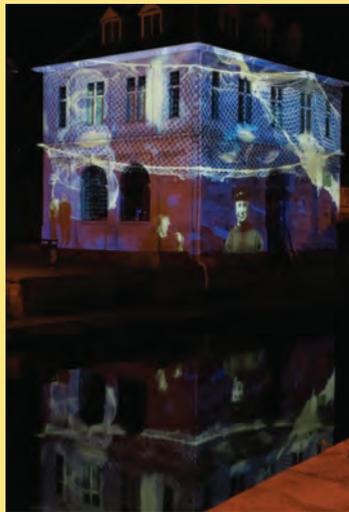


KING'S LYNN CIVIC SOCIETY



Autumn Newsletter 2014

A society for people who think only the best is good enough for King's Lynn

www.kingslynncivicsociety.co.uk

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Chairman's Report

by Alison Gifford

I was asked the other evening by a member whose annual subscription was due why he should re-join the Civic Society. A very good question which made me think that perhaps the "ordinary" members may wonder what they get for their membership money. I think it would be honest to say that the individual has only the newsletters and the winter lectures and meeting like-minded, civic minded people. But it is what the members together can achieve by enabling the Civic Society to function through those subscriptions that is, I hope, the point.

Ian Price has a very good grasp of our money but we are not running a savings bank and have no wish to build up reserves beyond what is prudent. We are able to give grants on your behalf to causes we know you support. £1,500 to the local St Nicholas Chapel refurbishment fund, £300 to sponsor a lecture during the King's Lynn Festival, £500 towards Heritage Open Day, a small donation to the King's Lynn Archaeological Society to so they could insure a local dig which would otherwise have been cancelled. Money towards All Saints' window. Providing modest refreshments for the panel who helped Liz James to refine her local list, paying visiting lecturers and renting Thoresby College Great Hall and Undercroft, printing, stationery and other similar expenses are all made possible by your annual subscriptions.

But over and above these financial matters is the work that the committee of the Civic Society. It is not headline news but does make a difference to the look of the town. The usual, and not surprising wish, of developers is to maximise profit and the best way to do this is to cram as many tiny units as possible into the land they have acquired or to leave fallow and overgrown parcels of land they have bought. Design, materials, local tradition and street scene are a

secondary consideration to them but of primary importance to the Civic Society and everyone who has to live in them or look at them.

Ugly buildings are dispiriting. Neglected buildings are depressing. We live with the results of town centre “improvements” from the past that gave us the ugly backsides of shops and offices to look at that we would never countenance today because the planning process now encourages, even demands, public comment. Every week the planning subcommittee write letters with comment and positive suggestions for the consideration of the Borough Council planning committee and frequently, because written with care and knowledge, these letters can and do make a difference. Remember that Lynn does not have a town or parish council to speak out about such matters.

It can also be small improvements that make a difference. Better lighting of the South Gates, painting our letter boxes or pressurising large rich national companies to put their windows in order are all things we try to achieve and having the support of our many members makes us a credible force in our endeavours. Your money helps too.

At the August Executive Committee meeting we will ask our President, Desmond Waite, to join us. Our aim is to formulate a policy about out-of-town shopping with particular regard to Morston’s disturbing ambition to ask for change of use from light industry to retail for their Hardwick development. Worrying for our town centre.

A question was asked at the AGM about trips to historic houses and towns but since Jean Tuck, after many years of successful heritage tourism, gave up organising the popular “Tuck’s Tours” no one has come forward to carry on that task in a regular way although Helen and Anne-Marie will organise trips if people are prepared to drive to the venue. Suggestions welcome.

Planning

Silo site, South Quay

The planning year has been quite busy as usual. Some major developments in town have been granted planning permission. The

largest is the McCarthy and Stone application for the old silos on South Quay. Last year the Nelson Street Residents’ Group fought valiantly to ensure that the first application was refused and the inspector’s report resulting from the appeal will serve the town very well in future planning applications in Conservation Areas. The second application has recently been approved with conditions attached. It is an improvement on the original, but the development remains tall, dense and massive for such a small and important area and will have a profoundly detrimental effect on two very old houses on Nelson Street.

Living over the shop

Long standing members will remember the Civic Society’s recent campaigns to use empty floors above shops in the town centre. Hurrah for Freebridge Community Housing. They have had a planning application accepted for flats above property in Norfolk Street and have a new application pending for flats above shops in High Street. This will help to bring some signs of life to the High Street after the shops close as well as providing much needed housing.

uPVC windows in Conservation Areas

The Borough Council lost an important planning appeal this year, which will have a detrimental impact on our Conservation Areas. Three Crowns House on the South Quay challenged the council’s refusal to grant them planning permission for uPVC windows to replace the existing timber windows. Three Crowns House is not a listed building but is a prominent building in a conservation area. The council lost the appeal and applications for uPVC windows and doors throughout the conservation areas are now likely to be granted planning permission.

