

READING CIVIC SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

AGM – 7 April 2018

The AGM was held this year at The Changing Room, the conference room of the Thames Lido, which we thought we should put to the test after we had been so enthusiastic about the restoration of the building. Luckily it was a lovely day so we were able to open the sliding doors and drift out on to the balcony at tea break time. This is a very well-equipped venue which suited us perfectly for the size of our meeting.

While we were arriving a PowerPoint presentation by John Missenden was being screened. Inspired by last year's visit to the Bath Preservation Trust, John put together 60 illustrations of Reading's Georgian heritage – if you missed this interesting survey you can access it on the Civic Society website.

The meeting was attended by 42 members. The minutes of the previous year's AGM were agreed and signed. The Chairman's report had been previously circulated and is available on the Society's website. The Chairman reported the Society's continued support of Civic Voice and he reviewed the Society events which had taken place over the past year: the visit to the Bath Preservation Trust; walks which had been led by Dr Margaret Simons for both Civic Day and for HODS; the Churches Tour organised by Lynette Edwell and our Luncheon party in March. He also reported the ongoing work to update our Town Walks and the Society's contribution to the "blue plaque" to Phoebe Cusden. Also there has been a lot of work to update the website, including information on buildings and streets with Article 4 designations. There is now a comprehensive record of these, including images of each group of buildings in a flipbook, which has helped the RBC planners to fill some gaps in their records. The Society continues to monitor and comment on planning applications, especially those with an impact on listed buildings, conservations areas or other heritage assets. Looking to forthcoming events the Chairman mentioned a visit to The Charterhouse in London (August), contributions to HODS and a Churches Tour to be led by Lynette Edwell in September.

Also included were reports on membership and the Hon. Treasurer's Statement of Accounts.

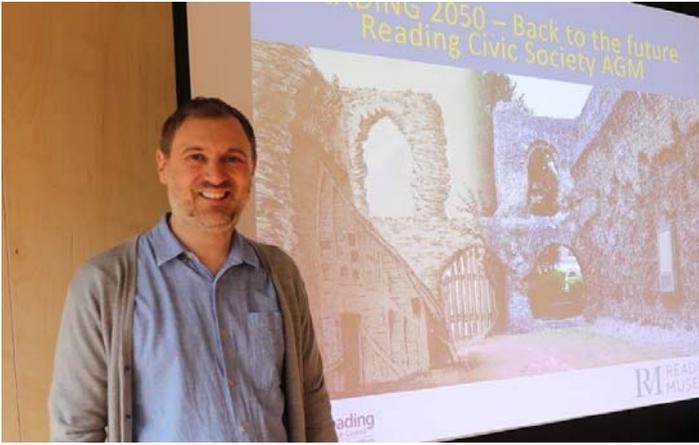
The Chairman then moved to the election of officers and committee members. Brenda Tait stood down after 22 years as Hon. Treasurer and was thanked by the Chairman for her long service to the Society and was presented with a bouquet of flowers (*below*). Brenda also becomes a Life Member of the Society



PHOTO: CHRIS WIDDOWS

Richard Bennett was re-elected as Chairman and he thanked the Committee for their work during the past year. Penny Kemp had offered to take over the role of Hon. Treasurer and she was duly elected to the Committee and to fulfil that vital role. All the other members of the Committee were willing to stand again and were elected *en bloc*. Paul Welch, FCA, was re-appointed as Examiner of Accounts.

After the official business of the meeting we were very pleased to welcome **Matthew Williams, Reading Museum Manager**, to give a talk entitled "Back to the Future, Reading's Heritage and Reading's Future", which showed the ways in which Reading's heritage can influence the future of the town, and developed a quote from Nicholas Crane, "To care about a place, you must know its story". Matthew emphasised that heritage regeneration has an impact on quality of life; people want to live and work in places with an interesting history and that heritage drives planning and is important for future development,



Matthew Williams, Reading Museum Manager

PHOTO: CHRIS WIDDOWS

which should be of its time but sympathetic to its surroundings. We also heard about recent initiatives such as the Reading Abbey Revealed Project and the promotion of the Abbey Quarter, with more recent history uncovered in booklets about Newtown, Oxford Road and Dee Park. The older sites in Reading provide areas for events and activities, such as open air theatre, and more opportunities will be provided by the cultural aspects of the future use of Reading Gaol.

