 was a cold, foggy and frosty night and at approx. at 4.30am a huge explosion took place completely destroying the 'Rising Son' public house and killing Bill & Joyce Griffin along with their 4 year old son Andrew but their daughter Jane was seriously injured surviving the blast. Huge flames, some 30 feet high, lit up the whole scene as both gas mains, the 12 inch and the 4 inch had ruptured releasing coal gas into the atmosphere. Above the 12 inch gas main were the main Post Office telephone cables between Chippenham and Bath and these were immediately destroyed thus stopping any telephone use for those wishing to contact the emergency services. Charles Woodgate, a neighbour, drove to the Police station in Box to raise the alarm and fire units from Corsham, Chippenham and Bath rushed to the scene.



Firemen searching the wreckage of the pub gas explosion.

Thirteen year old Eric Callaway, who lived next door to the pub, was first on the scene and quickly found Jane Griffin and her aunt, Barbara Rogers and her 2 children who had clambered over the wreckage from their rooms at the east end of the building. Box Hill unfortunately has a sand fault which runs from the top of the hill under a number of properties right down to the Bybrook and when the cast iron gas pipes were laid in the trenches all those years before, it wasn't realised the problems that could occur 30 years or so later. The current gas mains now lie along Beech Road and are made of a toughened plastic material than can bend with the movement of the surrounding land.

The main A4 was closed for months while pipes were replaced, but the 'Rising Sun' was never rebuilt, it became a bus stop instead. The disaster never made the national papers as that evening the Lewisham rail crash took place with 92 people killed, another fog related accident.

I am indebted to Eric Callaway for lending me the photos of the public and a copy of the Bath & Wilts Evening Chronicle.

Michael Rumsey

Corsham Civic Society Artifacts

In the last issue we reported that we had passed a quantity of coins and artifacts to the Chippenham Museum for safe keeping. They would be known as the Corsham Civic Society collection and would be available for display and education as required.

There was some difficulty in identifying where these items were found, although we were confident that it was in the Corsham Area. However, just by chance, we were pleased to receive a collection of papers/books which once belonged to Mr Arthur Hobbs, from a relative, Mr R Powell of Bradenstoke, and amongst these was a transcript of a 'talk' he had apparently given to a local group of people, about the history of the town. It seems he was displaying some of the artifacts that had been discovered and among them was the Roman dice and coins that we showed in the article. Mr Hobbs told his audience that these were all found by men digging a trench to house a water main. We know that there was a big excavation in the High St at some time for the purpose of supplying a water main, but we have no way of confirming if this was the source of these items.



Mr Arthur James Hobbs

Mr Hobbs was born in North Bradley in 1880, he married Dorcas in 1902, and is found in Corsham in 1911. For 60 years he ran a saddlers, and later a cycle repair shop from his premises in the High St. (today Mr Fox's Dental Surgery).

Article continues next page...

In those days it was a dark little shop, a complete clutter of cycle parts, tyres, tools, trays of nuts and bolts with scarcely room to stand. As if to escape the gloom, Arthur Hobbs used to spend much of his time at the front door of the shop, to good effect – as for half a century Arthur was the local correspondent for the Wiltshire Times. Few people who mattered in local affairs failed to stop at the little shop for a chat, and few 'happenings' escaped his attention.

For 36 years he was a member of the local Fire Brigade, and wore the famous silver helmet of Captain for 15 years. He served in the Royal Field Artillery during WWI and was an archdeacon of the Baptist Church in Priory St, and a lifelong Liberal Supporter.

A great lover of the town, A J Hobbs gathered together an extensive collection of historical relics, found locally. These included a Roman dice, of the type which Roman soldiers might have cast lots, and a rare Roman lamp in the shape of a foot. Mr Corsham as he had become known, died in December 1959. He is buried at Corsham Baptist churchyard.

(Source ~ Mr Joe James, late local historian of Corsham).



The Hobbs collection

The collection of papers from Mr Powell, also included several newspaper articles referring to Prince Philip's stay in Corsham at Kingsmoor Naval Barracks, locally known as Royal Arthur, Westwells, and now known as Wadswick Common Retirement village. The papers are dated 1947, 1952, 1957, and 1969; *A History of Cricket in Corsham* by H Lakeman 1848-1928; and a notebook containing newspaper cuttings of cricket scores 1927 -1935. There was also a large photo which featured in the 'Illustrated' magazine, August 1947, which showed the members of the skittles teams (including Prince Philip), Kingsmoor (Royal Arthur) and Moonrakers (Corsham locals) who played at the Methuen Arms. These papers will be added to the CCS collection of papers at Wilts Record Office.



Kingsmoor & The Moonraker skittles teams (incl Prince Philip) gather for a news agency picture on the lawn of the Methuen Arms. 'Illustrated' magazine, August 1947.

The Team Behind the Story [Illustrated magazine, August 1947]

The picture by Baron on this weeks cover is the first colour photograph to be published of Britain's most discussed young man. Baron is a personal friend of Lieutenant Philip Mountbatten and went to Kingsmoor Naval Barracks, Wiltshire, to get exclusive pictures of his Service 'home'. The story of the skittles rivalry between 'Kingsmoor's' 'salt horses' or instructors, and the 'Moonrakers', Corsham's team is told on pages 7,8,9. The rivals took time off during a skittles match to pose for a news agency picture on the lawn of the Methuen Arms.

L.to R: (standing) Jack Powell, Chippenham (a bookie), Eric Horlock (butcher); Cdr 'Boatswain' E Wheldrake; Lt Philip Mountbatten; Lt Cdr KRG Suckling; Cmdr 'Boatswain' JH Clark; Lt Cdr WD O'Brien; Jack Daymond (baker); Lt Cdr PRG Worth; & Lt AL Green.
Front: Cdr Gunner AG Hancock; Joe Daymond (retired baker); Lt Cdr PJH Hoare; and Tom Ives (butcher)".

