



WESTON VIEW

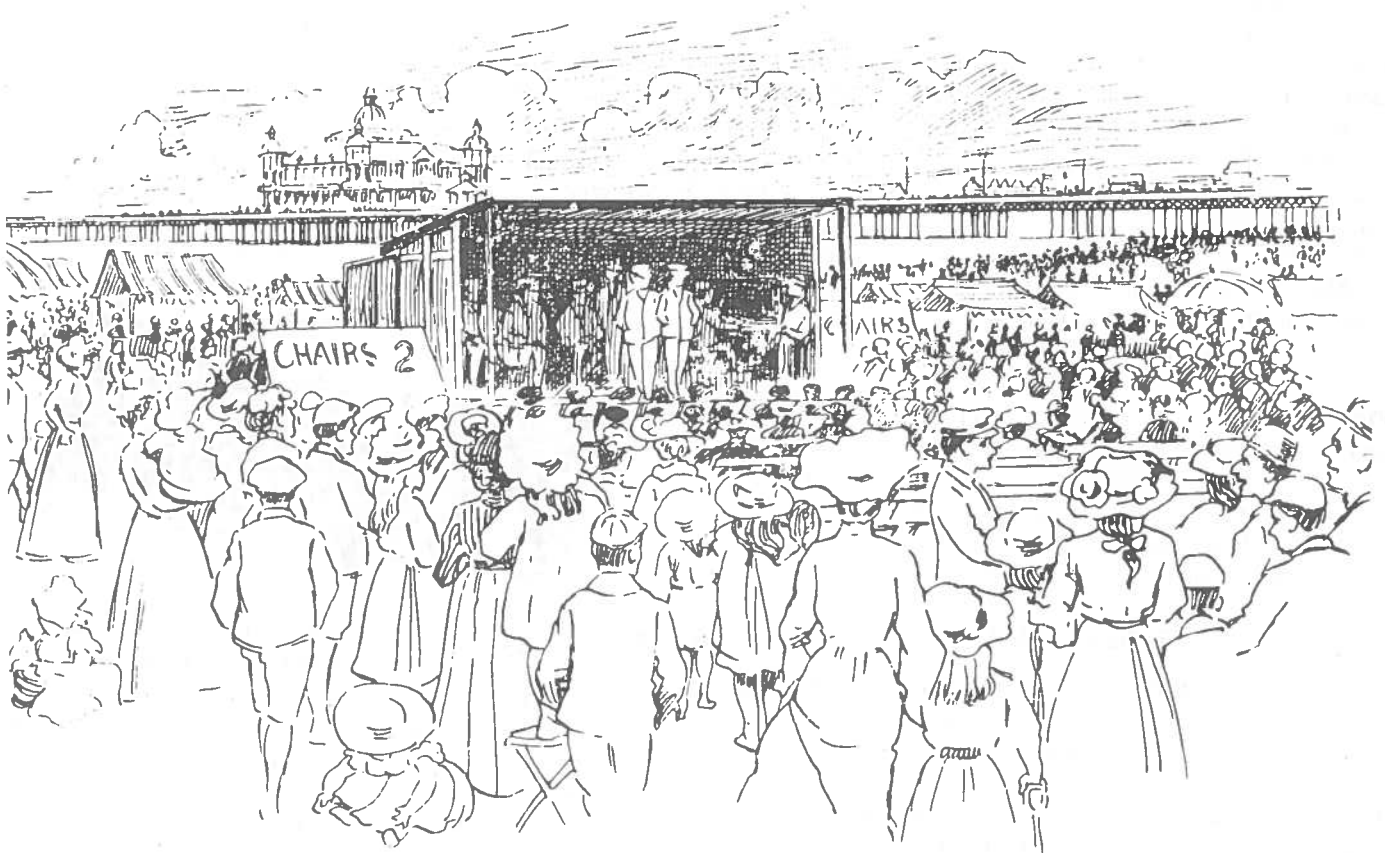
November - December 1987

Number 32

Ten pence

Delivered free to Members of Weston-super-Mare Civic Society

END OF AN ERA



AN ERA OF WESTON'S HISTORY AS A RESORT IS ENDING. THE TIDE OF THE MASS TRIPPER IS EBBING AWAY. WE LOOK AT THE CHANGES WHICH ARE OCCURRING, AND TAKE STOCK.

