# Corsham Spotlight

Magazine of the Corsham Civic Society
http://www.corshamcivicsociety.co.uk

Summer 2026
July 2026 Vol. 23 Issue 2

## Contents


| | |
|---|---|
| From the Chair | 1 |
| Reviews | 2 |
| AGM Chairman's Report | 3 |
| AGM Treasurer's Report | 4 |
| AGM Tapestry Project Report | 5 |
| Visit to Bayeux Tapestry | 5 |
| Obituaries | 6 |
| What You Find in Cupboards | 10 |
| James Tower 1919-1988 | 11 |
| Cleaning Box West end Tunnel | 15 |
| Corsham's First Dame | 16 |
| 80 Years of Folly Farm | 18 |
| History of Corsham Banking | 20 |
| Wiltshire Car Reg Letters | 22 |
| Faresaver Bus Services | 23 |
| "The King's Rose" | 24 |
| Dates for your Diary | 25 |


*Contributions to Spotlight are very welcome.*

*Please submit articles to Vaughan Hill at: vaughan.hill@gmail.com*

## Editorial

In mid July 'Corsham House' (latterly Lloyds Bank) was officially opened to the benefit of the High Street and the town. It will be a real asset I am sure, and we wish the enterprise well and are looking forward to sampling the delights it offers.

The building has been part of the High Street scene since the 19th century, a Listed Building, in a Conservation area, mostly as a bank under different names. Chris Johnson has provided article on the History of Banking in Corsham further in this issue. Do take a look.

It is understood that Andrew Hall, the owner of Martingate, is now contemplating a further project to enhance the Precinct and bring it more in line with the charm of the High Street. What an excellent idea! It must have seemed very progressive to erect a modern 1960's piece of architecture at the time, and the town has got used to it, but it might be improved by something a little softer on the eye. We shall look forward to hearing the plans as they develop. Thank you for all your efforts, Andrew.





## Officers and Committee Members:

**President**
Thomas Breakspear

**Chair**
Edward Barrett

**Vice Chair**
Vacant

**Secretary**
Cath Maloney
Tel: 01249 715159

**Acting Treasurer**
Chris Johnson
Tel: 07817 880287

**Membership Secretary**
Martin Cadwgan
Tel:: 07932 146647

**Programme Organiser**
Pat Whalley
Tel: 07570 946725

**Planning Chair**
David Bertwistle
Tel: 07984 668559

**Spotlight Editor**
Vaughan Hill
Tel: 07973 612805

**Proof Editor**
Edward Barrett
Tel: 07565 612408

### From the Chair

Went the year well? So far, so good – with Spring over and Summer well and truly on us, we are on course for a good year!

At the end of April, we had an interesting talk by the Head of Museums about the People and Places of Chippenham – a review is elsewhere.

This was followed in in the middle of May by our Annual General Meeting. I started it as Vice chair and completed it as Chair. I gave my report as Chair and followed that by delivering the Treasurer's report in his absence, and then, at the behest of its Chair, delivered the report of the Tapestry project - so rather a one-man band. Summaries of these three reports are elsewhere.

We had a display of some of the completed images of the tapestry at the rear. The hard work of our gallant band of embroiderers was much applauded by those present for the very fine sewing achieved.

We have lost six members of the Society over the last few months. An obituary Nancy Burrows was in the Spring edition. Obituaries for Jack Archer, Negley Harte, Margaret Gibbs, Kate Carless and John Maloney are elsewhere in this edition.

In June, we had a most interesting and informative talk about the Assize building in Devizes, its restoration and its future use for the Wiltshire museum – one of our best talks! The review is elsewhere.

On 24th July we had a fascinating talk about Distinctive women that have visited Bath by a Mayor of Bath's guide. Again, a review of this talk is elsewhere.

August is the time for our annual Garden Party on Saturday 29th August. It will be, as usual, in the garden of the Lady Margaret Hungerford Almshouses commencing at 3.00 pm. We have again been able to prevail on a number of our members to provide cakes and tarts etc so there is no need for any other member to roll up their sleeves – we are fully catered for. We hope to see you there - so please let me know if you intend coming. Thanks.

Pat Whalley has managed to find speakers to engage our interest In St. Aldhelm's on the last Friday of September, October and November. So, look on the back cover of this magazine and make a note in your diaries so that you don't miss any of them. Please note that next year's list of talks is almost complete already. Well done, Pat.

May I also commend Vaughan Hill for volunteering to be our Spotlight editor and the production of this issue.

And finally, my usual Cri de Coeur. We rely mostly on just three authors for Spotlight content. Plus, the occasional on-off article from another of our members. It really is time for some other members to put pen to paper. Each of you must have some little tale, experience or other vignette to share with us, so perhaps you can tell us how you came to arrive in Corsham, was it work, family, or perhaps retirement? What do you like about Corsham and the area in general, what would you like to see in the future? We would love to hear from you. ***Articles to the Editor for Winter edition of Spotlight to be submitted by 23rd November please.***

**Edward Barrett**

## Reviews

At our end **of April** meeting we welcomed Melissa Barrett, the Head of Chippenham Museum and Heritage Centre who gave us an opportunity to meet some of the many people who have influenced and enhanced the town. Some names were known to us, King Alfred, Brunel, Maud Heath, Neeld, Coles and Awdry, but there were many others, unfamiliar names of people who had lived the town and made a considerable contribution – such as ladies nursing during WW1, businesses which had flourished and provided employment for many years and sadly were now unknown to the local population. It is good to know that these names and lives are recorded - 'we pass this way but once' (Ralph Waldo Emerson).

The **AGM in May** was attended by 23 stalwarts of the Society. It is a pity that many others do not come to make a contribution to how our future might proceed. Nevertheless, we confirmed that the Society had an interesting and financially stable year, so that we can go forward, and hopefully provide another informative and varied programme. The Tapestry project continues at a solid pace, some of the completed individual pictures were on display, and showed the excellent skill and hard work of our stitchers. The evening ended with cheese and wine, (non -alcoholic available), which gave members the chance to socialise, and meet new members.

**In June** we welcomed the return of David Dawson, Director of Wiltshire Museum, who gave us an in-depth update on the progress in the development of the Devizes Assize Building which will become the new Visitors centre for the Wiltshire Museum. The building which has been derelict since the 1980's was acquired in 2018 by the Devizes Assize Court Trust with the proposal to convert it into a new home for the Wiltshire Museum. Acquiring funding is of course paramount, and in 2023 the National Lottery fund awarded £3000,000 to allow development plans to go forward, before an application could be made for the next steps.

The Trust now have received a further £8.5M from the NLF which covers half the £14.8M needed to complete the project. The aim is to open in 2030. The current building will remain as a part of the museum facility to store the many items they already hold and offering research opportunities for students. A wonderful scheme which breathes life into a building which deserves our attention and will prove an asset to the town of Devizes.

