



WESTON VIEW

Twenty pence

September - October 1988

Number 37

STOP THE ROT!



IN THE NEWS

NEW CONSERVATION AREA FOR BOULEVARD AND MONTPELIER

Following widespread local protest at the demolition of 23 Montpelier, Wood-spring District Council has responded to residents' concern about the trend to demolishing fine solid Victorian properties for redevelopment. It has started the procedure for designating a new conservation area covering Montpelier and the hillside above the Boulevard.

As part of this process the Council held a public meeting to explore the implications and to consult local opinion.

Conservation areas were established under the Civic Amenities Act of 1967, introduced by Duncan Sandys and largely drafted by the Civic Trust, our parent body. The act required local authorities to carry out surveys and identify 'areas of architectural or historical importance whose appearance or character it is desirable to conserve or enhance'.

In the early 1970s the Town Map identified two large potential areas in Weston: the whole of the hillside from Birnbeck to the cemetery, and the

district behind Beach Road including Ellenborough Park and Clarence Park. Before any action was taken, local government reorganisation took place. A small area around Grove Park and Park Place was designated, following pressure from the Civic Society, in 1980. This has been followed by the Shrubbery and Atlantic Road area, Ellenborough Park, and parts of Worle and Uphill.

A decision on the current proposals is expected at the full council meeting on September 20th.

TIDY BEACH

Although Weston failed to win a Blue Flag Award (see our July edition), progress towards a cleaner beach is being made. The Keep Britain Tidy Group last month presented the council with a clean beach certificate. Wood-spring has begun a policy of stricter controls on dogs, and we are hoping the water will soon be getting cleaner.



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WESTON VIEW has this month risen in price, but fully paid-up members of the Civic Society get it free through their letter box. Are you among them? If not, see the back page.

Our cover photograph shows a section of the crowd of demonstrators who gathered outside 23 Montpelier, on which demolition work had already begun.

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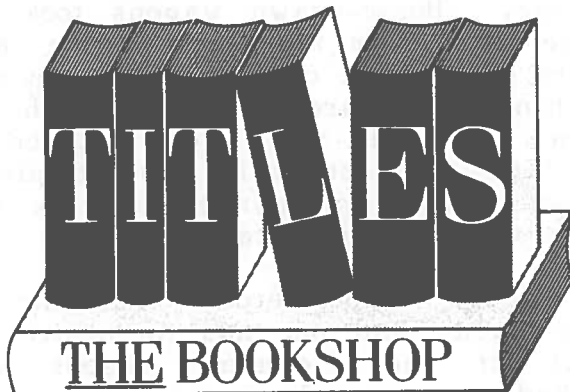
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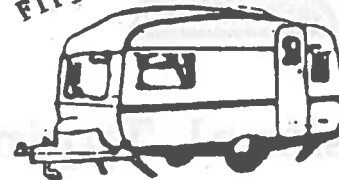
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THE TOWN QUARRY

The Society is sponsoring a major project to turn Weston's old Town Quarry, in South Road, into a useful new amenity. Wood-spring District Council granted us a 15 year lease on the site, which is at the top of Queen's Road, backing onto Weston Woods.

This is a key site in terms of Weston's story. From here most of Victorian Weston was built! Vast quantities of limestone were taken to build the handsome new villas along the hillside and behind the sea front. Stone was also used to build the roads and provide the miles and miles of kerbs and gutters - each stone dressed by hand!

The quarry began life in village days as the local gravel pit. The site was safeguarded under the 1815 Enclosure Award, and came into its own once the Victorian building boom got under way after the coming of Brunel's Bristol and Exeter Railway.

The stone was quarried by gangs of workers who undertook all stages of the operation. They blasted the rock with gunpowder, having first used iron rods to 'jump down' a row of holes for the charge. Horse-drawn wagons took the stone away from the face. In the later years of the last century steam-powered machinery appeared to help crush the stone, and this was later replaced in its turn by electrically powered plant. It was tough and dangerous work and there were several fatal accidents.

