



Corsham Spotlight

Journal of the Corsham Civic Society

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

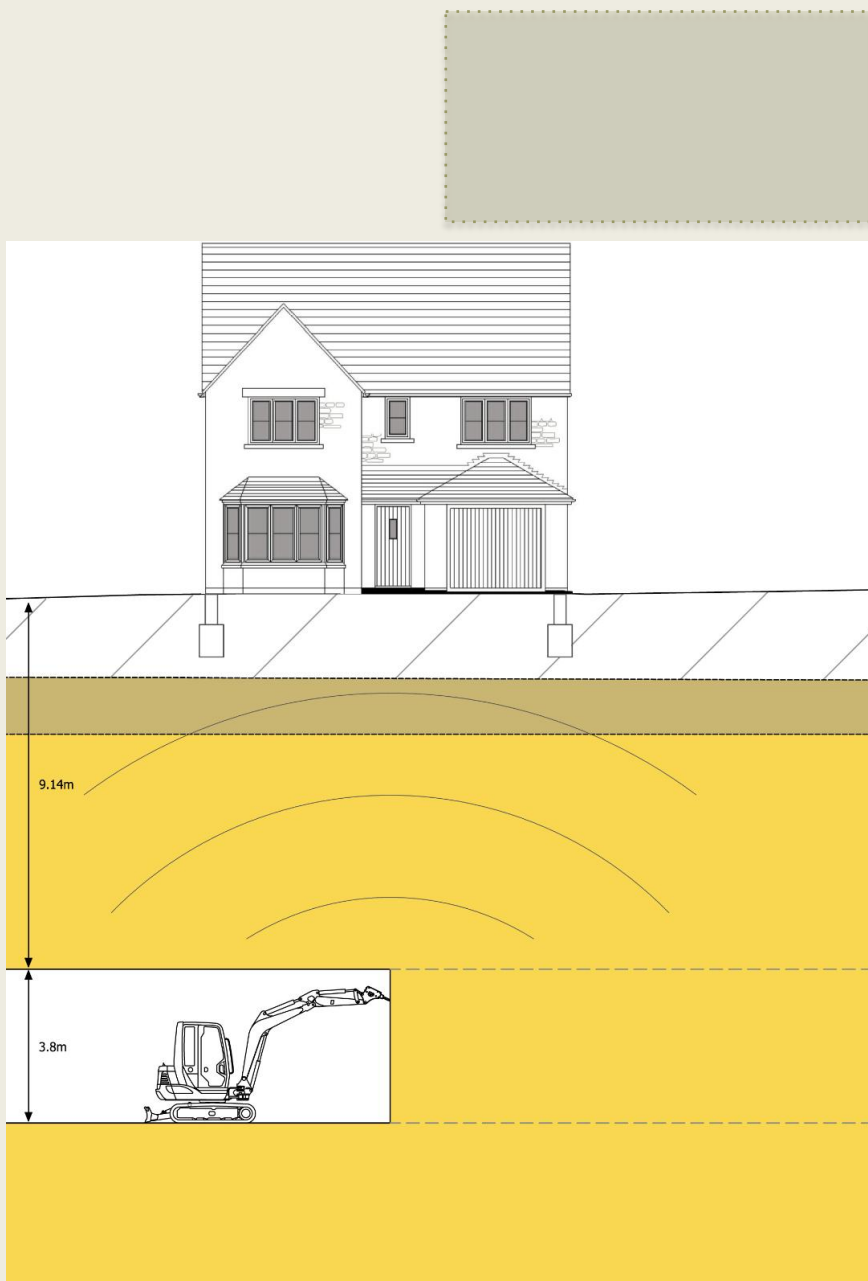
Spring 2020

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*Contributions to
Spotlight are very
welcome. Please
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Would you buy a new £350,000+ house built above a working quarry on the Bath Road, Pickwick?! [Reconstruction courtesy of Ruth Allington MSc, MBA, FIMMM, Ceng ~ see p. 18]

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Dear Members,

As I write this today, March 17th, St. Patrick's Day, I am mindful of the health problems that are currently sweeping throughout the world and through our own country. My thoughts and prayers are with those who are suffering from this virus and I hope that it strikes very few people in our area. Our last 'get together' was held on Friday, February 28th at Guyers House, where 28 of us enjoyed a most excellent lunch. I proposed a toast to absent friends, not knowing how quickly things would change in just 18 days. I am sorry we've had to cancel our March meeting and following meetings until at least the end of July. So do keep a lookout for information on our website. The Pound Arts Centre has already closed its doors and we have no idea when they may re-open.

Copies of the March edition of 'Spotlight' will be available from April 1st at Barnett Brothers or may be delivered to your home.

On a happier note, it's time to wish one of our founder members a very happy 100th birthday. Mrs Catherine Eden will celebrate this milestone birthday on Wednesday, April 29th [see p. 16]. Mrs Eden, along with her husband Robin, helped found the Corsham Civic Society in the 1960's and for many years was an active member. We wish Mrs Eden a very Happy Birthday for the 29th.

For the last 6 years, Revolution Arts, headed by Nicholas Keyworth and assisted by Ian Martin and Michael Wilkinson, have created and maintained our society website www.corshamcivicsociety.co.uk. The Executive Committee decided in February to ask Corsham Print and Chris Perry, the Managing Director, to take over the operation of the website [see p. 21]. We would like to thank Revolution Arts for their involvement with our website over the last 6 years and wish them well in their business activities.

With best wishes.

Michael Rumsey

Log Book entries from the Regis School and Corsham Secondary Modern School ~ Part 1

School log books were introduced following the implementation of the 1870 Forster Education Act. Every state school Head Teacher was required to keep a long book in which they entered significant events that happened in the daily life of the school. The Chairman of the Managers or Governors was required to inspect the log book and sign and date his/her visit. At my second headship I had a complete set of log books dating from 1872 and they made fascinating reading. The Wiltshire & Swindon History Centre in Chippenham has a large collection of log books from state schools within the county of Wiltshire. They are available for anyone to read except for those books with entries made during the last 30 years. It is not obligatory for schools to maintain log books any more, which is a great pity.

As I attended both the Regis and Secondary Modern schools in Corsham, I had a wonderful time reading both sets of log books and I'm pleased to say my name wasn't mentioned once on any of the pages!! There follows a selection of entries from both schools which I thought were of interest today.

