

# CHELTENHAM CIVIC SOCIETY

Parmoor House, 13 Lypiatt Terrace, Cheltenham GL50 2SX



## NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2014

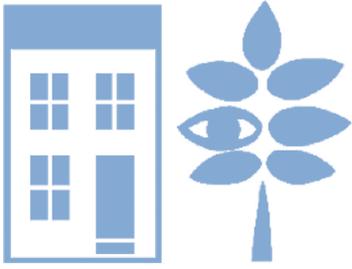


[www.cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk](http://www.cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk)

Member of

**CIVIC  
VOICE**

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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### Front Cover



In this 100th anniversary year of the start of the First World War, it is fitting to highlight the well supported Remembrance service and parade that takes place each November in Cheltenham.

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 3: *The Work of Frank Gehry*.



## CHAIR REPORT



*Roger Woodley*

Since the July Newsletter, we've enjoyed three important events. Our Summer Party commemorated the second Lord Parmoor (1882-1977), who, 50 years ago, bestowed on the Civic Society the extraordinarily generous gift of 13 Lypiatt Terrace. The least we could do was call it Parmoor House, after the family's Buckinghamshire home, which they left in the 1970s. So we raised celebratory glasses to Lord Parmoor on 30 August. We invited the present Lord Parmoor (the 5th) to join us, but sadly he was not well enough to accept. He sent us a message of warm good wishes.

Two weeks later we opened up the house for Heritage Open Days, and were able to welcome a good number of visitors – 62 on the Saturday and 85 on the Sunday. Not a record, but a good total, especially with so many other venues open in the town, thanks to the great efforts of Stephen Clarke. When Jane and I moved here 7 years ago, about 12 places opened – including Parmoor House: this year there were three times that number, a tremendous achievement.

In October we enjoyed a vivid talk on architectural style, Cheltenham's classicism in particular, from Fran Wilson-Copp. She opened our eyes to many details in the familiar architecture of the town, which even the most hawk-eyed among us had missed.

It's been a good summer for travelling, and each time we've driven home, I've become absorbed by the signboards which say 'Welcome to Cheltenham Spa - Centre for the Cotswolds'. They're good clear boards, and I feel a warm glow that I live in the town they proclaim.

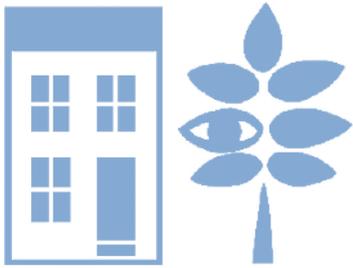
But I think it's significant that they say 'Cheltenham Spa'. (I also have views on the by-line 'Centre for the Cotswolds', but those views can wait). What's more, when you sit on those uncomfortable seats at Paddington, watching the train departures board slowly work towards your train, Cheltenham Spa is the destination you're looking out for. And, if you're sitting in even less comfort at Victoria Coach Station, you might be looking out for a National Express to Gloucester or Hereford, but you're going to get off at the place they call Cheltenham Spa.

Now, if 'Spa' is thought necessary in all these cases, why not elsewhere? For example, why not the Cheltenham Spa Gold Cup, the Cheltenham Spa Music Festival, Cheltenham Spa Football Club, and so on? Because, you may say, it's an avoidable mouthful. In which case why is 'Spa' retained by those who might be expected to simplify, like Network Rail and the Borough Council? And it's never been a problem for Leamington.



For my part, I'm a strong supporter of putting Spa into everything. Our waters made us famous, and improved the health of our Victorian grandparents, and attracted many visitors, and we should remember this with pride. (I've never understood why we don't sell the water, like Harrogate or Buxton – as I believe we used to, from the Lodge in Montpellier Gardens. But that point too is for another time). It's the name I'm talking about. I think *Cheltenham Spa* would sound grander, would help with tourist publicity, and increase our sense of living somewhere special. I wish I were writing as Chair of Cheltenham Spa Civic Society. What do you think?

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



## PLANNING FORUM REPORT

There have been no major developments of significance to the future of the town to report on since July. The schemes we have seen and the comments we have made on them have been limited. I am concerned that you may accuse my reports of the same sin as the schemes that we have looked at – that they are repetitive and unimaginative. I apologise for that as I wish it were not so.

Nevertheless, the most notable aspect of what we have looked at in recent months is of missed opportunities to use sites in an imaginative and inspired way. Boring and ordinary houses are being built where there is scope for something better. We are not talking about areas where there are constraints from the need to fit in with neighbouring properties – many are small developments in areas where there are few constraints and an imaginative scheme would be really worthwhile. We do hope that developers in Cheltenham will try to produce more buildings that are of real quality and have a wow factor. We want to see good quality buildings that enhance the reputation of our town, and make it a visually attractive place to live.



*Proposed view of new house*

Not all is doom and gloom. We were inspired by an interesting design for a new dwelling in Lansdown Terrace Lane by Edge Design Workshop. This is a difficult site, adjacent to the arch that leads into the Lane. But what is proposed is clever, imaginative and a contrast to what is an extremely architectural part of the town. We hope it will be built: it would be a serious contender for a Civic Award.

