



NEWSLETTER JULY 2013

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Dates for your diary – see back page for details

Summer Garden Party

Saturday 31 August 2013

6.00pm to 8.00pm in the garden at Parmoor House.

Visit to Hereford

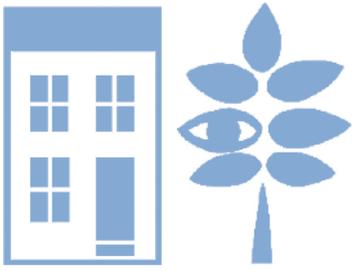
Tuesday 10 September 2013

9.15am from Parmoor House. Hosted by Herefordshire Civic Society.

Open Days at Parmoor House

Saturday & Sunday 14 & 15 September 2013

11.00am to 4.00pm. An opportunity to see the work and archives of the Civic Society.



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

For as long as I can remember a debate has continued in the Society on the comparative merits of our being based in Parmoor House and having a Town Centre presence, and the suggestion that we should find an empty shop unit to put the latter to the test has frequently been aired. This year's Civic Day, a national celebration of the Civic Society movement, fell within the RIBA's **Love Architecture Week** and provided an ideal opportunity not only to 'give it a go' but also to form a closer relationship with architects working locally. Thanks to the generosity of Regent Arcade manager John Forward and the considerable help and encouragement of Jeremy Williamson, Friday to Sunday 21 - 23 June found us manning a strategically placed 'pop up shop' in the Regent Arcade where we mounted a display of the Society's activities together with displays of a number of the major development schemes about to impact on Cheltenham.

These were complemented by an **Ask an Architect** free advice desk and panels depicting the work of a number of local architectural firms.

The exercise was deemed a success, both by ourselves and the architects involved, with a reasonable throughput of interested public, and well worth repeating in the future.



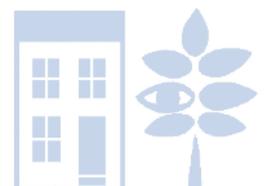
Visitors to Civic Day 'pop up shop'



Tasha Areyo, drawing competition winner

On Civic Day itself, Society members Roger Jones and Freddie Gick arranged a family quiz and drawing competition, and I am indebted to all those who manned the stand and contributed to the event's success.

Members will be aware that the Echo continues to publish our comments on planning issues on a regular basis and goes so far as to dub us 'guardians of the town's heritage'. In their recent commemorative issue they honoured us with a full page spread where we were able to set out the Society's activities, aims and achievements. However, it isn't all sweetness and light! A recent editorial railed against our disapproval of the proposed 'mock Regency' development on the Odeon/ Haines and Strange site, and we should explain our reasoning to you lest you feel we have gone astray.





Regency Cheltenham

There is indeed at times a good case for replicating our Regency Heritage and this has been successfully achieved in the past: for example in the faithful extension of Queen's Parade and in new terraces enhancing both Montpellier and Imperial Gardens. However, a faithful replication is not always achieved, especially within the constraints of modern building requirements, and often the result falls short of an acceptable standard. This can only lead to a dilution of our genuine Regency architecture which makes Cheltenham so special. In this particular instance we deemed a Regency approach to be inappropriate. Far from a grand tree-lined street or elegant square, the proposal fronts a busy inner relief road opposite the rear elevation of a shopping arcade, lying close to an unashamedly modern soon to emerge development and is itself purely a Regency veneer wrapped round two sides of a contemporary development.



Proposed view of Gloucester Place

We firmly believe that a high quality and well-designed contemporary design would sit much more happily on this site, a view shared by many who saw the scheme exhibited in our Regent Arcade display.

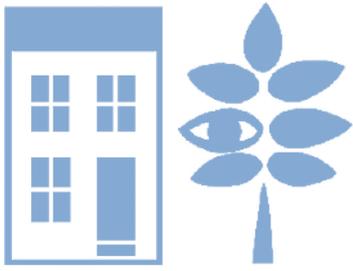
On a different tack, I am pleased to note that our past Chairman's considerable efforts in forming a support body hosted by the Civic Society for the various community and campaign groups within the wider bounds of the town have resulted in the creation of **Cheltenham in Focus**, an organisation where groups with similar interests and aims and who care for the wellbeing of Cheltenham can gain knowledge and strength through collaboration. This is something we have hoped to achieve for a while and we are indebted to Stephen Clarke, who will continue to chair the group which has already had several productive meetings, for making it a reality.