We thank Matthew very much for giving his time on a Saturday afternoon and for a lively and interesting talk which was so pertinent to the interests of the Civic Society. **ABB**

ANNUAL LUNCHEON PARTY

3 MARCH 2018

It's hard to believe now, writing this during our long, hot summer, but we had doubts right up until the last moment that this event would be attended by many because of – snow! As it happened only six members who had signed up were unable to get there.

Thank you to Jill Tait and Philippa Woodward who very kindly ran the raffle for us, raising £98 for our funds, and also thanks go to the donors of the prizes. Ambushed at the door, who could resist our charming highwaywomen? **ABB**

PHOTO: CHRIS WIDDOWS



Jill Tait

Philippa Woodward

Chris Widdows provided us with a picture quiz to test our awareness of our surroundings as we walk around Reading. This year's pictures ranged from the new Phoebe Cusden plaque right back to Henry I. Thank you Chris.

We were sorry to learn that Marco, who has looked after us so well over the years, has left Pepe Sale for a new job. We will miss his help and his bustling efficiency on the day.

And thank you to Clare Platts and Brenda Tait for organising this event so well for us again. **ABB**

THAMES LIDO - Highly Commended in the Civic Voice Design Awards 2018



(Left to right): Richard Bennett; Arne Ringner, Thames Lido; Deborah Lamb, Deputy Chief Executive Historic England

PHOTO: © PAUL HUMBLE

On 12 July the quality of the restoration and re-imagining work at the Thames Lido received a **Highly Commended Award** in the Historic Buildings Category as part of **Civic Voice's 2018 Design Awards**. The cost at £3m was astonishingly good value for such a complex project.

The winner of the category, and overall winner, was the Storyhouse in Chester, a £37m redevelopment of a former cinema into a cinema, two theatres and a library, funded by the local council. The Lido was placed equally with Turner's House at Twickenham.

The event took place at the London City offices of architects Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners, i.e. the Richard Rogers "Cheesegrater" building. Richard Bennett attended as the proposer of the building, on behalf of the Civic Society, and Sam Kendon represented Marshall and Kendon, the architects who worked on the project.

The judges, chaired by architect Max Farrell, said that "thanks to local people, a long-fought campaign and a sympathetic developer, Thames Lido has been saved. The careful and beautiful restoration of Thames Lido sets an example to others, at a time when many local authorities are having to close swimming pools. The quality of this restoration shines through." **ABB**

PLANNING UPDATE

National Planning Policy Framework

July 2018

Did you notice the launch of the new NPPF at the end of July? As Richard Morrison, writing in *The Times* (3.8.18), says, “slipped out under cover of Brexit, the document that will shape the look of England for years to come was duly awarded minimal coverage by the press”.

This is a wide-ranging document which necessarily has to take account of housing, town centres, the environment, transport and preserving historic buildings. From my reading of it, the section on conserving and enhancing the historic environment (Section 16) sounds much like the “same old, same old” with sweeping statements and vague aspirations, but its weasel words need more “bite” to make it effective. I think we have heard it all before. The success or failure of this policy, however, relies on how it is implemented by planning authorities

Where new developments are concerned there is emphasis on “good design”, but I believe that has been the case since the last NPPF was issued in 2012 – and has it got us anywhere? Morrison says this is “a fine aspiration if local councils had the experts, time, resources and money to match what any big housing developer can deploy in a planning battle” and that they can’t turn themselves into architectural watchdogs. From November LPAs will be penalised if they do not meet housing targets. This could lead to a scramble to ensure approved schemes are actually implemented and new proposals could be approved regardless of architectural merit in order to meet the quota. Can LPAs resist this pressure?

Overall, as Morrison says, this is a well-meaning document but it assumes that “England is still a country of communities safeguarded by strong, efficient local authorities”. For the past eight years lip service has been paid to localism without strengthening the means to implement it.

Draft Hosier Street Area Development Framework

While this is currently called the Hosier Street development, it covers the area of the market, the demolished Civic Offices, Broad Street Mall and the Thames Valley Police HQ. This certainly emphasises the short life span of modern buildings and the constant state of flux which characterises Reading. You can see the document about this proposal at www.reading.gov.uk/hosier_street and copies are also available at the Central Library and the Council Offices.

While the proposals include a wider area for updating on the periphery, the core development centres on the “Hexagon Quarter” and is driven by the Council making provision for housing in the areas vacated by the Civic Offices and the Police HQ (who want their landholding to be included) and by the owners of Broad St Mall (BSM), who wish to revitalise and expand their shopping centre.

BSM have purchased adjoining sites for future expansion, including, in the longer term, a cinema on the edge of the shopping centre. They wish to open up the frontages of the ground floor facing south and to add 2-3 towers above the existing building, with heights increasing westwards above the multi-storey car park.

