



Corsham Spotlight

Journal of the Corsham Civic Society
<http://www.corshamcivicsociety.co.uk>

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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



Jubilee celebrations on Corsham High Street, Monday 4th June 2012

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Contributions to Spotlight are very welcome. Please contact the editor, Jujhar Garcha, at: garchajujhar@gmail.com

From the Chairman

It's come to that time of year when I sit to write to wish all members and friends good wishes for Christmas and the New Year. It also gives me time to look back over 2015's meetings and activities. Our friend Negley Harte has given us a superb programme yet again and having had a sneak preview of next year's programme, I am sure you will enjoy that too. May I take this opportunity of thanking my colleagues on the Executive Committee for all their hard work. Special thanks go to Roger Truelove, our Treasurer, who retired at the AGM. I am delighted to welcome Elizabeth Addison as our new Treasurer. Elizabeth teaches Mathematics in Trowbridge and is also Treasurer for 2,000 members of the Wiltshire Branch of the NAS/UWT. Michael Wilkinson, our Webmaster, informs me that 4,531 visitors have looked at our website and read 11,603 pages (www.corshamcivicsociety.co.uk) and the back issues of *Spotlight*, the first issue being in July 2003, can be read online. I think the website will receive even more 'hits'. Our thanks also go to Michael, and to Nicholas Keyworth, who have worked hard in maintaining the website to such a high standard.

In a September issue of the Gazette & Herald a letter appeared with the heading, 'Corsham is becoming a ghost town!' My question is 'Why?' Perhaps times are changing. Ten years ago Corsham had five banks and one building society, but from the beginning of October we have one bank, Lloyds, and they are working on reduced opening hours. We have, at the time of writing, 7 commercial properties in the High Street and Martingate just empty. Last year the BBC and ITV both used the High Street as a background for their productions of 'Poldark' and 'The Suspicions of Mr Whitcher'. Sadly, 'Poldark' isn't returning to Corsham for a further period of filming as the BBC is trying to keep production costs down. I sincerely hope that 2016 will see an upturn of business in the town centre and all the empty properties will be filled by the next 'end of year' report. As our President comments, '*Your High Street needs you*'.

Since the last edition of the magazine in March, we welcome the following new members: Larry & Muriel St. Croix, Cath & John Maloney, Ian Logan and Elizabeth Addison. It only remains for me to wish all Society members and readers of this magazine a very Happy Christmas and a Prosperous New Year.

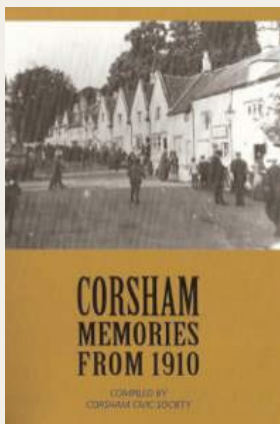
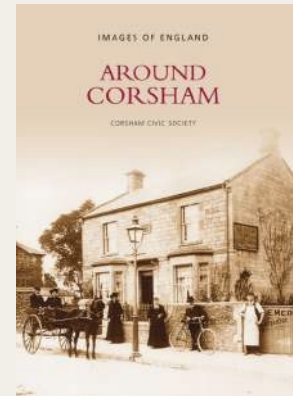
Michael Rumsey

Civic Society Bookcase

There are a number of good books about Corsham and our area, some out of print, others still available. Corsham Civic Society has published three books over recent years:

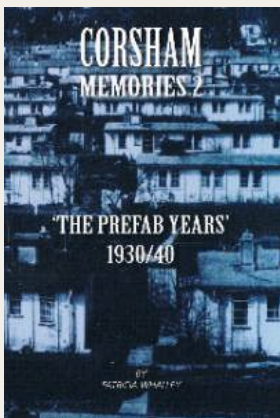
Around Corsham compiled by Anne Lock, our President, presents archive photographs of our town together with many stories of the great and the good of Corsham's past. It is an excellent document to have on your shelf when you want to know how something looked or how people lived in Corsham at a previous time.

Available from Corsham Book Shop or members of the CCS Committee. Paperback; 235mm x 165mm; 128 pages; 202 illustrations; first published 1997; reprinted 2011; £ 9.99.