The Executive Committee was recently joined by Freddie Gick. A newcomer to Cheltenham, Freddie brings with him a wealth of experience in the Civic Society movement and is a Trustee of Civic Voice, the body representing Civic Societies nationally. We have already benefitted from his presence and are delighted to welcome him.

Finally, an urgent plea. Since Sheila Chaplin stood down from the Executive Committee, we have been unable to fill the post of Programme Secretary, which she administered so ably. This isn't as onerous a task as it may sound. This year's programme is finalised and simply needs a bit of supervising to make sure it runs smoothly, and although next year's programme has yet to be established, there will be plenty of help and advice on hand. There must be someone out there who is willing to take on this essential but enjoyable task – **Your Society Needs You!**

Douglas S Ogle





CIVIC AWARDS LECTURE

Jonathan Glancey

Outrage revisited – all over again!



Jonathan Glancey

On 18 April, the Civic Society were entertained to a lively and colourful evening when Jonathan Glancey, architectural critic and writer, gave the Civic Awards lecture. Earlier that day Jonathan had presented the Cheltenham Civic Awards to the 2012 winners at the Town Hall. I hope he approved of our choices, but he was too polite to say if he didn't. I think they stood up well in relation to his arguments. And in the evening we heard, in the light, accessible and easy tones familiar from his books and articles (over many years, in *The Guardian* and the *Independent*), what his architectural principles were.



Outrage was the title of a 1955 article by Ian Nairn in the *Architectural Review* (of which Jonathan was once Assistant Editor).

Nairn raged against the repetitiveness and lack of imagination of post-war new building and the vandalism of town planners, and the clutter of structures and signage which was allowed to fill the streets. He was also a most perceptive and witty writer about architecture generally. Jane and I remember using *Nairn's London (1966)* to explore the docks of the East End when the area was still full of cranes and cargoes and smells, and big ships, before either Canary Wharf or the softer term 'Docklands' had been thought of. But he was outraged about what was starting to happen there too: *'Of all the things done to London in this century, the soft-spoken this-is-good-for-you castration of the East End is the saddest'*. Along with Pevsner, Ian Nairn was one of our heroes.



Ski slope, Dubai Mall

So it was with mixed emotions that we heard Jonathan Glancey confirm that his 'outrage' was as necessary today as 60 years ago. He showed us a series of staggeringly vulgar new architectural projects, not all from the UK admittedly – and I don't see how we can feel outrage or any other emotion about what they get up to in Dubai – but all in severe breach of the principles of simplicity, functionality and rational thinking. And what's even worse, mostly eyesores too. *'City buildings can be simple'*, said Jonathan, *'but should all be different'*. And *'modern buildings should talk to each other, not turn their backs'*. In other words there should be connections, proportion, context, appreciation of the spirit of place, a human scale.



I suspect that when Jonathan Glancey hears the term 'Wow factor' applied to architecture, he turns his back. He deplores the way we fail to protect local identities. He deplores the way Ian Nairn could drive in a Morris Minor from the edge of Southampton to the edge of Carlisle and not notice any difference between the two – and how much more serious that this is still the case.



Ian Nairn, Photograph, BBC

We have achieved nothing – or very little – but we have learned to build on a huge scale. Hence: *'Outrage revisited – all over again!'*

A depressing conclusion, undeniably. Deficit or not, we're far richer than in 1955, but when it comes to architecture, we've used that wealth to create giant look-at-me public buildings, without relevance to their location (think Gherkin and Shard) – the Lloyds Building (1978-86) is an example of how it should be done – at the same time mass-producing the same old boring repetitive quasi-cosy designs in domestic housing. We've learned nothing.

It was certainly a cheerful and entertaining lecture, but the serious underlying message was that we've failed. No doubt about it, as citizens of a beautifully proportioned Regency town, and members of its Civic Society, if we want to keep it that way, we've got plenty of work to do, and a duty to remain outraged.

