



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

The Newbury Society

www.newbury-society.org.uk

1973-2023 – 50th Anniversary Year

May 2023 Bulletin

Birth of the Newbury Society



Maureen Jobbins (NWN 1974)

In 1972 the Town Mills in Newbury were demolished. For centuries there had been mills on the site, behind St Nicolas' Church, probably dating back to Anglo-Saxon times.

A developer put forward plans for a modern 66-bedroom hotel on the site. Maureen Jobbins decided that she did not like what was proposed. She was an ex-Newbury Girls' Grammar School girl, who moved away from the area when she went to university, but coming back to Newbury regularly to visit her mother.

Having taken against this hotel in one of the most attractive parts of Newbury, she decided to organise a petition against it. The story was picked up by the Newbury Weekly News, and by the time she handed her petition in to Newbury Mayor Wilfred Cannings in April it had collected over 3,000 signatures.

The interest around the petition led to calls to create a Civic Society for Newbury, and a preliminary meeting was held at Newbury Library (the old library, in Cheap Street). It was decided to hold a public meeting at Newbury Town Hall to launch The Newbury Society in June 1973.

The public meeting was held in the Council Chamber on June 13, and the guest speaker was from the national umbrella organisation, then called the Civic Trust. The headline on the report in the Newbury Weekly News read "Society formed to save the town's best features." The first committee was elected, chaired by Mrs Jobbins, and 60 people joined the Society at the meeting.

This was not a one-issue Society; there were many parallel concerns at this time. One was with the quality of the parts of the Kennet Centre which had been built so far ("phase 1"). Another was – as Newbury Borough Council was just about to be abolished in the reorganisation of local government – to give a clear voice to Newbury residents to help defend the character and heritage of the town. And the roads network was under review, with proposals for the dual-carriageway "Sandleford Link," from what is now the Burger King roundabout up the hill to the junction with Monks Lane and Newtown Road.

By the autumn of 1973 a programme of Newbury Society meetings was in place, including a discussion of the Sandleford Link, and a talk from Keith Poole about Tudor Newbury.

Maureen Jobbins, whose home was in Harpenden, Herts., was not well even when she launched her petition. During 1973 she went back and forth into hospital, continuing the work by sending letters to the committee from her convalescent home. Her health forced her to resign as chairman late in the year, shortly before her death in January 1974. The obituary in the NWN states "It was largely Mrs Jobbins' drive that led to the formation of the Newbury Society..." Newbury owes her a lot.

**50th Birthday Event – Shaw House, 7-9pm Saturday 10th June
– see page 2**

Dates for Your Diary – 2023

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 11th May, 7:30pm – Simon Barnett: BBOWT in West Berkshire

The Berkshire Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) took over the management of West Berkshire Council's main countryside sites, including Snelsmore and Greenham commons and the Thatcham Nature Discovery Centre, at the beginning of 2014. Simon will be reviewing the way in which the management of the sites has evolved since then and highlighting some of the wildlife and plants that make the sites special. Simon was Countryside Manager at West Berks Council for nearly 14 years and is one of the Council staff who transferred to BBOWT when it took over the management of the sites. He is now one of the land managers for Berkshire. His lifelong obsession with wildlife, particularly wildflowers, trees, birds and invertebrates, developed largely as a result of growing up in a small village on the edge of Salisbury Plain and then in a small community in the North Wessex Downs on the Hants/Wilts border doing the usual things that youngsters do.

Saturday 10th June, 7:00-9:00pm at Shaw House, Church Road, Shaw, Newbury RG14 2DR

Celebrating 50 Years of the Newbury Society

An evening with food and wine

Advance booking required, tickets £10 – see separate form.

The Newbury Society was formed at a public meeting held in Newbury Town Hall council chamber on 13th June 1973. This is a chance to meet and reunite, and share memories of the people and the achievements of the Society over 50 years. The event will be held at Shaw House, the Tudor mansion which is one of the architectural gems of the Newbury area, built for the Dolman family and familiar to many for much of the 20th century as part of Shaw House School: a perfect venue for a Society which aims to stand up for the heritage and amenities of the Newbury area.

Thursday 14th September, 7:30pm – Jane Burrell: Newbury Art and Artists

An illustrated talk which will look at the life and work of some local artists, as well as the depictions of local scenes by others. It will include fine and decorative art, with the emphasis on the former. Among the artists covered will be JMW Turner, Joseph Toomer (thrice Mayor of Newbury), William Gore, Fred Hall, Victor Corden, Christopher Hall and John Perkin.

Jane Burrell is a retired museum curator with interests in local history, Speen Church, Newbury Quakers, poetry of the Great War, the history of The Abbey School Reading, and the Inter-testamental period.

Thursday 12th October, 7:30pm – AGM + David Peacock: Newbury in 2023

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 9th November, 7:30pm – Dave Stubbs: Lord Falkland, his life, times, death and memorial

There must be many people in West Berkshire who pass the massive granite obelisk at the top of 'Wash Hill' and have little or no idea of its origins, the man it was named after or even any connection with the Falkland Islands.

Having become immersed in the story of the First Battle of Newbury after digging up a musket ball in his back garden, Dave Stubbs, long-time resident and erstwhile 'local bobby' for Wash Common has recently spent time looking at the fascinating character of Lucius Cary, 2nd Viscount Falkland, who he was, why as a politician he was even fighting in the battle and why his death is commemorated in one of the biggest English Civil War monuments – and how this became only the second property taken into custody of the fledgling National Trust in 1897.