**In July** we were visited by Joy Roberts, a previous chairman of the Bath Mayoral Guides, and her successor Andrew Roberts who treated us to a most informative talk about the 'Ladies who came to Bath to 'take the waters.' Often, they were recommended by their doctors, who suggested their ailments could be overcome by bathing in the mineral waters.

Ladies have been following this advice since 1613, they were of course ladies of the aristocracy such as Queen Anne who came in 1688 and 1703, regrettably to no avail, but she had suffered many medical problems during her life. Queen Charlotte, wife of George III visited in 1817, suffering from stress. By that time, she had borne 15 children and her husband had what we would now call mental issues, I hope the rest improved her health! Angela Coutts of the banking dynasty, she visited to avoid a stalker – Richard Dunn. Cures were said to be achieved for gout, infertility, smallpox, stress and the like.

A more locally known name was that of Lady Constance Butler Lytton, a suffragette, who came to stay with the Blathwayt family at Eagle House, Batheaston, to recuperate from her times in prison for the 'cause'. *(In Spotlight Summer 2025, we told the story of this family, the support of Emily Pankhurst by the Blathwayts , and how they opened their home to give time for the ladies to recover from their ordeal in prison).*

---

### AGM 2026 – Summary of Chairman's Report

The report opened with a description of the ups and downs of the leadership of the Society over the last fifteen months. We had three new members, Bridget and Paul Hardstaff and Jackie Holbert, lost three members who did not renew their membership, Muriel and Larry St. Croix and Gilly Thorne, and lost three members who died, Jack Archer, Negley Harte and Nancy Burrowes – *and after the meeting, Kate Carless , Margaret Gibbs and John Maloney.*

As a new broom I looked at how we have operated and have made four suggestions to your committee about the Way Forward - I have a fifth suggestion, but it is not fully formed yet. First, we changed our venue to St Aldhelm's' church which everyone is very pleased with. We are now using our own projection and sound equipment as it is easier! We successfully changed the location of our annual lunch and to our first hostelry outside the Corsham parish boundary.

Second, the various tasks undertaken by the members of your committee have been studied. Each member now has a written list of their tasks which is constantly under review. However, I raise once again the ages of the committee. The average age of the committee is still a worry – we must encourage younger members to join the committee!

Third, the society's website is out of date. The chair and Chris Perry of Corsham Print who looks after the site have met. It is much too large. It has a copy of every issue of Spotlight which is useful for browsers, but we also have a vast number of articles, many of which are covered in the Spotlight issues. It is not easy to navigate and has not been kept up to date. A new annex of all the books written about Corsham or which have a section devoted to our town will be included in the revision. It will be a slow process!

Fourth, a really deep look into membership is needed. Several factors have been looked at and you all have received a survey recently. The result of the survey was as expected. Out of 105 members only 34 (⅓) responded but more importantly 71 (or ⅔) did not! Those who responded were mostly stalwart supporters. The committee will study the answer soon. Consideration will be given to how the Spotlight is delivered, emailed, viewed on website or ceased to the many life members who do not appear to want to be involved nowadays. Lastly, the work of the Corsham High Street Project is being reviewed. It started so well but it then came a rather sudden halt when John Maloney became unwell. The results of the questions asked in the survey were predictable. No-one has any expertise, but most respondents were willing to help in some way which was very encouraging. So, for the moment, any resurrection of the project is stymied unless we can find a friendly buildings archaeologist or three!

**Edward Barrett**

## AGM 2026 – Summary of Treasurer's Report

The accounts have been audited and we are very grateful to Paul Riches for this.
The society made a reduced surplus of £189 this year, helped by receipt of gift aid on the previous year's donations. We were also helped by a reduction in printing costs mainly due to a reduction in the size of Spotlight. Meeting fees have shown an increase - an attractive programme and new venue meant larger attendance and more non-members attending. However, with the surplus reducing, and costs increasing, your Committee decided to increase subscriptions for the first time for many years.
The surplus leaves us with general reserves of £3,348
Turning to the restricted funds – Firstly, Corsham High Street Project now stands at £7478, and we are seeking to get things going again. Secondly, the balance of a grant given to us by Corsham Town Council for Heritage Open Days was used to help cover the cost of running this year's programme bringing it to nil. Thirdly, the Tapestry fund shows a deficit for the year, but this is good news as it means we are spending money on the project. We still have £502 left to complete the project and a further £200 donation has been received since year end. We will claim Gift Aid on this.
Overall, the accounts show a satisfactory position for the Society.

**Chris Johnson**

## AGM 2026 - Summary of Corsham Tapestry Project Report

Those present were given a brief resume of the project so far. After a visit to Stitchstory, a new tapestry in Tewkesbury, a well-attended inaugural meeting was held in Corsham, a committee formed and planning started in November 2023. At its first meeting three things needed to be resolved. First, it was agreed that buildings, people, views and activities must be included. Second, the site should be in the long corridor in the Springfield Community Campus, and third, due to this location a size of seven metres by one metre was agreed.

There followed a considerable period of planning. We decided on eleven panels as the civic parish of Corsham readily breaks down into ten areas and the eleventh would cover the history of our underground areas. Each panel will comprise up to sixteen images of that area. The embroiderers would stitch over images painted by our artists.

We gathered together eleven local artists, and they started in September 2024. We gave each a number of photographic images which they dutifully painted into single images to fit onto a two-foot square panel of white card. Once the line drawings of the images were completed, they were copied onto linen by a firm in Macclesfield who produced two enormous rolls to be cut into squares

The embroiderers got going in April 2025. Each was given a line drawing on a fifteen-inch square of linen, with the colour image and the threads to complete the work. We now have some 21 stitchers!

Of the 157 images, 34 are complete and 25 more are with the stitchers so more than one third are done. Some stitchers are very skilled and return completed images fairly quickly. Other are slower but this does not mean any drop in standard.

For those who had not had a chance, many of the completed images are on display at the back of the room.

**Edward Barrett**

## Visit to the Bayeux Tapestry at the British Museum.

Several members of the Society and artists and stitchers involved in our own Corsham Tapestry have asked if we are going to organise a trip to view this incredible work of art. The simple answer is yes. But the key problem is getting tickets. One person rang the specified number at one minute after opening for two tickets and was over 10,000 in the queue. A company rang at 10 minutes past for a group booking and was over 4,000 in the queue!

We have looked at the travel arrangements and conclude that a specialised travel company is the best answer and have spoken with Holidays and Cruises of Melksham (known to many of you) about their 44-seat coach. They are prepared to bid on our behalf for a batch of tickets. The next available dates for obtaining tickets are in January and March. But we will not know the date of the visit until then.

