

## RETFORD TOWN HALL

One hundred and fifty years ago, in January 1868, the grand, new Town Hall opened with a splendid ball and dinner: guests ascended the grand staircase under the crystal chandeliers, which had come from Rufford Abbey; they saw the ornate gilt chandeliers in the new council chamber, which had come from the old town hall, and in the ballroom the crest of the Borough of East Retford, under which was the motto "Vetustas Dignitatem Generat' (Antiquity Generates Dignity). A tea party was held in the Butter Market for the townspeople's wives and for the Sunday School children.



Similar celebrations had taken place almost eighteen months earlier, when in June, 1866, the foundation stone was laid by the Mayor. The church bells rang, and, we're told, the 'junketings' went on for two weeks!

It was the previous Mayor, Alderman John Smith, who had been the driving force behind the construction of this splendid Victorian Romanesque building, and, later, in 1868, a portrait of him was presented, in recognition of his contribution to the scheme. He had argued that the Georgian town hall – it stood opposite, about where the roundabout now is – fine as it was, was no longer fit for purpose and inconveniently situated: 'It would conduce greatly to the general accommodation and work out a striking improvement to the Town if the present Town Hall were to be taken down and one of more commodious and convenient size erected on a site to be provided for that purpose and that Butter, Corn and Meat markets be provided in annexes therewith'.

Advertisements were placed, inviting architects to submit plans. That of Bellamy and Hardy of Lincoln was chosen; they had designed Grimsby and Ipswich town halls, so Retford knew what to expect! The builder chosen was Thomas

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## KINGS' PARK

Our Newsletter for 2017 included quite a lot of information about recent developments in Kings' Park. Below you will find out about its origins.



The site for the original Park, which occupies the land from Chancery Lane to the River Idle, was donated by Mrs M J Huntsman of West Retford Hall in 1937.

A public appeal by the Borough of East Retford raised £2,000 (equivalent to about £129,600 today) towards the estimated cost of £8,000 (equivalent to about £518,400 today) to develop the Park.

Because of its low-lying nature the land was raised between 1937 and 1938, using the town's refuse with landscaping on top.

The design and costings for the Park were provided by Mr H W Tee, who was the Borough Engineer and Surveyor for the Metropolitan Borough of Woolwich.

Quotations were received from a number of local companies including Mr B R Neale, Mr G F Gyles, Messrs Curtis and Howell Ltd and W Neal and Son.

Some of the most expensive items were:

- To provide and lay Bowling Green £488.50
- To provide and lay natural rock in rockery and plant with rock plants and alpines £754.80
- To provide and erect thatched pavilion £427.82

The layout for the Park is very similar to the present design, with the exception of the children's games and children's gymnasium, which were sited on the now extended car park for ASDA.

The Park was officially opened on 29 June 1938 to commemorate the reign of King George V and the coronation of King George VI. A further donation of the land by R H Williamson to the west of the River Idle allowed for this

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# CHAIRMAN'S CHAT

At the end of another year, I think we can look back again with a sense of satisfaction and pride in what we have achieved. 2017 was once more a busy year for the Society with lots to occupy the attention of our committee and, I hope, plenty of activities to keep members interested in what we do.



was shortlisted in the Historic Buildings category for the:

*'Painstaking rescue and restoration of the 18th century former coaching inn, with a characterful history associated with Dick Turpin, has given this once neglected, vandalised and vacant historic building a new lease of life and is an important addition to Retford's Heritage Trail'.*

Bob Lamb travelled to London to make a presentation in support of our submission at the Leadenhall Building (the 'Cheese Grater'). Although we didn't achieve first place this was a considerable achievement for the town. The overall winner was the University of Winchester Chapel, a truly amazing project.

Also in 2017 we saw the opening of the new Performance Area in Kings' Park with an all-weather, canopied performance stage. The Retford Civic Society worked again in partnership with Bassetlaw District Council officers and successfully brought in funding from Supporting Local Communities (Notts CC) – a £20k grant towards the project. The performance area was officially opened in August during the Steampunk Festival, and I led the procession from the Museum for that ceremony. The stage is already proving to be a real community asset and this will increase as performers realise its availability. It was also great news to hear that Kings'

Our Open Meetings attracted more members and friends than ever. In March, we were hugely entertained by Sit George Buchanan: his talk 'My Life at Hodssock Priory' was illustrated by beautiful photos, especially of the famous snowdrops, and realia, including a cricket bat made from willow grown on the estate and a costume worn by his great grandfather at a fancy dress ball in 1897. At the AGM in July, Carl Andrews, the Conservation Accredited Architect specialising in historic buildings who designed the recent extension to Trinity Hospital, gave a fascinating talk about the local buildings he had worked on. In October, we learned more about our Town Hall than we had ever known when Megan Doole, Building Historian, gave us the benefit of her detailed research. We have another three interesting speakers for you in 2018.

Retford Civic Society continues to be heavily involved in exciting projects to preserve our heritage and improve our town; the numerous and informative articles in this newsletters bear witness to this!

Early in 2017 the Society nominated The White Hart for a national design award following its restoration. It was with excitement that we learnt in April that 18 schemes from across England had been shortlisted by the expert judging panel for their high quality design and positive impact on the local community, and The White Hart was one of these schemes! It



Park had received a Green Flag Award for the 10th year running. This international award is a sign to the public that the space boasts the highest possible environmental standards, is beautifully maintained and has excellent visitor facilities.

