

# CHELTENHAM CIVIC SOCIETY

Parmoor House, 13 Lypiatt Terrace, Cheltenham GL50 2SX



## NEWSLETTER JULY 2014



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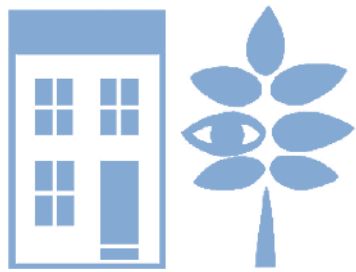


[www.cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk](http://www.cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk)

Member of



For the conservation of the architectural and historical features of the town and its immediate surroundings and the promotion of high standards of design in new developments. Affiliated to Civic Voice. Registered Charity No. 234749



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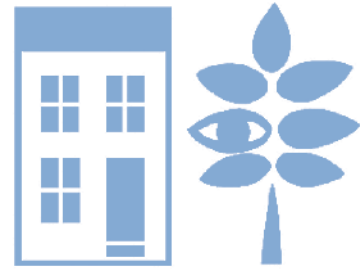
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### Front Cover



We are pleased to introduce your new Cheltenham Civic Society website, which has been re-designed to make it more accessible, attractive and informative. For news of all the society's activities and events, make [cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk](http://cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk) your favourite.

Continuing the serialisation of *Art in Architecture*, a 2013 academic paper by the Editor, architect / artist Mike Duckering, in which he discusses the philosophical question 'Is architecture art?' and examines the connections between art and contemporary architecture. See pages *i - iv* for *Part 2: Towards a contemporary architecture*.



## CHAIR REPORT



*Roger Woodley*

This is my first report in the Newsletter. You will have received bulletins from me by email - I hope not too often (we all know how easy it is to delete people who overdo this sort of thing). I regret that we haven't always been able to send printed copies of these E-Bulletins to those without email, but we shall try to do this as often as we can. Please don't hesitate to leave a message for me on the Parmoor House phone **01242 524632** if you want to make a point about anything. House Manager, Phil Collins always passes on messages straightaway, and I'll try to phone you back within 24 hours. I want to communicate and also to be thought of as accessible!

Because of this more regular mode of communication, I shan't report quite so fully in the Newsletter. But I do want to say: it's a privilege and a pleasure to be holding the reins at the Civic Society. I have been greatly heartened by the interest of the membership, the increased number of volunteers, and the energy to be felt at our events – such as the delightful outing to Madresfield, the stimulating talk from Liz Payne on the Stroud Canal, and the enriching experience of Civic Day at the Minster.

I greatly appreciate the goodwill, hard work and support of the Executive Committee. We have three new members, Bruce Buchanan, James Hodsdon and Stephen Lea, who are already contributing extensively (James has become our Hon Secretary, a post which had been vacant for several years). The planning aspects of our work remain in the capable hands of our Planning Forum, chaired by John Henry and are reported elsewhere in this newsletter.

Next year's Civic Awards will be convened by Bruce Buchanan, succeeding Diane Lewis, who has been the Convenor for some years but has now resigned from the Executive. We are all grateful for Diane's extremely diligent work, culminating last April in a highly successful awards presentation ceremony and lecture by the architectural writer and presenter Tom Dyckhoff (full report on p.4).

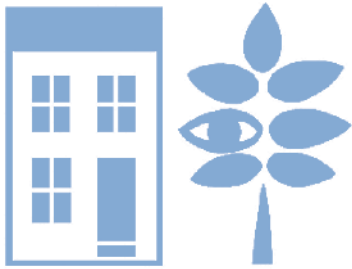
More recently, we enjoyed an entertaining talk by Geoffrey Rowe about the Everyman Theatre, and later in the year look forward to a lecture from Frances Wilson-Copp about architectural style and the usual update from Jeremy Williamson about Civic Pride. Our Summer Party will be on 30 August (form enclosed). Heritage Open Days will take place from 11 to 14 September, and thanks to the efforts of our former Chairman Stephen Clarke, a huge number of events will be occurring throughout the town, including of course the usual opening of Parmoor House on the Saturday and Sunday. Please see as much as you can of these riches over that weekend, and, if you have time, call in on us at Parmoor House too. We will be giving away Plaques Books!

The final piece of good news is that we have a new website, bursting with information about all the Civic Society does, with lovely images of Cheltenham on every page.

Do visit it soon – **[cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk](http://cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk)**: it will make you proud you're a member!  
Have a great summer.

*Roger Woodley*  
**Chair, Executive Committee**





## PLANNING FORUM

This has been a relatively quiet period for the Planning Forum, meriting only a short report, which I shall restrict to a few general observations.



*Contemporary replacement house proposed at Briggs Meadow*

First, we have noticed an increasing tendency at the top end of the market to replace serviceable but undistinguished dwellings from the 1950s and 1960s in relatively prestigious locations such as Battledown with completely modern buildings in a diverse range of styles. We have no quarrel with this. It is encouraging that people have the confidence (and the money!) to pull down existing buildings that though they may accurately reflect the slightly austere utilitarianism of the post-war era are not distinguished architecturally. The creation of a fair number of modern individualistic buildings is to be welcomed - provided such developments do not detract from an existing streetscape. The only comment I would make is that these buildings are often in such secluded locations that they are not going to be enjoyed by many except those who live in them or visit them.

