



*Cherry blossom time on the Stray near Tewit Well,
18 April 2026.*

'William Slingsby was the first person [in 1571] to recognise the medicinal quality of the mineral well at High Harrogate, vulgarly known as the Tewit Well' (Malcolm Neesam, Harrogate Great Chronicle, 2005)

The Civic Society in 2026-7

Our Annual General Meeting, to be held on 12 May, marks the end of the 2025-6 year and the start of the 2026-7 year.

We hope many members will attend the West Park Centre to hear our past achievements and future ambitions. The Committee would warmly welcome members who would like to help take the society forward.

Our team has put together a full programme of events extending into 2027 and the next talk *Flying from the Stray* will follow straight after the AGM.

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Please note that whilst every effort is made to ensure accuracy, no responsibility can be accepted should any losses be incurred. Opinions expressed are those of the contributor and not necessarily of the Harrogate Civic Society.
David Siddans, Editor

Notice of the 2026 Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the Harrogate Civic Society will take place on

Tuesday 12 May 2026 at

West Park Centre, Victoria Avenue, Harrogate

7.30 pm with refreshments from 7 pm

Nominations are invited from members for positions on the Committee by email to

chair@harrogatecivicsociety.org

All papers for this AGM will be available on the Civic Society's website.

www.harrogatecivicsociety.org

... followed by our talk

The talk *Flying from the Stray* will follow immediately after the AGM.

This is the fascinating story of the long-forgotten and controversial use of the Stray as an airfield.

Our speaker, Peter Rix, has a long interest in aviation and local history and has brought his two passions together in this talk.



Subscriptions 2026

Subscriptions are due on 1 May, so here is a polite reminder.

Many people pay by standing order, which makes it easy for us to administer. If you don't have a standing order in place, please consider setting one up, or make your bank transfer by the end of April.

We very much hope you will renew your membership and help us to continue to support our town, and work to *Celebrate our past, Enhance our present, and Shape our future.*

If you have recently paid, then thank you

Annually on 1 May

Individual £20

Joint* £30

Under 25 £10

*Two people at the same address

Caring for the River Nidd

Nigel McClea reports on a talk given to an audience of just under 70 by David Clayden, a member of the Civic Society and Chair of the Nidd Action Group.

On 11 February David Clayden gave an elegant but alarming talk on the state of our rivers. 'It is easy', said David, 'to think of Harrogate as not on a river system but this would be totally wrong'. We depend upon a web of watercourses draining into two becks (Oak and Crimple) before flowing into the Nidd - and the whole system is in trouble.

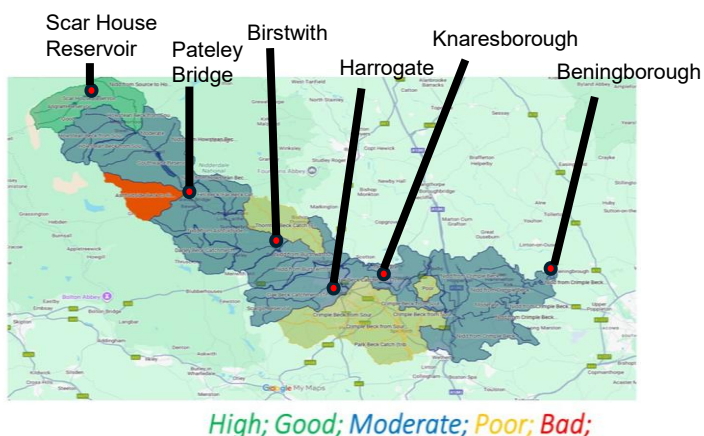
15 years ago, David retired to Harrogate intending to fly-fish, but so alarmed was he at the poor state of the rivers that now he chairs the Nidd Action Group with the very appropriate acronym of NAG! David posed a series of questions:

Why should we care?

He stressed how vital rivers are to life and wellbeing; meeting so many needs – water storage and abstraction, power generation, urban and agricultural drainage, flood control, the removal and dilution of waste. And what a contribution they make to our physical and mental health.

What has gone wrong?