Our local carboniferous limestone is very hard, and one has to admire the skill of the Victorian masons who worked it to provide the growing town's buildings. Sometimes it was shaped into such precisely squared blocks that it could be used as ashlar, just like the softer stone from Bath.

Today the Town Quarry is an intriguing place. It has not been worked since the 1950s, and nature has softened the scene with trees and plants. In this great hole in the Weston hillside you can get a good understanding of the local geology. You can see the strata or layers of the stone, laid down under the sea over 300 million years ago, and then buckled by movements of the earth's surface. There is an interesting fault line breaking the



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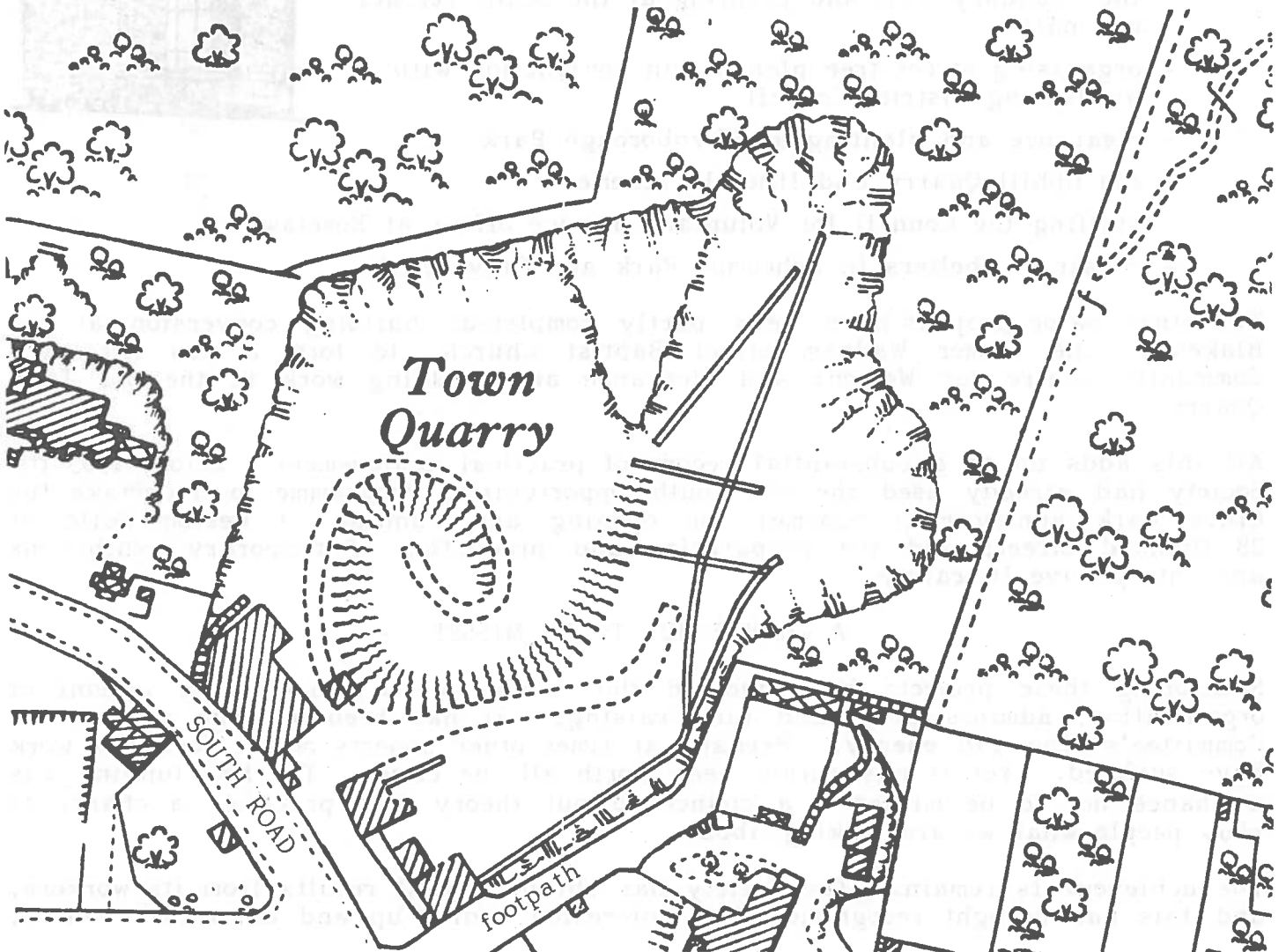
strata in the quarry. Some of the stone is stained red through the pressure of iron ore.