Corsham Memories from 1910 is a collection of interviews with local people who were born between 1910 and the 1940s. The Society feels it is important to record as much as we can of the town's past and the way people lived. This book particularly demonstrates the evolution of our town, how people worked, how children played, and the impact of a garrison town, which developed with each of the three services coming to work and live here. It is an interesting insight into our social history.

Available from Corsham Bookshop, the Tourist Information Office and Barnett's newsagents. Paperback; 210mm x 148mm; 136 pages; 61 illustrations; first published 2011; £9.99.



Corsham Memories II "The Prefab Years 1930/40" within this book we have a small record of Corsham's Social history, through a compilation of interviews with people who moved to Corsham in the 1930's and 40's and were kind enough to share their memories with the author, Pat Whalley. The book concerns the 30s/40s/50s austerity years in which food was on the focus of everyone's mind.

Available from Corsham Bookshop, the Tourist Information Office, Barnett's newsagents and Hawthorn Post Office. Paperback; 210mm x 148mm; 116 pages; £9.99.

There is also a new publication to be available in November of this year (just in time for Christmas) which is available from Pat Whalley and local outlets for £12.00.

The Shadow of Mary Deane Mary appears to have written a diary for most of her life, but only four are available here. She lived in Box during WWI and, with links to Corsham and Bath, her story is told through these diaries. It provides a social comment on the days of the Great War from the 'home front'. Pat has completed considerable research to find out about Mary and her family, and their connections to the local gentry, and an interesting view of our local area emerges.

Celia James

Over the late summer months, passers-by will have noticed a lady in a pink boiler suit working hard to clean and repaint the railings at the end of the Carriage Drive. This was Celia James, a painter and decorator who also does work at the Pound. The ornate gates originally here were sacrificed during the Second World War as were so many railings in the town, 'to contribute to the war effort', the idea being that they would be melted down and the iron used to make weapons and so on.

There is much scepticism about whether this was anything more than a morale-boosting exercise, but such was the fate of the gates here – Lord Methuen, seeing that railings were being taken from so many houses in Corsham, felt it his duty to make a similar sacrifice. Temporary wooden gates followed, to be replaced by the present gates in 1962. They were last refurbished some ten years ago, but not very well and had rusted badly. They are now resplendent in a new coat of paint, complete with the Methuen crest.



She had previously worked on restoring the WWI War Memorial on St. Bartholomew's Church for the 'Corsham Remembers' service in August of last year.

Thomas 'Customer' Smythe, 1522–1591

The Smythes lived in Corsham during the reign of Henry VIII. John Smythe was a farmer and clothier, and when he died in 1538 he left his wife a mill. His eldest son John inherited the rest of his property, with the exception of a farm in Amesbury, valued at about £20 per year, which was bequeathed to his second son Thomas. It is believed that Thomas was about sixteen when his father died, and he seems to have been rather a restless teenager – perhaps he found life in Corsham a little slow, so much so that he disposed of his lands and took himself to London, where he started his own business.

His ability to make money obviously paid dividends, and he must have been mixing in the right circles, because, during the reign of Queen Mary, he became a Customs Officer.

When he was about thirty-three, he took himself a wife, Alice Judde, the daughter of a Lord Mayor of London – Sir Andrew Judde. The couple lived at Ashford Manor, Kent, and had thirteen children.



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Queen Elizabeth I confirmed his appointment as Customs officer, and he remained in the post for about eleven years. However, he seems to have upset the Queen when there appears to have been a discrepancy in the revenue of some £6,000 (of course collecting taxes was an on-going problem at that time, just as it seems to be now). With the help of his friend Sir William Cecil, who was chief advisor to the Queen for most of her reign, he managed to avoid imprisonment and remained in the Queen's employ. He was later granted the charge of the Customs of the Ports of London, Chichester, Sandwich, Southampton and Ipswich.

With his increased wealth, Thomas 'diversified' into the mining industry of Cornwall and the lead mines at Perrin Sands, while also enthusiastically assisting the likes of Sir Walter Raleigh to fit out ships for the exploration of unknown lands.

