HARROGATE Civic Society

NEWSLETTER

Celebrate our past **Enhance** our present **Shape** our future November 2026



West Park Stray on a misty morning in November.

*The stone on the right is a Grade II listed rough-hewn gritstone pillar erected in 1778. It bears the inscription '**Boundary of the Leeds and Ripon Turnpike Roads'** and marked the boundary between the Leeds and Harrogate Turnpike Trust and the Harrogate, Hutton Moor and Ripon Turnpike Trust. (ref: Historic England)*

Harrogate's Heritage

The Civic Society has identified a significant number of locations where our heritage assets are at serious risk. See page 2 for more details including our efforts to get action to restore and protect these assets.

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Come to our Christmas Social

St Wilfrid's Church Hall
Sunday 6 December 3pm



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

Save our Heritage



A plea on behalf of Harrogate Civic Society by our Chair, ***Michael Newby***

Does North Yorkshire Council (NYC) care about Harrogate's heritage? That is the question that many of us have been asking ourselves as we see our cherished heritage assets rotting before our very eyes. The Sun Parlours* and Colonnade* in the Valley Gardens are looking almost derelict, the Old Magnesia Well* and the well heads behind it need urgent attention, the shelters on West Park* are in a very poor state of repair and Tewit Well* and St John's Well*, the first two wells in Harrogate, are looking very sad. There is also the question of the rotting and disappearing serpent benches* and the risk to our remaining heritage lamp posts*.

After emails did not appear to produce any positive response, I decided to issue a press release. Within two hours of the press release being circulated I had a reply from the Corporate Director of Environment suggesting that we should have a meeting. Success, I thought…but do you know what it takes to get a meeting with NYC? The answer on this occasion was 3 weeks, 14 emails and the involvement of 10 officers of the Council.

Good News

However, the good news is that I have had a meeting with the Head of Property Maintenance to highlight the Civic Society's concerns. NYC will also be meeting with English Heritage early in December to look at grant opportunities and we have been promised an update on the outcome of that meeting.

We are also planning to convene a meeting between NYC and the Civic Society committee to discuss potential plans and opportunities to progress key works.

Harrogate Town Investment Plan

In the meantime, I have also met with NYC's Principal Regeneration Officer to discuss projects within the Harrogate Town Investment Plan. I am hoping that the Council has learnt its lesson from other projects (you may know which one I mean!) when something was done FOR Harrogate rather that WITH Harrogate.

As part of the Town Investment Plan process a Harrogate Town Centre Design Guide is in its very early stages of development and there seems to be some enthusiasm that the Civic Society is involved.

Keeping up the pressure

So, whilst we have not yet got a fixed programme of repairs there is progress in increased communication between ourselves and NYC. You can rest assured that we will keep on pressuring the Council to look after our valuable heritage.

The timetable is tight; we need Harrogate to be looking its best for 2028 when we mark 250 years of The Stray with 'The Stray 250' celebrations**.

- *Pictured on next page*

** *See page 11*

Heritage Assets - Photographs



1



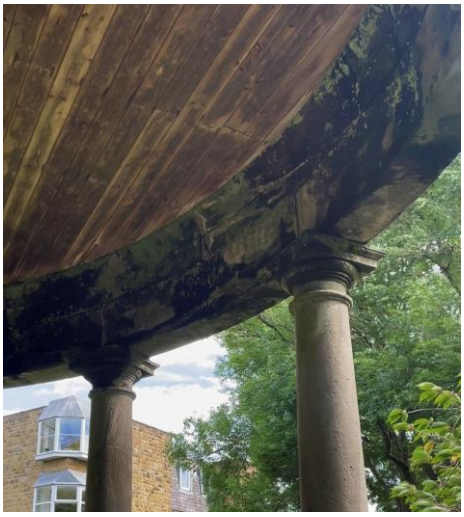
2



3



4



5



6



7

1. Sun Parlour
2. Sun Colonnade
3. Old Magnesia Well
4. Shelter on West Park
5. Tewit Well
6. St John's Well
7. Serpent Bench, Valley Drive
8. Heritage lamppost



8

A Look Back at Heritage Open Days 2026

Heritage Open Days (HODS) is a nationwide festival of history, community and culture, held in September each year. The event is promoted by the National Trust, People's Postcode Lottery, Findmypast and locally by the Civic Society.