We have such poor water quality. The ecological health of the Nidd catchment is shown below, ranging from 'Near Natural/Good' (green) to 'Bad' (red), but mostly 'Moderate' and 'Poor'.



The Government wants 80% of all rivers to rate 'Good' by 2028. The present figure is 14%.

And the problem?

Principally a wide variety of pollution – industrial, commercial, residential, agricultural – with inadequate control.

Who is responsible?

The polluters – which is all of us. Every time we clean our cars on the drive, the run-off goes through the drains straight into the river. And how much do we think about it? Then there are all the rule makers and regulators – the Government, the Environment Agency, the local authorities, the water companies etc. etc. Do they give the effort and financial resources needed? Do we care enough that they do?

For instance, our own Knaresborough Lido has been designated a 'safe bathing area' but this means only better monitoring and long-term actions – not that it is safe to swim in!

What should be done?

There is no shortage of legislation, plans, reports etc. aimed at tackling the problem with a White Paper currently under debate.

Better rivers need more of us to care; more of us to support the work of organisations such as NAG.

For more information see:

<https://www.niddactiongroup.org>

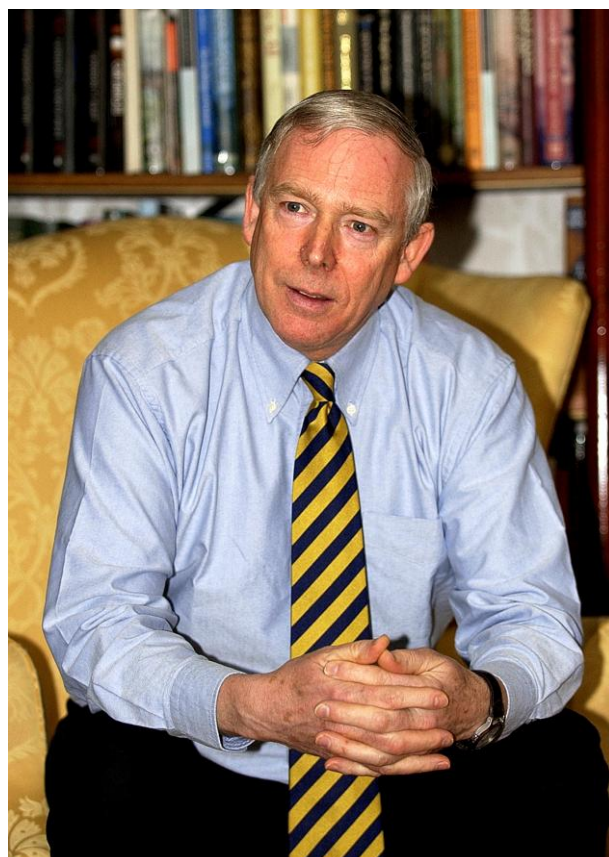


Precious Snapshots of Harrogate History

Nigel McClea, Chair of the HCS History Group, reports on how many of Malcolm Neesam's articles on Harrogate's history have been rediscovered and saved by the group.

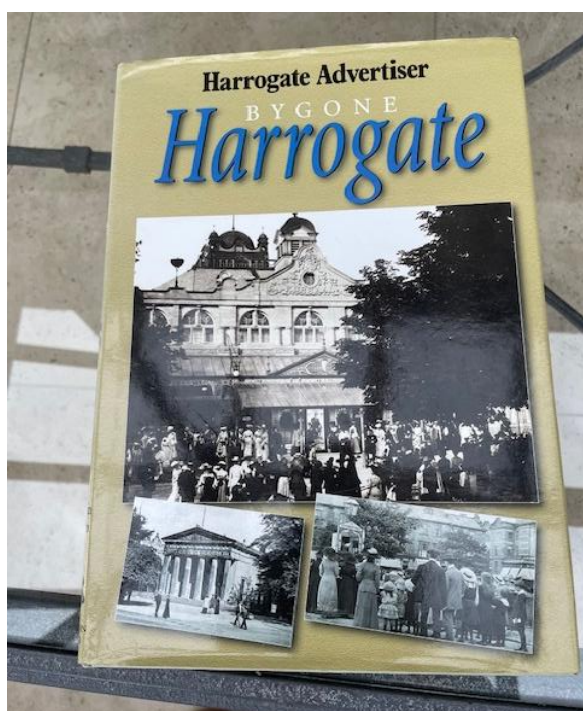
From 1997 until 2015 the late Malcolm Neesam (1946 – 2022) contributed a weekly column to the Harrogate Advertiser. Originally called *Bygone Harrogate* and later *Harrogate Heritage*, most of the topics he chose dealt with the history and heritage of our town. Even so, Malcolm could be a fearless, not to say fearsome, critic of modern Harrogate, and some of his criticisms were very frank.