Roger Woodley

CHELTENHAM TRANSPORT PLAN

At the beginning of July, the Cheltenham Transport Plan consultation document dropped onto the doormats of Cheltenham residents, and on Tuesday 2 July the plans were discussed at a meeting at Parmoor House. Chaired and introduced by Stephen Clarke, Jeremy Williamson, Managing Director, Cheltenham Development Task Force, explained the history and proposals for improvements to the town centre traffic layout. The scheme's Project Manager, Andrew Hieron of Gloucestershire County Highways was on hand to answer questions.

Designed to tackle a number of issues, such as air quality, the anomalies of the one-way system and excessive number of traffic lights, the undoubted focus was the planned closure of Boots Corner to virtually all vehicles other than buses. A lively debate ensued, with many key questions being raised by the well-informed audience.

No one believes that Cheltenham's traffic problems can easily be solved. Clearly much thought has gone into these current proposals, but many questions remain. What will happen to the 13,000 vehicles a day displaced from Boots Corner? Will the new pedestrian space be safe with buses passing through at the rate of one a minute? If you wish your views to count, then please ensure that you respond to the consultation. For more information visit:

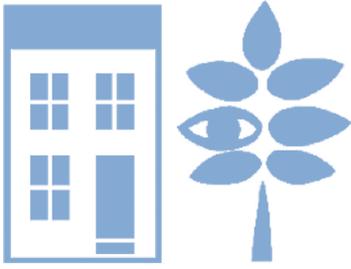
www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/cheltenhamtp

Mike Duckering

PARMOOR HOUSE

Three well-equipped rooms at Parmoor House are available for private hire.

For bookings, please contact the House Manager on 01242 524632 or email: parmoor@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk



PLANNING FORUM REPORT

What sort of new buildings do we want in Cheltenham?



Proposed view Albion Street and Gloucester Place

This has been an interesting period, as we have reviewed some important schemes. There is perhaps an impression that the comments we make on new buildings often appear negative, and we are sometimes quicker to condemn than to commend. There are two schemes we have looked at this quarter which have demonstrated that our views may be out of line with public opinion, and a third that I suspect everyone will like.

The scheme where our comments have been most controversial is the proposal for the old Odeon site. The developers have carefully assembled the land to come up with a comprehensive redevelopment of the Odeon and the adjacent Haines & Strange site. There is no doubt that such a scheme would be a massive boost to the town, and we wholeheartedly welcome that. Generally, public opinion – as canvassed by the developers and as expressed in the Echo - favours the scheme. The fact that it is traditional is seen as an added bonus, and there is a general view that this “fits in with Cheltenham”. This is where our views are in a minority.

We acknowledge that in this case the quality of what is proposed is good. There is real attention to detail, and the developers are to be commended for that – as it is not always the case.

This raises the issue of how we should celebrate the existing Regency architecture that is such a wonderful feature of the town. The most important thing is to protect and safeguard what we have. For infill developments it may often be right to copy what is there. If this is done well – as it has been, for example, in Montpellier Spa Road and the completion of Queen’s Parade, this can be a real benefit to the townscape, in completing what was a historic concept. Our concern is that in an area like the Odeon/Haines & Strange site, where there is little link with Cheltenham’s true historic buildings, the opportunity should be taken for a design that looks forward and not back. There is a real risk that to copy the traditional designs detracts from the real thing. The important fact about the historic buildings in Cheltenham is that they have stood the test of time – and still work today. Their history is a part of their attraction. No-one would think a visit to Venice Las Vegas an adequate alternative to a visit to the real Venice.



Proposed view of Fairfield Road

Similarly, we want visitors to look at the Municipal Offices and the existing terraces and squares and not to make do with a fake reproduction. As I said to the Echo, we are worried that these reproductions debase the currency.

There is also the question of what it says about the citizens of our town. We want them to take pride



that Cheltenham is not stuck in the past and is able to build on its magnificent historic legacy with good quality designs that are forward-looking and well-designed for the world we now live in.

The second scheme where something bolder could have been attempted was the proposal for 107 dwellings on the Travis Perkins site on the Gloucester Road, which has now been approved. Developing this for housing will be a good thing, and the layout is well done. It will also open up the Honeybourne Line for more pedestrian and cycle access. But a site of this size provided an opportunity for some more interesting designs.