***Geoff Brown** looks back at this year's event.*



The West Park Centre



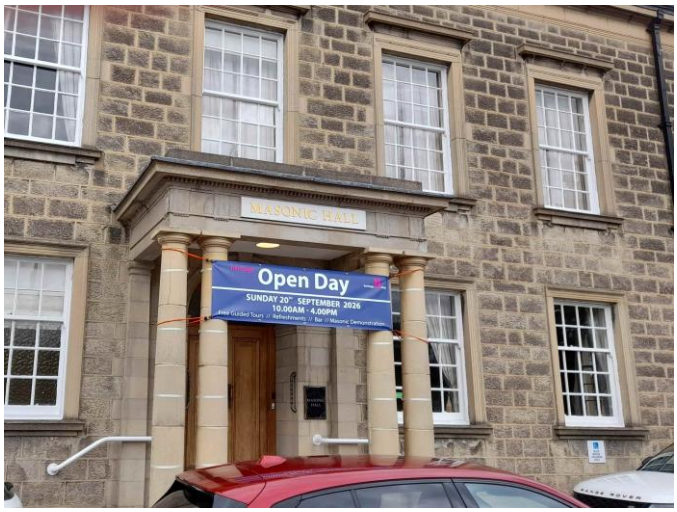
Valley Gardens Guided Walk

The 2026 HODS festival was a great success. It was a bumper year in the Harrogate area – over the 10 days there were 58 events at 28 venues, all of which were free to attend.

There was a wide variety of venues to choose from – guided tours, hosted walks, buildings to explore, talks, exhibitions and several events that were new for 2026. HODS provides a rare opportunity to visit places and events that are not available at other times.

The Festival gave us all the chance to see some of the amazing heritage within Harrogate and the surrounding area. People attending HODs locally have been very complimentary as well as learning so much about our area and heritage - they have clearly appreciated the hard work from the event teams.

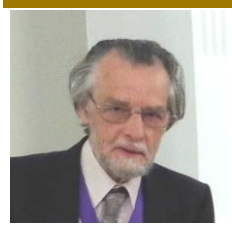
Around the area the individual organisers and volunteer teams have, once again, been magnificent. Following a huge amount of research and preparation they ran their events with such enthusiasm and effort. Our heroic Civic Society team also worked diligently to support the local events. Many thanks to all!



Harrogate Masonic Hall Open Day

The next Heritage Open Days Festival will be held on 10 -19 September 2027.

Planning Matters



Some developments seem to take many years to come to fruition following the initial planning approval.

***Henry Pankhurst** gives us four examples:*

Several applications that we have responded to are taking much longer to determine than the target of 13 weeks for major applications and 8 weeks for other applications. Large housing proposals almost always take far longer.

Windmill Farm

This site on Otley Road, almost in Beckwithshaw, was validated in March 2022 originally for 770 dwellings plus an allowance for 40 self-build homes plus 100 – 200 homes on land not included in these figures. A new primary school and a convenience store plus other facilities were planned. In October 2025 a revised description for 649 dwellings, 70 apartments for the elderly and 24 self-build plots etc, was issued, BUT still with the area previously suggested for 100 – 200 homes not taken into account, so well on the way to 1,000 homes. Since the original application, revised information and amended/additional plans and documents have been issued, many in the last two months - over 400 documents altogether! Could a decision be getting close?

Penny Pot Lane

In November 2017 an application was lodged for 350 dwellings on a large site south of Penny Pot Lane (opposite the Persimmon Homes site). Unsurprisingly, this application was refused in February 2018 in perhaps a record time for such a proposal!

After a long interval, this was followed in December 2025 by an application for 320 dwellings when it was clear that a 5-year supply of housing land could not be met for Harrogate. The applicant attempted to improve development in this countryside area by offering plans for structured woodland, orchards and outdoor recreation facilities. Will this ameliorate the views of the many objectors? The former Harrogate Borough Council gave very strong reasons for refusal of the original application.

Knox Lane

Another housing proposal, long in the pipeline, is for 59 affordable dwellings: 28 to rent and 31 to purchase. The site is not allocated in the Local Plan and is in a Special Landscape Area. It is next to Knox Sawmills and opposite a site allowed on appeal for 53 dwellings. After it was validated in January this year, many revised documents have been submitted and numerous consultees including our Society and dozens of members of the public have submitted comments. The Knox Valley Residents Association and Knox Community Conservation Group presented a masterly overview of the planning history of the site with detailed justification for refusing development.

