



HARROGATE  
Civic Society

*Celebrating 50 years*

# NEWSLETTER

**Celebrate** our past - **Enhance** our present - **Shape** our future

*October 2021*



On Saturday 18 September, the Civic Society unveiled its 88th plaque at the former home of the artist Jean - Georges Simon, a Hungarian refugee who came to England in 1925 and moved to Harrogate in 1943. He established a studio here and also taught at Harrogate Art College.

Pictured above are (l-r) the Mayoress of Harrogate, Janet Chapman, the Consul General of Hungary, Mrs Krisztina Katai-Nagy, the Mayor of Harrogate, Cllr Trevor Chapman and Civic Society co-chair, Stuart Holland. Many guests attended including Robert Waterhouse, who knew the artist personally, and Mr and Mrs Nick Cannon, the current owners of 4 Park Road where the ceremony took place. We are grateful to them for hosting the event.

*Inset: Jean-Georges Simon self portrait, 1920s. By permission <https://theirsafehaven.com> where more information on Jean-Georges and other Hungarian artists can be found.*

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## Coming up ...

### **Civic Society Christmas Social**

Sunday 12 Dec 2-5 pm

This year, the social will be held in the beautiful and spacious St Wilfred's Parish Hall, Duchy Road, with the usual festive refreshments.

Contact [events@harrogatecivicsociety.org](mailto:events@harrogatecivicsociety.org) to book

### **Andrew Carnegie and Yorkshire Libraries** Tuesday 18 Jan

This talk on the great Scottish-American philanthropist by Cllr Jim Clark will take place in Harrogate Library. It was postponed from last year.

### **The golden age of the Harrogate Spa**

date to be advised

A talk by Malcolm Neesam



## Visit to York Gate Garden, Adel, Leeds 8 September



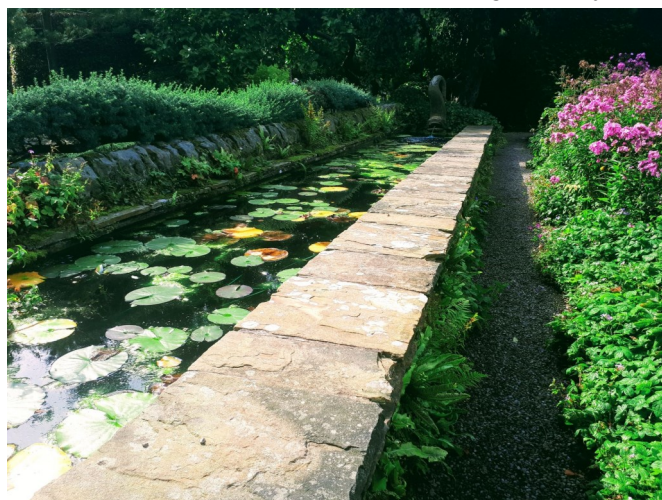
On a glorious day Society members gathered at York Gate garden for a group visit.

York Gate is a magical one-acre garden created by the Spencer family between 1951 and 1994. It is considered to be one of the finest small gardens in the country. Its garden 'rooms' are packed with carefully chosen plants and Arts and Crafts inspired paths, seating areas and water features. Sybil Spencer bequeathed the house and gardens to Perennial in 1994. York Gate is now Grade II listed.

Despite being only one acre in size members easily spent over an hour exploring it, assisted by volunteers who happily answered questions on its history and on some of the more unusual plants. Our visit ended with tea (and very superior cakes) in the private dining room.

Perennial is the former Gardeners' Benevolent Institution (est 1839) and helps horticulturalists in need.

*Angela Fahy*



### 'Down Your Way' Valley Drive

A new article has been written by Dr Paul Jennings, continuing his series on streets in Harrogate.

Residents and visitors alike admire the majestic and beautiful line of Valley Drive, ascending from Royal Parade and overlooking the Valley Gardens. This article traces something of its history and how its nature has changed over the 125 years since it was built.

