



# Droitwich Spa Civic Society

## CIVIC NEWS

**136<sup>th</sup> NEWSLETTER**

of the

**DROITWICH SPA CIVIC SOCIETY**

*'working for a better town'*



**SUMMER / AUTUMN 2010**

# DROITWICH SPA CIVIC SOCIETY

Founded 1974

Charity Reg No 503272

## Officers:

President	Donald Fletcher	01905 794039
Chairman	Stuart Haywood	01905 770553
Vice-Chairman	Richard Taylor	01905 779688
Hon Treasurer	Fred Randall	01905 455424
Hon Secretary	Helen Prew	01905 773166

## Committee Members:

Chris Bowers	01905 776870
Jennifer Carter	01905 827154
Roger Claxton	01905 776939
Mike Hayzelden	01905 456439
Frank Hazzard	01905 778755
Ken Hemmings	01905 770361
George Leech	01905 770770
Roger Peberdy	01905 772847
Don Walters	01905 774589

**Website:** [www.droitwichspa.com](http://www.droitwichspa.com) (click on Header 'Civic Society')

The Droitwich Spa Civic Society was founded in 1974,  
as a response to the rapid development of the town.  
The Civic Society provides a meeting place for all who have an interest  
in the enhancement and preservation of Droitwich Spa,  
as a town with a unique heritage and facilities  
in which to live, work and to find a stimulating environment.



## DROITWICH SPA CIVIC SOCIETY

*cares what happens in and around Droitwich Spa*



- by stimulating public interest in the town of Droitwich Spa and its surrounding area
- by promoting high environmental standards in this same area
- by securing the preservation, protection, development and improvement of features of historic and public interest in this same area

## Foreword - Summer 2010

Another five months have passed without decisions on developments to the south of the town (the infamous 'spatial strategy') or a clear date for the complete restoration of the canals. Recent encouraging publicity on the imminent re-opening has focused on the Barge Canal from the Severn to Vines Park: informed briefings confirm that there is as yet no firm date for the completion of the section from Chapel Bridge to Hanbury Road, clearly essential for the completion of the project.

We have been asked (and have agreed) to limit public comment in case this makes the negotiations more difficult.

On the development front there are 'rumblings in the jungle'. Applications for renewal of existing planning approvals have been made for St. George's Square, the OSO salt building in Hanbury Street, the ex-Medals Office site, though there is no indication when (or if?) the projects will go ahead.

We hope as many of you as possible commented on the proposal to develop the Copcut area: the committee has restated our opposition in principle to development on the southern fringes of the town, although we are advised that previous planning decisions make development there very likely. As you know our fall-back position was to link up with the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust to press for an extension of green space, and this has been accepted.

Pressure for building land will return, given that just under 50% of the estimated new dwellings said to be needed up to 2026 in the spatial strategy were generated by changes in 'household formation' locally. So any new development plan will have to address this. Our position remains the same; brown field sites (excluding gardens!) nearer the centre of the town should be given priority.

We still like to try to be 'ahead of the game' and the previous newsletter contained ideas for the greater public use of Yew Tree Hill. These have now been sent to Wychavon District Council for consideration. We are trying to turn discussion away from development there onto how to improve the green/leisure/recreation environment for the town as a whole.

We hope you have enjoyed the summer trips (some members got to record an Archer's type story on the BBC visit) and look forward to seeing you at our regular meetings in the autumn.

Stuart Haywood

August 2010

### AGE UK

Age Concern is currently merging with Help The Aged, and Age UK is the new name.

Age UK, Droitwich Spa has piloted some legal surgeries in conjunction with Parkinson Wright Solicitors. They have been a success and will continue. If any members are interested please phone 01905 772126 for information.

Appointments are free and without obligation. Topic areas for advice include wills, lasting Powers of Attorney, Administration of Estates and Application for Grants of Probate, long term care advice, Court of Protection and Trusts.