But Thomas did not forget his family roots: he bought Corsham House (Court) in 1575 and built the present house in 1582. The central section of the south front, including the porch and the entrance block from Church Square, is all that remains visible today. In 1602 the property passed to his son Henry, and later that year it was sold to Sir Edward Hungerford. Edward died in 1607, and the estate passed to the next Edward, his great nephew. This is the Edward who married Margaret Halliday in 1621, and it is believed they decided to live at Corsham House at about this time. Edward died in 1648, but his wife Margaret remained in residence until her death in 1672, during which time (1668) she built the Almshouses and Free School. For a small town, we do seem to have many interesting connections!

Pat Whalley

Bibliography:

- J. F. Wadmore, ARIBA: *Thos Smythe of Westhanger*
- Ernest Hird: *The Lady Margaret Hungerford Almshouse*
- James Methuen-Campbell: *Corsham Court Guide*



Neston Glove Factory

Brockleaze, Neston

The site of the Neston Glove factory at the corner of Rough Street was originally used as a coach house in the care of Harry May. Later, sheepskins were 'dressed' in preparation for glove cutting. Those employed were known as leather dressers.

It is understood that a Mr G. P. Fuller, who wanted to provide work for ladies to undertake if they didn't wish to go into service, founded the Glove Factory in 1906.

Paul Beard has posted on the web details of an ancestor named Samuel Davis, believed to have been an owner of the property known as 'Davis, May & Co.', which first appeared in Kelly's Directory in 1911. The name changed sometime between then and 1916, when it became known as 'Neston Glove Factory'. At its height, the factory was employing 60 people in the factory and 60 out workers.

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In the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s they were producing superior leather gloves for ladies and gents and had contracts with many of the mail order companies of the day, such as Gus, Kay's and Dent's. A local lady who worked in the office there remembers that the last time white, 'shammy' leather elbow gloves, were made there were for ladies attending the future Queen Elizabeth II's wedding in 1947.

In the 1930s the glove factory had a cricket team, and they practised in the lunch hour in the orchard close by (see 'Around Corsham' by Corsham Civic Society).

When the factory closed in about 1965, the building was taken over by Mr Brixey, who had worked for Dowty as an engineer. Later there was a new owner, Bob Sibley, who dealt in plastics and tyres. On Monday 7 April 2014 the factory buildings containing ten tonnes of tyres were destroyed by fire, and an investigation is currently under way as to the cause. Thus, another hundred years of local history disappears and will be unknown to those who come after.

Pat Whalley

Bath Bus Postcard

David Gibbons unearthed the postcard to his grandmother from a cousin and it was posted in Corsham on May 21st 1905. In that year, 1905, Bath Electric Tramways purchased 6 Milnes Daimler 32 seater double deck buses and these were used on various routes including the journey from Bath to Corsham via Box, as it says on the destination board on the side of the bus.

It's interesting that this first photo was taken in front of the 'Pack Horse' inn, now the 'Flemish Weaver', while the other photo was taken showing more of the Town Hall, but it is the same vehicle and it's probable that the photos were taken on the same day. The photo with the tram was taken at the junction of the Bradford on Avon/Bathford road where it meets the A4 on the outskirts of Batheaston, with the railway viaduct in the background. It's bus FB 05 in the photo, a very popular bus for photographers, and it's suggested the photo was taken circa 1910, I would suggest about 5 years earlier in fact. Passengers on the bus were transferred to the tram for the final part of their journey into the city centre. The same would happen in reverse for the return journey to Box and Corsham.

Bibliography:

- *Buses and Trams of Bath* by Steve Chislett. Millstream Books 1986
- *Bath Tramways* by Peter Davey and Paul Welland. Middleton Press 1996



Postcard dated May 21st 1905



Photo of the same bus – FB 05 outside the Town Hall



Same bus FB05 at the Bathford road junction transferring passengers to a tram going from Bathford in the the city centre. Photo date circa 1910.

Devizes

The Building of Devizes Castle

The March meeting of the Civic Society was privileged to listen to a very interesting lecture by Tim Tatton-Brown, FSA, the distinguished archaeologist and architectural historian, well known for his writings on various cathedrals and castles, particularly Canterbury and Windsor and Westminster. He brought his sharp and irreverent eye to bear upon the castle at Devizes.

