



THE WARWICK SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 2014

WINTER EVENTS ...

Thursday 4 December 2014

Christmas Musical Supper

Our annual opener to the Christmas season will again take place in the Great Hall of the Lord Leycester Hospital. We hope to be entertained at the start of the evening by musicians from Warwick School before we sit down to a feast prepared by Sue Butcher's team of volunteers. Do join us, whether or not you're among those who've taken part year after year, for good company, good music, good food, and good wine. The application form is at the foot of the last page of the Newsletter: please return it to Liz Holroyde by Monday 1 December.

On the day, arrive from 19.00 (7pm), choose with whom you would like to sit, and enjoy the music, the conversation, and the unique atmosphere of the Christmas Great Hall.

Please note that we have had to change the date from that originally planned.

Friday 23 January 2015

Pre-Election 'Any Questions?'

As in 2010, we are providing – though a non-political Society – a political forum before campaigning intensifies for the General and Local Elections in May. We hope that our members' questions and the politicians' answers will focus on local issues, and especially on matters within the Society's interests. We are inviting the candidates of the main national political parties. Chris White MP and Lynette Kelly, the Labour prospective candidate, have already accepted invitations. In this era, it is rare

to have a chance to see and hear aspirant Members of Parliament in face-to-face discussion with each other. Do come with your questions ready, so that we can ensure that the debate is free-flowing, fair, and enlightening.

Tuesday 10 February 2015

The Archæology of Northgate Street

Caroline Ram of the County Archæological Service will give us her eagerly-awaited report on the excavations conducted last summer on the site of the demolished 1930s office building behind the Northgate Street houses. Evidence of many centuries of occupation was uncovered, improving our understanding of mediæval Warwick's society and economy. Caroline will of course be showing us photographs of the dig and the finds.

... AND A PREVIEW OF SPRING 2015

Tuesday 10 March: Annual General Meeting

Tuesday 14 April: Joint Meeting with The Leamington Society: Ron Ball, Warwickshire Police and Crime Commissioner

and at a date as yet unfixed, a visit for a small group of members to the old Gasworks in Saltisford to view the renovation now underway.

More details in the February Newsletter.

Each of our meetings will be held in the Great Hall of the Lord Leycester Hospital, starting at 19.30 (7.30pm)*; and at each there will be time to catch up with other members over a glass of wine or fruit juice later in the evening.

** but the Christmas supper will start earlier: arrive at 19.00 (7pm) or soon after*

THE CHAIRMAN'S TIME

The Society's committee has been thinking carefully about the future governance and leadership of the society. Its thoughts were prompted at the October committee meeting, partly because I was away. This absence highlighted the fact that the committee is a small band of volunteers, and perilously close to being too small when one or two of us are unavailable.

It is time for change, and as we always hope, for rejuvenation. Like any goods that have been in a shop window for nine years my chairmanship must look and feel a bit stale and faded.

I am sustained only by the efforts and co-operation of my fellow committee members. They share my view that we must replenish our numbers, involve a wider range of people, and update how we do things. I am sure that the Society is as strongly needed now as it has been throughout its 64-year existence and that its objective to conserve, improve, and raise awareness of Warwick's beautiful and historic built environment remains valuable. I want to go on working for that and I want to find new active participants in our task, so that my own contribution can have a different focus.

We need to modernise the Society, not just its ancient constitution, but, more importantly, how it works. The word 'committee' is probably itself a deterrent to capable people deciding to put their time and capability into our work. Perhaps we need to think more in terms of a 'network', collaborating with each other, and with other interest groups all over the town. What is sure is that our present ways need refreshing, and that if they do not change the Society will shrivel. The alternatives might include, for example, joining forces with The Leamington Society, changing our own Society's character – and objectives - to being more like a residents' association for the town centre or (heaven forbid) winding it up.

Between now and our AGM on 10 March 2015, we want to consider carefully the options, and we want the membership as a whole to help our deliberations. Do please let me know if you would be willing to join an informal discussion in the New Year with other members interested in the society's future, to widen the debate and to inform our AGM decisions.

And will everyone would like to take on the chairmanship, read first this brief account of recent weeks' activities.

THE CHAIRMAN'S DIARY

This newsletter is compiled at the end of a vital week for the Society and the town. The District Council's planning committee approved on Tuesday another huge sprawling suburban housing estate south of Warwick and Leamington, filling the green gap between Europa Way and the Myton Road. It and another 3,000 other houses to be built on good agricultural land will depend for mobility on the car. The traffic that will be generated will worsen congestion, and make even more dangerously polluted the air that we breathe in Leamington as well as in Warwick Town Centre.

The development lobby, and a Council determined to implement its sham Local Plan before it has even been approved, decry the Society's opposition as holding back the provision of much needed housing. Wrong. This kind of housing estate, falsely labelled a Garden Suburb, is outmoded. It will create unhealthy, environmentally unfriendly expensive lifestyles. Above all the traffic will increase its threat to the viability, distinctiveness, beauty, even the habitability, of the town centre.

