

Our Town



The Newsletter of Cheltenham Civic Society

Debate, ideas, news and provocations

4

September
2016

Your regular update on how we are working to keep Cheltenham a great place to live



What is “good” architecture?

The Civic Society does a lot of thinking about architecture – it informs our input into local planning decisions; and we run the Cheltenham Civic Awards, to recognise the best in new buildings, restorations, and ‘improvements to the built environment’. But what *is* “the best”? What is “good”? How can you tell? Isn’t it all subjective? We asked architects, some eminent laymen, and you, our readers, for their views. First, the distinguished laymen:

Let’s start with the thoughts of artist P J Crook, President of the Friends of the Wilson (right). She writes, “Good architecture enhances the practical and aesthetic needs of its occupants, elevating it above pure function or ‘pure’ design. It embraces and uplifts its surroundings... Bad architecture is impractical, pompous and puts form over function when not relating to human scale or needs... What would be a good example, though? I thought of the glorious Basilica of La Sagrada Familia in Barcelona – or the beautiful traditional Japanese temples of Kyoto – or the square in Sienna. But in the end, I decided my example of “good architecture” would be my home – the place where I live and work, which we have created over nearly thirty years from a small two-bedroom house!” (Top left, one of the additions.)



What’s in **Our Town** this time...

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Sir Henry Elwes, sometime Lord Lieutenant, has this to say: “For town settings I am very much in favour of the Georgian style of architecture with its tall windows giving more light than wide ones, and I have no problem with copying the style today: the elegance is undated. The modern renewal of the south side of Imperial Gardens is a case in point.” (Top centre.)



For more opinions and pictures – including the views of an MP, two architects, and three Civic Society members – see pages 6 and 7...

What are we up to?



*PERSONAL
REFLECTIONS
by
the Society's
Chair,
Maxine Melling*

The Civic Society depends on its members in so many ways, but especially to help us stay relevant and active in the life of our town.

This month Membership Secretary Richard de Carteret, will be getting in touch to ask you to share some information about yourself, and to ask whether you would like – and are able – to play a more active role in the work of the Society.

I would urge you to reply to Richard's request, by sharing as much about your skills and interests as you can. If you would like to participate in the work of the Committee or its various sub-groups, do let him know, especially if you have experience in working with other voluntary groups. The Society is only as strong as its members can make it. I've been Chair now for a matter of months, but have already met many members and know there are impressive and valuable experiences and skills out there. If you feel able to use those skills to help the work of the Society, and make us more effective, now's the time.

Meanwhile September is busy – Heritage Open Days (8-11 September) is a national scheme that has grown and grown: and Cheltenham's efforts are growing too – we are opening doors to more properties in 2016 than ever before. There is also a new programme of walks and talks – and, fascinatingly, a trail of all 26 spa wells that have ever operated in the town. Read all about it on page 5.

And I am delighted to report a record number of new Society members – 28 since June. Welcome all.

...and where we've been:



The Society's outing to Great Witley Court (above) and Church (7th June) did not disappoint.

The church has an amazing 18th century baroque interior, quite unlike anything in England. Its elaborate vaulted ceiling, designed by James Gibbs, is in papier maché – an exotic alternative to more usual plaster.

In 1733 the widow of Witley Court's first owner, Lord Foley, had a new church built next to the house, to replace a ruined medieval church. We made a short visit down to the crypt to see the imposing lead coffins of later Foleys. We were rather glad to emerge into the sunshine for lunch in the tea room garden.

Later we toured the ruins of the great house, Witley Court, parts of which were designed by John Nash. It was almost wholly remodelled in 1854 by Samuel Whitfield Daukes (architect of Lypiatt Terrace), for a later owner, William Ward, 1st Earl of Dudley.

It was gutted by fire in 1937.

Although ruined, the building with its beautiful gardens and Perseus and Andromeda fountain retains echoes of a magnificent past when Royalty and the rich and famous were entertained in luxury. We didn't do too badly ourselves.

Lesley Whittall

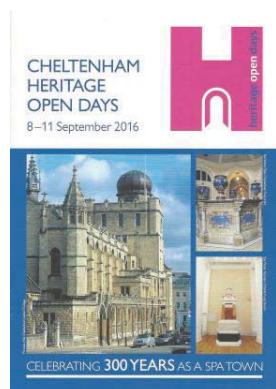
A WARM WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS:

- Anne & Vicky Lethbridge ● Philip & Jennifer Stapleton ● Jon Rigby ● Mrs S Pearce
- Cyril & Katy Bleasdale ● Mr and Mrs M Harbridge ● Geoffrey Smith ● Robert Rimell
- Mr and Mrs C Sillence ● Anne & Brian Shawcross ● Ian & Christine James
- Mike & Alison Scott-Baumann ● Tony & Angela Roberts ● Martin Evans
- Marjorie O'Neill ● Ian & Rebecca Dodsworth ● Simon Calcutt and Claire Plowright

Diary dates

Even if you are not a member of the Society, you are warmly invited to attend these events:

Thursday 8 to Sunday 11 September



Heritage Open Days

See the article on page 5.