Housing Density

The density of building, particularly in housing, has been a strong theme among several planning applications during the last year. Freebridge are developing the old Pilot Cinema site to provide social

housing. This is a difficult site sandwiched between a main road and an electricity substation. Housing associations have had their funding cut by government and the urge to pack in as many dwellings as possible is strong. The Civic Society planning group objected to the first application on the grounds of overdevelopment and the second less tightly packed application was successful. Work is well underway and the finished site will be an improvement on a derelict building in a sea of tarmac. The Civic Society will arrange and pay for a plaque about the Pilot Cinema and its local architect at the development when it is completed. The Civic Society was asked to suggest a name for the development – we came up with Pilot Place.

Loud advertising

Another theme that has recurred this year is the lining of shop windows with large plastic sheets of advertising. Such advertising can be done discreetly. There are very large images in some of the side windows in Debenhams. They are black and white and are an acceptable, if lazy, alternative to traditional window dressing when used sparingly. The Eastern European shops on St James Street have very colourful images in their windows which many people find glaring and unattractive – certainly not in keeping with the buildings in which the shops are housed. The new Spar shop beside the railway line has all windows facing the railway filled with loud adverts for their products. This is not an attractive look anywhere, and is an insult at the entrance to town rich in heritage. What have we done about it? Nothing, because our hands are completely tied. Advertisements attached to the inside of windows are not subject to planning permission. Action can only be taken if the material is obscene. If the material is simply offensive to the eye and degrades the quality of the area around it nothing can be done.

Hardwick development – new planning application

Morston Assets is planning a very large extension to the Hardwick Road Industrial Estate. The area covered is beyond Sainsbury's and reaches as far as the new roundabouts constructed. This land already has outline planning permission for light industrial, warehouse and

office space. Morston want to change this to outline planning permission for a multiscreen cinema, DIY store and garden centre, a limited assortment supermarket (Lidl or Aldi), restaurants including a drive through restaurant, a pub, hotel, gym and car showroom. This is a major change. As usual there is masses of paper to wade through full of arguments from consultants about how wonderful this will be.

The Civic Society is very concerned about how this proposal will impact on the vitality of an already unhealthy town centre and declining markets.

The borough council has obtained grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund to bring life back into the town. One is for the development of the town hall, the other for the Townscape Heritage Initiative which covers the south end of High Street, St James Street and Tower Street. A huge out of town development will undermine this work. There are areas within town that do need redeveloping like the Old Post Office and its environs but Morston are only interested in green field sites.

What would help the town centre is improved gateways to the town. The northern approach is narrow and congested. It would be hugely improved by using the Patrick and Thompson site to create a northern route out of King's Lynn and provide a multi-storey car park. The Southgate area is a bottleneck. A creative solution must be found to the traffic congestion and all new development in this area must enhance the Southgate itself. The council needs to produce guidelines for such building development, if necessary employing an architect to identify the principles of sympathetic development in a historic context. We have enough 'anytown' buildings already.

Is our town centre surviving?

by Ian Price

I first reviewed the empty shop situation back in 2009 and then again in 2012. With the latest Outline Planning Application for the extension of the Hardwick Industrial Estate from Morston Assets including Retail and Leisure proposals I thought it would be a good idea to bring the situation up to date.

As the table below shows the current vacancy rate, which had improved in 2012 (10.3%) compared to 2009 (14.3%), is now almost back to the 2009 level at 13.7%.

Table of Vacancy Rates in King's Lynn Town Centre
Survey date Thursday August 1st 2014

Street	Total Units	Vacant 2009	Rate %	Vacant 2012	Rate %	Vacant 2014	Rate %
High St	90	10	11.1	7	7.8	12	13.3
Norfolk St	89	12	13.3	4	4.5	7	7.9
Broad St	36	9	25.0	3	8.3	5	13.9
New Conduit St	22	6	27.3	3	13.6	2	9.1
St James' St #	47	6	12.8	12	25.5	14	29.8
Tower St	30	3	10.0	4	13.3	3	10.0
St Dominics Sq	8	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	12.5
TOTAL	322	49	14.3	33	10.3	44	13.7

St James' St includes Saturday Market Place

If any trends can be drawn from the above the most significant is around the area of the current Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) for which funding has now been received. The area of High St (Saturday Market Place to Baker Lane), St James' St and Tower St is covered by THI and from the above table this area currently represents 101 units with 22 vacancies giving 21.8% vacancy rate and at 22 a full half of all vacancies. It must be hoped that the spending of THI funds together with the changes to the layout of the Saturday Market Place and hoped for revamp of the Town Hall will help to improve this sorry situation.