After the August Bank Holiday there was a mood of celebration. It had brought good weather and holiday crowds. The *Weston Mercury* reported that "the bumper crowds, around 50,000, make it the best weekend for the resort so far this year". "Delighted council officials have this week been rubbing their hands with glee after a bumper Bank Holiday weekend drew the biggest crowds of the year to Weston."



Now this exactly illustrates our current problem. What the figures actually underline is the dramatic collapse of the 'popular' tripper market at Weston in the last few years. A little knowledge of local history puts the present position in perspective. The report tells us that the biggest holiday crowds of the year, in good weather, had fallen back to the level they had reached in the early 1920s. By the end of the 1930s they were nudging 80,000. As the curve on the graph rose further still in the 1950s and 60s figures of 200,000 were common.

The fact is that the curve has been going inexorably downwards since the middle 70s. Cheap foreign travel, greater ease of mobility within this country, the rise of new inland attractions are among the causes.

- A NEW PHASE -

It is no good burying our heads in sand of Weston beach. Wiser council officers know the truth. We understand the need to put up a good front in public. But let us not deceive ourselves. The mass tripper market on which Weston relied for so many years is a shrinking market. It is more or less at an end. It has had its day.

We should set about planning for a new phase of the town's history.

Two truths must be accepted:

- Weston is now a town of 65,000 people. It is a substantial town in its own right, regardless of the tourists. There should be a higher priority for the needs of the residents all the year round.
- The fading away of the old tourist market need not mean the end of the resort. It can still have a great future as a visitor town. But its future will be different. It will fit differently into the life of the town as a residential community.

A town of 65,000 exists in its own right. Too much of our thinking comes from years ago, when residents' interests were made to take second place to tourism. This explains why Weston's range of facilities is still poor for its size: why we have no Arts Centre; why we have only just got a Sports Centre. The Council is beginning to readjust its priorities, but there is much ground to be made up.

This orientation of thinking - economic at bootom - has been the cause of a lot of the damage to our environment: we did it because of tourism. It has coloured perceptions and attitudes. Weston, as a residential town, has become a community of low expectations - because of the tourists.



We believe there is much to be said for starting to think and behave as any other town of 65,000 people would do. What do we want, as residents, in the life of the place where we live?

- FLOGGING A DEAD HORSE -

Even when local leaders see the need for new initiatives they are too often trapped by the old idea of the resort. It starts to look like flogging a dead horse. Why not just leave the poor beast alone?

What is more, every time we try to breathe life into the old idea of the tripper resort, we postpone the next phase. The old image no longer works to Weston's advantage. It is a disincentive.

Take the fuss about the Scooter Rally. The real mistake was in allowing the business to attract so much publicity. As it flooded the television screens all over the region, the issue reinforced all the wrong images of the resort, all the tired, cheap, out-of-date pictures of Weston we want to bury.

We understand why those involved in local tourism keep on trying. They won't abandon the old ship until they can see a new one to jump on. But we must create the new one. The old ship is slowly sinking.



The English Tourist Board survey of 1978 found that 11% of the local population was economically involved in tourism in one way or another. Leaving aside the question of low wages, seasonal employment, and the fact that the figures are nine years out of date, the local historian would say: this shows that by 1978 *only* 11% of us were involved in tourism. Its importance in the local economy has shrunk to that, and is still shrinking.

The route to economic regeneration at Weston will involve improving the quality of the environment, the sporting and recreation facilities, transport services, the appearance of the shopping streets, and the quality and range of goods available.

This, and other similar priorities for residents, will make Weston more of a 'real' town - attractive to employers considering relocation, attractive to professional people who work here but at the moment live elsewhere. It will

be a more lively and interesting place to be. Weston has a lot going for it, and there are hopeful signs.