From the Regis School Log Book.

1943

May 3rd New school opened today with 194 children on roll. A large number who registered on Registration Day are absent with either measles or whooping cough.

Staff:-

Headmaster Mr Harold E. Hull, trained at Winchester

Miss Margery White Assistant Mistress

Mrs Hull, trained at Salisbury College, supply teacher



To alleviate the burden on the existing schools, the new Regis School was built alongside what we know now as King's Avenue, on the WWII Married Quarters pre-fabricated bungalows site (MQ1B), with Mr. H. Hull as its first Headmaster. The school opened on 3 May 1943 with 194 children attending on the first day and a large number absent due to measles and whooping cough.

Article continues next page...

May 10th. 80 children had cooked dinners supplied from the Holt Cooking Centre. 180 had milk for the first time.

May 13th. Miss McCredie Forster, Rural Subjects Organiser, visited at 2pm to discuss development of land around the premises for school gardens.

May 26th. 20 children, 10 boys & 10 girls taken to the new swimming baths in Bath for swimming instruction in charge of the Head. Caught 3.45pm train to Bath returning at 6.20pm.

July 26th. Number on roll 294. School understaffed because of teacher shortage.

July 27th. The Vicar of Corsham, the Rev. Glen Smith, visited the school to hear scripture lessons and attend assembly.

July 29th. Chief Inspector of Education visited the school.

Aug 6th. The school & Wartime Day Nursery was visited by a large party of officials including Sir Stafford & Lady Cripps. After touring the school, nursery, and one of the bungalows, the party had refreshments in the hall and Lady Cripps was presented with a bouquet. Sir Stafford Cripps was Minister of Aircraft Production at this time.

Aug 13th. School closed for Summer holidays and it re-opened on 20th September. The school was opened daily during the holidays to serve dinners for children whose mothers are on full time war work – 30 attending.

Sept 20th. School re-opened for the Autumn Term, 285 on roll.

Oct 1st. School closed today for one week to enable senior pupils to assist in the gathering of the potato harvest. This was done in all Wiltshire Elementary schools.

Oct 5th. David Eccles, MP for Chippenham, visited the school with his wife and also visited a nearby bungalow. David Eccles became Minister for Education in the 1950's and was knighted.

Oct 9th. Pleasing report on Religious Education – very good.

Oct 18th. Mr Brooks of Taunton was appointed Caretaker and will be housed in the bungalow as agreed with the Ministry of Aircraft Production. (Mr Brooks was still Caretaker when I was a pupil, 1952 to 1956, and his son Richard was also in my class and used to play for the school's football team.)

Nov 22nd. Blackout curtains fitted in the corridors, senior classrooms, Head's office, staffroom and kitchen. School now being used for Evening Technical classes.

Nov 22nd. To overcome blackout difficulties for the Winter, schools are now 9.25 to 12.15pm and 1.40 to 3.45pm.

Dec 20th. The school was closed during the afternoon. All pupils, with staff, were conveyed by buses to the Hawthorn Cinema where they were entertained by suitable films, the gift of Mr Smith & Mr Andrews of the Hawthorn Cinema.

Dec 22nd. School closed during the afternoon to enable the children to attend a party given at the new Community Centre. School closed for Christmas and will re-open on January 10th. Arrangements made for children of working mothers to have lunch at school.

1944

Jan 10th. School re-opened with 291 on roll. Mrs Tustin, registered teacher took up her post. She came from Teeside and will live in a Ministry bungalow.

Apr. 4th. Pathescope film projector for £35 purchased, staff had loaned money to pay for this as they hope to show educational films.

May 8th. Jumble Sale, Whist Drive and various competitions raised £49 to pay off the cost of the projector. The balance to be used to buy games for the dinner children on wet days.

Sept 28th. Headmaster attended a meeting at the Corsham Council School at which the Deputy Director of Education discussed with the Managers possible plans for a temporary Senior School in Corsham. Not sanctioned though handicraft room should be added to Regis School.

Nov 2nd. Accident – Joan Collier of 33 Kings Avenue fell in the garden at 3.30pm. Thought she may have fractured her arm. As no doctor available she was conveyed to the Bath Royal United Hospital by an ambulance of the Bristol Aeroplane Company. (The BAC had a factory underground in Spring Quarry).

1945

Jan 8th. School re-opened, Head absent as his son had scarlet fever.

Jan 26th. Weather very bad, poor attendance. On the 23rd the lorry carrying the dinners from the Cooking Depot came to grief on the icy road so no hot dinners until further notice.

May 3rd. The school has been opened for 2 years. Full school assembly held – pleasing ceremony of Birthday Greetings by the Infants. Between 3.15pm and 4.15pm the school was opened to the parents. More than 250 came to see the work of their children.

May 10th. School closed for 2 days following the announcement of public holidays on the cessation of hostilities in Europe. A new flagstaff has been erected and a Union Jack purchased.

Sept 10th. School re-opened for the Autumn Term. During the holidays the LCC (London County Council) authorities removed all their properties loaned to Wiltshire in 1943, tables, chairs, desks etc. There are no teachers' desks and we can only seat 40 children for lunch.

Oct 11th. The Senior pupils attended a performance of 'Macbeth' by the Osiris Players at the Community Centre. 2 guineas was given to the players, no child was charged for admission.

1946

Feb 1st & 4th. Losses at school – Reginald Ferris lost a knife from his overcoat pocket. Pamela Gale lost bus fare money. Roy Brake lost a fountain pen and propelling pencil and Douglas Smith 8d bus fare.

May 3rd. School's 3rd birthday. Whole school assembly with prayers by the Vicar. After lunch the school opened to visitors 2 to 3pm with light refreshments. Between 3.15pm and 4.15pm short demonstrations were given in the hall and playground by Infants, Juniors and Seniors of Rhythmic work, physical training and organised games. Extremely popular, 300 visitors. Managers attended, Col. Fuller, chairman sent his apologies. Miss Scott Baker, Deputy Director of Education also sent apologies.

May 6th. 16 senior pupils received swimming lessons at the Royal Baths, Bath. They will attend each week until the Summer Holidays. Cost of 1/5d paid by the Education Committee.

1947

Jan 31st. Attendance of children is extremely low this week owing to the very bad weather including deep snow. (The temperature on that day was registered as -5F!)