See it on the [History articles page of the Civic Society website](#).





## 'Wells and Swells' – the golden age of Harrogate Spa, 1842-1923

Harrogate Civic Society is pleased to announce the forthcoming publication of Malcolm Neesam's sequel to his *Harrogate Great Chronicle, 1332-1841* which was published in 2005 by Carnegie Publications.

Since that time, Malcolm has worked on the sequel, *Wells and Swells – the golden age of Harrogate Spa, 1842 – 1923*, which will be published by Carnegie later this winter. The work, which is the most detailed account ever written about Harrogate's history for the period from 1842 to 1923, deals with the growth of the Spa and treatments associated with the mineral waters. It also traces the town's social history, its urbanisation and building development, the history of the Corporation's parks and Stray, the undertakings for art galleries, education, electricity, libraries, museums, public health, and water, as well as the story of religious life and church building, entertainment and theatrical life, the private Gas Company, the hotel industry, policing, theatrical life, sport, transportation and visitors.

*Wells and Swells* describes the incredible story of the Victorian development of Harrogate, the high days of the Edwardian era, and the poignant time of the Great War, with a concluding chapter on post-war reconstruction up to 1923. Written in eleven chapters on nearly 900 A4 pages, with 528 illustrative plates, 206 maps and plans, *Wells and Swells* will be issued in two beautifully bound hard backed volumes with accompanying slip case.

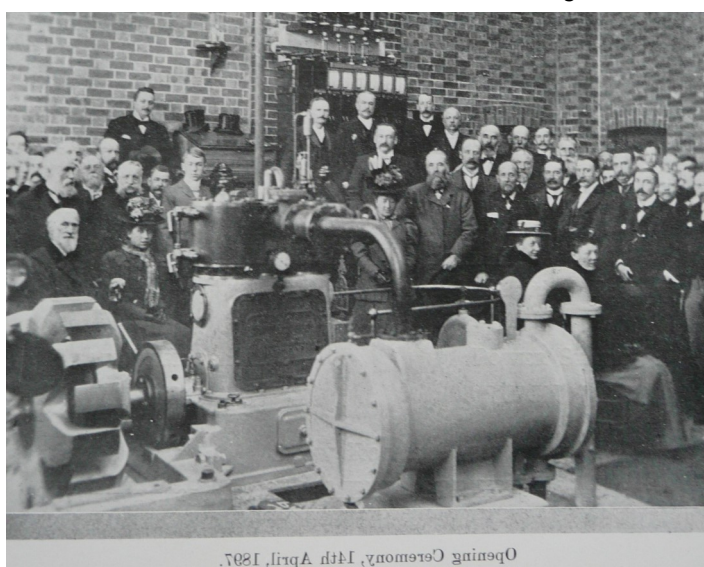
The great size of this book and the limited number of copies printed will require a realistic but reasonable

pricing of around £85 for both volumes.

The official 'launch' of *Wells and Swells* will be announced nearer to the time of publication, when the Civic Society will be well represented, along with the Mayor and guests. Author Malcolm Neesam will deliver a presentation on the book and the occasion will enable guests to participate in a unique piece of local history publishing, as the scale of this new book is unprecedented.

The book has received generous support from Hornbeam Park Developments Ltd.

*Nigel McClea*



*An illustration from the book: The 1897 opening of the electricity works*  
*Courtesy Malcolm Neesam*

# Dive

Celebrating 450 years of  
Harrogate's mineral springs.

in

The Mercer Gallery was built 200 years ago as the Promenade Rooms (where spa visitors could socialise), later becoming a Library, then Town Hall, before its rebirth as the Mercer Art Gallery in 2001.

## An exhibition in the Mercer Art Gallery

Until March 2022 you can yourself 'promenade' in the footsteps of early spa visitors while visiting an exhibition marking 450 years since the medicinal properties of the spa waters were recognised by William Slingsby.

