



Corsham Spotlight

Journal of the Corsham Civic Society

AUTUMN/WINTER 2014

<http://www.corshamcivicsociety.co.uk>

November 2014, Volume 11 Issue 3

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Christmas Message from the Chairman

Dear Friends,

It doesn't seem twelve months ago when I sat down to write the 2013 'Christmas Message from the Chairman' – doesn't time fly! 2014 has been a busy and fruitful year for the Society, welcoming new members, enjoying excellent talks and having a successful set of Heritage Open Days in September. 2014 has also been a sad year for the loss of our Patron, Robert, the 7th Baron Methuen. Though Lord Methuen had not been our Patron for too long, he was always interested in receiving copies of *Spotlight* and corresponding on various matters of interest. It was unfortunate that I was ill and unable to attend his funeral in Derbyshire, but I wrote to Lady Methuen and to James Methuen-Campbell sending our sincere sympathies for their loss.

This will be the last time I write to you as Chairman at the end of a year, as I will be retiring at the May Annual General Meeting. I have held the post for six years, and, for me, it has been a great pleasure and privilege to head this Society in my home town. I shall look forward to welcoming my successor at the May AGM, and I can assure them of my full support in their first year of office.

One piece of 'good news': more than 6,000 people have viewed the Society's website since it went online in March of this year, and according to the Webmaster, Michael Wilkinson, most people have viewed at least five pages. We have also received a good number of enquiries from members of the public through the website, and these

Corsham Civic Society welcomes new members. Join us to enjoy talks on local subjects, trips to interesting places and the company of local people interested in both the history and future of this lovely Wiltshire town. For membership contact Jean Beech on 01249 713833

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have been answered quickly by various knowledgeable committee members.

Dr. Negley Harte will also be retiring as our programme organiser. Negley has provided an excellent programme for the last six years, and he says he will be pleased to mentor his successor in their first year of office.

Finally, all that remains for me to say is to wish you the compliments of the season and a very Happy New Year.

Michael Rumsey

Heritage Open Days (HODs) 2014

The activities for this year's Heritage Open Days organised by the Society in the Corsham area were again well attended.

On Thursday 11 September, two parties of ten visited David Pollard's 'Stone Quarrying Museum' at Potley and were fascinated by the wide range of equipment used in quarrying that David has accumulated over the years. He has a wide knowledge of the industry, and the groups were fascinated with everything he had to show them. The largest piece of equipment, as seen in the photograph, is the Samson stone-cutting machine.

The next day, Friday 12 September, a group of ten people visited the Gardiner Houlgate auction house on the Leaffield Industrial Estate. A guided tour of the two floors, led by the two directors, enabled everyone to view items ready for the auction due to take place the

Contributions to Spotlight are very welcome: please contact the Editor, David Gibbons, on 01249 712212 or at davidagibbons@me.com

Subscription reminder

Subscriptions are due by 1 January. Prompt payment would be much appreciated!



Visitors to the Stone Quarrying Museum. Our host, David Pollard, is on the very left.



Above: Negley's walkers set out; and inside the musical instruments section of Gardiner Houlgate.

following week. Gardiner Houlgate is the largest auction house for musical instruments in Europe and probably in the world. The photograph shows the wide range of musical instruments and associated equipment due to be sold. On the same day, Dr. Negley Harte led a group of people on a Historical Town walk starting out by the Parish Church and ending at the Pound Arts Centre. That evening 65–70 people attended the illustrated talk on 'Corsham in the 20th Century' given by yours truly.

On the Saturday afternoon, Dr. Harte conducted a second town walk, which was also well attended. Meanwhile, in the Pound Arts Centre there was an exhibition of paintings by local art groups entitled 'Corsham in Colour'.

On behalf of the Society, may I take this opportunity of thanking Joan Maciver, Jean Beech and Margaret Shewring for helping me in organising this year's HODs events. Also our thanks go to Martin Campbell at the Pound Arts Centre for printing all the tickets and to our friends at the Corsham Information and Heritage Centre for distributing them; and finally to Fiona Cassidy for organising the hanging of the pictures for the exhibition at the Pound.