However, the fear must be that if further out of town development makes it less likely that people will want to visit the Town Centre for retail or leisure activities no amount of cash will be able to retain our Town Centre as a cohesive whole and more decline will follow. It is for this reason that the Civic Society is currently reviewing the proposals for the Hardwick Estate and will respond to the applicant's proposals once that review is complete.

The Pilot Cinema by Desmond K. Waite MVO F.R.I.B.A

We all became accustomed to the presence of the Pilot cinema over its lifetime, some of us even loved it for its films and family enjoyment and we miss it now that it is gone. Built in an amazing 12 to 14 weeks in 1938 by Chas D. Allflatt a local builder, it was designed by his Architect son young Keeble Allflatt. That team also designed and built the Theatre Royal at about the same time. Quite an achievement bearing in mind that in those days there were no JCBs or mechanical equipment for demolition, digging foundations and heavy work and no cranes to hoist roof trusses during construction, which was in those days by a centre pole and sheer muscle power.

I am pleased to say that Roger Allflatt, the grandson, runs the family business still with his son and daughter. Roger is very proud of the firm his grandfather started, its achievement and that of his father. To make the Pilot a success he had to master complex acoustic problems needed for cinema sound movies and stage productions for local amateurs. I knew Keeble Allflatt quite well myself. He set aside aspirations in architecture in order to run the family business until he retired although he was able to use his drawing skills on occasions for Roger during contracts being executed for me. He designed and built the distinctive butterfly roofed house for himself at Ashwicken which could not be missed when passing by.

The Civic Society is keen to record the existence of the Pilot cinema because it gave so many much pleasure and was designed and built by a local architect and his family. Seemingly eventually subsumed by television, it was a focus for family entertainment during the last war and for some time since. It was looking sad of late, needing some use and TLC in spite of several occupiers trying to make it useful. We are therefore seeking to sponsor a plaque to be fixed on the site currently being developed for housing. That development is well underway now and Freebridge Housing have indicated a willingness to consider it when the development on the site is complete.

Although the final form may have to be sized to suit the scope of the Plaque and setting, Alison our chairman has drafted some potential wording for it as follows:-

The Pilot Cinema John Kennedy Road 1938 – 1983

This cinema was the ultimate in modern “supers” launched by Ben Culey, a colourful local character, farmer and fishing smack owner. Keeble Allflat of King’s Lynn was the architect and it took fourteen weeks to build. The cinema took its name from Pilot Street which was partly demolished and truncated by John Kennedy Road.

Its special design introduced a “stadium” arrangement for the seating, one great sweep with no balcony, accommodating 797 patrons with some double seats for courting couples. There were dressing rooms and a stage for live shows.

The Pilot opened 28th November 1938 with the memorable Walt Disney production of “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs”, a unique occasion because no other cinema in the district had managed to book this famous film.

It also played a part in the film production when the King’s Lynn area was used for location scenes for the 1943 production “The Silver Fleet” starring Ralph Richardson. The film from each day’s shoot, the “rushes”, were screened at The Pilot to check their quality.

The cinema closed in 1961 but was reopened a year later by the partnership of Tony Rowlett and Malcolm Croot. A second and final closure came on 27th March, 1983 with the epic film “Gandhi”. It was sold for conversion to a snooker hall, joined by a hardware and builders merchants and later a snooker hall. Its last use was as a night club “Zoots” before becoming vacant followed by demolition in 2014.

I am sorry that the site could not have been used for a single iconic building, perhaps an hotel of modern distinctive stand-alone architecture and height to mark the focus of approaching it from North Street and along the south entrance to town but housing is

good for the wellbeing of the people of King’s Lynn and its widened district which the Pilot cinema once served.



Living Above the Shop

A long running campaign by the Civic Society has been to repopulate the empty flats above the shops, banks and offices in King’s Lynn town centre. People need places to live, no space that could be used for housing should be empty and no one should be allowed to have a property that is left empty for years. Out of town housing estates with limited services are planned for the outskirts of town in the near future where the residents will have to drive into town for most of their needs making our congested roads even worse. So it is wonderful to announce that Freebridge Community Housing have put in a planning application for 48 & 49 High St. 48 is the new Costa Coffee shop and 49 is another phone repair shop. They are in fact part of one building that has been split at ground floor.

Freebridge want to convert floors 1,2 and 3 into 6 one and two bed flats. Access will be from the rear and will not affect the shops at all. Obviously the ideal tenants will be childfree people without cars. This is to be welcomed and we hope more applications for similar schemes are in the pipeline. In 1950 almost every flat above a shop was occupied in the whole of High Street and no doubt all the other town centre streets. When I looked at the local electoral register for 2008 (the last where such details are public) there were, I think, five flats occupied and the rest wastefully empty.