# Civic Voice

You may recall that Droitwich Spa Civic Society is now a member of the new national body for Civic Societies - "Civic Voice".

The new association has strong links with the National Trust. For the first year of our membership, individual members of the Civic Society have been offered a free day access pass. This will provide free access to any National Trust property during normal opening hours subject to a small number of restrictions.

The pass is transferable and can be given to friends or family if a member is already a member of the National Trust.

The application form for the free pass is available to download by using the following link, [www.civicvoice.org.uk/nationaltrustcivicvoiceoffer](http://www.civicvoice.org.uk/nationaltrustcivicvoiceoffer)

Where members do not have internet access, a free day pass will also be available by sending a stamped addressed envelope to:

Civic Voice  
Unit 101  
82 Wood Street  
The Tea Factory  
Liverpool L1 4DQ

Requesting one, providing contact details and referring to Droitwich Spa Civic Society.

Fred Randall - Hon Treasurer

## NEWS ITEM 1

### Salt Day - 11th September 2010

A successful event, following the heavy early morning rain, for the Civic Society's stand in the High Street, we were able to attract a fair number of people. The display of the William Davis proposals for development of the Copcut Lane area to the south of Droitwich Spa may of course had have a small part to play in attracting people to our stand.

Free balloons are always an attention grabber.

We also teamed up with the History and Archaeology Society who put on a display about the Droitwich Spa walks.

Our thanks go to Jennifer Carter for liaising with Wychavon's event team and getting the free parking passes and free drinks vouchers organised.



# Heat Pumps and Photovoltaic Panels

## Some thoughts regarding the Droitwich Salt Bathing Lido

### Heat Pumps and PV help Lido Stay Afloat

Chipping Norton Lido has opened for the new season to be heated by a ground source heat pump and powered by solar panels on the roof.

The £140,000 project was possible with several grants, including £27,500 from EDF Energy's Green Fund, £63,500 from the Government's Low Carbon Buildings Programme and £35,000 from the Building Research Establishment's Community Sustainable Energy Programme.

The low carbon water heating system and solar panels are expected to save 15 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions each year. The heat pump captures heat from the sun which is stored in the earth by pumping cold liquid through nine boreholes, drilled in the car park when the pool was shut over the winter. The liquid is warmed by energy stored in the earth and, at the surface, a compressor raises the temperature to a level that can be used to heat the pool.

Since the Keep Our Pool Open campaign in 2004, which saved the pool from closure, energy costs had threatened its future.

EDF Energy says it has awarded £4m to 233 renewable energy projects since the Green Fund was launched in 2001, including £1.5m to 94 projects in schools, nurseries and colleges. Awards of up to £30,000 are available for projects in Great Britain.

Check out the following web site.

[www.edfenergy.com](http://www.edfenergy.com)

From Renewable Energy

## NEWS ITEM 2

### Proposals for Redevelopment at Blake Avenue, Droitwich Spa

Plans are being prepared by private architects in consultation with Wychavon District Council for a comprehensive redevelopment of the community facilities of the area in order to improve these facilities, recreate the shopping environment and provide some additional private and social housing units. A new access road and additional parking will be included in the proposals.

This is definitely one proposal to look out for and Wychavon should be preparing for a public consultation exercise, in such a way that the outcome reflects the needs and aspirations of the local inhabitants of the Chawson neighbourhood and immediate surrounding area.



# Why Call it 'Salt Day'?

## **Salt is the reason for Droitwich's very existence, that's why!**

For some 4,000 years, from the Stone Age until 1922, salt was made in Droitwich.

In Roman times several hundred tons of salt were being made each year and exported all over the country.

By 1922 more than 7,000 tons of salt were being produced actually in Droitwich, and a lot more was being made at nearby at Stoke Works, which was near Stoke Prior.

## **Where did all the salt come from?**

Deep under ground below Droitwich there are vast deposits of salt - rock salt. This is dissolved by underground flows of water to form the Brine Stream. In the area now known as Vines Park, this brine is near the surface appearing sometimes as salt springs.