Michael Rumsey

The Mayo Grave Plaque

Following the work to provide details on the family grave (*Corsham Spotlight*, Summer 2014), the following letter was sent to Pat Whalley from Craig Garrett, a descendant of the Mayo family on the maternal side. The family emigrated to Australia many years ago. It sounds as if Craig has a very interesting life. He writes:

Hi Pat,

Many thanks for the article on the Mayo grave and plaque. It's wonderful, I am so happy it was done. Thank you Pat and the Corsham Civic Society. My Dad was absolutely thrilled about it and seeing his photo in the article. He is not in the best of health at the moment. Unfortunately he won't be able to travel to the UK anymore.

I am now working in one of the most remote exploration camps in Australia. West Musgrave sits close to the border of Western Australia, South Australia and Northern Territory. It takes 4 hours from Perth in an 8-seater plane to travel to the site. There is an aboriginal community about 20 minutes drive from us. I am working as an Exploration Geologist exploring for Copper and Nickel working for a company called Cassini Resources. I have worked here before, about 6 years ago for the previous mining company of West Musgrave called BHP. The site hasn't changed a bit in that time.

Regards, Craig

Corsham Commemorates the First World War

The start of the national and international centenary events culminated on Remembrance Sunday with unprecedented interest in the men, stories and events of the Great War, with major services at the Menin Gate in Ypres, at the Cenotaph in London and from a national perspective at the Tower of London, where the sea of ceramic poppies really caught the public's imagination. In Corsham the attendance and interest in the Remembrance Day service at St. Bartholomew's and the parade to the War Memorial reflected the level of awareness and importance of the centenary commemorations. Family history and the sense of personal and collective contribution and sacrifice have undoubtedly fuelled the interest, and that has also been at the centre of the *Corsham Commemorates* approach towards the four-year centenary.

Corsham Commemorates is the initiative taken by Corsham Town Council to bring together those groups in the town that have expressed an interest in marking the centenary years in some way. It is also hoped to bring together all the ongoing research and its results and the record of centenary events as a legacy to the town. One of the legacies of the war being used extensively as a starting point for research is the *War Records of Corsham 1914–1919*, a book recording Corsham men who died or were killed in the Great War and those who served and returned. It is a remarkable record given to the town in 1920 by Field Marshal Lord Methuen, who chaired a War Record Committee. A copy of this book is available in the Town Hall. It provides the details of the military service of all the men, and women, who served and it provides an excellent basis for deeper research into the names – where they lived, occupations and family situations. Individual records are being updated with research on the Corsham Commemorates website, www.corshamcommemorates.weebly.com, and it is also being used to mark centenary anniversaries in a 'Today We Remember' feature.



Left: The newly cleaned war memorial on Remembrance Day. Little wooden crosses on either side of the Memorial represent those who died in the First World War.

The Concert to commemorate the First World War was held on 18 October at Corsham School and was a spectacular success. Sponsored by Corsham Area heritage and the Town Council, it was an evocative portrait in words and song of those four years of terrible war. The Narrator was Graham Paton, dressed appropriately in evening dress (with tails), who linked together readings from letters, poems and documents of the war years, alternating with the music of the era – including *Keep the Home Fires Burning*, *Roses of Picardy* and many more. Three choirs sang the songs – the Corsham Choral Society, Gita's Choir and the Lingmara & Find Your Voice Community Choirs, with individual solo pieces by Caroline Murray and Tony Emery. The readers were dressed in contemporary uniforms, including that of the nurses, to add an authentic period touch. It was an entertaining and often poignant evening, brilliantly brought to fruition by our own 'local impresario', Pat Whalley.





Left: Steve Williams demonstrates Great War weaponry and trench warfare to an attentive audience at The Batters.

The names of the Corsham Men who died are, of course, commemorated on the main War Memorial on Lacock Road and on the memorial at St. Bartholomew's Church. The Church memorial has been expertly cleaned and repainted by Celia James, and it was the centre of a well-attended commemoration service on 3 August that marked the anniversary of the declaration of war. The Church now has a standing display of Corsham war records for visitors coming to the church or specifically to the memorial. The main war memorial has also been cleaned and, with the addition of new commemorative benches, individually named crosses and poppies and the well-maintained flower beds, really looked the part for the annual remembrance parade and service. One should not forget to mention Neston,

where there is a First World War memorial plaque for their sons who gave their lives and who were named at their remembrance service and as part of a display.