This year's theme is 'Celebrating 300 years as a spa town'. Walks and talks, and a new self-guided walk around all 26 sites where there have been spa wells. Plus 27 properties for

you to explore FREE, many not normally open to the public. A booklet (above) listing venues and activities is available from the Tourist Information Centre, Town Hall and elsewhere in the town.

Friday 9, Saturday 10 and Sunday 11 September

Parmoor House Open Days



The Society's own Parmoor House will also be open.

There will be an exhibition of the Society's work; the 2016 Civic Awards winners; scrap-books of photographs and articles on Cheltenham's past; films of 'Old Cheltenham'. Plus, 'Cheltenham Life 1914-19', a special exhibition showing what

the Great War meant here on the home front.

(Thanks to Neela Mann and Cheltenham Local History Society.)

- Friday 1 – 7 p.m.; Sat and Sun 11 a.m. – 4 p.m.
- 13 Lypiatt Terrace GL50 2SX

Tuesday 4 October

Special General Meeting

Over the last year, the committee has been considering the Society's charitable structure. The proposal is to modify our constitution to reflect 21st century needs, as recommended by the Charity Commission. This Special General Meeting is to seek members' approval for the changes. Please watch out for an explanatory message and a formal notice to all members in early September. The full text will be available soon at the Society website:

<http://www.cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk/>

- 6. 30 p.m. Parmoor House GL50 2SX followed by.....



Tuesday 4 October

History of Punch and Judy

Presented by Mr Phil Collins (Manager of Parmoor House), a.k.a. Professor Collywobbles.

- 7. 30 p.m. Parmoor House GL50 2SX

Professor Collywobbles

Phil Collins first caught the limelight as Mr Toad in *Toad of Toad Hall*. Later he directed for Churchdown Players, and appeared in Open Air Shakespeare at Painswick Rococo Garden, at Cheltenham Playhouse, and Stroud Playhouse: he was in the stage version of *A Few Good Men* – "I played the Tom Cruise part." (Modest.)

"I remember at Swanage on holiday as a kid, seeing a Punch and Judy man and thinking 'one day I'll do that'." In 2009 Phil snapped up a set of Punch puppets on e-bay – and now he is Professor Collywobbles (all Punch and Judy men are 'Professors') and a widely-acknowledged expert on Punch and Judy traditions, much in demand to tell the fascinating history. An evening of surprises, colour and laughter in store.

Tuesday 8 November

Development Task Force

Jeremy Williamson's sparkling annual bulletin on what's new, and what's coming up (and what's coming down) in the town. Unmissable.

- 7. 30 p.m. Parmoor House GL50 2SX

And don't forget:

Thursday 3 November

The Tercentenary Dinner

For full details, and to book, go to:

<https://cheltenham300.wordpress.com>

The power of flowers



The roundabout by GCHQ; the skateboard park in Pittville; the south side of Hatherley Park; Coronation Square; on Wymans Lane; by Westal Green – just a few of the places where your eye is caught by a flash of unexpected colour.

It's not the dazzling, dashing municipal planting that's such a feature of the town – this is something more informal:

'Urban Meadows'...

patches of wild flowers – poppies, scabious, cornflower, Bishop's flower and more: red, yellow, purple, blue – and grasses, like a reminder of old country meadows.

The first Urban Meadow was planted in 2014. Now there are 75,000 square metres (18 football pitches) of "wild" flowers blooming gloriously in and around Cheltenham's verges, roundabouts, parks and unregarded corners.

The idea sprang from the Great War centenary – a commemorative seed mix, "Old Comrades Mix": that's why there are so many poppies. It's gone far beyond that now. The actual planting is done by an anonymous local hero, and some bright spark adds sunflowers every so often. However, the entire scheme is managed by Community Ranger Janice Peacey: "I got a 6-week temporary job when I came back to Cheltenham in 2009. Now I'm one of the two Community Rangers." The prime focus of Janice's job is to get communities to interact with their local outdoors, and get more out of it: "I got The Friends of Pittville working with St Paul's Area Residents – after all, they share Pittville Park!"

Janice has plans for Springbank now – the regeneration of Springfields Park won the 2010 South-West Parks Award. It's one of 5 Green Flag

Parks in the town – places of outstanding amenity value.

There's a new spring in the step of Winston Churchill Gardens too, thanks to volunteer leader Graham Gage and the Green Space Volunteers.

Other initiatives are keeping things buzzing: "Cheltenham Bird Group does a fortnightly survey of Pittville Park to help us plan – we want more birds, and greater diversity. We had a Dartford Warbler in 2014 – only the 5th ever in the county. There are kestrels too. And we are developing teaching materials for children – getting involved in the local environment is part of their curriculum."