Mar 6th. Weather conditions (deep snow) continue and school meals van failed to reach the school, children returned home for lunch who normally had cooked dinners.

June 2nd. School closed on the visit of 60 children and 9 staff to Wookey Hole Caves, Cheddar Gorge and Bristol Zoological Gardens, weather fine, visit much enjoyed.

Michael Rumsey

Corsham Bookshop

has been a presence at 16 Martingate on our High St since 2002. The building is newish (1960s) and stands on the site of Beszant's butchers and abattoir, a fact that is commemorated by the old stone carving of a bull on the corner of the shop. The bookshop was established by my good friend and long-time colleague



Peter French. We had both worked for many years for Waterstone's. In fact it was Peter who back in 1988 gave me my first bookselling job at Waterstone's in Milsom Street, Bath. In 2002 Peter decided to start his own shop and after some months of fitting out and preparation he began trading in the autumn of 2002. I was at a loose end at the time and he employed me to help set up the shop. Thereafter I stayed on to cover his days off, his holidays and the Christmas rush. Initially I commuted from Bristol and latterly from Pickwick. In 2007 Peter made a career change and went off to train as a teacher. I decided to buy the business from him, and I began trading as proprietor on 29th February 2008.

From the start I was well aware that we could never compete on price with either the big shops or the online retailers. However, I was sure we could outdo them in terms of personal service, book knowledge, convenience and community involvement. When it comes to less mainstream titles we can often provide just as good a price and a quicker and more reliable service than our competitors, since we are working on a much smaller scale, and we benefit from next day delivery from our wholesalers. We know personally many of our customers and their reading habits, with the overlap between friend and customer becoming pleasantly hazy.



Article continues next page...

The bookshop developed very much as an organic response to our customer base and the community as much to my ideas and those of my colleagues in the shop. To keep fresh, businesses constantly need to re-invent themselves. We have achieved this partly by developing relationships with various local organisations, and partly by the simple expedient of trying anything once - however bonkers it may sound! Obviously not everything works out, but lots does. As a result we have sold books in many different venues and in conjunction with many different bodies. These have included Bath Spa University at Corsham Court, The Pound Arts Centre, Bowood House Hotel, Lowden Garden Centre, various local schools, and even Corsham Civic Society!

We also organise our own events. We started on a fairly small scale, with lesser known authors or slightly home made events. But these days we have a pretty good reputation with both authors and publishers, and although we may not be able to lure the really



huge names (because we are just not big enough), we have had some great events [above, Janet with author Stuart Barnes(. But these days we have a pretty good reputation with both authors and publishers, and although we may not be able to lure the really huge names (because we are just not big enough), we have had some great events with some really high quality authors. Our cookery events are particularly popular and we have held them in the Town Hall, Church House and the Almshouses in order to accommodate as many people as possible. Now nearly all our evenings are full and you need to get your name down quickly if you want to come along. Although we sell books at our events, there are obviously overheads involved in terms of wages and other costs. So I very much see them as an exercise in raising our profile and good will in the community as well as amongst publishers and authors.

Running a bookshop will never make me a fortune but it provides me with a satisfying job in the heart of our community. It's true I am selling a product, but it is a product I believe in passionately. Books are at the very heart of our civilisation. After all, it is only through the written word that we are able to learn from people who we can never meet because of circumstance in time and place. Reading is a great pleasure for many, but it is also a vital conduit for the dissemination of ideas, information and insights.

Janet Brakspear

The Hell that was Corsham

Now that's a title to get your attention. Let me explain: a newspaper article and a manuscript from St. Patrick's Catholic Church archive [which was which curated last year by Cath Maloney] shed an interesting – if rather wretched – light on the initial experiences of the Irishmen who came to Corsham during WWII. *The Irish Post* newspaper article included 'an edited version of the entry with which Richard O'Gorman won The Irish Post's feature article competition for Listowel Writers' Week. The remnant of the newspaper was without a date but must have been published post-1945, perhaps sometime into the [early] 1950s ~ I've tried finding out online without success.

There follows selective extracts from the article ~

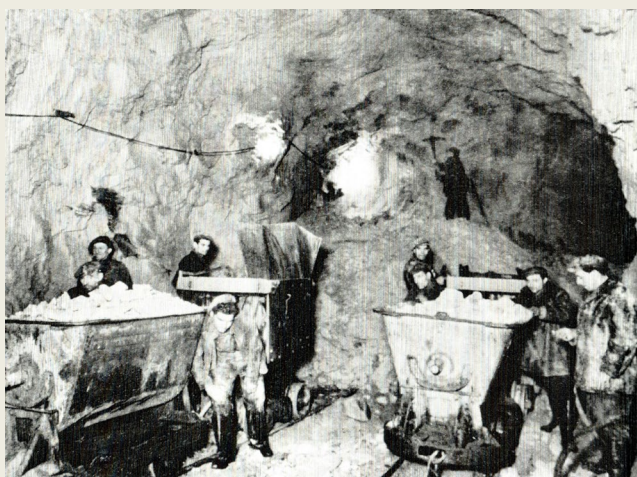
The time 1940, the place Corsham a sleepy little village in the heart of Wiltshire. Britain was embroiled in WWII and a large proportion of her able-bodied were in the armed forces. Meanwhile, the war effort had to be maintained in Britain and in the building and civil engineering industry, that meant some unusual contracts. But there was an acute shortage of labour. In the village of Corsham, a giant underground aircraft complex, occupying a site of some 5 square miles, was awarded to Sir Alexander Gibb & Partners, to whom Sir Alfred McAlpine, George Wimpey and others of such stature were but sub-contractors. The bowels of the Wiltshire countryside had to be blasted and hewed out and brought to the surface by loco-skip trains. To the Irish who worked on the project it was simply called the 'Corsham Tunnel'.

Men from places like Wigan, Bolton, Northampton and Scunthorpe - many of them veterans of the Mersey tunnel and Pitlochry - all converged on Corsham, the new Klondike of the West Country. All were skilled men at that kind of work, but although they came in droves from all over the country their numbers fell far short of the requirement. In desperation, the contracting companies turned to Ireland for yet more labour. Recruiting offices were set up in many parts of the country and men of all ages and callings were signed up and transported to Corsham. Many were fresh-faced lads who came with all the eagerness of Yukon gold-diggers but their enthusiasm soon confronted reality when they were herded like cattle into the various camps which had been hastily constructed to accommodate them. Soon that area of peaceful Wiltshire became a giant shanty town.