Other commemorative events have included the period display of a 1914 living room at Arnold's House by Corsham Area Heritage, which proved popular; the Recruitment Office Re-enactment at the Town Hall, which attracted more than 250 people and a BBC *Points West* presenter for a feature that was aired on the evening news; and a two-day display and presentation at The Batters by Wiltshire First World War expert Steve Williams. The Batters is the site where practice trenches were dug by Scots Guards during the war, and it provided an authentic backdrop to interesting talks about life in the trenches – which was particularly enjoyed by school children who attended as part of their studies (despite torrential rain that day). Most recently Corsham Area Heritage sponsored a Great War themed concert held at Corsham School on 18 October, with local choirs and actors relating a well-scripted war story through songs of the day and soldiers' letters. The Pound Arts Centre have been particularly supportive with a varied programme of themed productions, and local schools are involved in their own individual work and in a collective piece being coordinated by Mazy Bartlett from Corsham School that we will hear and see more about in the near future. Further reports about events are on the website.

The challenge for Corsham Commemorates is to maintain the level of interest over the next four years, which it is planned to do around specific events in the war and in related themes – we would particularly like to hear about the thoughts and experiences of children during the war, of local businesses impacted by the war effort and the stories of those men that came back from the war and had to rebuild their lives. If you have family information and photos to share we would love to hear from you through *Corsham Spotlight* or through the *Corsham Commemorates* website.

Kevin Gaskin, CCAN Coordinator
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100 Years Ago

November 1914 The German offensives in the west have failed; the Battle of the Marne won by the Allies; the Battle of the Aisne a stalemate. In the First Battle of Ypres, the Germans have failed to break through. Trenches now stretch from the Channel to the Alps. They will change little over the next four years.

To the east, the Germans have repulsed the Russians at Tannenberg; thereafter offensive and counteroffensives favour the Germans.

November/December 1914 British Empire forces invade Mesopotamia to attack Turkey. Meanwhile Austria fails to make headway against Serbia.

February/March 1915 In the Mediterranean, naval assaults on the Dardanelles precede the disastrous Gallipoli Campaign. And at sea, German surface raiders are essentially eliminated.

Reviews

In July, marking the centenary of the tragic events that led to the outbreak of the First World War, Richard Broadhead presented a wide-ranging talk about the course of the war and its effects on civilians, particularly those in Wiltshire and our area. He took us through recruiting, local recruits being sent to Devizes Barracks, through to conscription. Wiltshire became a huge tented camp, as recruits trained and dug practice trenches (such as those dug by the Scots Guards on The Batters), while visiting units included the 1st Canadian Division, who were billeted locally and left a lasting impression, including that of Winnipeg the Bear (who may have been the progenitor of Winnie the Poo). The talk was well illustrated by pictures and news cuttings that vividly evoked the flavour and moods of the times as rationing, coal shortages, blackouts (even here in Wiltshire) became the norm. By 1917 women were being recruited for farm work, as well as working in munitions factories, as the realities of 'total war' took their effect upon the population. Above, the air was abuzz with training aircraft, and there were many accidents. The hospital established in the Town Hall catered for recuperating troops, the main surgical hospital being in Bristol. There were even German prisoners-of-war incarcerated locally.

The summer social event, a cream tea, was held in Lypiatt Road on 22 August. Fingers were crossed as the beautiful weather of the summer temporarily deserted us, bringing cold wet weather – not the best for sipping tea and eating scones, cream and jam in the garden! However, the sun shone and everyone attending had a wonderful time. Our thanks to Joan Mciver for the delicious scones and to our cake bakers.