Secondly, there have been a couple of issues affecting The Park – one of the most important parts of the conservation area. The one that caused most excitement – particularly among the committee – was the proposal for a bus shelter with illuminated advertisements on it. It was our strong view that this sort of thing may be acceptable in the shopping areas of the town centre – but not in an important residential area like the Park. This led to the more general concern that the modern bus shelter is a fairly unsightly piece of street furniture. Quite a lot

of effort goes into the design of street benches and litter bins, but the bus shelter seems to be the same everywhere. Is there scope for a more harmonious design for residential areas?

The other concern in The Park was for a dwelling in the grounds of one of the more attractive villas - Oakfield. This would have completely ruined the streetscape of this important area, with its large villas well set back from the road. We are glad that officers - like us - are recommending refusal.

*John Henry*

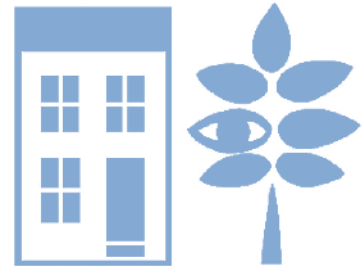
### DUNCAN DOUGLAS

Members were sorry to learn that Duncan Douglas died at Cheltenham General Hospital on 5 April 2014 aged 88 after a period of illness. Duncan read Law at Oxford before qualifying as a barrister. It was while working for Pfizer in Brussels that he and Mary bought a house in Cheltenham as their daughter was at the Ladies' College. They became stalwart members of the Civic Society. Mary was the Programme Secretary for many years, and both of them were assiduous attendees at Civic Society functions, with Duncan a frequent contributor to the Newsletter writing up talks or visits. In addition Duncan played an important role in the administration of the Society by acting as a pro bono lawyer, offering invaluable advice over the years on a range of topics, including Charity Commission legal requirements, tenancy agreements, and even help with obtaining payment off recalcitrant room-hirers.

*John Henry*



*Duncan & Mary Douglas at a Cheltenham Music Festival Launch in 2008*



## CIVIC AWARDS LECTURE

Following the successful Civic Awards ceremony at the Town Hall earlier in the day, an eager audience awaited Tom Dyckhoff's evening lecture at St Andrews Hall.



**Tom Dyckhoff**

Tom Dyckhoff has become a familiar figure on our TV screens, and all his programmes chime with our concerns as a civic society: *The Secret Life of Buildings* and *Saving Britain's Past* – these could be civic society mantras. So we very much looked forward to his lecture on our own Civic Awards evening in April. His title this time though, *The Right to Build – another history of housing*, sounded a little further away from our normal thinking. And so it proved. The argument Tom was developing, beginning from the way buildings influence our sense of well-being, as an element in their secret lives, is that buildings are inescapably part of the way we feel about being alive, the way we behave and develop our communities, the way we live. This is all too important, he argues, to be left to architects alone. We must as citizens become involved ourselves.

Tom showed us some vivid examples, from London mainly, of successful social housing, where the genuine needs of the community have been recognised and catered for by enlightened and participative design. But these, he emphasised, were the exceptions. Mostly architects decide with other 'experts' what is best for us. Nobody asks what we the occupants think. Where we should be going, he argues, is towards architects deciding with US, us who live in the housing. And if that can't be arranged, then we must decide for ourselves how we want to live and get into production – just leave the architects out.

This led to a series of slides of self-build projects in Europe and elsewhere, showing how citizens, acting alone, can build for themselves DIY-style, or can employ a contractor, to obtain the kind of housing they want, which meets the needs they've identified for themselves. 'Self' is the key word here. He adduced many benefits: self-build is cheaper, gives the users control, can reflect their long-term thinking, fits well with surrounding buildings, remains affordable for generations, stimulates pre-fabrication (much better than on-site construction), and itself builds communities.

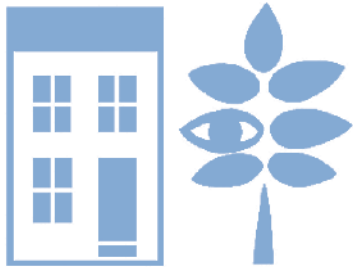
Of course architects are never far away, and can give guidance, or inspiration. But they're working here for the community, not for local government, nor for a rich landowner or wealthy client. The people living in the houses are the clients. The inspiration for this thinking comes from a range of sources, including the Netherlands, Germany and Wiki House (Google it – I had to!). But, Tom argued, a self-build mentality is the way forward for the 21st Century. It's harder in UK than in many places: we're short of land, of finance, of political will and we have overdeveloped and complex bureaucracies. But even here, we've started.



**Invisible Studio, Bath - built for £15,000**

We had no time for questions after Tom's talk – which was a pity, because members of the audience I think would have liked a chance to apply these arguments to Cheltenham. So we must just think the issues out for ourselves. To do so will provide a challenging and stimulating agenda for the town!

**Roger Woodley**



## STROUD CANALS

On 10 June we were pleased to welcome Liz Payne of the Cotswold Canal Trust to give a talk to members and guests on the **Restoration of Stroud Canal**.

