Newsletter

We were grateful that Rob Ireland kindly stepped into the void created by Jock's death to take on the editorship of the Newsletter. Rob, a noteworthy author, has done a splendid job, maintaining the high standards set by his predecessor.

Floodlighting of the Baldwin Statue

Following a refusal from WCC to proceed with the project an appeal to WCC's Director of Economic and Infrastructure produced a U-turn and, via the Council, we engaged their contractor to provide us with an electrical source adjacent to 14 Load Street. The cost of this was accommodated from our restricted statue funds. However, it is now down to the Society to install further cabling to the statue (we are not permitted to use the Council's contractor for this purpose). The exercise is taking longer to get done than anticipated.

The Hobson Room

We continue to enjoy the use of this excellent facility at 18 Load Street thanks to the generosity of Paul Crane who lets us have it rent free. It provides us with a depository for an expanding library (and that of the Research Group) and historic artifacts which have kindly been donated.

Civic Voice (CV) and WestMasa

We continue to play an active part in the wider civic movement. Barbara Longmore and I attended CV's AGM in Birmingham in November when it became clear that the organization is in financial difficulties. Closure was considered but rejected on the basis that a national umbrella organization is badly needed at this time of local government and planning legislative changes. A new model, based on volunteer operation, was favoured and a working party has been set up to put this in place. It is recalled that the Society paid 5 years subscriptions in advance (£2,500) in 2022 to assist with the CV's precarious cash flow at that time.
We also attend and contribute to the meetings held by The West Midlands Amenity Societies Association (WestMasa) whose area stretches from Cheltenham in the south to Hereford in the west and groups on the fringes of Birmingham in the east.

Membership

Membership continues to stand at over 500 possibly making us the largest amenity society in the county. Inevitably we lost members due to moving away and deaths, but these were offset by recruitment of new members.

Financial

2025 was a year of quite heavy expenditure albeit most was planned. Extraordinary items included a donation of £500 to St George's Hall towards a new projector, £630 anniversary bench, £551 commemorative plaque, £380 Dowles graveyard, £643 website development, £400 Bewdley Festival sponsorship and £600 Wythe Retinue sponsorship (two years). Unexpectedly we also received a backdated bill of £1,340 in respect of the Hobson Room for underpayment of electricity. This metering error came about through no fault of our own.
The Anniversary bench, £630, was paid for out of the restricted funds we received from Bewdley Conservation Area Association. The floodlight electricity source for the Stanley Baldwin statue (£2,555) and Pathe licence £468 were paid from the restricted statue funds.
Due to changes required in the HMRC mandate, no gift aid was received in 2025 (£666 received during 2024 for the year ended 31st December 2023). We therefore expect to receive the gift aid for the years ended 31st December 2024 and 31st December 2025 during the current financial year (estimated to be approximately £1,300).
At the year-end total unrestricted funds exceeded £10,000, although we must bear in mind our pledge of £3,000 for the Maypole contribution.
During the year the Executive Committee decided that subscriptions, which had remained unchanged for many years, should be increased to take account of rising costs, in particular, postage. The new rates came into effect from 1st January 2026. For members living outside Bewdley and our hand delivery routes, there is the option of receiving our Newsletter and Annual Reports by email. If, however postal material is preferred, an extra £5 will be charged for annual subscriptions and £50 for life membership subscriptions.

Thanks

I have mentioned some of our members who have supported us so well and I'm grateful also to the Officers and members of the Executive Committee for what they do to build the Society's strong reputation. I extend my thanks to all the volunteers who give their time and energy to our activities and events.

Summary

The Society exists to foster and improve the life and character of the town and to preserve its cultural and architectural heritage.
Our objects are:

i. to promote high standards of planning and architecture.
ii. to educate people in the geography, history, natural history and architecture of the area.
iii. to secure the preservation, protection, development and improvement of features of historic or public interest.