Site layout, Gloucester Road

To try to fit in with the Gloucester Road was not setting the bar very high. What is proposed is very much 'Anytown, Anywhere' design. A pity.

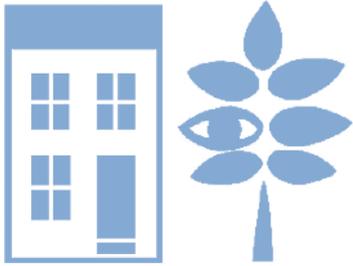
We had a presentation on the proposals for the development of the racecourse. The Racecourse is vital to Cheltenham's economy, and we were pleased

by what we saw. The new grandstand is carefully planned and will improve the flows of people through the site. The architecture completes what is already there, giving it much more unity. Overall, it is a functional design of which the town can be proud. Hoorah!

John Henry



Proposed Racecourse Development



WALLSWORTH HALL



Wallsworth Hall, Twigworth

26 Members gathered at Wallsworth Hall for a lecture by Simon Trapnell on the particularly wet and uninviting evening of Tuesday 14 May. The Hall is perhaps better known as ***Nature in Art at Tredworth***. However, those who made the journey were well rewarded by a very interesting talk by Simon, the Director, and the freedom to tour the exhibits in an 'out-of-hours' environment.

We were told that the hall had been built in 1750 as a large family home and initially occupied by the Hayward family. In 1803 it was taken over by the de Winton family who remained there until 1905. Thereafter it was occupied by various Gloucester families and during and after WW2 was used a Children's Home until 1951. It then had various minor uses until 1987.

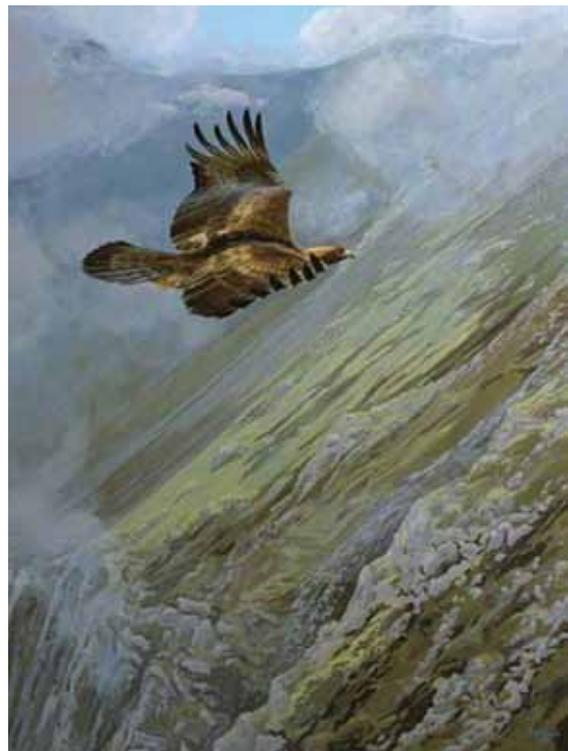
In the 1980's Simon's mother was looking for suitable premises, generally in the southwest, to establish a museum in which to exhibit art with an emphasis on nature. No similar museum then existed.



Noah's Ark, Jan van Kessel

After several abortive attempts to find suitable premises, Wallsworth Hall became available in 1987, and the Trapnell's bid was successful. Due to being unoccupied for such a long period, substantial work to the building was needed and the Trapnell's set about this with vigour and help from friends.

The Museum was duly opened to the public one year later, and prides itself on being debt-free – and it still is; it has charitable status under a Trust. As we witnessed, it has now become an established collection of various nature-inspired art forms. A further mark of its success is that it now has 1200 members enrolled as Friends of Nature in Art.