The Gallery has put together a selection of works from the earliest representation of Harrogate wells to modern photographs exploring our relationship with water as a therapeutic medium. Visitors will find drawings, paintings, sketches, cartoons, photographs and visitors' books from the Royal Baths, and even 19<sup>th</sup> century kid gloves embroidered with images of Harrogate spa landmarks. Harrogate is very lucky to have such an excellent public gallery (and admission is free!) and whether you have never visited or are a frequent visitor to the gallery this exhibition should not be missed.

The exhibition is supported by , amongst others, the Friends of the Mercer Art Gallery.

*Angela Fahy*

## The opening of the New Park Visitor Centre.



*Above: One of the displays inside the Centre*

*Top left: Terry Williams addressing the audience in the school room, flanked by Andrew Skepper and the Mayor and Mayoress.*

*Left: Andrew Skepper and the Mayor cutting the ribbon.*



The New Park Visitor Centre has been reopened after extensive renovation and forms the showcase for the New Park Heritage collection built up over many years by former teacher of New Park School, Terry Williams. This records the history and development of this very special, and somewhat overlooked, part of Harrogate.

Around 25 invited guests were present at the official opening of the Centre on 18 September.

The event was attended by the Mayor of Harrogate, Councillor Trevor Chapman and the Mayoress, Janet Chapman. Cllr Chapman has a special connection with

New Park having represented the ward on Harrogate Borough Council for 14 years. Their children attended the school.

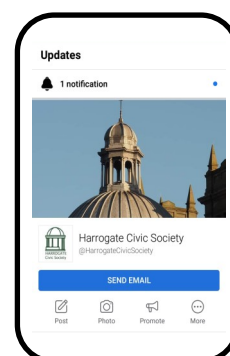
Also present was Andrew Skepper, son of Donald Skepper the former sub-postmaster at New Park Post Office who died tragically in 1974. Andrew also attended New Park School - more recently renamed New Park Academy.

The centre, which occupies a building in the grounds of New Park Academy, is now open to the public. To arrange a visit please contact Terry Williams on 01423 502840.

## Find us on

We are delighted to now be on Facebook, so please visit, like and share our page (as well as catching up on our latest news).

This is an organisation page, not a FB group page, so you don't need to 'join' it. You can simply read the posts (such as the Simon plaque unveiling and other Heritage Open Day events). But if you, or friends who are FB users, 'share' it means that more people will hear about us.





## Harrogate Dramatic Society

*We are grateful to Chris Rawson, chairman of the Harrogate Dramatic Society for this article.*

As live entertainment and theatre stages begin to light up again after their enforced period of darkness, Harrogate Dramatic Society invites members of Harrogate Civic Society to enjoy the world premiere of a play set right here in Harrogate. *The Stray* by local playwright Keith Burton is a compelling World War II drama that explores the intrigue surrounding the infamous bombing of The Majestic Hotel.

The play, based on true events, brims with all of the drama, espionage, and romance of the period and revolves around the Briggs family and the colourful array of military and intelligence personnel that cross the threshold of their Harrogate guest house. Tony Fennerty takes on the role of Briggs family patriarch and local councillor Joe, who juggles the complex demands of family life and local governance in wartime with his dramatic ambitions. The lives of Joe and the Briggs family are complicated further by 'The Coats Mission' – a top secret plan for the evacuation of the Royal family from London. A possible evacuation site of Newby Hall emerges, with additional accommodation for Prime

Minister Winston Churchill identified in Harrogate. Key players with conflicting interests in the success of the mission soon bring love and suspense into the lives of Joe, his nurse daughter Francis, and his easily fixated and unable to serve son Eugene.

