

## CPRE

I mentioned that the CPRE worked in tandem with us in connection with the WMSP proposals. We found this to be most helpful, each party gaining knowledge from the other. It was decided that the Society should become a member for a modest subscription and we later organised a joint meeting with them to discuss the WMSP decision and to consider input to the Local Plan Review. Representatives from local Civic Societies and town councils were invited and attended.

## Lectures

During the year the following lectures were held in St George's Hall:

13th January	'The Staffordshire Hoard'	by Dr David Symonds
18th February	'Severn – the Great British River'	by Richard Hayman
17th March	'The Mansions of the Kidderminster Carpet Barons'	by Nigel Gilbert
16th September	'The Dr Ordered Clay. Dr John Wall and the History of the Worcester Porcelain Manufactory During the First Period 1751- 1776'	by Paul Crane
27th October	'The History of Stourbridge Glass'	by Dr Kate Round

We have been delighted with the size of our audiences which have continued to increase in number since we returned to St George's Hall. Is the reason for this the venue or the subjects/speakers? Perhaps it is a combination of both. In October we provided sponsorship of £300 to Bewdley Festival for a talk by Joe Hawkins, Lord Cobham's Head Gardener, who spoke about the restoration of Hagley Hall's Landscape.

## Outings

In May we visited Ludlow, where we had lunch and then on to Stokesay Court, a wonderful Victorian pile in the Shropshire countryside made famous by the film *Atonement* which was filmed there. In September we made a reciprocal visit to Tewkesbury, courtesy of the town's Civic Society following their visit to us in 2014. Their Chairman, who is also the town's Mayor, gave us a most interesting guided tour of the town and historic Abbey. And in October, perhaps unusually for us, we visited a car factory, namely Morgan Motor Company in Malvern, where Society member Derek Richards was one of our guides. It is pleasing to say that all of our outings were well attended and I thank Jenny Frow, Sue Perrin and Barbara Longmore for organising them.

## Annual Dinner

St George's Hall was once again our venue for this event when 85 members and guests attended. We were delighted that the Mayor, Councillor Calne Edginton- White and her consort for the evening, Councillor Linda Candlin, were able to be our guests. After an excellent meal provided by Caterer Kit Bamford, we had a pictorial Bewdley Quiz to exercise our minds. Thanks go to Sue Perrin for organising the event.

## Annual General Meeting

The AGM in April was well attended by over 50 members and thanks were given to Jan Adams for her contribution to the Society following her retirement from the Executive Committee. Bill Dewar, Jock Gallagher, Robert Limbrick and Pauline Lowe were warmly welcomed as newly elected members of the Executive Committee. There was no Lecture to follow on this occasion but members stayed behind to enjoy canapes and to do some networking.

## Other Events

Brian Stephens, once again, organised the **Annual Cherry Fair** in July in conjunction with Bewdley Museum. This event attracts many visitors to the town and our stall, from which we sell cherries and cherry trees, is always a major attraction. Two **Himalayan Balsam clearing expeditions** were organised by Steve Bent whose idea it was. Ken Hobson had supported the project with gusto but, sadly, passed away before the plants were big enough to tackle. Nonetheless our balsam-bashers did an excellent job clearing parts of the river bank of this invasive plant and I know Ken would have been proud of them. The balsam will be back however and future expeditions are needed if we are to succeed in its eventual eradication in our environs. **Guided walks** of the town centre and Wribbenhall were undertaken by the Society at the Spring and Harvest Fairs organised by Bewdley Development Trust. The Society was pleased to sponsor the **Bewdley Passion Play** which was held over 3 days of the Easter weekend. It brought thousands into the town and relies on donations such as ours for it to take place. Our donation of £500 was paid out of the 2014 accounts. The Society's **Stall** was in operation at the **Christmas Lights Festival** in November. Thanks to those members who manned it in the pouring rain.

## Newsletter

Jock Gallagher has been our expert layout assistant for quite a while and we were relieved when he kindly took over as Editor following Kenneth's death. The Newsletter is our shop window and the highly positive feedback we get easily convinces the Executive Committee to support the continuance of four colourful editions a year. The cost is not insignificant but we enjoy a favourable printing tariff via the office where I work. We are indebted to Jock for his hard work and skill in the productions.