I am pleased to present my report for the year ended 31st December 2025

Richard Perrin
Chairman

BEWDLEY CIVIC SOCIETY

www.bewdleycivicsociety.org.uk

Registered Charity No. 700898

President
Beatrice Grant
His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of the County of Worcestershire
and Great Granddaughter of Stanley Baldwin

Vice Presidents
Peter Archer, Paul Crane, Barbara Longmore

Officers of the Society 31st December 2025

Chairman
Richard Perrin
Tel: 405823
Email: jrichardperrin@aol.com

Vice Chairman
Martin Guard
Tel: 402844
Email: martinjohnguard@gmail.com

Hon. Treasurer
Richard Willetts
Tel: 07971 863903
Email: richardwillets@btinternet.com

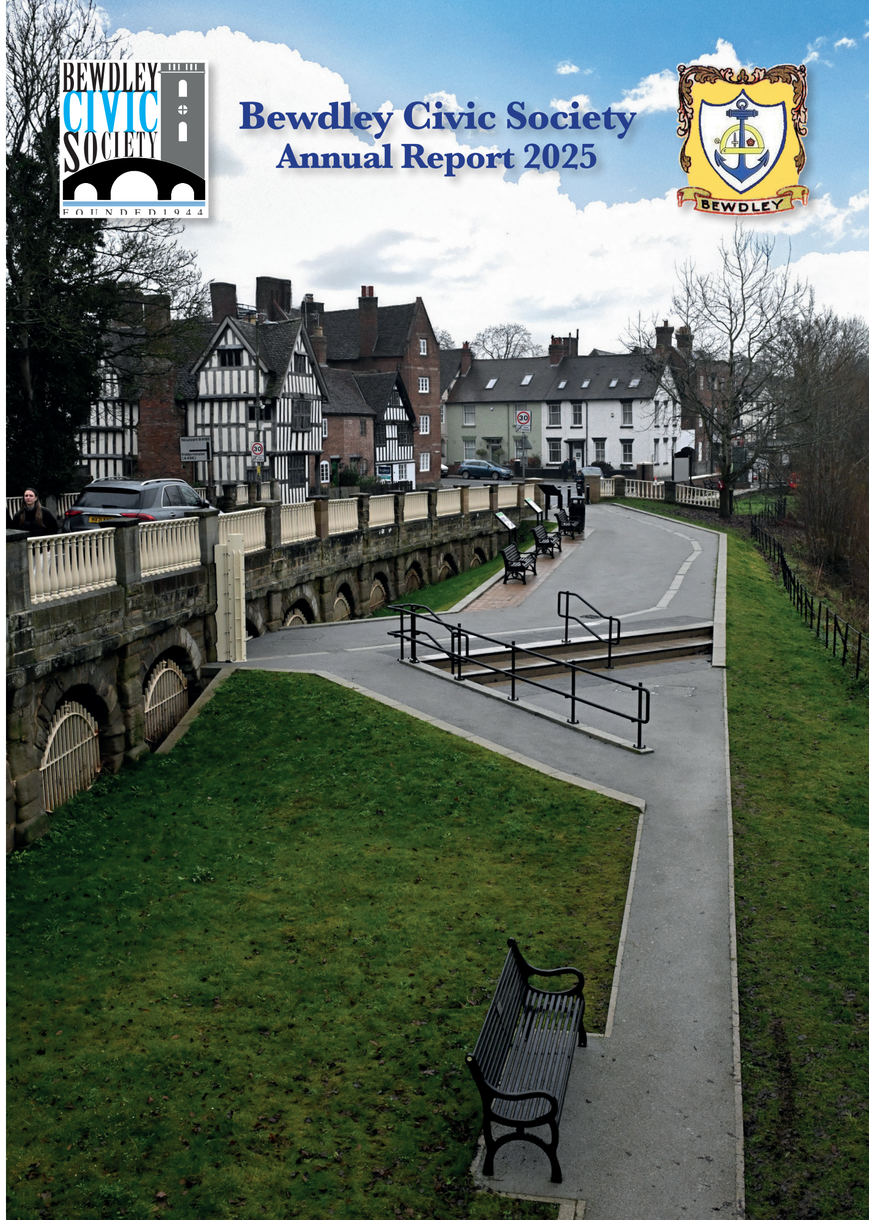
Hon. Secretary
Barbara Longmore
Tel: 403939
Email: bmlongmore@gmail.com

Executive Committee Members
Peter Archer, Cat Banks, Steve Bent, Eddie Burton, William Dewar, Martin Fisher, Kenneth Hadley, Councillor Sharon Harvey, (Deputy Mayor), Robert Ireland (co-opted 15th July 2025), Councillor Ian Latimer JP (co-opted 15th May 2025), Tony Leach, Robert Limbrick, Graham Luxford, Jane McDonagh, Susan Perrin, David Thursfield, Peter Waldron, Ex officio The Mayor of Bewdley - Councillor Nicole Harper.