Birds nest in the high quarry cliffs, and the abandoned site has become something of a nature reserve. It is also a marvellous sun trap. The disused quarry buildings hardly hint at the noise and dirt of the century of activity that went on here.

The Society has begun to clear the rubbish that has been dumped here, and to renovate some of the buildings. We see scope eventually for small craft workshops, as well as displays about geology, quarrying, building, and the flora and fauna of limestone terrain. As the base for our salvage scheme (administered from the Heritage Centre) it could also provide a training site in practical conservation. And it is a good starting point for a trail through the Woods to explore the hill-side.

We would not want to turn the Quarry into a crowded, noisy attraction. Its quietness is now a part of its distinctive character. It has a special place in Weston's story, and is a site worth caring for. It also provides a chance to show that such 'white elephants' can have a new lease of life, if they are imaginatively and sympathetically developed and not just turned over to another block of flats.

Full development of the project will take a long time, but we are well under way. We look forward to inviting all members to the Quarry before too long, but in the meantime, for safety reasons, the site is not open to the public.



COMMUNITY PROGRAMME ENDS

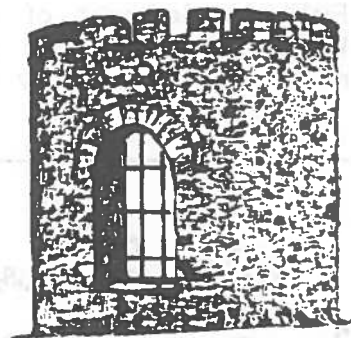
The Community Programme, funded by the Manpower Services Commission, came to an end on September 2nd. For over 5 years the Civic Society has sponsored a CP scheme, which enabled a wide variety of projects to be carried out in the town. MSC funding offered the chance to pursue our aims in a practical way. The ending of the Community Programme marks the close of an important chapter in the Society's life.

CP was designed to help unemployed people gain work experience and training by taking part in projects which benefited the community. Since 1983 over 400 local people have been involved in our projects at different times.

The list of projects which we have tackled is quite impressive. The biggest of all has been the creation of the Heritage Centre. This has given the Civic Society a permanent headquarters and created a major new visitor attraction for the town.

Other work sponsored by the Society's scheme has included:

- boundary work and clearance at St. John's churchyard
- the architectural salvage scheme
- conversion of the Uphill windmill tower into an observation and information point
- the front garden of the School of Art
- the boundary wall and planting at the South Terrace car park
- organising street tree planting in conjunction with Woodspring District Council
- clearance and planting at Ellenborough Park
- the Uphill Quarry and limekiln scheme
- staffing the Council for Voluntary Service office at Roselawn
- repair of shelters in Ashcombe Park and Grove Park.



Two other major projects have been partly completed: building conversion at the Blakehay, the former Wadham Street Baptist Church, to form a new Arts and Community Centre for Weston; and clearance and building work in the old Town Quarry.

All this adds up to a substantial record of practical achievement. Before 1983 the Society had already used the old Youth Opportunities Programme to undertake the Grove Park Enhancement Scheme; the opening and running of Weston Guild at 28 Orchard Street; and the preparation and production of temporary exhibitions and interpretive literature.

- A CHANCE NOT TO BE MISSED -

Sponsoring these projects has involved the Society in a considerable amount of organisation, administration and fund raising. It has been a large call on the Committee's time and energy. Perhaps at times other aspects of the Society's work have suffered. Yet it has surely been worth all the effort. The MSC funding was a chance not to be missed - a chance to put theory into practice, a chance to show people what we are talking about.