The trip will last several hours. The travel time is about 2 hours so that is four hours return. The actual time to visit the tapestry is only 45 minutes but we expect you will want to see other displays and perhaps have something to eat – there are five eateries of one sort or another in the museum, but there will also be many visitors! We suggest another two hours for on-site activities – so around six hours in total (give or take). BUT this service is door to door which will make life a lot easier for those who are no longer as nimble as they were.

The cost of the coach and the ticket will be of the order of £85. If you would like to join us, I need confirmation of your intention to do so. And, due the vagaries of time and numbers needed to fill a coach, a deposit of £25 will be required before the bidding date. This will be refundable if we fail to get tickets or you have an insurmountable problem about attending. My contact details are on page 2 of this magazine.

**Edward Barrett**

## Obituaries

**Jack Archer** passed away during April. He was one of our earliest members to join the Civic Society, so we have a very long record of his support for Corsham and its history.

It was only last August that we were delighted to attend and record an exhibition in honour of Jack's life which took place at the Pound Arts Centre. Jack had a talent for technical drawing and illustration which formed the foundation of his working life.

When he, his wife Jean, and children came to live in Corsham they quickly integrated into the community, singing, cycling, gardening, the local church, were some of the many activities Jack enjoyed. His wife and children were, I am sure, encouraged to become part of the myriad of activities available in the town, and the town was delighted that the family became such an asset to the community.

**Pat Whalley**

### Kate Carless of Box and Corsham, 1930- 2026

Richard and Kate Carless moved to Box in 1975. When we moved in 1984 to Kingsdown, we soon got to know them well through Box Church where they sang in the church choir and we spent many enjoyable evenings together. Kate was very involved in the establishment of the Box Revels, which is still a very popular event. With her home built on top of a Roman villa site, Kate was inspired to become an archaeologist by joining classes at Wiltshire College. Her qualification was validated by UCL Institute of Archaeology. She led digs and her findings were curated and often displayed at Wiltshire.

Following Richard's death, Kate moved to 1 Post Office Lane, Corsham. She later joined the Civic Society as a life member but due to age and poor health, was rarely able to attend meetings. After my husband died in 2020, I also moved to Corsham's High Street, thankful that my friend lived only 2 minutes away. I was delighted to learn that on the day before her fatal stroke, aged 96, she had walked with her pusher to The Pound Arts Centre to see an exhibition of Betty Sargent's Artwork. Kate was very intelligent and yet self-effacing. We shall miss her sense of humour, generosity and enjoyment of life.

**Jane Cox**

**Margaret Gibbs**

We heard of another sad loss recently, that of Margaret Gibbs who lived at Neston. Margaret and her husband were long standing members of the Society, Brian helped us a great deal as our first web master, when we entered the realms of the infamous World Wide Web in 2010. Margaret was known locally as an endless support volunteering in the community. A member of the Neston WI, walking groups, and craft groups she was never very far from an activity to help anyone who needed a hand, or any group activity that needed support. We shall miss her thoughtful and willing nature.

**Pat Whalley**

**Dr Negley Boyd Harte (August 1943 – March 2026)**

Dr Negley Boyd Harte passed away on 19 March 2026, leaving his much-loved and respected wife, Eva, their two children and three granddaughters.

Raised in Rochdale, Lancashire, Negley attended the local grammar school, where he was noted for his academic ability and passion for history. These qualities shaped his intellectual trajectory and became defining features of his professional identity. A committed advocate for rigorous local history, he challenged what he regarded as the encroachment of antiquarianism and amateur historical practice—at times, this generated controversy and put him at odds with his contemporaries outside of academia.

Negley began his academic career in London, undertaking training as an economic historian at the London School of Economics (LSE). In 1969, he joined University College London (UCL) as a Lecturer in Economic History. He was well known for his research and published work on the history of the college, although his interpretation of UCL's origins occasionally placed him at odds with fellow scholars. Harte became a Senior Lecturer, and later an Honorary Fellow, He concluded his academic career as Emeritus Senior Lecturer in 2007. Before retiring from UCL, Negley and Eva relocated to Corsham, commuting weekly to London. His involvement with the Corsham Civic Society (CCS) began soon thereafter, and he served as Programme Organiser from 2008 to 2018.

During this period, he drew extensively upon his academic and social networks to secure distinguished speakers. These included Robert, Lord Methuen, who spoke on the workings of the House of Lords; James Methuen-Campbell, who discussed the art collection at Corsham Court; Thomas Woodcock CVO, then Garter Principal King of Arms, who lectured on English heraldry and Richard Broadhead, who talked on Corsham during the First World War. Lord Hennessy talk about Corsham's potential strategic role during the Cold War drew the largest audience in CCS history. Upon his retirement from the programme organiser role, Negley was appointed an Honorary Vice President of the Society. In later years, as Negley's health declined, he became developed a certain irascibility. His unwavering commitment to scholarly precision—particularly in the domain of local history—frequently brought him into disagreement with other CCS members, reflecting the intellectual seriousness with which he approached all historical inquiry.

Dr Negley Harte was a larger-than-life figure who exerted an even larger influence within the sphere of local history. His character, and many of his social and political views, belonged—much like his favoured subject matter—to a different era. Yet his contributions, intellectual tenacity and distinctive presence will be remembered for his passionate commitment to promoting Corsham's history. On a personal level, despite our opposing social views, which he expressed with growing candour, I regarded him as a good and sociable friend.

**Stuart Boydell**

## John Maloney

John was born in 1950, the eldest of five children. His parents were Irish and having emigrated from Co Mayo; they settled in Southall, London where John went to school. John and Cath met whilst at university, married, moved to London and eventually had two children, Anna and Michael (affectionally known as Spud).

John joined the Museum of London in 1974, at a time when professional archaeology was in its infancy, working on redevelopment sites in the City of London. His work in archaeology, mainly in the centre of the city , led him to be given the 'Freedom of the City of London' but he never took the opportunity to walk his sheep across London Bridge. A major change to the archaeological profession in the early 1990s saw John leave the Museum of London and take on a number of different heritage consultancy roles, including the British Museum Millennium Project and the Royal Opera House redevelopment, as well as Deputy Project Director for English Heritage for Stonehenge Visitor Centre.

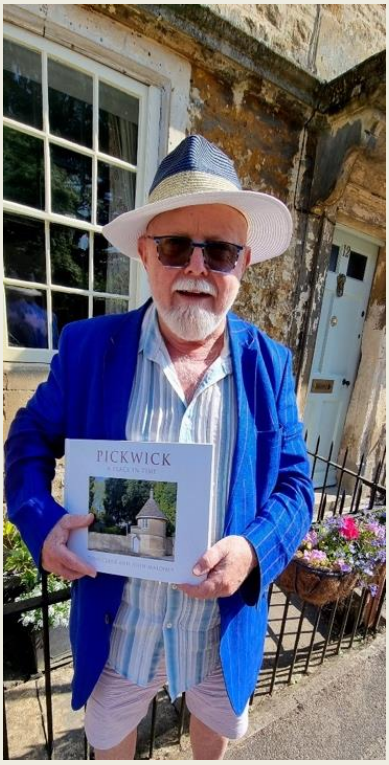
In 2015 John and Cath retired to Corsham to be near their daughter and her family. It was a good move. John didn't hang around, becoming involved in the community as a town councillor, advising, in particular, on local planning and heritage assets, and joining Corsham's Civic Society.

