



BEVERLEY & DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER SPRING 2015

Please could contributors to newsletters note that the deadline for copy is always the last day of February, May, August and November, unless notice in good time is sent out otherwise

Margaret Powell



Margaret Powell, a tireless defender of Beverley in the 1960s and 1970s, has died at her home in Trewoofe, Cornwall, aged 91. She came to East Yorkshire in 1964 with her husband Leslie, who was Chairman of Reckitts (Colours) Ltd, and they bought a house at North Bar Within.

Her background was architectural; her great-grandfather was Sir George Gilbert Scott, the architect of the Midland Hotel at St Pancras Station and the Albert Memorial, and her uncle Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, architect of Liverpool Anglican Cathedral, Battersea Power Station, and our famous K2 red telephone boxes. Her father Adrian Gilbert Scott, also an architect, worked on projects with his elder brother Sir Giles. Her other grandfather (whose biography she wrote) was the marine artist Charles Napier Hemy, RA, RWS. **PTO**

Mrs Powell 'came upon unsuspecting Beverley with the suddenness of a storm cloud'. An independent councillor at both county and borough level, she was also chair of the Beverley Girls' Venture Corps, member of the East Riding Hospital Management

Committee and founder and first secretary of the East Riding Branch of the Council for the Protection of Rural England. She was a powerhouse of energy, and on arrival in the East Riding found that Beverley was on the brink of the 1960s destruction that wrecked many of our historic towns: the era of Ian Nairn's 'Outrage' and 'Counter Attack'.

Colonel Rupert Alec-Smith, Hull City councillor and himself a great conservationist, commented (in writing to John Betjeman) that 'Mrs Powell ... is a formidable woman ... a descendant of one or more of the great Architect Scotts, who had family connections with Hull.'

The councils planned to demolish North Bar or alternatively leave it on a roundabout felling the houses on each side, to knock down one side of Hengate including Nellies, put a road through Old Waste to York Road, take out Ladygate, widen Eastgate and allow the Friary to be flattened. Of the Friary, one of the great conservation successes of the late 20th century, she (described by the press as 'a Beverley housewife') said at a public inquiry in 1965 that she had 'spent the most heartbreaking afternoon of her life examining the Old Friary'. Margaret Powell, with the backing of Cllr Rosemary Kinloch and George Odey, opposed these ideas and with the help of national figures such as John Betjeman and the members of the Royal Fine Arts Commission, schemes such as the 'mad roundabout' were abandoned, although Eastgate was damaged. She helped prevent the later attempt to widen Walkergate, but was not successful in the battle to stop the councils knocking down the Globe Inn and building Sow Hill Road.

In the 1960s and 1970s it was possible to buy Georgian houses and cottages in Beverley for £75 - £300, many being condemned by the council as unfit. Mrs Powell and some others bought these and restored them, and many now highly prized buildings were saved by her example.

Margaret and Leslie Powell retired to Cornwall, where she continued to be very active, writing, working in sculpture and taking part in the Cornish art world. Her husband and son died before her, and she is survived by her three daughters.

Looking back now, the 'modernising' policies of the 1960s and 1970s seem extraordinary. You can guess what Margaret Powell would be opposing today. Farewell to a great woman who saved much of Beverley, and thank you.

Barbara English
December 2014

2015 YHACS AGM in Harrogate

On 31st January members of the executive (Sylvia Ashwell, Barbara English, Berna Moody and Pam Hopkins) attended the AGM of Yorkshire and Humberside Association of Civic Societies at Harrogate.

The day in Harrogate began with a stimulating talk from the chairman, Kevin Trickett, '*Is heritage a load of old hat? Should we demolish the past and start building the future?*' His presentation included pictures of old buildings in England and modern skyscrapers in Dubai and other places. His question: how much should we demolish the old in order to make room for the new?

At the **AGM** present members of the committee were re-elected there being no new nominations. Kevin put forth his belief that civic societies although independent work better when they operate together and see themselves as part of a wider movement.