Community Ranger Janice Peacey

Challenges and future plans

"The joy of my job is seeing people enjoying the parks – getting more out of them; making them safe and welcoming places. I want to encourage people to be "eyes and ears" – so we can cut down graffiti, petty crime, drugs, vandalism. And I encourage volunteering – building teams and setting up working parties – like monthly litter picks. It's a social thing too. Staff from Waitrose give their time to help." The current big challenge is 'Fishy Park' – Hesters Way Park, officially. "We really need some volunteers to get that one moving..."

Great oaks from little acorns....

27+9+6+11= 4

glorious Heritage Open Days

In 2016 Cheltenham celebrates 300 years as a spa. So this year for Heritage Open Days -

September 8-11

- we are not just opening lots of historic properties for you to visit and enjoy FREE, we are adding a new programme of walks and talks, all on the theme 'The Spas of Cheltenham'.

There are **27** properties to see, **9** guided walks to join, **6** talks, and **11** self-guided walks. (Ten years ago just 9 properties were opened, and there were just 3 'architectural heritage' walks.)

Well, well, well

In 1788 George III came to the town seeking a cure for his mystery illness. Up till then Cheltenham had been a small, insignificant spa. George changed all that. He brought an explosion of activity – as many as 26 wells were opened over the subsequent years. Today there is just one left - Pittville Pump Room. (These days you can't even sample the waters at the Town Hall.)

All 26 well sites – from The Montpellier Wine Bar to the Rodney Road car park – are listed, with a brief description of each, in the new 16-page free Heritage Open Days guide booklet. Copies are widely available – from the Town Hall, Pittville Pump Room, the Tourist Information Centre (TIC), libraries, etc. It will give you a wonderful insight into how Cheltenham has changed over the years.

Though the Brown Signs call us 'Regency Cheltenham', the properties opening up for this year's Open Days cover a thousand years of history: St Mary Magdalene in Uckington is Norman; Cheltenham Minster is a medieval gem; Pittville Pump Room is a classically-inspired masterpiece from 1830; and there are superb Victorian Gothic Revival churches by Cheltenham's own master architect, John Middleton, not to mention the Princess Hall in Cheltenham Ladies' College, with 'Arts and Crafts' décor.

Walk: The Prestbury You Didn't Know
Start & Finish: Church Lane (by the side of the pharmacy)
Leader: Roger Beacham
An hour's gentle stroll along Prestbury High Street. See the childhood home of the poet Alice Meynell and the Georgian house built for a mistress. Hear about Tennyson's time at a hydro and see the war grave of a hero of the Battle of Waterloo.
Thursday 2.30-3.30pm. Pre-book and collect ticket from the TIC.

Walk: The Pittville Pump Room & Estate – what a story!
Start: Central Cross Café
Finish: Pittville Pump Room
Leader: Judy Langhorn
A walk through the Grade II listed pleasure grounds of the Pittville Estate to explore the grand vision of Joseph Pitt and the trials and tribulations that dogged his project. Walk culminates at Pittville Pump Room to 'take the waters'.
Friday 9.30-11am. Pre-book and collect ticket from the TIC.

Walk: Cheltenham in the Great War
Start: The Wilson
Finish: Parmoor House
Leader: Neela Mann
Neela Mann, author of 'Cheltenham in the Great War' takes you on a walk with stories of people and buildings showing Cheltenham's contribution to WW1. The walk ends at Cheltenham Local History Society's exhibition 'Cheltenham Life 1914-19'.
Friday, Saturday & Sunday 2-3.30pm. Pre-book and collect ticket from the TIC. No children under 11.

Walk: Edward Wilson Walk
Start: The Wilson
Finish: Cheltenham College
Leader: David Eider
This walk celebrates the life and achievements of Cheltenham's Antarctic explorer Dr Edward Adrian Wilson (1872-1912) taking in many of the sites associated with him, including a visit to Cheltenham College to see the chapel window dedicated to his memory.
Saturday 10am-12noon. Pre-book and collect ticket from the TIC.

Walk: Tivoli in 90 Minutes
Start & Finish: St Stephen's Church
Leader: Adrian Barlow
Exploring what the architecture of the streets around Tivoli can tell us about the evolving growth and character of Tivoli today.
Saturday 10.30am. Pre-book by calling Sue on 07905 307859.

Walk: Guided Walk of Regency Cheltenham
Start: The Wilson
Finish: The Promenade
Leader: Mary Moxham
Explore the development of this Regency Spa town; discover architectural highlights and significant personalities in Cheltenham's history.
Saturday 11am. Pre-book and collect ticket from the TIC.

12 For further information please visit heritageopendays.org.uk

Just one page from the free 16-page guide booklet

Our walks and talks embrace all of Cheltenham, from 19th century church reformers to Antarctic explorer Edward Wilson; the early days of the General Hospital, and life during the First World War (read all about it below.)

Do take this opportunity to find out more about the history and heritage of the town. It's all FREE, and all run by volunteers.

See page 3 for dates and times.

Fiona Clarke



From 9 to 11 September, Parmoor House is hosting Cheltenham Local History Society's exhibition, **Cheltenham Life: 1914-19**. It shows, with hundreds of images, the way life was for Cheltonians at home in the Great War – women in particular.