Last year I mentioned that Bassetlaw District Council had launched a Blue Plaque Scheme to recognise important people who have lived in Bassetlaw. I am pleased to say that the first Blue Plaque under this scheme in Retford will be unveiled this year in recognition of Flt Lt Jim McCairns, a heroic pilot in WW1. He lived at 20 Chapelgate from 1930-39. (See article on p. ) We are working closely with Adrian Sumner, a member of Retford Civic Society, who is representing the local RAFA group as well. The Committee are compiling a list of other deserving people and would be happy to receive any recommendations.

It was good to see the fulfilment of a long-term aim to assist with the upgrade of the Lady Chapel at St Swithun's Church, to enable it to be used by the community as well as the Church. New independent heating has been installed, the whole area carpeted and the room is now enclosed with glass panels and doors and disabled access provided. Together with the attached kitchen this is now a pleasant place to hold a meeting or activity. Those who attended our Christmas Wine Tasting can testify to that. The old King Edward VI School building is now looking good and has been tastefully restored and landscaped. We are still left with three major concerns: Beardsall's Row, The Masons Arms and St Alban's Church, the latter not giving a good first impression of Retford. Meanwhile, the Civic Society has been beaver away behind the scenes. I believe we are influencing the situation and there are signs of movement. Please have

faith and offer a few prayers! Hopefully this year!! Our Planning Committee continues to monitor, comment on and discuss numerous planning applications whilst overseeing developments (see article on p. )

As part of on-going improvements to Retford's Heritage Trail, the Society has had restored, by local sign writer Jason Chapman, the old London and York and Garage and Stabling signs on the White Hart. People are really fascinated by the 144 1/2 miles to London!

Retford Civic Society took part in National Civic Day 2017 and invited schools to visit Retford Town Hall and to take part in the Town Heritage Trail on three days in June. The Mayor, Helen Richards, showed the mayoral robes and chain of office and explained her role in supporting the community. Deputy Mayor, Michael Storey and Councillors Caroline Troop and Alan Chambers were able to answer children's questions, while Civic Society members assisted by welcoming the schools and providing refreshments. Retford Primary Schools taking part were Carr Hill Primary, St Joseph's RC Primary, St Swithun's C of E Primary and Ordsall Primary School. It was a pleasure to see the interest and enthusiasm for Retford's heritage shown by the pupils. Heritage tours have also been undertaken with Thrumpton Primary School and a Heritage assembly in the school.

At Retford Charter Day in May the Civic Society had a stall on Carolgate to publicise our work and ran a children's Heritage Trail Treasure Hunt. Keira Wood was the winner after successfully 'finding' the treasure buried in the new Splash Pool area, obviously next to the pirate ship! She received a £20 book token. Interestingly, Keira and her parents had travelled by train from Worksop.

In September we organised our tenth Heritage Open Day, a great success that brought together so many organisations, and followed a theme of 'Dukes and Outlaws'. The launch of our new Heritage Trail Leaflet opened the proceedings at the Museum (See articles on p. ) This year, Heritage Open Day will be held on Saturday, 8th September 2018. Once again we have an enthusiastic committee planning the day. Please make a note in your diary, come along and support us and offer help for an hour or two if you can.

Two major litter picks took place during the year with an increasing number of participants enjoying the fellowship of working together and improving our local environment. Our efforts are really appreciated by BDC who have provided us with 30 additional high-viz vests for volunteers inscribed 'RETFORD CIVIC SOCIETY in partnership with Bassetlaw District Council'. Although the number of bags of rubbish remains high, it is noticeable that, overall, things are improving. The increased number of volunteers means that we are able to pick up litter over a larger area of the town. It was also noticeable that the number of plastic shopping bags being collected has gone down since the 5p charge came into place. Plastic bottles are a major problem – perhaps the solution is a returnable deposit system?



Bolham Manor gardens were open again under the National Garden Scheme in February. The money raised from refreshments was donated by Pam and Butch Barnsdale to the Retford Civic Society for projects in Retford. Once again many members visited and helped on the day (see p. )

Thanks to Pam for that, and also because, as always, she has worked tirelessly moving projects on with BDC, the Business Forum and other organisations, as well as applying for funding to finance future projects (see p. )

Our thanks to Joan Turner and Hilary Holdaway for organising our visits so well, and to all of our members who come along and join in so willingly with our raffles. A full programme for 2018 has already been planned.

I would also like to thank the editor of our Newsletter, Tina Jones, for producing such a professional publication and Pat Barnett for the Summer News Sheet. Barrie King continues to move us forward in regard to our website, as

well as through social media. A younger generation is now receiving information about our activities through Facebook.

We continue to support the Retford Business Forum, and a representative attends their meetings. The Forum's aim is to create an attractive image of Retford as a market town with individual shopping offering great value. They also hope to increase awareness over a wider area of Retford as a successful shopping environment and by doing so increase footfall. We support their efforts to improve the appearance and amenities of our town.

At times you might ask: 'Do we make a difference?' Surely anyone reading this Newsletter and the reports of last year's activities must be impressed by the range of Retford life with which we are actively

involved. As an organisation we can only achieve with your support. Even if you are unable to support physically, your continued membership gives us the finance to continue our work, and the greater the number of members we represent the more authority we have when negotiating.

Once again, I have thoroughly enjoyed my (tenth year) as your Chairman and feel really proud of what we achieved in 2017. It has been wonderful to see an increasing number of members who have responded to the calls for help – manning stalls, collecting litter and offering their skills and knowledge, etc to help improve the quality of life in our Retford. Thank you!