YHAC holds three meetings a year in different towns in Yorkshire. In 2015 these meetings are to be held in April in Ilkley, in July in Skipton and in October in Pontefract. He urged members of YHACs to attend and use the opportunity to exchange views with representatives from other societies.

He welcomed Barbara English to the meeting and congratulated her on her recently awarded MBE given in recognition of her services to the community.

After the AGM **Joan Humble, a Civic Voice Trustee**, spoke. Following the localism act of 2011 (which aimed to give more power to communities) Civic Voice had produced its manifesto which, she said, was to be launched in London on 11th February. The main aim of the manifesto was to promote participation rather than consultation. i.e. communities should be involved with local government plans at the initial stage, not after the decisions had been made.

Katherine Boardman then spoke on behalf of the Heritage Lottery Fund. She stressed that the fund was not just for buildings but for projects which would make a lasting difference for heritage, people and communities. Over the 20 years in which the fund had been available £6 billion had been given out. She was enthusiastic about the Beverley Georgian Festival, in which Beverley Civic Society played a leading role. She showed pictures of the Festival, and particularly praised the way in which the Festival had brought together many different organisations within the town to provide a wide range of events.

After her presentation the YHACs Peter Spawforth Awards were presented. First prize went to Selby for its newly created town trail, second prize to Scarborough for their programme of events in celebration of their 50th birthday and third prize to Hull for its Heritage Open Day contribution. Congratulations to the winners for some very strong entries.

The day finished at 4pm. As we returned to Beverley we all felt that the £50 our society pays in order to be a part of YHACs was money well spent not only for the exchange of ideas between societies but also for the strength YHACs gets by working in numbers.

Pamela Hopkins

Membership

Please will members check their Standing Order payments are on the correct date, which is October to the following September, and also that those paying annually are up to date with payments. We have a few who may have forgotten. **PTO**

We are delighted to welcome ten new members from January 2015: Janice and John Barrett, Nicholas Waudby, Mike Abbott, Belinda Szonert, Tony Lancaster (re-joining), Jean and Harry Burton, David Stringer and Wendi Hall. I hope they will enjoy membership of the society.

Wendy Usher-Bacon

Beverley Civic Society talk on Spurn Point

Beverley Civic Society's open meeting on January 13th drew a large audience to hear Andy Mason's talk on his project *Spurn's Communities Along Sand*. As the Heritage Officer for Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, he leads the local group which now has responsibility for maintaining this highly distinctive sand spit that protects the Humber Estuary. Andy gave a very comprehensive account of the nature of this constantly shifting feature and its history over the centuries owing to its strategic position, as well as its importance to shipping.

His aim is to involve the local residents, including those of Kilnsea and Easington, in working to protect Spurn's environment whilst generating employment. The YWT's primary task is to preserve the natural habitat, and in particular its bird life, which draws ornithologists to see both the local species and the migratory visitors. These are increasing in numbers and variety and include egrets, marsh harriers, Dunling waders, geese and ducks by the hundred. Among the macro fauna deer and seals are often seen now indicating improved food sources, owing in part to climate change.

An additional factor is likely to be the reduction in human numbers as fewer people are resident on Spurn and visitor numbers dropped after the great tidal surge on December 5th 2013. This churned up the land, temporarily flattening the dunes, and swept away part of the road. A lottery grant enabled the community to repair the damage and to set up schemes to bring back nature tourism while minimising affects on the wild life. The construction of paths around the vegetation has encouraged visitors while avoiding disturbance to breeding and feeding habitats. As a trial project "Spurn Safaris", using all-terrain vehicles, provided guided tours for around 400 people during 2014.

On New Year's Day a successful 10k walk took place ending at the Point, which was well supported by local people, to raise money towards future plans. These include major restoration of the lighthouse and a new larger visitor centre. At present the YWT has the prospect of gaining a grant of £900,000 from the Community Fund in relation to proceeds from the Humber Gateway Wind Farm scheme. However, it still needs planning permission in order to go ahead.