Each hut housed twenty-six to thirty men. Camp beds were positioned close together and, at each end of the hut, there was a coke stove. Other amenities were non-existent. It was primitive in those early days in Corsham. I clearly recall the men using a single stand-pipe in the middle of the camp to wash and shave. Toilet facilities were absolutely crude and the canteens little better than cattle byres. The approach of the camp boss and his 'hammer gang' was to take it or leave it.

Article continues next page...

In time, the workers began to organise themselves and to demand their rights. But the early months were soul-searing and only the strongest were able to rise above the indignities. Meanwhile, Corsham was being dug into amidst frenzied activity. Many hundreds of raw Irish youngsters - and some not so young - were literally thrown into the mine to assist the tunnel-diggers, heading drives and blasting gangs. The conditions were awful - the incessant noise of the blasting; the eerie glow of the sodium lamps; the dirt and mud and general debris; and the shrill clanking of the locos with their choking, acrid fumes. They burnt the eyes and made one claw at one's throat. Even the very spittle in the mouth was as black as the sludge beneath the wheels of those diabolical machines.



These photographs are indicative of the working conditions in the Corsham 'Tunnel'.

Hell could not be worse.

All of the time the work was arduous and extremely dangerous. Every gang was ruled by a hard-faced ganger-man. They worked their charges full out! McAlpine most often favoured Mayo men in positions of authority: *And woe was he who called for the tea, for if you value your life, don't join by Christ with McAlpine's 'Fusiliers'* [from a version of the song, *McAlpine's Fusiliers*, attributed to Martin Henry from Rooskey, East Mayo, c. 1950]. The 'tunnel' steamed on. Much blood was spilt in needless accidents. Dozens, perhaps, ultimately, scores were killed or maimed for life. However, at least conditions in the huts became better as the men began to assert their rights. The contractors noted the changing mood of the men and, in general, acceded to their demands. Temporary churches, recreation halls and even a makeshift cinema sprang up and life above the ground, at least, became more bearable. Furthermore, hundreds of men went into digs in the local towns and the bosses again cooperated by supplying fleets of buses to ferry them to and fro.

Article continues next page...

All of the time, the general attitude of local people seemed to be one of resentment, bordering on hostility towards the Irish men: at best we were intruders, at worst, army dodgers. Many VIP's came to view the great excavation, among them Winston Churchill, Ernest Bevin and the gracious Queen Mary. Then came a dramatic event: the great air-raid on Bath when for three hours the Luftwaffe dropped bomb after bomb. Many scores lost their lives and many hundreds were injured that night. Many Irishmen who by then in digs in Bath or who were visiting the town that night were killed. Some were never identified as, generally, the navvies travelled incognito for reasons of their own.

By now the camps were well-organised and a great community spirit prevailed in the huts. The work of dedicated priests contributed much to that. As the months stretched to years, the Corsham 'Tunnel' began to take shape and show itself as a masterpiece of civil engineering. In time the momentum began to slow down the great 'Tunnel' was almost completed. It had taken three years of toil, sweat and lost lives. Soon we were being dispersed to various other priority jobs all over Britain. Despite everything, there were few of us, as we walked away from Corsham, didn't feel some twinge of nostalgia. It was a distinct part of Irish life in Britain during those years. We would never again know anything like it. Of all the thousands of Irish workers who passed through Corsham, not one will ever forget it.

Also in the archive is a manuscript entitled 'My Life' by Billy McComb which recounts experiences similar to that which RO'G wrote about ~ what follows is an extract:

William 'Billy' McComb came to Corsham in 1940 to work for McAlpine's Constructions stone blasting and skip filling at Spring Quarry (RAF Rudloe), 120ft underground. He along with 40 other labourers lived in wooden huts in a camp with very basic facilities: washing was in a trough using cold water, and toilet facilities were holes in the ground. When he wrote his first letter to his mother in Ireland, his return address was Labour Camp, Thorny Pits, Corsham. His mother responded "For God's sake, Billy, come home immediately from that dundgeon". But he stayed, raised a family and for his remaining 58 years was a devoted supporter of St. Patrick's Church.

This is dedicated to my father, John 'Jack' Maloney who came to England from Co. Mayo in 1945 and worked in London on WWII bomb sites clearing rubble and, also, on the building of additional runways at Heathrow Airport during 1948-9 where he first met my mother, Catherine (also from Mayo). Shortly after they were married and whilst working for George Wimpey he was involved in the Harrow Wealdstone train crash during the morning rush hour of 8 October 1952: 112 people were killed and 340 injured and it remains the worst peacetime rail crash in the United Kingdom. Both his legs were amputated just below the knee and right hand just below the elbow. However, after a period in hospital he was fitted for artificial limbs, learnt to drive an adapted car and went back to work with Wimpey running their Transport and Plant in Hayes, West London.

John Maloney

Mollie Mitford – an appreciation

January this year saw the loss of one of our older members, Mollie Mitford, who passed peacefully away aged 95 years on January 16th. Mollie was born in the then village of Longwell Green, on the outskirts of Bristol on ANZAC day, April 25th 1924, and was educated in Hanham and also at Kingswood Grammar School. At the outbreak of the 2nd



World War she was working as a bookkeeper in a Bristol office and witnessed the effects of the bombing, which was quite devastating in parts of the city centre. In 1950 she married Peter Mitford who was an electrical design engineer working for the National Grid and they set up home in Portsmouth. In 1959, Peter moved to work at the Hall Green, the Birmingham office of the National Grid helping to design and maintain the network in the ever-growing region now known as the West Midlands. Mollie lived in Solihull for 46 years and only moved to the Corsham area in 2005, as she commented, 'It would be nice to be back in the area near my birthplace of Longwell Green'.

She became a life member of the Society and enjoyed the various talks and visits over the years and was looking forward to Paul Martin's January talk, which she sadly missed. She insisted to one of her carers that not many people would attend her funeral, but she was certainly wrong there.



