



A Registered Charity (No. 1016770)
and Member of Civic Voice

The Newbury Society

www.newbury-society.org

April 2020 Bulletin

From your Chairman

The Coronavirus pandemic has overwhelmed the normal activities of the Society, and meetings have been cancelled until further notice. There is a serious threat to life, and we urge everyone to follow the advice being given nationally.

Your committee has had robust discussions about whether we are able to support the local community in this time of crisis, and if so, how. We considered donating funds to the Greenham Trust emergency appeal, but the consensus among the committee is that our constitution (a legal document) does not allow us to do so. The constitution sets out the charitable purposes of the Society, and changing it would be a controversial and complex process.

Garry Poulson is heavily involved in coordinating the voluntary effort going on in the local community at this time, and has stood down from the committee. There will therefore be no official newsletters for some time, and these more basic "bulletins" will take their place for the time being.

As said, we will not be able to run talks or other events. The next scheduled event in our programme is a talk on Horse Chestnut trees by John Handy on September 10, but whether this will go ahead will depend on circumstances at that time. The programme for the rest of the year is currently as shown below.

Do please let us know of any local concerns or news you have. In the meantime, our best wishes to everyone during this difficult time.

David Peacock Tel: Newbury (01635) 524017 Email: chairman@newbury-society.org

Provisional Dates for Your Diary – 2020

(all subject to confirmation due to the Coronavirus pandemic)

Talks are held in the **Parish Room, St John's Church**, St John's Road, Newbury RG14 7PY.

Admission is free for members or £2.50 for non-members. **Visitors are most welcome.**

Thursday 10th September, 7:30pm – John Handy: Horse Chestnuts: vulnerable giants

Horse chestnut is a much-loved tree, but recently in the news because it appeared on the Endangered list from the International Union for Conservation of Nature, listed with about 400 other trees and shrubs as vulnerable. It is a familiar tree and Newbury has several fine specimens; the talk will include what the main dangers are and look at some local examples.

Thursday 8th October, 7:30pm – AGM + Newbury in 2020

Newbury Society chairman David Peacock will be reviewing the past year; talking about Newbury today, some of its attractions, and the range of challenges it faces.

Thursday 12th November, 7:30pm – Mike Robinson: Changes in Agriculture since the Great War

This talk will cover agriculture over the period from after the end of World War 1 up to the present day, with some references to local agriculture; and will therefore cover the period that most people are able to relate to. It will include references to the foundation of the industry, and a review of the future of the industry, with challenges from global warming and changing dietary preferences.

We hope to be able to reschedule any talks we are unable to hold this year in 2021. This includes those we had planned for April and May, on William Marshal and on Newbury Traffic Schemes.

THE NEWBURY SOCIETY – OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE 2019/20

President: Richard Benyon Vice President: Garry Poulson

OFFICERS

Chairman: David Peacock 01635 524017 chairman@newbury-society.org

Treasurer: Chris Marriage

Secretary: Graham Smith 01635 580356 secretary@newbury-society.org

(also Membership Administrator, Bulletin Editor & Waterways Representative)

COMMITTEE Dr. Paul Bryant

Yolande Fothergill

John Handy (Trees and Landscaping Advisor)

Conservation Area Appraisals – Signs of Progress?

As we have reported before, very few of West Berkshire's 53 conservation areas are properly protected from inappropriate development because they lack adequate documentation on why they have been designated.

Just before the Coronavirus pandemic took hold, an initiative was started by the Council in association with the West Berkshire Heritage Forum (of which the Society is a member) to involve community groups such as local societies and parish councils in researching and framing these documents ('appraisals').

For each conservation area, a small team will be needed to research and write the Appraisal, in a form which satisfies planning guidance from West Berkshire Council and Historic England. This could be a major benefit in terms of protecting local heritage, but is a very specific process which requires training, best suited to those who know their own area well.

We would like to put together a group to make progress on these. Some members of Newbury Town Council are keen to get involved, and even if just two or three members of the Society came forward we could set up a working group and make progress.

Newbury's conservation areas include the whole of Newbury town centre (from near Waitrose down to the Newtown Road cemetery, all as one area in its own right); along the Kennet and Avon Canal on both sides of the town centre (two areas, K & A Newbury East and West); Shaw Road (including Smith's Crescent); Donnington Square; and Stroud Green; and there are additional conservation areas at Speen and Shaw-cum-Donnington.

The first area we envisage tackling is the Kennet and Avon canal corridor on the east of Newbury town centre: from Victoria Park to past the bridge which takes Hambridge Road over the Canal. If we can put a team or teams in place, we will be ready to get stuck in when the lockdowns associated with the pandemic are over. Any volunteer can opt to be involved in the team for a particular area. If you are interested in helping, please contact David Peacock (01635 524017 or chairman@newbury-society.org) in the first instance.

Restoring a Box Tomb

Paul Bryant, March 2020



As the name suggests, a box tomb is an oblong monument usually in a church yard. I hasten to add that the body is 6 feet under and not inside the monument. The tomb I have restored is in Shaw-cum-Donnington church yard and is that of Edward Valentine Stead who died in 1790. The photo (left) shows the state of the tomb before restoration. Stead's history is a story for another day.

There are three reasons why it was falling to pieces. First there is a large yew tree nearby and the roots have distorted the foundations. Second it was invaded by ivy that forced the stone slabs apart. Third the land is soft and distorts.

A box tomb has a brick core. The stone slabs slot together and are held in place with metal straps secured with lead. This is so that the tomb is easy to take apart to introduce new inhabitants. With time the metal straps corrode and break and also often break the slabs as the tomb distorts. Ideally the whole tomb should be dismantled and rebuilt but with my unaided effort that would not be possible so it was a 'make do and mend' process. The first job was to remove the side panels and then repair the brickwork so that the various parts could be supported. Many of the bricks were rotted and so quite a lot of new material was needed. Ideally it should have been rebuilt with lime mortar but I made do with normal cement. The slabs on top of the tomb are massive and all that could be done was to knock them into some sort of alignment but with the distorted foundations the top is not flat. The next job was to replace the side slabs. These were secured with galvanized steel strips secured with rawl plugs and screws. With the distortion in the foundation alignment was impossible so the gaps had to be filled with cement. The last job was to replace the coping stones between the side slabs and the slabs on top. These are supported on the side slabs and the repaired brickwork. Again these were secured with cement. Whilst the resultant tomb is a bit wonky to the cursory glance it looks quite good and should last a good few more years as long as the ivy and roots do not re-destroy it. The final edifice is shown on the right.