Golden Eagle, Charles J F Coombs

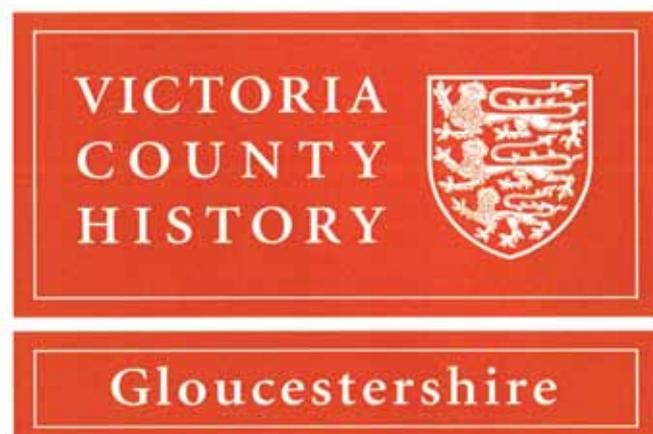
Initially planned as a lecture to be given to the Society at Parmoor House, the alternative of our visiting Wallsworth Hall and seeing the exhibits as well was an inspired suggestion and of benefit to all those who attended.

Ken Stephens



VICTORIA COUNTY HISTORY

The Victoria County History reaches Cheltenham



Anyone interested in heritage issues will welcome the news that work begins soon on the Cheltenham and district volume of the Victoria County History (VCH). If you've ever had cause to consult the VCH for the 50% of Gloucestershire that's already been covered, or for other parts of England, you will know how useful it is – a structured, authoritative account of every single parish, based on the full range of national and local historic sources. It has been called the '*greatest publishing project in English local history*'. Nearly all volumes issued since the project began are online at: www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk.

Who uses it? Apart from historians, the VCH is a standard reference source for anyone looking for solid facts and answers to questions on heritage, conservation and planning issues, be they to do with landscape or the built environment. Karen Radford has remarked that when working in Gloucester, she found the VCH volume covering the City invaluable, and surveyors have made similar comments elsewhere in the county. Having the equivalent for Cheltenham and district would be a real boon.

Help is at hand! The Gloucestershire County History Trust, set up in 2010 to advance the VCH locally, is now gearing up for two big new pieces of work. One is a volume for Cirencester, for which a good

slice of the funding is in place. The other is Cheltenham – to include Charlton Kings, Leckhampton, Swindon Village and Up Hatherley, plus top-up work on Prestbury, covered previously.

An outline plan for the volume has already been drafted. A very timely grant from the Summerfield Trust has ensured that research will get under way later in 2013, under the supervision of County Editor, Dr John Chandler. Steve Blake, Anthea Jones, and Tom James are providing advice to the editorial process.

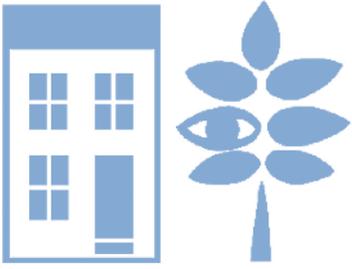


Well Walk - an example of buildings included

Cheltenham Borough Council has also signalled support in the form of a Community Building grant. However, more funds are needed to complete the project in a reasonable time (4 years?). James Hodsdon will be delighted to hear from anyone who can offer support.

Email: jj49@btinternet.com Tel: 01242 233045

James Hodsdon



THE GORDON LAMP



Gordon Lamp, Montpellier

Two years ago Councillor Anne Regan, then Mayor of Cheltenham, commented on the poor state of the Gordon Lamp, erected in 1887 and funded by public subscription. Originally a gas lamp, it was converted to electricity in 1900. By now there were no lights, only one globe left and one of the lamp brackets missing. In fact Gloucestershire County Council, as the Lighting Authority, had already started to prepare new and refurbished ironwork lanterns and globes, and early in 2012 the lamp was back in working order.



Commemorative plaque

But the structure itself was in poor shape. Lichen and other detritus was rife, and parts of the grey and pink granite from Shap and white Carrera marble had become misplaced. Two of the four ornamental supporting inverted cast-iron consoles were missing, and the brass plaque commemorating General Gordon, who died in Khartoum in 1885, was almost unreadable.

There was however, a major problem in that no-one wished to claim ownership. Fortunately, Councillor Rob Garnham obtained the written acceptance from the County Council that they were the reluctant owners.

The Civic Society then agreed to be responsible for the refurbishment, and through the good offices of Councillor Diggory Seacome, obtained £600 from Cheltenham Borough Council towards the total cost of £1,680. Mark Hancock of Centreline Architectural Sculpture, Painswick, has contracted to undertake the remedial works, which will be started at the end of July. The lamp will then once again add to the elegance of Montpellier and continue to be a fitting memorial to a brave man.