Over 110 people attended either the cremation service at Semington in the morning or the service to celebrate her life held in the afternoon at Box Methodist Church, where the 23rd Psalm was read from the 19th century Mitford family bible, something Mollie would have been pleased about. She will be missed by her many friends and the photograph taken at Wadsworth Brewery in Devizes in 2017 shows her at her best with a good smile and very much looking forward to tasting the various beers that were being offered by the brewery.

Molly (in the wheelchair) and other members of the Corsham Civic Society on an outing to the Wadsworth Brewery)

Michael Rumsey

New Mexico

Renewed greetings from your American correspondent! In 2016, I set out on a 50,000-mile “back roads” drive around the U.S.A. for National Geographic, where I was editor of travel books. I mapped out 50 itineraries highlighting intriguing sites, both natural and man-made, and thought I’d share one of these itineraries with you. This drive extends across New Mexico in the U.S. southwest (between Arizona and Texas).

Very large array

We begin in west-central New Mexico, in a remote, desert-scrub expanse framed on all sides by distant mountains. Our first stop, the **Very Large Array**, or (VLA), is truly amazing: 27 huge radio antennas, each ten storeys high and weighing 230 tons, scattered on the desert plain. If they look familiar, you may well have seen them playing a prominent role in the 1997 film *Contact*.

The antennas work together to detect invisible radio signals from the most distant reaches of the universe and have revealed groundbreaking information about outlying galaxies, quasars, pulsars, black holes, and more. And why are we in the middle of nowhere? The antennas need to be incredibly isolated, as cosmic radio waves are a billion-billion-million times fainter than a mobile phone signal. Speaking of mobiles, turn yours off as you enter the site, as it can disrupt the telescope’s performance. In fact, the VLA could detect your phone’s signal from Jupiter.



San Antonio

From the VLA, it’s about 75 lightly-populated miles east to **Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge**, a 57,000-acre preserve for birds and other wildlife. Twelve miles of roads lead you through the refuge’s marsh wetlands and forests. In the winter, hundreds of thousands of sandhill cranes, snow geese, eagles, and blackbirds call the preserve home, while warmer months see visits by songbirds, hummingbirds, sandpipers, and birds of prey. If you’re lucky, as I was, you may also catch sight of some earthbound fauna—like the pig-like javelina, sometimes called a peccary.

Hatch

Head south 100 miles from Bosque del Apache to the town of **Hatch**, the 'Chile (chilli) Capital of the World'. The area's desert heat and low humidity produce prized, capsaicin-rich peppers by the ton-load. Hatch, a town with a heavily Hispanic population and culture, contains no shortage of friendly shops and stands selling chillies of all heat levels, while the small café at the Village Market grocery store in town makes a variety of delicious house-made burritos starring the local red and green chillies.

White sands missile range

From Hatch, it's 60 miles to the **White Sands Missile Range Museum**. The museum is within an active U.S. Army missile range, the site of many rocket and bomb tests ~ including, most famously, the first ever nuclear bomb detonation, at Trinity Site in July 1945.

The museum's outdoor plaza features dozens of old rockets and missiles, including a restored V2 rocket. At the end of World War II, Wernher von Braun, one of the minds behind Germany's wartime rocket program, and more than 100 other German scientists surrendered to the U.S. and eventually came to work here on the American rocket program. The main museum's eclectic collection includes samples of "Trinitite," molten nuggets of radioactive glass formed when desert sand scooped up in the mushroom cloud of the first nuclear bomb at Trinity Site rained back down to Earth.

White sands national monument

Continue east 30 miles to the extraordinary sand dunes of **White Sands National Monument**. These intensely bright, white dunes are part of the largest gypsum sand field in the world, extending more than 275 impressive square miles on the site of an ancient sea. Gypsum, a commonplace mineral, is water-soluble and normally swept away by river currents—but there are no rivers nearby, so the powdery sand has accumulated here and shifted with the winds into a variety of sizes and shapes. Kids and the young at heart may want to buy a small plastic sled at the visitor center for sand-sledding down the dune-sides.



Article continues next page...

Roswell

From White Sands, it's another 130 miles into **Roswell**, a famous name in the UFO world. Long story short: Something crashed near Roswell on July 8, 1947. Alienologists believe it was a UFO, that a dead alien was discovered, autopsied, and that the whole thing was covered up by a massive U.S. government conspiracy. While there was indeed government stonewalling, sceptics point to the fact that the incident has been conclusively determined to be a crash of a top-secret, high-altitude surveillance balloon designed to keep tabs on Soviet nuclear tests...which would explain the reticence of U.S. government officials to be forthcoming on the original event.

However, the believers at the **International UFO Museum and Research Center** think otherwise and provide extensive information on the Roswell Incident, though frankly I'd put more credence in their view if the exhibit labels had fewer typos. There is, nonetheless, a fantastic diorama featuring life-size models of what we've come to expect aliens to look like (see photo).

Carlsbad

It's an hour's drive from Roswell through the quiet New Mexico desert to our final destination, **Carlsbad Caverns National Park**.

The caves are the largest in the world; the three paved miles of underground paths that are accessible to the casual visitor only scratch the surface.



The caves are the largest in the world; the three paved miles of underground paths that are accessible to the casual visitor only scratch the surface. You can take an elevator or walk down the hundreds of feet to the Big Room, a giant chasm 1800 feet long and 1100 feet wide, with myriad towering limestone formations and a ceiling that soars up 25 storeys. This one cave is so large that it will take at least an hour to explore.

Hundreds of thousands of Mexican free-tailed bats pour out of the cave's natural entrance every summer evening at sunset. There's a little amphitheater set up outside the cave mouth to watch the amazing spectacle, the black mass zipping by at speeds of up to 25 m.p.h.

Stay tuned! In several months I hope to be back with another little window into back-roads America.

Larry Porges

My life in antiques – talk to CCS meeting on 24th January by Paul Martin

Paul Martin was a very engaging speaker, relaxed, informal – even chatty in style.

He started by saying he loves Corsham and always thought it would be a good place for his shop 'The Gallery', which has been open now for over a year. He is pleased with how it's gone but because he had too many TV commitments he couldn't be in the shop as much as he wanted. This year he is hopeful of managing three days a week.