*John Henry*

### PITTVILLE GATES



The restoration work begun two years ago – and generously supported by the Civic Society - is all but complete, bar some finishing touches. The major step this autumn has been the fitting of six newly-fabricated gates (two pedestrian, and two pairs of carriage gates), finally replacing those lost or scrapped 90 years ago. The casting and fitting of these has been executed to a high standard by Barr & Grosvenor of Wolverhampton.

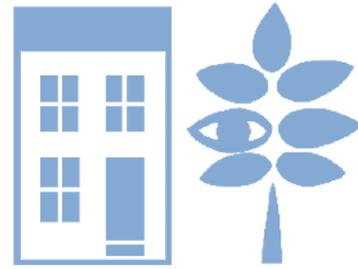
In July this year, a horse trough, complete with bedding plants, was moved from the Promenade to the front of the gateway to replace the one that had stood there from 1883 to sometime in the 1970s, and the lamp in the 1897 overthrow has been hand-made to match a late Victorian design. Two information boards have been installed to inform passers-by of the history of the gateway and of Pittville more generally.

The project has been a formal partnership between Friends of Pittville and Cheltenham Borough Council. It has come in on budget (just under £290,000), and to the hoped-for quality, though perhaps unsurprisingly it has taken a little longer than expected. Spin-offs have included considerably greater knowledge about the Gates' architect, Robert Stokes (subject of a Society talk next spring), and the creation of a group investigating the lives of 19th century Pittville residents. An exhibition of their work will take place in Pittville Pump Room on 26 February 2015.

*James Hodsdon*

### PARMOOR HOUSE

Three well-equipped rooms at Parmoor House are available for private hire. For bookings, and contact details please see [cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk](http://cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk) or call the House Manager on 01242 524632



## EVERYMAN THEATRE



**Geoffrey Rowe**

On Tuesday 8 July, we were privileged to hear an illustrated talk, *History and Restoration of Everyman Theatre*, by Geoffrey Rowe, their Chief Executive. He entertained us with information about the history and renovation of the Everyman – as well as something of his own history in the theatre.

The Everyman, designed by the famous theatre architect Frank Matcham, was opened in 1891 as The Opera House. Geoffrey was concerned that the exuberant ornamentation, which is such a feature of Matcham's designs, would not find favour with the guardians of Cheltenham's neo-classical heritage. But we were all fascinated – especially by the pictures of other later Matcham theatres, where the ornamentation gets more elaborate. We should be glad that the Everyman is one of his earlier theatres!

An enduring legacy of the 1890s is that the foyer is very cramped. Class segregation meant that only those proceeding to the Dress Circle would enter by what is now the only foyer and ascend by a grand staircase to the Dress Circle: *hoi polloi* had to reach the Stalls and the Gods by a separate entrance at the side. The construction of a new staircase to the upper floors in the 1980s has not helped – the crowded foyer being the only way out for everyone in the theatre. Another concern is that the theatre is perhaps too self-effacing from the outside: the erection of the canopy and pavement area has helped.

It was obvious that the recent renovation was a labour of love for Geoffrey. He explained that the pink in which the theatre was previously painted arose because the local authority had a superfluity of pink paint – much favoured in the 1960s.

The present colours, though not absolutely recreating what was there when the theatre opened, are at least an attempt to replicate the theatre's original appearance. One difficult issue was replacing the carpet with something more in keeping with the original decor. This was achieved by copying the design of The Gaiety Theatre in the Isle of Man – a Matcham theatre of the same period. Geoffrey is proud of the scagliola framing the proscenium as an integral part of the original design. He explained that it has to be visible for all productions – even if directors would prefer a non-reflective black to focus attention on the stage. The most contentious issue of the restoration was the removal of the central aisle. Many people still miss this, but it was possible to have more leg room by reducing the number of rows.

But those who mourn it are not convinced. Among them are the actors in the annual pantomime – making one half of the audience compete with the other to shout louder is very difficult if there is no central aisle!

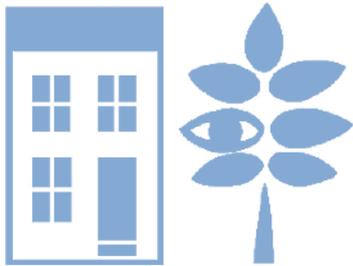
Geoffrey told us that he had previously been involved in a major theatre restoration – the Lyceum in Sheffield. This was brought under the same management as the Crucible, where he then worked, and its restoration was the cultural component of the World Student Games, which Sheffield hosted in 1991. He has also worked for Welsh National Opera – and in television.



**Everyman Stage**

Although the Everyman does its own pantomime – and now one production a year – the fare on offer is to a large extent dictated by what is available from touring companies. It is to be hoped that this will not be curtailed by recent cuts in Arts Council funding.