The subject captivated the audience as Liz Payne gave an interesting insight into the restoration work that has been carried out in recent years on the Stroudwater and Thames & Severn canals. It was fascinating to see the "before and after" images of the restoration work, which showed how the scrappy, dirty old canals have been turned into beautiful amenities, now enjoyed by thousands of visitors and local residents. Liz certainly knows her subject and her enthusiasm inspired members to visit the canals and see the work done for themselves.

I would encourage those interested to visit the Trust's website [cotswoldcanals.com](http://cotswoldcanals.com), which contains much detailed information and photographs. The following brief, edited extract records the historic origin of the canals.



**Bond Mill Bridge, 1986**



**Bond Mill Bridge today**

*Cotswold Canals is the title given to two connected Gloucestershire waterways, The Stroudwater Navigation and The Thames & Severn Canal. The thirtysix mile long waterway links England's two great rivers, the Severn and Thames. The Stroudwater Navigation meets the Thames & Severn Canal at Wallbridge in Stroud.*

*The origins of the Stroudwater Navigation began in the 1740s when Richard Owen Cambridge built a man-made waterway near to Wheatenhurst for pleasure purposes. Then between 1759 and 1763 the Kemmett Canal was constructed from Framilode to the Stonehouse area. This mainly consisted of making sections of the river Frome navigable between weirs or mill ponds. Cargo was then craned, up or down, from boats on one side of the*

*weir to a boat on the other side. This system was the earliest known example of container traffic on an inland waterway.*



**Capel's Mill under restoration**



**Capel's Mill new channel**

*The Stroudwater Navigation as we see it today was built between 1775 and 1779 from Framilode, on the banks of the River Severn, to Wallbridge, Stroud. From the beginning, it was very profitable. Such success meant that the Company of Proprietors was keen that their canal form part of the proposed link with the Thames and thereby London, and in 1781 they commissioned a survey of the line from Stroud to Cricklade on the River Thames.*

*The Thames and Severn Canal was completed in 1789. Its eastern end is Inglesham Lock near Lechlade where it connects with the River Thames. Its western end is Wallbridge near Stroud, where it connects with the end of the Stroudwater Navigation. The canal had one short arm from Siddington to the town of Cirencester. A Bill was introduced in 1783 and construction of the canal was expected to take six years. Josiah Clowes was appointed Resident Engineer. On 31st January 1785 the first vessel passed through the lock at Wallbridge in Stroud and went up the new canal as far as Chalford.*

*The 241 feet rise from Wallbridge to the summit level at Daneway (near Sapperton) was completed in the summer of 1786 requiring 28 locks over a distance of seven miles. The canal was built to accommodate Severn Trows, which were 68ft x 16ft, from the Severn to Brimscombe Port and Thames Barges, which were 90ft x 12ft, from the Port to the Thames. One of the original purposes of the Port was to facilitate the transfer of goods between the two."*

**Lesley Whittal**

## ART IN ARCHITECTURE

### Part 2: Towards a contemporary architecture



*Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, Spain, 1997*  
*Architect: Frank Gehry (1929 - )*

Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao built in 1997 is a remarkable example of contemporary architecture. Despite its visually complex form, the Guggenheim is a uniquely original proponent of the genre. It uses a limited number of honestly expressed materials, planes and shapes that are simply connected with minimalist detailing throughout. In Part 3 the building will be examined in greater depth, but what of the origins of contemporary architecture? Gehry's Guggenheim did not, as some have suggested, land as an alien from outer space, but resulted from a lineage of modernist design that can be traced back to the 1900's.

As the invention of photography and the industrialisation of production in the Western world led to modernism in art, so the invention and introduction of new construction techniques made possible a new freedom in architecture. Traditional masonry construction, with its limited structural options of post and beam and/or arch, exploited to its maximum possibilities in the medieval Gothic cathedrals of northern Europe and the domes of Renaissance architecture, was essentially a craft based methodology. Like the fine arts, it relied on craft skills, in this case stonemasons and carpenters; and of course sculptors and painters provided much of the exterior and interior decorations. In direct contrast, the use of reinforced concrete, cast iron and structural steel opened up enormous possibilities in the design of buildings, for which science-based skills and industrial processes were needed to design and implement the new architecture.

Richard Weston in his 1996 monograph on Modernism, writes that early in the new century several distinguished concrete buildings were built in France, notably by the young French architect Auguste Perret (1874–1954), in whose office the future Le Corbusier became acquainted

with the material. Perret's early buildings, such as the block of flats at 25 bis rue Franklin (1902–3) and the Garage Ponthieu (1905–6), made use of exposed concrete, but only by assimilating it into the familiar rectilinear aesthetic of column and beam structures and not really exploiting the new possibilities latent in the material. (1996, p35).

In terms of its aesthetics qualities, rue Franklin does not break new ground, but it is the exploitation of a structural frame to create light and space that is unique. The aesthetic thread of modernism that leads to today's contemporary architecture can be traced through many innovative buildings designed and constructed during the early twentieth century. Much of this new approach to architectural design initiated in Germany, and Christopher Crouch, in *Modernism in Art, Design and Architecture*, tells us that in 1906, a year before founding the *Deutscher Werkbund*, an association of artists, architects, designers, and industrialists, Hermann Muthesius was calling for a new form of design that did not simply decorate but which could 'provide a form of social training' and which 'might be called a new style of living'. Muthesius proposed an idea of fitness of form and its relationship with function. He observed that form developed purely from function was often so expressive that an appreciation of functional success differed little from what was traditionally thought of as aesthetic pleasure. (1999, p47).