On each of the three days Neela Mann, whose 2016 book 'Cheltenham in the Great War' developed from this research, will be leading a walk at 2 p.m. based on her book, with stories of the parts Cheltenham buildings and people played. The walk is free. You can book at the Tourist Information Centre.



What is “good” architecture?

From page 1...

On our front page two eminent and thoughtful laymen – artist P J Crook, and sometime Lord Lieutenant Sir Henry Elwes gave their views. Now here are the thoughts of another eminent Cheltonian – our MP, Alex Chalk. But first: what do the ‘experts’ say? Here are the thoughts of two architect members of the Civic Society:

Douglas Ogle “What is good architecture? Tricky! My professional life has been devoted to ‘spreading the gospel’, and the past 30 years encouraging appreciation of contemporary architecture through world-wide study tours – so maybe I should be prepared to give a learned discourse. Alas, experience teaches that the views of a professional are likely to be shot down: “elitist”, they cry! So let us be practical – no theory: only a single superb building to sum up my views.

“Having recently revisited Salamanca – perhaps the most stunningly beautiful of cities – my admiration was rekindled for the extraordinary *Casa Lis Museo Art Nouveau I Art Deco* (left). Designed around 1900 by local architect Joaquin de Vargas y Aguirro, it is a rare example of modernist industrial architecture adapted to create a home. Sold in 1917, it fell into disrepair. In 1981 the city fathers acquired it to house the huge Andrade collection of furniture, glass, porcelain, dolls, toys and automatons, and restored it to its present glory.

“It makes my heart sing – who could ask for more?”



Now here are some words from **Alex Chalk, MP**: “I believe the touchstone of good architecture is this: a profound respect for place and context. All architects purport to have this, of course. But in

Bruce Buchanan

“The Roman architect Vitruvius stated that a structure must exhibit three qualities: *firmness, commodity and delight*.

“The definition helps in assessing contemporary buildings:

“*Firmness* applies to the quality of construction, and that a building is well-detailed. You can widen that definition to include how the structure is expressed, and if it can easily be understood.

“*Commodity* defines that a building expresses its purpose and function. A major criticism of Victorian architecture, by Modernists, was that many buildings did not appear to express their function: St Pancras station appears to be a Gothic fairy-tale castle, whereas its neighbour, Kings Cross, is quite clearly a railway station.

“*Delight* means that a building is pleasing to the eye, in that it is well proportioned, and the relationship between solid and void is well balanced. This is one reason why Regency and Georgian architecture is popular. Fashions change in architecture, as in other art forms, and today we appreciate St Pancras Station for its contribution to the townscape in a dismal part of the Euston Road.

“Initially, Modernist architecture had to be assertive to obtain recognition, but today opinion holds that a building should relate to its context without resorting to pastiche.

“Most new building in Cheltenham fails to achieve that difficult balance.”

my experience it’s not always observed in practice. I chaired the Planning Committee in Hammersmith & Fulham for four years, listening to architects claim their proposed design ‘echoed’ the surrounding streetscape. But not uncommonly the link was fairly academic. Pointing that out to eminently talented professionals initially required nerve!

“But feedback from ordinary residents consistently confirmed their preference for consciously sympathetic designs. It’s why I think the new Albion Street design is spot on. It respects Cheltenham’s context. And for those who decry pastiche, don’t let’s forget that some of the greatest English buildings (Blenheim, St Paul’s) lift architectural elements from classical buildings like the Pantheon.”



Experts aren’t always right. This from **P J Crook**: “When I first saw my house in 1989, I knew it had great potential. But it was not an architect, but our local builder who realised that a staircase would fit up to the loft – suddenly we had a third floor.”

To conclude, **Sir Henry Elwes** again: “I have often wondered what the planners might say if the original plans for the Town Hall were submitted today.” Yes, indeed.

Can we ever agree on what is ‘good’ or ‘bad’? Or are we condemned to live with the consequences of our ignorance?

My favourite building

In the last number of *Our Town*, in the 'Brainwaves' section, we said we had it in mind to run a colour spread on: 'MY FAVOURITE CHELTENHAM BUILDING'.

Three members responded to the call....

Cheltenham College Chapel *by* Cecil Sanderson

There is joy for the eyes in every direction. Behind the altar, the magnificent stone reredos carved at Boulton's of Cheltenham; along the sides, fine woodwork by H H Martyn, also of Cheltenham; above, on the north side, the memorial window to Edward Wilson, and on the south side, the beautiful windows to fallen soldiers by Louis Davis (right), radiant in afternoon sun. In the entrance passage is a memorial to the 675 Cheltonian who died in the Great War – an almost incredible figure.