**John Henry**



## SUMMER GARDEN PARTY

The last Saturday in August proved sunny and warm and Parmoor House an ideal setting for the Society's annual Summer Party, filled almost to capacity with a gathering of members both of long standing and recently joined. This was a special occasion to celebrate, it being the fiftieth anniversary of Lord Parmoor's gift of 13 Lypiatt Terrace to the Civic Society's forerunner.



*A Sumptuous Summer Spread*

Our Chairman, Roger Woodley gave a warm welcome to our guests, among them our MP, Martin Horwood, followed by an account of Lord Parmoor's importance to the town and particularly to the Society in the generosity of his bequest. We had hoped to welcome his descendant, the present Lord Parmoor, but unfortunately a recent operation prevented his being with us.

Wine flowed, a particularly tasty finger buffet was consumed and Martin Horwood, wielding a large knife which questioned his campaigning in The House against the possession of offensive weapons, did the honours of cutting the celebratory cake. Our thanks go to Diana Brown and her willing helpers who organised and catered for an evening enjoyed by all.

**Douglas Ogle**



*Guests Enjoy the Garden*



*Martin Horwood MP, Diana Brown & Roger Woodley, Chair, Civic Society*



*Aidan Rose, Bruce Buchanan, Pat Rose & Jane Woodley*

### MEMBERSHIP NEWS

The current membership year ends on 31 December and subscriptions therefore fall due on 1 January, 2015. A membership renewal form for 2015 is enclosed with this Newsletter.

***If you already pay by Standing Order then you do not need to do anything. But, if you pay by cheque, or wish to change your method of payment to a Standing Order, then please return the enclosed form to the Membership Secretary.***

Please remember to let us have details of changes to your postal address, telephone no. or email address.

We warmly welcome new members to the Society  
Mr & Mrs C Ballard and Mr M Bottomley.

***Roger Brown, Membership Secretary***

## ART IN ARCHITECTURE

Examining the connections between art and contemporary architecture with reference to the work of Frank Gehry and others.

Mike Duckering BSc BA RIBA

*With last month's opening of the Fondation Louis Vuitton building in Paris, architect Frank Gehry is once again in the news. One might ask what relevance this is to Cheltenham, but his work exemplifies the way in which good contemporary architecture can complement and enhance the historic architectural fabric of our towns and cities.*

### Part 3: The Work of Frank Gehry

In his essay marking Gehry's 2008 Serpentine Gallery Pavilion, Mark Rappolt recounts that Frank Owen Gehry was born Ephraim Owen Goldberg in Toronto in 1929. He moved to California in 1947, changed his name in 1954 and became both the centre of the vibrant Los Angeles architecture scene and a naturalised US citizen. His first big architectural 'hit' was his own house in 1978, an ordinary two-storey timber-framed clapboard structure that he transformed into a jumble of chain-linked, corrugated metal and wood, seemingly struck by an earthquake. Derided by his neighbours at the time, the house has become the destination for almost every architectural pilgrim, although far from being a static icon of his work, it has been subject to change and alteration over the years. (2008, p56)

In 1991 at the age of 62, Gehry won the architectural competition for the new Guggenheim museum to be built in the almost unknown northern Spanish town of Bilbao. At its completion in 1997 it was universally acknowledged as an architectural masterpiece. So great was its impact, not only on the declining industrial port of Bilbao but across the world, that its architectural qualities were almost forgotten in the rush to replicate its success. According to Jonathan Glancey: *The fairy godmother of . . . grand designs was undoubtedly the Guggenheim Museum designed by Frank Gehry. Sensational, provocative and all but unprecedented, it made mayors and city managers throughout the world want a dose of . . . the 'Bilbao Factor'.* (2011, p442)

Great works of art and architecture do not simply materialise fully formed in the creative consciousness. Many architects produce their best work when they are older, and Gehry had already produced many buildings during his career up to 1991. Looking back at his earlier work, the forms and ideas that eventually came together in the Guggenheim can be seen in various projects. For example, the Vitra International Furniture Museum, Germany completed in 1989 reveals the introduction of

sculptural fluid forms that break up the regularity of the typical cubic mass of the building. To quote Gehry from Coosje van Bruggen's 1998 monograph: *I learned how to make a building that was much more plastic, and the first chance at that was the Furniture Museum at Vitra . . .* (1998, p57)



*Vitra International Furniture Museum, Weil-am-Rhein, Germany, 1989*

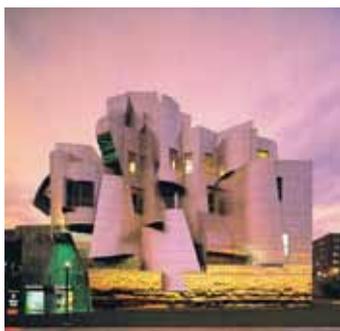
Earlier still, was the Winton Guest House, Minnesota, a project started in 1983. The use of sculptural shapes, albeit geometric rather than curved, clearly herald the groupings seen at Bilbao. According to van Bruggen: *. . . in its small scale and use of Platonic geometrical shapes, placed closely together in the landscape of Wayzata, Minnesota, it embodies a highly sculptural concept. Gehry considers it his most refined work, and refers to it as a "tight complex, like a still life, like a Morandi." At the time, he felt that "the breakthrough for me in this house was the idea of cracks between the buildings, wedge-shaped cracks that serve to differentiate parts of the pure forms and suggest that they are complete forms because of this cleavage."* (1998, p60)