The achievements remain. The Society has obtained good results from its workers, and this has brought recognition from interested bodies up and down the country,

as well as in Weston. We are grateful to all our workers who have taken up with enthusiasm the chance to make a positive contribution to the life of the town. We hope they have benefited personally from their involvement in our work. The Society has certainly made many good friends along the way - and gained some useful members as well!

We are also grateful to all our members who have supported our work over the last five years, and to all the local traders and others who have helped with materials, equipment or expert advice.

OVER TO THE TRUST

So what of the future? The government is replacing the old MSC schemes by a new programme, Employment Training, which puts more emphasis on the occupational training and qualifications of participants. It will be run by fewer and bigger organisations.

However, project work will still form an important part of the new scheme, and sponsors of smaller local projects can still be involved as 'sub-contractors' to the main training organisations. So, while the Civic Society will no longer be a sponsor, it is not the end of the road for project work in Weston.



The torch is being handed on to the town's building preservation trust, the Weston-super-Mare Trust, which the Civic Society helped to create. The Trust's first project is the Blakehay, where much remains to be done. The Trust is negotiating directly to continue this important project in the future.

WESTON-SUPER-MARE HERITAGE CENTRE

The story of Weston, the sea and the countryside, in models and pictures. Find out the sites to visit and explore. There's so much to discover!



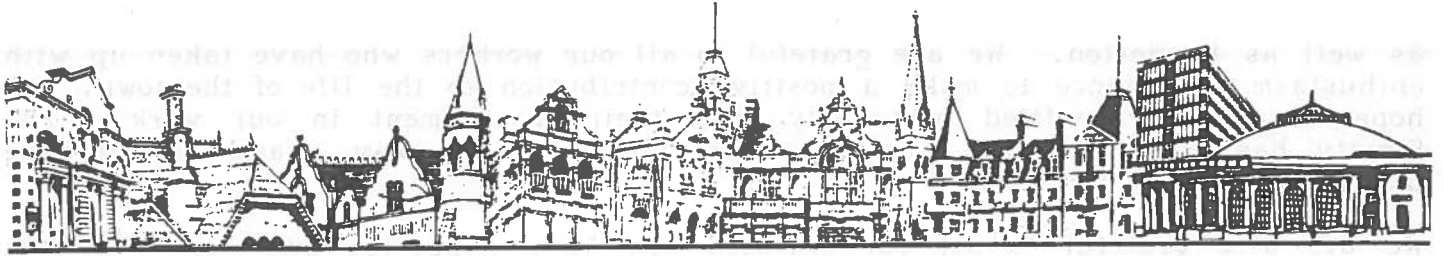
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VIEWPOINT

SAVING THE HILLSIDE

The Council's response to residents' concern about the Montpelier area is heartening. There was real and widespread disgust at the sneaky manner in which 23 Montpelier was demolished one Saturday morning. It was a handsome and solid Victorian villa, the type that makes up a great part of our architectural heritage and the pleasant character of so much of Weston.

This was a disgraceful act of developer's vandalism. The idea was simply to exploit the site by cramming in another enormous block of flats. We have seen some of these blocks already: they are out of scale and they overwhelm the neighbourhood.

The fear was that other properties would soon share the same fate, and that, very quickly, the whole area could be ruined. Because of the hillside location, these huge monoliths would have been all too visible from the town centre below. At the moment the hillside of period houses and the woods beyond provide a superb backdrop to the town centre.

Residents of the area could not save 23 Montpelier, but were determined to stop other properties being bulldozed. They lost one battle, but can still win the war. They welcomed the help offered by the Society, but there should be no doubt that it has been *their* campaign. A hundred joined the demonstration outside 23 Montpelier on the Monday lunchtime following the start of demolition, brought by word-of-mouth. The lively scenes on that occasion, and the vigour with which they have argued the need for decisive action, prove their determination not to brook delay in obtaining proper protection for their environment.

They realised, better than anyone, that this trend, if allowed to continue, would spoil the very character that had drawn them to the area: a high proportion of them are relative newcomers, attracted to Victorian Weston. Given the state of the market, and rise in land values, too many properties with large gardens offer rich short-term pickings to development vultures.