The week after next we will be at a County Council workshop on another Transport Strategy. The Council knows that its proposal to channel more traffic across the Castle Bridge, through the town, and to an expensively enlarged A46 roundabout on the Birmingham Road, will not work. But it remains addicted to the car. I am gloomy that we have not yet recognised that its rôle as the preferred mode of travel for suburbia is inconsistent with a civilised and prosperous town centre

The same planning committee meeting refused unanimously Merlin's application to build holiday lodges in the Foxes Study woodland. The Society and many neighbours had argued fiercely against the proposal.

For once we are full of praise for the committee. Warwick Castle Park, of which Foxes Study is a part, is a landscape of the highest national significance. Grade I listed, it is as important as the landscapes at Stowe and Blenheim and as

buildings like York Minster and St Pancras railway station. The proposal would have caused substantial harm to the landscape: immediate and severe visual damage, and in the long term its dereliction, decay, and demise. The woodland has been poorly maintained and damaged by the 'glamorous camping' tents, and by fencing and pathways built without the required planning permission. Disrupting the ecosystem of the woodland by even more human intrusion would destroy it.

Merlin tried to seduce us into believing that the damage to the woodland would be justified by financial and economic gains. Astonishingly, even English Heritage fell for this argument and did not object. But it is not what planning policy requires: substantial harm to the most significant landscapes and buildings is only justified by extraordinary circumstances. Merlin, a very well managed business with a net cash flow inflow from operating activities last year of £364m, spuriously pleaded that the conservation of the Castle itself depends on the income produced by the destruction of Foxes Study. It also played on the belief that the town's economy depends on more of 700,000 visitors each year being enticed into the restaurants and shops. In our view the town's economy depends on it being valued by the much more numerous residents of Warwick and the surrounding area. 100,000 of them, each spending some 330 days a year within reach of Warwick town centre, represent a market about 50 times as big as do the Castle's visitors.

Foxes Study, summer 2013: to the left, undamaged woodland, with its understorey and thriving trees; just visible to the right, 'glamping's stockade



In the face of worryingly strong support from other factions, our opposition to the proposal depended on the efforts of many people who shared our own views. Christine Hodgetts, on our committee but also the local representative of the Garden History Society, invaluable produced expert assessment of the woodland, its history, and the planning issues. Mark Sullivan of CPRE and Christine revived an alliance nearly 25 years old, from days when the whole Park was threatened by large scale development. Jackie Crampton, Rotarian and professional planner, spoke persuasively to the committee. But above all Dr Veronica Hyland and Chris Edwards, members of the Society and neighbours of the Castle, put huge energy into pursuing every possible source of support, motivating a cascade of objection letters, grasping and putting across the real issues. Warwick is deeply indebted to them.

I regret that the *Courier's* report on the planning decision, taken late in the evening, after the paper's reporter had gone home, consists almost entirely of adversarial after-the-match comments. We do recognise the significance of the Castle, and the capability of Merlin and its manager Geoff Spooner, and we do hope to be able to discuss with him a better future for the Castle estate.

James Mackay



Foxes Study, summer 2013: the restaurant marquee and the mobile toilet block, part of the 'glamping' planning permission; and the double fence and hardcore path for which the required planning consent was not sought



Tellingly, at its September meeting that same planning committee had approved, against our advice, a grossly oversized block of flats - affordable but very unattractive housing - in Theatre Street. But it rejected in November applications for substantial developments of affordable houses in Leamington. Forty years after Warwick Borough Council was swallowed by the District, in politics as well as in sprawling development Warwick feels increasingly like a neglected suburb of Greater Leamington. Our own councillors have great difficulty in asserting the town's significance and its needs in the face of a majority with other concerns; and some do Warwick a dis-service by their own support for proposals which - in the views of many in the town and not just the Society, are not what Warwick deserves.

The next act in the long running play will be a debate at 18.00 on Wednesday 19 November at Leamington Town Hall on the Council's plans for the development of the Common. The Friends of St Mary's Lands and very many people in the west of Warwick have campaigned determinedly, with the full support of the Society, against the loss of public space. They find themselves in opposition even to several of Warwick's councillors. Do be at the Town Hall by 17.15 that day to lobby councillors as they arrive for the debate: 'people pressure' really does demonstrate that Warwick is not just a colonial outpost.

THE WARWICK SOCIETY



THURSDAY 27 NOVEMBER
THE VICTORIAN CHRISTMAS EVENING
17.00 (5PM) TO 21.00 (9PM) IN THE
MARKET PLACE, SWAN STREET, ST
MARY'S CHURCH, AND ALL THE TOWN
CENTRE SHOPS AND PUBS
HAPPY CHRISTMAS!

Application for The Warwick Society Christmas Supper, Thursday 4 December

Please reserve ___ places/s for me/us at the Warwick Society Christmas Supper.

For the place labels, the name/s of those attending, as well as myself, will be:

_____ and _____.

The price is £13.50 per person, including the first glass of wine on arrival (or unlimited fruit juice): bottles of wine will be available to buy for later in the evening. My email address

(or phone number as I have no email) is: _____.

I enclose a cheque for £ _____. My own name is: _____.

Tickets will not be sent, but your application will be acknowledged by email or by phone.

Please return the completed form with your cheque by Monday 1 December to:

Elizabeth Holroyde, 38 Coten End, WARWICK CV34 4NP.

sec@warwicksociety.org.uk