*Winton Guest House, Wayzata, Minnesota, 1983-87*

Although a potentially disjointed design, the arrangement of disparate geometric shapes at the Winton Guest House, which are clad simply and without decoration, achieve a surprisingly harmonious and visually coherent composition. I concur with van Bruggen's claim that the approach of interstices between sculptural shapes returns in an altered state in the Guggenheim atrium. (1998, p60)

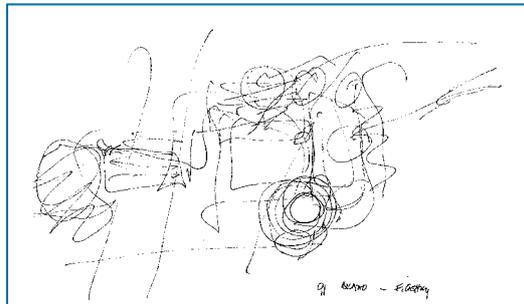
Gehry had been experimenting with the use of metal cladding, which because of its visual lightness, responded beautifully to the fluidity of curvilinear forms. This combination of fractured forms clad in metal was used on the Frederick R Weisman Art Museum in Minneapolis completed in 1993. Whilst the visual links to the Guggenheim are obvious, for me the building has a stiffness and certain lacking of purpose in the jumble of interlocking forms.



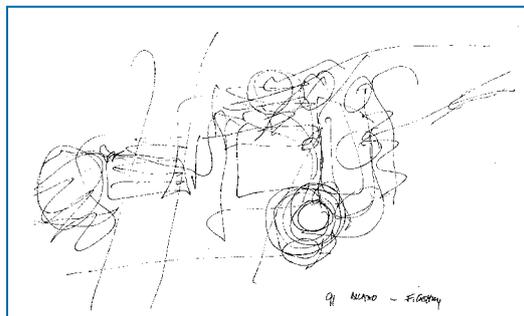
*Frederick R Weisman Art Museum  
Minneapolis, 1993*

The fundamental key to Gehry's leap of imagination into the seemingly unstructured fluidity of disparate and sinuous forms, and the ability to transform these into a rational building process was the use of CATIA (computer-aided three-dimensional interactive application). As Hal Foster points out, because CATIA permits the modelling of non-repetitive surfaces and supports, of different panels and interior armatures, it allowed Gehry to privilege shape and skin, the overall configuration, above all else. (2011, p14)

Like many architects, Gehry's approach to starting a project was by sketch drawings and models. The initial sketches for the Guggenheim Bilbao are little more than scribbles, but they will have recorded his first thoughts after visiting the site for the first time. If architecture is art then this is evidence indeed of that vital creative connection. These two sketches, which we are fortunate to see since most architects discard their early sketches, are a visual record of Gehry's initial ideas.



*Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, Plan, 11 July 1991*



*Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, Elevation, 11 July 1991*

In September 2012 I made my first visit to Bilbao in order to study the Guggenheim. Of course I was familiar with the building from photographs and articles in the architectural press and other publications, but there is no substitute for the direct experience of reality.

Having arrived at Calatrava's gleaming white Sondika Airport, I approached Bilbao from the north at dusk. Crossing from countryside to city on the road bridge over the Nervion Estuary, the distinctive silhouette of the Guggenheim was caught in the car headlights, trapped between river, road-bridge and the city's edge. I was to visit the building many times over the next few days, both to study its external form and context, and to understand its internal arrangement and spatial qualities. On approaching the building in daylight for the first time, the inadequacies of my preconceived ideas became obvious. Whilst its outward form was as expected, more important was the realisation that isolated images in publications cannot fully convey the context or impact of the building in its setting.



*Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, from the North*

The setting of the Guggenheim is fundamental to its design. The chosen site was not an idyllic open space where the grand building could display itself, but a gritty, derelict industrial site hemmed in by the estuary, the *Ponte Principe De Espana* and the two-storey drop from the *Alameda Mazarredo*, the urban street marking the edge of the city. The museum's own publication records how, in order to resuscitate the estuary area, it was suggested that the proposed museum should be built on an estuary site. The choice of site was said to have delighted Gehry, particularly because of its industrial past and the architectural challenge it presented. (2011, p 019)



*Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao from the South West*

This was indeed a great contextual challenge, and one that Gehry has handled with great skill. Here was an urban site exposed on all sides to totally different aspects of the city, yet the building succeeds not only in linking the *Alameda Mazarredo* with a new riverside promenade, but also reclaims the negative space under the *Ponte Principe De Espana* and resolves the significant changes of level across the site. The response of the building's design to such a difficult and complex site has clearly been the catalyst for its iconic sculptural form.