Weston will take advantage from its proximity to Bristol, one of the Country's most prosperous cities. We are part of Avon, and we might as well start to benefit from the link with Bristol and Bath. Instead of being a bit of a joke in Bristol, Weston will start to be seen as an attractive area for Bristolians to use and visit, just like revived parts of the city itself. Weston might even start to get some spin-off from Bristol's commercial fortunes - not just more more houses for Bristol commuters.

- A POPULAR RESORT -

Ironically, this will also be the best policy for establishing a new identity for the resort. Visitors will want to come here to share in what the residents have - to visit our shops, to go to concerts, to explore our heritage. It will be a more popular conference venue.

Along the sea front the resort will return to something more like its heyday. It was never meant to be another Blackpool. Family holidays with bucket and spade will still be a factor. There will be a rediscovery of the northern end of the bay - Knightstone, Glentworth Bay, Anchor Head, Birnbeck - the most interesting part of our coastline, which is almost a distinct resort on its own. The appeal will not be electronic gimmicks or artificial noisy amusements. The character of this part of the sea front will be a strong card, but it will be one facet of the town as a whole - a kind of bonus enjoyed by the residents.

Those in the local tourist trade will learn to adapt, and will stop worrying about the vanishing trippers. The new visitors will pay more, stay longer, do more while they are here. Hotels which have closed will re-open.

In this way the balance between residents and visitors will be readjusted. The new pattern will make more sense, and all sections will enjoy Weston more.

We are grateful to Weston Central Library for permission to use the Loxton illustrations.



PLANNING MATTERS

FEELING THE SQUEEZE

Regular inspection of planning applications within the town reveals a disturbing tendency to pack in extra housing accommodation, either as extensions to existing buildings, as additional units in odd corners, or as outright replacements of older houses which are in most cases structurally sound.

The effect of this is to spread building out to the very corners of available sites, swallowing up gardens and eliminating the traditional rhythm of structure and void. It is rare for extensions to be designed to fit in harmoniously with the original house, and quite unknown for any replacement building to be an improvement on what has had to be demolished.

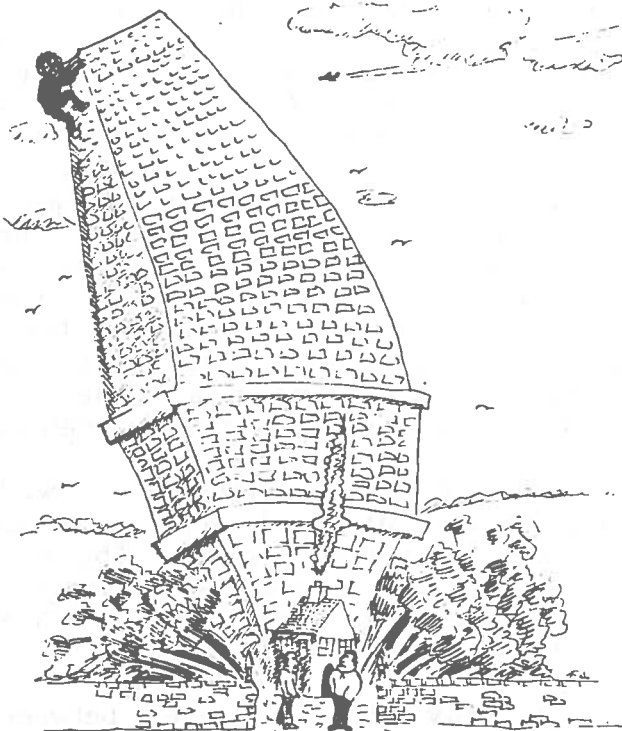
the town. Buildings require breathing space. Filling up every available gap with bricks and blocks tends to destroy the sense of place which makes a town interesting to live in and to visit.

Plans to demolish Ashcombe House and fill up the space have now been approved. Another large house in Trewartha Park has been deemed worthy of nothing better than demolition. The latest building to join the list of intended victims is Tallford House in Walliscote Road, once the Town Hall Annexe. Gradually the familiar stone town is being frittered away. The motive behind the relentless pressure on urban space is not, as it might be elsewhere, a need to house the homeless or to replace sub-standard accommodation. It is simply greed.

