

Isle of Wight Society Newsletter

December 2013

Issue No 114



ISLE OF WIGHT HERITAGE CONFERENCE



On Saturday 23rd November the Isle of Wight Society co-hosted an Island Heritage Conference at Osborne House. Representatives from various Island Museums and Heritage Centres came together to listen to speakers in the morning. In the afternoon workshops were held to form an Action Plan to carry out the Island Heritage Strategic Framework.

The Isle of Wight Council can no longer spend the money it would like to on our Island Heritage. The Heritage Service is therefore seeking partners to help promote

Island Heritage in future years.

Rob Flower, general manager of English Heritage here on the Island spoke of the problem of raising sufficient funding to carry out the daily running of an estate such as Osborne House. Soon to become a charity, Osborne will be able to plough back profits into the estate. £2.5 million will be needed each year, with additional grants being sought for capital projects such as the restoration of Swiss Cottage which is underway at present. The aim there is to attract new customers and

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The Isle of Wight Society was formed in 1969 to stimulate interest in the beauty, history and character of the Island, and to encourage high standards of Planning, Building Development and Conservation. The Society is affiliated to the national Civic Voice, and is a Registered Charity, No. 276986.

HERITAGE CONFERENCE—*Continued*

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raise more funds, providing better interpretation at every opportunity. At Swiss Cottage there will be opportunities for volunteers to help with this, joining the band of volunteers already helping with the gardens.

On the wider concerns of English Heritage, Rob revealed an interesting figure. **Per head of population, the Isle of Wight has more buildings “At Risk” than any other authority.** On the 10th of October there were twenty two Island buildings on this list.

David Thornton of the DMO (Destination Manage Organisation) which has as its website “Visit Isle of Wight” has the task of improving the Island’s tourism figures. These went up over the last year thanks in part to the weather, with a 37% rise in short breaks. DMO links the Council, Chamber of Commerce, Southern Vectis and the Ferry companies etc. Joint marketing pays dividends. In the last year they have spent £1million promoting the Island. **They aim to spend £4 million over the next four years encouraging an extra 300,000 visitors to make stays on the Island, which will increase revenue far more than day trips to the Island.**

Next year Visit Isle of Wight will be promoting Heritage on the Isle of Wight. Any organisation involved in Heritage should give as much publicity information as possible to their website such as trips, tours, walks and talks. We need a map of the Island marketing Heritage. We need to bring history to life. David suggested that we consider the visitor as a time traveller – from dinosaurs to rockets. The economic value of our Heritage must be realised.

Robert Miles from Quay Arts Centre spoke about the 90,000 people who visit that cultural hub every year. They have submitted a bid to present an Island-wide game that will involve people physically exploring their Heritage. He wishes to promote the fascinating heritage and culture of the Island. He sees that as our “Brand.” Culture and heritage need to

be shared.

For the Isle of Wight Society, David Burdett was asked to give a case study in partnership, and spoke of the links between the East Cowes Heritage Centre run by the IWS, and the IWC Heritage service.

Richard Smout from the Heritage Service spoke of the existing links between the Council and the voluntary sector. Museums interested in accreditation get together in a Museums Forum with the IWC, and heritage groups join in a Heritage Forum. The Family History Society work hard with the records office to transfer the Births, Marriages and Deaths Index on line. Richard worked closely with the Milne Society and Carisbrooke Castle Museum over the Milne Exhibition and information panel. The IWS hosted the Milne information on our website, well worth examining to see this.

The IWC Records Office have the British Museum breathing over their shoulder with regard to the storage of their archives. The partnership that the Records Office have with those who donate material relies on trust. There must be mutual respect. Much is being asked of volunteers – who can walk away from a job. Their purpose is to make things better for heritage on the Island.

After lunch workshops were held on three themes: Heritage Tourism, Heritage Hub and Heritage Collections. They were led by John Allen (Chamber of Commerce), Esme Ballard (West Wight) and Corina Westwood (IWC Collections). Members of the IWS helped by acting as scribes as the various issues from the draft strategic plan were examined and problems and action plans discussed. These went back to a plenary session led by Astrid Davies from IWC. Various key points were brought forward to form an achievable action plan, and Astrid extracted names of people who were prepared to work on this which was encouraging.

We await Astrid’s final list of these action points, and will inform the IWS members of these when we have them.

It's not as easy as it looks from Jenny Kendall

Am I alone in enjoying spotting continuity mistakes in TV programmes? Recently I have had two experiences which have made me appreciate the difficulties of filming and editing.