After the Civic Offices came down I rather liked the more open feel to the area and would have liked to see the back of 10-12-storey Fountain House – but, no, it is to stay and will be joined by others of that ilk. The Council has identified the area as an opportunity for tall buildings and envisages 3 to 5 of varying heights. On the site of the Civic Offices, they propose a tower of 20 storeys, on the edge of the IDR, which will be the tallest to be allowed on the site. All the tall building applications will be referred to the Design South East Review Panel.

Some of the residential accommodation blocks will be in the ownership of RBC and they will all be for social rent, although with between 500-750 dwellings, of 1, 2 and 3 bedroom units, this is very high density housing. Let us hope that we have not forgotten the lessons of the 60s; high rise, high density = social disasters, which we have been demolishing.

The lack of information on infrastructure for health services and education may reflect the fact that this is not going to be a child-friendly area.

The lower-level blocks appear to curve round into rather inward-looking areas and look out on each other rather than having larger useful areas of green open space between them. It feels as though this development would be better sited elsewhere rather than jammed into such a constrained space.

Queen’s Walk has been designated a “greenway” with planting, seating and play areas. Will it still be a wind tunnel? There is also a suggestion for a bridge or wide decking across the IDR to re-establish a link with Howard Street/Baker Street. Now where have I heard that before?

This development will impact negatively on the two neighbouring CAs, putting Russell St/Castle Hill CA even more “at risk”! I wonder if these CAs will be a constraint on development or be disregarded.

A Tale of Three Pubs

Two doomed, but one given a boost.

The first pub, originally The Royal, later an Irish pub called **The Battle Inn** and finally a Polish pub called *Gospoda*, at the corner of Oxford Road and Bedford Road, is the subject of a planning application (**180876**). This is for the demolition of the pub which is to be replaced by a new build ground floor shop with 6 flats above. The site has listed buildings on all sides and is opposite the northern limit of the Russell St CA. The flats would be in a building of 5, 4 and 2 storeys. While this is a better design option than the previous suggestion, which, above the ground floor, was forward of the building line so that there was only the width of the pavement between the picture windows of the first floor flats and the passengers on the upper deck of the No. 17, it is still problematic in that it will block a lot of light, and views to the south, from sheltered housing in Trinity Place. The design is not stunning but an attempt has been made to follow the pattern of the fenestration of older housing in the area.

The second is the **Red Lion** at 34-36 Southampton St (**181117**). No. 34 is a handsome, well-proportioned building, with no. 36 attached, and makes a good contribution to the streetscape. No. 38, also rendered white, a two-storey residential building adjoining, is included in the planning application. It is a shame that business was so bad that the pub had to close and the building has since become so run down. The application is for the demolition of 34-38 and replacement by a 4-storey building and basement to provide 11 residential units. A previous application (172328) was not supported by either planning officers or the Reading Design Review Panel as it was thought to be too dominant. It was, indeed, too “blocky” and unattractive. The new design has a much lighter feel to it, with more glazing. Although the applicants have included details of the proposed materials, i.e. light purple/grey brickwork with some red brick detailing (to tone with listed buildings in the area), the representations of the building in the Design and Access Statement are all white. This gives an impression of a less solid, heavy building and I wonder if it would not be better for the new building to be rendered white, allowing it to take the place of the old pub more easily in the overall streetscape.

The third is **The Fisherman’s Cottage** (GII listed) on Kennet Side (**180626**). This application has been permitted and will allow the partial demolition of the rear projection and the erection of a new 2-storey linked building, in character, to form 6 rooms for guest accommodation, with changes to parking and some landscaping. The historic buildings consultant had no objection to the proposals.

ABB



PHOTO: PHILIP GRIFFIN

This Grade 1 listed complex of buildings certainly lives up to its billing, a “hidden gem”. It is situated in an oasis of calm even though there are busy streets all around this area – the fact it was a Saturday when we visited probably contributed to that impression. The new works which have recently been carried out to the building, providing a modern reception area and a small museum which connects to the chapel, have created a very welcoming space for the growing number of visitors who have been admitted since 2016. The commendation which the project received from the Civic Trust is well deserved. Our guide did emphasise at several points the debt which is also owed to the architects Seely and Paget who, after the Second World War, restored those buildings which were damaged by bombing.

All aspects of the history of this site are represented on the tour: the Black Death cemetery; the Carthusian Priory; Tudor mansion (Duke of Norfolk); Thomas Sutton’s charitable foundation (the largest in 17C Europe) - school and almshouses; and continuing use as almshouses today.