But the new architecture of modernism was to acquire increasing criticism through its connections with the socio-political ethos of the times. This association with totalitarianism and nationalism taints many people's views of modernist architecture; nevertheless the radically new design philosophy that developed during the first half of the twentieth century has a crucially important relevance, for it is the artistic lineage that began with those early seminal buildings that lead us to today's contemporary architectural aesthetic.



*Steiner House, Vienna, 1911*  
*Architect: Adolf Loos*

According to Weston, the Steiner House was one of the first private houses to be built in reinforced concrete, and its garden elevation was of unprecedented austerity. With its flat roofs, horizontal windows, absence of ornament, and spatial continuities within, it was as near as anyone in Europe came before the War to an unmistakably modern house. (1996, p51).



**Fagus Factory, Alfeld-an-der-Leine, Germany, 1913**  
Architects: Gropius and Meyer

Industrial buildings lent themselves more readily to a functional, modernist aesthetic, and although Peter Behrens' AEG Turbine Factory in Berlin pre-dates the Steiner House by two years, it is the Fagus Factory at Alfeld-an-der-Leine, Germany, completed in 1913 by two of his former employees, Walter Gropius and Adolf Meyer, that best illustrates this revolutionary aesthetic. Here they designed a brick, steel and glass factory that abandoned the visually solid structures of architecture to date, and to quote Weston: *The offices of the Fagus factory are steel-framed, with a lightweight glass curtain-wall hung from the floor slabs. The fact that the wall is non-loadbearing is emphasised by the absence of structural supports at the corners, yielding an unprecedented sense of openness and continuity between inside and out.* (1996, p51).

It was the Bauhaus, founded by Gropius in 1919 that was the single major influence of modern architecture, not just in architectural design terms, but also in the whole ethos of teaching and practice. As Barry Bergdoll records in MOMA's publication of its 2009/10 Bauhaus exhibition, Gropius's new Bauhaus building was a veritable demonstration of the call for an architecture born of functional analysis. He says: *Unified in the aerial view, its parts are experienced on the ground as a myriad changing effects of transparency and reflection, of continual realignments quite unlike any of Gropius's previous compositions, with their lingering classical organisation . . . The curtain wall was a vitrine for Gropius's most original achievement, a training in which the workshop became a laboratory . . . for a new type of artistic practice.* (2009, pps 51 & 52).



**Bauhaus, Dessau, Germany, 1926**  
Architect: Walter Gropius

The impact of the Bauhaus on design and production within Germany was substantial, and although Gropius' enthusiasm for a machine aesthetic of simple forms and the use of factory based mass production was more idealistic than political, with the benefit of hindsight it is possible to see the attractions of 'machine age' functional architecture to the growing totalitarian regimes of 1930's Europe.

Built near Potsdam, Germany in 1921, the Einstein Tower by Erich Mendelsohn is a wonderful example of expressive architecture that not only reflects the building's function, but also like the Bilbao Guggenheim 76 years later, shows that modernist architecture does not have to be totally linear. The building is unique in using flowing forms in a simply detailed design that hints at the future work of Santiago Calatrava and Oscar Niemeyer. According to Jonathan Glancey in his *Modern World Architecture*, Mendelsohn, who was fascinated by the cosmos, made superb drawings of fantastic buildings – streamlined designs that appeared to owe nothing to conventional architectural logic or to the constraints imposed by existing materials. The Einstein project could not be built as he had hoped, of a single material with highly plastic properties; such a material didn't really exist. It had to be built of crude brick and concrete, rendered to look as streamlined and otherworldly as possible. (2011, p83).



**Einstein Tower, Nr. Potsdam, Germany, 1921**  
Architect: Erich Mendelsohn



These new freedoms and developments in architecture were not taking place in isolation – there were close links between artists and architects, and both influenced the other. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the de Stijl movement, based around the magazine *de Stijl* first published in 1917 by Theo van Doesburg, painter, writer and architect. David Lewis, in his 1957 monograph on Piet Mondrian tells us that Mondrian first met van Doesburg during the war years, and through the de Stijl architects came into contact with the new architecture, and: *From that moment, he grew most keenly aware that the new architecture was making an advance parallel to the advance he was making in painting. The new architects had begun using industrial materials, glass, concrete and steel as he had begun using colour in painting, unambiguously and constructively. And they, too, were finding a release of joy and optimism in the new space and light – the new mass and translucence – the new, constructed 'plastic of pure relationships, of free rhythm.'* (1957, p5).

Clearly sharing influences with Mondrian was Gerrit Rietveld (1888–1964). According to Frampton, his Schroder House in Utrecht was in many respects a realisation of Van Doesburg's *16 Points of Plastic Architecture*. *It was elementary, economic and functional; monumental and dynamic; anti-cubic in its form and anti-decorative in its colour. Its living space on the top floor, with its open 'transformable' plan, exemplified his postulation of a dynamic architecture liberated from the encumbrance of load-bearing walls and the restrictions imposed by pierced openings.* (2007, p145).



**Schroder House, Utrecht, Netherlands, 1924**  
Architect: Gerrit Rietveld

This unique house, with its sculptural interplay of coloured planes introduced a three dimensional spatial quality many years ahead of its time, and was to be greatly influential on the modern movement.