He became editor of Spotlight, a job he enjoyed (mostly), researching local historical matters and contributing many articles. He was chairman for a while in 2022 before his health started to decline.

Living in Pickwick he soon became engrossed in its history and as a town councillor he became involved in the Pickwick Association's updating of its conservation plan. Together with Tony Clark, another Pickwickian, they produced the Pickwick Conservation Area Appraisal in 2021 which was formally adopted by Wiltshire Council's Northern Area Planning Committee in 2022. So much of general interest, fascinating stories and images were brought together in this appraisal that it was decided to adapt it for more general readership, resulting in the publication in 2024 of Pickwick a Place in Time which they co-authored. John was rightly very proud of this highly successful book which received an endorsement by Queen Camilla. He was also the founder of the proposal to research and discover the archaeology of the houses in Corsham High Street.

Though John's last couple of years saw him get weaker and more tired, he was able to enjoy his family, visits from friends, his daily and weekly schedule and his fortnightly read of Private Eye. And although his memory became poor, he never lost his sharp wit and enjoyment of a pun or joke. He died on 17th July of lymphoma, mourned by his family and many friends.

**Cath Maloney**



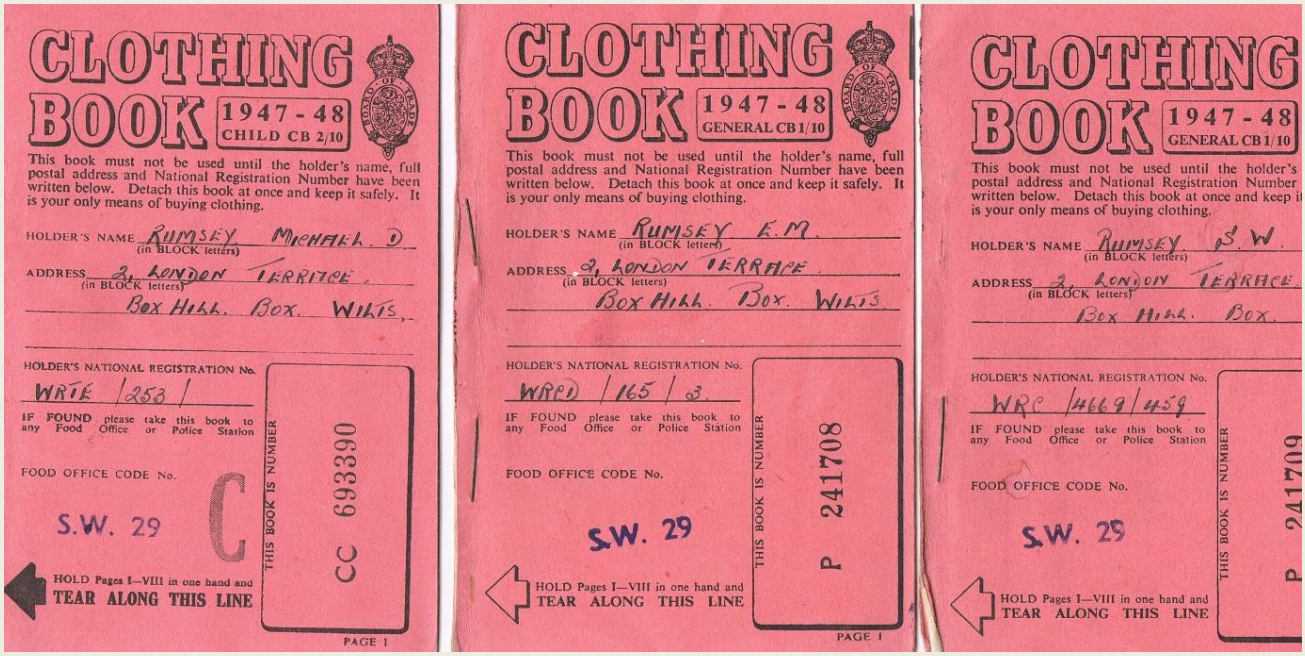

The members of the Civic Society were extremely sorry to hear of the passing of John Maloney. He was a stalwart of the Society, always interested in the history of Corsham and its surrounding area. Our sympathies go to his family and friends; we shall miss him terribly.

## What You Find in Cupboards!

While looking for something else the other day I came across my family's 1947-48 Clothing Ration books in excellent condition. I found it quite fascinating that so much trouble was taken by the post War Government to ensure everyone got a fair share of food, household items and clothing. Luckily, my Father bought his Army greatcoat, when discharged in March 1946, and my Mother took off the brass buttons and dyed it dark brown, added leather buttons and he wore it every day during the terrible Winter of 1947. He said that it kept him warm while visiting the farming customers for Bussell, Pike & Wheeler, Agricultural Merchants, Chippenham. I wonder what they spent the coupons on for my new clothes and theirs. Rationing didn't finish until July 4th 1954, when meat and bacon were freely available.

**M.D. Rumsey**



## James Tower 1919 – 1988

Were you watching The Antiques Road show in January, and did you participate with Fiona Bruce in the game ‘Basic, Better, Best’? You may remember that the expert, Chris Yeo, showed three pots for her to rank in order of quality and value, and he described them as being by three people who blurred the boundaries between ceramics and fine art. The star item was the piece by James Tower, described on the programme as ‘the most famous potter you have never heard of’, whose great monumental vases can sell today for £25,000 - £30,000.

Antiques Roadshow, January 2026, Chris Yeo describes the piece to Fiona Bruce



Are you among those who have never heard of James Tower? Members of the Corsham Civic Society should certainly, I hope, have done so, and be familiar with this eminent resident of Corsham, who set up the pottery school at Bath Academy of Art, Corsham. The aim of this article is to give more information about his career and local connections.