Special thanks go to our Committee, whose good humour, enthusiasm and hard work have enabled us to achieve so much over the years. I look forward to another successful year in 2018, and I do think this should be the Retford Civic Society motto – *'Onwards and Upwards'*.

Derek Turner

## RETFORD ROTARY CLUB IS BLOOMING FANTASTIC

Green-fingered successes were honoured with a presentation of awards for the best entries in the Retford-in-Bloom competition. A ceremony was held in the ballroom at Retford Town Hall; the awards were presented on behalf of the Civic Society by the President Elect of Retford Rotary Club, Eddie McGarvey. The Rotary Club of Retford – Percy Laws Memorial Fund – sponsored this year's event.

The annual contest captured the imagination and gardening skills of businesses, residents and school children. This year, certificates were awarded in four main categories: residential,

The winners of this year's Retford in Bloom are

### BEST FRONT GARDEN:

**East Ward:** Large Garden – 9 Welham Road.  
Small Garden – 155 Moorgate.

**West Ward:** Large Garden – 2A Ordsall Park Road.  
Small Garden – 9 West Park Place.

**North Ward:** Large Garden – 1 Redforde Park Road.  
Small Garden – 4 Clifton Way.

**South Ward:** Large Garden – 33 High Street, Ordsall.  
Small Garden – 26 The Oval, Ordsall.



### AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE:

Awards of excellence were presented to 17 Cornwall Road and Rectory Barn, Rectory Road for consistent high standards of floral display over a number of years.

### BEST GARDEN TO ENCOURAGE WILDLIFE:

41 High Street, Ordsall

### SHIELD FOR THE BEST PUBLIC HOUSE DISPLAY:

Whitehouses Inn

### BEST FLORAL SHOP AND BUSINESS FRONT:

Malcolm's Taxis

Best Primary School/Play Group Project – Potato-Growing:  
St Joseph's R C Primary School

**THE MAGGIE BATTERSBY SHIELD** was presented to Carr Hill Primary School, to acknowledge the continuing development of the school garden and growing projects throughout the school. This year every class in school participated in a school based potato-growing project.

shop and business fronts, public houses and schools, together with special community awards.

Chairman of the Civic Society, Derek Turner, said: 'Thanks are due to all gardeners in Retford – not just the winners – for helping to make our town such a pleasant place in which to live.'

He also thanked Icon Aerospace Technology, Traffic Labour Supplies Ltd (TSL) and the Retford Business Forum for their support of the Retford Hanging Basket Scheme.



### THE MOST IMPROVED SCHOOL GARDEN AWARD:

St Swithun's C of E Primary School

### COMMUNITY AWARD:

The 2017 Community Awards were presented to:

- The staff at Boots for keeping the car park behind the store litter-free.
- The Rotary Club of Retford for planting crocus bulbs throughout the District in support of the End Polio Now Campaign.
- Taste Bistro for developing a boxed garden adjacent to the bistro.

### CERTIFICATES OF APPRECIATION:

Certificates of appreciation were presented to:

- Acer Landscapes for restoring and maintaining the Ordsall roundabout over a number of years.
- The Retford Times for their continued support of Retford-in-Bloom.

Rotarian Adrian Sumner is also a member of the Planning Committee together with Inner Wheel member Lesley Sumner.

*Derek Turner*

## NEW SHIELD FOR RETFORD-IN-BLOOM PUB AWARD

The Whitehouses Inn has kindly donated a new shield to be awarded to Retford public houses and hotels for outstanding floral displays in our Annual Retford-in-Bloom Competition.

The old shield was very small and looking rather battered and had only space on the back to acknowledge winners. The new shield shows all the previous winners and has spaces to be filled over the next 20 years!

Our thanks to the Stokes family for their support: the Whitehouses Inn has been a deserving winner in the past, and always provides a colourful welcome when entering Retford from the South. Our photograph shows Jonathan, from the Whitehouses, with the new shield.

*Derek Turner*



## PLANNING MATTERS

Despite all our efforts, there has been no progress with the St Alban's site. The District Council has limited power to compel the owners to take action. It is ultimately up to the Diocese of Southwell to come up with a solution.

As the building is listed, this will require them to spend money on architectural and other studies to show that their preferred way forward complies with national and local planning policies that seek to preserve listed buildings unless there is no viable alternative. It is now ten years since the fire and the complete lack of action by the Diocese is very disappointing. We will continue to press them to make progress.

Better news about fly posting: following sustained pressure from the Society, the District Council has now adopted a Policy which sets out how unauthorised signs should be removed, and includes reference to using voluntary groups to help in the work. We hope to reach an agreement soon on how the Society can work on behalf of the Council to remove unacceptable signs.

We are pleased to see planning permission for alteration to the former TSB building on The Square. Let's hope 2018 brings this building and the derelict building on Beardsall's Row back into use. There has been a delay in the conversion of the Old Police Station into a hotel which we hope is only temporary. Work is progressing to turn the Old Post Office in Exchange Street into a restaurant with living space above and hopefully this will be completed during the year.

We continue to monitor empty shops, the latest of which is Bright House in Carolgate, and we have a half-yearly meeting with Bassetlaw Planning booked for February, the outcome of which we will report at the next open meeting.

*Bruce Barnett*

## AUTOCHROMES LAUNCH AT AMCOTT HOUSE

The Stephen Pegler autochromes are a photographic collection of historic local and national importance. They were cutting-edge technology at the time, using two glass slides to create 3D images.