It is well known that Devizes, like Salisbury, is a medieval 'new town', though originating in its castle rather than its cathedral. The castle built by Bishop Roger of Salisbury in the 1120s became a spectacular affair, one of the grandest castles in Europe, soon to play a crucial role in the civil war that involved Matilda, in residence there, the only Holy Roman Empress (by marriage) who aspired to be Queen of England (by inheritance).

The borough of Devizes grew up around the castle, its plan still determined by the dominating castle. The castle itself was demolished by the order of Cromwell in the 1640s. The present building is a Victorian recreation, presently owned by a mysterious lady alleged to be a Princess of Thailand.

No archaeology has ever been undertaken on this important site, neither the castle, its walls, nor its large park. Many aspects of the castle and indeed the town of Devizes remain unexplained. Tim Tatton-Brown discussed this all quite brilliantly.



Devizes Castle is a Grade I listed building



Visit to Devizes Museum

The Civic Society's summer outing was to the Wiltshire Museum – the newly adopted name of what for some years had been the Wiltshire Heritage Museum and for many years more generally known as the Devizes Museum. The new name was intended to stress the Museum's county-wide role as part of a learned society founded in 1853 (the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society), without in any way belittling the Museum's younger sister museum, the free-standing Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum, founded in 1860.

When I was Chairman of the Trustees for the Museum for three years I kept trying to undermine the general strange view of geography long held in Corsham, that London was much closer to Corsham than Devizes was. None of the 30-odd intrepid travellers from Corsham who made their way to Devizes on the 26th June had been to the Museum before. They were very impressed by it.

Article continues next page...

The party was addressed by David Dawson, the enthusiastic Director of the Museum (who had given the lecture to the Society at the Pound a few weeks before), and were shown around the impressive new Prehistoric Gallery, recently completely redesigned quite magnificently. The Museum proclaims that it has the best Bronze Age exhibit in the country, better even than the British Museum. The way they are laid out is quite outstanding.

It is a remarkable fact about Corsham that we are in the centre of a triangle of excellent museums – the town museums in Trowbridge and Chippenham and the county museum in Devizes. The two town museums are well funded by their respective town councils; the philistine Wiltshire Council provides a mere £35,000 a year for the county museum. In 2014 our summer outing was to the Trowbridge Museum, and on the 24th June 2016 we shall complete our triangulation by visiting Chippenham Museum.

Dr. Negley Harte

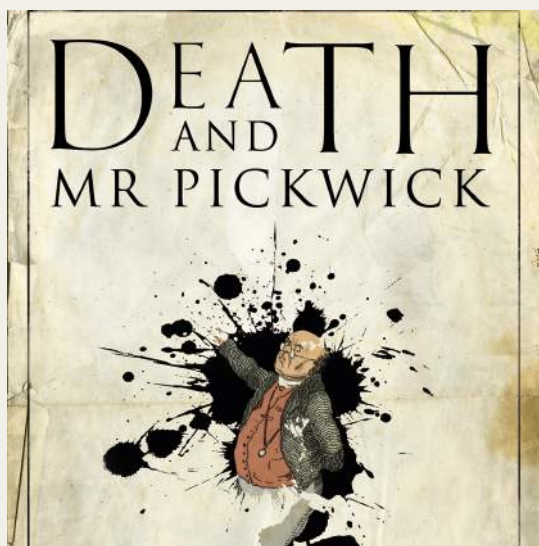
Death and Mr Pickwick

This work of 'fictionalised history', as the author addressed it on a bleak July evening in a small auditorium, explores the origin and entire history of Charles Dickens' most beloved piece of work at that time - The Pickwick Papers. Jarvis claimed the work was 'Harry Potter times ten thousand' and 'bigger than the Beatles', it was unprecedented for such a piece of work to be so universally renowned to the extent 'even the royal or most powerful weren't as famous as this'. Of course, such pandemonium circulated around Pickwick, leaving it (especially the Hotels) to be overrun by tourists to say they've shaken hands with a Mr Pickwick. Some would quip 'I could give them the dirt of my shoe and they would thank me'.