How well does the building meet its functional requirements? After all it is an art gallery and not just an architectural sculpture, and curving, sloping walls cannot be good for hanging paintings. I am pleased to dispel these myths. The museum is planned on a radial pattern from which the galleries connect around the central atrium space. Varying from the traditional regular orthogonal to the sinuously curved, the galleries perfectly suit the variety of exhibitions that are shown. Of course, the Guggenheim Foundation is no stranger to unorthodox exhibition spaces. Frank Lloyd Wright's gently sloping spiral ramp of the New York Guggenheim has seen constant exhibitions since 1959.

From the city aspects, the orthogonal galleries are expressed as conventional stone clad blocks, albeit beautifully designed and detailed, and the relatively small administration block provides a striking counterpoint with its strong blue rendered facades. However, the aspect to the river sees the full effect of the sinuous organic titanium-clad forms of the central atrium and curved galleries. References to boats and fishes are obvious, although for me the beauty is in the form and materials, and such references are an unnecessary attempt to rationalise what does not need rationalising.

The building's external form is a sculptural *tour de force*. It has used a restrained palette of materials with refined and well executed detailing to create a three-dimensional object of excitement, complexity and fascination. To walk around the building at different levels constantly reveals new views and elements to delight the observer, and it has achieved this by fully embracing the context of its environment and connection to the city. Carlos Giardano quotes Gehry as saying: *If you go to Bilbao, you will see that despite the Museum's exuberant appearance, it is carefully adjusted in relation to the buildings that surround it.* (2011, p061)



*Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao from the North*

The extra dimension of architecture, which is absent from most art, is the ability to pass through and in it, to live and work in it, and to experience those aesthetic perceptions from within that only architecture can provide. Setting the main entrance at a lower level allows the visitor to experience the full effects of the soaring light-filled atrium. And the radial layout of the galleries at different levels creates a constant passing and re-passing through the amorphous volume, across curving bridges at the higher levels, to experience a total immersion in its theatrical space.



*Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, Views within the Atrium*

As with the exterior, Gehry has used a limited palette of materials – natural stone, glass and white plaster – within the interior. The plastered shapes, like the titanium exterior, are sinuous and curving, sometimes dropping dramatically to hover above the lowest floor. The glass, freed from the need to protect from the elements, is faceted and overlapping as if the flat sheets are curving. This is a beautifully uncluttered space, and one can judge its functional success by the notable absence of the usual additional signs and random furnishings after 15 years of operation.

At Bilbao, Gehry has used the building's functionality, its different sized galleries, to create a beautiful composition of varying shapes and forms that not only addresses the difficult context of its location, but uses the amorphous titanium clad components to make a unique architectural sculpture: a metaphoric signifier of its artistic purpose. Judged by any subjective criteria for evaluating art, the Guggenheim clearly elicits an emotional aesthetic response in many, as evidenced by the plaudits of experts worldwide and the large numbers of visitors.

Paul Goldberger, writing in his *Why Architecture Matters* sums up admirably: *Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum Bilbao is a superb work of contextual architecture, not because it looks like anything around it . . . but because Gehry designed it with the neighbouring buildings always in mind. Gehry wanted his building to stand out – it was created specifically to stand out, to be a foreground building – but his way of standing out came not from indifference to what was around him but from a deep understanding of what was there and how a different kind of building might play off against it.* (2009, p222)

There are some who decry its spectacularism, including Frampton who is critical in a somewhat contorted intellectual analysis of its morphological shape:

*. . . notwithstanding its organic shape it is paradoxically removed from any kind of interstitial biomorphic organisation that is potentially as much a formative presence in architecture as it is in nature.* (2007, p356)

I disagree. In this building Gehry has used its unadorned materials of stone, glass and metal to create an original, innovative and artistic solution to a highly complex technical brief, one that lesser architects would struggle to resolve; a fact confirmed by the clearly ordinary rejected competition entries from Japanese architect Arata Isozaki and the Viennese practice, Coop Himmelblau.

Hugh Pearman refers to the melting forms of Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao as purely sculptural a building as Frank Lloyd Wright's original in New York, though perhaps kinder to the works of art in it (in other words it functions better). He calls it a jewelled shrine intended for Picasso's *Guernica*, and one of the great buildings of the era. (1998, p11)

**Mike Duckering © 2013**

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## HERITAGE OPEN DAYS

A few years ago Cheltenham tended to celebrate Heritage Open Days in a rather perfunctory fashion. Only a handful of properties opened their doors to the public - which made the borough look very much the poor relation to Gloucester with its rich heritage of historical places.

Gloucester still trumps Cheltenham when it comes to the number of places open to visitors, but the latter is now doing much better. This September a record number of 32 buildings opened their doors including the Parabola Arts Centre, Cheltenham College Chapel and St Stephen's, which was omitted from the brochure.



