



LANCASTER CIVIC SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

No. 108 February 2012

Civic Voice Network Event in Preston

Freeman's Wood



Anne Stelfox and Roger Frankland with Griff Rhys Jones

"Our Common Voice" was the theme of a networking event organised by Civic Voice and held in Preston in January. It was attended by delegates from civic societies throughout the north-west and provided an opportunity to exchange ideas and experiences and to hear from Tony Burton (Director of Civic Voice). Griff Rhys Jones, TV presenter, conservation campaigner and President of Civic Voice, gave a stirring address, warning of the potential dangers of the National Planning Policy Framework which he described as "a blueprint for growth by developers and the Treasury" and urging us to stand up for our towns and countryside and to inspire others to do likewise.

Society's March Meeting

The Society's next meeting on 14th March, will be on planning supermarket developments. Tom Miller, former Head of Planning, Ellesmere Port and Neston will speak on "What seems to work best in planning supermarkets: 38 years of error and trial".

Given the recent applications for supermarkets in south Scotforth, the possible retail element in any re-development of the Canal Corridor North site and the future of the Market building, this talk promises to be of particular relevance and interest.

We were concerned to read about the fencing of Freeman's Wood by the Bermuda-based company which now owns the land. This woodland has been used by local residents for many years and it also supports much wildlife. The Council has placed a Tree Preservation Order on the site but this has been challenged by the owners. If you would like to support the Order please write to Maxine Knagg, Tree Officer, Lancaster City Council, Town Hall, Dalton Square, Lancaster LA1 1PJ or email mknagg@lancaster.gov.uk quoting TPO 496 (2011). The Society has already expressed its support for the Order but individual expressions of support would be helpful and welcome.

Supporters are hoping to launch a non-political campaign to save the wood. Possible actions include:

- applying for public footpath status for paths across the land;
- applying for Town Green Status for the land;
- getting the area designated as a county biological heritage site.

Information about the history of the site is also being sought.

Country Houses of Lancashire and their builders; by John Champness

Shortly before his untimely death in June last year, John completed the manuscript of this, his last book, a product of thirty years' research and experience as Conservation Officer and Historic Buildings Advisor for Lancashire County Council.

It is a lavishly illustrated appreciation of the rich heritage of Lancashire's country houses and is published by the Centre for North-West Regional Studies, Lancaster University, price £15.95.

Reports on Meetings

November meeting

The November lecture, on Thomas Mawson, the landscape architect, was given by Derek Woolerton, a practising landscape architect and keeper of the Mawson Archive. Derek spoke of Mawson's life and work, emphasising his innovative and visionary qualities, and identified him as the father of landscape architecture in Britain. In Lancaster Thomas Mawson is best known for Westfield Village, the planned community for returning soldiers, financed by Sir Thomas Storey, a project that Mawson initiated and had hoped to see replicated in many communities across the country. Mawson was also responsible for several northern garden designs, such as Langdale Chase (1894), Brockholes, Bailrigg House, and Graythwaite Hall - a breakthrough design. He worked nationally on such projects as Port Sunlight and in Exeter and Hastings, integrating gardens and buildings, and looking for restful elements in his spaces. Internationally, he was commissioned to design, for example, in Vancouver and Banff (Canada) and in Athens and Corfu. Derek Woolerton felt that Mawson's best work was completed between 1898 and 1912; however his lecturing and publishing continued long after. He made several trips annually to the U.S.A. for lecture tours and his "The Art and Craft of Garden Making", which Derek praised highly for going into the absolute basics of garden design, ran to five editions. Thomas Mawson was prevented by ill-health from completing his last project of establishing a school of landscape architecture at Caton; however his legacy lives on in his own work and in the fruits of his lectures and publications. We are indebted to Derek Woolerton for bringing to life this significant and influential Lancastrian through his enthusiastic and informative talk.

Sheila Jones

January meeting

Where have the people of Lancaster gone shopping over the years? That was the theme of Dr Mike Winstanley's talk on "Retail Revolutions" at the January 2012 meeting. The 'market' in mediaeval Lancaster was in the Market Square area, though the butchers and fishmongers (as noisome neighbours) were kept further away. These food markets needed regulating to protect local farmers and shoppers from wholesalers and dealers. The next step was a single market site between Market Street and Common Garden Street, first under a

roof and by the 1880s in a cast-iron, glass-roofed monument to municipal vision, which burned down a century later. The market still focused on fresh food but came to include textiles and household goods. By 1914 national chains of shops had appeared in Lancaster - manufacturers and importers of standardised, cheaper goods, undermining the local traders. Today's four big supermarket chains dominate the sale of fresh foods and several other products. Yet not only small shops closed; even the mighty Co-op shut its city-centre store and suburban branches. But away from the main shopping streets and the big out-of-town sites, independent local traders still flourish, even in the food sector. Given the current debates on the future of the current market building and the likely retail element in any re-development of the Canal Corridor North site, this was a fascinating insight into the dynamics of markets and shops, local and national traders, and the debates on the roles of the city centre, suburbs and out-of-town.