Stephen Pegler was the son of the founder of the Northern Rubber Works and Amcott House was their home. Stephen was a keen amateur photographer and became a member and Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society. He recorded family life, local people and scenes and holiday destinations as far afield as Madeira and Egypt.



*Bassetlaw Museum, S. Pegler, Autochromes Collection*

Initially, from 1907 to 1910, the images were black and white, but then colour became available and he used it until the 1930s.

Some of the autochromes had always been stored at Bassetlaw Museum and when others came up for sale from elsewhere, the Museum decided to try to buy them. An appeal was made to local individuals and organisations to raise the necessary funds.

They were successful and now the ambitious project has enabled the autochromes to be catalogued and stored there for posterity. They have also been reproduced on photographic paper for easier viewing by the public.

The launch of the Autochrome Collection celebrated the Museum staff's achievement, as well as the donations by people of the area. Retford Civic Society were proud to donate £500 and were represented at the evening by Derek and me.

The autochrome images are stunning and well worth a visit to the Museum for those interested in life in Retford in the past, as well as being "one of the largest collections of this medium in the country, and with perhaps the widest range of subjects".

*Joan Turner*

Hopkinson, a local man; his bill was £6,421.8s.3d. The façade is Bath stone and red Mansfield stone, and details include falcons, Robin Hood and Maid Marion, and a bull (symbol of fertility); there is a cupola and a tower to show civic pride.

The Retford Times described the building as 'handsome, commodious, replete with convenience', just as Ald. Smith had intended. When he died, the town came to a standstill, and he was credited with supporting 'pragmatic improvement for civic gain'.

Following this precedent of 'pragmatic improvement', changes have been made over the years, such as the replacing of gas with electricity and the conversion of the Borough Surveyor's office into the ladies' loos. The biggest change of all came in

1974, when the last meeting of East Retford Borough Council was held: local councils were to be reorganised, and the new District Council offices were to be built in Worksop.

However, some ancient traditions survive: we still have a Mayor, and celebrate Mayor-making Day annually; we still have a Lord High Steward, and civic processions still leave from the Town Hall. The civic plate is on view in the Museum, and is brought to the Town Hall on special occasions.

Now host to concerts, exhibitions, meetings, weddings, and presentations, Retford Town Hall still presides over our splendid Market Square. Indeed, 'Antiquity Generates Dignity' still.

## THE SEBASTOPOL CANNON – 160 YEARS

After the Crimean War, the government was freely distributing captured Russian guns to towns that applied for one, and many Retfordians thought that we should have such a memorial to all those who had died. An application was duly sent, and we were lucky!

On 1 May 1858, the Retford, Newark Worksop and Gainsborough Advertiser announced that the 'long looked for treasure' had arrived at Retford railway station. It now needed to be placed 'in a manner worthy of the town and loyalty of the inhabitants'.

This proved somewhat of a problem: it was some time before the money (thought to have been about £100) to install it could be raised by subscription, and the decision made about where it should go. The newspaper recorded that 'it does seem strange that a gift, so earnestly coveted... should lie so long neglected and uncared for'. Eventually, the money was found, and the triangular space in front of St Swithun's Church gates chosen, and on 17 February 1859 it was taken there.

'The streets of the town and the road to the station... crowded with hundreds of townspeople and others... three to four thousand people were present... Two horses, caparisoned with red, white and blue rosettes at their heads, were attached to the truck... a number of fog signals were exploded in the yard, which had an excellent effect. Gunner Cole rode on horseback as guard, with his drawn sword, and in full regiments.' In front were the Retford Drums and Fife Band, the Sergeant at Mace and the Town Crier, carrying our splendid maces, and followed by several members of the corporation.

'After three times three hearty cheers, the cavalcade proceeded to the cannon's destination... Here it was safely planted, amidst the cheers and greetings of the assembled thousands. Several chests of oranges and a large quantity of nuts were distributed among the juvenile portion present... The male adults were treated with a plentiful supply of ale, and the whole multitude soon afterwards quietly dispersed.' There followed a dinner at the Crown Inn for the committee of management, subscribers and 'others of the townsfolk'; many loyal toasts were drunk!

IN 1929, the cannon was threatened by a report from the Street Lighting Sub-Committee of the Sanitary and Highways Committee report, which stated that 'a bus stand and adequate



lighting was necessary in Cannon Square'. This would mean the removal of the cannon. There were heated discussions in council meetings; a petition was submitted, signed by 1,339 ratepayers and supported by the Retford Branch of the British Legion, which stressed its importance.

Instrumental in rallying support for these objections was Alderman Alfred Wilson; it was successful. He also came to rescue in 1942, when metal was being collected for WWII. The church railings went, but the cannon was saved by Ald. Wilson, who bought it for £12.10s from Bradshaw's Iron Foundry in Albert Road, where it had been taken for scrap, and kept it there until 1950. Only the barrel remained, so he had a new gun carriage constructed, and acquired new wheels, before presenting it to the Mayor.

This article in the local newspaper of 7 April 1950 describes the re-installation: 'The Crimean cannon was returned to its pedestal last week, the Mayor of Retford (Cllr. T. Richmond) performing the unveiling ceremony, watched by a large group of interested spectators... Later, Ald. A. Wilson, who was largely responsible for saving the cannon, gave a luncheon in the Council Chamber'.

Retford Civic Society\* is greatly indebted to Desmond Wilson, who researched this history, and Robert Wilson, an out-of-town RCS member, the sons of Ald. Alfred Wilson, for the gift of the family archive from which the above information is taken.

