

The Newsletter of the Shrewsbury Town Centre Residents' Association

Towndweller

February
2006



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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

It's lovely to be home!

We are just back from Singapore after a long holiday with the youngest members of our family - a joyful but tiring experience! Shrewsbury seems a haven of calm in contrast: even Town Walls, that infamous cross-town route, seems quieter. What has happened in my absence to the daily 5200 vehicles? Perhaps the threat of road pricing has already changed people's habits. I have just seen in action Singapore's congestion charge, introduced for the down-town area in the 1970s and now totally automated with smartcard tags and roadside sensors. The buses are full and the shops are thriving. Is this the future for Shrewsbury? They say that traffic in Singapore has been cut by 13%, even though major through-routes pass through the zone. In Durham, where only a small area has been zoned, apparently there has been a cut of 90%. No doubt Shropshire County Council will be producing data for different schemes for us to consider in the next few months as part of their public consultation.

Fellow committee members report that not much has happened in Shrewsbury while I've been away. But already I am thinking of what will transpire in the next 12 months. The County Council must eventually decide on the traffic direction in the St Julian's Friars development and we think it important they hold to the original plan. Maybe they will start to revamp the pedestrianised area (walking up Pride Hill this morning, looking with fresh eyes, it seems distinctly shabby). Will the West End regeneration be in this year's budget? How will our licensees cope with longer opening hours? Might the Quarry swimming pool be closed and will the number of CCTV cameras be reduced? Perhaps our councillors will realise that public toilets are an essential service. So many questions that we have already discussed and advised on! Is progress really slower in Shrewsbury than in other comparable towns? Over the past two years, while organising the STCRA Archives, I have read every letter and report written in the past 15 years. There have been many successes, but many issues drag on and on. This year, I hope will be the one in which they are solved.

Our objectives are few but deep:

- Promoting a balance between residential, business and visitor interests in Shrewsbury
- Maintaining the essential character of Shrewsbury
- Enhancing the quality of life in the town.

How do we translate these objectives into practical reality? As Lalage said in her annual report, the Association has increasingly worked with the Councils and other bodies. There is a high expectation of us. We try to initiate debates as well as react to others' ideas. We also try to influence policy and practice through personal channels, this newsletter and the media. I'm sure it will be a busy and interesting year. A happy new year to all of you!

Rosemary Thornes

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Tuesday 28th February 2006

Environmental Issues affecting the Town Centre

**A Representative from the Environment Agency
will lead a discussion**

at

St Julian's Church

at 7.30 pm

Wednesday 22nd March 2006

Ian Kilby, Borough Conservation Officer

Adapting our Heritage for the Future

at

St Chad's Church Hall

at 7.30 pm

Wednesday 26th April 2006

We have arranged conducted tours of

THE MUSIC HALL

at 2.30 pm

Come and bring friends to see behind the scenes

Farewell to 2005

A very satisfactory and gratifying number of members turned out for our Annual General Meeting. Most voluntary organisations have to lay on an entertaining outside speaker to lure people to their AGM. In our Association's case we are our own entertainment. Our members make us a lively organisation and this, along with the work of our efficient Membership Secretary Lyn Leach, means that our numbers are steadily growing. Her team of Area Representatives recruits new neighbours and keeps existing members in touch by delivering this *Towndweller* and invitations to events.

It fell to me as Secretary to report on issues raised by members at the last AGM. Recycling bins have been secured for the town centre, and we continue to seek further sites. The repaving of Pride Hill is in the current programme, and consultation is expected on major improvements to the whole route from Castlegates through Dogpole to the bottom of Wyle Cop. We have nagged constantly but fruitlessly about the London rail service; our new MP has promised to keep raising the issue.

Alan Shrank, the retiring Treasurer, thanked Richard Panton for acting as accounts examiner while he himself was thanked for his efficient stewardship of our affairs. Alan has been succeeded by Arthur Richardson. It was noted that our subscription has remained unchanged over the fifteen years of our existence.