Pickwickian in its length, the book is composed as a series of episodic pieces concerning the great caricaturist (and original illustrator of The Pickwick Papers) Robert Seymour's (on the right), and every significant figure that crossed his path, lives. Unlike its muse, it has a conspiracy story to tell. Inbelicate and his assistant, Inscriptino / Scripty (the pseudonyms were taken from printer errors in early copies of Pickwick's first edition) embark on a journey regarding the supposed suicide of Seymour.



This quest gives the novel its propulsive momentum all of which culminates in the resolution of the mystery, of which it has much to say about the nature of the media culture Pickwick helped spawn. Ostensibly circulating around the origins of Pickwick, the author has another aim of displaying the mass culture so far described. Nearing the end of 1836, Pickwick transcended its serial format.



Article continues next page...



Author Stephen Jarvis



Mr Pickwick Addressing the Club, illustration by Robert Seymour

There was merchandise (e.g. Pickwick cigars, canes, hats), advertisements everywhere and spin-offs in both the physical and literary realms. A virtual world, delivered in monthly episodes, which ran in the presses for nineteen instalments – with the final one issuing 40,000 copies. Pickwick had bridged ‘Literature’ with ‘entertainment’.

Author Stephen Jarvis, a former Telegraph columnist, devoted twelve years on his research and writing drawing upon different editions of the book, contemporary newspapers articles and drawings to detail his Dickensian debut. The talk itself had a strong local emphasis with Jarvis acknowledging the local Pickwick family and speaking at length on Mr Pickwick who ran the Hare and Hound pub, not too far from the Arts Centre, as one with the most extraordinary voice ‘like a combination of Barry White and Mickey Mouse in one person.’ Indeed, we did in fact impart wisdom of our own concerning a Mrs Hancock (to him a housekeeper of Mr Pickwick), as found out it is also a common surname in the Corsham area. The topic of Pickwick Papers is particularly interesting to me (son of the owner of the local newsagents Barnett Brothers) as one who often delivers papers to Pickwick.

Death and Mr Pickwick was published by Jonathon Cape in May earlier this year and can be bought at the Corsham Bookshop for a modest £20.00. ISBN: 9780224099660

Thanks to Stephen Jarvis for his talk and Janet Brakspear for supplying the books. Quotes are from his talk to the Pounds Art Centre, unless stated otherwise.

Jujhar Garcha

Bibliography:

- Jarvis, Stephen. *Death and Mr Pickwick*, Jonathon Cape, May 2015
- Dicken, Charles. *The Pickwick Papers*, Wordsworth Editions, May 1992
- Dames, Nicholas. *Was Dickens a Thief?* The Atlantic, June 2015

Electrifying News on the G.W.R!

Monday, September 1st saw the first high-speed passenger trains through Corsham after the line closure for the 6 weeks previously. During those 6 weeks, much work was completed between the east end of Box tunnel and Sydney Gardens in Bath. The lowering of the track by some 50-60 cms through both Box and Middle Hill tunnels and under the 2 road bridges in Box, both listed structures, and through Sydney Gardens in Bath plus the rebuilding of the junction at Bathampton and the lowering of the track under the Dundas Aqueduct. At a cost of £50m, the following facts help to put things into perspective:

- >10,000 site hours
- 226 engineering trains
- 22,914 concrete sleepers replaced
- 98,889 tons of ballast, removed, cleaned and replaced
- 163,650 tons of spoil removed
- 1,394 tons of pea shingle delivered
- 1,420 tons of sand delivered

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We had already seen the work in replacing the station footbridge in Corsham back in March to June. The 500-ton crane used to remove the old footbridge and hoist in the new footbridge was a sight worth seeing. That work was completed on time and Councillor Philip Whalley did the honours in cutting the tape and re-opening the walkway on Monday, June 8th. The latest footbridge to be replaced is the one at Shockerwick on the A4 just before the Wiltshire/Somerset boundary, that will be open again at the end of November.

The aqueduct which spans the track at Corsham, just before the Potley road bridge, is the next problem the engineers have to face. Unfortunately, water doesn't run uphill, so the heightened new structure will have a weir at the Station Road end and will be built further back into the stream bed on the Tellcroft Close side of the railway cutting. The next large-scale engineering task will be the installation of the catenary masts which will hold the 25,000-volt power cables, this will be happening sometime in 2016. I am sure I.K. Brunel is looking down on the current work happening on his railway and smiling. The railway he built 174 years ago is now being upgraded for faster trains, something he envisaged in the 1830's.