In September, Lord Lansdowne, 9th Marquis of Lansdowne from Bowood, gave us an insightful, thoughtful and frank perspective on the management of our great estates. He explained the three

Below: A rarely seen aerial view of MOD Corsham.



categories into which these estates fall – the National Trust has 400 sites; English Heritage is responsible for about the same number, including Stonehenge; and in the private sector about 300 homes are open to the public. These are supported by the Historic Houses Association, which the public can join as a Friend. The privately owned houses start with a disadvantage compared with the NT and EH as, not being charities, they do not receive any grant aid or VAT exemptions – they are, in effect, unpaid custodians of the nation's built and landscape heritage. Bowood was opened to the public in 1975, with half the house converted to exhibition rooms and a shop. Lord Lansdowne was forced to sell the best picture in the collection to fund the changes – half of the proceeds went in tax. The house was losing some £100,000 a year by opening to the public, and new tax rules made it impossible to cross-pollinate the surplus and the loss-making sides at Bowood, so Lord Lansdowne was forced to look to other enterprises such as domestic/commercial properties and a hotel. At its zenith the estate encompassed 120,000 acres; now that figure is just less than 4,000.

In October, Colonel Gordon Rafferty, former Chief of Staff at the Ministry of Defence establishment at Corsham, gave a most entertaining and informative talk about the history of the place and the impressive new buildings that opened in 2000. Now home to Joint Forces Command, the hub of the top-secret site is the Global Operations and Security Centre (GOSS), a key MOD computer complex. The Centre provides defence communications around the world as well as satellite operations on a 24-hour basis and is manned by all three of the armed services, with civilian technicians providing support. Some 2,000 people work here, and more than 3,000 visitors arrive each year. Over a period of 25 years £690 million has been budgeted for the building and maintenance of this important link in the nation's defences, which sits, appropriately, above the underground complex that in the years following the Second World War was to have been the government's emergency headquarters.

Jane Browning and David Gibbons

Corsham Maternity Home

If you were in town on Wednesday 23 September, you may have seen approximately sixty people having their photograph taken outside Alexander House in the High Street. This building was the Maternity Home from about 1913 to 1950. There were only two homes in Wiltshire in the early years, so mothers had to come from Chippenham as well as outlying towns and villages to have their babies.

This meeting arose as part of the 'Pass it on' project led by Dominic Campbell in association with the new Springfield Campus and Corsham Heritage. The object is to gather stories of the life of people in Corsham (and other local towns and villages) down the decades, so that it may be stored at the Wiltshire History Centre in Chippenham for posterity.

The participants were then invited to the Campus, where some of them were interviewed to paint a picture of their earlier lives in Corsham.

However, the event was so well attended, with people travelling from as far afield as Devon to be there, that it was impossible to gather as many stories as would have been liked. So: were *you* born in Corsham Maternity Home? If so, let us know and we will pass your name on to Corsham Heritage. There may well have to be another story-gathering exercise in the future!

Pat Whalley



Above: The train standing in some three feet of water by The Batters at about two in the morning of 19 September 2014, lights ablaze, passengers still on board. This murky photo was illuminated by big lights manned by the fire service and police on the bridge at Prospect. Right: Daylight, and the flood waters recede.



The Great Thunderstorm of 2014 ...

Few in Corsham will forget the mighty thunderstorm that hit the area during the night of 18/19 September this year. It was as if one of those great spaceships from science fiction was hovering above us for a couple of hours firing down great thunderbolts of lightning and a huge torrent of water. Many cellars and homes were flooded – the member of Corsham Fire Service who made a report to the Town Council said that when the first Corsham call came in they were in fact already in Bradford on Avon – not down by the river, but on top of a hill! In all they received notification of 56 weather-related incidents, and crews arrived to help from as far away as Warminster, Malmesbury, Westbury, Bath, Yate, Bradford on Avon, Chippenham and Amesbury. Ninety people were evacuated. It was the simple volume of water coming down that overwhelmed drainage, and, as in 1935, it flooded the railway cutting. By about two in the morning, the level of water was some three feet deep, forcing a downline train to stop by The Batters. The passengers were successfully evacuated from the Ladbroke Lane end of The Batters, and the flood gradually receded. The last time a train was halted was on the night of 20/21 November two years ago, when cascades of water from the Yockney Brook halted a Bristol-bound train just short of the station site; but the water was not on a par with this year's event, let alone that of 79 years ago.

