



Cockermouth & District Civic Trust Newsletter



President: The Lord Egremont, Chairman: Phil Campbell
Secretary: John Dent, Treasurer: Ian Dodsworth.
Issue no 117, August 2011

It seems early to be writing our late summer newsletter, but I need to remind you of the excellent events we have this year as part of the Heritage Open Days in early September.

It is also time to renew subscriptions. I hope that you will, as we need your support more than ever with the challenges ahead arising from both the Main Street refurbishment and the local implications from implementation of the Localism Bill. We also need new members and we issued a challenge at the last lecture for all members to seek to recruit one new member (or more). Please try. Remember, membership is not just about attending our events. It is also about supporting our cause, and the more members we have, the stronger our voice. And of course it gives people as members the opportunity to influence 'our voice'.

I hope that you have been able to take advantage of the free day passes to both a National Trust property and an English Heritage property, available to you through our membership of Civic Voice.

Heritage Open Days – 8th to 11th September

This is the last year that the Heritage Open Days Event will be coordinated nationally by English Heritage. In future years, Civic Voice will jointly coordinate the event as part of a consortium with the National Trust and The Heritage Alliance. So it will perhaps become more important that we are fully involved. I therefore hope that you will be able to support our contribution this year by attending as many of the local events as possible.

For the first time we have organised a couple of topical lunch time lectures at the Kirkgate Centre and are keeping our fingers crossed for a good attendance. Both are on Friday 9th September & free tickets can be obtained from the Kirkgate Centre Box Office. The first is on 'Conservation aspects of the Cockermouth Post Flood Refurbishment' & is at 11.30am. The second is on 'Roman Papcastle Archaeology' and is at 1pm.

Now that the Civic Trust has taken over accountability for tours of the castle, we are conducting 2 tours as part of this event. These are

at 3pm on Thursday 8th and Friday 9th September. Tickets (free) must be obtained in advance from the Tourist Information Centre and are restricted to 30 per day.

The Museum Group have kindly agreed to stage an exhibition of photographs of old Cockermouth at the Kirkgate Centre on Saturday 10th September, between 10am and 1pm.

In addition, the following buildings will be open for visits & tours 'for free' in the Cockermouth area:
All Saints Church (Thurs, Fri, 10-2pm; Sat 10 – 1pm)
Bank's Ironmongers (Sat 10 – 2pm)
Higham Hall (Fri, 10 – 4pm)
Isel Hall (Thurs, Fri, 2 – 4pm)
Masonic Lodge (Sat 10 – 2pm)
Winder Hall (Sat 12 – 4pm)
Wordsworth House (Sat 11 – 4.30pm)

More information can be obtained on our & other events at the Tourist Information Centre or on the web site www.heritageopendays.org.uk .

2011/12 Lecture Programme

We have decided to hold an extra member's meeting this year in January, exact date to be announced. The idea is to provide a forum for members to discuss issues potentially affecting the town without the time constraint of a following on lecture. For example current issues could be the Main Street improvement Scheme, the implications for us of the Localism Bill, potential housing developments and flood protection. The idea is that we will include an agenda in the next newsletter, so please let us know what you would like included. This is an experiment so please help to make it a success.

The main lecture programme is detailed below. All lecture meetings will be held as usual on the first Wednesday of the month at 7.30pm in the Friend's Meeting House, Kirkgate.

5th October

Jessica Hendry of North Lakes Foodbank will talk about 'feeding people in crisis during the floods & providing for other families in need'.

2nd November

Local astronomer Robin Leadbetter of 'Three Hills Observatory' will speak on 'the 21st century Gentleman Astronomer'.

7th December

Zoe Gilbert (et al) of Wordsworth House will speak on 'costume drama * Georgian food with a Christmas slant'.

1st February

Malcolm Bobbitt, motoring writer & automotive historian, will admit to 'confessions of a motoring writer'.

7th March

Chief Superintendent Steve Johnson, Area Commander of West Cumbria Police, will inform us about 'policing in West Cumbria'.

4th April

David Handley of Oxfam will give us a first hand account of the impact of Cyclone Nargis on Myammar (Burma) in 2008, and Oxfam's longer term response.

Skipton

A total of 25 of us visited Skipton on 1st July, including 5 members from Workington Civic Trust. The weather was once again very kind to us. We were all impressed with the Coniston Hotel where we had coffee & 'home made' biscuits en route, and 2 of the party even returned there for an evening meal. We were superbly looked after by Skipton Civic Society, giving us a very informative guided tour followed by tea, a piece of their anniversary cake & a small exhibition of their activities. In the afternoon, we all did our own things, including castle visits, tour on a barge & viewing kingfishers on a local lake.

Main Street Improvement Scheme

Public consultation on the Main Street streetscape proposals was held in July. I hope that you were able to contribute. The next stage is to take on board the public comments & develop firm proposals, which again I believe will be subject to public feedback. The earliest date to start implementation of the improvements, as I understand it, will be July 2012.

