

# Corsham Spotlight

July 2009

Volume 7, Issue 2

*Newsletter of the Corsham Civic Society*



## Individual Highlights:

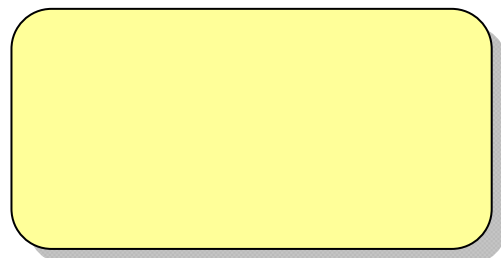
Editorial	1
New Chairman	2
Review	2
Forgery	2
HODS	3
Post of Editor	3
Book Review	3
Guyers House	4
Shergolds	5
'Line of Duty	6
Local Life	7
Qtr Session 1608	7
Altus Display	8
Olga Lehmann	9
Snippets	10
Station	11
Local Films	11

## Editorial

The 2009 AGM took place at the Town Hall in May, and a new committee, reduced in number, was elected. It is hoped that other members will continue to be willing to come forward to help at the various events we have in the year. (Committee members, whilst fully committed to the Society, still only have a limited amount of time they can use to run the Society successfully, whilst maintaining their other interests and family life). Dr Keith Robinson, Chief Executive of (the brand new) Wiltshire Council then spoke to the assembled gathering after the formal business had been dealt with, giving an overview of the new unitary authority, "Wiltshire Council, Wiltshire Communities". The Q & A session that followed the presentation was especially interactive and enlightening.

Planning Issues. The plans sub committee were pleased to see that the planning application to restore Rudloe Manor, by creating two apartments, and other accommodation in the attached listed buildings which form part of the estate, plus the introduction of 10 other new dwellings on the site, has been approved at last. The Planning Committee had requested that the building should be put on the 'At Risk' Register several years ago. This resulted in a hunt for the owner of the time, and two subsequent applications to restore and build on the site, all of which was refused. But now, a successful application, though there have had to be some compromises. In order to achieve restoration, the proposal had to include 'new build' homes to make it financially viable, and there is much concern about access to the site along a very slim lane. The Highways Authority will address this, probably by creating lay by type passing points.

Whilst being aware that this is not ideal, it would be hoped that most people will be delighted that this marvellous Grade II Listed Building will be restored at last.



Spotlight Magazine. Please note this is the penultimate copy of this magazine. My tenure at Editor will cease following the issue of the November Spotlight. It will be a great pity if new membership is no longer encouraged and existing membership maintained because our voice can no longer be heard in the local area, for the want of an editor.

*Pat Whalley*



## Our New Chairman

Michael Rumsey was born in the Nursing Home situated in Corsham High Street in October 1944, even though his parents lived in Chippenham. In 1946 they moved to Box Hill where he spent the next 14 years watching his beloved steam trains as they raced towards Box Tunnel or as they emerged from the smoke filled tunnel to continue to Bath and Bristol. He spent his school years in Corsham at the County Primary, then Regis School and finally at the Secondary Modern School under the eye of Harold Hull, the Headmaster.

Michael always wanted to be a teacher and always considered himself fortunate to train at Newton Park College, Bath. His first teaching post was in Warminster, with other posts in Bradford on Avon, Burnham on Sea, before moving to Mid Devon in 1977 to spend the next 23 years as Head Teacher of two rural primary schools situated at Poughill and Sampford Peverell. Retiring in 2000, Michael returned home to look after his Mother, which



he enjoyed very much. In 2007 he sold up the home on Box Hill and return to his place of birth, Corsham, where he enjoys living in Tellcroft Close with a much smaller garden, but a special room for his growing model railway layout!!

Since a very young age, Michael has been passionately fond of railways, steam ones especially and he still owns several pieces of equipment he rescued from Box Signal box which closed in 1964. His other main interest still lies in Box where he has served the Methodist Church as organist for the last 42 years. He combines this role with that of Senior Steward, which is equivalent of Churchwarden in the Anglican Communion. Michael joined the Civic Society last year and became Treasurer, and this year, with the death of Les Davis, he volunteered to be Chairman hoping someone would volunteer to become Treasurer. (He is ever hopeful on that subject!) Michael looks forward to leading the Society forward into its 47th year.

## Review

Our March meeting concerned the finding of the Chippenham Bomb at a site where a new school was to be built. Fortunately, a local farmer was able to tell the developers that they may find unexploded bombs in the field, a statement that brought the local media and concerned householders from nearby, to find the Bomb disposal Unit at their work.

Paul Connell, from Chippenham Heritage Museum showed us the local and national TV news footage, and gave us more information regarding this exciting though potentially dangerous find. Three bombs apparently dumped in a field over Chippenham, near the Pewsey Estate in World War II. Were they dropped coming back from the Bath or Bristol raids, or were these bombs really meant for Chippenham, perhaps somewhere like Westinghouse?

The bombs were decommissioned, and the school has been built, but are there any others out there??