Membership Secretary
Pauline Geddie
c/o BCS
18 Load Street
Bewdley
DY12 2AE
Email: paulinegeddie@hotmail.com

Frontispiece: The Beale's Corner Flood Defences
Photo: Colin Hill

Bewdley Civic Society Annual Report 2025



Obituary



We were very saddened when we learned that our Vice President, Jock Gallagher, had died age 87 after a spell in hospital in June. He had been a major player in the Society for many years, not least his first-class productions of the Society's Newsletter. He took over as Editor from the late Kenneth Hobson in 2015 (but was Kenneth's formatter for some years before that) and the accolades we have received since then show how fortunate we have been in consistently producing a colourful, informative, and interesting Newsletter. The Society was well represented at his Service of Remembrance, and heard Paul Hill's excellent eulogy, which described Jock's high-profile career in journalism, radio, TV and politics and as an author. Paul also dwelt upon Jock's substantial contribution to the social and cultural life of Bewdley, especially in regard to the Civic Society and Bewdley Festival. We conveyed our sincere condolences to Sheenagh and the family.



The Wribbenhall Flood Defences

2025 saw the completion of the Environment Agency's (EA) Beales Corner Flood Risk Management Scheme with the result that both banks of the River Severn now provide complete protection from flooding; the cost, nearly £7M. The EA claims that it will protect approximately 31 houses and over 150 jobs as well as ensuring that main roads into the town remain open during flood events. We were pleased that our pleas for installation of glass panels on top of the permanent barrier along Stourport Road were listened to. We think that the extra cost of £0.5M was money well spent. We were also pleased that the EA's commemorative panel acknowledges the Society's contribution.





Bewdley Bridge

In 2017 Telford's Bridge was added to the Historic England's At-Risk Register which reflected a lack of maintenance by the owner, Worcestershire County Council (WCC). Our lobbying for corrective action since then appeared to fall on deaf ears but, during the year, appropriate work was carried out to the stonework and cast-iron balustrades, which facilitated the bridge's removal from the above Register.

The question of whether Bewdley should have a pedestrian footbridge again raised its head when we accepted Dr. Clive Prince's request to present to the Executive Committee. Clive is a member of the WCC Active Travel Stakeholder Group and is a keen cyclist. He points out that a pedestrian bridge would be of benefit to a raft of people-powered modes of transport (sic) and gave examples of attractive travel bridges in towns across Europe, some older than Bewdley! The Committee reaffirmed its support for the idea with the proviso that it would be in keeping with the surroundings. Clive admitted that it might be some time before it becomes reality.

Anniversary Bench and Commemorative Plaque at 54 Load Street

In September, we were pleased that our President was in Bewdley to unveil on our behalf a commemorative plaque at 54 Load Street to mark the sympathetic restoration of this prominent building in the Town Centre. We were grateful that the owner, Councillor Calne Edginton-White, had consulted the Society's archives to assist in ensuring that the building's features remained as close as possible to when it was built. We thank Graham Luxford for arranging the Listed Building Consent. The President and assembled company then moved on to Load Street car park to view the Society's 80th anniversary bench which had recently been made for us in oak by The Wyre Community Land Trust, and installed in the green space beneath the landmark copper beech tree.



The Maypole Piece

Historically, this land in Wribbenhall has been part of Bewdley's life for generations, although in more recent times access to it has been problematical. During the year its future became uncertain when the land was put up for sale in a number of individual plots. This prompted a group of local residents led by John Frost to form a charitable organization with the view to purchasing the principal plot for the town to enjoy in perpetuity. A pledge campaign was so successful that it enabled the trustees to offer the asking price and to date a definitive response from the proprietor is awaited. The Society commended the efforts of the group and duly agreed to pledge £3,000 towards the cause.