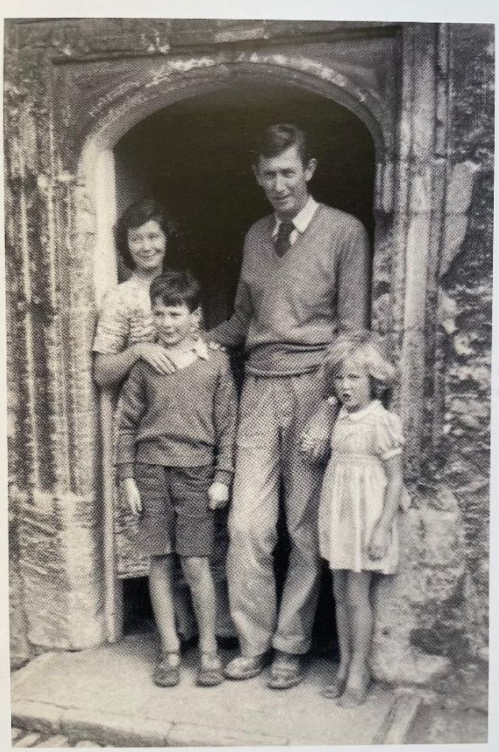
James Tower was born in 1919 in Sheerness The windswept beaches and mudflats, with their configurations of pattern and texture, and rhythmic pattern, were to influence his work; as Chris Yeo commented on the show, there was evidence of reeds, moving water and bubbles visible in his work. In 1937 Tower made a voyage to Australia, working there for a season, before returning via the Pacific. He was at this stage set on becoming a landscape painter, and in October 1938 was admitted to the Royal Academy Schools, where, among other prestigious prizes, he won the Gold Medal for painting. His studies were interrupted by the war, and as he had lost an eye in a childhood accident he was taken on by the Camouflage Unit, and later transferred to the Polish Ministry of Information, drawing maps. In 1944 he married Maureen McManus, a fellow student from the Royal Academy, who was extremely talented in her own right, though she gave up her own career to support James and devote her life to him.

In 1946 James Tower enrolled at the Slade School of Art, where he applied himself to drawing and painting. It was during his postgraduate year at the London Institute of Education that he was first introduced to English slipware, and this step proved decisive. With almost no teaching experience and limited grasp of ceramics, in 1949 Tower set up the pottery school at Bath Academy of Art, housed in the stables at Corsham Court. The horses' stalls with their wooden partitions remained in place throughout his time there. Its visionary principal was Clifford Ellis and, for him, Tower's commitment to his career as an artist was paramount. Ellis wanted the tutors to produce their own work in amongst the students, who would benefit from the presence and practical example of a creative artist. During his time at Corsham, Tower was able to show his work with the London dealer Gimpel Fils in his first solo exhibition. This was a great success and led on to more opportunities.

The home of the pottery department in the stables at Beechfield House, c.1957.




By now, James and Maureen had two young children, Nicholas and Theresa, and they lived in one of the Flemish Weavers' cottages which they rented from Lord Methuen.



Maureen and James Tower with their two children, Nicholas and Theresa
Corsham, Wiltshire, late 1950s



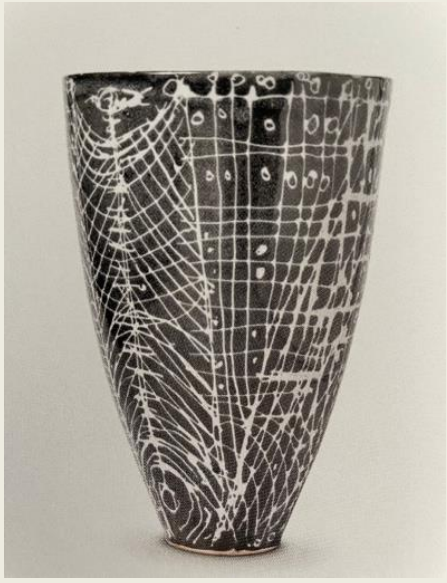


Theresa recalls, “James converted an outhouse to contain a bath… and the lavatory was at the end of the little yard with no electricity”.

She continues, “There were daily visits from other artists working in Corsham, including Kenneth Armitage (with his pet raven), Howard Hodkin, William Scott and Peter Lanyon. As children, we were fascinated by their discussions and ideas, and there was always a very active social and entertainment life around students and staff. A memorable masked ball at Corsham Court inspired James to make beautifully painted papier-mache cat masks that covered our heads”.

In 1966 James Tower became Head of Fine Art at Brighton College of Art, where he set up a sculpture course. As a school friend of Theresa, I missed having her closer at hand, but it means a great deal to me (and to her other Corsham friends) that I am still in touch, and I always anticipate with pleasure the home-made Christmas cards of James’ talented daughter. James himself died in in 1988 of heart failure, but Maureen lived on, as lively, pretty, and vivacious as ever until 2020.

This is the vase, made in 1953, during James Tower’s time in Corsham, shown on the Antiques Roadshow. It is earthenware with tin glaze and can be seen in the Ken Stradling Collection at Bristol.





Nearer at hand, in Chippenham Museum, this large platter with doves, dating from a similar period, is on display, together with ink and gouache studies for sculpture.





You may also like to see some of James Tower's work currently on display in the Victoria Art Gallery in Bath, as shown below. There are also other items in their reserve collection.

**Susie Weaver**

### Cleaning and repairing the West end of Box Tunnel.

Network Rail have recently repaired the masonry at the west end of Box Tunnel, a much needed job as small trees and bushes were seen to be growing out of the parapet. This will be the 3rd time, in the last 120 years, that work has been undertaken to ensure the tunnel frontage is clean, tidy and the stonework safe. The photographs show the work carried out in 1985, for the 150th anniversary of the GWR, and this year. Sadly, to see the tunnel front from the viewing platform was all but impossible because of the vegetation, trees and bushes. In 1985 all of that was cleared away, it's a pity it isn't the same today.

**Michael Rumsey**





## Corsham's First Dame

Corsham has had several knights and baronets from the late 1600s to the 1900s – Hatton, Hungerford, Blackmore, Methuen, five different Goldneys, Poynder-Dickson, Brakspear, Aylmer-Jones and Tippett. And it has, of course had its own baron since 1838.

But we now have a Dame! In the 2026 New Year Honours it was announced that Sonia Blandford was appointed a Dame Commander of British Empire. She was invested by HRH The Princess Royal at Windsor Castle on 9th June 2026.



She was born in Feltham in 1958 and brought up on the Allied Estate. At school in Longford Secondary Modern/ Comprehensive she learned to play the cornet and guitar and was first offered a chance to be a conductor at the age of 15.

In the late 1970s, she did her teacher training as music student at Bretton Hall College of Education, just seven miles from Barnsley, where her musical career really got going.

In the late 1980s, she completed two master's degrees in music and education at Reading University and in 1992 gained a Doctorate in leadership and education at the University of Bristol.

She subsequently spent many years working in leadership and professorial positions at Oxford Brookes University, Canterbury Christ Church University, Warwick University, University College London and Plymouth Marjon University where she is Professor of Social Mobility. Her stellar career has been built around her desire to make education accessible for all regardless of background, challenge or need. She is an expert in improving the educational opportunities for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. She is the author of the seminal work '*Born to Fail? A Working Class View,'* and 55 other books.