NB The Daymonds had an excellent bakery at 78 High St; Tom Ives was a family butcher at what is now 'Mother & Wild'; Lt Cdr Hoare, made his home here and wrote the book 'From Ceylon to Corsham' which includes mention of Prince Philip being at Royal Arthur.

Pat Whalley

Corsham Civic Society outings

Wadworth Brewery



Now this was certainly a tour not to forget. Our guide was excellent taking our party from the top to the bottom of the brewing tower and ensuring, by the time we came to sample the beers in the bar, that we knew everything about brewing and its history in Devizes. We also inspected the brewery's fine collection of horses and the drays they pull either around the town or at major shows.

Enjoying the delights of Autumal colours at Westonbirt Arboretum

A party of 23 members and friends enjoyed a most beautiful day on Friday, October 27th, to have a guided tour among the avenues of trees at Westonbirt. Our guides showed us with great pride historic trees which now displayed superb colours of the Autumn. It was truly a magical sight and most interesting.

Michael Rumsey



Corsham in pictures



During the Summer, I and others were amused to see a peacock apparently proudly looking out from its house, sniffing the air, in the High Street, near to the Post Office. A little later on, the same peacock [?] decided to go shopping!



An interesting and to my mind rather well designed new wall with 'blocked in window spaces', in Bath Stone, at No. 20 Pickwick Road

Latest on banking in Corsham

As a result of the petition in support of the Nationwide Building Society bringing a regular, personal banking service to the town the Town council is in discussions with Nationwide to see how they can work together in the future. Meanwhile, staff from the Melksham and Chippenham branches are running fortnightly drop-in sessions at the town Hall on a Tuesday, from 9am - 4.30pm to explain what they can offer. The next session is on 28th November.

John Maloney

Corsham in Focus – a photographic treasure hunt

This very successful book has led on occasions to streams of people walking past my house in Pickwick peering intently at its architectural features. The results of the competition for which there are cash prizes will be made known 'The Big Reveal' at 6pm, Friday 24 November at The Pound Centre, prior to the meeting of the Corsham Civic and a talk by Dr Negley Harte, fittingly entitled 'Corsham in Detail'. We will report the results in the next issue.

'The Sources for the history of education in Wiltshire' by Claire Skinner

The Civic Society's meeting at the end of September listened attentively to a lecture by Claire Skinner, the Principal Archivist at the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre in Chippenham, on the subject of the sources for the history of education in Wiltshire. It was a wide-ranging talk, since she was attempting to cover the whole of education and the whole of Wiltshire.

The history of education becomes easier to grasp after 1833, when the government first provided any money for it. Previously it had left it to a mixed and uncontrolled bag of individuals, charities and religious bodies. Religious bodies still controlled the government grant after 1833, and schools were founded which were either Anglican or non-conformist. The board schools after the Education Act of 1870 began to try to rationalise the situation, but it was not until the twentieth century that the state really began to take control of a rapidly expanding education system.

This lecture was the background to the study which the Civic Society is trying to sponsor of the development of schooling in Corsham from the original Free School of 1668 in the Lady Hungerford Almshouses, through the Methuen School of 1816 and the middle-class independent schools at Claremont (girls) and the Mansion House (boys), up to the government-grant using the British School of 1839 – the very room in which the Society now meets – and the National School of 1858 (now the Catholic Church), up to the Elementary School of 1895 (now the Pound Arts Centre), the origin of the present primary schools and the comprehensive school.

A small group of people are emerging to work on this interesting subject, for which the archaeological evidence is so striking in Corsham. We would welcome more keen volunteers. Please get in touch with Dr. Harte at n.harte@ucl.ac.uk

Dr. Negley Harte

CORSHAM CIVIC SOCIETY 2018

All meetings are at the Pound arts centre (telephone 01249 701628) at 7.30pm unless otherwise stated. Members £2, Non-Members £5, this includes free tea or coffee or £1 off a glass of wine. Guests are very welcome.

- 26 Jan David Leonard: *'Fragrant Harbour to Abode of Peace: An English Judge in the Far East'*
David Leonard, now a resident of Corsham, is about to retire as Judge of the Court of Appeal in Brunei
- 23 Feb Lunch at the Methuen Arms
- 23 Mar (meeting at Corsham Primary School, Pound Pill)
John Maloney: *'A Career in Ruins'*
John Maloney, now editor of *Corsham Spotlight*, long worked for the Museum of London
- 27 Apr Sir David Wilson: *'What are Museums for?'*
Professor Sir David Wilson, FBA, FSA, is the former Director of the British Museum
- 18 May AGM at the Town Hall
- 29 Jun (Note that this is not the usual Friday)
Thomas Woodcock: *'Heraldry and the College of Arms'*
Thomas Woodcock, FSA, is Garter King of Arms
- 27 July Richard Hoyle: *'The Industrial Revolution in Chippenham'*
Professor Richard Hoyle is the former General Editor of the Victoria County History of England
- 28 Sept Dorothy Treasure: *'The houses of Corsham High Street'*
Dorothy Treasure is the Principal Building Historian of the Wiltshire Buildings Record
- 26 Oct TBA
- 30 Nov Michael Rumsey, Dr Negley Harte, John Maloney and others: *'The History of Education in Corsham'*
Michael Rumsey is a retired primary school head-teacher, Negley Harte is a retired university lecturer, John Maloney is a retired archaeologist

* Please note that the Programme may be subject to changes