The Eagle (Star) Tower *by* Susan Hamilton



Can I be serious? Well, yes. At least, I don't loathe it as much as some do. It wasn't included in David Verey's 1970 *Pevsner*: when he was writing it, it hadn't been finished. But when Alan Brooks came to revise *Pevsner Gloucestershire* in 2002, he let rip, describing "its graceless bulk" and "lumpen mass", and lamenting it as the villain of the piece in the demolition of the east side of Montpellier Parade. I beg to differ. I find its bulk gentle, even graceful, with its curving elongated hexagonal shape. Its colour is warm, its detailing harmonious. It throws the surrounding Regency villas and terraces into glorious relief. I find my emotions stirred by its vigorous modern presence, as an offset to the human scale and cosiness of Cheltenham. I love its sense of drama when seen against the escarpment. And it adds distinction to the townscape when looking down from Cleeve Hill. It certainly isn't as bad as it has been painted. It seems to have frightened the planners though: they never permitted 13 stories in the county again (even Gloucester Royal Hospital has only eleven). Perhaps we should be grateful for that, if nothing else.

Cheltenham Grammar School

by Robert Rimell

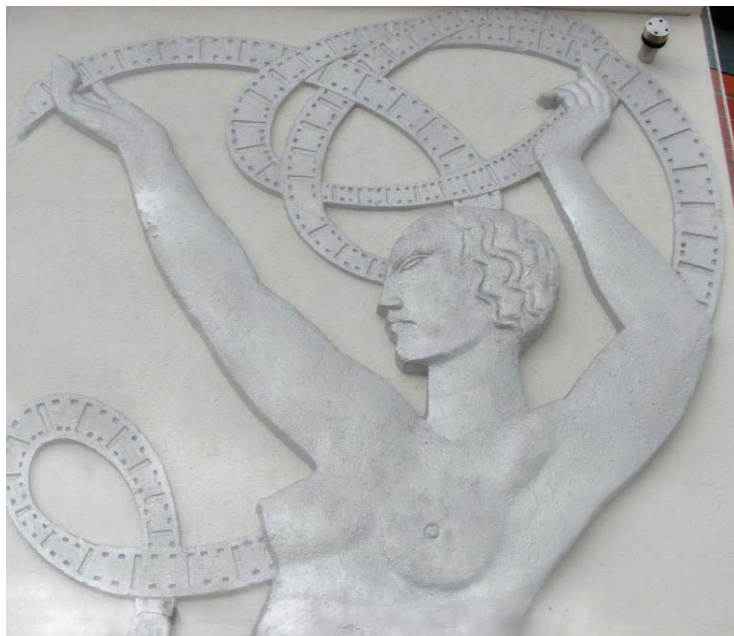
It was a revelation for me to move to my new school at Hesters Way in 1965. Even as a callow 14-year old, I sensed I was entering something remarkable. Dr Bell, headmaster from 1952, warned the Governors, "to expect their design to be more difficult to appreciate than some of the more traditional buildings." Many insist it looked like a jail: someone on Facebook in 2013 claimed the School was indeed based on a

French prison. The internal courtyard was intended for strolling. The corridors beyond were originally open to the elements: positively monastic. Papers survive which indicate Dr Bell's tireless research into finding the best architects for the job. The school's demolition in the 1990s - as a result of 'concrete cancer' - was a great loss to the town's varied architecture. For me, the building was an eye-opener, and an introduction to fine and robust Modern Architecture. In a video recently discovered in the archives, a section showing it being razed to the ground with a wrecking-ball was too painful for me to watch! "...it is now hard to imagine that so remarkable a building ever graced such a suburban setting": Elain Harwood, in her book on the school's architects, *Chamberlin, Powell & Bon* (2011).



Saving the Celluloid Ladies

The former Odeon cinema on Winchcombe Street was originally built as a Gaumont Palace in 1933. It replaced a congregational church that stood on the site from 1852. The new cinema was designed by Gaumont's in-house architect, William Edward Trent (1874-1948). His rather conventional (for the time) façade was enlivened by two naked ladies entwined in celluloid film - almost certainly designed by Newbury Abbot Trent (1885-1932), cousin of the architect.



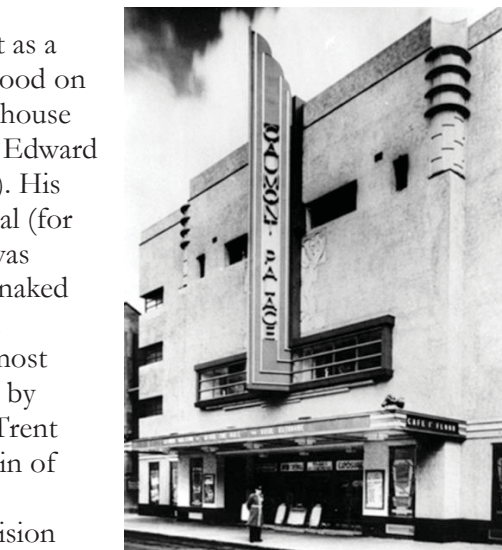
When the decision was made to redevelop the site in 2013, it was realised that nothing worthy of salvaging had survived other than the ladies.