In 2011, she founded and was CEO of the Achievement for All charity which provided educational opportunities and support for young people and children. The charity aimed to improve academic and social outcomes of all children, reaching 6,000 schools across England and Wales.

Her relationship with Corsham began in 1980 when she was appointed the music teacher at The Corsham School September 1980. There she started the Corsham School Windband in March 1981 which evolved into the Corsham Windband Association Charity which she founded in 1984.

Dame Sonia has been its musical director since its inception and has built an enviable reputation both locally and in a considerable number of towns and venues in throughout the UK including Scotland and Wales but also during the many trips abroad to places in Europe such as Alsace, Blois, Chambord, Chartres, Chateaux, Chenonceau, Rouen, Jargeau (many, many times), Orleans and Strasbourg (four times) in France, Barcelona in Spain, Mandal and Oslo in Norway, Cologne, Dörscheid and Schwabisch Gmund in Germany plus hosting a number of bands from America.

The Windband is celebrating its 45th anniversary this year with 45 concerts! Over the years, hundreds of local children have benefited by being part of the truly special organisation, many still involved as adults. Since 1984, Sonia and a team of expert musicians have introduced music-making to over 1,000 children in primary schools in Corsham, Chippenham and Melksham, growing enjoyment of brass, woodwind, percussion and now strings!

Despite years of commuting both east and west, she and her family now reside in Kingsdown.

**Edward Barrett**

## 80 years at Folly Farm, Rudloe, with the Maidment Family.

80 years ago on Michaelmas Day, September 29th 1946, the newly married Leslie and Mary Maidment moved into Folly Farm, Rudloe in Box Parish. The farm can always be seen in the Box valley when you stand at the top of Box Hill, beside the A4, and look across towards Colerne, the farm stands proudly in the middle.



The farm has now 360 acres from the A4 down to the By Brook valley with 300 Friesian cows, milk and beef, plus the Hereford cross bull. Every other day 500 litres of milk is collected for the Wyke Farm Cheese factory near Evercreech, Somerset.



When Leslie and Mary, with their beautiful shire horse and farm equipment settled in, my Father, who worked for the local Agricultural Merchants in Chippenham, called on them for the cattle cake order and hopefully a fertiliser one too. This started a relationship between our families that has lasted all these years. In the black & white photo, that's me in my 3rd year sitting on the horse with Uncle Les holding the bridal.

Three children followed Richard, Gillian & Mark. Now Richard and Mark, with their children James, Kevin and Lucy all work to make a success of the family business. James and Philip are my Godsons and Philip, the builder, helps when needed in the busy times or when a piece of equipment breaks down.

In the family photo you see, from left to right, Kevin, Mark, Lucy, Richard and James and the tractor had the honour once of appearing the Lord Mayor's Show in London.



This year has seen the completion of a major project to ensure no effluent from the farm enters the By Brook. At a cost of £250,000 this is now in operation. It was a pleasure to visit Folly Farm today and see the family. With Red Kites circling we had a good laugh as the photos were taken. With the 3rd generation of the family working on the farm, I wish them every success for the future.

**Michael Rumsey**

## History of Banking in Corsham

Unlike other local market towns (e.g. Melksham, Chippenham, Warminster, Trowbridge) Corsham did not have its own private bank and so the first recorded bank opening was that of the Melksham headquartered, joint stock bank, North Wilts Banking Company in 1836. Henry Spackman, draper, was appointed agent and was also a shareholder of the Bank, along with another Corsham trader William Little, a tea dealer. By 1849 Thomas Gay, gent was another Corsham shareholder but the branch in Corsham had closed again in March 1839 due "to irregularity on the part of Mr. Spackman as to certain accounts at Corsham". It was nearly 20 years later, in 1857, that its archrival, the Wilts & Dorset Banking Company, headquartered in Salisbury, opened an agency controlled by Chippenham branch in the building opposite the most recent Lloyds Bank branch. And in 1863 it appears that the North Wilts Banking Co reopened at 15 High Street. At this time, we were still far from a full banking service as Kellys Directory shows that in 1867 North Wilts Banking Co were opening Tuesday and Saturday and The Wilts & Dorset Banking Co Wednesday & Saturday, albeit by 1875 both banks were opening "daily".

In 1877 the Wilts and Dorset Bank appears to have moved across the street to 13 High Street and the North Wilts Banking Co merged with the Hampshire Banking Company to form the North Wilts & Hampshire Banking Company; the following year this bank was renamed Capital & Counties Bank and after a brief period at Old Bank House, 61 High Street (1880-1883) it seems to have settled at 15/17 High St (called the Post Office) by the time of the 1891 Census. Interestingly, the manager between then and 1924 – Mr. Frederick J Bryant – managed to combine his banking duties with running the Post Office!

In 1914 Lloyds Bank took over the Wilts & Dorset Bank and four years later it also took over Capital & Counties Bank meaning there was now only 1 bank represented in Corsham again (albeit two branches as they did not actually combine until 1924). However, in around 1919 National Provincial Bank also opened a branch in Corsham. These two banks continued until 1938 when National Provincial was closed and the business transferred to Chippenham and for 10 years Corsham only had one bank yet again until, in 1948, Midland Bank Ltd (now HSBC) opened a branch at 25 High Street under the control of Chippenham branch, and in 1956 this became a full branch. The 1960's saw increased competition with Barclays opening a branch at 16 High Street in 1966 having converted the previous house on the site. The Manager was Alan Smart.

This was quickly followed by Westminster Bank Ltd in 1967 who opened a branch at 21 Pickwick Road, previously Marsh's flower and veg shop which went into receivership. In due course following the bank merger in 1968 this bank became National Westminster Bank. In 1997 the conversion of Halifax from a building society to a bank meant that Corsham had 5 banks (Halifax originally opened their agency in Pickwick Road c 1980 in the office of DMS Insurance Brokers and transferred, as part of Kennet Insurance Brokers, to 15/17 High Street in the mid 1990's ) This situation of 5 banks represented here in Corsham only lasted until Barclays closed its branch in 2000 which was met by a petition seeking to keep the bank open. Halifax withdrew its agency in 2009 (when Kennet Insurance Brokers were bought out). The other 3 banks continued until Nat West appeared to set off a chain reaction, closing its branch on 25th July 2014, followed by HSBC in October 2015 and finally Lloyds Bank in 2016 closing after 180 years in Corsham. What has become of the buildings? Barclays is now the Hunter French lettings business, HSBC an office for Wishford Schools (who operate a chain of private schools including Heywood Prep School) and Nat West is now Amore, the Italian restaurant, whilst Halifax is a Wealth Management firm. And, finally, Lloyds Bank has just opened as a boutique hotel – called, perhaps confusingly, Corsham House (being the name that Corsham Court was referred to in the mid 18th Century).

