



ARNOLD'S NEWS

The Newsletter of Corsham Area Heritage

Winter 2014-2015



IMPORTANT MATTERS

As declared in its Constitution, Corsham Area Heritage holds its Annual General Meeting (AGM) in February. For a group like CAH, an AGM is an important event. It is the one occasion in the year when all the Members come together to decide how the group is going to set out to perform over the coming 12 months - what it is to achieve and how it is going to organise itself to maximise the prospects of securing these achievements. The purpose of the CAH AGM is not only to appoint its officers and the members of its Management Committee.

The 2014 CAH Management Committee met on 14 January to prepare a set of recommendations to put to the CAH Members when they came together at the AGM. The Committee first reviewed what had been accomplished over the last year. It had to acknowledge that, as a collection of individuals, it was running out of steam. Certain members had other interests which they were keen to pursue - ranging from fulfilling life-time ambitions to advancing business objectives. While the Committee had developed relationships with outside commercial entities such as Corsham Print and Right Angle Picture Framing to great advantage, some of its own members simply didn't have any more to give. Efforts had recently been applied to seek out 'new blood'. It remained to be seen how successful this would be.

The Committee formulated its recommendations and the AGM is now set for 25 February 2015, at Arnold House, starting at 2pm. All Members are urged to attend.

The Autumn 2014 edition of Arnold's News proved very popular. This didn't automatically guarantee a Winter 2014-15 edition. This needed the approval of the 14 January meeting - which was given.

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Corsham Area Heritage's primary purpose is to research, celebrate & present the heritage of the Corsham Area to the people who reside there and those who visit the Area, whether they are here visiting friends or exploring what the Area has to offer.

Corsham Area, as defined by Wiltshire Council, comprises Corsham, Box, Colerne & Lacock.

MAINTAINING A PRESENCE - by Peter Tapscott

In view of the increasing uncertainty regarding the future of CAH, as 2014 drew to a close it was decided that it would be prudent for the group to keep a lower profile than had previously been the case. Prior to the 14 January meeting of the Management Committee, decisions had already been taken not to submit articles for the November and December 2014, and the January and February 2015 editions of Spring Spirit (the latter having a due-date of 9 January).

Likewise a decision had been taken not to submit an article for the December 2014/January 2015 edition of Corsham & Box Matters. (No such pre-14 January meeting decision had been taken in respect to the February/March 2015 edition of this newsletter, its due-date being 16 January - giving 2 days for an article to be composed and submitted should that meeting so decide.)

Previous to this, for upwards of a year, CAH had made it a matter of policy to submit articles to both newsletters. Why? In order to keep the name and purpose of Corsham Area Heritage in the Public Eye.

INCREASING OUR USE OF SPRINGFIELD CAMPUS - by Peter Tapscott

We've stepped up our use of the exhibition space at the Springfield Community Campus. The Quarrying display that we mounted over the 5-week period commencing early October 2014 was followed by a WW1 display which was erected at the very beginning of the New Year.



We now view the Campus's Exhibition Space as being of wider value to Corsham and have applied ourselves to the task of exploiting it yet further. This has brought us into contact with the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution (BRLSI), located in Queen Square, Bath.



We erected the ten boards that comprise BRLSI's "Bath and the Nile Explorers" exhibition at the Campus on Thursday 15 January. We are now planning to hold a talk on the Nile Explorers in June this year, in Corsham. The speaker will be David Baker MBE FRGS, a descendent of Sir Samuel White Baker who, with his wife, Florence, explored the Nile in Uganda in the 1860s. David now lives in Salisbury and supports the Sir Samuel & Lady Florence Baker Historical Trail in Uganda and South Sudan. He also assists activities at the Sir Samuel Baker secondary school in Northern Uganda.



Our collaboration with BRLSI has already brought us one rather large benefit. It has yielded the opportunity to extol the virtues of Corsham live on BBC Local Radio. We were interviewed on BBC Radio Wiltshire's "Afternoon Show" on Tuesday, 13 January. Did you catch it? It's not too late - but you'll have to be quick. It's available on iPlayer - but only for 30 days from the date of broadcast. Go to <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02gfkdg> - 48 minutes in.

BORN CORSHAM MATERNITY HOME, May 1948 - by Pat Whalley

One of the ladies who attended our September "Pass it on" event was Mrs Joan Leighfield (now aged 86) from Chippenham, who told us her personal experience of being admitted to the 'Home' in 1948. At the time she and her husband Bertie lived at Castle Combe, but everyone had to attend Corsham as it was the only hospital available at the time.