Some councillors, heedless of the damage that will be done to the town's economic prospects, imagine that it is their duty to smooth the path for developers, promoting the triumph of short term private gain over long term public good. There must surely come a time when the right of the speculator to make a fast buck is recognised as subservient to the right of the community not to have the town messed up.

The Council has a perfectly sensible policy restricting the height of new sea front development to four storeys. Apart from providing someone with a handsome profit, there was no good reason for it to set aside the policy and sanction a set of seven-storey blocks on the site of the Bus Station.

Pressure for development will continue in the central part of town, though it is apparent to most people that very little more can reasonably be squeezed in. A system of ad hoc decisions, which may owe more to knowledge of the applicant than to the merits of his plan, should give way to the discipline of implementing coherent policies based on a proper analysis of what the town needs.



"PERSONALLY I WAS ALL FOR YER DOCK-GOTHIC GARGONLE
BUT THE PLANNING COMMITTEE SAID IT HAD TO BE IN CHARACTER"

All this helps the building industry, but in the long term it does not help

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CROSSED WIRES

Typical of the depressing effects of British Telecom's decision to wipe out the traditional red telephone kiosk, is the blighted view from the north across the Italian Gardens, where six of the new version, in two groups of three, now turn their featureless backs to the open space. In spite of their crude appearance and insensitive positioning, they occupy what is, amazingly, regarded by BT as their permanent site.

One local trade finds the view of his premises quite spoiled by what amounts to a pair of steel crates. It seems sensible enough to have abandoned the original location in time for redevelopment there, but surely some more acceptable options could have been explored. The original set were outside a post office and had their backs to

a blank wall. Since the post office is to be moved, is there any need for such a concentration of new kiosks? Could they not usefully have been dispersed? On the other hand, if it was considered essential for them to be kept in one place, did they really have to be lumped together in threes?

BT are under the impression that the architects for the new shopping centre and the District Council agreed on the new location, but even this is apparently in dispute. Many Westonians feel that they have not been well served by whatever decision-making process preceded the lamentable imposition of this latest eyesore.

A great deal of money is about to be spent on improving the High Street and landscaping the Winter Gardens open space. If the result is not to be prejudiced, much more careful thought must be given to matters of detail which amount to an important element in the town scene.

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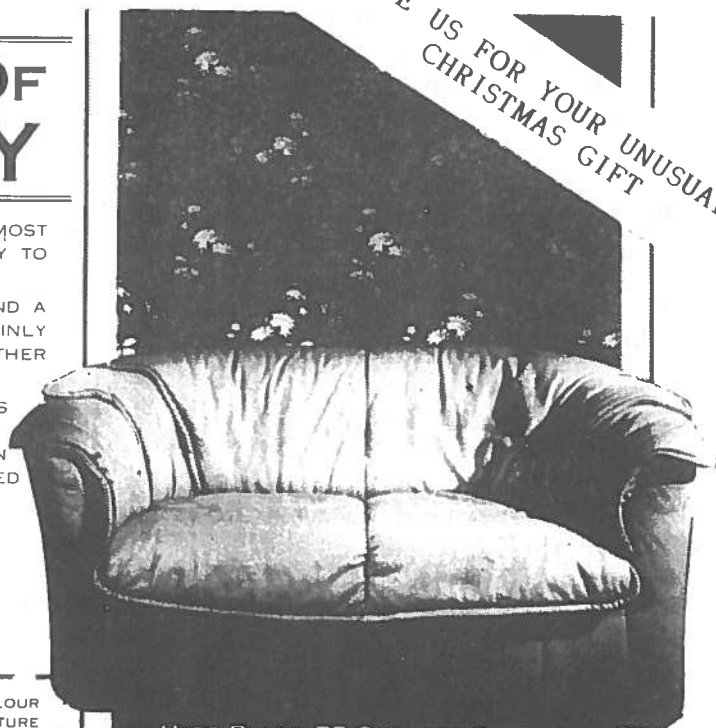
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SEVERN BARRAGE DEBATE

THE CURRENT CONTROVERSY

The Government is hoping that, by the end of next year, it will be in a position to decide whether plans for a Severn Barrage should be allowed to go ahead.