In 1999 the Advertiser (as part of its millennium celebration) published a reprint in book form. Rather patronisingly they called it the best of Malcolm's articles. Although no longer in print, second-hand copies are available online; thoroughly recommended to anyone with an historical interest.



But after Malcolm's death we discovered that the Advertiser had binned their entire back catalogue. So, we were delighted when Simon Kent (who had worked closely with Malcolm in his later years) re-created the original texts from the microfilm archive in Harrogate Library. The Advertiser agreed to reprint selected articles and the first, chosen by Simon, assisted by Paul Jennings, appeared in late 2024. This was followed by a further ten, all of which are archived in the History section of the Society's website. Following a brief pause, I am delighted that a second batch is currently being published and archived monthly.

I am extremely grateful to Simon and Paul for all their hard work and delighted that the Advertiser is also happy for us to convert these articles into another book, perhaps at some later date.



Safeguarding Knaresborough's Heritage

The Civic Society's March talk was given by Kathy Allday (right) of the Knaresborough Museum Trust.

Paul Jennings writes:



On Tuesday 10 March, members gathered at the West Park Centre for what proved to be an inspirational talk by Kathy Allday of the Knaresborough Museum Trust. Its title was *Safeguarding Knaresborough's Heritage: the work of the Knaresborough Museum Association.*

Kathy has been a key player in its origin and development over the last seven years. It was back in the autumn of 2019 that a heritage-themed community festival was held. She recruited everybody with knowledge of the town's history and any other local people with relevant information and artifacts. The resulting pop-up museum attracted some 750 people and from that the idea of a permanent town museum was born and a Town Museum Group formed. This would complement the existing Court House Museum and Castle by offering what they lacked, for example, archaeology and social history. Kathy went on to detail the hard work and time involved of seeing this idea to reality.



A painting of the new Heritage Centre by Linda Young

Temporary premises on York Place proved unsatisfactory before the present Heritage Centre was opened on the 27 April 2024 in the High Street, opposite the bus station.

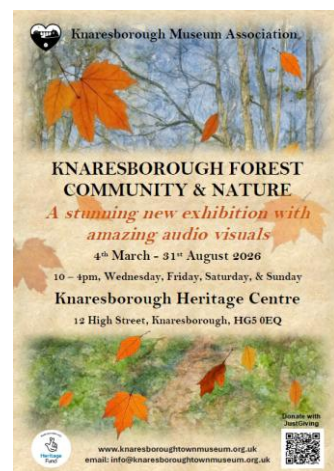
Extensive refurbishment was completed with grants from the George Moore Foundation.

It would take a much longer piece than this to document all the work that has been done. This has included exhibitions, for example on World War Two and the linen industry; starting an oral history memories project; undertaking excavations, as into the Spitalcroft leper tunnel; supporting research, for example on the geology of the Nidd Gorge; 400 years of education in the town; and promoting outreach work with local schools and other community groups.

The Trust also publishes pamphlets and books, for example on the Castle Yard Riot, which are available to purchase..

The current exhibition is on the Forest of Knaresborough, of which Harrogate was once a part. It traces the history of the area from the ice age, through the royal hunting forest years, to enclosure and on to the present day.

Right: The exhibition poster



Harrogate Town Neighbourhood Plan



An update from
Nick Brennan

Throughout 2025, our Society members worked closely with the Harrogate Town Plan Forum to develop a Neighbourhood Plan for the unparished parts of Harrogate. We tackled important subjects like the local economy, transport, housing, heritage and architecture, nature, health and wellbeing, and sustainability – all things that matter to our community.



