Visit to Salisbury

What a great day! The sun shone on the motorways cleared, and we arrived on time in the lovely city of Salisbury. Where to wander on such a delightful day?

Coffee first in the garden of Monkseaton House where “Sense and Sensibility” was filmed 20 years ago. How on earth did Emma Thompson get into that ball gown? And they had corsets underneath!

Lunch on the green gazing at Salisbury’s beautiful cathedral then on to the town’s museum to see the Turner Exhibition, a gift to the town by his only son. The paintings from his early years. The artist had worked for several architects, so his pencil and water colours of the cathedral are exquisite. A couple of the pictures had access on the frame where a little curtain was hung to protect the painting. Did you know that?

And so into the cathedral. Thunders still visiting to see their copy of the Magna Carta. There were candles, but, with the huge forecast increase in attendance, this was not enough. It needs to get its priorities right. For the moment, it is pressed against with a loss-making Christmas market - £40,000 deficit to date. All for an event that lasts just weeks. Yet Verulamium Park, with its lakes, is an all-year-round destination.

The Book Sale on 24 October in the Old Town Hall, in partnership with the Arc & Arc, to boost funds for the new museum and gallery, raised £1,700. Well done everybody!

News from the Clock Tower

Click St Albans’ 93 steps for great views. We are planning to do more throughout the year. It is with sadness we report the recent death of Father Michael Neighbour who worked for several architects, so his pencil and water colours of the cathedral are exquisite. And they had corsets underneath!

Forthcoming events 2016

Saturday/Sunday 23/24 January
Enjoy St Albans Weekend
Clock Tower opening
Climb St Albans’ 93 steps for great views. 2.00pm - 4.00pm FREE (provisional event - check nearer the time in the special programme)

Thursday 18 February
Daughters of St Albans
An illustrated talk by Elizabeth Eastwood from the City Guides.
The Cross Street Centre* Dagnall Street at 8.00pm - FREE

Thursday 17 March
Fleetville: A Game of Consequences
A talk by Michael Neighbour of Fleetville Diaries.
The Cross Street Centre* Dagnall Street at 8.00pm - FREE

Non-members are most welcome at our Cross Street evenings or to enquire about availability of seats on visits.

*Disabled parking only at The Cross Street Centre.

The Railfreight Petition of 11,500 signatures to not sell the land was handed in to County Hall on 10 November last. We await the decision.

It is a pity more members did not attend Elizabeth Eastwood’s superb talk (19 Nov) ‘Sons of St Albans’ - she came up with 26 local notables! Don’t miss ‘Daughters of St Albans’ on 18 Feb 2016 - see events

Membership Matters

To join or renew membership
Subscriptions remain unchanged and are renewable on 1 April each year
Individual £20
Family (2 or more) £45
Pensioner/Student/Unemployed £47
Residents’ Associations Free
Corporate £50

To join or renew membership, please contact the Membership Secretary, Bryan Hardon, tel: 01727 857574, or email bryanhardon@gmail.com or post to: 24 Monkis Horton Way, St Albans AL3 4HN

The Society acknowledges with gratitude the support of the following Corporate Members:

T&B (St Albans) Ltd
Debenhams Ottaway
Runbold Sedgwick
National Pharmaceutical Association
Christopher Place Shopping Centre
St Albans College

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To avoid any possible confusion or misunderstanding, members are respectfully asked that if they attend any meeting or activity where they declare they are a member of this Society, they make it clear that their attendance and any opinion expressed does not necessarily represent the views of the Society's Committee. The Committee can always be contacted for further explanation and update by any member. Also, the Society wishes to make it clear that when it is consulted about any plans or proposals, this should not automatically be deemed as leading to consent.

Planning functions in St Albans are under threat. We are gravely concerned over the Government’s latest move that could eventually emasculate local planning. This is covered in our article ‘Nineteen Eighty-Four and Big Brother’. Do not be deceived by the attempt at humour – this is deadly serious and threatens St Albans in its picturesque attraction and local democracy and decision-making. These new powers are, to use a local analog, ‘Grimmthorpe’ in their scope. The Society intends to raise the issue with Anne Main, our MP and Civic Vice, to which we are affiliated. The latter’s policy of advocating collaborative processes with developers is now surely too one-sided and an academic exercise.

We accept there is a need to build more houses, but, with the huge forecast increase in population, no one seems prepared to echange the two. Are our leaders so incompetent that they cannot connect these issues, or is it that they dare not do so? Meanwhile, none of the questions that we asked in the Summer newsletter regarding school budgets, house, health care and transport, have been answered. These need to be addressed in parallel with any housing developments in our area. Housing should not simply be imposed on the District with no regard for supporting infrastructure. It is simply not sustainable, which would be in itself a strong reason to reject more housing until these important issues are addressed.

The Buonconsiglio Italia dell in Lattimore Road will be known to many members. It is therefore pleasing to note the Planning Inspector, a Matthew Nunn, who actually seems to listen to what local people say in Appeals, turned down the proposed conversion of part of the building to residential. Back in April, when councillors on Planning Committee narrowly refused the application, one of its members, Cllr Packenham, was reported as saying that the decision was “ludicrous” and that it was a “weak case”. The application was appealed.

Fortunately, the Inspector saw that the shop provided jobs and a wide range of high quality foods not readily available nearby. It had also won a number of awards and was a “very popular and valued local facility”. Not so ludicrous and weak after all!
The government announced on 12 October that the two year temporary rule allowing offices to be automatically converted into flats is to become permanent. This prior approval clause, imposed onto the local planning system, means neither the council, nor any other authority, can object to the conversion of an office into a flat. Under the government’s plans, developers will then have carte-blanche power to convert any office into a flat, provided they meet certain criteria. The problem here is that our council has still not finalised its Local Plan. At this rate, the government might indeed kill off Localism! Memo to Civic Voice – this must not go unchallenged.

The Assault on Our Local Democracy

The government announced plans to end the right to appeal against a planning decision, meaning that developers will have carte-blanche power to convert any office into a flat, provided they meet certain criteria. The problem here is that our council has still not finalised its Local Plan. At this rate, the government might indeed kill off Localism! Memo to Civic Voice – this must not go unchallenged.

The City Assets and the City Neighbourhood Committee (CNC)

The cabinet of the council has decided to transfer certain ‘assets’, notably green spaces (other than Versailles Park which has been retained as a strategic asset), children’s play areas, public conveniences, and the Christmas lights in St Peter’s Street to the CNC. However, the council has not given the Government any indication that it intends to step in and dictate where new developments take place. It’s shades of Orwell’s “Nineteen Eighty-Four” and Big Brother. Some people find it hard to believe what’s happening. Whither Localism?

Developers must be rubbing their hands in glee. The need for an independent voice in the planning process has never been greater. No Room 101 here! Such was the monthly column for the Review in November. Things have moved on. The national press has since reported that: “Ministers have quietly given developers the right to be granted planning permission in areas marked for new housing, without a council’s say, in a move that could allow brownfield sites to be reclaimed and used for new homes irrespective of their design. Developers then talk to local politicians or, indeed, bother to engage with the community? The government will have killed off Localism? Memo to Civic Voice – this must not go unchallenged.

The Commissions

The Trevelyan Prize

A new feature this year was the introduction of the Trevelyan Prize. This is awarded annually to a project that has achieved the finest quality in terms of conservation/restoration.