More at home behind the camera than in front of it, I have 'performed' in two heritage-related recordings.

The first was an interview about going to school in the 1950s at Grange Road Primary, East Cowes for a DVD 'Going Home' produced by Rob Lipscombe in collaboration with East Cowes Heritage.

Others who contributed their memories were Harry Price (Trinity House), Maurice Mabey (Saunders Roe radio engineer), Nora and Ian Wray (Grocers), Robert Hall (schoolboy and butcher's son), Ray Wheeler (Saunders Roe designer) & Bob Saunders (J.S.White's joinery apprentice).

I was amazed how much footage was shot to produce the 50 minute DVD (a masterpiece of editing!) which is available for £6 from East Cowes Heritage Centre.

I thought my 'film' career was over but in October (2013) I was contacted by Pier Productions of Brighton who were making a programme for the BBC and were short of a local historian (Sarah was on holiday!).

The piece is about Frank James' Hospital and with only a couple of days notice (they were desperate) I furiously revised everything I could find about the subject.

I turned up at Frank James' at the allotted time just as a mighty thunderstorm broke. My contribution was to take place in a car and at the seafront, but fortunately they were running behind time so I stayed dry in the hospital (such a sad sight) while filming continued inside. The weather cleared and my turn came. Radio mic. securely fastened inside my top with gaffer tape, I was to be driven by the presenter, Tom Holland, to the seafront, chatting about FJ. However, Tom had not driven the car before (an old Morris Minor convertible), he didn't know where he was going and there was a cameraman squashed in the back seat. Stage fright kicked in and I staggered through a conversation hoping a) I was making sense,

b) we didn't hit anything/anybody & c) that the crunching gears could be edited out. With a slight detour to the ferry terminal we reached the seafront unscathed.

A short chat whilst sitting on the seawall followed, and then a set of 'noddies', i.e. being filmed in turn nodding sagely for editing purposes. More filming walking to the car, getting in and shutting the door (from several angles) completed my contribution. Of course, none of things I had revised came up in conversation and most of my answers were things I already knew or creative guesswork. All credit to the interviewer and crew for keeping positive and encouraging in the face of amateur performance.

The whole recording at Frank James' went on all day with various interviewees and more material was filmed at the Town Hall on another occasion.

The result of all this will be one small slot in a half hour programme on BBC1 at the beginning of December. At the time of writing, this is in the future but by the time this newsletter is published the programme will have aired and you can judge for yourselves how good the editing is!

I shall still be entertained by continuity errors, but will be more forgiving when amateur interviewees are involved!

Subscriptions

The Isle of Wight Society annual subscriptions will become due in January 2014, and should be paid to the treasurer by 31st March, 2014. Payment may be made direct to the Treasurer, (address on page 7) or by bank transfer to:

Lloyds Bank Limited
Bank code:30-95-99
Account No: 00331217

At the AGM in May, it was agreed to that the subscription rates for 2014 will be:

Full	£.00	Joint Full	£15.00
Senior	£7.00	Joint Senior	£13.00
Corporate	£20.00	Junior	Free

Town Halls – The centre of the town?

Newtown, Newport and Brading all boasted the right to elect two Members of Parliament prior to the Reform Act of 1832. Each had municipal buildings to match.

Newtown Town Hall was built in the 1690s, probably on earlier foundations. As the town had dwindled in size when the estuary silted up, the election of M.P.s was in the hands of two wealthy families who shared out the parliamentary position. There were few constituency duties! After 1832 the Town Hall became a school, then a residence, then fell into ruin until rescued by the Ferguson Gang for the National Trust in 1933. It remains an iconic building.

Brading's situation was similar. It had been an important port on a sheltered harbour. A suitable Town Hall was constructed, with the "lock up" beneath it and covered space for a market. In 1874 an Act was passed that reclaimed Brading Haven, leaving Brading high and dry. The old Town Hall has been preserved and is a quaint reminder of the heritage of the town.

Newport had a similar building for use as a Town Hall until the Guildhall was built on the site. Designed by John Nash in 1813, it gave the town a suitably impressive building for the status of Newport as the capital of the Island. The Guildhall (originally known as the Town Hall) looked much better before the asymmetrical clock tower was added to celebrate Queen Victoria's golden jubilee in 1887. From the balcony the results of Parliamentary Elections could be proclaimed to the crowds waiting below. The building was converted, with some difficulty, into court rooms in the early 1970s. Down stairs now houses the excellent Museum of Island History – open Tuesdays and Saturdays.