Mr. Michael Spicer, Under-Secretary at the Department of Energy, while inspecting investigative drilling in the Bristol Channel, confirmed the Government's interest in renewable energy sources. "We are not starry eyed about the proposal," he said "but we are not blind to the potential of renewable energy."

Mr. Spicer's department will be financing a £300,000 research project into the likely effects of a barrage, particularly on bird and fish life in the estuary. The Government has already contributed £4 million to feasibility studies since the Bondi committee decided 9 years ago that a barrage was a possibility. Mr. Spicer has however made it clear that finance for constructing a barrage would have to be raised on the open market outside the protection of government guarantees.

The barrage, in the form promoted by the **Severn Tidal Power Group**, a consortium of construction companies, would cost £5.6 billion, at 1984 prices, and could provide, if estimates are correct, about 5% of the nation's energy requirement.

- ESTIMATES QUESTIONED -

Because the supply of electricity from a barrage would be linked to the tidal rhythm and not to the times of maximum demand, the realistic proportion of national requirement that could be met is put as low as 2.5% by the **Severn Estuary Conservation Group**. They also contest the estimated construction cost, citing the Thames Tidal barrage which cost over 6 times the figure projected. Hidden costs would include major sewage treatment provision, since a barrage would curtail the estuary's natural flushing properties.

Jobs created in the construction stage would disappear as soon as a barrage was complete, say the Conservation Group. Subsequently fewer jobs would be provided than by coal-fired power stations, and one effect of a barrage would be a loss of jobs both in existing power stations and in Bristol and Cardiff docks.

- POTENTIAL DANGER -

In the recent House of Commons energy debate, a Bristol M.P., **Mr. Michael Stern**, pointed to the risks inherent in the application of new technology to the construction of a barrage. Apart from a possibility of the spread of evil-smelling mud pools, dams were, by their very nature, potentially dangerous, and had created a number of spectacular accidents. "We cannot subject the population to such dangers unless there is an overwhelming environmental and ecological case for the barrage."

The impact of a barrage on wild life would be enormous. Leaving aside what actually lives in the water, over 100,000 birds depend for survival on the Severn mudflats. Mudflats would be lost if a barrage were built. The reduction in salt content of those that remained, together with the increase in pollution, would increase the inevitable death rate among birds.

- MORE RESEARCH NEEDED -

Those who are worried by the ecological implications of a barrage necessarily deal in hypotheses, as do those who seek to minimise the risks to the environment. The ecology of an estuary is a complex web of interactions, and not enough is yet known about the extent to which the fragile balance would be affected by a barrage. Such studies as have so far been carried out have been limited in scope, and a comprehensive programme of research is needed before an informed decision can be taken on whether there should be a barrage.

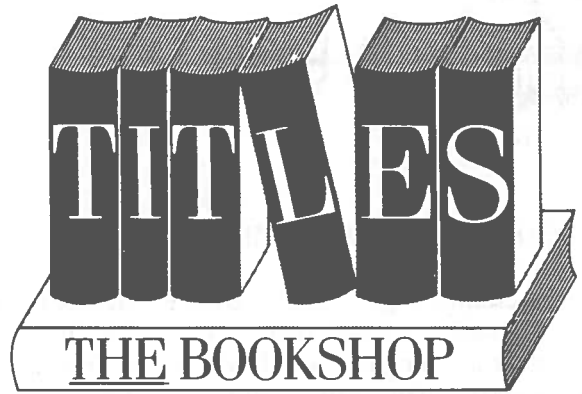
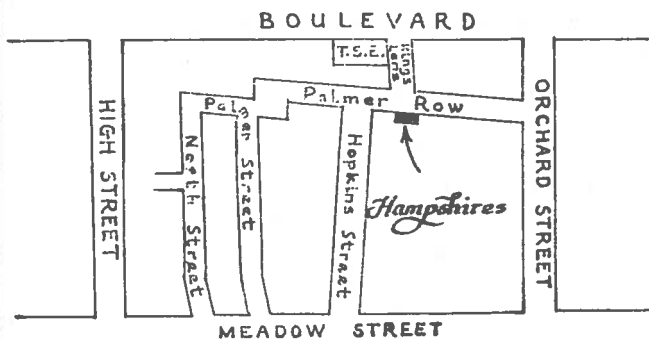
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AROUND THE SOCIETY