Knaresborough Road

Applegarth Homes is a group of almshouses built in 1939, set well back on a large plot near to Rydal Road. The existing building would be demolished and replaced with a larger building extending forwards into the gardens.. Over the years, we have seen many amendments to the original proposals. The most significant is a reduction from 26 to 20 apartments made in February this year. Car parking has been increased from the original 10 spaces to 20 spaces. The application is noted on the Council website as ‘Awaiting Decision’.

The Walker-Neesam Archive
A Gift to Harrogate

***Nigel McClea** reports on the progress being made to preserve the huge archive left by the late Malcolm Neesam.*



In June 2022 Malcolm Neesam died, bequeathing in his Will a lifetime of material to North Yorkshire Council on the strict understanding that the collection (mostly paper) would never leave Harrogate. The Council accepted the terms and 54 document boxes containing a total of over 100,000 items were carefully relocated from Malcolm's home to a specially prepared room in the Mercer Gallery.

It was here that the hard work really started. It was never in doubt that this important resource deserved proper curation and it was agreed that the archive should be preserved not only on paper but also digitally with every item being photographed, given a unique number and title and a short description of content. This was always going to be a project of legendary scale. Indeed, two years in, some 97,000 of the 100,000 items have yet to be catalogued.

Charged with day-to-day responsibility for this 'labour of Hercules' is Collections Assistant Danielle Little. Recruited into the North Yorkshire museums service at the start of this project, Danielle is eminently qualified, with three masters degrees to her name and blessed with infinite patience. She cheerfully acknowledges the scale of the challenge. Despite only being able to allocate a day a week or so to the archive, Danielle and her support team of loyal volunteers refuse to be daunted by what was always going to be a very long-term exercise.



So what is to happen to the archive while it is being curated?

First and foremost, it will be kept safe. Then it will be made accessible to all those (such as our own Paul Jennings) who need to consult it. But Danielle and the team are also keen to display elements to the public whenever time allows. There have already been two exhibitions, both held at the Mercer: *Harrogate's Historian: a first look at the Walker Neesam archive* and, earlier this year, *Sounds of the Spa* which celebrated Malcolm's love for Harrogate's musical heritage. More are planned.

As for the digital database, this is being designed for eventual public access. But exactly when 'eventual' will be, Danielle is rather more cautious, not wishing to press the button with so much of the archive still awaiting conversion. But the day will come. That much she promises. And when it does, we shall be among the first to know!

Danielle Little

North Yorkshire Local Plan

North Yorkshire Council (NYC) is in the process of preparing a Local Plan which will eventually replace the existing local plans drawn up by the former District Councils. This Local Plan will shape land use and guide future developments in the county up to 2045.

Individual towns and communities are preparing, or in some cases have finalised, Neighbourhood Plans which will form part of the NYC Local Plan.

Harrogate Civic Society is actively engaged in the Town Council's preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan for Harrogate.

Current timetable for the Local Plan:

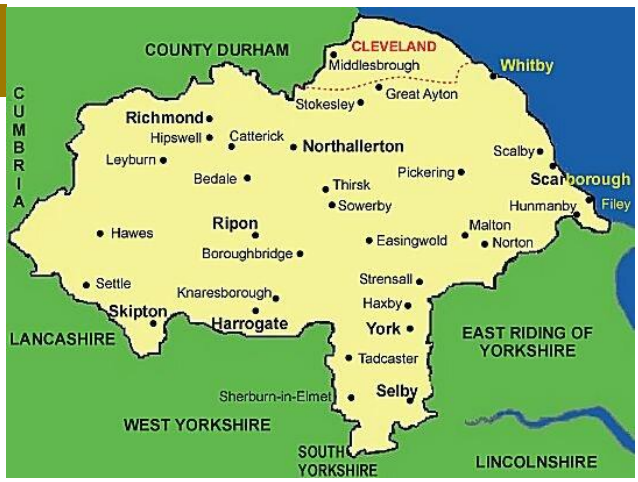
23 October 2026 Start of the scoping consultation. This will invite comments on what the local plan should contain and how we should engage during later stages.

If members wish to comment, the consultation is open until 7 December. Search North Yorkshire Local Plan Consultation for details.