David Gibbons (and with thanks to Anne Lock)

... and The 'Great' Railway Flood of 1935

The recent flooding of the railway line in Corsham and the marooning of a train is not the first time this has happened, for Herbert Spackman noted in his diary on 24 October 1882 that the station was flooded to quite a depth. The worst such flood occurred during the afternoon of Tuesday 25 June 1935, when a two-and-a-half-hour thunderstorm deposited three inches of rain on the town of Corsham and the surrounding area. The Yockney Brook, just west of the station, burst its banks, and the water started to pour down the embankment on to the sidings and the main line. The last train to get through the station before the water completely flooded the track was the 3.15 p.m.

Chippenham-to-Bath stopper, and by 3.33 p.m., ten minutes after the train had departed, the water level was 3 feet 6 inches above ground level. Within the next hour the water level was 9 feet in the station and covered not only the platforms but the seats in the two waiting rooms. The signalman on duty in the box was marooned for two hours, and all the electrical circuits were put out of action. Trains were diverted from Thingley Junction to Bradford on Avon and then on to Bath and Bristol. Box Tunnel did not get flooded, as the line rises slightly before entering the tunnel, but the whole cutting beyond Potley bridge was covered with flood water. Passengers sitting in the 4.47 p.m. Bath-to-Chippenham train at Bath station were asked if they were travelling to Box or Corsham, and these people were hastily dispatched by bus, but this found it could not get through at Lambridge because of flood water, so it was turned around and proceeded to drive via Lansdown, Wick, Marshfield and Biddestone. The Box people finally got home at 8.30 p.m. instead of 4.59. The next morning the bus operated in the reverse direction, and the first through train passed Corsham station at 11.15 a.m. Geoff Knapp remembers the occasion very well and can give an account of what happened that day to anyone who wishes more detail.

Michael Rumsey

References: *The Ways of Corsham*, by John Poulson; *The GWR Swindon to Bath Line*, by Colin G. Maggs.



The flood of 1935, showing the station platform awash and spectators taking in the view. Dramatic though the railway flood of 2014 was, the flood of 1935 was three times deeper!

The Station Campaign

As from April 2015 all decisions on major transport scheme funding will be devolved to Local Transport Boards. However, since March 2013 these Transport Boards, a key part of Local Enterprise Partnerships, have become responsible for prioritising major scheme funding, based on studies of eligibility and value-for-money criteria. Through a process of sustainability checks, 10 schemes out of a possible 70, four of which were rail projects, emerged for inclusion within the Local Growth Fund of the Swindon and Wiltshire Strategic Economic Plan Priorities List to 2021 – one of which is Corsham Station reopening. Both Kevin Gaskin (on behalf of our Community Area Partnership) and I for the Campaign submitted statements in support of the Corsham reopening to the first meeting of the SWLEP.

As you will know from previous updates, due to my attendance at quarterly Public Transport Forums across the Bristol–Bath area since the late eighties, Corsham Station is included within their

planned MetroWest bid Phases 1 and 2. Cross-boundary cooperation on the part of the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership and Wiltshire Council will be required, of course, to bring the scheme forward within the electrification programme presently being undertaken by Network Rail. Councillor Horace Prickett, the new Portfolio Holder for Public Transport, is mindful of the need for NR engineers to take account of both Corsham Station and the provision of a local rail service when planning the positioning of their electrification gantries in this area.

On Tuesday 28 October I caught an early train to London, to be certain of arriving in good time for the meeting Wiltshire had arranged with Rachel Brown, Local Authorities Schemes Manager for the South West, at the Department for Transport. Recently in post, I was struck by her positive attitude, so very different to that displayed by her predecessor. Rachel's suggestion towards the end of the hour's meeting was that there should be another meeting, more technical in nature, towards the end of January 2015.* At this point Wiltshire Council's political ambitions for the Chippenham Constituency came to the fore – rather than appointing his colleague, Councillor Prickett, who has knowledge of the industry, Councillor Dick Tonge informed Rachel Brown that the bid team would be led by their prospective parliamentary candidate for the constituency, Michelle Donelan!