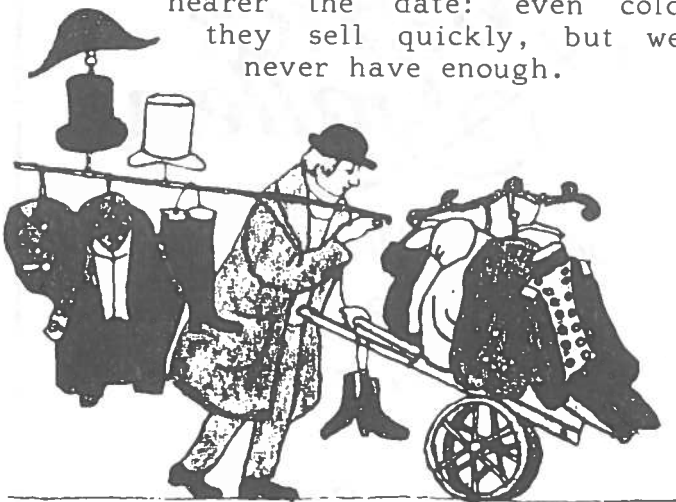


CAN SPRING BE FAR BEHIND?

Our Autumn Fair took place in October and raised something over £200. A number of people worked very hard in preparation for the event, and on the day itself, and their efforts are much appreciated.

It is fact, though, that a rather low proportion of members make our two annual fairs a matter of priority. Available manpower was stretched on this occasion, which not only makes the work harder for those who do turn up to help, but must limit the amount of money taken.

Our Spring Fair in 1988 is on Saturday, April 30th. Please put the date in your diary and come along to help make the event a success. In the meantime, how about collecting good quality bric-a-brac, books and clothes for sale? A plant stall would be popular if enough people would raise half a dozen credible-looking indoor or garden plants. Start planning now! Cake baking can be left until a little nearer the date: even cold they sell quickly, but we never have enough.



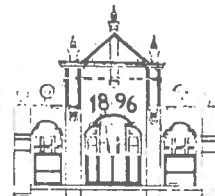
GETTING TO KNOW YOU

A vitally important role for members who want to support the Civic Society actively is the manning of the Heritage Centre, the point at which the Society meets the public. Volunteers are coming forward in encouraging numbers, but more are needed.

There is more to this than just selling things. Whenever there are two volunteers on duty, one of them can be available to chat to visitors to the first floor exhibitions: this personal contact is much appreciated.

Existing and potential volunteers are invited to coffee mornings at which there is an opportunity to get to know other members of the team, to become more familiar with what the Heritage Centre offers, and to discuss what is to be sold in the shop.

The Heritage Centre is not something which someone else is operating on behalf of the Civic Society. It is ours. The Community Programme employees are an enormous asset, but ultimately the responsibility for the running of the centre belongs to the members of the Society. If you have not yet become involved and could make yourself available, even if only rarely, phone 412144 and VOLUNTEER!



A LITTLE WATER CLEARS US

"I'm not feeling very well: I need a holiday." The familiar formula encapsulates the rise of the spa in England and on the continent, when taking the waters was recognised as a refreshment in more ways than one. At a recent Civic Society evening meeting Howard Smith discussed the medicinal and recreational benefits of the spa, and administered samples of commercially available mineral water.