30 April 2027 'Gateway One' self-assessment summary: publication of our self-assessment confirming that the initial procedural requirements have been completed and that we are ready to proceed into the formal 30-month plan-making period.

3 September to 15 October 2027 The content and evidence consultation. This will consult on the proposed content of the local plan and supporting evidence, including the emerging vision, aims and objectives, spatial strategy, policy topics, constraints and the scope of the strategic environmental assessment.

October 2029 Target date for final adoption of the Local Plan



Source: https://casualramblers.co.uk/nyorks/

Harrogate Neighbourhood Plan

The Town Council has agreed that the vision for the Neighbourhood Plan should link with the Town Investment Plan's vision as follows:

> **Harrogate will be a vibrant spa wellness town, proud of its heritage, culture, green spaces and floral landscapes. We will build on our reputation as a welcoming and inclusive town for all ages through high-quality development, supported by sustainable transport and first-class community facilities. Guided by the themes of Water, Welcome and Wellbeing, we will protect Harrogate's historic character and natural environment, promote health and belonging; ensuring a thriving, accessible community for residents, businesses and visitors now and in the future.**

Discussions with adjoining parishes on the area to be covered by the Plan have now concluded and the timetable for the Plan remains on programme with the 'Made Plan' being achieved in 2031.

Harrogate Civic Society is a Key Stakeholder in the Local Plan preparation.

Harrogate at War



On 13 October, ***Guy Wilson*** *gave his talk on how WW2 had changed Harrogate and how what happened in Harrogate helped to change the course of the war. Guy, who was until recently Head of the Royal Armouries Museum in Leeds, summarises his talk below:*

I started my talk to the Society with the deaths of two Harrogate-born pilots, reminding everyone that the real and important history of Harrogate during the Second World War is an amalgam of the hopes, fears, joys and sorrows of all its inhabitants, a history never to be forgotten.

Harrogate's war was like that of so many other places, the local community had to cope with the fear of bombing, with air raid precautions and blackouts, with evacuee children, and with rationing; and through it all they raised money and material for the war effort. But Harrogate's war was also very different from many other places. Because Harrogate was in a designated safe area with plenty of hotel accommodation and good rail links, it was chosen to host large numbers of service personnel and civil servants.

To Harrogate came the army, men to the militia camp at Penny Pot and women of the ATS to work at the signals station at Forest Moor. But more importantly, a large number of air force personnel arrived, both male and female. Most significant were the staff of RAF Medical Training Establishment and of No.7 Personnel Reception Centre which processed aircrew returning from overseas, mostly after training courses, before they were sent to their postings.
Even more important still were the number of civil servants relocated here from London as part of the Government's dispersal of key departments and functions. Harrogate became the principal home of various parts of the Air Ministry, including the critical departments of Planning, Production, and Research. In 1939 these were described as 'a very vulnerable basket of precious eggs.' Harrogate-based civil servants were involved in decisions about the development and supply of almost everything required for the air war – from factories to aircraft to clothing.

The programme developed in 1939, which laid out what aircraft should be produced during the war, was called T*he Harrogate Programme* because it was developed and finalised here. And its implementation was subsequently driven from Harrogate. The Directorate of Equipment, based here, was responsible for many of the ever-changing items installed in our aircraft throughout the War.

Harrogate was also involved in vital research and development work. The development of the air communications that bound together the defensive system that helped ensure the Luftwaffe did not win the Battle of Britain was also run from here. All told, Harrogate-based civil servants played an important part in defeating the Luftwaffe and winning the War. A fact worth remembering. ►

Harrogate at War (continued)

◄ Often not appreciated but the war was good for Harrogate, giving its economy a much-needed boost. But more importantly, we can be proud of what our town did. Harrogate contributed far more to first staving off defeat and then to crafting victory than most towns of its size.







Clockwise from top: Clearing up in town after a bomb raid on The Majestic Hotel, ploughing the Stray to plant crops, ruins of the villa at the corner of Swan Road and Ripon Road destroyed by one of the bombs aimed at The Majestic.

2026 Allotment Show

Harrogate Civic Society is always pleased to be invited to have a presence at the annual show organised by the Harrogate and District Allotment Federation at the Sun Pavilion.