\*In 2006, RCS unveiled a fully restored cannon, in a reconstruction of the original unveiling ceremony.

extension of the Park, which was officially opened 27th April 1960.

Kings' Park's central feature, the River Idle, followed the line of Carr Dyke within the Park, which represents the historic Parish boundaries of East and West Retford. The brick boundary wall adjacent to Rectory Road/Hospital Road was constructed in the early 19th century. 1826 saw the addition of a dower house (West Retford Cottage) in the south-west corner of the site for the widow of William Huntsman (of West Retford Hall). Much of the landscaping throughout the west half of the park dates to the 19th century, with open vistas, lawned areas, tree belts and specimen trees located throughout.

The Park has continued to hold its prestigious Green Flag status since its first award in 2008. In addition to this, Kings' Park has also gained a Special Innovation Award this year from Green Flag for "demonstrating democracy for the next generation". This was for the consultation work carried out with local schools in the development of the new splash park.

The Park has already been booked for a number of annual events for 2018, including Retford Charter Day, Retford Armed Forces Day, the Scout and Guide Carnival and Skatefest. Organisers are currently working with Talegate Theatre to provide performances on the new Performance Area during Love Parks Week but dates not yet confirmed. In addition to these, they are hoping to stage a number of activities in the lead up to the anniversary event.

You heard it here first! There are plans for the 80th Anniversary celebrations for the Park. On Saturday 30 June 2018 the organisers plan to stage a themed event that will take us on a trip back in time, giving significant focus to the 1930's... Imagine garden parties, afternoon tea, swing-bands, Charleston dance, gangsters and molls, vintage cars and big screen entertainment. They would like to include local talent with an array of demonstrations by local dance academies, drama and music groups and encourage local business to come on board. If anyone would like to get involved then please get in touch with Julie Foye or Carol White at Bassetlaw District Council.

Our thanks go to Julie Foye for providing the information for this part of the Newsletter.



During WW1, in response to Germany's Zeppelin and, latterly, the long-range Gotha Bomber raids, Britain was forced to divert elements of the Royal Flying Corps and Royal Naval Air Service back to the Britain, to protect the 'Motherland' from enemy air raids. As a result, South African General Jan Smuts was authorised by the Imperial War Cabinet to conduct a review of the British Air Services.

Smuts recommended that air should be treated as a separate force from the Royal Navy and the Army, and a new force should be created, solely responsible for conducting warfare in the air. So Parliament passed the Air Force (Constitution) Act 1917, which was given Royal Assent by King George V on 29 November 1917. A few months later, on 1 April 1918, the Royal Naval Air Service and the Royal Flying Corps were merged to create the world's first independent air force, the Royal Air Force.

The RAF will be celebrating its Centenary on 1 April 2018. Then, throughout the year, its RAF100 programme will salute and commemorate the achievements of all those who have served. The RAF will also be celebrating today's Service in order to inspire its own people and the wider public about its future, through wide-ranging local, regional and national organised events and activities.

As part of RAF100, on Saturday 30 June, here in Retford, the Royal Air Forces Association (RAFA) Branch, supported by the Civic Society, Bassetlaw District Council and RAF Waddington will be unveiling a Blue Plaque in Chapelgate to honour a local hero, Flight Lieutenant James 'Jim' Atterby McCairns, who lived in Retford, and is buried in our cemetery. After completing his secondary education at King Edward's, Jim joined the RAFVR in 1939 as a Sgt pilot at the age of twenty, and flew Spitfires with No.616 Sqn as part of Wg Cdr Douglas Bader's

famous Tangmere Wing. In July 1941, whilst on an intruder sortie, McCairns's Spitfire was hit by enemy fire, forcing him to crash-land in France. He became a prisoner of war, but eventually escaped through Belgium, France, Spain, and Gibraltar. For his courageous and determined evasion, McCairns was awarded the Military Medal. Resolving to repay his debt to the Resistance for helping him escape, Jim joined No.161 (Special Duties) Sqn in 1942 as a Pilot Officer at RAF Tempsford, which provided aerial support for the Special Operation Executive (SOE) flying Westland Lysanders. Over thirteen months, Jim flew twenty-five successful missions, a greater success rate than any other pilot, delivering and picking up intelligence agents and supplies in occupied France. McCairns was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and two bars (one of only forty-five pilots to be so honoured), plus the Croix de Guerre, for these daring exploits. He was promoted to Flight Lieutenant and converted back to fighters flying Tempests in combat with Nos.3 and 56 Sqn throughout 1944 and 1945. Post-war, he transferred to the re-constituted Royal Auxiliary Air Force, and returned to No.616 Sqn. at RAF Finningley. Sadly, Jim was killed on 13 June 1948 when the Mosquito he was flying had an engine failure at low level. Jim's son,

Chris, has kindly agreed to unveil the Plaque.

Additionally, on the same day in June, the RAFA Branch will be planting a black walnut tree in Kings' Park to commemorate RAF100, which will also form part of the Kings' Park

80th Birthday Celebrations, the significance being that black walnut was one of the woods used to make aircraft propellers during WW1.

*Adrian Sumner*



## PROJECTS

### SPRING INTO ACTION

Through the dark nights of winter, we all look forward to those early Spring flowers, and with this in mind the Society purchased 6,000 mixed crocus bulbs, which, thanks to the volunteers from Muddy Fork and Bassetlaw Council's Parks Department, we were able to plant throughout St Swithun's churchyard.

The crocuses should follow on from the snowdrops we previously planted, and help provide a real Spring welcome in the town.