Neighbourhood Planning journey moves forward as Forum hands the baton to the Town Council.

L - R: Stuart Holland, Cllr Viv Poskitt, Cllr Chris Aldred

Handover

At the end of last year, the Harrogate Town Plan Forum officially handed over the project to Harrogate Town Council at a special event at West Park Centre, West Park United Reformed Church. Our thanks go to the Forum steering group, which included Civic Society members Paul Hatherley and Stuart Holland, Jemima Parker from Zero Carbon Harrogate, and Kathryn Jukes from Directions Planning.

Harrogate Town Council has now set up a Neighbourhood Plan Group made up of councillors and community members, including the Civic Society. This group has met several times over the past year to discuss how we should connect with neighbouring parishes.

Connecting with Neighbouring Parishes

Three neighbouring parishes expressed interest to be included within the evolving Neighbourhood Plan. The parishes expressing interest are Killinghall, Haverah Park with Beckwithshaw and Follifoot. Pannal and Burn Bridge Parish Council were also consulted but decided against as they have developed their own neighbourhood plan. Now, the Town Council will work with the interested parishes to decide if the Neighbourhood Plan area should grow beyond Harrogate's unparished area. If this happens, North Yorkshire Council's agreement will be needed.

Timescales

It is currently envisaged that the Neighbourhood Plan would not be formally adopted until 2031, but it also should be acknowledged that both local and national elections may have an impact upon the timetable.

In the meantime, the Harrogate Civic Society will continue to support the process of developing the Neighbourhood Plan that harmonises with the North Yorkshire Local Plan. The Neighbourhood Plan will address specific planning concerns in Harrogate that may be overlooked by a county-wide plan.

North Yorkshire Local Plan

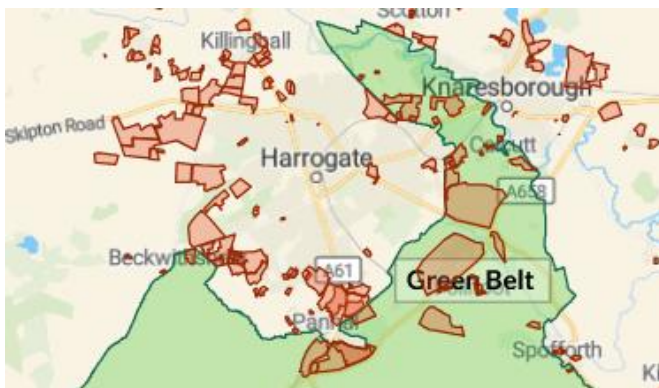
The existing Harrogate District Local Plan (2014–2035) remains in effect until a North Yorkshire Local Plan is adopted.

The intention is for the neighbourhood planning work undertaken by Harrogate Town Plan Forum and Harrogate Town Council Neighbourhood Plan Group to inform the North Yorkshire Local Plan. The current timetable for the development of the North Yorkshire Plan can be seen below.

Current North Yorkshire Local Plan, Status and Timetable

- *Call for Sites*: Closed in November 2025, the council is currently assessing over 2,000 submitted land parcels for potential development.
- *Issues and Options Consultation*: The first conversation stage is scheduled to take place in early 2026 (rescheduled from late 2025 to account for national planning reforms).
- *Preferred Options Consultation*: expected in Autumn 2026
- *Submission and Examination*: slated for 2028
- *Final Adoption*: targeted for 2029

Once adopted, plans must be reviewed, and an update commenced, every five years.



The North Yorkshire Local Plan *Call for Sites* map has been updated on [its website](#) to show all submitted sites up to November 2025.

While this process has now closed it may reopen after North Yorkshire Council has reviewed all submitted sites to date.

While the existing Harrogate District Local Plan (2014–2035) remains in effect until a North Yorkshire Local Plan is adopted, you may be aware that there are several speculative non-allocated housing sites beginning to test that Plan.

Unfortunately, this is due to a shortage of a five-year housing land supply within the district. When this occurs the National Planning Policy Framework triggers a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which could outweigh the spatial restriction of a defined allocation within the existing Local Plan.