Sheila Chaplin

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

We warmly welcome to the Society Dr A E F Gick, Mr & Mrs R de Carteret and Mrs Sheila Bridge who have joined us recently.

Cheltenham Civic Society welcomes new members. If you have family or friends who are keen to preserve what is best in Cheltenham, please contact me and I will send them details of events and an application form.

The membership fee per annum is £15 single, £20 couple, £8 student & under 18's and £50 corporate.

Roger Brown, Membership Secretary



TALK BY HOWARD BARBER

Re-imagining Cheltenham's Public Spaces.

On Tuesday 11 June, we welcomed Howard Barber to Parmoor House. Howard is the Public Space Designer for the Cheltenham Borough Council. His topic could hardly have been more relevant to the Civic Society: re-design of the town's public spaces.

We focussed on three spaces; Boots Corner, the subject now of important public consultation; St Mary's Churchyard; and the pedestrian area of the Promenade. What does the Civic Society think? On Boots Corner, we seemed to accept that some kind of continued access for buses was unavoidable, but we preferred the notion that the new pedestrian space might be defined by trees, rather than a public sculpture or fountains.



Possible layout for Boots Corner

On the Promenade, which we all like as it is, not everyone supported the need to retain the phone-boxes, but they seem to be a fixture: some imaginative new uses are proposed.

If only the buildings round St Mary's did not exclude this lovely churchyard from public view! What were past architects thinking of? But that's how it has turned out, and we can't just spirit the forbidding walls away. Let's hope Howard and his team will be able to improve Cheltenham's most intractable area.

Roger Woodley

CIVIC AWARDS



Nominations are invited for the Civic Awards 2013. The categories for nomination are:

- *The restoration of a building or structure*
- *A new building or structure*
- *An improvement to the built or landscaped environment*
- *A restored or new shop front*

Nominations for Civic Awards 2013 should be submitted by the 31 October 2013. Nominations may be made by a building owner, the builder, architect or other professional, and members of the public.

If a member of the society would like to nominate a project, please send the address and details of the project to my email address:

dianelewis@waitrose.com

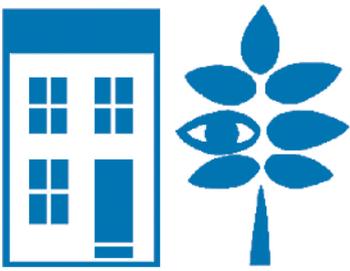
Diane Lewis

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:

The Editor, Cheltenham Civic Society,
Parmoor House, 13 Lypiatt Terrace, Lypiatt Road,
Cheltenham GL50 2SX
or email: newsletter@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk



FORTHCOMING CIVIC SOCIETY EVENTS

Saturday 31 August 2013 – 6.00 to 8.00pm
Summer Garden Party

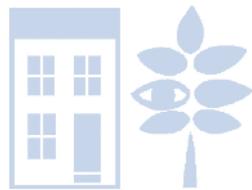
In the garden of Parmoor House
Please complete the enclosed form.

Tuesday 10 September 2013
Visit to Hereford

A visit to Hereford hosted by Hereford Civic Society.
Leaving Parmoor House by coach at 9.15am. Please
complete the enclosed form.

Thursday to Sunday 12 – 15 September 2013
2013 Heritage Open Days

Open buildings and events around Cheltenham.



Saturday & Sunday 14 & 15 September 2013 –
11.00am to 4.00pm

Open Days at Parmoor House

An exhibition of the work and archives of the
Cheltenham Civic Society

Tuesday 8 October 2013 – 7.30pm
Lecture at Parmoor House

Roger Brown will give a talk entitled Christ Church:
a microcosm of socio/religious changes in the
nineteenth century.

Tuesday 12 November 2013 – 7.30pm
Civic Pride Report, Parmoor House

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

*The admission charge to a Civic Society Lecture at
Parmoor House is £2 (members) and £4 (non-members).
It would be helpful if you could tender the correct
change at the door. Doors open at 7.00pm for tea
or coffee and biscuits beforehand.*

CHELTENHAM CIVIC SOCIETY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Chairman: Douglas Ogle
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Chairman of Planning Forum: John Henry
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Honorary Treasurer: Ken Stephens
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