*Parabola Arts Centre*

A number of special events were put on: walks exploring Pittville Park, Cheltenham's literary heritage, and Cheltenham General Hospital; talks on Cheltenham's Jewish Cemetery, Cheltenham Minster, St Peter's Leckhampton, and the restoration of Pittville Gates; with an exhibition of Cheltenham life from 1914 to 1919 and others.

The number of visitors town-wide was gratifyingly large. According to Cheltenham HODS convenor, Stephen Clarke: *"We had about 5000 visits this year compared with 3500 last year and 2500 two years ago, which just shows the growth over the last few years."* Cheltenham Minster, for one, is in celebratory mood after attracting a record 379 visitors over 4 days.



*Cheltenham College Chapel*



*The Pittville Pump Room*

Parmoor House attracted a more modest number - 147 in all over the weekend - with the showing of vintage film footage of Cheltenham proving a particular draw. The photo-montage of Cheltenham High Street in the 1960s was another attraction, as were the old scrap books of Cheltenham Civic Society, which brought back memories to some. An additional attraction this time round was a bookstall selling old books from the Davy Collection and Commemorative Plaques of Cheltenham, which netted the Society the not inconsiderable sum of £116.50. CCS Chairman Roger Woodley reported: "My impression was of a rather different type of visitor from a couple of years ago when I was last involved - more interested in the house and its history, and Cheltenham, ie more connected with the CCS. So I do hope we get some members from it"

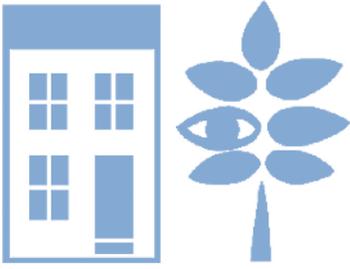
Thanks are due to all those members who kindly gave up their time to act as stewards, showing people around and keeping the conversations flowing.

**Roger Jones**

### Newsletter

In addition to providing articles and information to the members, the Newsletter provides publicity for the Society through its wider circulation. We are always looking for fresh ideas, articles and images.

If you feel that you are able to make a contribution, either for publication or as backroom support for the Editor then please get in touch - your help would be much appreciated. Please email Mike Duckering, [newsletter@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org](mailto:newsletter@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org).



## ARCHITECTURAL STYLE



*Dr Frances Wilson-Copp*

On Tuesday 7 October we were pleased to welcome Dr Frances Wilson-Copp to Parmoor House to give a talk to members and guests on **Architectural Style**. The talk was billed as a presentation of Cheltenham's Classical and Neo-Gothic heritage. Unfortunately, there was insufficient time to cover both, which was a pity because Cheltenham has a fine legacy of churches and school buildings in the Gothic style, notably The Cheltenham Boys' College chapel.

We started with an architectural primer on the three classical Greek orders of Doric, Ionic and Corinthian and how these were later adopted by the Romans who added two more orders of their own, the Composite and Tuscan. A brief look at the buildings on the Acropolis, in Athens, illustrated the technical competence of the ancient Greeks: mortar was not used and columns were fixed together in sections with bronze pins, which also helped to counteract lateral movement at times of earth tremors. In addition, geometry (entasis) was used to make optical corrections to overcome visual distortion. The buildings of the Acropolis: the Parthenon, the Erechtheion and its caryatid porch were a source of inspiration for architects, throughout western history, using the classical style and, of course, in Cheltenham.



*Erechtheion Caryatids, Acropolis, Athens*

A trip to Rome illustrated the Coliseum with its three Greek classical orders used as a decorative façade, with the main structure supported by huge brick arches. The Pantheon, with its early use of concrete is one of the most remarkable buildings in Rome, and has only survived intact because of its early adaptation to a Christian church. The problem of how to enter this round building was resolved by a grand porch in the Ionic style, possibly a source of inspiration for the architect of the Queen's hotel in Cheltenham.

A stop off in Florence and Mantova showed how the classical orders were used purely decoratively (as at the Coliseum) with strong rusticated ground floors and pilasters to the upper floors. We can see all these elements used in the Regency architecture of Cheltenham.



*Villa Rotonda, Vicenza, Italy*

At the Villa Rotonda by Palladio, at Vicenza, we saw elegant classicism and the prototype for several English country houses. The eclectic mixing of Greek and Roman orders at the Palazzo de Tè, in Mantova, were enough to make a classical purist blanche with its rewriting of architectural grammar. Worse was to follow, with the stigmatization of Santa Teresa, in the chapel of San Maria della Vittoria in Rome, where the alter niche is framed by a distorted classical pediment and grouped Ionic columns; as in much of the Baroque style, architecture is used purely as theatre.

We were then taken on a walk around Cheltenham from South to North with our first stop at Lloyds Bank where elegant Doric columns sit on pedestals; then followed the extraordinary use of caryatids separating the shop-fronts, with their delicate ironwork, in Montpellier.



*Caryatid, Montpellier*

These ladies are buxom and have a different stance to those at the Acropolis. The entablature supported by the ladies has to curve because of the street topography. We then popped into Suffolk Square to admire the grand porticos framing some of the houses.