Lynn town centre needs to be lively and busy with a variety of shops, cafes, restaurants pubs and a cinema and theatre. People living above the shop makes the town seem safer, makes the streets lighter and brings revenue to local businesses. Well done Freebridge.

Membership Report

by Margaret Worledge

We currently have 217 members and I would like to thank those of you who continue to pay your subscriptions by Direct Debit. I would also like to thank members who renew with no prompting and those who respond to a gentle reminder which I feel is necessary when we all lead such busy lives. We always need new members so if you have a friend or relative whom you think would be interested in becoming a member please encourage them to do so. We have several members who cannot attend meetings but are keen to keep up with what is happening regarding development, demolition and neglect of buildings in King's Lynn so are pleased to receive the Newsletter. While stewarding on Heritage Day it is very gratifying to see how many people care about our town.

Purfleet House - ongoing

Mr Gawn has emailed the Chairman with the message below. She comments, "While he says that Purfleet House is for sale only the "middle bit" is for sale which has no access door of its own. I hear that he says "In all the time I've owned 1 King Street no-one has ever come up with an offer to take on the building and make proper use of it". Do people usually buy a historic building and then wait for somebody else to come forward and make proper use of it? And it is

also possible that he doesn't have the freehold of 1 King Street. The centre of the range of buildings - the bit that is currently up for sale - is owned by another company from whom he has a lease. I could be mistaken of course".

"I would like you to bring to the members' attention the fact that I have formerly (sic) placed Purfleet House on the open market via Sowerbys Estate Agency. This will give an opportunity to all potential purchasers to complete the restoration works and create an active new use.

Our general enquiry notice on the property over the last year has not brought forward any serious interest and the lack of investment available generally has continued to frustrate any ambition of developing the "Optics Museum". The rear yard though will continue to be available for a project if suitable interest and investment ever materialises in the future."

Cecil Beaton's Big Top

by Herbert Knights

In the early 1930s at Ashcombe House in Wiltshire, Cecil Beaton, the society photographer, played ringmaster to a creative cast of friends including Rex Whistler and Oliver Messel. They drew inspiration from the circus to transform the photographer's bedroom. The playful theatricality of the space, now re-created at a new exhibition in Salisbury is fully in keeping with a blissful pre-war tenure in which visiting revellers gave themselves over to 'gaiety and masquerade`.

"My four poster bed", wrote Beaton, "was executed by Savages of King`s Lynn". Father Neptune at the bed-head was flanked by cupids and subaqueous plants. The canopy was held aloft by barley sugar posts of brass like those found on a Savages galloping horse roundabout.

This fantastic endeavour was designed originally by Whistler, with grotesque masks at the corners made from papier-mâché. Twin seahorses holding a shield emblem faced each other at the foot of the bed and an alternately coloured striped canopy above suggested a `big top`.

Funds were a bit low during the depression so the room remained unfinished until a house party of painters in May 1932 presented a solution; they were all to decorate a panel in the bedroom. Whistler contributed a superb fat woman; Lord Berners a columbine with performing dogs; while Christopher Sykes' offering was a tumbler, upside down, balancing a bowlful of goldfish on his feet. Oliver Messel painted a small black boy, naked save for an ostrich feather. `Jack` Von Reppert-Bismarck depicted a rider on a flower dappled circus pony, while her husband Yorck (Hans-Jorg) produced a circus strong-man. Beaton painted the Harlequin and also a downcast Pierrot by the door.

A recreation of this room is the central feature in the Salisbury exhibition entitled 'Cecil Beaton at home - Ashcombe and Reddish' (his second country home). Andrew Ginger of Beaudesert has assembled 450 exhibits, film, personal objects and photographs. His bedroom was `mad`, says Ginger, 'but one of the great rooms of the 20th century'. One can appreciate why Noel Coward thought it was `the most courageous thing I've ever seen`.

It is worth contrasting Beaton's £50 a year rent for Ashcombe with the reputed £9m price tag when current owner and resident, the singer Madonna, purchased the Ashcombe estate near Wilton House and Cranborne Chase.

Savages' house, offices and adjoining works near the corner of John Kennedy Road and Estuary Road were demolished in the 1980`s, supposedly to widen the road, although this never actually happened and we got the Anglia Cannery factory on the site instead. As industrial heritage tourism is booming, this was a very short-sighted move and a great loss to King`s Lynn. Artefacts from Savages are housed at King`s Lynn Museum, and his statue can be found on London Road.

For more information, contact The King's House, 65, The Close Salisbury, Wilts SP1 2EN. The exhibition runs until the 19th of September

For opening times ring 01772 332151 or visit salisburymuseum.org.uk

King's Lynn Civic Society

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