Wentworth Woodhouse, Yorkshire's Forgotten Stately Home

On February 10, a packed Civic Society public meeting at St Mary's Church Hall heard the story of a once grand house near Rotherham which was lost from public view 60 years ago but is now making a re-appearance. The speaker, Mrs Marilyn Walker shared her fascination with this most impressive building and its history.

The house is an enlargement of one designed in 1615 by Inigo Jones for the famous Wentworth family. In 1695 it passed through marriage to Thomas Watson and the powerful Rockingham dynasty. As a keen Whig Party supporter he engaged in a building competition with a Tory rival, Lord Raby, who built Wentworth Castle only 5 miles away. Watson re-created Wentworth Woodhouse as a mansion in the Baroque style. Later the east front received a new Palladian facade in stone, to impress the

many distinguished Whig visitors. The frontage was extended to exceed any other private home in Europe and was reputed to have 365 rooms and 5 miles of corridors.

In 1782, again through marriage, ownership went to the Fitzwilliam family which over the generations would amass a great fortune from coal mining on estate land in the area. By 1900 the house had gained international fame for its lavish hospitality. In July 1912 the seventh Earl entertained George V and Queen Mary but sadly the stay was overshadowed by a serious colliery accident.

1943 was the beginning of the end for the glory days of Wentworth Woodhouse. Death duties on the seventh Earl's estate were due again in 1948 with the sudden death of the eighth Earl in an air crash. At the time he had been flying with Kathleen Kennedy, sister of the future President Kennedy, to the south of France. An additional blow was the introduction of open-cast coal mining by the Ministry for Fuel and Power, which destroyed the extensive grounds and may have contributed to the weakening of parts of the house itself.

Further death duties in 1952 compelled the Fitzwilliam family to let the house and it became a physical education college. They eventually sold to a private buyer in 1989. The present owner, Mr Clifford Newbold, acquired the house in 1999, and he is currently restoring Wentworth Woodhouse for public view once more.

Mrs Walker was thanked by Prof. Barbara English for her stimulating introduction to the subject for Civic Society's summer outing in June – a visit to the house itself. Mrs Walker's talk was given on behalf of a charity in Nepal, Tri Netra, which works with blind children. Along with her husband she raises money through giving talks to sponsor two girls living there.

The Civic Society's next talk on Tuesday, 10 March is by Tim Stimson and entitled *Waterloo, Lady Butler and her battle pictures*.

Rosemary Major

Annual Dinner

This will be at Ceruttis again this year in October. The menu and booking form will be in the Autumn newsletter.

Wendy Usher-Bacon

PTO

Forthcoming Public Meetings & Events...

All meetings are held in St Mary's Parish Hall, North Bar Within, Beverley. Members and non-members are welcome

Tuesday 10th March 7.30pm

Tim Stimson

Waterloo – Lady Butler's battle pictures

Tuesday 31st March 2.30pm

Sheila Dixon

Titanic – the local connection

Tuesday 14th April 7.30pm

Discussion between Jill Jones and Christopher Coles re housing and planning policy. Followed by Open Forum.

Tuesday 12th May 7.30pm

John Tibbles

Archaeological excavations in and around Beverley

Friday 5th June

Day visit to Wentworth Woodhouse and Wentworth Castle and gardens (details to be given later)

Saturday 27th June

A FREE 2 hour tour, guided by the York Civic Society, meeting at Fairfax House, York, at 11.00am. Maximum 30 people. Own transport arrangements. To enrol contact Jill Jones on 01482 862271 or at the next meeting on 10th March.

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Please send material by email if possible: this saves re-typing. However, if you do not use email, no matter – all contributions and letters, no matter how brief, are welcome. **The deadline** for copy to be included in the Spring 2014 Newsletter is **Sunday 31st May 2015.**

Over a third of our membership now receive this newsletter in electronic form via email, thus saving valuable Civic Society resources for other use, not to mention the distributors' shoe-leather and time. It is appreciated that many do not use email or prefer to receive their newsletter in hard copy form; but if you are willing to join the e-circulation list, please could you let me know via the above email address. Many thanks.