Early visitors to Weston came because their battered constitutions required that they should both immerse themselves in sea water and take it internally. Bob Smart outlined the role played by Knightstone in this early initiative and its subsequent developments.



Taking the waters is not necessarily a thing of the past. Natural remedies are becoming fashionable again. Saline baths and saunas are a valuable asset to a modern resort. Knightstone is still ideally placed to provide a range of restorative and pampering experiences, with opportunities to eat and drink and relax in civilised surroundings while admiring the dramatic views.

Here is a way in which Weston can make its mark in a new generation of leisure provision. Will it take the plunge?

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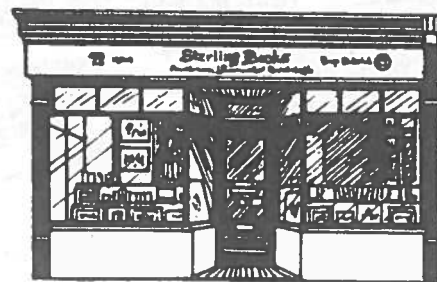
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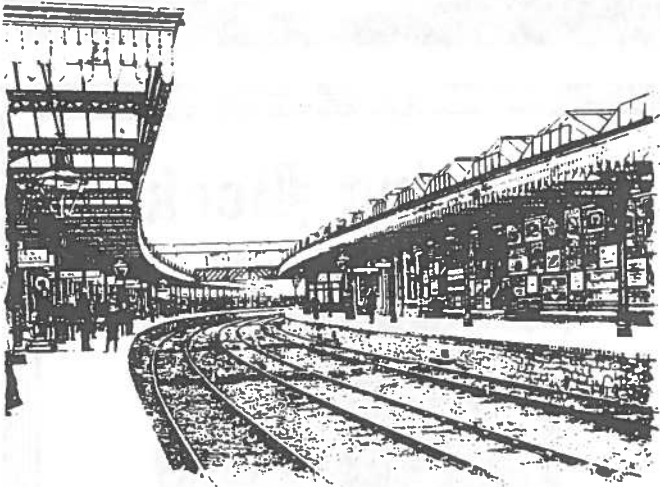
HERITAGE

A Personal View

H. E. Dommett

Recently, I decided to have a close look at the meaning of the word heritage, and discovered it referred to 'land or other property that pass by descent in course of law to an heir'. Imagine my gratification on a visit to a stately home of England to find that this was my heritage! Imagination clothed me in a red robe and coronet but these were dispelled when I had to pay an entrance fee.

Joking apart, heritage is personal, and its modern format is difficult to isolate and quantify. For example, I am really fond of my Victorian house, no doubt as much as the owners of two such dwellings within a quarter of a mile of mine. During the present year these dwellings have been demolished and I feel offended by their disappearance. In the past I have walked by with scarcely a glance, but now that they have gone I gaze angrily at the space they once occupied.



In a recent issue of the *Weston Mercury* I read the reprint of an article by John Bailey describing the destruction of the Carlton Street area. Not being a native of Weston, the physical appearance of Carlton Street meant nothing to me, but having read the script of the Civic Society interviews with former inhabitants, I felt the same anger as I did with the houses so recently destroyed. In other words the loss is of spirit rather than eye.

The canopy of Weston Station is an instance of which possible loss is accompanied by prevarication. Being a frequent user of the station I accept

the canopy as part of the scenery, and I have been charmed by the floral displays. One Councillor seems quite happy with the removal of the canopy, but perhaps one should ignore the aesthetic aspects and turn to the practical. If it happens the canopy is removed, can one imagine the station without one, especially those who wait on Platform 1 on a winter day when the east wind is blowing icy cold; or on Platform 2 waiting for a train to Taunton, Exeter or Plymouth in a howling south-westerly gale and driving rain?

Whilst on the subject of heritage, newcomers to the Woodspring area are at first surprised at the continued resentment of local people at having been placed in a county called Avon. They will also learn to appreciate that generations of people stretching back over a period of some 1000 years have lived with pride of being men of Somerset, whereas despite their recorded objections the present generation were forced to accept a new county name, Avon. Avon is a name derived from the Celtic word 'Arfon' meaning water; Water County! It makes the flesh crawl, and its imposition is destruction of heritage by dictatorship.