The Cheltenham Development Task Force negotiated both with the developers of the former Odeon site and of the Brewery,

with the idea of rescuing the ladies, and relocating them near the new home of the town's new cinema. Thanks to the diligence and support of the teams at Elender Estates, Crest Nicholson and NFU Mutual a transfer was successfully achieved – with full restoration and a prominent location befitting this historic link to the cinema history of the town.



The re-location also solved a long-standing puzzle: what were the ladies made of? We only found out for sure during demolition – they were carved in bas relief on very large and heavy blocks of local stone.



*Jem Williamson (Cheltenham Development Task Force)
Historic details provided by Professor Timothy Mowl & Carole Fry*

Planning Snippets

Number 1 Crescent Terrace (right) is set to become a family home. Work is scheduled for completion this month. Handy for the bus station.

Work has started on **John Dower House** in Crescent Place. Word is (from someone on site) that the overpowering 1960s office block in the “back garden” is to be demolished and replaced with some town houses.



The unsightly ‘**Shopfitters**’ site (by the Bayshill pub) has finally been cleared (shown – right – on 20 June). For the moment it is being added to the Synagogue Lane car park while its long-term future is considered. Now all we need is the road in front of it – the south end of **St George’s Place** – to be re-surfaced. Is this the worst road in Cheltenham? (Or is that **Townsend Street**? Do let us know your favourite potholed peril.)



Controversially there is the prospect of a **new restaurant with frontage and terrace opening on to St Mary’s Churchyard**. (You can see the details at the Cheltenham Borough Council planning website: **16/01107/COU**.)

The idea is to re-develop **Cheltenham House**, the old C&G Building Society HQ in Clarence Street. The Civic Society’s Planning Forum has commented, “We very much welcome the attempt to revive the churchyard, and are happy with the proposed restaurants and the glazed openings.” Chair of the Forum John Henry adds, “Glazing at both the Clarence St and churchyard end will be transformational.”

The Gloucester DAC (Diocesan Advisory Committee) has this to say: “Members were hugely positive about the prospect of having Cheltenham House have a proper ‘face’ onto the churchyard, and felt that if carefully detailed and managed this could have a hugely positive impact upon both the character and appearance of the churchyard, as well as the setting of the Minster.” The vicar of St Mary’s, Revd Tudor Griffiths, is fully in support of the plans too.

Not everyone is so happy. Many comments have been recorded deploring the application: “the idea of people sitting outside drinking beer while a funeral is in progress.” And not everyone thinks one additional element – a space for hearses and bridal cars to park by the church door – is a good idea.

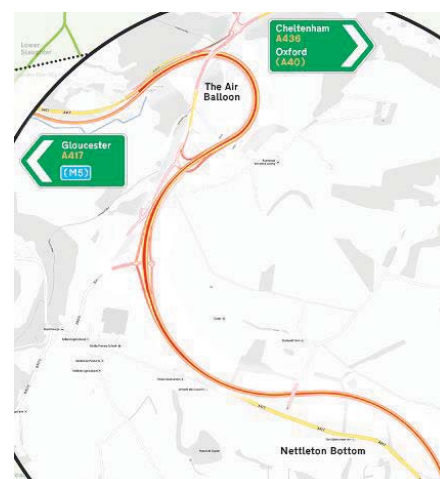
Determination deadline is 19 August – just as we go to press!

We lately received this from Mike Hawthorne, Leader of GCC, about the **A417 Loop** – the Air Balloon roundabout to you and me:

“Highways England (HE) has announced ... the project will move ahead to Phase 1 ... the project is on track to...see work begin on site by 2020.” HE will now begin looking at options, working up plans, costs, a feasibility study, and look at ecological issues, as well as seeking local residents’ views. Phase 1 is a 13-24 month period of so-called “option identification” for the works.

The study will begin this year. Hope springs eternal...

For more see <http://a417missinglink.co.uk>



Good News: 3

Vanishing sparrows?

In Our Town 3 we mused: “House sparrow numbers are in steep decline in the UK. They are now only to be found in small pockets here and there in the town, usually where there is an overgrown hedge or unruly bush. If you are out and about in Cheltenham, let us know your house sparrow sightings.”

New member Sue Silience writes, “Sparrows in King Arthur Close – don’t remember when they arrived, but they dominate our garden!” Richard Sharpe reports, “We live on London Road opposite Holy Apostles Church Hall. We have had a number of sparrow chicks and adults feeding in our garden. We saw six on a bird-feeder at one time one day. We assume they are nesting nearby.” Christine Chambers adds, “When we lived in Queens Road (for 39 years) I never saw any sparrows. But we have lived in Lypiatt Street for the last 3 years and this year we have had a pair flitting in and out of our pyracantha bush - though I can’t see any sign of a nest.” Douglas Ogle goes further: “After many years’ absence in our garden, the humble house sparrow returned last year in numbers - as many as 15 at a time in a frenzy of feeding on our kitchen windowsill. They have shown up again over the last couple of months but fewer and more timidly.”