A few years later came the exquisitely beautiful German Pavilion in Barcelona by Ludwig Mies van de Rohe (1886–1969), who himself ran the Bauhaus from 1930 to 1933. According to Philip Jodidio in his book

*Architecture: Art*, it was built for the 1929 Barcelona International Exhibition with a structure of glass, steel and four different kinds of marble. A study in perfect modernism, the temporary pavilion was dismantled after the exhibition in 1930, but faithfully reconstructed on its original site in 1986. Jodidio goes on to tell us that Mies van Der Rohe was told by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs that in the Pavilion *"Nothing will be exhibited, the pavilion itself will be the exhibit."* Indeed, the structure contained only one sculpture by Georg Kolbe (Alba) and the furniture the architect designed for the building, including the Barcelona chair, which became one of the icons of twentieth century design. The emptiness and rectilinear purity of the Barcelona Pavilion remains one of the high points of Modernism. (2005, p26).



**German Pavilion, Barcelona, Spain, 1929**  
Architect: Ludwig Mies van de Rohe

Undergoing construction at the same time as Mies van der Rohe's German pavilion was Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye. Following a not so dissimilar design philosophy but executed in a totally different way, Villa Savoye is Le Corbusier's most well known domestic work, and according to Weston, crystallised around the *Five Points of a New Architecture* – an iconoclastic manifesto for domestic design. It was built in suburban Paris as a weekend house, and marked the peak of Le Corbusier's Purist phase. Organised as an 'architectural promenade' around a central ramp, the plans progress from the near-symmetry of the ground floor to the freedom of the rooftop garden: *The atmosphere is unmistakably nautical – 'an architecture pure, neat, clear, clean and healthy' as he (Corbusier) said of the liner 'Empress France' – but without a trace of kitsch. The journey through space is magical, and all around geometry stands bathed in light: here, in full song, is architecture's purist gift – 'mathematical lyricism.'* (1996, pps 112 & 113).

The Villa Savoye is without doubt a masterpiece of modernist architecture, with its beautiful and sculptural simplicity of form and composition. It is remarkable that all the tenets of modernist architecture, which undoubtedly inform the contemporary architecture of today, were established in such a short period of time between 1900 and 1930. Indeed, according to Weston

the Modernist aesthetic reached maturity around 1930, when the capitalist economies were laid low by the Great Depression and the rise of Totalitarianism in Germany, Italy and the USSR began to threaten artistic freedom. (1996, p7).



**Villa Savoye, Poissy, 1928-31**  
**Architect: Le Corbusier**

There are many other examples of modernist architecture of the period, but it is the design philosophy (rather than a style) that continues to underpin modernist design to the present day. Subsequent decades saw many key modernist buildings all of which were immensely influential, but none as groundbreaking and unique as those first experimental leaps into a new decoration-free aesthetic.

The limitations of construction techniques in the early modernist buildings caused considerable problems. The purist white walls made with painted sand/cement render on brickwork were prone to failure, as were the slim-line painted steel window frames. The new structural frame designs, whilst creating column-free open space, were not matched by cladding technology. By the 1960's, more robust and reliable building methods were being introduced, particularly prefabricated precast concrete, leading to heavier, clumsy and ultimately brutalist architecture. Despite some key buildings being built in this period, the refined and minimalist detailing that characterised modernist design was struggling to survive. Even Stirling and Gowan's Leicester Engineering Building was plagued by leaking windows, and the Sydney Opera House reveals its 1970's credentials in the heavy precast concrete panels used around the building's lower storeys.

It was the surge of new and radically improved technologies and building systems from the late 1970's onwards, particularly in glazing and lightweight natural stone cladding, that eventually provided the key to achieving successful contemporary architecture. To quote Kenneth Frampton: *All the arts are in some degree limited by their means of production and reproduction, and this is doubly so in the case of architecture.* (2007, p9).

The important influence of new construction technology on contemporary architecture is also recognised by Hal Foster in his entertaining *The Art-Architecture Complex*.

He tells us that new materials and techniques play a role in contemporary design that is aesthetic as well as functional. The global styles of Rogers, Foster, Piano and others often feature heroic engineering, and here technology is seen as a virtue. Contemporary materials and techniques tend to be light, and this lightness has affected art as well as architecture. In particular it has forced a reevaluation of material integrity and structural transparency. (2011, p ix).

After almost 100 years, technology has caught up with the modernist design philosophies of Loos, Gropius and Corbusier to give a new freedom of expression to today's contemporary architects. There is a clear and obvious connection between the aspirations of the early modernist architects and the design ideals pursued today by the likes of Gehry, Chipperfield, Alsop, Heatherwick and many others. Hugh Pearman, writing in *Contemporary World Architecture* talks of the many conflicting theories and positioning over the end of Modernism and the styles that replace it. However, he refers to Colin St John Wilson (1922 - 2007), the respected architect and academic, who, in a 1960 paper *Open and Closed* sought to identify an alternative tradition of modernism: *Not an architecture after modernism, . . . but a continuing tradition that served far better to connect past, present and future . . .* (1998, p8).