In April we were joined by Mike Stone, Curator of the Chippenham Heritage Museum, who gave a very interesting talk on the early origins of the town of Chippenham. It seems there are lots more archaeological digs to be undertaken in the town, as and when sites become available. We shall look forward to hearing more.

On an appropriately balmy June evening, David Smith entertained us with the story of Cricket in Corsham, most appropriate for a June evening. We are indeed fortunate to have such an beautiful cricket field, with a history of exceptional players such as Sep Kinnear and Big Jim Smith; the opportunity to host County matches, and the ability to encourage new players, both younger and older, male and female, at such a well maintained ground. Long may the club continue.

## Forgery at Corsham

*This story appears in Nick McCamleys book "Secret Underground Cities", and he has given his permission for the tale to be related here.*

In the mid 1930's work was undertaken to clear areas of Eastlays Quarry. In one particular self contained area, enclosed by dry stone walls and still retaining some of the light railway system, which had been used by the Agaric Company some ten years earlier, an extraordinary discovery was made.

The area had also been used for mushroom production – and when clearing this site it was discovered that someone had added to the manufacturing base by using the area for the production of half-crowns (now equivalent to 12 ½ p). Hidden in a corner was a considerable amount of half-crown coins and a die press. It was later revealed that 3 local people had been apprehended in Bromsgrove for attempting to pass the forged money in a café. The men were convicted and sent to prison for 6 months each.



## HODS, 2009. Programme of Events

### Friday September 11<sup>th</sup> September

Corsham (Wine) Cellars – Eastlays Quarry, Gastard. at 11am and 2.30pm – Tickets required. 10 places per tour.

### Thursday – Saturday 10 –12<sup>th</sup> September

Monks Park Chapel. Open 2 - 4pm only.

### Friday September 11<sup>th</sup> September

Talk by author Nick Mc Camley on 'Secret Underground Cities' - Town Hall, High Street, 7pm. Tickets required.

### Saturday September 12<sup>th</sup> & Sun 13<sup>th</sup> September

Town Walks –meet at Tourist Information & Heritage Centre - 2pm & 3.15pm Led by Simon Williams. Tickets required. 15 places per tour.

### Thursday - Saturday September 10<sup>th</sup> –12<sup>th</sup> September

An Exhibition of the work of Olga Lehmann, who painted the murals on the underground walls at Spring Quarry, at the Corsham Tourist & Heritage Centre.

Arranged by Mandie Stone , Bath University Graduate .

**Tickets and location details available from Corsham Tourist Information & Heritage Centre from August 21<sup>st</sup>. Car Parking is available in town centre and at other venues.**

## The Post of Editor of 'Spotlight'

A voluntary, part time post. Currently we produce three Newsletters a year, (March, July, November) and have a copy date for each issue of six weeks. Two weeks for collating, co-ordinating and writing pieces for the magazine. Two weeks for producing the graphics, layout and editing, and a further two weeks to Corsham Print for printing. We then label for distribution.

Applicant needs only to be conversant with the use of Microsoft Word. If you are familiar with all of these tasks, then production could be achieved by one person only.

An applicant may feel it necessary to reduce the number of issues, and/or the time scales. All ideas can be considered.

The current editor will be happy to help/advise in the initial stages of takeover.

Please help if you can, it would be a pity to lose such an asset.

Pat Whalley

## Book Review – Corsham Facts & Folklore by Patricia Whalley

This is an excellent book to dip in and out of. The book contains a review of the earliest times in the history of Corsham to the present day, and an A-Z of snippets of information regarding the local community and buildings. The old photographs made me yearn for the days before yellow lines and the plethora of road signs. Pat had long been aware that visitors often ask, "Is there a History of Corsham?" to which the reply was inevitably that "There are excellent guides, but nothing too detailed". It seemed appropriate, therefore, that she should compile, from the many records she has long held, a rather more detailed story of the history of the town. Many of the photographs and stories were made available by the Civic Society and some local facts were provided by Joe James, Les Davis and countless others who provided interesting details of the town's families and their ancestors.

Corsham Facts & Folklore can be purchased from the author, and/or at meetings of the Civic Society for £9.99. It is also available at Corsham Bookshop, the Corsham Tourist and Heritage Centre and the Hawthorn Post Office.

Pat has previously written a smaller volume on the 'History of RNSD Copenacre' which concerns the conversion of some of the quarries for MOD storage and its subsequent closure. This can also be obtained from the above sources.

.Jane Branev



## The Guyers House – Colonel K.S. Dunsterville.

Following our article on Guyers House, this story is provided by Mr Hugh Dunsterville of Sutton Veny, Warminster.

“My grandparents Col KS Dunsterville retired from the Indian Army, in around 1910, and returned to England.

On the liner – (Port out Starboard Home = POSH Travelling), the cabins were cooler on the side of the ship way from the sun – no air conditioning then!! He met a passenger who asked him where he was thinking of retiring. He replied that as his ancestor Walter de Dunsterville had come over with William the Conqueror, and was buried at Castle Combe Church, he was thinking of Wiltshire. The passenger replied: “I hear there is a good house called Guyers in Corsham”

My grandparents bought it and it became their family home, and to which their two Army sons came home on leave. I believe that Col Dunsterville must have sold Guyers house in around 1915/16, when he was recalled to the War Office and lived in a London flat.