Therefore, the next few months and years will be important for Harrogate and its residents as we see how our town evolves. The Harrogate Civic Society will continue to keep a close eye on new development proposals and welcomes all Society members' involvement with upcoming consultations.

Your input can help shape Harrogate's future!

Left: an extract from the North Yorkshire Call for Sites map showing submitted sites as at 25 November 2025

Health in Harrogate – A Legacy

Nigel McClea gave an introductory address at the opening of the *Health in Harrogate* event held at the West Park Centre on 7 April. The event includes an exhibition and a series of talks, walks and activities marking the 200 years since the opening of the first hospital in Harrogate.



This is a summary of that address:

Four years ago, Malcolm Neesam knew that he was dying. In his final months we were able to help with the publication and launch of his last work, the monumental *Wells and Swells*, telling the history of Harrogate from 1842 to 1923. We may be able, at some time, to add a final volume covering the period 1924 to 1974. This will draw upon largely completed chapters and detailed notes that Malcolm left behind. But that is another story for another day.

During our many hours of discussion over *Wells and Swells*, Malcolm repeatedly expressed one regret, that he would not live long enough to see three major Harrogate anniversaries. He asked if we, the Society, would ensure that all three were marked appropriately. And this has become something of a point of honour, particularly following Malcolm's death in June 2022.

1. In 2023, the centenary of the Harrogate War Memorial
2. In 2026, the 200-year anniversary of the opening of the first hospital
3. In 2028, the 250-year anniversary of *The Great Award* which established The Stray

It is the second of Malcolm's three anniversaries that we celebrate this year. The sixth of April saw exactly 200 years since The Bath Hospital on Cornwall Road (later The Royal Bath Hospital) accepted its first patients. Harrogate had at that time a population of only 4000 and this was its first hospital.

We are delighted that the Harrogate Medical Society, at our suggestion and with our encouragement, has spent over a year crafting an innovative exhibition they have called *Health in Harrogate: 200 years*.

This, with an extensive programme of supporting events, is running at the West Park Centre until 16 May. Full details can be found by visiting health-in-harrogate.net

We hope - no we are sure - Malcolm would be very pleased.



Above: the event brochure

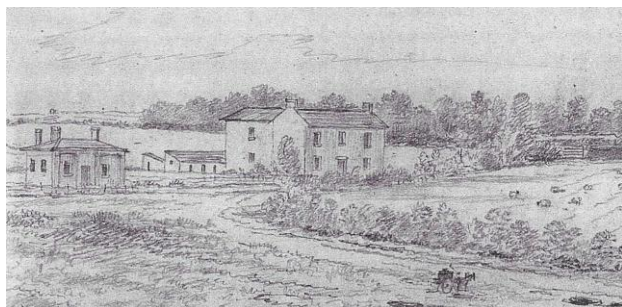
Left: The Mayor, Cllr Chris Aldred formally opens the exhibition.

Harrogate's First Hospital - Gone but not Forgotten

The Civic Society's April talk formed part of the series of events marking the Health in Harrogate 200 anniversary programme.

Nigel McClea reports:

April fifteenth was a very special evening. A record turnout at the West Park Centre enjoyed a joint meeting with Harrogate Medical Society, part of *Health in Harrogate 200 years*. We were there to learn about Harrogate's first hospital and why it was so important to the town.



The Bath Hospital drawn by John Field in 1830. Source: Malcolm Neesam, Harrogate Great Chronicle, 2005

The Bath Hospital (later the Royal Bath Hospital) opened in 1826 off Cornwall Road, close to the future Valley Gardens. The hospital went through many transformations over the years, not least a significant extension in 1889, before finally closing in 1994 with many of the old hospital buildings sympathetically converted into apartments.

Our principal speaker, Peter Holmes, a volunteer in the Valley Gardens, became intrigued by the former hospital 'just over the wall' and his fascinating talk was impeccably researched.

We were told that, at the start of the 19th century, health in Harrogate was two tier. Although, by modern standards, all medical care was primitive, the rich had at least some relief drinking the Harrogate waters and, as Peter described

from a cartoon, 'annoying Satan and cheating death' The poor had no such relief !