*... a top secret plan for the evacuation of the Royal family from London. A possible evacuation site of Newby Hall emerges, with additional accommodation for Prime Minister Winston Churchill identified in Harrogate.*

*The Stray*, directed by Sue Rawson, runs from 4 - 6 November 2021 at The Crown Hotel and is the first production in Harrogate Dramatic Society's 2021/2022 season. Playwright Keith Burton, writer in residence at Pateley Bridge Playhouse, was assisted by local Harrogate historian Malcolm Neesom with advice and information about wartime Harrogate. Please join us for *The Stray* in the beautiful Crown Hotel. Tickets are available now for any members interested in experiencing this dramatic celebration of a unique moment in our area's history.

Harrogate Dramatic Society has roots stretching back to just a few years after the period depicted in *The Stray*, 1945 to be precise, meaning the society was recently able to proudly celebrate its 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. This milestone was belatedly marked with a black-tie dinner at Oakdale Golf Club this month. Celebrations had been delayed until all members were able to celebrate together without social distancing.

Harrogate Dramatic Society has presented a diverse range of productions over the past 76 years, ranging from comedies and drama to classic theatre productions of the works of Shakespeare and Chekhov. Some notable past productions include the Harrogate Dramatic Society's very first production, *Red Peppers* by Noel Coward, as well as *Stepping Out* by Richard Harris, *Calendar Girls* adapted by Tim Firth, *Brassed Off* adapted by Paul Allen, and *The History Boys* by Alan Bennett.

The Harrogate Dramatic Society presents  
the premiere of

# THE STRAY

A play about Harrogate by Keith Burton  
Directed by Sue Rawson




At the  
**Crown Hotel, Harrogate**  
Thurs 4<sup>th</sup> to Sat 6<sup>th</sup> Nov 2021  
7:30pm nightly & 2:30pm Sat  
only

Tickets available from  
**Ticket Source** at  
[www.ticketsource.co.uk/harrogate-dramatic-society](http://www.ticketsource.co.uk/harrogate-dramatic-society)



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## Shop window displays

*We are grateful for the support of Harrogate BID, who commissioned the displays and Malcolm Neesam who provided the text and images. The images are reproduced courtesy of the Walker-Neesam archive.*

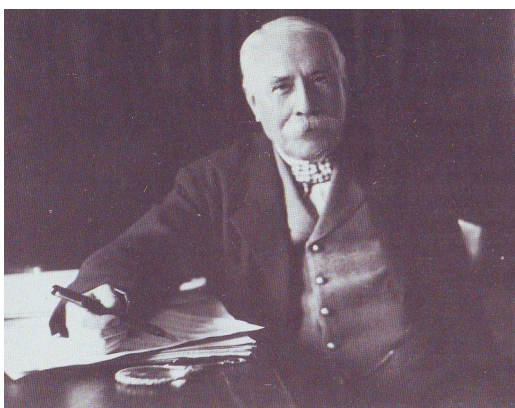
**You will have noticed as you walk about town the series of interesting panels illustrating just some of the famous people who have visited and/or lived in the town. These have appeared masking the windows of many of the empty shops.**



Queen Elizabeth's first Harrogate visit occurred on Wednesday 27 July 1949, when some four years before her Coronation, Princess Elizabeth arrived in Harrogate with the Duke of Edinburgh to attend the Great Yorkshire Show. Her first official visit to Harrogate as Queen was in 1957 when she arrived to see the Great Yorkshire Show and also to tour her Harrogate estates, which the Monarch owns through the Duchy of Lancaster inheritance of 1399, when at Henry 1Vth's coronation he declared that, henceforth, the Duchy of Lancaster would always be the monarch's property. Queen Elizabeth made her second official visit to Harrogate in April 1985, when she visited the new Conference Centre. A further royal visit occurred in December 1998, when Her Majesty opened the newly restored Sun Pavilion, and also visited Harrogate Theatre and the home of Farrah's Harrogate Toffee.