As was customary the Dunsterville and Goldney families went to Sunday services at Corsham Church, where my father Graham met my Mother Eveline (Goldney). They were married in Corsham Church in July 1912, and my Father joined his regiment – the Devonshires in their garrison duties on Jersey. In the summer of 1914, when war was imminent, the regiment returned to Aldershot to mobilise. As there were no officers married quarters in those days, my mother, with my year old sister went to live with her in-laws at Guyers. I was born there in the December. My father was killed in France at the end of October 1914. My Goldney Grandfather, who owned most of Pickwick village, gave my mother Greystone House, opposite the Hare & Hounds Inn in Pickwick as a home in which to bring up her family. We lived there until 1926, when my Great Uncle left me a house and estate at Halse, Taunton to which we moved.

Walnut Avenue – At my Christening in Feb 1915, the families, to record the event, planted an avenue of walnut saplings, twelve each side. It ran from the rear of the Pickwick Street into the Beechfield estate. They were a special strain, which produced a hard timber used in the fuselages of fighter aircraft of the RFC, and hopefully would have replaced all those felled for the war effort!

Beechfield was requisitioned by the army in WWII, and later taken over by the bath Academy of Art.

When Beechfield was later bought by a developer and the site was developed for housing, most of the trees were cut down, but 3 or 4 have TPO's and survive. “

*Hugh Dunsterville*

## Obituary – Les Davis

Our much loved Chairman passed away on 30 March 2009. Les had been part of the Civic Society scene for what must be at least 40 years. He cared deeply for the town and its people, and was always keen to enhance our knowledge about its history. He spent a great deal of his time researching the history of the High Street, the quarries, and local families, so that you could go to him with any question, and if he didn't know the answer immediately he would make it his business to find out.

His other interests were well known, The RAF Association – having served in the RAF from a young man, his career had brought him to Corsham, and it was here he met his wife Maude and raised a family. His other passion was the camera club, a member for many years, he was vice chairman, and was made Life President last year. As a member of the Town Twinning Association his visits to Jargeau were well known. Les was also keen to



promote the work of the local Tourist Information and Heritage Centre.

Les's working life included such varied occupations as an electrician for the Ministry of Works, (hence his knowledge of the underground quarries), he worked at Westinghouse, and as a Betterware salesman, cycling throughout the area to ply his trade. He later ran a market stall in Trowbridge with his dear wife Maude, (he was then in his 60's)!

Here was a very energetic gentleman, who loved to help others whenever he could, and devoted his time to many worthwhile causes.

We are grateful for the many facts about the town that he has imparted to us over the years. There are certainly many more to come in this magazine, so don't be surprised to see his name again in later issues. We shall miss his friendly smile, and his willingness to help, for many years to come.

*Pat Whalley*





## LOCAL LIFE – “Shergolds”

*Shergolds was a greengrocers and fresh fish shop located where 'Perfect Rooms and Interiors' are now established. Jim Shergold has given us some of his reminiscences about his family during the period 1947 – 1958.*

“We came to Corsham in 1947, my Dad had worked for a large wholesale fruit firm in Bath, and my Mother had a fish and chip shop, and they put their trades together and bought a fish, fruit and vegetable shop in Corsham High St. It must have been at the beginning of the school summer holidays, because it seemed many weeks before my brother and I had to start a new term, but this gave us plenty of time to make new friends before starting at a new school. It was a very exciting time for a nine year old, a new town and many new friends. My brother who was three years older than me, made different friends, but we soon settled down to our new environment.

Corsham was one of those very busy small towns, there were shops for everything. Butchers, bakers, grocery, chemists, clothes and shoe shops – all the trades were represented.

The children whose parents owned these businesses were often to be seen helping their parents, doing odd jobs around the shop. My particular task was to take all the empty fruit and veg. crates and boxes, take them out to the back yard, where they had to be sorted into several piles according to the names of the suppliers, as they were returned to be used again. There was normally a charge on the boxes, of about two shillings (10 pence). This could add up to a tidy sum, so it was important to make sure that all the empties were returned to the correct suppliers, and quickly, to make sure we got our refund. (*A form of re-cycling we could do with now! Ed.*)

When I got older I was charged with washing the wet fish boxes, nailing on the lids and loading them on to a van to be returned to Corsham Railway Station, to be sent back to Grimsby docks, where the fish had come from.

Life was not all work, we still had plenty of time to go out with our friends and have a good time. We would go over to the lake in Corsham Park, and try to make rafts to go out on the water, they always seemed to tip over and sank, we would get a soaking for our troubles, and a good telling off from our parents. We had to make our own entertainment, and try to behave ourselves at the same time – not always easy really, as often having fun meant doing something that wasn't allowed, like going after rabbits with catapults and bows and arrows. Sometimes we would go to the local picture house (*The Regal*) one of us would pay to go in, and then when the time was right, go down to the emergency exit and let all the others in. So we all got in for a shilling ticket. (5p).