Paul in his Corsham shop

He told us he wanted a career in films and to that end he did all sorts of jobs, including scene-setting in which he used antiques (he had a love of art and antiques). He soon realized however that getting on meant stepping into dead-men's shoes and so, with help, he started up an antiques business in Marlborough, The Table Gallery. Nineteen years ago a TV researcher came into his shop and asked about one of the antiques. He 'waxed lyrical' for one and a half hours! Four weeks later someone telephoned him and asked for a CV and then a screen test. He (PM) suggested the auction house in Cirencester which they did. Paul found it difficult though and didn't think it would go anywhere so he was surprised when two weeks later he was offered a job. He said he had the knowledge to talk about antiques but his 'camera skills' were poor because he hardly watched any TV, so he asked his mum for advice; she made some very good suggestions which he took up.

'Flog It' has taken him all over the country and there are very few country estates and galleries that he hasn't been in, as well as getting to know the families. He's also got to know so many artisans, craftsmen, historians, archivists and painters. He says the public are Flog It, not him – they have the 'stuff' which makes the programme. His passions are furniture and pictures. With old furniture, he thinks it has an energy – in the patination and the tight wood. There's nothing more green than antique furniture and he hopes people will begin to like 'brown' furniture again ('not brown, but hues of brown'). It's so cheap relatively speaking; he never charges more than 20% of the purchase price.



Flog It was de-commissioned last year because the BBC realized that the repeats do very well! He made 1500 Flog Its – 80 per year with a budget of £600,00. Paul will still be working in TV (apart from running The Gallery in Corsham), doing a programme on crafts. He is passionate about heritage crafts. He told us of a programme he did on Avebury Manor restoration in which he travelled to China to commission reproductions of hand-crafted 17th century pots: it was fascinating.

He is a patron of The Heritage Crafts Association which helps promote traditional heritage crafts skills and supports apprentices in learning these skills. He believes there is a renaissance in arts and crafts and that we should re-skill the country! His vision is to have craft 'swops' eg. the traditional craftsmen of Wiltshire swapped with, say, those of Northumberland, to present and learn traditional crafts from different counties. He'd like this in Corsham.



Paul at the Pound talking to the Corsham Civic Society [photo. By Larry St. Croix]

Paul took many questions and could have been there all night if he hadn't been rescued. He had no pictures or notes – it was as if we were sitting in the pub with him having a chat and a laugh together – a great evening!

Cath Maloney

Catherine Eden ~ a Pickwick centennial

Catherine was born in Flax Bourton, North Somerset, on 29th April, 1920. She is the youngest of three sisters. She went to school in Clifton, Bristol. In 1938 she went to Somerville College, Oxford, but when war was declared in 1939 she went to work with the Land Army and later at Kew Gardens which gave her a 'good grounding' when she later set about creating her garden at Pickwick End (No. 23 Pickwick ~ see p. 22). At the very end of the war she joined the International Voluntary Service and went to Berlin.



Young Catherine aged 7

Catherine met Robin Eden in London and they married there in 1946. Robin was a trained cabinet maker and had worked for Peter Jones as a furniture designer. They both had a 'very good eye' and this led them to opening their first antique shop in Bradford-on-Avon. With their growing family, in 1952 they bought Pickwick End from the Matthews family - the only other interested party was a demolition expert who was running a practised eye over the lead roof! Their new shop was called Robin Eden Antiques - and also sold garden furniture - and was then run from the barn at Pickwick End. They had six children, Matthew, Thomas, Rose, Anna, Felicity and Alice.

During the halcyon days of the '50s and '60s, Catherine dedicated herself to her 6 children planting vegetables, her unique herbaceous border and helping Robin. Son Matthew joined the business in the early 1980s. They kept sheep, shared a Jersey cow with a neighbour and made beer from their homegrown hops!

In 1991, Matthew and wife Miranda moved to Pickwick End from Chippenham and took over the business. Robin and Catherine built themselves the Garden House overlooking the walled garden. Robin and Alison Currey [a neighbour] were founder members of the Corsham Civic Society and Robin served as President 1980-1992. Robin died in 1993.

Pickwick End was well known for its annual garden fete which raised money for charity. Latterly, Catherine has opened her splendid walled garden once a year and been host to sometimes as many as 300 visitors [Autumn 2019 issue, p. 11]. Given its reputation, no wonder it's known as the Garden of Eden.

Catherine is a staunch Catholic and has been a regular worshipper at the local St. Patrick's Church. Even at 85 years of age she still cycled to Mass and down into Corsham. These days she enjoys sitting in her garden [photo. right] and is keen on reading, knitting, patchwork, jigsaws, crosswords etc.



The Eden's remain a close knit family and Catherine's longevity is a testimony to a full life, lived well.

John Maloney, Miranda and Matthew Eden

A rambling we will go!

Barry Cox, David Wright (Cotswold Voluntary Wardens) and Ian Rooney applied to the Corsham Area Board and were awarded funding for a Heritage Trails project for the production of eight trails. The leaflets were also supported by Corsham Town Council, Wiltshire Council, Cotswold Conservation Board, Corsham Walking Festival and a number of other local organisations. The project has involved improving public footpaths and rights of way, providing a series of way markers and informed walks to encourage the community and visitors to experience the natural beauty of the North Wiltshire countryside.

Six leaflets have been produced shown in the photo. above] and are available free of charge in Corsham at the Town Hall, Tourist Information Centre and Springfield Community Campus (none of which are accessible for the foreseeable future). The Biddestone Heritage Trail and Corsham to Biddestone Peacock Trail when printed will complete the set. The leaflets cover a variety of aspects including the countryside, historic buildings, the quarrying industry, the milling trade along the Bybrook valley and the military presence in Corsham, Biddestone, Box and Colerne area. The leaflets are A2 when open and fold down to DL size (221mm x 100mm) and so are easily kept in a jacket or anorak pocket etc.

The route maps are of a good size and clearly and well-marked out and the 'what to see' are well illustrated with good photographs, complete with key descriptions. Overall, the balance of contents and design is most attractive.

To date Cotswold Voluntary Wardens have provided over 1500 hours of labour fixing stiles, putting in kissing gates and extra way marker posts, as well as producing this excellent series of leaflets. They are to be heartily congratulated for all their efforts and services to walkers and ramblers.