Indeed, the very presence of the poor with their all too obvious ailments was an offence. A charity did exist for their benefit, surprisingly well funded by visitors to the various town inns but, by 1818, the trustees were driven to contemplating a bath house for the poor (largely to keep them away from the rich). Later that ambition extended to a hospital and The Bath Hospital was born.

However, there were strict rules for patients – they had to be poor, worthy of charity and sound of mind. They mustn't loiter round wells or in public places or be seen 'strolling around' !

As the century advanced these rules were substantially relaxed, with much wider patient care and charges introduced for hydrotherapy treatments. Nevertheless, until the creation of the NHS in 1948, the hospital continued to be privately run, funded principally by treatment charges and generous private donations. For instance, in 1879 alone, donations exceeded £500,000 in today's money with legacies on top.

Peter was joined on stage by Fiona Evard, Carmel Duff and Domini Bryer who regaled us with vivid reminiscences of their time working at the hospital in the 1980s. By then it was a regional treatment centre for rheumatology before it was finally allowed to close, bringing down the curtain on 168 years of world-class care.



The speakers at the 15 April talk

Left to right: Domini Bryer, Fiona Evard, Peter Holmes, Carmel Duff

Summary of the final events in the bi-centenary programme

Date	Speaker(s)	Topic	Booking website
Wednesday 22 April 7 – 8.30 pm	Dr Peter Hammond	1922 and all that: from insulin intrigue to the artificial pancreas - searching for a cure for type 1 diabetes	www.trybooking.com/uk/FUPW
Wednesday 29 April 7 – 8.30 pm	Harry Satloka	Harrogate's spa heritage	www.trybooking.com/uk/FUOC
Saturday 2 May 7 – 8.30 pm	Sarah Devonald Andrew Hitchen Paul Jennings	Sound Health - the music of Harrogate's Spa, Stray and Streets	www.trybooking.com/uk/FWKO
Wednesday 13 May 7 – 8.30 pm	Dr Mike Green	Rheumatology advances through the ages	www.trybooking.com/uk/FWKL

From one of the Health-in-Harrogate display boards referring to the contribution of the Grand Duchess George of Russia to the welfare of the wounded of the First World War by founding a military hospital in Harrogate, together with her two daughters:

One wounded soldier came round after surgery, puzzled to see a rather grand lady standing by his bed. "I am Princess Margaret of Denmark" explained the nurse. "And that is Princess Victoria, the King's sister. The soldier asked who the third was. "Oh, that's the Grand Duchess George of Russia". "Blimey!" he said, "We really are among the nuts!"

Summary of Forthcoming Events

in the next few months

Unless otherwise stated, talks are held at the West Park Centre, Victoria Avenue, commencing at 7.30 pm. Teas and coffees from 7.00 pm

Date	Event	Booking website
Thursday 7 May	Tour of Swinton Castle <i>Fully booked</i>	
Tuesday 12 May	Annual General Meeting Followed by: Flying from the Stray – a talk by Peter Rix	trybooking.com/uk/GHTV
Saturday 6 June 2.00 pm	Tour of All Saints Cemetery , Harlow Hill Led by Paul Jennings	MEMBERS WILL BE ADVISED WHEN BOOKING OPENS
Wednesday 10 June	The Challenges of the Stray Ferret – in a fake news world By Tamsin O'Brien	trybooking.com/uk/GIGC
Tuesday 14 July	George Hudson – the man who brought the railways to Harrogate By Robert Beaumont	trybooking.com/uk/GIGD
Wednesday 16 September	Harrogate Rocks – popular music in Harrogate By Derek Shelmerdine	trybooking.com/uk/GIGF

Payments (where applicable)

by bank transfer: Name: Harrogate Civic Society Sort Code 05-04-54 Account 16746595
Reference: please use your name followed by the date DDMM of the event

By cheque: Post to Mr P Fennimore, HCS Treasurer, 9 Merryfield, Harrogate, HG2 9DH

All details are on our website and are continuously updated. Full information and reminders will be issued via email, newsletter and social media.

Contact us

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