Corsham was one of those small towns where you got to know most of the people, like Mr & Mrs Watts at the sweet shop and their two boys Ralph and Doug; Mr & Mrs Mattingly who ran the dry cleaners; and Mr & Mrs Love the butchers. Other traders included the coal merchants Mr Hancock, and his son, my school mate Clive, his brother Ted and three sisters; the Royal Oak pub with Mr & Mrs Goss, and their son Mervyn, one of my closest friends, and his older brother Roy.

As I got older, like many of my friends I learned and passed my driving test. I remember I had a competition with Mrs Dyke, the jeweller's wife, to see who would pass first. I can't remember who won, but I will give her the benefit of the doubt, and say it must have been you Dot!

I had bought an old Morris Minor, a real old banger, and proceeded to overhaul it, making a good car out of it, with a lot of help from my girlfriend Marlene. Amazingly, all the oil and grease that went her way didn't put her off! We married and had three children, and now eight super grandchildren. This year we celebrated our golden wedding, anniversary – 50 years gone in a flash.

Growing up in Corsham was good, getting up at five in the morning, when the frost was on the inside of the windows, and driving down to the Station to pick up the fish in boxes that were covered in ice, and having to take it back and wash the ice off after it was unpacked in cold water; then to make it ready to go on a fish slab was, it has to be admitted, a bit daunting, but it had to be done.

These were the good old days of the 1950's!

*Jim Shergold*



## ALL IN THE LINE OF DUTY

### Or - In search of water – Corsham Waterworks

It was the first Sunday in April. The afternoon was fine and sunny. The woods around Derry Hill were filled with that first unmistakable scent of wild garlic and there were just the beginnings of an azure haze as the bluebells came into bloom. But just why did I have an appointment with a local resident living at the bottom of Old Derry Hill – and how did I come into contact with Lord Lansdowne under slightly dubious circumstances? The answer to both these questions? It was all in the line of duty in my role as ‘project manager’ of the Mayo Memorial Restoration Project.

The local resident – I’ll call him John Smith here, just in case his occasional excursions on to the Bowood Estate should render him liable to interest from ‘higher levels’ – had noted the mention on our website of springs at Loxwell Farm, near Derry Hill, as being the source of the water that C T Mayo’s waterworks company had piped to central Corsham back in the 1890s. “John” knew where the original Loxwell Farm had stood and had noted some ‘collecting chambers’ at the site, these being shallow pits, formed out of concrete, furnished with concrete covers, into and out of which, fresh spring water continues to flow. Intriguingly, the covers carried the letters “CWW”. The chambers were close to his home. Putting two and two together, John now concluded that this CWW for “Corsham Waterworks”. He invited me over to see them for myself – and hence my visit in April.

Sadly, the Loxwell Farm of Mayo’s time is no more. There are, however, newer farm buildings (but still rather old) close to where the previous buildings stood. The collecting chambers are just down the hillside from these buildings. A lane leads from the A342 to Loxwell Farm, but it is not suitable for normal vehicles. John and I walked up to the site across the fields, stout walking boots were the order of the day.

It turned out that John was a water engineer by profession. We soon found the collecting chambers. John had come prepared for our expedition. He carried a jemmy secreted about his person – for the purpose of lifting the covers off the chambers. photo I confess to having felt a little self-conscious about what we were doing – but reasoned that we were really doing no harm to anyone, and who was around to catch us ‘at it’, anyway? John set to work with his jemmy and we were soon peering into one of the two collecting chambers. I captured the moment on my trusty digital camera.

Next John showed me where the output of the chamber now emerges a little down the hillside. My camera was out again. But why was the water – brilliantly clear, by the way – being released here? John explained - At some time in the past, probably when some drainage work was being undertaken, Mayo’s 6” diameter pipeline had been damaged and a short section of it had been removed. And there it was! Once again, my camera was to the fore. A final picture was taken of the farm buildings which now stand close to the site of the old Loxwell Farm.

John then told me that he had made some progress in tracing the route of Mayo’s pipeline as it headed off towards Reybridge – and, eventually, to Corsham. He had found an exposed section in the middle of a field. Additionally, he had found further evidence of the pipeline. It was at this stage that I learned two things about this one-time source of Corsham’s water supply, one technical, the other historical.

Firstly, water can be made to run uphill – if only in a pipeline and for short distances! There are two prerequisites for this. The location where the water enters the pipeline must be higher than the location at which it eventually emerges from that pipeline, and, there need to be points along the pipeline, at which air which accumulates in the pipeline can be ‘vented off’. Without them, air would collect at high points along the pipeline and flow would stop. There is, apparently, so John told me, devices called ‘Air Vents’ which do the job. They are located in the pipeline and can, therefore, be several feet below ground level. People who maintain the pipelines need to know where they are. A post bearing the letters ‘AV’ marks their presence. So now you know! John had used his knowledge of such matters to trace the pipeline as it left Loxwell Farm. He pointed out the route to me. Unlikely as it might seem; the route actually went uphill on several occasions. John undertook to complete a full mapping of the route for me over the coming months.