### SOMETHING TO BLEAT ABOUT!

You may have noticed that Thomas Cook have now undertaken the much-needed repairs to their wall next to the Society's noticeboard on Spa Lane. This is part of an ongoing partnership project with Retford Art Society, to produce a mural, using images from the Museum's Welchman collection, of the Sheep Fairs that used to take place on Spa Common. Design work has already begun and the painting of the mural should start in April as the weather improves. The photo shows how bad it was before; I'm sure you've noticed the difference now!



### LET'S BANK IT!

As part of Retford-in-Bloom, talks have been taking place with the HSBC Bank on Carolgate and with metal sculptor Kenny Roach of West Street Gallery. The hope is to produce a 'giant' window box of sculpted flowers and foliage, to stand in front of the building on the flagged area behind the metal railings, working with groups from Inspire Culture, Retford Skills for Employment and others. We'll keep you updated as plans develop!

## KIERSON

We are lucky to have in Retford a company that is dear to our hearts, and very supportive of RCS: Kierson, Sash Window Restoration and Timber Repairs, have long been a corporate member and Alison de Roeck, Managing Director, is a regular attendee of our Open Meetings.

So we were pleased that Kierson was one of only three national companies to be shortlisted for the British Woodworking Federation's prestigious Project of the Year 2017.

The nomination was in recognition of the restoration and upgrading of historic windows at the former St Helena's School for Girls in Chesterfield, and was supported by glowing references from the client, principal contractor, architects and surveyors when the £1 million sub-contract package was completed on time and in budget to a very high standard.

### RETFORD STATION

The Society has been continuing to work with the Community Rail Partnership and Retford Business Forum throughout the year, and it was great to receive the news that BDC had secured a £90,000 community grant from Virgin Trains, and £20,000 from Notts County Council to bring about improvements to Retford Station. These will include better directional signage to and from the station, much needed improvements and security to the underpass from the station through to Ordsall, along with welcoming signs and Heritage display boards at the station. The Society holds funds from a Community Safety grant, and we are looking at contributing towards the cost of installing CCTV at the Ordsall subway.

We also received the good news that the problem with the dry rot throughout the Railway Society's meeting rooms at the station is finally being addressed. In January the Railway Society will vacate the building for approximately four months while repair works are carried out.

The Society is looking at the possibility of bringing in additional funding to generally improve the approach along Albert Road and Victoria Road to the station, to help further enhance the visitor experience.

### CENTRE STAGE FOR RETFORD

Now that the performance area is complete, as part of the Kings' Park 80th Anniversary celebration, the Parks Department is looking at a calendar of events to take place in the Park and on the performance stage. Planning is well underway, but if any groups or organisations would like to take part, please contact Julie Foye at Julie.foye@bassetlaw.gov.uk

*Pam Barnsdale*

## PEOPLE POWER

One of our members, who is also a member of the Retford-in-Bloom Committee, Bob Davenport, was very busy at the end of the year after he noticed the dangerous condition of the towpath between Grove Mill and the Hop Pole.

With moral support from the Civic Society and numerous phone calls and letters to the authorities involved, Bob was successful in getting the towpath cleared and made safe again.

Well done, Bob!

*Joan Turner*

## LAUNCH OF THE RETFORD HERITAGE TRAIL GUIDE

The town has an attractive new Heritage Guide. It was launched at Bassetlaw Museum on Heritage Day at an event attended by Madelaine Richardson, Chairman of Bassetlaw District Council, with her Escort/Consort Cllr Debbie Merryweather, and Helen Richards, Mayor of Retford.

Derek Turner, Chair of Retford Civic Society, explained that the Society had decided that the town needed a new Guide, and had adapted the old leaflet, to include up-to-date information, presented in more user-friendly language and format. Beautifully illustrated by local artist Andy Massey, it includes an easy-to-read map and suggested trails, with information about significant buildings en route.

Madelaine Richardson said that the Guide was well presented and she specially liked the watercolours; Debbie Merryweather said: "Stunning!" The Mayor agreed. Indeed, everyone who received a copy on the day was impressed.

It was funded by RCS (with the help of The Rotary Club of Retford Percy Laws Trust), in partnership with Bassetlaw District Council and Museum Development East Midlands supported by Arts Council England.



Derek thanked all those involved, including Sam Glasswell of the Museum and Burgess Design and Print.

Available at The Hub, the Museum, Bookworm, and other locations around the town, it is free (although donations are always welcome), and provides a wealth of information for residents and visitors alike.

Andy Massey has chosen five of his beautiful watercolours from the Guide to sell as a postcard pack, which you are able to purchase from Bassetlaw Museum, The Hub and Bookworm.



## HERITAGE OPEN DAY 2017

Retford's 10th annual Heritage Day on 9 September, featuring 'Dukes and Outlaws', was enjoyed by visitors and townspeople alike.

It started splendidly, with a welcoming peal of bells from St Swithun's Church and the launch of the exciting new *Heritage Trail Guide* in the Museum, where a Mediaeval Court also took place. The Guide is now freely available

from the Museum, Hub, Bookworm and the Library.

The Community Choir 'popped up' in the Library, the Museum and St Swithun's, which also hosted the U3A recorder group. Robin Hood (aka Mike Mahoney), with his bow and arrow, popped up everywhere! Talegate Theatre performed twice in the Town Hall, which also saw

the Youth Theatre from Retford Little Theatre in *The Rapid Tales of Robin Hood*.

There were fascinating places to visit, including Trinity Hospital, Retford Railway Society at the Station and backstage at our two theatres, all places not usually seen by the public.