The meeting formally adopted the summary of Traffic and Transport Policy Guidelines, which members had been able to study in the last *Towndweller*. This was also one of the discussion group topics in the informal part of the meeting after the refreshment interval. In each case – licensing, traffic, and the plan for enhancing access to Old St Chad's – members' emphasis was on the hard practicalities.

Lalage Bown, with characteristic efficiency and attention to detail, had run off copies of her Chair's Report. Initially, some members looked daunted at its seven typescript pages, a feeling rapidly dispelled by her lively commentary. She was proud of the Association's history of influence and took trouble to thank her predecessors, colleagues and all the Association members on whose efforts continuing success depends. She thanked retiring committee members Joleen Hayes and Norma Maxwell. She gave an account to members of social events and meetings, involvement in planning, licensing, traffic, environmental concerns and the river, the Police Community Consultative group, the arts, museum, initiatives on Shuts and Old St Chad's churchyard, and collaboration with other organisations such as the Civic Society, the Network of Residents' Associations, SADAA, Tidy Shrewsbury Group, the Shrewsbury Enterprise Partnership. The list goes on. "Anyone reading this outline of STCRA activities will certainly conclude that it has energy and promise," she said.

It was typical of Lalage to deem a privilege her involvement with the Association over the years as committee member, Treasurer, Vice-Chair and for the last three years as Chair. In public everyone has seen her skilful and urbane conduct of meetings.

Those who worked with her have seen her commitment, vision, courtesy, humour,

occasional forthrightness, and encouragement of others. We have discovered that she has interrupted work in London to make a special return to Shrewsbury for us. The formal vote of thanks was cut short by a spontaneous round of applause from the forty-five participative members. We have been well served by her period in office. Thank you, Lalage.

**John Simblet
Hon. Secretary**

Police & the Community

In December, Alan and Lucy Shrank were invited to meet Shropshire's most senior policeman, Commander Guy Rutter. Here Alan writes of that meeting:

Guy Rutter was very open about the problems and clearly appreciates our concerns over minor but unpleasant misbehaviour such as cycling on pavements, litter, and dog fouling. He told us of plans, not yet confirmed, to increase considerably the number of Community Support Officers, many being detailed to work in the town centre.

Parking. He is in favour of parking controls being devolved onto local authorities, and hopes that the CSOs and any staff appointed to manage parking will have the power to issue warnings and fines so that parking on the pavements and congestion problems will diminish.

Licensing. Importantly he agreed with us that a liaison committee should be formed of representatives of all parties involved in licensing so that they could discuss problems and how to resolve them.

He told us about the new Custody Facility being constructed. By this he meant new cells, and would invite us to the opening in January to inspect them.

We raised the vexed question of drugs and dealers, and he reassured us that the police were active in this field, closing drug houses when they were clearly identified. Inspector Sarah Wagstaff is the new Local Policing Officer for Shrewsbury and has taken a special interest in this. He suggested we might meet her and she has already contacted us and hopes to be a speaker at one of our meetings.

We welcome the concern of the police to seek the views of local residents and to join with us in trying to solve the problems that can make life unnecessarily unpleasant for us. We look forward to more of this positive approach to the local community's concerns.

Janet Goose is our representative on the Police Community Consultative Group and will be watching developments, informing us and putting forward our views.

Alan B Shrank

Charles who?

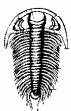
Whingeing letters in the Chronicle about the proposal to buy The Mount and turn it into a museum and centre for the celebration of Charles Darwin made my blood pressure go up by about 20 points. When I arrived in Shrewsbury just five years ago I was ashamed to find that Darwin was celebrated in the town centre only by a shopping mall! This pathetic gesture perhaps underlines Shrewsbury's long and productive preoccupation with commerce and the apparent belief that the town's culture must somehow be involved in directing our tourists to the shops. Surely, I thought, we can do better than that?