**Secondly**, Corsham had not been the sole beneficiary of the Loxwell Farm spring water. It transpires that the water source had a much earlier usage. To paraphrase the English Heritage description of the site:

*“A Cistercian Abbey was founded at Lockswell, 1151, but was moved to Stanley in 1154. Though there is no contemporary evidence for buildings at Loxwell, the site of the earlier Abbey was claimed as being found by Rev. W.L. Bowles. Early records indicate a copious water supply at the first site and there is a substantial spring flowing from ‘beneath’ the foundations of the farmhouse, which Bowles claims, stood on the site of the early building. The spring was later conveyed by a stone conduit to the new site at Stanley in 1241. No traces are visible but its course is discovered from time to time.”*

[I am indebted to John for this additional information.]



And this would have been the conclusion of this particular excursion of mine into the countryside above Lacock. However, matters then took a different course. It had not occurred to me that the land upon which I was happily tramping was, in fact, part of the Bowood Estate. Naively, I had supposed that the Estate stopped at the Chippenham to Devizes road. Just to prove me wrong, who should hove into sight but Lord Lansdowne – Charles Maurice, the 9<sup>th</sup> Marquis of Lansdowne and Earl of Shelburne. He was out and about on this Sunday afternoon, in his 4-by-4, checking that everything on his estate was as it should be. Deciding that it was in our best interests to be helpful and nonchalant, we opened the gate that was temporarily blocking the Lord's way and engaged him in conversation as to what it was that had brought us on to his land. (John thoughtfully concealed the jemmy throughout this period.)

Lord Lansdowne was genuinely interested in what we had to tell him. He appeared to know of C T Mayo and his connections with Corsham and Lacock. I told him about the 'Mayo Pike'. He responded with a question. Where did we suppose, he asked, did Mayo catch his pike? I explained that we knew that Mayo was a great friend of Fox Talbot and used to go fishing with him over at Lacock, presumably in the River Avon. Lord Lansdowne offered another possibility, noting that it was not very common for such large specimens to be found in rivers; lakes were their preferred environment. It was known that Fox Talbot had enjoyed an arrangement whereby he occasionally pursued his pastime in the Bowood Lake. Perhaps, he suggested, Mayo had caught his pike there, while fishing with his friend Fox Talbot. I thanked him for the suggestion and told him we would look into the matter.

Our conversation then turned to what had become of the original Loxwell Farm. Lord Lansdowne pointed to an area now well-covered with small trees and other vegetation, saying that its remains could just be discerned there. The buildings that we could now see were of much later vintage. As to the collecting chambers, while he believed that the covers – the ones bearing the marking "CWW" – were originals, he supposed that the concrete walls themselves would have been rebuilt during the Second World War. He remembered that there had been an army camp on the site throughout that period. The chamber walls would undoubtedly have been built of brick, that being the custom of our Victorian ancestors, Lord Lansdowne observed. Making-good crumbling brick-built walls in concrete is exactly the sort of work that the army would have undertaken at the time.

All in all, Lord Lansdowne was extremely understanding and helpful. Phew!

Rest assured, the collecting chamber cover was properly returned to its original position after our inspection.

*Peter Tapscott, Project Manager, Mayo Memorial Restoration Project.*

## ANOTHER LOCAL LIFE. Watch this Space!

I was recently contacted by Mrs Margaret Stocker from Gloucester, who told me the story of a relative – Irene Parkinson who lived at 'Dunsford', 9, Prospect, and was a Queens Alexander Nurse at the Town Hall Hospital during the First World War. Our discussions led me to believe that there is another very interesting story here - of the military hospital in Corsham, the soldiers, and the nurses.

Norman Duckworth has very kindly offered to do some further research, and we hope to publish something in the future.

Another interesting aspect of Corsham that we have not previously heard about. .

*Ed.*

## QUARTER SESSIONS - 1608

*"Illegal Alehouse at Corsham. The homage within the Libertie of Corsham hath often tymes made presentements that 3 tipping houses are enough and sufficient for the town. That is to say Thos. Ralph - Vyntner, John Morret - Innholder, and Gyles Keynes - Butcher. Notwithstanding, Christopher Nott hath about a year since set up a new alehouse in a remote place in the skirts of the towne, where is dayle used great abuses by drunkards, common haunters of alehouses, and Idlers.*

*That the said Nott, being lately presented for setting a rayle and straightening the highway, hath newly in contempt of the said presentement set up the sign of the Red Lion. The Court ordered the alehouse to be suppressed".*



## ALTUS ENGINEERING - EXHIBITION AT HERITAGE CENTRE

*Readers may have seen the exhibition at the Corsham Tourist and Heritage Centre through the month of June, which commemorated some 60 successful years of the firm known as Altus Engineering, which was based in Stokes Road, where Kinnear Close now stands.*

I was pleased to obtain an interview with a previous Managing Director and Chief Executive, Maurice Read, who had started with the firm as a 5-year apprentice in 1951, specialising in design. There followed National Service and six years with Wessex Machine Tools, and then back to the Altus by special request as Commercial Director.