Passengers on Ken Thompson's Heritage Bus and on the Seth Ellis narrowboat had views of Retford and its surroundings from different perspectives. During the day nobody went short of refreshments, available all over town, including from St Swithun's, St Michael's, The Grove Methodist Church, The Hub, and many more locations.

Thanks are due to everyone involved in making this a thoroughly interesting, fun day in our beautiful town.

There's a lot to celebrate in 2018: the Town Hall's 150th anniversary and the 80th anniversary of Kings' Park. Plans are already underway for a 'Regal Retford' Heritage Day on Saturday 8 September, so do pop the date in your diary.



## VISIT TO SELBY ABBEY AND LOTHERTON HALL

Selby Abbey was founded nearly 1,000 years ago, and is now a parish church. The building is beautiful, with its arches, stunning ceilings, and stained glass windows. It was a bonus to have a knowledgeable Guide to take us round.



Initially, it was a wooden structure, built by St Benedict (then a monk) at the place where he saw three swans on a bend in the river, as foretold to him by St Germain in a vision; that's why the Abbey's coat-of-arms has swans on it. Others came to join Benedict and soon a monastery was established, eventually with cloisters, stables, kitchen, workshops, dormitories, infirmary, cellars and barns – all surrounded by high walls.

In 1097, the next abbot, Hugh, realised that a new building was needed. Stone from a quarry was transported along a waterway dug for the purpose. Abbot Hugh worked alongside the labourers, giving his wages to the poor. Most of the building was completed in his lifetime, only the nave remaining unfinished.

Foundations matter, and two partially collapsed Norman archways in the nave reveal how enormous is the weight on the pillars, which sank in the clay. Part of the tower fell in 1690, destroying the south transept; it was rebuilt in 1912, and now the building is safe.

At the west end of the nave, each stone has its stonemason's mark: a star, an arrow, various cross shapes, and many more.

A candle left burning in a side chapel by an organ builder caused a huge fire in 1906. People donated generously, as all were keen to restore the Abbey. The magnificent altar was rebuilt by Peter Rendl of Oberammergau, and a new, improved organ was built in 1909. 1947 brought floods to Selby, but the Abbey, fortunately, escaped. In the 1960s under-floor heating was installed.

As well as listening to our Guide, we were informed by useful information boards: the monks rose at 2 am; the first service was from 2.10 to 3 am; then they worked, and had more services and study time; dinner was at 2.30 pm. Unsurprisingly, bed-time was 5.30 pm. We were allowed a squint from the Leper Squint: lepers, being contagious, could not join the congregation, so could look down this pipe-like structure and see the altar during Communion.

There is so much more to tell, but it was time to travel on to Lotherton Hall. Our group began with the old chapel, where people remarked on its special atmosphere. The house was full of beautiful artefacts, and the tour itself was so full of interesting information that we had little time to explore the gardens. I really liked the Mouseman's items, especially the clock with two mice, one either side. I hope we will have a repeat visit, as both places were wonderful.

*Elizabeth Davies*



## NOVEMBER TRIP TO DURHAM

The morning of 16 November saw forty-seven members and guests head north on a Wifreda coach to spend two days visiting the Durham area. Our first stop was for tea/coffee and cake at a hostelry near Bishop Auckland called The Red Alligator (named after a famous racehorse). Then a short drive to a very old, quite small Saxon church at Escomb, a small town on the River Wear. We had a very good ex history teacher guide who explained the true and also the assumed history of the building.

The short drive back to the Red Alligator and our pre-ordered lunch followed. This was a little bit chaotic but we all were well fed and watered with our dinner monitor, Joan Turner, watching over things for us.

We were then driven to the Derwent Manor Hotel near Consett, where we had time to freshen up before being taken to Durham in the early evening to see LUMIERE, the UK's largest light festival. Durham was very busy with hundreds of people in a slow procession doing the circuit around the town. It was especially slow as people went into the cathedral and a few of us skipped that bit.

There were several light installations around the trail but the ones that stood out for us were the large moon with a human face that changed expressions, and the final walk along the river, where, on the opposite bank, the trees were painted reds and blues by concealed lights and eerie electronic music created a really thoughtful atmosphere.

Amazingly, we all emerged back at the bus at the agreed time, to the surprised delight of Joan. Later, back at the hotel,



we enjoyed our evening meal, socialising with people we had grown to know better during the trip.

After breakfast on Friday the coach took us to Barnard Castle and the Bowes Museum, where we all had a really interesting guided tour, interspersed with teas, coffees and a soup-and-sandwich lunch. I think we were all taken with this purpose-built museum and thought a return was required.

We arrived back in Retford in the early evening, some replete with wonderful raffle prizes, and maybe a few pounds heavier, but I'm sure we all enjoyed yet another well organised Civic Society coach trip.

*Merv Waring*

## TRIP TO HULL, CITY OF CULTURE



We set off from Kettlewells on two coaches, such was the demand for our July trip.

The weather was dull with some drizzle as we headed north up the A1. During the journey we were treated to one of Derek's wonderful raffles. Arriving in Hull, we were met by members of the Hull Civic Society, who escorted us through the shopping centre to the Mission public house for coffee, tea and biscuits.

We then split into four groups for our tour of the old city, starting down Postern Gate, where we were told that Trinity Estates owns twenty acres of the area.

The new indoor market was also pointed out before we entered the Land of Green

Ginger, formerly an open sewer, to look for the smallest window in England at the George Hotel. Also pointed out were several narrow alleyways, which had existed since the city was laid out in medieval times, when it had its original name of Wyke. It became Kingston upon Hull in 1299 after a visit by Edward I.