Gordon Clark

February meeting

Why does the Windermere area have so much high-quality architecture? That was the question posed by Andy Lowe, the Lake District National Park's former Buildings Conservation Officer, when he spoke to the Civic Society on 8th February. First, you need an area that attracts people, for profitable commerce or for leisure. Second, you need wealthy clients, with the money, taste and commitment to the area to commission good buildings beyond the ordinary. Third, the area needs to be able to supply skilled craftsmen who work to the highest standards; and imaginative architects who can match the best of the current designs and styles. Fourth, you need a strongly conservation-minded planning authority to protect, enhance and even to save the best buildings.

The Windermere area has had all four advantages over the centuries. It has attracted the wealthy from West Cumbria, Liverpool and Manchester whose new money built grand summer residences, even if many are now hotels and flats. Local and national architects have taken commissions in the area. Even modern commercial buildings are award-winning. The area is a microcosm of the fashionable styles from 1750 to the present day, carried out with panache; hence so many listed buildings. The large audience were left wondering what lessons there are for Lancaster.

Gordon Clark

Special General Meeting and Christmas Social

34 members attended the SPG and Christmas Social on 14th December. The SPG, called to approve two amendments to the constitution, took place at the beginning of the evening. The two proposed amendments, one regarding the auditing of the accounts and the other about a repository for the Society's records in the event the Society ceased to exist, were approved and the constitution has been amended. The revised constitution and the draft minutes of the SPG are available on the Society's website (www.lancastercivicsociety.org).

The social which followed the SPG included a performance of gentle rock and folk music by guitarist Jeremy Selman, an excellent and intriguing quiz devised by Gillian Sheath plus the traditional mince pies and mulled wine. It was a most enjoyable evening and we are grateful to Anne Stelfox for organising the event and to all those who helped to make the evening run so smoothly.

2012 Ugly Walk



Photograph by Paul Hutchence

Eight members met at Penny Street Bridge Hotel and were later joined by two others, making a nice number for this walk through the Aldcliffe Road area, on a mild, slightly drizzly, January morning.

With Roger Frankland's guidance, we noticed the damage to the hotel's stone walls caused by the nail holes for signs that had been put up and taken down by a succession of owners. Here, as in several places on the walk, Roger noted the absence of a necessary street sign.

However, all was by no means negative on the route which took us along the canal towpaths to Bridge 95, back to Cromwell Road, then the area of Brook Street, Carr House Lane, Regent Street, Lindow Square and Portland Street.

Repeated problems were: Rediffusion wires; BT wires slung across roads; unkempt front gardens, some with multiple recycling bins or rubbish; piles of dumped rubbish; poor maintenance of house fronts and lack of sympathy for the prevailing traditional style; some derelict sites; some stone walls apparently in need of immediate repair. En route there was only a small amount of litter and dog excrement (of course there should be none, but this was a big improvement over what one would have anticipated 10 years ago). However there were also some beautifully kept properties; a new footpath leading from Cromwell Road to Abraham Heights; nice cobbled lanes off Portland Street; lovely features such as old chimney pots, decorative eaves and lintels; the beautifully carved 'chamfered' end of the house at the bottom of Portland Street which was perhaps once a pub; some well-placed public benches. We had an opportunity to view the site that is projected for development around Basin Bridge, and it seems a sound proposal, though there was some concern about access. Along a cobbled lane from Portland Street, is a gas street light in need of preserving and painting, one of the jewels one would only see on a walk such as this.

Thanks are due once again to Roger for organising the walk, and for the follow-up work he undertakes.

Report by Sheila Jones



Photograph by Don Burnett

Society's Photographic Competition

To mark the Queen's Diamond Jubilee year, the Society is organising a photographic competition on the theme "Civic Pride : Civic Shame", encouraging people to look more closely at the city. Photographs are invited which show aspects of the city in which the entrant feels pride and/or those which engender a feeling of shame.

Lancaster boasts many fine buildings and features of which we can be proud, but there are also blots (as the Ugly Walks highlight each year) - neglected areas, derelict or badly treated buildings and unsympathetic designs. Photographs should show an appreciation of the good, the bad or the ugly and this will form part of the judging criteria.

The competition is open to all over the age of 18 years, except professional photographers, and the closing date is 16th April. The competition will be judged by: Sue Ashworth (Lancashire Museums Service), Louise Bryning (the Dukes Press and Information Officer), Mike Quinton (Civic Society) and Reg Stodden (Robertson's Photographic).

The prizes (£100 for the winner and £50 for the runner up in both categories), have been provided through an anonymous donation and will be presented at the Society's AGM on 13th June where the winning entries will be on display. It is also hoped to hold an exhibition of all the entries during the summer (dates and venue to be confirmed).

Full details, including the rules and an entry form, can be found on the Society's website: www.lancastercivicsociety.org or printed copies can be obtained by sending a sae to the Chairman, Jenny Greenhalgh, 16 Colywn Avenue, Morecambe LA4 6EQ.