So what was the 'Altus', what did it produce, where did it all begin?



Altus = Greek for pinnacle. An apt name for a company that would reach the top of the toolmaking industry.

Started by Maurie Stuart and Bob Brown in 1935, a site for the business was found in Stokes Road which was then used by the Strenic Stone Company, a firm of master masons that later re-located the Pound Mead. The very first mould was charged to the Avon Rubber Company at £13.10s.0d. During the war years much work was carried out for Stothert and Pitt of Bath. The firm then steadily went from strength to strength, until they were recognised as the top mould making company in the country.

In 1948 Pitman Press had acquired an interest in the firm, during which time Altus designed and made the Multichrom masking cameras. The company was sold on to JW Singer & Son in 1954. By 1956 'Singers' had been taken over by Delta, with Altus as a subsidiary company.

A new factory building was erected about 5 years later, and in due course Altus became a full Delta member. But life was not to be all plain sailing, in 1970 a fire severely damaged the newly built spark machine shop. (The company had been one of the first toolmakers to use spark erosion in mould making), and it was only due to the prompt action of the fire brigade that the rest of the new building was saved.

Maurice was appointed as Executive Director in 1973 and Managing Director in 1976, a really great achievement on his part - apprentice to Director in 25 years.

By 1977 Computer Aided Design (CAD/CAM) was making its mark, and the firm created the first mould to be both programmed and manufactured at the company using this new technology. With this computer knowledge came the requirement to take part in International Conferences, involving 14 countries, and to present technical papers on these advances, and Maurice presented these papers for 3 conferences.

The company kept abreast with new technology for 2 decades, intending always to keep ahead of the competition, which resulted in high order books and good profits.

However, in 1995 Delta opted to sell Altus as part of a package of their 3 moulding companies, but refused to sell Altus individually to the Weir Group who had similar companies in their portfolio.

Maurice Read was unhappy with this outcome and decided to take early retirement rather than be part of what was likely to be asset stripping of such a successful company.

It seems that the demise of the Altus was then due to the slow erosion of the work, which was redirected to other companies within the group, together with advanced machine tools from Corsham. We have seen before that the centralisation of tasks within large organisations often leads to the closure of successful subsidiaries, and it must have been with great sadness that the staff who had worked there for so many years had to watch it close.

Maurice Read was most assuredly one of these people. For although he had taken early retirement in 1996, after 22 years as Chief Executive, he continued to take an interest in the friends and colleagues he had worked with for so many years.

However, not one to rest on his laurels, Maurice's passion is golf, interspersed with bowls, and bridge, and driving for Link. With his wife, and a family of two sons, and two grandsons, there is much enjoyment to come. He is, I am sure, very proud of the Altus Engineering Company, and his contribution to its success.

Ed.





## Olga Lehmann & the Corsham Underground Murals

*Following the talk on the Burlington Bunker, held in Corsham in January, and given by Oxford Archaeology researcher Jane Phiminster, who has been commissioned by English Heritage to carry out research on the Burlington area, including the Spring Quarry mural locations. It might be of interest to hear a little more about the artist responsible for the murals on the quarry walls. The information is supplied by Mandie Stone, who lives at Frome, and is a Bath Graduate.*

In 2004 in a charity shop in Essex I bought an oil painting of a 'hippie girl' called Miranda signed by artist 'Olga Lehmann'. I've since undertaken a journey of discovery from overground Essex to underground Wessex to gradually unravel the story of the artist and her fascinating connection with Corsham.

Olga was born in Chile in 1912, eldest of three children. She died in Saffron Walden, Essex in 2001 aged 89. She married poet Carl Richard Huson and had one son Paul Huson, who

was co-screenwriter of 1980s TV series 'The Colbys'. He writes books on herbalism, tarot and witchcraft and lives in Los Angeles with his partner film producer and script writer William Bast.

In 1929 Olga Lehmann won a scholarship to Slade School of Art in London, studying under Professor Henry Tonks and Randolph Schwabe. She spent most of her life as a jobbing artist, illustrating covers for the Radio Times as well as designing film sets and costumes for many movies. Tom Thumb (1958) received an Academy award for special effects. She also worked in the art department for movies such as Around the World in Eighty Days (1956). Lehmann also worked in television production, receiving an Emmy nomination for costume designs for The Man in the Iron Mask (1977). Sadly, she wasn't always credited for her work.

Olga Lehmann came from a talented family. Her sister Monica Pidgeon was once hailed 'Queen of Architecture'. At the age of 92 she runs a video-based website 'Pidgeon Digital' celebrating architects of the 20th Century. Her brother is the late Professor A G Lehmann, (known as George) a writer on European history.

