



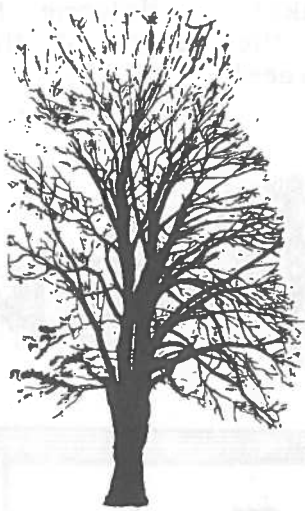
WESTON VIEW

July - August 1988

Number 36

Ten pence

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

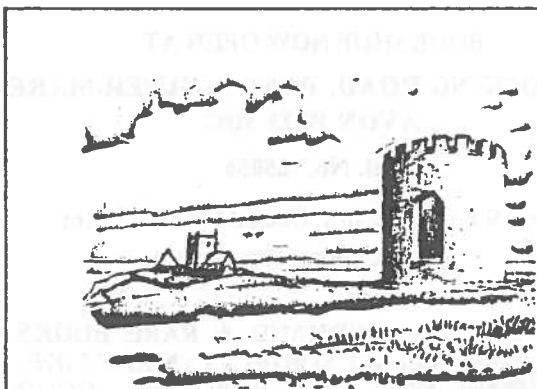


A GREEN GATEWAY



FOR WESTON - SUPER - MARE ?

Tree planting is one of the keys to enhancing Weston's image as an attractive resort, and changes taking place in the town offer the chance to strengthen Weston's 'green appeal'. We propose a new strategy aimed at greening our visitors' introduction to the town.



Our new Uphill Trail is reviewed on page 7: 30p at the Heritage Centre.

Also available: **Weston-super-Mare: A History and Guide**, a new book by Philip Beisly (see page 10).

Beach pollution page 3

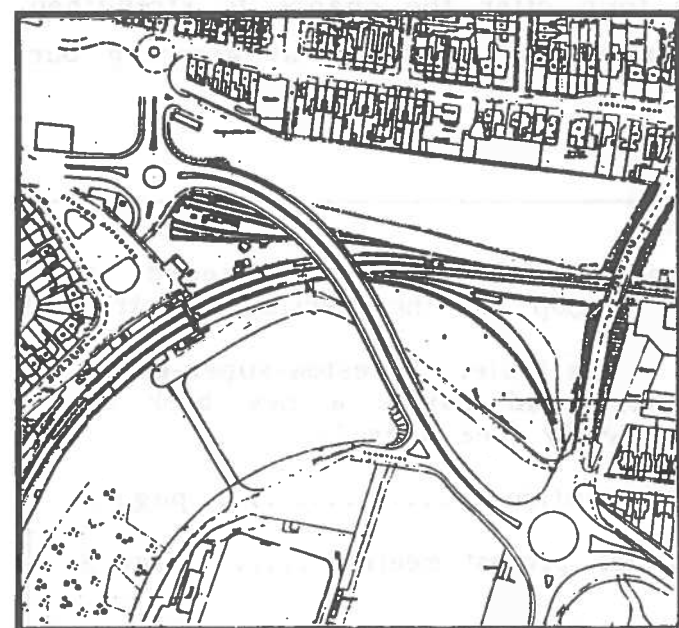
Montpelier protest meeting page 9

Weston Woods are the town's crowning glory, adding to the resort's superb setting where the Mendip Hills meet the sea. In Victorian times Weston extended this appeal by planting lots of street trees as well as trees in parks and gardens.

Recently town centre trees have begun to make a come-back. Joint Wood-spring - Civic Society initiatives have led to planting schemes in South High Street, Alexandra Parade, and elsewhere. The Tesco car park has been plentifully stocked with trees. When all these - and more! - mature, the town centre will take on a softer, pleasanter aspect, in keeping with its traditional character.

Now that sections of the new motorway link road are to be built, feeding into the Tesco - Railway Station junctions, we have the chance to provide a 'green gateway' to Weston. We propose that the new road should be an avenue - and where possible the railway line too. In this way the visitor's introduction to Weston would be made more attractive. A green theme would be established.

Journeying in to the centre of Weston from Worle would become a positive experience. The distant view of the woods would be complemented by greenery in the foreground, instead of simply rows of modern houses.



The proposed new section of the M5 link road near the Railway Station - an opportunity for greening the main approach to the town centre.