So it was very good to read at the beginning of December about aspirations to get a lottery grant from the 'Living Landmarks' scheme to transform the town into a Darwin landmark. It was even more encouraging to listen to Jon King, the town's Darwin co-ordinator, when he came to speak to our Association on his work. His energetic and enthusiastic advocacy for the establishment of a higher Darwin profile for Shrewsbury was warmly received. Jon has already developed a Darwin trail through the town and he spoke of the projected longer Darwin trail for the Midlands that would take in Shrewsbury, Maer Hall in Staffordshire where Charles spent much of his time as a young man, and the Potteries where his continuing association with the Wedgwood family was cemented. Birmingham gets a look in too, through Boulton and Watts and the Lunar Society. What a wonderful route for the itinerant Europeans, Americans and Japanese, who usually manage Stratford (William who?) or Liverpool (John who?).



When Rosemary and I travelled in China and the Tibetan Plateau in 1998 as guests of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, we were several times asked where we came from in Britain. We soon learned that Wenlock was met with instant recognition, but Shrewsbury with a glazed expression. The reason is not hard to find. Much of Chinese geology is named after Shropshire locations: the Wenlockian, the Longmyndian and even the Caradocian. So it is around the world. The eras in geological history are named after the type localities where the rocks (and their fossil content) were first described. This is another of Shropshire's unrecognised heritages. Geology, especially palaeontology and stratigraphy) were developed and established in our South Shropshire hills. Some of this story is told by Peter Toghil in *Geology in Shropshire* in which the argument between Murchison and Sedgwick about the boundary of the Palaeozoic in the Welsh borderlands is outlined. There is a nice connection here because Professor Sedgwick encouraged Darwin's geological thoughts and practice, which stood him in good stead on the voyage of the *Beagle*. We could and should strengthen this connection for the hundreds of foreign and British geologists who visit South Shropshire's famous localities.



Of course it is for the theory of evolution by natural selection that Darwin is best known. This theory is hard to come to grips with in *The Origin of the Species*, but is brilliantly told by Richard Dawkins in *The Blind Watchmaker* and *Climbing Mount*



Improbable (both available in Penguin). Another story still to be told is how Darwin's ideas have invaded other areas of science, particularly the idea of evolution as 'emergence', linked to chaos theory and genetic programming. My own theoretical work, as a geomorphologist, has recently been along these lines.

I have one other Darwin 'fixation'. An entire career in universities has brought me close to the higher education scene. I am at something of a loss to understand how Shrewsbury has become a home for retired professors rather than an active university town. They tell me that there is no 'student market' in the West Midlands for another university. But surely we do not want another poly-university. The whole of Britain could be the market for the Charles Darwin School of Natural Sciences, embracing Botany, Zoology, Geology and Ecology, with service departments in Maths, Physics and Chemistry. At the very least we should have a Shrewsbury Charles Darwin Fellowship that would fund scientific exploratory fieldwork for young academics. The Royal Geographical Society could be a partner in such a venture.

John Thornes



The small icon at the beginning of each paragraph is a trilobite. This is a fossil found in the oldest rocks in Britain such as the Ordovician. There are many different species that can be used to date rocks. Darwin almost certainly collected some on his outings with Murchison. They are part of our Shropshire heritage.

About the author:

Following his retirement, John Thornes has the title of Research Professor in Physical Geography at King's College, University of London. His research is on landforms and how they originate, especially in Mediterranean areas.



The Editorial Team would like to thank all the contributors for their articles. If you have anything you wish to say about Shrewsbury, the Association or any other subject you feel might be of interest, please let us know – we are waiting to hear from you! The next issue is due to appear in May with a copy deadline of the 31st March.