**Chris Johnson**

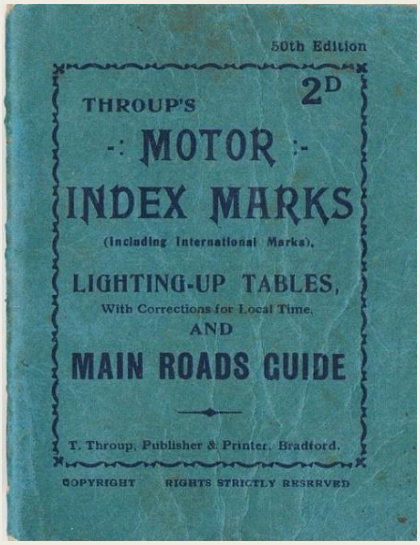
Picture of new establishment – Corsham House

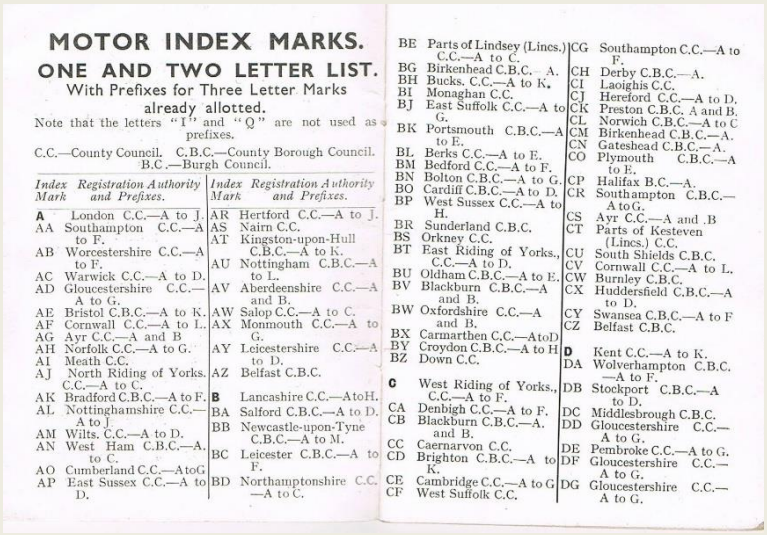


## Wiltshire's Car Registration Letters

Recently while watching the TV programme 'Bangers & Cash' I spotted several older vehicles for sale with ex Wiltshire car numbers. I knew that Wiltshire County Council was given 5 registrations marks after the passing of the 1903 Motor Car Act, these were AM, HR, MR, MW & WV but WV was transferred to Brighton in the 1970's. Bath City received FB & GL, but these were given to Cornwall when Bath became part of Somerset C.C. whose car numbers from YA to YD. Gloucestershire had DD, DF & DG. I inherited this wonderful book of information costing 2d as shown in the photographs. Every Government issued registration letter combination is listed even Ireland which bore all the Z letters. My own car number as seen in the photo shows a Wiltshire and West Riding of Yorkshire number MR & WR but of course, knowing me there has to be a railway connection, MR – Midland Railway and GWR – the 'Great Way Round', sorry, the Great Western Railway, but also my initials plus my great, great grandfather's initials, George William Rumsey.

**Michael Rumsey**



MOTOR INDEX MARKS.

ONE AND TWO LETTER LIST.

With Prefixes for Three Letter Marks already allotted.

Note that the letters "I" and "Q" are not used as prefixes.

C.C.—County Council. C.B.C.—County Borough Council. B.C.—Burgh Council.

| Index Mark | Registration Authority and Prefixes. |
|---|---|
| A | London C.C.—A to J. |
| AA | Southampton C.C.—A to F. |
| AB | Worcestershire C.C.—A to F. |
| AC | Warwick C.C.—A to D. |
| AD | Gloucestershire C.C.—A to G. |
| AE | Bristol C.B.C.—A to K. |
| AF | Cornwall C.C.—A to L. |
| AG | Ayr C.C.—A and B |
| AH | Norfolk C.C.—A to G. |
| AI | Meath C.C. |
| AJ | North Riding of Yorks. C.C.—A to C. |
| AK | Bradford C.B.C.—A to F. |
| AL | Nottinghamshire C.C.—A to J. |
| AM | Wilts. C.C.—A to D. |
| AN | West Ham C.B.C.—A. to C. |
| AO | Cumberland C.C.—A to G |
| AP | East Sussex C.C.—A to D. |
| AR | Hertford C.C.—A to J. |
| AS | Nairn C.C. |
| AT | Kingston-upon-Hull C.B.C.—A to K. |
| AU | Nottingham C.B.C.—A to L. |
| AV | Aberdeenshire C.C.—A and B. |
| AW | Salop C.C.—A to C. |
| AX | Monmouth C.C.—A to G. |
| AY | Leicestershire C.C.—A to D. |
| AZ | Belfast C.B.C. |
| B | Lancashire C.C.—A to H. |
| BA | Salford C.B.C.—A to D. |
| BB | Newcastle-upon-Tyne C.B.C.—A to M. |
| BC | Leicester C.B.C.—A to F. |
| BD | Northamptonshire C.C.—A to C. |
| BE | Parts of Lindsey (Lincs.) C.C.—A to C. |
| BG | Birkenhead C.B.C.—A. |
| BH | Bucks. C.C.—A to K. |
| BI | Monaghan C.C. |
| BJ | East Suffolk C.C.—A to G. |
| BK | Portsmouth C.B.C.—A to E. |
| BL | Berks C.C.—A to E. |
| BM | Bedford C.C.—A to F. |
| BN | Bolton C.B.C.—A to G. |
| BO | Cardiff C.B.C.—A to D. |
| BP | West Sussex C.C.—A to H. |
| BR | Sunderland C.B.C. |
| BS | Orkney C.C. |
| BT | East Riding of Yorks., C.C.—A to D. |
| BU | Oldham C.B.C.—A to E. |
| BV | Blackburn C.B.C.—A and B. |
| BW | Oxfordshire C.C.—A and B. |
| BX | Carmarthen C.C.—A to D |
| BY | Croydon C.B.C.—A to H |
| BZ | Down C.C. |
| C | West Riding of Yorks., C.C.—A to F. |
| CA | Denbigh C.C.—A to F. |
| CB | Blackburn C.B.C.—A. and B. |
| CC | Caernarvon C.C. |
| CD | Brighton C.B.C.—A to K. |
| CE | Cambridge C.C.—A to G |
| CF | West Suffolk C.C. |
| CG | Southampton C.C.—A to F. |
| CH | Derby C.B.C.—A. |
| CI | Laoighis C.C. |
| CJ | Hereford C.C.—A to D. |
| CK | Preston C.B.C. A and B. |
| CL | Norwich C.B.C.—A to C |
| CM | Birkenhead C.B.C.—A. |
| CN | Gateshead C.B.C.—A. |
| CO | Plymouth C.B.C.—A to E. |
| CP | Halifax B.C.—A. |
| CR | Southampton C.B.C.—A to G. |
| CS | Ayr C.C.—A and .B |
| CT | Parts of Kesteven (Lincs.) C.C. |
| CU | South Shields C.B.C. |
| CV | Cornwall C.C.—A to L. |
| CW | Burnley C.B.C. |
| CX | Huddersfield C.B.C.—A to D. |
| CY | Swansea C.B.C.—A to F |
| CZ | Belfast C.B.C. |
| D | Kent C.C.—A to K. |
| DA | Wolverhampton C.B.C.—A to F. |
| DB | Stockport C.B.C.—A to D. |
| DC | Middlesbrough C.B.C. |
| DD | Gloucestershire C.C.—A to G. |
| DE | Pembroke C.C.—A to G. |
| DF | Gloucestershire C.C.—A to G. |
| DG | Gloucestershire C.C.—A to G. |