Douglas raises a new bird query: “The **starling** is much more of a mystery - I haven’t seen a solitary bird in the garden in years.” **Have you?** We are planning a feature on the town’s bird life in **Our Town 5**. Do write in.



“MY DREAM CHELTENHAM”

No 2: The Cheltenham Hyper Flyer

There is precisely one thing wrong with Cheltenham. It takes so unbelievably long to get to London.

Take the train. The average train time between Cheltenham and Paddington is 2 hours 14 minutes. The fastest is 2 hours 1 minute – but, be warned, that includes changing at Swindon, so wear running shoes.

By car, it is – on paper – a tiny bit faster. But not much. The website *distancesfrom.com* says it's 95 miles from Royal Well Bus Station to Marble Arch, via the A40 and M40. It should take 2 hours and 3 minutes. Call it 2½ hours.

By bus – just over 3 hours.

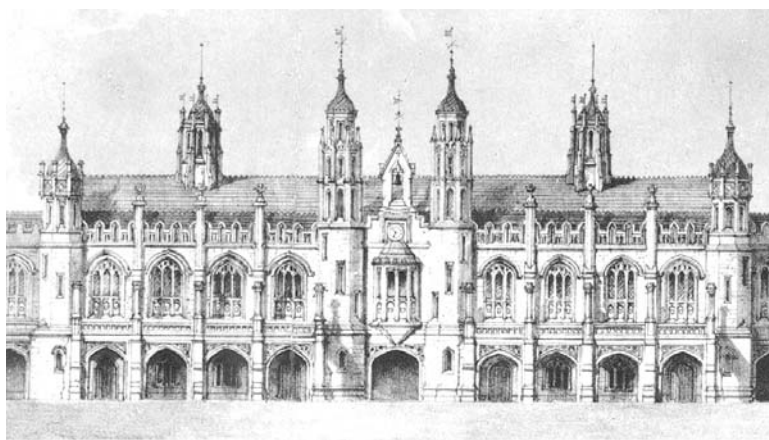
Never mind about costs – yes, I know the bus is only a fiver, and the train is about £50 – check the latest mind-bogglingly various deals at *crosscountrytrains.co.uk*. And, no, I haven't checked every single price! Costs are not the point – not in this dream, anyway. The point is this: the average journey time between York and London is **8 minutes less** than from Cheltenham to London. The fastest journey time

is 1 hr 52 mins. Lots of trains do it in 2 hours flat. As the crow flies, it's 84 miles from here to central London: the York to London crow has to fly 174 miles!

The average train time from Bristol to London is **30 minutes less** than Cheltenham to London. From Birmingham **26 minutes less**. Glasgow to London takes **only just twice as long** as Cheltenham to London.

So what we want is not HS2, or HS3. What we want is The Cheltenham Flyer Plus: the Non-Stop Door-to-Door All-Singing All-Dancing Bullet Train Cheltenham Hyper Flyer.

We'll take a direct route (detailed plan below) via Witney, Oxford, then, with a massive tunnel through the Chilterns at



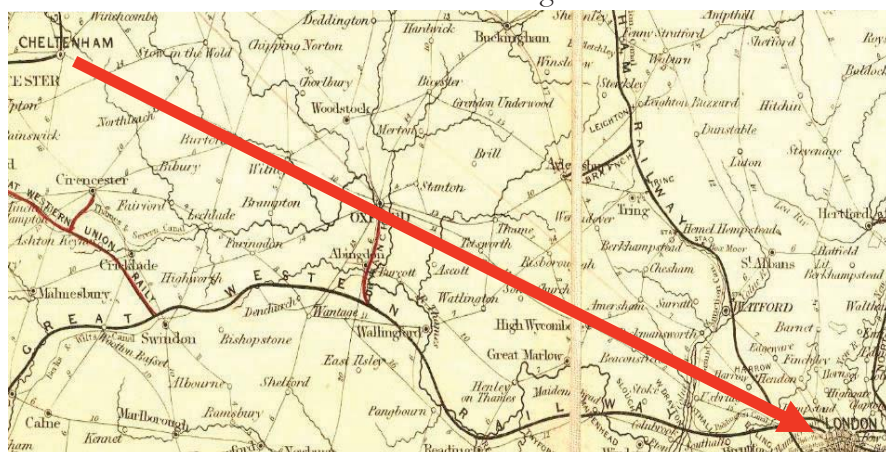
S W Daukes's snappily contemporary design for the new Cheltenham Parkway – actually his 1847 design for a Cheltenham terminus (in Townsend Street) for the London, Oxford and Cheltenham Railway. Never built.

Stokenchurch, on to High Wycombe, and, via the Chiltern line (lavishly upgraded), to Marylebone. The French are currently proposing a high speed line from Lyons to Turin, with a 35-mile tunnel under the Alps. The Chilterns? Chicken feed. The Alps tunnel is expected to cost €8 billion – small change. Never mind the Northern Powerhouse. Get us out of the Western Doghouse.

Alec Hamilton



Why don't we have one of these?