During the Second World War in 1943, Olga was commissioned by the Bristol Aircraft Company to go 150ft underground into their Spring Quarry factory, Corsham to paint murals on canteen walls. Owner Sir Reginald Verdon Smith wanted to boost the morale of factory workers producing high performance Centaurus engines for Hawker Tempest war jets. Fellow artist Gilbert Wood joined Olga. They painted floor to ceiling size scenes in several canteen areas. Themes included the circus, pre-historic monsters, sports, sailors, mermaids and Alice in Wonderland. The factory closed in April 1945.

During the 1950s the vast underground area, with over 60 miles of roads was redeveloped as a bomb and radiation proof Cold War bunker code named 'Burlington' to protect the Government, providing a base for the country to be re-started should there be a nuclear war.

The Ministry of Defence are selling off the land to developers. One business is Corsham Media Centre, a film and TV industry 'media factory', a movie making alternative to London with film stages, rehearsal studios, sound stages, state-of-the-art workshops and a private 20 acre area for large scale production of special effects and street scenes.

Most of Spring Quarry is now decommissioned by the MoD. There is still secrecy around the exact locations of murals and how many of them survive.

Miranda, the subject of my painting currently lives in Bristol and is in fact the niece of Olga Lehmann, the daughter of Olga's brother George. I recently met her in Corsham. She bought with her the original study sketch that Olga did before completing the painting in 1975. It was a surreal experience meeting the subject of an oil painting, which had been hanging on my wall for years, and to see how much she had changed since the portrait.

The underground site at Corsham is not accessible to the public. It remains to be seen what the future holds with regard to preservation of the remaining murals.

*Mandie Stone*



## SNIPPETS FROM SPACKMAN'S SCRAPBOOKS.

*Each of these stories has been extracted from the Spackman scrapbooks dated between 1880 – 1908.*

### A RAGING BULLOCK 1891

“Much consternation was caused in this town on Thursday evening of last week, owing to the vagaries of a bullock. The animal endeavoured to enter Mr Eli Merrett’s shop, but was ejected with much difficulty. Mrs Ogg of Church Street, who is a paralytic invalid, was out for a ride in her wheelchair, accompanied by her daughter, they saw the animal approaching and turned into the lane by the Vicarage, which leads to the park hoping to escape, but the bullock pursued them and charging full at the wheelchair, overturned it. Mrs Ogg was thrown to the ground, and besides being much frightened, was cut about the face. Meanwhile after several narrow escapes, the animal entered the lane leading to Dr Woods’s stables. After crossing the yard it entered the garden, and a long rope having been obtained, every effort was made to entice the animal back into the stable yard in order to secure it; but for considerably over an hour the bullock was master of the situation, and played sad havoc with the newly laid flower beds, ploughing up the soil.

The missiles thrown at it did not tend to improve matters, and once Mr Coates got too near and the animal dashed at him, hurling him to the ground, and for some moments he was unable to rise. Luckily the beast did not return to the attack. After some attempts to lasso the brute, incurring much risk, this was at length accomplished by Mr Percy Gane and the animal, becoming entangled in the rope, fell to the ground where it was speedily pole-axed and carted away. It was thought that the long distance it had been driven was the cause of its fury, as before starting it was very quiet “!



### MARRY IN HASTE!



*From the Evening Post 19 May 1897.*

“An amusing story from Blackburn. A pair of operatives were being married and as he produced the ring the bridegroom exclaimed triumphantly “Now we shan’t be long!”

The officiating clergyman promptly retorted “You are mistaken; you will be at least a week” and breaking off the service abruptly left the ‘chapfallen’ bridegroom, with an intimation that the couple might present themselves a week later if the man had by that time learnt to behave himself “!

*‘Chapfallen’ does Spackman mean ‘crest fallen’, or is it a deliberate play on words appropriate to the situation?*

### “HINTS FOR THE HOME – EXERCISE AND SUNSHINE

*From Wiltshire Times, Saturday. August 22nd 1908*

The art of taking plenty of exercise and plenty of sunshine are the most needed duties of a person who intends to follow the cause of health. He may drink his stimulating wines, coffee, tea etc., but without exercise in some form he is unsafe and runs the risk of falling into some disease. The stimulating drinks only last a certain length of time and when they have passed away, and the effects are no more, he is in a bad condition. Take plenty of exercise night, morning and mid-day, together with all the sunshine you can get. Sunshine does the entire body good. It warms it and helps Nature to wear away disease. The cause of so much stupor among a great majority of the masses is the damp and dark places that they have to work and sleep in”.