The fabric of Main Street was damaged by the floods and is in need of repair. Insurance money is available to make the street good and some additional grant money has already been obtained with more being sought from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The objective of the extra money is to make the repaired streetscape better than it was before the floods. Our understanding is that the new streetscape is being funded on the basis that it will

last for at least 30 years and reduce future maintenance costs.

Core to the Civic Trust's aspirations is that Cockermouth must retain its unique identity and not develop into a clone town. This does not, and must not, mean that everything has to be kept as it is, or even returned to what it looked like in Georgian times – that really would be a 'theme park'. The town has evolved over the years to meet the needs of the times and must continue to do so, whilst retaining its own identity.

The trees on Main Street have particularly sparked controversy with a petition being raised by some demanding that they not be removed. This perhaps misses the point because I haven't heard an argument from anybody suggesting that the trees are not a vital component of Cockermouth's continuing identity. So the only question in doubt to us is whether the existing trees should be retained, or whether some or all need to be replaced by new but mature trees that maintain the Main Street character. This is where informed decisions based on expert advice comes in, because if the wrong decision is made now, there will be repercussions in the future, especially as further funding is unlikely to be available in the next 30 years or more. For example, the current trees were planted in 1887, 124 years ago, and have been regularly & heavily pruned, reducing their life expectancy, which in any case we are informed would only be around 100 years for an average urban tree. Is it best to replace some now rather than have trees die off over the next decades? Expert advice is being sought and a full all-encompassing tree survey is currently in progress. The present tree roots are not contained and have damaged the pavements & penetrated some building foundations. Is it best to replace these trees now with proper containments for the roots to prevent future damage to our pavements and buildings? Again, expert advice is needed for informed decisions.

Opportunities to procure funding for improvements to our town centre are rare and, given the current economic situation, we are unlikely to see further funding in the foreseeable future. So let's hope this current opportunity to improve on what we have got is grasped, retaining the character of our historic market town, but doing so in an informed way such that the quality of the infrastructure is maintained over the next decades for ourselves and for future generations.

Localism Bill

The new Localism Bill, which is still before parliament, will have significant implications for local communities and interest groups like ourselves. The main measures include:

- New freedoms & flexibilities for local government, including at Town Council level
- New rights & powers for communities & individuals
- Reform to make the planning system more democratic & more effective
- Reform to ensure that decisions about housing are made locally

Clearly the bill presents both opportunities and dangers from our perspective, which perhaps emphasises the need to maintain an active civic society able to monitor and challenge.

In common with other civic societies, we have become particularly concerned about the proposed new National Planning Policy Framework, which taken with the provisions of the Localism Bill, may adversely affect the balance between private gain and public benefit. For example, there is a proposed presumption in favour of granting planning permission for developments where there is no up-to-date local plan. In practice, 80% of councils do not have an adopted local plan, including Allerdale Borough Council. What does this mean for inappropriate housing developments in Cockermouth? We have written to our MP, Tony Cunningham, expressing our concern.

In our May newsletter, I mentioned that Cockermouth has been chosen as one of the pilot areas for implementation of aspects of the Localism Bill concerning the development of planning policy frameworks and planning decisions. There are two main mechanisms for this, 'Neighbourhood Development Plans' & 'Neighbourhood Development Orders'.

Neighbourhood Development Plans can be used to establish neighbourhood planning policies for the development & use of land. However, since such a plan for Cockermouth would need to sit within the overall Allerdale Local Plan, which is not yet in place, it is considered that it is not yet appropriate to develop a Cockermouth neighbourhood plan.

Neighbourhood Development Orders would normally sit within a Neighbourhood Plan and can be used to permit certain types of development within constraints without the need for planning

applications, potentially removing some of the time consuming bureaucracy. As part of the pilot, Cockermouth Town Council are currently considering the development of a Development Order through the establishment of a working group. Both the Civic Trust & the Chamber of Trade have been invited to be represented on this group. Any developed order would be subject to public referendum before implementation.

Watch this space!

National Awards

We are involved in the submission of applications for 3 separate awards, all relating to the post-flood shop front improvement scheme.

The first is jointly with Allerdale Borough Council for a Georgian Society Award.

The second is jointly with Allerdale BC & Cockermouth Town Council for a (national) Civic Trust award.

The third is by ourselves to Civic Voice for both an individual (Darren Ward) and a Society that has most contributed to the civic movement in the last year.

Who Do We Think We Are? (With apologies to the BBC)

(By John Dent)

Well, Cumbrian of course – someone who lives in Cumbria. But the present Cumbria is a recent administrative area and is the result of local government re-organisation in the 1980's. This present county is almost identical to the Diocese of Carlisle – was this a happy accident or did some faceless bureaucrat in Westminster really know his/her geography/history?

