



# e-NEWSLETTER

HARROGATE CIVIC SOCIETY

October 2020



Molly Todd and Sheila Pantin at the unveiling of the Spitfire plaque on 11 September. See the report and photo on page 3.

## Keeping in touch with our members

During these troubled times, we are especially keen to hear from our members and keep in touch as best we can.

Very recently we were sad to learn of the death of one of our long-standing members, Eric Waight, at the age of 94. Eric was a former Mayor of Harrogate. His son Ken got in touch to say that, although living further away, he still had a strong interest in Harrogate and we are delighted to hear that his family intends to continue membership of the Civic Society.

We always love to hear from our members or prospective members. Please contact us on [membership@harrogatecivicsociety.org](mailto:membership@harrogatecivicsociety.org)

## Looking ahead to our Golden Jubilee !

It is nearly 50 years since the formation of the Harrogate Civic Society. In those early days we were called 'The Harrogate Society' and were created for a very specific purpose, namely to resist a monumental set of road proposals - the so-called 'five phase traffic scheme'. Had this scheme been allowed to happen it would have changed the face of our town forever. In opposing, our founders were largely successful. Only the conversion of West Park / Parliament Street to a one-way system was ever implemented.

The photo on page 2 commemorates a very early committee meeting, held on the top floor of Walter Davey's photographic studio at 26 James Street in

*Continued on page 2*

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

Continued from page 1

early 1971. We must thank Malcolm Neesam for this image. We are delighted that no less than three of those shown in the picture are members to this day: Malcolm himself, Michael Laycock and William Woods.



With the Jubilee in mind, the recently formed History Sub-Group has started to research our back story and we could do with your help.

If you have any memories or records of the Society, its members or its work dating from any part of the last fifty years, we should love to hear from you (email below). We are particularly interested in photos and reminiscences.

Please help if you can - and thank you.

Contact us on [info@harrogatecivicsociety.org](mailto:info@harrogatecivicsociety.org)

*Harrogate Civic Society c.1971*

*left to right. Standing: Michael Laycock, Walter Brown, Malcolm Neesam*

*Sitting: Walter Davey, Enid Davey, Winston Hartley, William Woods, Joe Harris, Christine Shaddick*



## Autumn meeting: 26 September

The YHACS Autumn meeting, conducted on Zoom, attracted fifty

participants including Harrogate Civic Society. Originally planned to be held in Halifax, it was compared by Kevin Trickett, Chair of YHACS, with a welcome from the Chair of Halifax Civic Trust.

The main focus of the meeting was a discussion on the Government's White Paper 'Planning for the future' with a presentation by Ian Harvey of Civic Voice. Civic Voice is the organisation representing the Civic Society movement which is involved in high level discussions with ministers and advisers.

Described as providing 'radical reform' of the planning system 'unlike anything we have seen since the Second World War', the White Paper sets out to 'streamline' the planning system to deliver a target of 300,000 houses per year. The paper proposes a new Local Plan process in which areas of land would be allocated into three categories: growth, renewal and protected, the first two being areas for 'suitable



development'. There is much concern amongst civic societies that, whilst the public will be invited to get engaged in this early stage of the planning process, there will be little or no involvement at the later stages. There would be no consultation, for example, on individual planning applications. This is all in the interest of speeding up the planning process.

Ian Harvey said a lot of detail is yet to be worked out. As presented, it would radically change the way housing is delivered, including the ability of the community to influence the way that development takes place.

Consultation on the White Paper ends on 29 October. Societies, including Harrogate Civic Society, have been urged to submit comments and Civic Voice intends to submit its full response in the week beginning 19<sup>th</sup> October.

The meeting was recorded and the video, which also includes a virtual tour of Halifax, can be seen here: <https://vimeo.com/showcase/7321826> - you will need to enter this password to see the video: YHACSHal2609

## Unveiling the Spitfire plaque

In our previous newsletter, we reported plans for the unveiling of a replica plaque to commemorate the gift of a Spitfire Aircraft by the people of Harrogate in 1941. On Friday 11 September this year the unveiling ceremony took place at the Crown Hotel and we are grateful to the hotel for ensuring that the ceremony was able to be held in a fully Covid-secure setting.