The next stop was The Queen's Hotel, which with its round arches, voussoirs, rusticated ground floor and elegant portico, has to be one of Cheltenham's finest buildings. The houses to the west of the hotel showed the use of symmetry with handed porches.



*Queen's Hotel, Cheltenham*

A trip along the Promenade has the Borough Council offices to the west with its Roman arches and giant orders crossing between floors. We rarely look up when shopping on the east side of the Promenade but there is much rich architectural detail to appreciate.

Further along, the juxtaposition of different classical orders at the Café Rouge and Waterstones fit together without offending the eye.

A detour back to the Town Hall demonstrated an eclectic Edwardian building with odd oculi sprouting several keystones. Boots is another grand Edwardian building with its bold neo-classical façade; and also Lloyds Bank, in the High Street, with its neo-classical architecture, which is solid and reassuring.

Buildings of the later twentieth century to admire are the old Burton's building in jazzy Art-deco and the Odeon cinema that is alas no more. For those of you who think that new buildings should be in a vaguely classical style, be careful what you wish for; Cheltenham House in Clarence Road, with its Barbara Hepworth sculpture, is monotonous and totally out of scale with its surroundings.

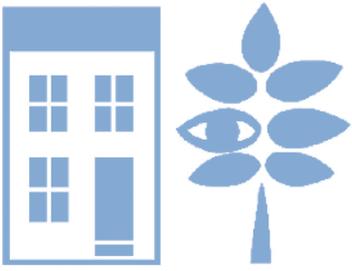


*Dorset House, Pittville Lawn*

It was a relief to move on to elegant Pittville with its fine villas lining Pittville Lawn, notably Dorset House designed by J.B Papworth in 1825. Our final stop was, fittingly, the Pittville Pump Room with its grand Ionic columns and spectacular interior.

I think what we gained from the talk was a greater appreciation of our elegant surroundings and to be more observant, and look for those odd little architectural details and juxtaposition of styles. To the architectural purist, much of Cheltenham's classical architecture is illiterate, but it doesn't matter because the end result is so pleasing. We look forward to a talk on the Neo-Gothic buildings of Cheltenham.

**Bruce Buchanan**



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Ad Hoc Planning

Sir - We have seen what is happening to the High Street with shops empty and companies moving away to where the people go, i.e. out of town to multiple stores where they can both park and shop in comfort. My prediction is the High Street and The Promenade will in time revert to their original format as residences and shopping will move away from the town centre.

Unfortunately the planners here have not recognised this trend and seem to have made no provision in the extension of the town, particularly on the Tewkesbury Road where supermarkets are scattered amongst garages, car showrooms and building suppliers producing a completely unplanned and uninviting entrance to the town. Recommendations of the professional Town Planner in the Latham Report, who advised special treatment to this entry to the town by planting, verges etc were completely ignored and planning on a do as you like basis seems to have been the order of the day.

It might be said that this is all past history, but an area of land is allocated as an extension of the town on the Tewkesbury Road to accommodate the County's development quota towards the countryside housing shortage. One disastrous aspect of the proposal is that this area will be administered separately by Gloucester, Tewkesbury and Cheltenham according to existing boundaries, and there appears to be no intention to pre-plan the layout for transport, parking, shopping, commerce etc.

The Council, in common with most other authorities, has a Planning Department. Unfortunately they are unable to plan anything and act as an administrative office to meet government requirements. All this might improve dramatically if a professionally qualified Town Planner were appointed. **George Mathers**

*George, the demise of the High Street and Promenade may not be so imminent. According to recent reports, the days of the 'big box' retail stores are numbered as our shopping habits move away from brand loyalty and the big once-a-week shop. Online shopping and click-and-collect must have some impact and Amazon have announced they are to open a shop, so who knows, the High Street might be making a come-back!*

**Editor**



### Smile Please

Sir - **The Cheltenham Camera Club** is celebrating its 150th anniversary next year. A Photographic Society was founded in Cheltenham in 1865 by, amongst others, Dr E T Wilson, father of the explorer, who also helped found a Natural History Society, the Hospital and the Art Gallery and Museum. The Club is organising a number of events and publications to celebrate this anniversary, beginning with the launch event on 8 January 2015 at the Parabola Arts Centre.

*Capturing the Moment* is an opportunity to meet two authorities on early photography – Roger Watson, Curator, the Fox Talbot Museum who is an authority on Daguerre and Fox Talbot, and Professor Mervyn Heard, an international showman who will be bringing his *Peerless Magic Lantern Show*. The Club is also hoping to launch a book *A History of Photography in Cheltenham*, which covers the subject through essays on the major photographic personalities, such as Dr E T Wilson, linked by technological change and social impact.

Other events planned include three exhibitions, our third International Salon, prestige lectures, a club visit to Edinburgh to meet the oldest Photographic Society and a second book featuring photographs taken in Cheltenham called *A Year and a Day*.