The kissing gate 'crew' beside the gate on the CORM3 path which runs from Westrop Lane into Corsham Park

John Maloney with thanks to Barry Cox

Current planning matters

Proposed Burlington Grange development (land north of Bath Road, Pickwick)

The four-day Public Inquiry scheduled to hear Gladman's appeal resumed on 14th January 2020 and was adjourned shortly after opening at the request of Gladman [!!]. Various of us that belong to the Pickwick Association [PA] and some members of Corsham Town Council made representations to the Public Inquiry Inspector. Counsels for the PA and Wilts CC had made some telling points and the Appellants Counsel for Gladman Developments Ltd seemed a little rattled. In particular, their attention was drawn to the fact that they had been emailed in November about a flaw in the proposed foundations design and after a break for lunch, Gladman's counsel astonished the Inspector and everyone else by requesting an adjournment of the entire Inquiry as they needed more time to 'tweak' the design of the proposed housing foundations so that they might comply with the requirements of Conditions 22 and 23 [see reports in previous issues of *Spotlight* eg Autumn 2018, pps. 21-22]

The Counsels for Wilts Council and the PA initially objected but the Inspector, having been placed in an impossible situation - had he not granted an adjournment Gladman were likely to have sought a judicial review in the High Court taking the matter out of his hands and that of the Inspectorate - and after careful consideration he granted Gladman's request. The Inquiry is due to reconvene on 21 July but, given the existing circumstances it is probably more likely that it will be postponed for the third time! And so, yet more delay and uncertainty: the dislocation, delay and additional cost implications are dreadful and unfair to WC and PA and the mine owner! The system is shockingly skewed in circumstances like these and needs to be overhauled ~ if you have very deep pockets it works in your favour.

There is a reasonable chance that some of PA's costs will be met but, nonetheless, they are likely to face a shortfall in funds of as much as £20,000. Meanwhile, an appeal for further funds is in preparation, based on not-yet-complete revised estimates of costs to completion of the inquiry.

57 High Street, Corsham ~ application by Bewley Funeral Directors, Melksham

Notwithstanding the existence of AJB Funerals (Aaron & Jonathon Bewley, previously *Bewley & Merrett Funeral Directors* before being forced to change the company name), Pickwick Road, Corsham, a company that has served Corsham for many years, another, rival branch of the family mainly based in Melksham, has sought to open a funeral operation in the High Street.

To the surprise of many of those attending, the Wiltshire CC Planning Officer, Simon Smith, introduced a report which recommended granting planning permission and listed building consent, subject to conditions.

Article continues next page...

At the start of the debate a proposal was moved by Cllr Hutton [Conservative, Chippenham], seconded by Cllr Toby Sturgis [Conservative, Brinkworth, near Royal Wootton Bassett], to grant planning permission: do any of them know Corsham in detail and, indeed, the Corsham Neighbourhood Plan?? I'd love to know their reasons for recommendation ~ it certainly wasn't based on 'Localism'! Had they taken into account that previously the Corsham Town Council had unanimously passed a resolution against the decision, and the raft of local objections?

Cllr Ruth Hopkinson, Division Member [and Corsham, Pickwick Ward], spoke regarding the application with the main points focusing on: compatibility with adjoining businesses; lack of rear access; ventilation and odours; traffic and parking concerns; hazardous waste; overdevelopment of the site; impact on the listed building; impact on a historical and heritage site; the Corsham Neighbourhood Plan; impact on local amenity *and the lack of engagement from the applicant* [my italics].

A proposal was then moved by Cllr Gavin Grant [Liberal Democrat [Malmesbury]], seconded by Cllr Howard Greenman [Conservative, Kington], to refuse planning permission contrary to the officer's report. This motion was carried.

Resolved: That planning permission and Listed Building Consent be refused.

PS I wonder where that leaves the 'shop' they have already opened at No. 57: on their website for the new premises there are just contact details unlike their other premises in Melksham and elsewhere. Perhaps it will just be used as an office.

Celebrating 125 years of Corsham Town Council

A great change in local democracy came about with the Local Government Act of 1894 which for the first time introduced elected councils at district and parish level. Parishes with a population of 300 or more were to have an elected parish council which now became the first tier of local government. Another significant outcome of the act was that it entitled women who owned property to vote in local elections, become poor law guardians, and act on school boards.

A parish meeting was called in Corsham on Tuesday 4th December 1894 to elect the first fifteen Parish Councillors. The candidates could be either registered householders or 'residents' ~ those who had lived in the parish or within three miles of it for the whole of the previous twelve months. Top of the election poll was a Mr John Bull described as a roadman, and the other councillors were a quarry-master, two quarry firemen, two quarrymen, two masons, a builder, a carpenter and joiner, a gentleman, a teacher, the Vicar, a farmer and an insurance agent.

For the first time decisions about local matters such as community buildings, planning, street lighting, allotments etc., were made by local people. In the case of Corsham the demographic of the area was reflected by the preponderance of local people involved in quarrying.

The first full meeting of the Council took place in Corsham Town Hall. A fine Market Hall (photo. Right) had been built in 1784 by Paul Methuen [3rd Baron Methuen of Corsham Court] as a gift to the townspeople and in 1882 that building was partially demolished and a two-storey structure erected on the site as a Town Hall to commemorate the Jubilee of Queen Victoria.



In 1896, one of the first major public acts of the Corsham Parish Council was to commission a memorial to the late Charles Mayo who had been Vice-Chairman of the first Parish Council and a benefactor to many local causes, not least as Chairman of the Corsham Water Works Company which provided the town with a water supply in 1889. The Mayo Memorial, *in the form of a fountain for foot passengers and cattle*, was erected across the road from the Town Hall.

Matters dealt with in the first years of the Parish Council included, variously ~

- a resolution was passed asking the Rural District Councillors to *use their influence upon the Guardians of the Chippenham Union not to prosecute parents who refuse to have their children vaccinated*
- the Fire Engine Committee was empowered to *engage twelve members at two shillings a year with the captain at £2. 10s. 0d as heretofore*
- the erection of the first *public facility* [the Station road toilet] in 1896
- in May 1896 the sanitary Committee made it clear that *Glassware, Tins and Metal of any kind be separated from the rest*: the weekly collection of household rubbish from the town area had started in 1891 and soil from the earth closets twice a week!
- The Council became the trustees of the Town Hall and informed the coroner that it *felt that, after a body had been viewed by the Jury, the Town hall or one of the schoolrooms rather than a public house would be a better place to hold an inquest.*

Thus began the work of Corsham Parish Council.