Originally these springs were made to flow into pits from which brine was taken and evaporated in big metal pans over wood or coal fires to make salt.

By the 15th century there were more than 300 of these pans, each with its own fire and always smoking chimney, in the area bounded by Dodderhill, the High Street, and the present Worcester and Kidderminster Roads.

This made Droitwich a *very* dirty place indeed! Later brine was pumped up in huge quantities and several thousands of tons of salt were made here every year and as a result there was subsidence as well as dirt!

## **Where did all the salt go to?**

Droitwich salt was taken all over the Midlands and as far as London and into Wales. Originally it was all carried on the backs of pack-horses.

The roads they used can often still be followed on maps by their names, 'Salt Way', 'White Way' etc.

Wood to fuel the furnaces and boil the brine was also carried by horses, with several hundred horses entering and leaving the town every day. More dirt!

Eventually the Droitwich barge canal was built and large barges passed to and fro between the town and the River Severn and beyond. Later narrow-boats also carried salt via the Droitwich Junction canal onto the Midlands canal system at Hanbury Wharf.

Later still came the railways, and at one time there were railway lines and salt trains right in the middle of the town (where Morrison's is now) and at Chapel Bridge!

# Why Call it 'Salt Day'?

## Why was salt so important?

### Salt is essential to life (although too much of it can do harm!)

It is also important in many chemical and manufacturing processes. In ancient times it was needed for the curing of animal hides and skins and wool to make clothing, and to help with the colouring and dyeing of cloth.

For generations the most important use for salt was in the preservation of food to feed the people over winter. These days we are used to imported food, frozen foods, tinned foods, dehydrated foods etc. which ensure year long supplies but, until the nineteenth century most food was produced locally and some means had to be found to keep it edible during the long 'hungry months' when there was almost no fresh food to be had. The packing of both meat and vegetables in salt was a major means of preservation, so salt was really *vital* and so extremely valuable!

Hence the old expression 'worth his salt' meaning someone of value! The word 'salary' comes from the latin word for salt and Roman soldiers received some of their pay in the form of salt.

In the 13th century, Droitwich salt was a major contributor to the country's economy, the Royal Exchequer receiving as much from the Droitwich salt trade as from all the trade and commerce of most of the rest of the major towns put together (excluding London).

As the King originally held all the rights to Droitwich Salt and hence made all the money, the town itself was not a rich one! Later, when local people (The Burgesses) eventually came to hold and control the 'brine rights' many individuals became very rich, as did some charities (so the poor benefited too!)

### Why did the Worcestershire salt industry come to an end?

By the early 19th century were a multitude of small firms making salt in Droitwich and this, together with the difficulties with transport in and out, limited production.

John Corbett, the Salt King, built a huge new works away from the town at Stoke Prior (Stoke Works) and by the early 20th century almost all of the salt was being made there.

John Corbett helped to develop Droitwich as a Spa town, with hotels, brine baths, parks and gardens, which brought new prosperity until World War Two brought it to an end.

The last Droitwich salt works was the big one at Covercroft (the Droitwich Pharmacy, the old library, the Baptist Church and Morrisons now occupy the site). This closed in 1922 bringing Droitwich Salt making to an end. The Stoke Salt work closed in 1973 when the then owners, ICI, concentrated all their salt-making in Cheshire.

R M Peberdy  
September 2010



## Radio Bath?

Some years ago a successful action was brought against the Savoy Turkish Baths Company Limited of London under the Merchandise Marks Act because they had been providing 'therapeutic and medicinal baths; the water of which was not of the nature and character suggested by the title used in their description'. The Company had claimed in their pamphlets that people no longer needed to incur the inconvenience and expense of travelling to Droitwich Spa to enjoy the undoubted benefits of the famous brine, as they were now providing 'Droitwich Brine Baths' in the capital itself.