The Great Hall

PHOTO: PHILIP GRIFFIN

The Charterhouse – 4 August

The Great Hall now makes a lovely dining room for the residents of the almshouses, known as the Brothers. They live in sheltered accommodation in the form of individual flats in the old courtyards and meet for meals. They are each allocated a seat when they arrive and they keep to that place for the duration. The seating plan is worked out to try to keep people with similar interests together, who will get on well – let's hope they don't fall out. Over the years a number of residents have been artists and retired actors but they come from a variety of backgrounds and meet the criteria of being single and in needy circumstances. The Brothers have been joined for the first time this year by a lady who has opted to still be called a "Brother".



PHOTOS: CHRIS WIDDOWS

The Great Chamber (*above*) built during Lord North's ownership (1553-1564), and embellished by the Duke of Norfolk, was known at one time as the Throne Room as both Elizabeth I and James I held court here before formally entering London as monarch. The very elaborate floor-to-ceiling chimneypiece has been very much altered since then.

"Gownboys Hall" (*below*) was the dining room for the Foundation Scholars of Charterhouse School (with accompanying graffiti). Thanks to the enormously wealthy Thomas Sutton's legacy, the Poor Brothers and the Scholars arrived in 1614.



PHOTO: CHRIS WIDDOWS

Welcome shade in Charterhouse Square.

ABB



PHOTOS: CHRIS WIDDOWS

One side of the Great Cloister of the Priory remains post-dissolution (*above*). The original cloister (1371) had 5 or 7 monastic cells on each of the 4 sides but only one doorway is left (*below*). To the left of the door is an opening for food to be passed to the monk without disturbing his work or prayers. This remaining part of the cloister was rebuilt by the then owner, the Duke of Norfolk, in 1571 to make a covered walkway to his new real tennis court. Due to the politics of the time he did not live to enjoy his lovely Tudor brickwork for long.



CITIZENSHIP CEREMONIES

hitherto at Yeomanry House



In the last newsletter I reported on what happens to the services provided by the Register Office following the closure of Yeomanry House in November 2018. Since then it has been announced that Yeomanry House has been sold to a company which will use it for a nursery, so it is going back to being a school – as it was in the late 1800s.

Last autumn I was given the opportunity to watch a Citizenship Ceremony and subsequently I have presented the Citizenship Certificates on behalf of the Lord-Lieutenant for Berkshire in Reading, to some 20 new citizens, and in Slough, with the Mayor of Slough, Paul Sohal, to some 30 new citizens. They come from all over the world: those I have met hailed from Canada, Australia, India, Romania, Zimbabwe, South Africa, India, Poland and Denmark.

The decision to make formal presentations of certificates was to give added significance to the process of becoming a British Citizen. The ceremonies are held each Wednesday in most Register Offices. Individuals go through a process which for some appears to be as short as 3 months yet others have told me it took them 11 years. A test, called “Life in the UK”, has to be taken consisting of 24 questions and a pass mark of 75% has to be achieved.

The test covers British Principles, Traditions & Values and British Culture, History, Government & Law. As to costs there are a range of charges. However, £1330 seems to be the main option, with children only slightly cheaper.

Once all hurdles are passed individuals have the option of attending a Citizenship Ceremony, at a cost of £80, organised by the Register Office. On the day the Registrar welcomes everybody and explains the process. Each person then swears the oath of allegiance to the Queen and the certificates are presented, sometimes by the Lord-Lieutenant for Berkshire (or a Deputy) or the High Sheriff of Berkshire and the Mayor, or sometimes by the Registrar alone.

Each Registrar brings their own flair and experience to the event. Both Thomasz Latawiec, Deputy Registrar in Reading, and the Registrar in Slough had been through the citizenship process themselves so are able to share their own experiences. We all aim to make it a very special day for the new citizens – the final step for many on a very long journey.

As part of the speeches each of us makes before the certificate presentation, we ask that they accept the responsibility of becoming a citizen and making Britain a better place. We emphasise the value of taking a full part in society and, amongst other things, joining local groups and societies.

After the ceremony many participants want to have their photograph taken with their family before a picture of The Queen, with the Union Jack and sometimes with the presenters. I have met so many people who have clearly been delighted to be one of Britain’s new citizens.

My next ceremony is at Wokingham.