Winston Churchill first visited Harrogate in November 1900 to give a talk in the Winter Gardens about his experience in the South African Wars. Staying at the newly opened Majestic Hotel, Churchill also organised a 'charge of the Harrogate Bath Chair men' which saw entrants lined up at the top of Parliament Street before racing down the hill, the winner being whoever crossed the finishing line outside the George Hotel. Churchill returned to Harrogate in 1944, when he had a military conference with General Montgomery, being met at the railway station by the Mayor, who invited him to sign the visitors book in the Council Offices. In recent times it has been suggested that, had the Nazi invasion occurred and the Royal family evacuated to Newby Hall, Churchill's HQ would have been moved to Grove House.



Sir Edward Elgar (1857-1934) visited Harrogate in the summer of 1912 to undergo the 'cure' at the Royal Baths. Staying at the Crown Hotel, Elgar also dined with friends at the Majestic Hotel, where he noted that *'Harrogate thinks itself very fashionable and more than chic...and the ladies dress up terribly'*. During the depths of the Great War, Elgar recalled happier times to Lady Alice Stuart Wortley *'I was dreaming yesterday of woods and fields and perhaps a little drive round Harrogate – or a little journey to Fountains or some lovely remembrance of long ago idylls... Well, I have put it all in my music...'*. Elgar's last visit occurred in 1927, when the composer was observed to take a daily walk from the Majestic Hotel to Valley Gardens along what is now known as the Elgar Walk.



Cousin to King George V and Emperor Nicholas II, Grand Duchess George of Russia first visited Harrogate in 1910, at the recommendation of Empress Alexandra, for her two daughters, Nina and Zenia, to receive treatment at the Royal Baths. Her annual visit in 1914 saw her marooned in Harrogate at the outbreak of war on 4 August and soon afterwards she opened a hospital for wounded servicemen. The success of this led to other hospitals and convalescent homes being opened in Harrogate, with members of European royalty assisting with their running. By the end of the war in 1918, the Grand Duchess's hospitals at Tewit Well, Heatherdene, St. George's and St. Nicholas had treated 1,200 casualties in an outstanding act of humanity. Following the murder of her husband along with the Emperor, the Grand Duchess never returned to Russia.



## Heritage Open Days 2021

Heritage Open Days, held during the middle of September, was a resounding success and we are grateful to the many people who contributed by opening their building, leading walks and to the organising team who managed to visit most events and promote the Civic Society.

Guided walks were a new addition this year and were particularly popular. We had to close bookings on most due to their popularity.

Tower tours at St Wilfrid's Church were fully booked and the Private Chapel at Ridding Park wowed all visitors.

New Park Heritage Centre was opened by the Mayor and has attracted many visitors.

We had fantastic media coverage from the Harrogate Advertiser and the Stray Ferret that helped with the success of the events and also promoted the Society.

Next year HODs will run from 9 - 18 September with a theme to celebrate creativity and innovation, looking back at the history and heritage of our innovations and inventions.

Harrogate should do well – I sense that Sampson Fox may get a mention or two!

If you would like to be involved in HODs next year, please email [events@harrogatecivicsociety.org](mailto:events@harrogatecivicsociety.org)



*The Chapel at Ridding Park attracted over 60 visitors during the hours it was open for HODs.*

## Harrogate Station Gateway - latest



On 1 October, members of the Civic Society committee met virtually with officers from Harrogate Borough Council, North Yorkshire County Council and their consultants to be briefed on the work being done on the Station Gateway Project.

Design work is now being focussed on the single lane option for Station Parade with bus lanes, cycle lanes and pedestrian footways.

As well as concerns over the traffic implications, the treatment of Station Square was discussed at length and is likely to be of significant interest to members.

Public consultation on the project begins on 16 October. We have been promised more detailed plans and we will be inviting all our members to voice their opinions in the weeks ahead.

### Contact us:

General matters	..	..	<a href="mailto:info@harrogatecivicsociety.org">info@harrogatecivicsociety.org</a>
Membership queries	..	..	<a href="mailto:membership@harrogatecivicsociety.org">membership@harrogatecivicsociety.org</a>
Event bookings	..	..	<a href="mailto:events@harrogatecivicsociety.org">events@harrogatecivicsociety.org</a>

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