Scientific evidence was presented to the Court and an expert witness, Mr Ballantyne F.I.C, testified that he had visited the Savoy's 'Droitwich Brine baths' and found the water to be saline but with a buoyancy not much different from that of ordinary London water. Furthermore, he had been unable to detect any actual radium or radioactivity, which was known to be one of the elements in the efficacy of Droitwich Brine, in either the water contained in the bath, the air above it or in the dry "Droitwich Brine Crystals' from which the Savoy's baths were prepared. He had also, he said, visited the Brine Baths in Droitwich itself, where natural brine was pumped directly up from within the earth. He found that that brine was very strong and pure and had an extreme natural buoyancy - so much so that in order to remain immersed he had had to be physically held down in it by boards being placed across his body! In addition to being very salty, the natural brine was also very radioactive and contained quantities of radium. Likewise the air in the baths was also noted to be radioactive.

Sir James Dewar F.R.S stated that he had analyzed a sample of Droitwich Brine by 'the liquid hydrogen method' and found that it contained gases which were derived from radium and that he did not believe that evaporating off the water from Droitwich Brine to make the crystals from which the Savoy's baths were produced would preserve its healing powers, which were at least in part due to the brine's natural radioactivity.

An eminent physician, Dr A P Luff, also said that he had long been in the habit of sending patients to Droitwich and to other spas for treatment by bathing and he had never known the baths to be effective except when taken at the Spa itself.

The Court concluded that, from a medical point of view, any benefit resulting from the use of a solution of Droitwich Brine Crystals' in London water could not be in any way compared to that derived from taking the baths in Droitwich itself.

The case ended when the defendants changed their plea of 'not guilty' in the light of the proven scientific evidence which had shown to the Court's satisfaction that it was beyond doubt that a bath with the physical, chemical, radioactive and therapeutic properties of Droitwich brine could not be artificially prepared anywhere elsewhere.

A nominal penalty was imposed on the Savoy Baths Company who, in the light of the overwhelming scientific evidence, withdrew their plea of 'not guilty' and forthwith ceased to offer their London 'Droitwich Brine Baths' to their clientele.

R M Peberdy 2010



## September 1940 and beyond

*Can it almost now be seventy years since I was garbed in blue  
Merely then a common 'erk', too late to be one of 'The Few'  
Oh! I tried to fly in forty one for my morse had become quite good  
A WOP/AG I wanted to be but I found I had misunderstood  
They said "Without glasses the chances are, you could not even hit a barn door"  
So they sent me packing to get some specs and then to return once more  
I finished up as a radar mech, a somewhat mundane chore  
Journeying round to various sites that guarded our southern shore  
I suffered no trauma, no danger arose, no doodle-bug carried my name  
I was just a small cog in a very big wheel, an item within a large frame.  
So I honour all those who volunteered - for volunteers they were -  
Who flew aloft and gambled all though filled with residual fear  
Of losing out in a burning plane or crashing into the ground  
The daily courage of all of them must each of us still astound.  
As well as 'The Few' we remember those who trundled the darkened skies  
Hour after hour, cold and stressed, knowing what would arise.  
And this they did not once, not twice, but on many a long, long night  
Pushing aside the thought that this could be their final flight  
For every one who gave their all and did not survive the fight  
We will always grieve and always keep their name and memory bright  
To those who remain, in their twilight days, we give thanks for what was done  
We salute them now and wish them well in their years that are still left to run.*



*Descamisado*

*N.B. WOP/AG — Wireless Operator/Air Grunner*



# Improvements Still Required in the Town!

Well here we are, another five months has passed by since the Spring comments.

Apparently not much has happened to resolve the issue of the removal of the barricade and to tidy up the Saltway frontage of the Health Centre.

Some comment was made in a local newspaper and several letters of complaint have been published but the County Council and the Health Service have been very quiet on the matter of the completion of the retaining wall and reinstatement of the road.

Let's hope that this reminder will jog a memory or two and that action will be taken.