RB

HOT OFF THE PRESS

Our local history industry has been busy. Recent and imminent books include:

Reading’s Bayeux Tapestry, by Reading Museum, reproduces the whole embroidery, with accounts of the original, the making of the replica by the ladies of Leek, and its circuitous journey to Reading via Germany, the USA and Brighton Pavilion. Available at the Museum and RISC.

Reading Abbey and the Abbey Quarter, by John Painter and Peter Durrant, does what it says on the tin, aided by many illustrations. Available at the Museum and RISC.

Anon’s History of Yeomanry House, formerly Castle Hill House, lists its former owners – including John and Lady Augusta Twistleton Wykeham Fiennes – and later uses by a school, the military and the Council: what next for this valuable site? On sale at the Library.

Coley and Coley Park, by Katie Amos and Mike Cooper, traces the story of the big house, for some time occupied by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and now a hospital, but also describes the surrounding area, known as Coley Gorge. On sale at the Library.

Reading Abbey Records: a new miscellany, edited by Brian Kemp, Berkshire Record Society. Four segments: general records covering 1199-1281; an account of 27 miracles attributed to the alleged hand of St James; Henry I’s anniversary celebrations; and a schedule of anniversaries and pittances. On sale at the Berkshire Record Office.

AS

Bad Dog!



Brewdog, who recently took over the premises of the old Congregational Chapel, in Castle Street, from Dogma (no relation), did not apply for the necessary permissions before they applied black paint to the ground floor front elevation of the listed Grade II building, and put tables and chairs outside. The building is also within a conservation area so doubly “bad dog”.

The retrospective application for the fascia board and signs and the painting of the building was refused as these works were considered to be detrimental to the character and fabric of the listed building and out of keeping in design. The disabled access ramp was too utilitarian and failed to respect the character, or

preserve the setting, of the listed building. The application for the placement of furniture on the public highway was also refused as being out of character with the rest of the street and causing a cluttered appearance, thus failing to preserve or enhance the character of the CA.

The paintwork is already peeling as the wrong type of paint was used – not suitable for the stonework. This is probably why it is taking so long for Brewdog to comply with the planning refusal.

The Times reported (23 March) that Brewdog’s annual profits had more than halved, partly due to heavy investment in new bars. Perhaps they could save a few pennies if they got it right first time! **ABB**

New dog on the block



Seen at the corner of St George’s Road and Oxford Road – oh dear, now they’ll all want one!

A post by Joe Doak from the Facebook page “Old Reading”

“The charter revision of 1638 included a clause forbidding further subdivision of houses into slum tenements” from Brod, M. (2006) ‘The Case of Reading: Urban Governance in Troubled Times’, p. 109

There you go the use of Article 4 Directions to control HMOs back in the seventeenth century!

Guide to The Charterhouse

I have a surplus copy of the Guidebook to The Charterhouse, still in its cellophane. No charge.

Even the guidebook won an award; the 2018 Best Guidebook from the Association for Cultural Enterprises. It is beautifully produced.

If you would like this copy, please contact me, details in the Committee box below, and I will get it to you. First come, first served. **Alison Bennett**

LOCAL INTEREST BOOKLETS

Kendrick School's Houses by **Katie Amos** provides information about the school's use of Watlington House, Sidmouth and Cedars Houses. Published this year, it is available from Reading Libraries at £2.

In 2018 **Anne Green Jessel** has published two booklets about the history of the houses in Southcote Road, "**A Road of Distinction**" – one for each side of the road. There is also information about their occupants, many of whom are very well-known contributors to the story of Reading. Whilst many of the houses are now long gone, Anne's work provides an excellent reference. Available from Anne Green Jessel direct (07798 708760) at £3 to cover printing and postage for both booklets together. **RB**

NEW MEMBERS

Mrs J Clark, Mr K Jerrome, Ms E Marshall,
Mr R Stainthorp, Dr Margaret Simons,
Ms A Berrisford, Mrs V Barker, Mrs J Hailey

Contributions to the Newsletter

Please send contributions to the newsletter and Letters to the Editor to Adam Sowan, contact details below.

Forthcoming Events

CHURCHES TOUR

Sunday, 30 September 2018

We will visit three churches by coach; St Mary's at Great Shefford, St Mary's at Aldworth and St Mary's at Bucklebury.

David Peacock, who is a local journalist, lecturer and writer, will join us again as our guide.

As we did last year, we will stop for tea at Angelica's at Camp Hopson in Newbury. A full afternoon tea can be ordered and paid for in advance.

Booking forms have already been circulated but, if you need any further details, please contact Lynette Edwell on 01635 820445.

OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE 2018/19

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