As other communities grew, they too wanted the kudos and facility of a Town Hall. Ryde – the up and coming residential area in Georgian times, constructed an impressive building that could host grand balls and concerts, with a Council Chamber to match. Now the building, and the cost of its upkeep, is no longer required by the council. The residents of Ryde wait to see what will happen to the Town Hall.

Cowes Town Hall was bombed during WWII, but East Cowes Town Hall remains. The funds to build this were raised by Mrs Amy White, wife of the shipyard owner John Samuel White. She laid the foundation stone in 1896. Her intentions were that the building should be used by the local council for their meetings, for entertainment, political meetings, fundraising events and society functions. East Cowes is lucky. While the impressive gates and railings disappeared during WWII for re-cycling, all the people of the town can still use and appreciate the facilities today.

Building a Town Hall has always been a large community investment. The size of the building could reflect status, but funds for upkeep of the building need to be available. If they are, then the building can still be a valuable centre for activities in the town.



Cowes Group

The Cowes Group members were invited to the Group AGM on Thursday 21st November. This was the first meeting since April when ten members had been present. The outing in August that had been proposed by the Cowes Group was attended by only one of the Group, the other 11 being from East Cowes and Ryde.

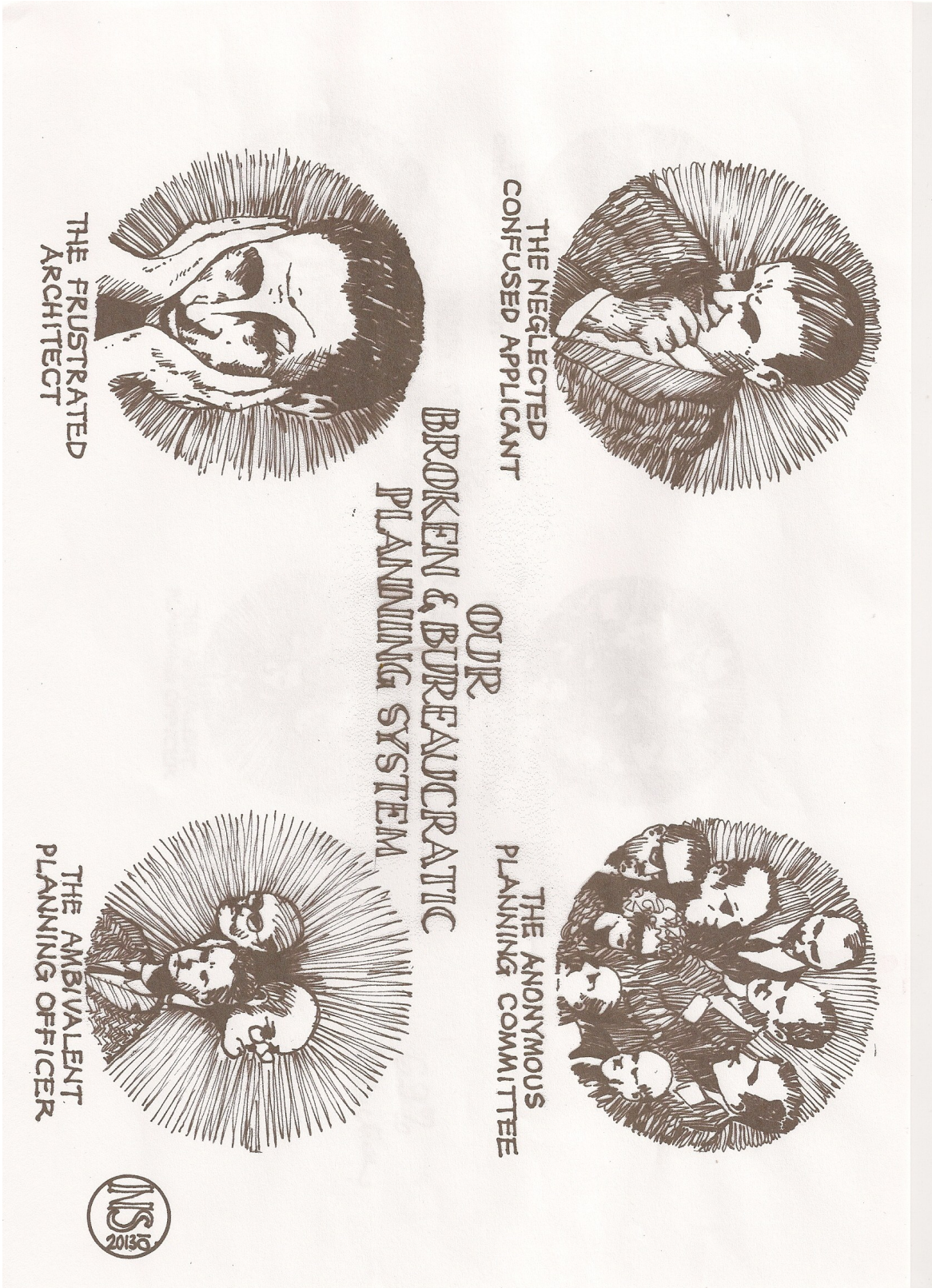
Just seven members attended the AGM where the proposal was put that the Group should no longer hold regular meetings. If there was a specific subject that needed discussing a meeting could be called by any of the Society from the Cowes Area.