Hull became a major import and export hub. Several merchants grew very rich on the trade of sugar, grain and fish. Later on it had a large whaling fleet of sixty ships employing two thousand men. From the Davis Straits fishing area alone, in 1821 a total of 294 whales caught yielded 3,142 tons of oil. Today there are only four trawlers left fishing.

During our free time many of us enjoyed wandering through the museum quarter, where it was possible to learn much more about William Wilberforce and his life's work to abolish slavery; about transport or street life through the ages; about the maritime history of Hull; or marvel over the exhibits in the air-conditioned cool of the Ferens Gallery.

A journey home over the magnificent Humber bridge sealed a perfect day out, with many reminiscences and intentions to return to this interesting city – only an hour's drive from home.

*Barrie and Jenny King*

## STAR FESTIVAL

From modest beginnings in 2016, the Star Festival at The Grove made a second appearance in 2017, bigger, brighter and bolder. Let's hope we can now begin to think of it as an established part of Retford's pre-Christmas scene.

There were more entries this year, an eclectic mix from church members and local organisations, and including some which had been carried in the Illuminate procession which shortly preceded the opening of the Festival. RCS again contributed its Starlight Express display, but perhaps the most interesting and thought-provoking one was a star made from the fragments of the fallen ceiling boss, which led church members to a realisation that much work needed to be done on the fabric of The Grove, and to embark on an ambitious programme of restoration and refurbishment. There's a long way to go on that, but it was noticeable that the chilly conditions in which the inaugural festival was held had been superseded by warmth on account of the heating system having now been repaired, so there's already some good news on that front.

Congratulations are due to members at The Grove for establishing and developing this Festival, and for donating profits to the local women's refuge; there are few more worthy causes. We all look forward to an even bigger and better Starlight Festival in 2018!

*Rob White*

# CHRISTMAS TREE FESTIVAL

Inaugurated in 2002, the Christmas Tree Festival at St Swithun's Church has become such a well-established feature in Retford's annual cycle that you might think there's nothing new to say. But, every year, its freshness and vitality seem to be renewed. It has that "wow factor" which draws visitors from Retford and farther afield. Children, in particular, are always delighted by it. It remains the most important annual fundraiser for Retford's most important heritage asset – St Swithun's Church.

Retford Civic Society supported the event in style. The decorations on our traditional tree highlighted some of our achievements in the town: photos of projects mounted on silver were hung by Joan Cordall, Joan Turner and Christine and John Hayward. Thanks to them for again beautifully decorating the tree.



Once again, there were nigh-on 100 trees, each one with the capacity to strike an emotional chord. Greater inventiveness than ever was evident in some of the entries: who'd have thought you could make a tree from paint tins, pairs of mittens – or an angel out of folded paper? Others were touching, even moving, in their effect. Some thrilled the senses; all engaged the eye.

The continuing success of the Festival is down to the efforts of many people, not least the churchwardens at St Swithun's. RCS was again heavily involved, not just in providing a tree inside and out (courtesy of members Anna and Chris Holliland), but in contributing to the stewarding and catering arrangements; the W.I. was involved for the first time this year. Particular mention should be made of the RCS 'task force' of Gavin Johnston, Roger Jones, and Barrie King. No sooner had the final "Amen" been spoken at the Thursday morning Communion than they were hard at work in the nave, installing the tree-platforms, laying on the power supplies, and generally making the church ready for the trees. It couldn't have happened without them, and Retford would be a poorer place without such selfless service.

*Rob White*



## QUIZ NIGHTS

Our annual quiz is always enjoyed even by those who are not regular 'quizzers'. It's an opportunity to be with old friends and make new ones; the food is good, the raffle is entertaining, and the questions are not at all taxing – good fun, in other words! This year's Pie-and-Peas Quiz Night will be at the Clumber Inn, Ordsall, on Thursday 10 May, 7.00 for 7.30pm. Cost £7.50. Come as a team, or individually. Please let Tina Jones know (email: grobevill@aol.co or tel. 869549) by 19 April – and mention any dietary requirements.

## LITTER-PICK

10am, Sunday 18 March - Meet at Bay Tree

## BOLHAM MANOR OPEN GARDEN 2018

As Derek mentioned, Pam and Butch Barnsdale's garden was open last year in February. This year, you will be able to view it in its summertime glory. It will be open on Sunday 24 June, from 12.00 till 4pm. Admission is £3.50, children free. There will be home-made teas – proceeds to Bluebell Wood. There will also be plants for sale.

## COME WITH US! VISITS 2018

A varied programme with something for everyone:

Wednesday 25 April – Oakwell Hall and Halifax Piece Hall, West Yorkshire.

Wednesday 18 July – Temple Newsam (Tudor/Jacobean House and Museum)

Wednesday 26 September – Newark Town Hall and The National Civil War Museum

Wednesday 21/ Thursday 22 November – Birmingham Museums and City Tour+Christmas Markets

## WEBSITE & EMAIL [www.retfordcivicsociety.org.uk](http://www.retfordcivicsociety.org.uk) E: [retfordcivicsociety@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:retfordcivicsociety@hotmail.co.uk)

The website is regularly updated, with details of events and upcoming outings and meetings. You can also find Newsletters and Minutes of Open Meetings. It is now possible to pay subscriptions by PayPal. We also have a Facebook page – Retford Civic Society – so if you are a user of social media have a look, give our page a 'like' and share it with friends.

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