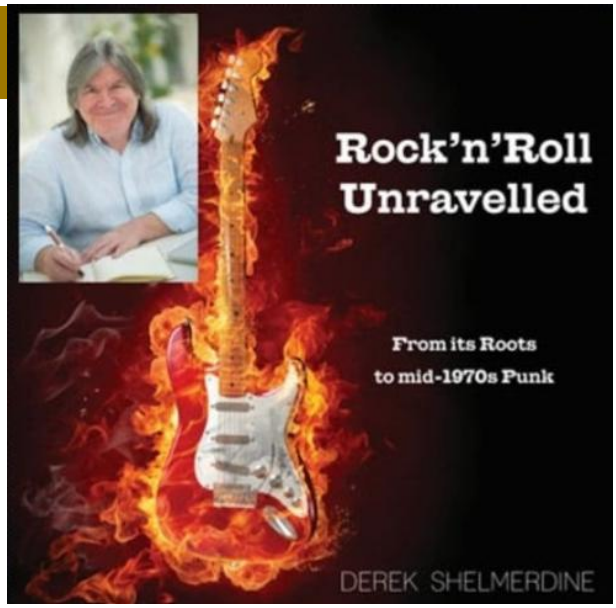
This year it was held on Sunday 16 August.

It is an excellent opportunity to showcase our society and chat to many residents and visitors.



left to right: Stuart Holland, Michael Newby, Cllr Chris Aldred

Harrogate Rocks



The talk on 16 September was given by Derek Shelmerdine. ***David Poole*** *has provided this summary.*

Derek's life-long love of music led him to publish the book Rock'n'Roll Unravelled *in 2016. Since then, he has made hundreds of radio guest appearances on music shows around the world, including BBC Radio York. Derek had his own radio show, initially on a Liverpool based radio station and later, on a Canadian station.*

Derek's talk, *Harrogate Rocks* was a jaunt through the UK's and Harrogate's musical landscape during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Derek's encyclopaedic knowledge and meticulous research is well known. This music historian and radio broadcaster has also been a drummer with the rock group 'Cleo's Mood' and a professional 'roadie' during the 70s rock scene. How did he find the time to be the author of modern music's comprehensive reference tome 'Rock 'n' Roll Unravelled'?

In his talk Derek meticulously uncovers the specific local venues, performers, and milestones that put Harrogate on the national rock and roll map. He describes how the 1950s and early 1960s witnessed a grassroots music explosion created by local performers. Small community and church halls across Harrogate regularly hosted local, semi-professional talent, building a dedicated regional subculture as traditional skiffle groups slowly morphed into electric beat groups.

Derek refers to local bands and individuals who contributed to the rock and roll scene at national or international level. The first of his Harrogate references is Derry Jones who found fame with the Jimmy O Show Band. However, he was probably better known locally as being the resident pianist at 'Bettys' for a period!

Others included John Hutchinson who worked with David Bowie and Dewey Bunnell , co-founder of the internationally successful band *America*, son of a U.S. serviceman and born in Harrogate.

This home-grown energy eventually paved the way for massive international stars. In March 1963 The Beatles famously performed at The Royal Hall. Supporting them on the bill were local bands Barry Corbett and The Mustangs, The Chinchillas and The Apaches. All brought together and promoted by local music shop owner Derek Arnold.

As the 1960s transitioned into the 1970s, Harrogate's venues grew significantly in stature, regularly drawing legendary rock, folk, and progressive artists. Derek highlights the deep, lasting connection between visiting touring musicians and the town itself. A prime example is the progressive rock band *Wally*, who immortalized Harrogate by naming their 1975 album '*Valley Gardens*'. From prestigious grand venues like the Royal Hall to local social hubs like the Bilton Working Men's Club, the town offered an eclectic mix of venues where enthusiastic fans could experience most things musical throughout this unique era.