Newman Smith had previously indicated that he would continue to monitor events in the Cowes Area and report to the monthly executive meetings.

All members are now invited to attend the monthly meetings held on the fourth Tuesday of the month at the East Cowes Heritage Centre.

The meeting agreed that the Group funds should be transferred to the Executive but retained as a separate fund for three years in case there is a revival of the Cowes Group.

Who is the Master?
Who can provide the Answers?



Goodbye, Cowes by Colin Arnold

The air-raid siren was screaming, and German aeroplanes were droning overhead. Whistling bombs and explosions sounded, as my parents made haste to the shelters. I have no memory of the flying brick-dust or the fear of that night, but my father was running as he carried me to safety of an air-raid shelter. He wore an army greatcoat over his jacket, and a piece of shrapnel hit him in the back, cutting an L-shaped tear, right through to his vest. The raid on Cowes was in 1942 and caused extensive damage and a great number of deaths.

I was only four at the time, but can remember entering a large hall full of townsfolk in family groups; some bedded down, others sitting or standing, with the appearance of refugees. Women were talking about who had been killed in the raid and discussing the grim details of what had happened.

Later, by daylight, we were on a bus travelling towards Sandown. Our black cat, *Tibs*, was in a wicker basket, in the luggage rack. The frightened creature was desperate to get out, and I saw its head and paws appear as the lid lifted. It miaowed feebly, only to be thrust back into the basket, under a secured lid.

We stayed at my aunt's house at Lake, in the old farm's tithe cottage owned by Major Perowne, who was also the owner of Lake Farm. Later, we moved to rented accommodation in Newcomen Road, Lake.

Our favourite game, then, was playing at soldiers, and my own favourite occupation was listening to the radio. Tommy Handley's "ITMA" - *It's That Man Again* - was the most popular programme for me, with its comic characters.

The later course of the war brought forth the flying bombs, nicknamed *doodlebugs*. These rockets were sent over from Nazi Germany in 1944, and once the rocket engine stopped the missile sped to earth and exploded. It seemed that Hitler was determined to root us out, for yet another bomb was coming our way.

My two brothers were babies at the time - twins - and the whole family was sleeping in

the caged protection of a Morrison indoor shelter.

I remember the droning noise of the rocket bomb as it passed overhead. My father was standing outside, looking up as the engine noise ceased. Soon the rocket would hurtle to earth. My mother was screaming louder than I had ever heard before: "Albert! Get in here! Albert!"

"All right! All right!" It seemed a casual reply as he came inside. Not long after that, it was anything but "all right". A tremendous explosion shattered every window in our road. The rocket had landed only two streets away, at the end of Denness Road, in Stag Road. (The site of the 50s Police Station.)

Next day, I was running around with some older lads, investigating the damage and looking for shrapnel. Every night, from that time onwards, whenever an air-raid raid was pending, we took our nightwear and bedding up to the underground shelters at the top of Lake Hill.

Eventually, we moved to a council house at Fort Mews, Sandown. By then, the word *Victory* was paramount in everybody's mind, and appeared everywhere as the war came to an end.

I had a book called *Who's who at the Zoo*. On each page, all the zoo animals were giving the Churchill *Victory Vee* sign, with fingers, arms and legs.

The King's message was heard on the radio, by everybody. It was the summer of 1945, and at last the war was over and the tunes of *Johnny comes Marching Home Again* came to us over our acid-cell wireless sets.

Celebration Union flags fluttered in abundance from house windows. We were proud to shout "Rule Britannia" in those bright days of celebration.