Picture taken on  
10<sup>th</sup> September 2010



**Gas Alliance, as part of their work replacing gas mains and service pipes throughout Droitwich, are also doing their best to paint the streets with some unusual graffiti. Apparently the 'eco-friendly' paint may wear off after a year or so.**



**Maybe it would be better if less paint was used when marking out the underground services.**



# Purton Hulks

The following item has appeared in an IWA Head Office Bulletin

## GLOUCESTER & SHARPNESS CANAL

Archaeologists have begun excavating boats from Britain's largest 'ships' graveyard using 3D laser technology. The barges, known as the 'Purton Hulks', line the River Severn near Sharpness.

Around 100 years ago, locals started deliberately beaching the vessels in the mud to stop the banks of the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal being eroded by tides on the River Severn.

The practice continued until the 1970's and now there are 81 boats lying derelict, making it the largest 'ships' graveyard to be found on mainland Britain.

A group of conservationists called the Friends of Purton are documenting all of the vessels and have undertaken their first archaeological dig.

For more information go to [www.friendsofpurton.org.uk](http://www.friendsofpurton.org.uk)

## British Waterways Helps Mark Ship Graveyard

Visitors to Purton on the eastern shores of the River Severn are now able to learn a little more of the village's hidden past thanks to a joint venture between The Friends of Purton and British Waterways, marking the largest ships' graveyard in mainland Britain.

This comes in light of strengthening ties between both parties and the unveiling of two specially commissioned interpretation boards, which have been positioned adjacent to the Sharpness to Gloucester Canal, in order to mark the boundary of region's now famous Purton Hulks.

Formed between 1909 and 1965, the collection consists of 80-plus abandoned river craft which are helping to arrest coastal erosion. The hulks are understood to form a site of both local and national importance. This has further been outlined in the recent designation as a Scheduled Ancient Monument by English Heritage on the 9 June 2010 and subsequent inclusion of the vessel Harriett on the nations Historic Ships Register.

Following the unveiling of the new interpretation boards, Friends' chairman Paul Barnett said: "This continues to be a great day in the efforts to have the regions maritime heritage recognised and he praised British Waterways' commitment to ensuring the site is properly recognised as an important archaeological site."

British Waterways' volunteer supervisor, Suzanne Byrne, added: "British Waterways was delighted to be working closely with the Friends of Purton to help mark the site and to provide information to visitors". She passed on her thanks to the volunteers for their hard work installing the two signs.

(This article appeared in the Waterscape weekly newsletter)



## Future Programme

### September 2010 - December 2010

After three successful outings this summer when even the weather was good for us, we are now starting our Autumn programme with our very own "Question Time" although David Dimbleby will not be present. We received a request from a member earlier this year for some time to be allowed at one of our meetings for members to ask questions and discuss matters of interest relating to the Civic Society's views on matters appertaining to the town and neighbouring area.

We decided to arrange this at our meeting on **Tuesday, 21st September** commencing at 7.30 p.m. The discussion will be followed by a talk by Dr. R. Peberdy on '**Alternative Medicine**'. We hope as many of you as possible will be able to come along to air your views. If you wish you could send your question beforehand to any member of the committee.

On **Tuesday, 19th October** we have an illustrated story by John Boynton, one time teacher at Westacre School on "**Tramways old and new - pure nostalgia**". Having heard this I can recommend it as very interesting.

On **Tuesday, 16th November** we have a thought provoking talk by the Rev. Peter Holzapsel on Stoddert Kennedy - '**Woodbine Willy**'.

And on **Tuesday, 14th December** Chris Jaegar, Chief Executive of 'Worcester Life' is coming to talk about the **Swan Theatre, Huntingdon Hall, Worcester Festival and Worcester Life**. Mince Pies and punch will be served to celebrate the season.



*Helen Prew*

Unless otherwise stated, meetings are held in the Community Hall, Heritage Way, Droitwich Spa and start at 7.30 p.m. Admission £2 for members and £3 for visitors, to include tea or coffee. Society Membership is £6 per household per year (due April). Newsletters are published quarterly.