## Faresaver Bus services in the Corsham & North Wilts Area.

Eleven years ago, in 2016, First Bus, successors to Bath Tramways, gave up the 231 bus route from Chippenham, through Corsham, to Bath and Faresaver Buses took over that route and they have expanded their services to towns and villages ever since. Today they cover 50 routes and 5 of those either travel through or are centred in Corsham. Services include 231 & X31 Chippenham to Bath, 10 & 10A services around the town including Neston and Westwells, service 69 which zig-zags from Trowbridge to Bradford on Avon, Melksham and Corsham and finally route 636 starting from Colerne which passes through Ford, Biddestone, Corsham and ends in Chippenham.

Faresaver Buses were founded in 1979 by John Pickford, father to Daniel & Justin Pickford current directors of the company.

Today they have 18 double deckers, 25 single deckers and 15 smaller vehicles. Most of the vehicles were built by Alexander Dennis of Larbert, Scotland, and in their 2nd factory in Scarborough, with smaller buses built by Optare. Today double deckers cost £300,000, single deckers £200,000 with smaller vehicles costing a little less. Currently they employ 80 drivers plus maintenance and office staff.

Bus passes for pensioners and other groups are funded by H.M. Government, so too the £3 fare limit. Daniel Pickford explained to me how they looking to expand some routes around our part of Wiltshire. Perhaps one day they may think of making the X31 service run on Saturdays which many feel this would be a good idea. I would like to thank Daniel Pickford for helping with the creation of this article plus Oscar Taylor for the photographs he kindly sent me.

**Michael Rumsey**







Photos kindly provided by Faresaver include a 231 bus at Rudloe and a single decker having passed the Almshouses in town.

### ‘The King’s Rose’

This beautiful rose bush was presented to me 12 months ago by members of the Society’s Executive Committee to mark my retirement after 16 years as Chairman. This new rose was first seen at the 2025 Chelsea Flower Show and was bred by David Austin Roses from the West Midlands. It was given the name of ‘The King’s Rose’ to honour the monarch’s ‘lifelong dedication to nature and horticulture’. It has centre stage in the new rose bed I created last Autumn once the diseased Box hedge had been removed. The whole bed has been a beautiful scene of colour this year and this one rose is certainly my pride and joy.

**Michael Rumsey**



**STOP PRESS**

**Due to unforeseen circumstances, we have been unable to identify an alternative speaker for our November meeting. We therefore propose to hold a Pre-Christmas social evening, with a short Quiz, followed by Cheese and Wine (non-alcoholic beverages are available) and an opportunity to get to know each other better. We look forward to seeing you there.**

## Dates for your diary:

**12th September –** Corsham Street Fair

High Street 12pm - 4pm.

see: https://www.corsham.gov.uk/events/street-fair-2026/

**11-12th September –** Heritage Open Days

Various Events & Towns

see: https://www.visitwiltshire.co.uk/whats-on/heritage-open-days

# corsham stationery

Corsham Stationery, 19 Pickwick Road,
Corsham, Wiltshire SN13 9BQ

**01249 712 122**
**shop@corshamstationery.co.uk**
**www.corshamstationery.co.uk**

**Find us on Facebook!**

# mander duffill

Est 1947

CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS
TAX & FINANCIAL ADVISERS

**WHAT WE OFFER:**

- Accountancy and Tax Services
- Tax Compliance, Planning and Advice
- International Tax Planning and Advice
- Business Sales and Acquisitions
- Company Restructuring
- Company and Business Start-ups
- Management Accounts, Bookkeeping and VAT Services
- Payroll and Auto Enrolment
- Research and Development
- Financial Services
- Investments
- Protection
- Inheritance Tax Planning
- Pensions and Retirement Planning

**GET IN TOUCH:**

info@manderduffill.com
01249 650441
The Old Post Office
41-43 Market Place
Chippenham SN15 3HR

Offices also in Devizes, Malmesbury and London

ICAEW CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS

# Corsham ...for a sunny day out

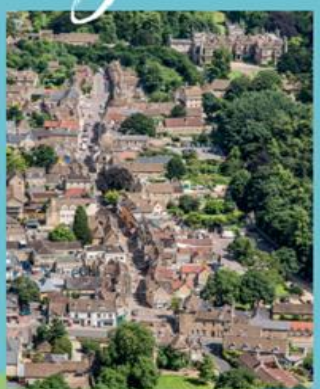
**Award-winning independent shops**

**Arts, antiques, books, toys, fashion, food and more...**

**Great places to eat and drink**

**Historic High Street**

**Plus FREE Two Hour Parking!**



**www.corsham.gov.uk/visit** Visit Corsham

# RIGHT ANGLE
## Picture Framing

Serving Corsham since 1985




For all types of picture framing & art materials too!

**OPEN**
Mon. to Fri. 9-5.50
Sat. 9-4

20 High St
Corsham
Tel 01249 716051

www.rightanglepictureframing.co.uk

# CORSHAM CIVIC SOCIETY TALKS 2026

All meetings are at St Aldhelm's Church Pickwick Road Corsham SN13 9BD at 7:30pm. unless otherwise stated. Members £2, Non-Members £5. Guests are very welcome. Please be aware that these events are subject to last minute changes beyond the control of the CCS.

29th Aug **Annual Garden Party**
At the Lady Margaret Hungerford Almshouses 3pm.

25th Sept **The Mines and Tunnels under Westwells**
Morgyn Davies reveals all!

23rd Oct **Climate Change and Bio-diversity**
A talk by Gary Ford of Corsham Town Council

27th Nov **A Pre-Christmas Social Evening**

Please note that the programme may be subject to changes.

For more information email: corshamcivicsociety@gmail.com
or see the website: www.corshamcivicsociety.co.uk

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 Tourist Information Centre, Arnold House, 31 High Street, Corsham SN13 0EZ**