Michael Rumsey



Workers preparing the site before removing the old footbridge



The new bridge waiting to be put into place



New footbridge being swung into place, photo by Robin Jackson



The 500-ton crane in place on Station Road on the evening of March 21st



Once in place, the rest of the work begins



The new footbridge



Work at the west end of Box tunnel



Corsham Springfield Centre

Wiltshire's first community campus in Corsham, run by Wiltshire Council, it contains a library, leisure facilities and neighbourhood policing team. The campus also offers state of the art youth facilities, a public café and flexible community spaces available to hire. Previous sports facilities have been vastly improved including a state of the art all-weather pitch, outdoor recreation space and an indoor climbing wall. Furthermore there is free car parking on site which includes electric car charging points as well as free Wi-Fi throughout the building.

The library has 15,000 items to borrow with £10,000 spent on new stock which includes a £5,000 donation from local charity The Methuen Trust. The free to join service has a huge range of books and information, space to study, read and relax and free internet access with bookable PCs.



For more information:

- tel: 01249 468460
- website: <http://www.springfieldcampus.org.uk/>
- email: springfieldcommunitycampus@wiltshire.gov.uk

Spotlight's New Editorial Team

During the twelve-year existence of our Society magazine Spotlight, we have had only three Editors, Pat Whalley, Jane Browning and David Gibbons. With David's departure in the spring, the Executive Committee had great difficulty in finding someone to take on the role of Editor. It is, therefore, pleasing for me to introduce to you two members of Corsham School's 6th Form who will be working to produce this current issue. May I introduce the following members of the team:

- Jujhar Garcha & Tom Cole

They are all in their final year of schooling and each of them is proficient in English and in I.T (Information Technology). We thank them for their hard work in producing this issue. To produce the Spring 2016 issue they will need a new set of articles, so if anyone would like to contribute an article it will be gratefully received – no articles leads to no magazine!

I must emphasize that this must be regarded as a temporary measure until we can find a full-time editor. The current 6th formers will be leaving school next year and we do not know if there will be any interest from upcoming 6th formers to carry out this role. So, please, if anyone would be willing, or knows someone who would be willing, to become the editor, I urge him or her to get in touch with me.

Michael Rumsey

CORSHAM CIVIC SOCIETY 2016

All meetings at the Pound Arts Centre (telephone 01249 701628) at 7.30 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.

15 Jan:	Lunch at the Methuen Arms (members & friends only)
26 Feb:	Prof. David d'Avray, FBA Professor of Medieval History, University College London 'Magna Carta: Origin and Outcome'
18 Mar:	Dr. Simon Draper Assistant Editor, <i>VCH Oxfordshire</i> 'The Landscape of Saxon Wiltshire'
29 Apr:	Michelle Donelan, MP MP for the Chippenham constituency 'My First Year in Parliament'
20 May:	AGM To be held at the Town Hall at 7.15pm.
24 June:	Summer Outing Chippenham Museum
22 July:	James Methuen-Campbell (Lord Methuen) Lord of the Manor of Corsham 'Trees in Corsham'
? Aug:	Cream Tea (members only). Date to be announced.
30 Sept:	Julian Orbach Editor working on the 3 rd ed. of Pevsner's <i>Buildings of Wiltshire</i> 'The Buildings of Corsham'
5 Oct:	A guided tour of the Westonbirt Arboretum by our member Jim Ball, of Corsham and Rome. Tickets required.
28 Oct:	Dr. Virginia Bainbridge Former Editor of the <i>Victoria County History of Wiltshire</i> , and Director of the Wiltshire Manorial Records Project 'Governing Wiltshire: Almost a Thousand Years of Manorial Records, 1086-1922'
25 Nov:	Martin Head 'Director of Content, Corsham Institute' 'The Corsham Digital Hub'

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 historical interest, in Corsham and the surrounding countryside.

Corsham Civic Society, 91 Tellcroft Drive, Corsham, SN13 9JQ, Wiltshire. Registered Charity No: 275321