## Financial

Our financial position remains satisfactory as evidenced by the Accounts which accompany this report. We still enjoy the benefit of the generous bequest from Ken and Beryl Stroud which enables us to make donations to causes which we consider will enhance the life of Bewdley. In the year we made a donation of £500 to help restore Bewdley



Methodist Church's pipe organ plus a number of smaller donations totalling £100. We also consider that it is important to continue our membership of Civic Voice where the subscription, in 2015, was £462. While we still have a good level of cash balances the Executive Committee is conscious there will come a point where we need to retain a material reserve as a fighting fund for a possible future requirement. An operating budget for 2016 showed that the Society would make a modest deficit before any donations it may wish to make. The existing subscription rates have been in place for 6 years and it was decided therefore to increase them with effect from January 2017 to £10 p.a. for a single membership and £15 p.a. for a household which we hope will still represent good value for money.

#### **Summary and Acknowledgement**

I feel I can report another year of satisfactory progress notwithstanding our disappointment in being unable to reduce the negative impact that the Safari Park proposals will have on our beautiful Green Belt landscape. Our membership continues to be in excess of 500 which compares extremely well to our peers and undoubtedly reflects a sincere desire of the people of Bewdley for the health and prosperity of our lovely town and its environs.

All the activities reported above represent much work – all done voluntarily. I would especially like to thank the Executive Committee, Sheelah Bolam our Membership Secretary, Ann Sutherland who does our comprehensive minutes, Robert Albert our Bookkeeper, and all those who assist in a number of ways.

**Richard Perrin**

## **B E W D L E Y C I V I C S O C I E T Y**

**[www.bewdleycivicsociety.org.uk](http://www.bewdleycivicsociety.org.uk)**

Registered Charity No. 700898

President

**Post Vacant** Vice Presidents

**Brian Stephens**

**Peter Bolam**

**Peter Archer**

### **Officers of the Society 31st December 2015**

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### **Executive Committee Members**

Steve Bent, William Dewar, Councillor Philip Edmundson, Dr Jenny Frow, Jock Gallagher, Martin Guard,

Robert Limbrick, Pauline Lowe, Graham Luxford, Susan Perrin, Dr Alan Scaplehorn, Brian Stephens, Robert Swan,

Peter Waldron, Ian Williams, Timothy Willis, Ex Officio. The Mayor of Bewdley - Councillor Calne Edginton-White Membership Secretary **Sheelah Bolam**

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**Kenneth Hobson**

We were greatly saddened when we lost our President and friend, Kenneth Hobson, very suddenly in long time. Upon his appointment as a Partner in the law firm of Ivens and Morton trading as Marcy to the success of the Society was firstly manifested in the public profile resulting from the legendary talks productions which sold in the hundreds with all proceeds going to Society funds. The Oral History enjoyed for decades to come, if not for ever. He will be sorely missed and our condolences are extended



May at the age of 88. In living memory there has been no greater friend of the Society than Ken and we will benefit from what he achieved for a Hemingway in Bewdley he soon joined the Society's Executive Committee and became Chairman in 1992; and in 2001, its President. His devotion he gave which were illustrated with photographs of Bewdley Past, always given to packed houses. Later came the videos of Bewdley; wonderful project recorded on a series of CDs was another example of his work which together with his enormous photographic archive of Bewdley will be to Joan and the family.

#### Stephanie Barnes

Stephanie sadly passed away in March. She had been our Outings Secretary for 20 years as well as serving

on the Executive Committee for a similar period. We also remember her late husband, Dennis; between them they contributed so much to the Society.



#### School Heritage Project

The theme for 2015 was the scientific and geological identification Dr Peter Oliver and Mike Preston kindly agreed to lead a workshop and field trip for the purpose of viewing and identifying local rocks and to develop an understanding of how they were formed. This extended to looking at the stone which was used in the building of some of the important properties in the town. The pupils, later in the year, were entertained at the Guildhall by the Mayor, Calne Edginton- White when prizes were awarded. We are very grateful to Barbara Longmore for administering the project.

of the Bewdley area. Once again we worked with the Bewdley School and Sixth Form Centre to deliver a successful Year 7 project. Local geologists

#### Bewdley Festival Duck House Trail

The 2015 Festival featured a Community Art talented team of Dave and Penny Griffiths, Jan Pearce and Pauline Lowe proved and Bewdley, and its adjoining garden even housed a memorial bench to Kenneth



Project comprising wooden duck houses decorated by local community groups etc. The Society took up the challenge and the efforts of our seriously enough to beat all challengers, by the town's popular vote, to capture first prize. Our duck house (see front cover) illustrated aspects of the Society Hobson.