End of a Chapter



*A quiet day in St John's Hill, Shoplatch, and Pride Hill, in about 1895.
Photo. courtesy of Shropshire Archives.*

Churches with their spires and towers give Shrewsbury a distinctive skyline. Sadly several are redundant, and now one of the finest of the Nonconformist chapels that contribute to the townscape, the Methodist Church in St John's Hill, is to close on 31st March 2006. Christians recognise that it is the people who are the Church, and not the buildings where they meet to worship: the Minister and her congregation are to move to St Chad's. So before St John's Hill church closes its doors perhaps we should note some things about the building and the history of Methodism in this town.

Built in red Ruabon brick, with some classical 'Italianate' styling of the period which contrast with its older surroundings, it stands on the site of an 1805 chapel. The 'new' Wesleyan Methodist Chapel saw its first services on 31st August 1879, and a contemporary account in the *Shrewsbury Chronicle* commented upon the "light and cheerful appearance" of the building which was still far from complete due to the severe winter weather of 1878.

The building was designed by a Mr G.B.Ford of Burslem, and built by the local firm of Messrs W.&J.Gethin. It cost the members £4000, including the purchase of two additional half-timbered cottages next door, demolished in the 1930s to provide a most useful car park.



In plan, the building reflected the pattern of the first big Methodist chapel in the City Road, Islington. Central double doors, recently replaced with glass ones, open to a spacious lobby off which there are two entrances to the ground floor and stairs to the splendid raked galleries. These are supported on slender iron columns. Inside there are two aisles serving the banks of fixed central and side pews, with simple arched windows above them. But one's eye is drawn to the honey coloured woodwork of a massive pulpit that dwarfs a small communion table in front of it. In this Methodist building the preacher does indeed stand 12 feet above contradiction! The woodcarving is exquisite. It is the work of a Mr Landucci, - an old Salopian name?



Methodism had arrived in the county town sometime after 1744, through a visit to Bristol by a Mr John Appleton, a tanner by trade. By the time John Wesley first visited the town on 16th March 1761, there was a thriving society. Wesley preached at No. 1 Fish Street, and the house bears a plaque to that effect. Do go and look at it. The first chapel was opened in Hill's Lane twenty years later, and it was there that Wesley preached a year before his death aged 87. He recorded in his Journal of the congregation that he "was much ashamed for them. The moment I had done speaking ... some of them were talking all at once." Does anything much change?

By the early 19th century, Methodism had split into factions: the Primitive Methodists - 'The Ranters' - had their simple chapel in Frankwell, and the New Connection had a much grander place on Town Walls, now owned by the Girls' High School. The Wesleyans also established the church in Belle Vue opposite Oakley Street. The early part of the 20th century saw a new chapel in Greenfields. The building was inspired by the Art Nouveau and Arts and Crafts Movement, and is now the joint Methodist/Anglican St George's Church.

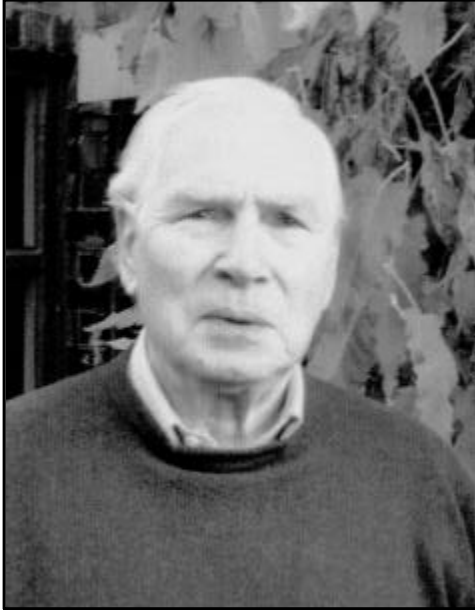
We hope the building will not disappear, but if you want to see it and worship there in its pristine splendour of 1878 there is little time left.

Terence S. Hyde

The last services will be held in St John's Hill Methodist Church on Sunday the 26th March at 10.30 am and 6.00 pm and all are welcome to join the congregation.

Introducing your new Committee Members

Arthur (Richie) Richardson



Richie came down to Shropshire in 1943 from Leeds, and has lived here ever since apart from two years serving Her Majesty and four years reading Maths and Physics at Keele University, where he met Joyce. (They were both in the first intake there of 150 in 1950.)