Isle of Wight Society Information

Chairman: Helena Hewston, The Old Station, Wellow Road, Ningwood. Tel: 760833.

Treasurer: John Barnes, 51 Cambridge Road, East Cowes. Tel: 293010.

East Cowes Group

meet at East Cowes Heritage Centre on the fourth Tuesday of each month at 7.30 pm, except August and December. All Society members welcome to attend.

Chair: Mrs Sarah Burdett (296718)

Treasurer: Mrs Joyce Scandling

Cowes Group and Ryde Group no longer hold regular meetings

Newsletter

The Isle of Wight Society Newsletter is published twice a year. The Editor is always happy to include items from members. Contact the Treasurer for details.

The contact address for the Society is:

East Cowes Heritage Centre, 8 Clarence Road, East Cowes, PO32 6EP. Tel:(01983) 280310.

e-mail: eastcowesheritagecentre@onwight.net

Web site address is: isleofwightsociety.org.uk

An Isle of Wight Society Statement of Concern

The loss of character and focal points of towns and villages on the Island.

Members of the Society have been observing the development and changes around the Island for over 40 years. We have reached a point where the cumulative effect of business and social changes is leading the loss of focal buildings with traditional functions that gave a community its individual character.

The arrival of out-of-town supermarkets with large car parks has had a detrimental effect on town centre retail areas. A significant number of churches have been sold as the cost of maintenance rises and the size of congregations decreases. Across the country pubs are closing or changing to restaurants. The banks no longer aim to impress by using buildings of stature. There are few Town Halls active as part of the community. Neither Councillors nor the commercial sector have seen any viability in investing in the High Streets to make them attractive places for residents to go about their daily business.

So far this is a trend but, especially in the evenings, some town and village centres are remarkably quiet. Residents do their own thing and there is little communal activity. This gradually leads to a loss of Civic Pride in being part of vibrant community. As the ageing population and increase in single parent families leads to more residents leading lonely lives, the decline in community spirit will lead to a marked decline in the quality of life.

The Society feels that this is a subject that should be considered in depth by Councillors and Planners, so that the trend is considered and appropriate action taken. The Society will look at the Core Strategy Plan and Area Action Plans to see whether amendments or additions are needed to ensure our Island communities are enjoyable places to live in years to come.

Southern Comfort Conference—*from Wilf Curtis* ***Protection of Historic Character and the pressure for growth***

I felt extremely privileged when I was asked to attend the Southern Comfort get-together hosted by the Guildford Society. This meeting is for Civic Societies in our region to offer support and encouragement to each other.

I must confess that I was very interested by the recent successes of various groups. Farnborough, Portsmouth and Guildford, all recounted achievements despite pressures from developers. To protect historic character, it appeared that the main importance was communication strategy. Everybody referred to their website and its importance to their success.

Groups discussed their activities. Having a “Master Plan” to protect historic buildings was seen as important, and, to this end, public meetings, education and reaching out to

other local groups took place.

It was imperative that the area had a good Council Conservation Officer, or life was an uphill battle. Some societies felt that they had been instrumental in encouraging their Council to employ the right person.

A Local List of historical sites, not already Listed Grade 1, 2* or 2, was very helpful, and we are lucky to have this on the Island already. (But are there any omissions?)

Among the speakers during the day was a local architect who was very keen to get architectural values recognised, and felt that the public should gain pleasure from architecture. She also referred to the importance of Conservation Awards, which we have been handing out for 40 years! RIBA are now becoming more involved in our awards, and we look forward to the next Awards presentation.

Isle of Wight Society Conservation Awards 2013

Have you seen any restored properties or conservation work over the last year?

Have you been driving past an old house and thought, “Wow, that looks better!”

Have you seen a small wall carefully repaired to return it to its original state?

Have you seen a building given a facelift?

We need to know of any properties, large or small, that we need to congratulate at our Conservation Awards Presentation on Friday 25th April 2014. This will be at the Royal Yacht Squadron, kindly sponsored by the Lord Lieutenant Major General Martin White, who will be presenting the awards. Tickets to the event will be available in February, and cost £8 to include welcoming drink and refreshments.

Let the Secretary to the Awards know any details of owners or builders, at East Cowes Heritage Centre, 8 Clar-

ence Road, East Cowes, PO32 6EP or by email to:

eastcowesheritagecentre@onwight.net

Entries can also be made on line, on the Society’s web site:

isleofwightsociety.org.uk

Completed entries must be received by 14th February 2014.



The Watch House, East Cowes, one of last year’s winners