Andrew Jones MP opened proceedings to a socially-distanced audience of 28 (including four Civic Society members drawn from a ballot). This was followed by a talk from Malcolm Neesam on Harrogate during the war, copiously illustrated by photographs, many previously unseen. He took the audience through the years from 1938 to 1945 describing the way the townspeople coped with the wartime conditions. Despite the hardships, many West End productions were staged at the Royal Hall featuring leading actors and performers of the day.

Malcolm also showed a photograph of the cheque for £7000 made out to Lord Beaverbrook, Head of the Ministry of Aircraft Production, handed over in August 1941 and a rare photograph of the actual aircraft with 'Harrogate' painted on its fuselage.

The original plaque was installed inside the Council Offices, but disappeared sometime in the 1970s. In



*Lord Houghton of Richmond with Andrew Jones MP after the unveiling*

anticipation of the approaching 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Britain, the Civic Society along with many individuals managed to raise the funds for a replica plaque.

The plaque was unveiled by Lord Houghton of Richmond, GCB, CBE, DL, former Chief of the Defence Staff, who paid tribute to the role that the armed forces play supporting the democratic institutions of the state.

Among the guests we were delighted to welcome two veterans of the second world war, Molly Todd and Sheila Pantin. They provided a wonderful living link to the events being celebrated. (Photo: page 1)

## Our next (virtual) talk

### The European presence in Edwardian Harrogate.

This illustrated talk by the social historian Dr Paul Jennings will look at groups of workers from several parts of Europe who lived and worked in Edwardian Harrogate. They comprised Jews fleeing persecution in eastern Europe who worked in tailoring; Italians who worked in retail and as street musicians; Germans who also worked as musicians; and particularly men working in the hotel trade from Germany, Austria, France and Italy.



*Otto Schwartz's Bavarian String Band c.1903 (Courtesy Walker-Neesam archive)*

**Wednesday 4 November at 7.30 pm**

Please let us know if you would like to listen to Paul's talk via Zoom and we will send a link with joining details nearer the time.

## St Mary's Church, West Cliffe Grove

St. Mary's is a Grade II\* listed building, completed around 1916. It was designed by Sir Walter Tapper in 14<sup>th</sup> Century Gothic style. It contains the fine tomb of the founder, Richard Lofthouse, Deputy Surgeon General of the Army. Now redundant, several proposals have come forward for re-use of the Church. The Churches Conservation Trust would not take it over because of the unfortunate prematurely degraded stonework. A welcome proposal for offices and a flat was approved in 2017. This was less damaging to the interior than an earlier scheme for a health spa. Six self-contained offices were proposed, slotted between the columns of the nave, causing very little interference with the original fabric. Importantly the nave and chancel would remain open for its full length and height. A one bedroom flat was to be accommodated in the transept, so this would not remain open.

We were concerned about the removal of the Lofthouse Memorial from the south chapel to the east end. Moving such a tomb is a very skilled and delicate job.



A further concern was a proposal for car parking in the church garden, which is considered to be important for the setting of the church. Neighbours were concerned that five trees were taken down recently without the necessary conservation area consent. With this experience, interested residents were suspicious of what may currently be happening inside the church.

We are keen to see the best outcome for this listed building and its curtilage. Work is underway but ownership of the church has now changed hands.

## 4 Belford Road



One of our members has contacted us concerned about the future of this historic building, the first dedicated hospital in Harrogate and then the original Masonic Hall. It was most recently known as The Home Guard Snooker Club.

In addition to this, it is of significant architectural merit, not only in terms of its distinctive external and internal features but also as an integral part of the urban fabric - a hub in this relatively unspoilt part of the conservation area.

Over many years, the building has had minor structural defects and dry rot. The roof was condemned as 'unrepairable' in 2008 and has been leaking for over 14 years.

The current owner has twice submitted and withdrawn applications to demolish and replace with a block of flats. It is feared that, without some kind of intervention now, the developer will achieve his goal.

As recently as 2006, the interior was still largely intact with several interesting features including vaulted plaster ceilings above the hall and even a gaslit fire exit sign! Contact us for further information.

**Your society  
needs you!**

We are urgently needing somebody to help us with the role of Treasurer so, if you are able to help, or know someone who might, do please contact us [info@harrogatecivicsociety.org](mailto:info@harrogatecivicsociety.org)

# Devolution for North Yorkshire: a Town Council for Harrogate?

The 'hot potato' during July and August was devolution for North Yorkshire.