#### Development Control

##### West Midland Safari Park (WMSP)

The long awaited plans for a 250 bed hotel, conference centre and indoor water park had been submitted in the previous autumn. This was by far the largest subject to occupy the time and minds of the Society's Town Centre group throughout most of the year. Whilst the Society was not against the development in principal it wished for the visual impact to be minimised and for it to be located in a more suitable position in the park rather than its proposed location prominently atop Bunkers Hill. We were not alone in objecting to the proposals, said to be costing £80million, the largest scheme by far to involve Bewdley for many years. The Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) also submitted their strong disapproval of the scheme. The Society in its letters to the Planning Authority (Wyre Forest District Council (WFDC)) raised serious concerns about the visual impact of the proposed new features, their intrusion into the Green Belt and the additional traffic on an already overloaded road network. The Town Council, although recommending approval, had similar concerns.

During the year photo- montages were provided by the developer which confirmed that the openness and amenity of the Green Belt between the two towns of Bewdley and Kidderminster would be eroded - causing the destruction of something that has long been valued by the Society and residents of our historic neighbourhood. WFDC's Conservation Officer agreed as did local residents who were particularly concerned about loss of privacy and potential light pollution. Unfortunately, the Highways Authority considered that the impact of the resulting additional traffic would not be severe and this, coupled with the perceived economic advantages the development would bring to the district, led WFDC's Planning Committee to approve the application. The Society (and CPRE) then wrote to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government urging him to call- in the proposals.

He declined saying that he prefers decisions such as this to be made locally rather than by an unelected (though expert) inspector. Where do we go from here? The subject will be raised again when the developers apply for detailed planning permission for the hotel complex (outline permission only granted at this stage). In the meantime, the Management of WMSP has agreed to meet with us and the Chairman of the Town Council's Planning Committee when we shall seek, inter alia, ways in which the impact can be ameliorated.

#### Other Developments

All other planning applications affecting the Conservation Area, plus some others, were examined. Our views are communicated to the relevant authorities and at our regular attendances at both Planning and full Town Council meetings where we often speak in the public question time. We are vigilant for breaches of planning permissions and lobby accordingly.

#### Bewdley Town Council, Better Bewdley Advisory Committee

Martin Guard and I continue to serve on this Committee which aims to encourage economic and general well- being in the town. Generally items are brought, by the public, to the Committee which then recommends appropriate action to the Town Council. However the Committee has been tasked with implementing a Neighbourhood Plan and in this regard the first round of public consultation will take place in the early part of 2016. It is agreed that the area covered will be the whole of Bewdley and Wribbenhall but excluding Ribbesford. The Society will doubtless be making significant input to this exercise.

#### Local Plan Review

WFDC is currently in the early stages of undertaking a Local Plan Review. The new Local Plan will replace the current Adopted Core Strategy, Site Allocations and Policies Local Plan and Kidderminster Central Area Action Plan and it is anticipated that it will be adopted in late 2017. An initial consultation was undertaken by WFDC and while this was not for the purpose of allocating sites for future development it was to identify some broad areas for potential development in the future and to encourage comment and debate. Hence the District Council made a call for new potential sites. Alongside this the public and community groups were asked to complete a detailed questionnaire which, in our case, was attended to by the Society's Town Centre group. The Society stated that it doesn't wish to see any large scale development in Bewdley and urged that the Green Belt be protected from further unwelcome development, for example WMSP. We understand that all of the submitted sites have now been assessed by an independent panel and that this technical evidence base will be used to help inform as part of the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment. It will also help to inform the allocation of sites which will be identified at the Preferred Options stage of the Local Plan process. As usual there is much more consultation to come.