In December 2013 the Government announced funding for an East–West rail link between Oxford and Cambridge, linking both cities to each other and London – the 'High-TechTriangle', as it is dubbed. The icing on the cake for us would obviously be the return of the Bristol–Oxford service so that we, as part of the overall Bristol economic area, can have direct rail access to any part of that IT hub. There is a petition, and our MP, Duncan Hames, has drawn together a cross-party group of ten MPs with constituencies along the route to impress on the Secretary of State, Patrick McLoughlin, the benefits such a rail service could deliver to the economy of the areas through which it passes. Last July PTEG – Passenger Transport Executive Group – published a Report entitled *The Economic Value of Rail in the North*, which includes their finding that a £1 investment in rail delivers more than £4 in economic benefits. It also of course contributes to more healthy lifestyles: just think, a half-mile walk each morning, rather than three steps to the car, could help to decrease the number of folk in GP waiting rooms!

Anne Lock

* Network Rail, as Infrastructure Managers, need to ensure that schemes are compatible and integrate with existing railway operations. To do this, schemes proceed through the GRIP process (Governance for Railway Investment Projects), which is divided into eight distinct stages: 1) Output definition; 2) Feasibility; 3) Option selection; 4) Single Option Development; 5) Detailed design; 6) Construction test and commission; 7) Scheme hand-back; 8) Project close out. Obviously, the further any scheme proceeds through this process the more likely is a successful conclusion to be reached.

Corsham Library's New Era in the Campus

This summer, Corsham Library closed and moved into the new Springfield Campus. The old Library was opened in 1969, replacing a wooden hut just off Pickwick Road. This was a great improvement – the old wooden building, crammed with books and with limited seating, was heated in winter with a stove that produced lots of condensation on the windows – not the best conditions for the preservation of books! By contrast, the purpose-built Library was spacious and well organised, with a wide variety of books. The new Library in the Campus opened on 7





Opposite page: The old pre-1969 Library. This page, top left: Its successor. Above left: The Campus Library. Top right: The entrance, with the climbing wall to the right, a curious juxtaposition. Strangely, there is no closing door to the Library, but this allows the automatic book-lending and renewing machines to be used during all the hours the Campus itself is open. Above right: Corsham 'Timeline' in the computer area.

August 2014, attracting 700 visitors that day. During August more than 11,000 people came to see the new facilities, and since then just over 400 new members have been registered, bringing the total to 7,400. Of these, just under half are currently 'active', i.e., have books out on loan. Some 30% of members are below the age of 16.

The Community Librarian for the Chippenham Group of Libraries, Jessica Phillips, heads a team of volunteers running the Library. Maintaining the right balance of stock is important as the population of Corsham grows. The Library stocks some 15,000 items (books, DVDs, videos, etc.) of which 60% are fiction, and 30% are usually out on loan. £10,000 has been spent on new stock, which includes a donation of £5,000 from The Methuen Trust. There is an especially good section on the Corsham area. You can borrow ebooks too – there are 3,000 to choose from. And bookable computers are available there with free access to the internet.

At the time of going to press, the future of the *old* Library site seems uncertain. Together with the Mansion House, it is empty and stands forlorn surrounded by metal barriers.

David Gibbons

2015 Programme

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

| | | |
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| 16 January | 12.30 for 1.00 | Lunch at the Methuen Arms |
| 27 February | 7.30 p.m. | The Parish Churches of Wiltshire, Third and Final Part by Michael Rumsey, retired Head Teacher and Chairman of Corsham Civic Society |
| 27 March | 7.30 p.m. | The Building of Devizes Castle by Tim Tatton-Brown, FSA, distinguished archaeological and architectural historian |
| 24 April | 7.30 p.m. | The Wiltshire Museum, Devizes by David Dawson, FSA, Director of the Museum |
| 15 May | | Annual General Meeting to be held at the Town Hall |
| 26 June | | Summer Outing to the Wiltshire Museum, Devizes |
| 24 July | 7.30 p.m. | To be announced |
| 14 August | | Cream Tea , members only, details to be announced |
| 25 September | 7.30 p.m. | The Stonehenge Landscape by Mark Bowden, who works for English Heritage (West) |
| 23 October | 7.30 p.m. | The Turnpiking of the London-to-Bath Road, 1700–1850 , by Dr. Brenda Buchanan, former Editor of <i>Bath History</i> |
| 27 November | 7.30 p.m. | To be announced |

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 ASHTAV (Association of Small and 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, 91 Tellcroft Drive, Corsham, SN13 9JQ, Wiltshire. Registered Charity No: 275321