No one wants a ban on all building. No one wants to turn these areas into museums. New building can be fitted in acceptably. Extensions can be added properly. But the new trend is something else - totally destroying good, solid, attractive houses, and then over-developing to the very limits of the site.

The *only* way to control this sort of pressure, in fairness to everybody in the locality, is to designate a conservation area. That is precisely what the conservation area was designed for. It makes it necessary to get permission to demolish. And it can help secure the right scale and design for any new buildings allowed. Mature trees are also protected.

Designating a conservation area can also release grants for properties in the area. However, one should not have too high hopes of this. We all understand that funds are limited. The Council does not have a bottomless purse.

No, the real point is a check on wanton destruction for the sake of a quick profit. This is the urgent matter. The town must invoke the available legislation to show it values the character of the area - to show it cares. Thank goodness the residents do care, and expect the Council to back them.

AIRFIELD CONTROL

The news that Mr Peter de Savary has bought Weston Airfield caused a frisson of media interest, partly because he is fast becoming one of the new type of high-profile entrepreneur - a media personality. Should we be thrilled or alarmed?

Pessimists will say that, for all the PR hype, such businessmen have no real interest in anywhere except for the purpose of exploitation: witness his buying and selling St. Anne's Board Mills in Bristol. One rather resents being expected to roll over in delight just because he is terribly rich. He says his company will create hundreds of jobs, but then he would say that, wouldn't he?

Optimists will welcome the promise of major new investment and employment, and an injection of new ideas from a successful operator. There is the prospect of a revitalised airfield, which recently has seemed in something of a limbo.

The proper question is whether his plans will serve the town's true

interests. We should neither be dazzled by a modern millionaire's mystique, nor unduly prejudiced against him. Until we hear more, promising him unqualified support is as premature as condemning his intervention out of hand. Let's wait and see what he wants to do.

After all, he may just decide to sell the site again.

● ● BLACKSPOTS ● ●

This edition's Blackspot has to go to the insensitive developers who bulldozed 23 Montpelier, despite appeals from the Council to take no action while talks were held. The fact that the guilty parties include local businessmen makes it even more shameful. We are not anti-business, but has greed driven out all social responsibility?

LETTERS

As a footnote to your article in the July edition about the High Street, I would commend the floral baskets outside Marks and Spencer's store this summer. They have been a splendid show, well placed over the main doors, and surely an example to other shops in the High Street. I am pleased to see that the council is also providing baskets on the new lamps. When the whole scheme in High Street is finished, this kind of floral theme is just what is wanted as a finishing touch. I have been to several historic towns where this sort of thing is organised in the old shopping streets, and it is always a success when the effect is one of profusion, with flowers and plants spilling over in great masses.

Mr. R. Wolfe.

I agree with your comments on the pedestrianisation of High Street, and the resurfacing. All I would want to add concerns the position of the new lamps. I like the 'roses' done in setts around the lamps, but would these not have been better either in the middle or along the gutter? There is still an obvious camber on the street, so having the roses half way down the slope looks slightly odd.

Altogether, though, the scheme is a good one and should smarten up High Street a lot when it is completed.

Mrs. B. Cream.

Two readers' letters, and on the same topic! Please keep them coming. Editor.

AROUND THE SOCIETY

OVER TO YOU!

Our involvement with the Community Programme has left us with a major asset. We have established a Heritage Centre as a base for all aspects of our work as the local amenity society. The involvement of volunteers in the Centre will be more important than ever. We now have a base which most other civic societies would envy. We must use it now to forward our aims - good planning, pride in our town, care of our surroundings and our amenities, and proper appreciation of all that makes Weston special and worth caring about.

It's up to you to help the Society. If you have time, please consider volunteering to help in the Centre. It belongs to you.

MINDING THE SHOP

The implications of our responsibility for manning the Heritage Centre are spelled out by Harry Dommett, who has played a major rôle in co-ordinating volunteers:

It is planned shortly for the shop at the Heritage Centre to be self-supporting, and staffed only by volunteers. This operation needs to be as flexible as possible in order to cater for any personal problems that may arise to prevent attendance.