Local elections: West Berkshire Council and Newbury Town Council

May's local elections saw control of West Berkshire Council pass from the Conservatives to the Liberal Democrats. The Lib Dems now hold 29 of the 43 seats on the council, with the Conservatives on 11. Of the five Newbury wards, four (Newbury Central, Newbury Clay Hill, Newbury Greenham and Newbury Speen) elected only Lib Dems, while at Newbury Wash Common a Green Party councillor emerged with the two Lib Dems elected there: so 11 of the 12 district councillors representing Newbury and adjoining areas are Liberal Democrats. All seven district councillors for Thatcham are also Liberal Democrats.

West Berkshire Council has many responsibilities relating to heritage and local amenities. It takes the planning decisions, and is also responsible for planning policy. As most of Newbury town centre is a conservation area, it is responsible for the awaited Appraisal which would guide future development in this area. It also owns much of the Faraday Road area (the London Road Industrial Estate, LRIE), where its development plans have proved controversial. The council is a unitary authority, created in 1998.

Newbury Town Council remains in Liberal Democrat control, now with 21 Liberal Democrats and two Green Party councillors. Although it has little power, it has a greater opportunity to work alongside West Berkshire Council.

Newbury Town Council can express its view on planning issues, but has no power to decide. Through its Heritage Working Group, it has been responsible for the town's Blue Plaques (which The Newbury Society has supported financially), and for the dendro-dating of a number of Newbury buildings. The latter has revealed that the former Tudor Cafe (Côte Brasserie) was built in the 1490s, during the reign of Henry VII; and that the old Pearce's almshouses in West Mills (near the swing bridge) were built earlier in the 15th century.

Newbury Town Council was created in 1997, reinstating a council for the town for the first time since the 1970s, when Newbury Borough Council was abolished.

Appeal for photographs and memories

This is an appeal for old photographs of people or events in the 50-year history of the Newbury Society.

We are interested in any good photographs of people who were active on behalf of the Society, including members of the committee at any time; and we are interested in all periods, although we would particularly like more from the 1970s and 1980s.

Ideally, could you please scan anything to the best quality, and then email them, one at a time, to chairman@newbury-society.org.uk or secretary@newbury-society.org.uk. If you have memories of the Society which you want to put on the record, please send them to the same address.

If this is easier, please write or send photographs (with your name and address on the back) to David Peacock at 140 Boundary Road, Newbury RG14 7NX. Otherwise, if you have photographs or anything else connected with the history of the society, please bring them along to show people on the evening of June 10.

Image right: Jacqueline Webb, one of the original committee members, d. 2021 (family photo taken in 2018)



THE NEWBURY SOCIETY – OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE 2022/23

President: Lord Benyon Vice President: Garry Poulson

OFFICERS

Chairman, Planning Spokesman and Local History Advisor:

David Peacock 01635 524017 chairman@newbury-society.org.uk

Treasurer and Membership Administrator:

Mike Hood 07775 800183 treasurer@newbury-society.org.uk
& membership@newbury-society.org.uk

Secretary, Bulletin Editor and Waterways Representative:

Graham Smith 01635 580356 secretary@newbury-society.org.uk

COMMITTEE

Dr Paul Bryant

John Handy (Trees & Landscaping
Advisor)

Chris Marriage

Garry Poulson

Our aims over the decades

The aims of The Newbury Society have remained fairly steady across five decades. Here are some of the words which have been used to describe them since 1973:

1973: "The determined aim of The Newbury Society is to work for the retention of Newbury's remaining character and identity as an historic market town while in no way impeding its economic growth. Indeed, it is the past wealth of the town which has given us so many beautiful buildings. The new wealth coming into Newbury should, in our view, continue our fine architectural tradition. Economic growth and good architecture should go hand in hand; the one complementing the other. Our intention is to see our fine old buildings harmonised with first-class new ones which should show respect for the architectural tradition of the town."

1976: "As the town loses more and more of its older buildings, its character and soul disappears with them."

1979: "In the midst of rapid and sometimes ill-planned and unsympathetic development, Newbury has yet managed to retain a great deal of its original charm and character. This is typified in the fine main street with handsome buildings, the old bridge giving glimpses of river and canal and the grouping of ancient tiled roofs. Walk along the canal, view the cottages at West Mills, St. Nicolas' church, and the broad sweep of water eastward between the park and the wharf with its fine old granary. No, the heart of Newbury is still intact and no-one should wish to destroy it."

1987: "As Newbury continues to grow and prosper, the pressure on open spaces is enormous. The Society, since its inception, has always jealously guarded its parks and development-free areas. These range from the small green oasis in the town centre like the churchyard of St Nicolas and Northbrook Street Methodist Church to larger areas such as Goldwell and Victoria Parks."

1991: "Newbury should remain a pleasant town for all who live here and come here. For this reason, a major continuing object of The Newbury Society is to build pride in our town, so that all will share the wish to retain and improve what is good in and around it:

- the market-town atmosphere, with a thriving town centre interspersed with architectural gems.
- the rich history expressed in so many of its buildings.
- the waterways heritage and the unique canal and River Kennet landscape.
- the green spaces near the town centre."

2002: "Our mission statement is to make Newbury a better place in which to live, work and play..."