Joan's experience was a little different from the norm. She was only 7 months pregnant when she was rushed to Corsham. Attended by a gentle Welsh nurse, SRN Price, Adrian weighed in at 2lbs.7oz. - and mother and baby had to remain at the hospital until baby weighed 5lbs. This gave Joan ample opportunity to get to know the building and the nurses very well.



She remembers a long ward, probably on the first floor, where the mothers slept, and a nursery downstairs. The nursery contained a large coal fire with a screen around it, and a notice which forbade moving too close. Matron Green was a special favourite of Joan's, described as a lady of mature years who married late in life, and is known to have transferred to Greenways maternity hospital when Corsham closed.

Once Joan had recovered from her labour, she had to remain at the hospital, in order to feed baby Adrian, initially with a 'fountain pen' filler. But she also had some spare time, and was able to help the nurses in their general duties, and assist the kitchen staff, preparing meals, etc. Matron Green seemed particularly fond of Joan and baby Adrian. Once, when away on holiday, she sent a postcard, which addressed "To Joan and Tom Thumb, from Matron", recalls Joan.

There was a strict regime of timekeeping, but Joan managed to find time to sneak out one evening, meet a couple of friends and her husband, and go to the Corsham Fair. A late return was observed by a nurse, but no recriminations followed. This was a particularly happy period of Joan's life, the nurses went out of their way to be helpful and friendly, and made everyone's stay at the hospital really enjoyable.



When it was time to go home, Joan found that the fashions were changing. She had gone into the Maternity Home in a costume (suit) with a skirt demurely sitting at the knee. When she returned home, skirts were moving to calf length. Travel was also something of a problem. To go shopping in Chippenham, Joan had to set Adrian in the pram, and walk 6 miles to Chippenham, and 6 miles back just to fill the larder!

Sadly, Joan's husband, Bertie, died in 1999, and Adrian died in 2003, aged 55. Joan now lives alone, but she has another son, Alan, who lives around the corner and visits her daily.

It was a pleasure to meet with Joan, and add another story to those that make up a picture of a Corsham of bygone days.

One photo shows Joan, baby Adrian and Matron. The other shows four uniformed members of staff, one holding Adrian. Both were taken in the rear garden of the Maternity Home.

HERITAGE - and the Corsham Town Council - by Peter Tapscott

We met with the Corsham Chief Executive, Dave Martin, and his team at the Town Hall on 7 January. We asked what CAH could do to assist the Town Council in pursuing its declared objective of improving Corsham's appeal as a visitor destination. We were informed that a new Strategic Plan had been adopted and that the necessary steps to implement it were in hand. Work packages had been defined and resources assigned to them. We were assured there was a role for CAH in this. This was confirmed in an email the next day. The Council clearly needs us!

TAKE ONE LAST LOOK - by Peter Tapscott

Network Rail's Western Region Electrification Project requires that several substantial structures - including, no less, the Box Tunnel - be modified. At the lower end of the scale, this includes the replacement of the Corsham Footbridge between Pound Mead and The Cleeve. A new bridge will replace the old one, with that new bridge being positioned at a height significantly higher above the track than was previously the case. The new bridge is in the factory now. Lifting out the old, and dropping in the new, will be quite a spectacle. Presently this is scheduled for March. The footbridge lift-out/drop-in is sure to be dramatic to watch. Good vantage points will be at a premium. In the meantime, now is the time to see what is presently in situ - and still functioning. After March things will be changed forever. Go see the old footbridge now!

Ken Oatley, one-time resident of Corsham, now lives in France. Ken regularly adds to our fund of knowledge of the town's past. Just as we are, he is currently paying the Project great interest.

Our photographs capture the "before", as well as the "preparing for". The 1st photo shows the footbridge as it was in its pre-Beeching days, the 2nd as it is now (on a bright winter's day in 2015). One difference is very obvious. The original lattice-work sides have gone. The 1st photo is from the private collection of Steven Flavin, appearing on page 100 of his fine book "Corsham Born and Bred 2". (Ken has an even earlier photo of the footbridge, sadly of very poor quality. It like-wise shows the lattice-work construction. Ken assesses it to have been taken in the 1930s. Another source dates it earlier - around 1892.)

The 3rd photo shows today's interim arrangement whereby the surface water pipe previously carried across the track cradled underneath the footbridge has been made to by-pass the structure. It will be re-attached to the bridge once the replacement unit is in place.

The lowering of the bed of the track through Box Tunnel will be a much bigger exercise, inevitably giving rise to major disruptions to services. All this can be followed on the website: www.networkrail.co.uk/great-western-route-modernisation/wiltshire



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Corsham Area Heritage & Information Centre | Arnold House, 31 High Street, Corsham,
Wiltshire SN13 0EZ | Tel: 01249 714660