Attendance is regarded as being split into two periods:

Mornings 10.00a.m. to 1.30 p.m.

Afternoons 1.30 p.m. to 5.00 p.m.

This means that the number of periods of attendance to be covered amount to 12 per week.

Twelve members to cover the twelve periods would be ideal, but allowance must be made to cater for unforeseen circumstances. It has therefore been decided to compile two lists:

- 1) Members willing to commit themselves to regular attendance;

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- 2) Support members who are willing to attend when requested.

It would be appreciated if all volunteers will confirm their preference for either 1 or 2. Those opting for 1 should state their preferred periods of attendance.

New volunteers will always be welcome at the shop volunteers' coffee mornings, details of which are published in Weston View from time to time.

THURSDAY CLUB

At their recent AGM the Thursday Club elected Mr. B. Copley Jones as their Chairman. Miss M. Hodges is Hon. Secretary and Mr. D. Milford is Hon. Treasurer. Other members of the committee are Mr. F. Churchley, Mr. H. Dommett, Mrs. R. Dowie and Mrs. M. Milford. The retiring chairman, Miss A. Dale was thanked for her service.

The Thursday Club is a vigorous section of the Society, and a strong programme of meetings attracts a good attendance. We urges all members who are free in the afternoons to go along and join in.

DIARY

Thursday,
September 22nd **DISCOVERING OUR DISTRICT.** The first of ten weekly meetings at the Heritage Centre, 10.00 a.m. - 12.00 noon. Tutors led by **Mary Harding.** Organised in conjunction with Weston College. An introduction to our district, and the history of the local landscape, from prehistoric times. This popular series explains historic sites and features you can visit on short outings. Class visits may be organised as part of the course. Get to know the wealth of interest in our area and become a local explorer! Fee: £20.40 (usual concessions available). To enrol, contact the College, Tel. 621301 extension 259, quoting course number 511.

Thursday,
October 6th **THURSDAY CLUB.** Eric and Joy Wilkinson will present a **PORTRAIT OF THE ISLES OF SCILLY.** Thursday Club meetings, in the Heritage Centre, begin at 2.30 p.m. and finish at about 4.15. An admission charge of 40p applies to Civic Society members, and 50p to non-members.

Saturday,
October 22nd **AUTUMN FAIR.** Boulevard United Reformed Church Hall, Waterloo Street, 2.00 p.m. - 4.00 p.m. The Society needs *your* support - not only behind a stall on the day, but in providing plenty of items for sale and setting them out before the sale begins. Last time we made a special effort with the plant and cake stalls, and this made a big difference to the takings. *Every* member should supply something for sale: please use the enclosed form to let us know what it will be! The scope and quality of our work depends on how much money we can raise.

Friday,
October 28th **LOCAL HISTORY TO 1988.** Heritage Centre, 7.30. Readers will associate **Brian Austin** with the regular Family History spot on Radio Bristol. At this meeting he will be taking a fresh look at local history and methods of assessing it. Sometimes controversial and always stimulating, Brian will give us a memorable evening. All are welcome.

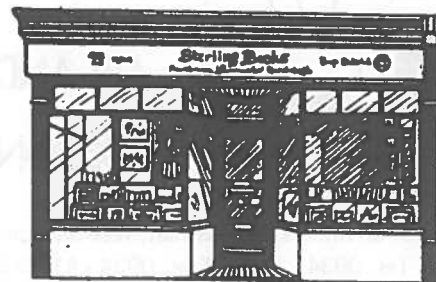
Thursday,
November 3rd **THURSDAY CLUB.** Brian Gosling will talk about **BRITISH WATERWAYS.** Arrangements as above.

Thursday,
December 1st **THURSDAY CLUB** Doug Woods will talk about the work of the **SOMERSET TRUST FOR NATURE CONSERVATION.**

See our next edition for details of our plans for a Christmas celebration.

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The editors welcome comments
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