Buildings at Risk



Work at Ribbesford House stalled during the year and we were concerned to learn that the owners had tried on more than one occasion to dispose of the property by auction, each time failing to reach its reserve. An earlier planning application to substantially increase the number of units within the house, received a mixed reception and a decision on this is still pending. We understand that the roof is now watertight, but there is still much to do in its restoration and conversion. Better news was the change of ownership of the Old Workhouse in High Street and the consequent start of the building's restoration. However, such has been the deterioration of the fabric over the years that approximately 1/3 of the property needs to be demolished and replicated using as much as possible of the old materials. During the year it became evident that the state of the former Red Lion pub in Wribbenhall was cause for concern. We have therefore made representation to the District Council's Conservation Officer, and hope for some action to be taken.

Dowles Graveyard

Bill Goodall reports "after several decades of sublime neglect, the small group of helpers have restored a measure of order to the Old Dowles Churchyard, their patient work being generally much appreciated by walkers and townspeople alike. The cemetery is still consecrated ground, the primary responsibility of the diocese and its local officers. It hardly needs to be said that they are bound to struggle to meet all their commitments. The legal status is not going to change any time soon, and this cherished area, the home of some fine specimen trees, a wonderful array of snowdrops and with a promising future as a wild-life sanctuary, will continue to rely on the 'housekeepers' and the support of the Civic Society. It is obviously important that the Church officials and the Civic Society sustain their interest in the site." I would like especially to thank Bill Goodall and Barry and Avril Maloy for their enthusiastic and valuable work there.

The Bewdley School

The Society continues to maintain a relationship with the Bewdley School and both our Secretary and Vice-Chairman represent us as Directors of the School Foundation. The school has chosen to become a Foundation School, which means that although it is still funded by the local authority, it has more freedom in the way it operates. The directors of the Foundation make decisions regarding the buildings and land belonging to the school. The headmaster is currently considering changing the structure of the day to create time during the lunch period for pupils to attend clubs and he will be seeking to work with the local community to find a wide range of enrichment activities to offer during this time. The Headmaster also has ideas to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the school with an Arts and Culture project to continue through the whole of the 70th year from this April.

Annual General Meeting

The AGM was held as usual in April in St George's Hall and marked the retirements of Peter Archer and Sheelah Bolam as Honorary Treasurer and Honorary Membership Secretary, respectively. Peter, who remains of course a Vice President, had held the post since 2012 after being Honorary Secretary for many years. Peter, along with Margaret Gillam, continue to act as our Newsletter collator and distributor. Sheelah had been in her post for an amazing 28 years and we thanked both her and Peter for their extraordinary service over the years. We were pleased to elect Rick Willetts and Pauline Geddie to succeed Peter and Sheila respectively. Vice President Paul Crane retired from the Executive Committee and Jane McDonagh was elected in his place. All other committee members and the officers were re-elected. Subsequently Councillor Ian Latimer and Rob Ireland were co-opted to the Executive Committee.

Lectures

During the year the following lectures were held in St. George's Hall. They were all well attended and much enjoyed.

13th January	**"Dowles Manor: some personal reflections"**	By Nick Trustram Eve
13th February	**"Exploring Bewdley during the Industrial Revolution"**	By Dr Malcolm Dick OBE
10th March	**"Shelsley Walsh: the story of a village"**	By Max Hunt
8th April	**"Churches and Nature"**	By Rosemary Winnall MBE
5th August	**"Stanley Baldwin, the first Freeman"**	By Heather Flack
15th September	**"Kinlet: the Life and Times of a Shropshire village"**	By Francis Engleheart
28th October	**"The Great Kidderminster Jubilee Baths Insurrection"**	By Mike Loftus

In October, as a partner of Bewdley Festival, we provided sponsorship which helped to promote some interesting events.

Summer Outings



Eddie Burton kindly organised two most enjoyable outings. In June we visited the Stourbridge Glass Museum and witnessed some wonderful items being blown. After a tasty fish and chip lunch our coach took us to nearby Ashwood Nurseries where we were amazed at the extent and beauty of "John's Garden". A sudden downpour did not dampen our spirits.

In September, not for the first time, the Society visited Hellens Manor House in Much Marcle which dates to the 12th century; a most fascinating place. In the afternoon we visited nearby Weston's Cider for a guided tour. The timing of this visit, in the middle of the cider making season, was perfect. Full coaches on both these outings are testament to the popularity amongst our members of these adventures. We are indebted to Eddie for hard work and ideas for making them happen.