*Where have we heard all this before?*



## Corsham Station Campaign



In March of this year I attended a meeting of the S.Gloucestershire authority at Thornbury, having learnt the MoD were to make a presentation on Abbeywood. I heard that apart from the purchase of land nearby for staff accommodation, they are already occupying an extension to the original site. 1000 staff from Andover have been moved there and more will come later this year. In 2010 others from two sites in East Anglia will join them, whilst in 2011, 1,500 will move from Bath. By 31st March 2012 they anticipate there will be ten thousand working at Abbeywood, of whom three-quarters will be civilian and one quarter military

I rather doubt any of you will have heard an interview – it was 2.50 am on BBC World Radio - when Prof.Stern was asked to respond to concerns that the Government in its anxiety to boost the economy, might invest in transport schemes that increased greenhouse gases - such as new roads and airport expansion. His response “*This might not be so - so long as their investment is in rail and public transport, - that could lead to a lower-carbon future*”. Sadly this view is not shared by our SW Regional Assembly, whose Officer

Group chose road schemes as their favoured “investments” to head their bid in the Regional Funding Allocation (RFA2) 2009-2014; the doubling of the Swindon-Kemble railway line was a late addition, the rest bus orientated. The East of Westbury bypass was there at £30m, with £108m presently proposed for a major road at Kingskerswell. Just think what that might achieve if spent on the Greater Bristol Metro - the West of England Partnership would have serious money to offer Network Rail. Instead, we are supposed to be grateful that rail schemes have a place at present in the 2014-19 funding slot.

This situation leads us to believe there is a need to launch a basic campaign, aimed at our “new” Wiltshire Council. They have promised “things will be different” but we believe we need to let them know just how different we wish them to be. The employment of a rail engineer, with a budget to take forward rail schemes, would certainly be different! We responded to WC’s recent Consultation on their Local Transport Plan at length and we pressed them to adopt their proposed “Radical” approach.

Anne Lock 7th June 2009

## LOCAL FILM MAKING

Whilst researching the history of Eastlays Quarry (now home to Corsham Cellars), Norman Duckworth came across a reference to film making in Corsham and district.

Thought it might be interesting to see which films had been made – in part – in Corsham

Date	Film title	Stars	Location
?	Northanger Abbey		Corsham Court
1987	Codename Kyril (HTV Film)	Denholm Elliot, Edward Woodward	Corsham Court & Bath
1993	The Remains of the Day	Anthony Hopkins, Emma Thompson	Corsham Court
1997	A Respectable Trade	Jenny Agutter, Richard Briers, Warren Clarke Anna Massey	Corsham Court & the Almshouses
2000	The Mayor of Casterbridge	Cairan Hinds	Church St.
2001	Bertie & Elizabeth	James Wilby Juliet Aubrey	Hartham Park
2002	Forty	Company TV for Channel 4.	Corsham Media Park
2006?	Lark Rise to Candleford	BBC TV Serial	Neston/ Kingsdown

It seems the Greater Parish of Corsham is becoming better known location!



# Corsham Civic Society

## Civic Society Officers

### President

Mrs Anne Lock,  
Little Lypiatt Farm  
Rough St.  
Corsham  
Tel: 01225 810357

### Chairman/Treasurer

Mr Michael Rumsey,  
91 Tellcroft Close  
Corsham  
Tel: 01249 715741

### Hon Sec

Sally Fletcher,  
56 Brook Drive  
Corsham  
Tel: 01249 713048

### Social Organiser

Mrs Joan Maciver,  
15 Moor Park  
Neston  
Tel: 01225 812225

### Membership Secretary

Mrs Jean Beech,  
108 Brook Drive  
Corsham  
Tel: 01249 713833

### Programme Organiser

Dr Negley Harte,  
St Aldhelm's Cottage  
Stokes Road, Corsham  
Tel: 01249 713529

### Plans Chairman

Mr Geoff Knapp,  
2 South Street  
Corsham  
Tel: 01249 712270

## We're on the Web!

See us at:

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

## PROGRAMME FOR 2009

Date	Event
April 24 <sup>th</sup>	Mike Stone (Chippenham's Early Origins)
May 15 <sup>th</sup>	AGM (Followed by a talk by Dr Keith Robinson, C.E. of W. Council, providing an overview of the transition to the new unitary authority.) (St Aldhelm's Church Hall, 7 for 7.15pm)
June 19 <sup>th</sup>	David T Smith (Cricket in Corsham) Summer Walk – date to be confirmed
July 24 <sup>th</sup>	Dr Negley Harte (Who were the Flemish Weavers?)
August	No Open Meeting
August 20 <sup>th</sup>	CCS Outing - American Museum, Bath
September 25 <sup>th</sup>	Dinah Starkey (Two Tudor Gentlemen)
October 23 <sup>rd</sup>	Steve Flavin (Biddestone and Hartham in Postcards)
November 27 <sup>th</sup>	Ela Palmer (Director of ASHTAV) - (Issues in Conservation)
December	No Open Meeting
<b>2010</b>	
January 23 <sup>rd</sup>	Celebration of the New Year – Social Gathering. Venue to be advised.

All meetings to be held at 8pm, at the Pound Arts Centre (unless otherwise stated).

**Venues may change. Please check our notice board at 'Centuriun' Nr Somerfields.**

Guests are welcome. Members - £1, Non members - £2

### 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.*

**Corsham Civic Society**  
Arnold House  
31 High Street  
**CORSHAM**  
Wiltshire  
SN13 0EZ

**Registered Charity No: 275321**

Contributions to Spotlight are welcome. Please contact Pat Whalley (Editor) on

01249 713618