**Mike Duckering © 2013**

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## CIVIC DAY: 21 JUNE 2014

To quote from Civic Voice:

*“Midsummer day on Saturday, June 21st, was the perfect opportunity for civic societies the length and breadth of the country to celebrate Civic Day 2014 - a national day when we stand up and say “we care about where we live”. Groups up and down the country rose to the challenge to promote a positive image of their cities, towns and villages and generate a renewed sense of civic pride in their communities. Over 250 fantastic events took place this year involving thousands of enthusiastic and committed civic champions.”*



*Cheltenham Minster, St Mary's*

For Cheltenham's Civic Day we decided to focus our attention on the town's oldest building, Cheltenham Minster, which has been standing proud in the town centre for over 850 years. The Minster was open to visitors for the whole day and more than 100 people passed through its portals to admire the stained glass, John Higgs' gravestone in the Minster grounds, the interesting range of memorials and other architectural features. Although the current Mayor was unable to honour Civic Day with his presence due to prior commitments, we were delighted to welcome the former Mayor of Cheltenham, Cllr Wendy Flynn, who brought along a group of Brownies (girls, not cakes!) to serve tea to those attending the afternoon talk and walk.



*Visitors at the Minster*

Freddie Gick organised an art competition and Stephen Lea's survey was circulated during the afternoon. The day concluded with a service of Evensong expertly performed by the Choir of St Philip and St James and conducted by Robert Sutton. Thanks are due to the Choir, the Brownies, the Friends of the Minster and others who made the day such a success.

**Roger Jones**

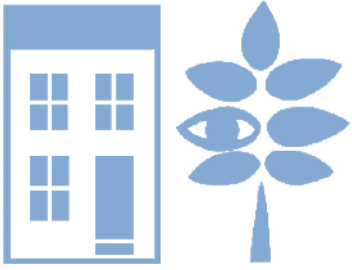
## CHELTENHAM MUSIC FESTIVAL

Once again the Civic Society organised walks around the borough in early July at the invitation of the Cheltenham Music Festival. Roger Jones' walks took 1945 as their theme, when the Cheltenham Music Festival burst on to the scene - the first of the UK's post-war festivals. This was a time when traffic was light, no buses were ever seen in the Promenade, when Boot's had a tea room and lending library, the High Street still boasted a seat of learning, and the main railway station was the GWR terminus in St James' Square. Participants on the walk reflected that much had changed since 1945 - and not always for the better. At 32, numbers were slightly down on last year, but everyone seemed highly committed and plied the tour leader with a number of pertinent questions at the end of the tour.

Roger Woodley's walks, by contrast, invited those taking part to note how little Cheltenham had changed - since 1834! His themes were the celebration of Gustav Holst's Planets, whose centenary occurs this year, and the concept of Cheltenham as the first 'garden town'. The latter argument was based on the Merrett map of 1834, of which participants were given a copy and invited to note the continuities, for example, Imperial and Montpellier gardens, the Rotunda, Montpellier Street and Royal Crescent. Unconnectedly, the numbers were rather higher at 47, making a total of 79 for 2014.

These walks are popular and successful, and a good advertisement for what the Civic Society can contribute, both to the Festivals and the town. We hope that we will continue to be invited to organise them.

**Roger Jones**



## LORD PARMOOR 1882 - 1977

2014 is the 50th anniversary of Lord Parmoor's generous bequest of his house at 13 Lypiatt Terrace to Cheltenham Civic Society, and this year's Summer Garden Party at Parmoor House will celebrate his generous gift. Over-shadowed by his father, the 1st Lord Parmoor and his younger brother, Stafford, we seem to know little of Lord Parmoor himself. There are few images of him, he did not marry, and has no offspring.

Alfred Henry Seddon Cripps was born at Standish Hospital (near Stonehouse) in 1882, the eldest son of Charles Cripps, the first Lord Parmoor of Frieth, and his first wife, Theresa Potter. He had a younger sister Ruth and brother, Frederick. Sadly, his mother died in 1893 after a sudden illness, and in 1919 at the end of the First World War, his father re-married. This produced two more brothers, Leonard and Stafford (who was to become the eminent politician). Alfred succeeded his father in 1941 to become 2nd Baron Parmoor. The brief listing in Cracroft's Peerage says simply *"Captain, Lincolnshire Yeomanry; barrister, Middle Temple 1907; Bursar, Queen's College, Oxford 1928-45."*



**Parmoor House, Frieth**

Alfred was brought up in the family home, Parmoor House in the village of Frieth, Buckinghamshire. In the 12th century the Knights Templar owned Parmoor House, and after falling into ruin it was rebuilt by the new Earl of the hundred in 1352. The property was then lost to the crown around 1790 when George III supplanted the incumbent Earl with a John "Frith," whose surname was to be that of the village. Although Frith never took up residence, on his death in 1791, the Cripps Family of Berkshire

bought the property.