Pride in the community – the rise and rise of St Paul's



A few weeks ago, we received an unexpected e-mail. It was from St Paul's Road Area Residents' Association (SPRA), about a local history event planned for "autumn 2016 or early spring 2017". It tied in neatly with our plan to highlight activities in different parts of the town in each issue of **Our Town** – we started a while back with Hesters Way.

The Editor went to meet two guiding lights of SPRA: Tess Beck (Chair) and Les Thurlow (Treasurer).

Here's their story.

SPRA began in 2008 – people were looking for a way to address concerns affecting the whole community: "We wanted to get some conversations going," says Tess Beck, "about things that are important to people here – and find a better way of communicating local worries to the Borough Council, the County Council and the police."

They were pushing at an open door. The community responded enthusiastically. As a result, much has already been achieved.

One of the big issues is the mix of housing. Tess explains: "It's about 50% students in some streets. They come and go, and don't have much of a stake in the community. Students bring real energy, which is great. But sometimes there's 'culture clash'. They can be noisy! But we have built up great relations with the University – the Landscape Architecture department runs a community involvement module each year and their students have come up with some great suggestions for the area. Their theme this year is "walkability" – making the area better for pedestrians. But how to achieve it?"

More young families

Multi-occupancy housing is an issue. "We want to encourage more young families to live here to get a better mix. There's a policy called 'additional licensing' which has been used effectively in other towns to manage multi-occupancy. It could help here. We have a lot of older people – who've lived in St Paul's all their lives, maybe 25% of us. We want them to be able to continue to live here and not to become isolated. They, like the rest of us, value the area because it's so convenient – you can walk into town, and we back right on to Pittville Park. The trick is to get a balance which works for everyone."



SPRA Chair, Tess Beck

Les Thurlow picks up another issue, top of mind – traffic! "St Paul's Road is a bit of a rat-run, and getting worse. People use it to bypass the A4019/Swindon Rd/St Margaret's Rd at the Brewery complex... and when they close Boots Corner, the impact could be massive – as much as a 50% increase! We need to work more with Highways on some ideas. We've had success with the County Council (GCC) in redesigning on-street parking. 'Staggering' it along St Paul's Road helps traffic calming. And we're making it easier for residents to park outside their houses too, and harder for commuters." Then there's the NCG – Neighbourhood Coordination Group – which brings together police and residents to help set local policing priorities. This year there's yet more in hand: a Community Survey to feed residents' views into the next Cheltenham Plan. And three bids for 'Community Pride' money – the local history project mentioned earlier; more street litter bins; and a Front Gardens Award – recognising those who make an effort to make the street look loved and flourishing. "We take pride in St Paul's – and we love to see it looking taken care of." Not to mention Streetwatch and the Edible Garden.... It's all go.



Come aboard!

If you are already a member of the Civic Society, this page is not really for you (unless you know someone you think might be interested in what we do. In which case, pass this on – they may even sign up).

... This page is aimed squarely at non-members. Here's why:

If you have enjoyed this edition of **Our Town** you might like to see future editions. Or you might have found something in it which interests you enough to find out more. You might even think about joining... This free copy of our newsletter (it comes out 4 times a year) has been put through your door by one of our members – an unpaid volunteer. We want to spread the word about the work of the Civic Society. We want to be better known.

And we would like to be better supported.

The newsletter gives you a flavour of who we are, what we are interested in, and what we try to do.

The more members we have, the louder our voice, and the more effective we can be. So we are offering you...



1 YEAR TRIAL MEMBERSHIP

If you want to keep Cheltenham a great place to live, the Society is for you:

- ✿ We value, and work to protect our streetscape
- ✿ We lobby, we persuade; we work with other key groups to safeguard what is precious to us.
- ✿ We advise on planning applications, we encourage excellence in building design, and reward those who do great work in conservation.
- ✿ We take the lead on projects and campaigns.



As a member you enjoy these benefits:

- * The newsletter – **Our Town** – four times a year.
- * e-bulletins from the Chair: news, matters of interest.
- * A lively programme of events and talks (see page 3).
- * Invitations to lectures by nationally-renowned speakers
- * Invitations to the annual Civic Awards.
- * Summer and Winter parties.

Membership is £15 a year; or £20 for joint membership (two or more living at the same address).

Using this form, you can try it for a year, and see how you like it....

Complete and return to the Membership Secretary, Cheltenham Civic Society, 13 Lypiatt Terrace, GL50 2SX.

YES, I would like a year's trial membership of Cheltenham Civic Society.

Name _____

Address _____

Postcode _____ Telephone _____

e-mail _____

I enclose my cheque for £_____ payable to
'Cheltenham Civic Society'.

Please send me a Banker's Order for future years ☐

Gift Aid Declaration

If you sign this part of the form, the Society will be able to reclaim the tax on your subscription.

I would like all membership subscriptions I make to Cheltenham Civic Society to be treated as made under Gift Aid. I am a UK taxpayer. I understand I can cancel this declaration at any time.

Signature _____

Date _____

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