Balsam Bashing

For the ninth year running an annual balsam bash was completed, concentrating in the year on the Town's riverside environment, and upwards into the old parish of Dowles on both sides of the river. Our efforts over the years have had a marked effect in so far that it is now obvious to an observer where the work of our volunteers end and growth of the dreaded weed restarts. Once again, we thank Steve Bent for his work on this project and to David Thursfield for his assistance particularly in the Dowles Brook area.

Sustfest Wyre Forest

In support of this year's Sustfest Festival we undertook guided walks around the historic areas of Wribbenhall and Bewdley which were generally well attended.

Annual dinner

The dinner was held on a November evening in St George's Hall. Our President presided and we were delighted that the Mayor, Councillor Nicole Harper and her consort, Bill Barry, could be our guests. Unfortunately, our MP was unable to attend at the last minute due to illness. Our guest speaker was our good friend and Honorary life member, Stephen Price. His illustrated talk was a wonderful account of significant reports by visitors to Bewdley over the centuries.

The Wythe Retinue

We again helped to sponsor a two day face-to-face free to the public event in Bewdley Museum in September to mark National Heritage weekend. The Wythe Retinue, a local re-enactment group, entertained with demonstration of life in Georgian times. The event was complemented by the guest appearance of Jane Austen (aka Lesley Smith), who later gave one of her usual sellout performances at Bewdley Festival (as Anne Hathaway).

Cherry Fayre

Run in conjunction with Bewdley Museum, the event was a success attracting hundreds of residents from the Wyre Forest area and beyond. Our Stall and raffle were organized so well by Sharon Harvey.

The Society's Stall

We are grateful again to Sharon for manning the Stall on civic occasions, the most important to us being the Christmas lights switch on event where the Stall was located as usual in St. Anne's church.

Development Control

Bewdley Town Council Neighbourhood Plan

Further progress was made during the year; in particular yet another public consultation survey was carried out in the Autumn. 2026 remains the anticipated completion date with the final touches currently being carried out by the Town Council's Steering Group prior to submission to the Government-appointed inspector and thereafter the public referendum. The Society is represented on the steering group by Tony Leach, Richard Brine and myself.

WFDC Local Plan

We are informed that the current adopted Local Plan will carry on until 2027. Under the plan the "Housing number" for the Wyre Forest area is 276 being the minimum number of new dwellings that need to be built up to 2036. Consequent upon changes made by the new Government, WFDC has been informed that the new mandatory Housing Number is 584. There will be consultations to come in this connection, but one suspects that Bewdley, like as before, will have to take a share! At this point in time one cannot imagine where they will be.

Local Government re-organisation

The new Government wasted no time in announcing plans for local authority re-organisation.

The centrepiece was to abolish district councils (where they exist) and to replace them by much larger unitary councils. Town councils would continue but with greater powers and responsibilities. In Worcestershire there is the option to have either one or two unitary councils. Local authorities within the county are split on which option is preferred. WFDC prefer the "one option" and no doubt it will be the Government which decides at the end of the day.

The Town Hall (Guildhall)

Towards the end of the year, we learned that WFDC had acquired special grant funding of £300,000 to enclose the undercroft in glass, fixing it to the inside of the iron gates and other iron work which are open to the elements. Heating and sound proofing will also be installed. The Society welcomed this proposal which will provide the building with a much warmer space on entrance and facilitate some additional exhibition space.

Catchem's End, Habberley Road and Stourport Road Triangle Developments

All three sites were largely completed during the year and, in fairness, have not been too much to the detriment of the Wribbenhall boundaries. The awful traffic situation on Stourport Road at school times, however, will only get worse.

Glamping Units at The Coppins (opposite Safari Park)

The Society objected to an application for four glamping units and shower block etc. at this location as did The campaign for The Protection of Rural England (CPRE) on the basis that this was green belt land and approval might open the floodgates for more of this type of development. The planning authority, WFDC, duly refused permission but this decision was subsequently reversed by the Government's Inspector on appeal.

20 mph Zone

This initiative in the town centre came to fruition during the year and was much welcomed.

Other Developments

All planning applications affecting the Conservation Area, plus some others, were examined and our views communicated to the relevant authorities where appropriate. We are also vigilant in looking for breaches of planning permission and lobby accordingly.