Alfred's grandparents came to Parmoor House in 1860, and it was taken over by his father in 1884 when the grandparents retired to a smaller house near Marlow. Alfred recalls fond memories of family life at Parmoor:

*"Parmoor was a delightful family home and close enough to London to be much used, enabling us to take a strenuous part in all country pursuits, and to take a real interest in the village, giving one the sense of belonging to a well recognised and well conducted community."*



**Governing Body, Queen's College, Oxford, June 1943**  
Lord Parmoor (back row, 3rd from right)

At the age of 46, Alfred became Bursar at Queen's College, Oxford. In its 1977 obituary, the College Record tells us that during the war years, 'Parmoor' kept chickens in the Fellows Garden *"thereby assuring a measure of the protein requirement of the wartime undergraduates, Fellows and the Government agency staff then occupying the college."* The obituary goes on to note that *"Parmoor was a very positive character, at times impatient and with a commanding voice with which he would summon Bursary staff to his presence - and his manservant from his room in the basement: it was linked to Parmoor's room by a speaking tube. He got on very well with the undergraduates, and was in the habit of joining them in games of poker"*.

*The above photograph is reproduced by permission of the Provost and Fellows of The Queen's College, Oxford.*

*Acknowledgements to FriethHistory.org for the edited extracts from "Parmoor and the Cripps Family" by Lord Parmoor.*



Although Alfred was living and working in Oxford, Parmoor was clearly dear to his heart. He was very much interested in the Parmoor name and recalls: *"It so happened that I had gone on a visit to Uppsala in Sweden at the invitation of their Archbishop, who was a friend of my father's and a frequent visitor to Parmoor. My object was to study Swedish methods of farming and I happened to arrive there on the five hundredth anniversary of the University of Uppsala. There was a large banquet in the evening, to which the Archbishop took me as his guest, and I sat next to a University Professor whose name I did not catch. In the course of conversation the Professor asked where I lived in England and the name of the house. He then asked me if I knew why the house was called Parmoor, I told him that we were not sure but had some rather hazy ideas.*

*He said, "I will tell you: it is called Parmoor because there was a pear orchard by a mere, or pond, there, and Pargrove which is close by was named for the same reason". I nearly collapsed. To think that anyone living such a distance overseas knew much more than I did of my own home and district made me feel very small, and I wondered if any Oxford professor, living close-by, could have given such a sure reply. However the mystery was somewhat cleared up when the Archbishop told me the next morning that the Professor was the greatest expert on place names in Sweden and probably in the world."*



**King Zog, Queen Geraldine & Prince Leka at Parmoor**

The first Lord Parmoor died in 1941, and Alfred tells us that Parmoor had to be let until such time as its future could be decided. Extraordinarily, the tenant

the family found was the exiled King Zog of Albania, his beautiful Queen and large court. Many stories were told of his 'reign' there, but after King Zog and his large entourage left in 1946 for Alexandria, where King Farouk of Egypt had offered him hospitality, the fate of Parmoor had to be decided.

The house was too large and costly for the sole occupation of a bachelor, and after much deliberation, Alfred took the painful decision to sell Parmoor, his beloved family home. The house was empty for some months, until it was bought by the Anglican Community of St Katherine as a convent, a purchaser that Lord Parmoor thoroughly approved: *"... happy to know that a religious community would be able to appreciate its restful peace which we had so long enjoyed."* In 1999 the house became known as St Katherine's, Parmoor, the headquarters of the Sue Ryder Prayer Fellowship.

Lord Parmoor died in March 1977 at the age of 95. He was succeeded briefly by his brother, Frederick as the 3rd Baron Parmoor, who also died later that year.

**Mike Duckering**

### **MADRESFIELD COURT**

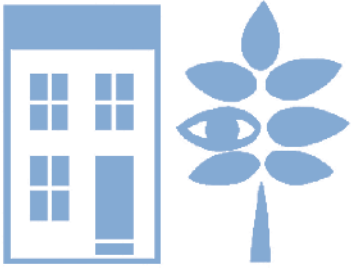
On 13th May, members took a trip to Madresfield Court, near Malvern, the ancestral seat of the Lygon family. The tour guides gave a very interesting and informative tour of the beautiful old house, and members were fascinated to see the lovely antique furnishings, and the numerous family portraits and photographs.



**Interior, Madresfield Court**

After the tour of the house, several people wandered in the well-tended gardens before boarding the coach and driving to The Yorkshire Grey, Earls Croome for a tasty pub lunch.

**Lesley Whittal**



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Open House

Sir - One of the most interesting things that the Civic Society does on behalf of the people of Cheltenham is to consider planning applications for new and altered buildings in our lovely town and give awards and commendations to those it considers special. I am always struck by the variety and innovative ideas that are thrown up.

I wonder if other people would, as I would, like to be allowed to visit those buildings that achieve such accolades, ideally inside as well if the owners will allow, since a space has to work for those who use it as well as be attractive to those who pass by. Maybe one of the judging panel would be prepared to give up one evening a year (or even two if there was sufficient demand) to show us the buildings and why they were chosen. To see the interior on such a visit that would be a real bonus. I am particularly thinking of the house in Rodney Road, which seems to have made such good use of a narrow site without overshadowing its neighbours.

Maybe if other people think this a good idea they could contact the Civic Society. Such a visit could be tied into the Heritage Open Days in September.