The above is an extract from *The formation of Corsham Parish Council ~ an introduction* which I wrote on behalf of Sharon Thomas (Head of Community Services, Corsham Town Council, for the Corsham Town Council Newsletter, Winter 2020)

John Maloney

Corsham Civic Society website and Facebook pages to be revamped

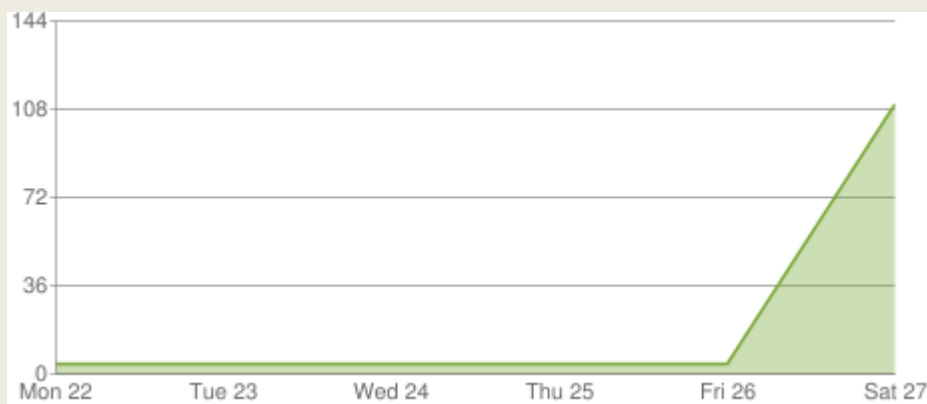
With the agreement of the executive committee, Michael Rumsey and I have been reviewing how the CCS social media sites might be improved and we recently had a meeting with Chris Perry (MD, Corsham Print). As Michael reported in *From the Chair* [p. 1], Revolution Arts created the website and have maintained it for the last 6 years. Separately, the magazine has been printed by Corsham Print who will now provide an integrated service by also upgrading and maintaining the website and the existing Facebook page ~ <https://www.facebook.com/corshamcivicsociety>, offering opportunities for better efficiency as well as better connectivity and all round improvements. The Facebook page has hardly been utilised but could become a real asset in respect of giving people the opportunity to record their memories, upload photographs and other images and exchange views and ideas. Chris Perry is going to establish a direct connection to it on the website and in due course we will look to make other connections.

I have long maintained a page on the following website - <https://birbeck.academia.edu/JohnMaloney> - as a former extra-mural lecturer at Birkbeck College, London, and so I have uploaded articles that I have written, been quoted in or have edited. That has included *Spotlight*: the article about the dendro and apotropaic markings on the timbers in 12 Pickwick attracted more 'hits' [ie views] than anything else I have ever uploaded and the last issue of *Spotlight* broke that record with now more than 110 views [see below] from all over the world! Looking at the analytics it seems that the articles about Pickwick School and the 1860s Corsham School exercise books were the main draw. It can be said of Corsham Civic Society's *Spotlight* that it truly has a worldwide audience which could be improved!

ACADEMIA

Hi John,

Congratulations! You uploaded your paper 6 days ago and it is already gaining traction. Total views since upload ~



You got **110 views** from the United Kingdom, Australia, Croatia, the United States, Indonesia, Sierra Leone, India, Turkey, Gambia, Germany, Israel, Vietnam, Ireland, Lithuania, Sudan, Japan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the United Arab Emirates, Belgium, Ecuador, Uruguay, Thailand, Bulgaria, Hungary, South Africa, Poland, and Portugal on "Corsham Civic Society, Spotlight journal ~ Spring 2019".

John Maloney

Christmas may be now a somewhat distant memory but the Christmas party at Pickwick Manor is certainly not. Hosts Lucy and Tom Brakspear even provided a choir [shown right, on the main stairs] to sing Christmas carols and the guests joined in. Others involved were Christine Burt, Jacqie Johnson, Helen Horsewell and Anthea White. Annemaria and Stuart Boomer-Davis brewed the splendid mulled wine. What a fine way to celebrate the festive season.



Lights at Pickwick End,
No. 23 Pickwick



And, finally, in these straitened times and with virtual quarantine, all the officers at Corsham Civic Society, hope you all take care and keep safe and well.

The poem opposite is quite poignant given the present circumstances but I hope that by the time the Summer issue is published - end July/early August - the worst of the epidemic may be over.

John Maloney

Gone are the days of climbing trees

We wore odd socks and scratches on knees
Played out the days before it got dark,
Cowboys and Indians, we ran round the park.

Mums and dads always knew where we played,
'Be home for dinner' so we never strayed.
Always asking so what have you done?
Read comics, played conkers and always had fun!

Children were told to be seen and not heard,
Say that nowadays, it seems so absurd?
Sometimes cheeky, got a clip round the ear,
And waiting for father would fill you with fear.

A week with the family spent down at the coast
Up early for breakfast and poached eggs on toast,
We never said bored with so much to do
Walk down to the beach and creamed teas for two.

How did this change, it's all gone wrong
Phones, computers and violence through song
Gone are the days of happier times,
A broken society, binge drinking and crimes.

Harry Betts

CORSHAM CIVIC SOCIETY 2020

All meetings are at the Pound arts centre (telephone 01249 701628) at 7.30pm unless otherwise stated. Members £1, Non-Members £3. Guests are very welcome.

- Apr 24th** David Dawson, Director, Wiltshire Museum, '*The making of the Kingdom of Wessex*' ~ **NB this and all talks until July CANCELLED and THOSE thereafter will be subject to confirmation**
- May 15th** **AGM** ~ a brief meeting followed by a social gathering with wine and cheese
- June 26th** Hannah Severn, Senior House Steward, '*Life and works of Sir Richard Colt Hoare (Stourhead)*'
- July 24nd** Wendy Reynolds, '*Falkland Islands today*'
- Aug TBC** **VISIT**
- Sept 25th** John Maloney, Project Co-Ordinator, '*Progress on the Corsham High Street Project*'
- Oct 23rd** Edward Barrett, ex-Clerk to the Charter Trustees, '*Mayors of Bath*'
- Nov 20th** **SOCIAL EVENING**
- Dec** No meeting

- *Please note that the Programme may be subject to changes*
- *NB new attendance fees*

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 Close, Corsham, SN13 9JQ, Wiltshire. Registered Charity No: 275321