Did you know that a large part of the county, including Cockermouth is not featured in the Domesday Book? When that was compiled we were subjects of the King of Scotland. The Prince of Cumberland used to be the title given to the successor to the Scottish throne – like the Prince of Wales is heir to our Queen Elizabeth.

In due course a King of England, namely William II, decided that we should be his subjects though the King of Scotland didn't agree. It took about 100 years to complete the transfer.

But it was still considered to be the "Wild West" as far as the rest of England was concerned – an opinion not helped by the activities of the Border Reivers. The people living here at that time considered themselves as a race apart and did not take kindly to strangers. It is said by people who know the Cumbrian dialect that there are 109 words for beating, 67 words for a fool but only one or two words for affection.

In the 1700's Londoners knew far more about France, Italy and Germany than they did about our county (Has that changed, I wonder?). However little local difficulties like the French revolution put off these Londoners from going over there and the Lake District benefited from a growing number of visitors. Wordsworth and his gang of poets contributed to the promotion of the Lake District as a tourist destination – the rest as they say is history.

(Please treat the above in the light hearted manner in which it was written. I can't vouch for the total accuracy of all the details and if a reader thinks I have got some fact wrong they are probably right).

Town Trail Visitors

We have recently taken a couple of groups around Cocker mouth. This month we took a group from Christ Church around the town trail itself. This was much appreciated – even locals were finding nooks where they had never been before.

In July, we took a group from the National Trust Lake District Association round the flood trail. They were also very appreciative and complimentary. I quote from their autumn newsletter "*The medieval buildings, with Georgian or Victorian fronts, were restored very beautifully, we loved the fresh appearance of the town, the colours of the paintwork, and the tastefully designed shop signs. We were so impressed with the massive amount of work undertaken, and due to the cooperation between big businesses, the steering team and the locals, something quite amazing has been achieved. So do go there as soon as you can and enjoy this unique town*".

Its always interesting to know how others see you, and particularly gratifying when they are impressed!

Tour of Cocker mouth Town Trail (15):

(by Shirley Campbell)

1887 was the year of Queen Victoria's Silver Jubilee. Two bridges were opened in Cocker mouth that year, Quaker Footbridge on Jubilee Day, 21st June 1887 and Waterloo Bridge, (Brewery Bridge), on 18th June, which was the 72nd anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo.

The site of Waterloo Bridge was probably a ford originally. The first bridge, mostly paid for by the Castle brewery, cost £288. It was a road bridge and allowed barrels from the cooper in High Sand

Lane to be easily transported to the Brewery over the Cocker. Buses also used the bridge. The stanchions of the bridge were formed as brewery barrels and the bridge was commonly called Barrel Bridge. It has been damaged by flooding many times. Within 9 years of opening, a flood in 1896 meant strengthening was needed, again paid for by the Brewery. 1918 saw more damage, a year being taken to do repairs. Then in 1938, flooding carried most of the bridge away. War prevented rebuilding and it was not until 1963 that a footbridge was opened by the Head Boy of Derwent School. The 2009 floods caused more problems, repairs not being finished until August 2011.

The area around Waterloo Bridge was an industrial one until recent times. There were tanneries on the banks of the Derwent, factories making chairs, mangle rollers and churns, and a foundry first run by the Herbert family called Derwent Foundry. It supplied a hot water heating system to All Saints Church in 1875. The business was still working in the 1930s.

Beyond the foundry was a windmill, probably used for crushing bark for the tanneries, but it may have milled corn. The brick built mill was 25 feet high and had 6 sails according to a painting in All Saints Church. It collapsed in the early 2000s and now little is left but a pile of stones.

Riversmeet Proposals for 2-4 Market Place

Frank McGrath, Secretary of Riversmeet, attended our July committee meeting to outline their plans, in association with Groundwork Trust, for a community & resource centre on Market Street. They intend to upgrade the building as a demonstration of improving energy efficiency in older buildings. There will be meeting rooms upstairs and offices for Groundwork Trust. They hope in future to have a training centre, seminars and workshops. Riversmeet are looking for community support for their project to aid their grant applications. The committee were happy to give the Civic Trust's support through a letter from the chairman.

History Wall

We were very pleased to present a Civic Trust Merit Award to John Cusack for the History Wall in Old Kings Arms Lane. I hope you have all seen it as it is a credit to the town.

Phil Campbell, Chairman

COCKERMOUTH AND DISTRICT CIVIC TRUST

Will members please note that subscriptions are now due for
2011 – 2012
Please send your fee of **£5.50** PLUS **£5** for each additional household member to
the treasurer –

Mr. I Dodsworth
1 Banks Court
Market Place
COCKERMOUTH CA13 9NG

OR

Bring to any lecture
Membership cards will be available at the lecture evenings or be sent by post.
Please note that the fee for visitors is now £2.00p

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