**Rosemary Harvey**

*Dear Rosemary, your interesting suggestion has been passed on to the Civic Awards team and those involved locally with Heritage Open Days. Editor*



16a Rodney Road



Brimscombe

### Canal Knowledge

Although I am not a member of the Civic Society, I did attend the talk at Parmoor House on the Cotswold canals restoration by Liz Payne of the Stroud Canal Restoration Trust. She explained with the aid of many current and old photos just how much work the trust with 7500 members has carried out since 1972. It is quite amazing to think that such a small band of canal enthusiasts can achieve so much in such a relatively short time. I have lived in Gloucestershire for over forty years but had no idea there was a port at Brimscombe that was used for transferring goods from Thames barges to Severn barges because the two barge systems were not compatible with each other's canals. It must have been amazing to be able to travel on water from Gloucester to London across such wonderful countryside years ago

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Civic Society for providing such an interesting and informative talk. Every time I see a section of Gloucestershire canal in the future it will mean so much more to me.

**Alec Cornish-Trestrail**

### **Do you have strong views about anything that affects the environment of Cheltenham?**

If the answer is yes – then please tell us about it. The Editor welcomes letters, emails or any other contributions to the Newsletter.

### **Please send letters to:**

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Cheltenham GL50 2SX  
or email: [newsletter@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk)



## 2014 PROGRAMME

### Summer Garden Party 30 August

The 2014 programme continues with the annual Summer Garden Party on 30 August. This year the garden party will be held in honour of Lord Parmoor, celebrating the 50th anniversary of his gift of Parmoor House to the Civic Society.

The garden party is open to all Civic Society members and their guests, who can enjoy chatting with fellow members and friends over delicious canapes and a glass of wine or two. Hopefully, the weather will be fine but if not the party will be held in Parmoor House.

### Heritage Open Days 11 - 14 September

It is the heritage of buildings and green spaces from the early nineteenth century that transformed a small medieval market town into the Cheltenham of today, a town in a park with a vibrant cultural and sporting life. Each year Cheltenham Heritage Open Days celebrates this proud heritage with buildings open, walks and talks on some of the architectural features and history of the town. This year, Cheltenham Heritage Open Days will be on the 11th to 14th September with more events for visitors and residents alike free to explore.



*St Peter's Church, Leckhampton*

New this year is St Peter's Leckhampton with its fascinating churchyard and a chance to try your hand at bell ringing. The 1960's St Christopher's has some wonderful stained glass. Dennis Jackson will talk at St Gregory's about the decorative stones, and the University will open its doors at Francis Close Hall Campus to show how student life has change over the years since it first opened in 1850. The

Cheltenham Synagogue has always been a favourite and this year there will also be a talk about the Jewish Cemetery hidden away off the Tewkesbury Road and brought to our attention by the late Brian Torode. As in previous years there will be some of our award winning buildings, including a behind the scene look at the Local Collection at the Wilson Art Gallery and Museum.



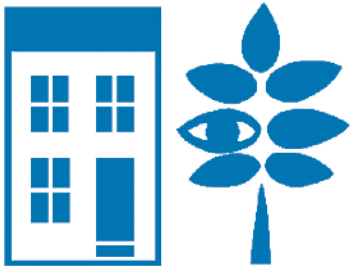
*St Christopher's Church, The Ravens*

Thanks to the Cheltenham Community Pride Fund and a number of generous sponsors we will have a 16 page brochure which you can pick up at the Tourist Information Centre at The Wilson from early August. Do take the opportunity to look around these buildings, and if you can spare a few hours to help with stewarding or even guiding then that will be appreciated, and you will also gain much from the experience. We like to think that over the last few years the Cheltenham Civic Society has made Heritage Open Days into a community pride project.

*Stephen Clarke*

### Architectural Style

On Tuesday 7 October we have the opportunity to attend a talk by Dr Frances Wilson-Copp, a former lecturer of Art History and Theory at the University of Gloucestershire, and who now lectures privately as well as teaching at Rendcomb College, Cirencester and Oakridge School, Stroud. Her illustrated talk will focus on the classical and gothic architectural styles, very much in evidence in Cheltenham, and how the use of these styles and details came together to form the identity of buildings and also of the town.



## FORTHCOMING CIVIC SOCIETY EVENTS

**Saturday 30 August 2014 6.00 - 8.00pm**

**Summer Garden Party**

Celebrating the 50th anniversary of Lord Parmoor's bequest in the garden at Parmoor House.

Please complete the enclosed form.

**Thursday to Sunday 11 - 14 September 2014**

**2014 Heritage Open Days**

Open buildings and events around Cheltenham. Collect the brochure from the Tourist Information Centre at the Wilson Art Gallery & Museum.

**Saturday & Sunday 13 & 14 September 2014**

**11.00 to 4.00pm**

Open Days at Parmoor House  
An exhibition of the work and archives of Cheltenham Civic Society.

**Tuesday 7 October 2014 - 7.30pm**

**Lecture at Parmoor House**

Dr Frances Wilson-Copp will give a talk entitled Architectural Style.

**Tuesday 11 November 2014 - 7.30pm**

**Civic Pride Report, Parmoor House**

Update from Jeremy Williamson, Managing Director, Cheltenham Development Task Force.

**Tuesday 2 December 2014 - 7.30pm**

**The Paterson Memorial Lecture**

**Harwood Hall, Christchurch, Malvern Road**

Enshrining The Mary Rose

Lecture by Chris Wilkinson of renowned architects, Wilkinson Eyre.

*The admission charge to a Civic Society Lecture at Parmoor House is £2 (members) and £4 (non-members). Doors open at 7.00pm for tea or coffee and biscuits.*

### CHELTHENHAM CIVIC SOCIETY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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