Stray 250

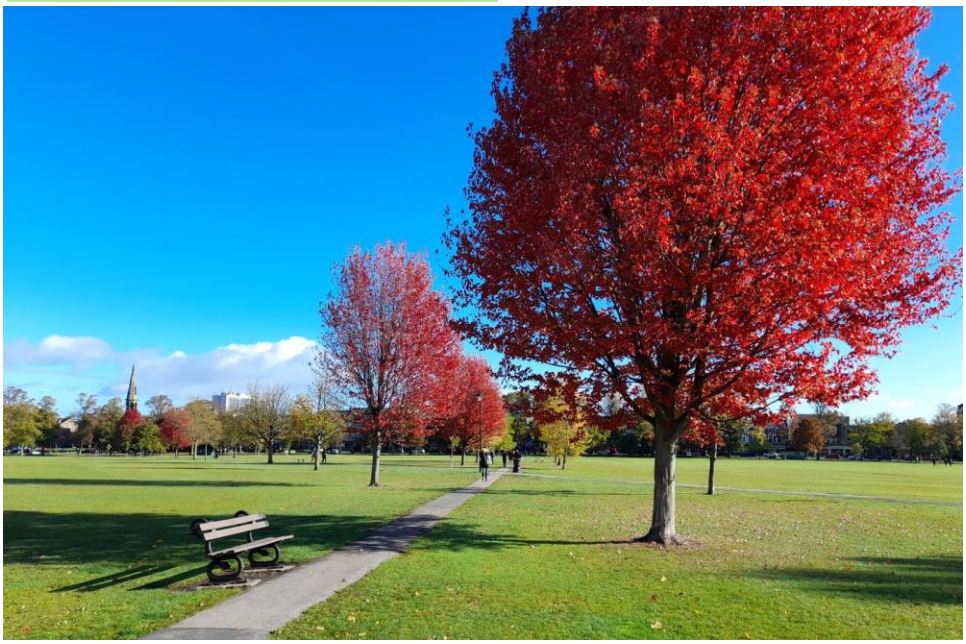
The Stray, which is perhaps Harrogate's greatest asset since the decline of the taste for sulphur water, was created by what was known as ***The Great Award****, signed and sealed on 19 August 1778.*

The year 2028 will represent the 250th Anniversary of the Award establishing the Stray as we now enjoy it.

A steering group has been set up with the Town Council and several local organisations, including the Civic Society, to prepare a programme of events and activities to celebrate the 250th anniversary of The Stray in 2028.

The aim is to deliver an inclusive celebration and promote understanding of the history and importance of The Stray and its contribution to Harrogate.

Over the course of the next year or so, the group will develop a full and exciting programme of events. Watch this space for more details as they emerge.



Organisations currently involved are:

- The Town Council
- Harrogate Stray Association
- Harrogate Civic Society
- Harrogate Dramatic Society
- Harrogate BID
- Harrogate Chamber of Commerce
- Brigantes Rotary Club
- HOPS Musical Theatre
- Harrogate International Festivals
- Royal Hall Restoration Trust
- West Park Centre

Civic Society Committee

We are delighted to welcome ***Zach Greaves*** *as our newest trustee of the Civic Society, co-opted at our October committee meeting.*



Zach writes:

Having lived in Harrogate since 2014, I care deeply about our town and am delighted to have joined Harrogate Civic Society as a trustee. Through my business, Artus Digital, I help manage the Society's social media marketing to ensure our heritage, campaigns and events reach as wide an audience as possible. I am committed to supporting our local community wherever I can, also serving on the management team at the Harrogate District Chamber of Commerce and sitting on the board for The Stray 250 celebrations.

Summary of Forthcoming Events in the next few months

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

Date	Event	Booking website
Sunday 6 December	**Harrogate Civic Society Christmas Social** 3.00 pm to 5.00 pm at St Wilfrid's Church Hall	trybooking.com/uk/GTRG
Tuesday 12 January	Cancelled This talk has been cancelled at the request of the speaker for personal reasons.	
Tuesday 9 February	**Montague Burton – The Tailor of Taste** - the life and achievements of Sir Montague Burton Speaker: Jeremy Burton, grandson of Sir Montague Burton	trybooking.com/uk/GTTN
Tuesday 9 March	**The Good, the Bad and the Lovely** - the history, layout and architecture of Harrogate's urban landscape Speaker: Michael Goodliffe, Harrogate geographer	trybooking.com/uk/GTTO
Wednesday 14 April	**Espionage – the Silent War** What Espionage and how does it operate? Peter, who has served as an electronic warfare operator, will also explain the role bases such as Menwith Hill play in supporting the UK's defence and intelligence related priorities.. Speaker: Peter Holmes	Booking not yet open
Tuesday 18 May	**Annual General Meeting** followed by: **Harrogate BID: making Harrogate the best it can be** The work of the Business Improvement District to support, safeguard and improve Harrogate for business Speaker: Jason Maxwell	Booking not yet open

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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