He has been involved in many aspects of town life: as a town centre resident for the last twenty-three years, he has been keen to maintain the unique atmosphere of the mediaeval centre.

His more recent activities have included Treasurer and Trustee of the Shropshire Music Trust, and Treasurer of the Caradoc and Severn Valley Field Club.

Peter Crompton's story



I was born in 1939 in Castle Bromwich, but raised and educated in Streetly near Sutton Coldfield. On leaving school I took up accountancy, later starting my own practice. In 1974 I became a Financial Adviser specialising in executive arrangements.

Ann and I were married in 1967 and have two children and three lovely grand children. Together we enjoy sailing the canal system on our narrowboat, but my particular hobby is the stock market. We moved to Lower Blackfriars, overlooking the river, in 1997. I sold my business and retired on the millennium and am now getting to grips with the demon computer and the internet.

My particular interests are conservation, the environment, recycling and Darwin. I am keen on preserving the heritage and prosperity of our beautiful town for our residents by encouraging tourism. I would also like to take a role in improving the area downstream of English Bridge which I feel is sadly neglected. When I was invited to stand for election to the committee, I was delighted to accept.

The Committee welcomes back **Verena Waterhouse** who, after a year teaching at her previous post in London, has taken up her work on our behalf with **the Tidy Shrewsbury Group**. Here she reports:

At the recent AGM of this organisation we were treated to a presentation from the Schools' Liaison Officer who visits all primary schools in the area once a year. He was a dynamic speaker and made the whole thing lively by frequent questions to which a correct answer could earn you a chocolate. Soon little choc bars were flying through the room as he asked us to list the ways in which litter is harmful:

It looks disgusting

It is dangerous to animals

It is against the law to drop litter

Dropping it could cause a person to be fined

It could be recycled

It is a waste of money and resources if not recycled

It could be an economic success if recycled

Some of these aspects of litter had not occurred to me and I was impressed with the way in which children in Year Six could be started to think responsibly about litter. "Catch them young!" seems to be the thing; unfortunately it would seem that it is the older teenagers who need to be 'caught'.

The Tidy Shrewsbury Group is concerned about litter and graffiti in the town and there are some groups who go out and litter pick on a regular basis. There is a plan to have fines imposed on litterers; unfortunately the paperwork which will be necessary to achieve this has not yet been designed.

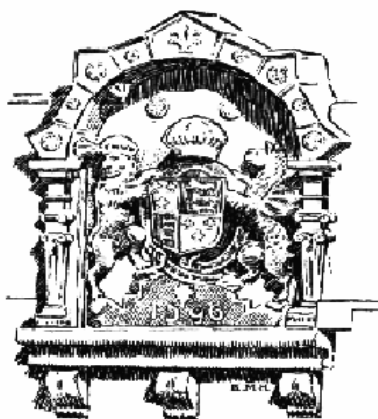
Here in the town centre the cleaners seem to do a good job on the whole. However, if any member finds a bad litter problem springing up, particularly in some of the shuts, I have copies of the Litter Notice that can be sent to Derek Caddy, the Councillor responsible for Public Amenities in SABC. Please give me a call on 343811 and I can get a copy to you.

Verena Waterhouse

***The Shrewsbury Town Centre Residents' Association
Committee***

Chairman	Rosemary Thornes
Vice-Chairmen	Patrick Anderson David Waterhouse
Secretary	John Simblet
Treasurer	Arthur Richardson
Membership Secretary	Lyn Leach

Members: Peter Crompton, Ada Fordham, Janet Goose,
Mike Maxwell, Alan Shrank, Verena Waterhouse



**This issue of the Towndweller has been produced by Patrick Anderson, Ada Fordham,
Joleen Hayes, Sue Ratcliffe and Verena Waterhouse**

The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily the views of the Editors
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