By the same token, Weston-super-Mare, which proudly received its charter in 1937 now 50 years later is a town subordinate to district administration. Whether such changes were based on manipulation of franchise or dictated by a need for reformed administration is a matter for conjecture, but it resulted in Weston losing a great deal of its independence and its heritage.

I remember in World War II servicemen were told that they were preserving their British heritage. It is a sad fact that in recent years British politicians have succeeded in destroying much more of local heritage than was ever achieved by the Germans.

So what of the future? There is always hope, and there can be no better sentiment than expressed by Rudyard Kipling in a poem "The Children's Song", the second verse:

Father in Heaven who lovest all
Oh, help Thy children when they call
That they may build from age to age
An undefiled heritage.

TREES FOR THE TOWN

The Civic Society is once again concentrating its autumn tree planting in the central area of the town. Half a dozen Italian Alder will be introduced into Christ Church Path South, alongside the school hall. A mixed planting of Small-leaved Ash and Double Wild Cherry will go in along the wide pavement on the north side of Alexandra Parade between Orchard Place and Alfred Street. The same species will be planted on the north pavement of Oxford Street between High Street and Walliscote Road. Some lost trees will be replaced in Baker Street and Waterloo Street.

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GETTING TO KNOW YOU EVEN BETTER



The next coffee morning meeting for Heritage Centre volunteers is on Wednesday, January 13th, 10.30 for 11.00. Come along and find out what helping at Wadham Street is all about. All sorts of good ideas have come from these meetings already: new lines are to be added to the shop stock; a Weston Game for children is being devised; some members are to make items for sale not only in the shop but at our Spring and Autumn Fairs; the Plant Stall is actually going to be planted! Don't watch this space - come along on January 13th.

SNOW ON THE CARDS

We reproduce alongside one of our new greetings cards now on sale at the Heritage Centre. Designed by Frances Stenner, one of our members, the cards evoke snowy Christmases in Victorian Weston.

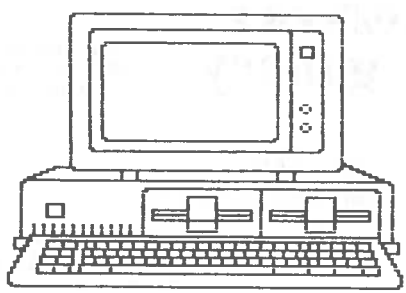
As well as the cards, the Heritage Centre has a number of special lines for Christmas, so do drop in to complete your seasonal shopping and to relax in Cornish's Coffee House afterwards.

And lastly, may we wish all our readers a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous New Year.

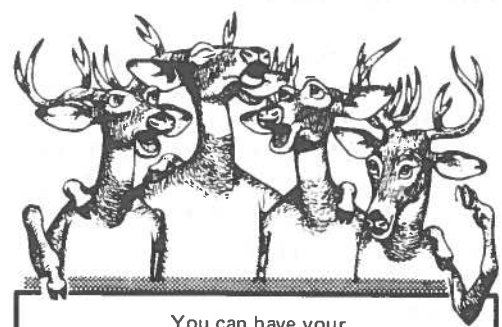
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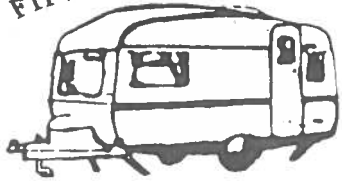
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Saturday, December 19th, 8.00 p.m.
CIVIC SOCIETY CHRISTMAS PARTY.
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Wednesday, January 13th, 10.30 a.m.
Meeting for Heritage Centre helpers.

Thursday, January 14th, 2.30 p.m.
THURSDAY CLUB. ASPECTS OF LOCAL
HISTORY - Harry Dommett.

Thursday Club meetings are open to
Civic Society members at a cost of
40p; non-members pay 50p.

WESTON VIEW is published by
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