Details can be found on our website:

[cheltenhamcameraclub.co.uk](http://cheltenhamcameraclub.co.uk)

**John White, In Focus Editor**

### **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](mailto:newsletter@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk)



## 2015 PROGRAMME

### Paterson Memorial Lecture



*Chris Wilkinson*

This year's Paterson Memorial Lecture at Christ Church, Tuesday 2 December, will be given by Chris Wilkinson of renowned architects Wilkinson Eyre, entitled *Enshrining The Mary Rose*.

The £27m Mary Rose Museum opened to visitors last year to great acclaim. Located next to Nelson's flagship, HMS Victory, it provides one of the most significant insights into Tudor Life and forms the new centrepiece to Portsmouth's Historic Dockyard.

*The Tudor ship Mary Rose captured the world's imagination when she was raised from the seabed in 1982. Now dramatically housed in a new museum, which includes many of the 19,000 artefacts found on board, Henry VIII's flagship is the only sixteenth century warship on display anywhere in the world.*



*Mary Rose museum, Portsmouth*

Founded in 1983 to explore new directions in architecture, Wilkinson Eyre Architects is a leading force in the design world, with an extensive portfolio of major international projects. The practice has received wide media recognition, twice being awarded the RIBA Stirling Prize for Architecture. Chris will give an insight into the complex and exacting task of creating this unique building, which succeeds in making a fitting setting for this national treasure.

### Annual General Meeting

On Tuesday 10 March 2015, the AGM will be held at Parmoor House. On conclusion of the formal business, the meeting will be thrown open to the floor, and Members can question the Executive and raise topics of discussion on important issues.

### Old Cheltenham on Film Part Two

Tuesday 10 February 2015 sees more film of old Cheltenham. Following last year's much enjoyed presentation "Old Cheltenham on Film," in Part Two Roger Jones introduces a colour film that traces the development of Cheltenham from the foundation of the first spa until the present day. It also incorporates b&w archive film depicting the town in the 1920s.



*Former Odeon Cinema*

### Editor

Taking over as Newsletter Editor in 2011 was a great opportunity to reinvigorate the format. The Executive supported the bold move into colour printing and the introduction of a fresh graphic image for the Society. In our ever busier lives we have little time to read, so we responded with shorter, punchier articles and more images. Text fonts, size and colour were changed to make reading easier. The Newsletter has sought to be interesting, informative and a good advertisement for the Society, its events and activities. And earlier this year, we were able to introduce the same graphic qualities and content into the new website. But now it is time to hand over, and with some sadness I shall be stepping down as Newsletter Editor at the end of the year. My thanks go to the Executive and all those who have contributed many excellent articles, and I hope will continue to do so.

*Mike Duckering, Newsletter Editor*



## FORTHCOMING CIVIC SOCIETY EVENTS

**Tuesday 2 December 2014 - 7.30pm**

**Harwood Hall, Christchurch, Malvern Road  
Enshrining The Mary Rose**

Lecture by Chris Wilkinson of renowned architects, Wilkinson Eyre.

*Admission on the door £5 including a glass of wine.  
Tickets also available at the Tourist Information  
Office.*

**Sunday 18 January 2015 - 12 noon - 2.00pm**

**Winter Party - Parmoor House**

Refreshments provided. For details please see and complete the enclosed form.

**Tuesday 10 February 2015 - 7.30pm**

**Talk - Parmoor House**

Roger Jones will give a talk and show titled 'Old Cheltenham on Film Part Two'.

**Tuesday 10 March 2015 - 7.30pm**

**Annual General Meeting at Parmoor House**

An opportunity for members to attend the AGM and have their say about the activities and work of their Society.

**Tuesday 12 May 2015 - 7.30pm**

**Talk - Parmoor House**

James Hodsdon will give a talk on 'Robert Stokes - Architect of Pittville'.

*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.*

### CHELTENHAM CIVIC SOCIETY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Chair: Roger Woodley

[chairman@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:chairman@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk)

Chair of Planning Forum: John Henry

[planning@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:planning@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk)

Honorary Secretary: James Hodsdon

[enquiries@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk)

Honorary Treasurer: Lloyd Surgenor

[treasurer@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk)

Membership Secretary: Roger Brown

[membership@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:membership@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk)

Newsletter Editor: Mike Duckering

[newsletter@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk)

Civic Voice: Freddie Gick

[fgick@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:fgick@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk)

Publicity: Roger Jones

[rjones@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:rjones@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk)

Chair of House Committee: Bob Keevil

[rkeevil@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:rkeevil@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk)

Programme Secretary: Lesley Whittal

[lwhittal@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:lwhittal@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk)

Civic Awards Convenor: Bruce Buchanan

[bbuchanan@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:bbuchanan@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk)

Plaques Officer: Cecil Sanderson

[csanderson@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:csanderson@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk)

Stephen Lea

[slea@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:slea@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk)

Douglas Ogle

[dogle@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk](mailto:dogle@cheltenhamcivicsociety.org.uk)

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