Schools Competition

The Society has also organised a competition for Lancaster junior school pupils. Senior pupils were invited to submit a photographic or written essay on the theme "What I love about Lancaster". The prizes, £30 for the winner and £15 for the two runners-up, have been funded by the Society. Sheila Jones is organising this competition and the results will be announced just after Easter.

James Donald (Don) Waddell, OBE

We are sorry to report the death on 24th December 2011 of Don Waddell, former Town Clerk and Chief Executive of Lancaster City Council and founder member of Lancaster Civic Society.

Martin Widden has provided the following appreciation:

In his capacity as Town Clerk of Lancaster from 1955 to 1979, Don Waddell had a very significant and beneficial influence on developments in Lancaster, particularly in the decade 1958-68.

In this ten-year period, he successfully promoted the foundation of St Martin's College (now the University of Cumbria) in the former King's Own Royal Regiment barracks at Bowerham; he was involved in the foundation of the Duke's Theatre; and, realising that there was a chance that a new university could be located in Lancaster, he was very active in pursuing that outcome.

He persuaded the hospital authorities of the Royal Albert Hospital in Lancaster to release the whole of their site as a possible site for the university, provided a replacement could be established. Later, when he came to the view that the attractions of this site might not beat off the competition from Blackpool, he managed to convince the then owners of Bailrigg Mansion to sell their house and grounds to the City Council. With this virgin site to offer, Lancaster won the contest for the new university. Under his leadership, the City Council also bought St Leonards House, the former factory premises of Waring and Gillow; it was able to lease part of this to meet the needs of the university until the permanent buildings at Bailrigg were ready.

Don Waddell was also an active supporter of Lancaster Civic Society, founded in 1967, becoming its first secretary, and providing a room in the Town Hall for its meetings - an arrangement that continues, although no longer free of charge. Don Waddell died on 24 December 2011, more than 30 years after the end of his term as Town Clerk. After so long a period, those of us who were around before 1979 will have only distant memories of his influence on the City; but his legacy is enormous, and every citizen of this District owes him a very large debt of gratitude.

Martin Widden

Winter Gardens, Morecambe

Following Malcolm Taylor's letter about the Winter Gardens in the November newsletter, Mike Quinton has contributed his thoughts on the building's future.

In the concluding paragraph of Malcolm Taylor's letter about the Winter Gardens he asserts "It must be saved". I think I understand how he feels, but the brutal question "Why?" cannot be avoided. Was the project intrinsically unquestionable - or has it become so because of admiration for the amount of effort already invested by its supporters?

If the first is applied then a number of other, very serious questions have to be satisfied, relating to the long term in particular - about importance, feasibility, future responsibilities/ownership, implications for any future developments nearby and, *of course*, costs. These are questions which should be, but too often are not, asked at the outset of any conservation project, whether prompted by individuals or imposed by, say, English Heritage.

Back in 2000 our Civic Society Committee was invited by the City Council into discussions (happy days!) on the development of the city centre. We produced a discussion paper entitled "*Towards improving the city centre*". My contribution was a section on "Conservation" in which I included the following suggested "**Criteria for choosing to conserve buildings**":

"First, of course, buildings which should be retained because of exceptional historical or architectural significance, e.g. the Castle and the Priory Church.

Secondly, buildings the architectural quality of which will continue to bring pleasure and distinction to the city for many more years, e.g. 18th century houses in the Friary area of the city or the castle precinct.

Thirdly, buildings which, whilst not necessarily of outstanding merit on their own, are nevertheless worth retaining because they contribute to the character of the city and can be put to good contemporary use, e.g. warehouses on St George's Quay and mill buildings in Moor Lane".

With the exception of the first I would now want to qualify each with a proviso: "**that retention of any building should also depend on realistic**

assumptions about its future use and economic viability".

The exclusion of the first category obviously lies in the national importance of some examples but those frequently benefit from other income sources such as tourism.

If, from my own admittedly limited familiarity with the Winter Gardens, (and yes, I was also bowled over when I was first shown round the interior a few years ago), I try honestly to apply those criteria to this question then I fear I cannot support Malcolm in his certainty. I *would* like to see that magnificent brickwork facade with its incorporated viable shops maintained, but I am not convinced that the rest of the building measures up to what could justify its preservation, with all the costs, now and in the future, that would entail. So I think that Malcolm is wrong and that this project probably never was justified. It would be so good to be convinced otherwise, but . . .

Mike Quinton, December 2011

n.b. The discussion paper "Towards improving the city centre", mentioned by Mike Quinton is available on the Society's website:

www.lancastercivicsociety.org

The following events may be of interest to members:

Friday 9th March in Manchester:

Widening access for voluntary groups in the historic environment: workshop organised by English Heritage and Civic Voice

Saturday 24th March in Preston

Neighbourhood Planning: workshop organised by Civic Voice and NWACTs

For further details contact the organisers of the events or Winnie Clark (01524 33411)

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[www.lancastercivicsociety.org](http://www.lancastercivicsociety.org)