Should there be a north/south divide or should we go for east/west of the A1? Maybe one whole area?

The Society Committee set aside an evening to talk through the effect devolution might have on Harrogate. One of our members attended an online debate with the leaders of Harrogate District Council and North Yorkshire County Council.

After much discussion, the Committee felt that they did not have sufficient information to make a rational decision over boundaries for a new authority but did feel very strongly that clarification was needed over how local administration would work. Would we have a Town Council or would the new authority control our local administration? Some form of local administration was felt to be essential to protect our special town.

We wrote to the Chief Executives and Chairs of both Councils as well as all the leaders – 11 letters in total – and have received 4 replies.

## Our letter:

**Stuart Holland  
and Susan Amaku  
Co-chairs**



*'We are interested to know how grass roots administration will work within our town.'*

*'It would seem that we have an ideal opportunity for a town council to be formed and so wish to ask your opinion on whether you envisage the formation of a Harrogate Town Council (similar to parish councils) and if so, what do you envisage the legal powers and duties of that Council will be.'*

*'If you do not envisage a town council, then will you please explain how you think local matters will be administered.'*

*'As you are no doubt aware, the Civic Society has a diverse membership and is passionate about its threefold aim. Our third aim, Shaping our Future, is so important at this time and we really look forward to a comprehensive reply so that we can make reasoned and constructive comments..'*

## ..and two of the replies

**Cllr Graham Swift  
Deputy Leader**



*'With such a large element of this not yet clear, little time or none has been spent on how cities, towns and villages may organise further to engage more within such potential unitary councils. I appreciate that NYCC has talked about giving more powers to parishes but I have yet to see what these really might be or how much money the residents will have to pay for the privilege. In short, we are a long way from working through any of the potential implications of any potential reorganisation. Even if things fast tracked, it is my view that we are a year or two from entering into such discussion and I do not yet sense that we are on a fast track.'*

**Cllr Carl Les  
Leader**



*'We do envisage the establishment of a town council for Harrogate.'*

*'.....this would be tailored to local ambition and priorities, with an appropriate transfer of resources which could include parks and open spaces, community buildings, street scene, heritage, tourism and leisure facilities ..... training and advice would be given.'*

**Since engaging in a dialogue, it has become clear that devolution is not going to happen any time soon and so we will just keep a watching brief for now – ready to react as soon as there is further debate.**

In advance of a public consultation, we were pleased to be invited by the owners of the building - James and David Hartley of Impala Estates - to visit the site and see the progress of the initial work and to view their proposals for conversion of the building. All asbestos has now been removed from the building, which was a challenging process. They are now in the process of stripping out the interior, including services and suspended ceilings – with the exception of the central core area, which accommodated the Council Chamber and Mayor’s Parlour.

The proposal is to refurbish the building up to an energy efficient standard for use as offices in multiple occupation. Offices will be accommodated in the two ‘wings’, whilst the former Mayor’s Parlour, the Council Chamber, along with the rooms either side of the entrance at ground floor level will be converted to lettable meeting rooms, which will be available for use by the public.

At roof level, two additional storeys are proposed, which will match the height of the existing central section. These will be set back from the front and side elevations and designed in a contemporary manner, with large areas of glazing (sliding doors) along with timber cladding and external seating areas partially covered by the projecting solar shading. These will

Right: The Mayor’s parlour



accommodate additional office space, with a restaurant on the upper storey.

At second floor level two 1- bed apartments are also proposed to accommodate a concierge/caretaker, whilst a small gym, cycle storage and showers, will be provided in the basement. Due to the need for increased electrical capacity a new substation will be constructed to the west of the building.

We understand that the intention is to phase the works, with the conversion of the existing building preceding the addition of the new upper storeys - although the new lifts in the central core will be installed as part of the initial phase.

We are currently preparing our response to Impala but please do contact us if you would like to view and comment on their preliminary proposals. Email:

[info@harrogatecivicsociety.org](mailto:info@harrogatecivicsociety.org)

We also encourage you to respond later to the formal online public consultation on the proposals on their website: [www.crescentgardens.co.uk](http://www.crescentgardens.co.uk).

Sketch of proposals for former Council building showing additional floors above.

Courtesy Impala Estates Ltd



## 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>

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