The theme would be sustained on arrival. Station Approach should become an avenue leading to the Town Hall, with more trees going down to Carlton Street and the sea front.

The new Tesco - Railway Station road scheme has already opened up exciting vistas we did not have before, and the planning of the link road - with generous spaces - gives us a unique chance to create a tree-lined corridor from the motorway to the heart of town.

Tree planting has taken place already in Winterstoke Road - a welcome step. Just think of what a difference such a policy would make! 'Welcome to Weston-super-Mare - the resort of the woods, the town of trees!'



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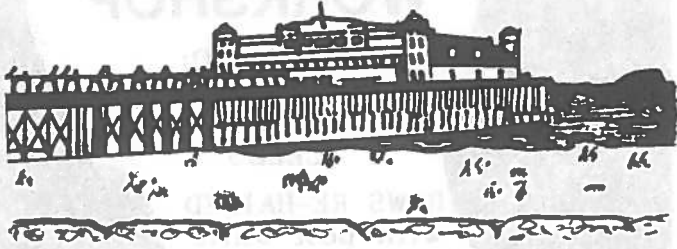
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NO BLUE FLAG!



We failed to gain one of the new Blue Flag awards given by the Tidy Britain Group and sponsored by the Water Authorities Association - but so did quite a lot of other popular beaches. However, the competition does highlight a growing awareness of the problems of Britain's beaches, and there are at last signs of efforts at improvement.

A major cause of beach pollution, as at Weston, is the Victorian sewerage system. At Victorian resorts sewers discharged straight onto the beach. A century or more ago the building of sewerage systems was itself a step forward. But it seems incredible that today, with much larger populations, we still put up with discharges of largely untreated domestic sewage on bathing beaches.

There is obviously a health risk. It has been estimated that 3 bathers in 100 will get infections, skin irritations or gastroenteritis from our polluted waters. There is a threat to wildlife. And of course the image of the seaside suffers, at a time when it is struggling to retain its appeal. Resorts are understandably reluctant to publicise the problem, but this can result in water authorities postponing action. The public is bound to become aware of the problem in any case.

Industrial pollution is an additional factor, sometimes bringing metal deposits such as mercury and lead into the cocktail. Our estuary is naturally muddy, because of the large amount of silt in suspension, so the pollution factor makes a difficult situation ten times worse for us.

In 1976 the European Community asked member countries to name their most popular bathing beaches, monitor them for sewage pollution, and clean up those that fell short of designated standards of cleanliness. France named 1400 beaches, Italy 3300. Britain names only 27! This ludicrous attempt to evade the reality of the problem was, fortunately, unsuccessful. The EEC had to threaten the British government with with action in the European Court before our Department of the Environment came up with a revised list of 392 bathing beaches. When, in 1986, the results of monitoring were finally published, 40% of the 392 failed to meet cleanliness standards. Weston was one of the failures, together with many other leading resorts such as Blackpool, Worthing and Scarborough.

The Marine Conservation Society is one body leading the national campaign to improve things. Its Good Beach Guide gives details of hundreds of British beaches. And the campaign does show signs of getting results.

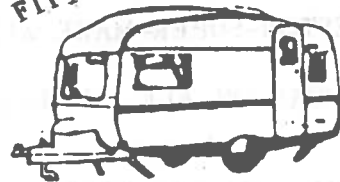
continued on page 4

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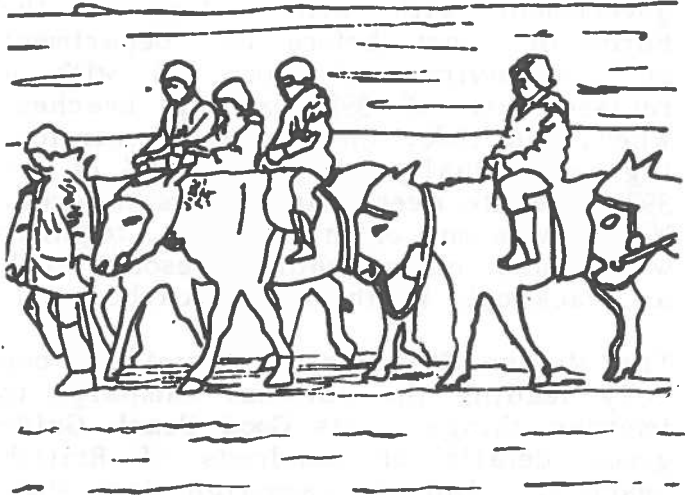
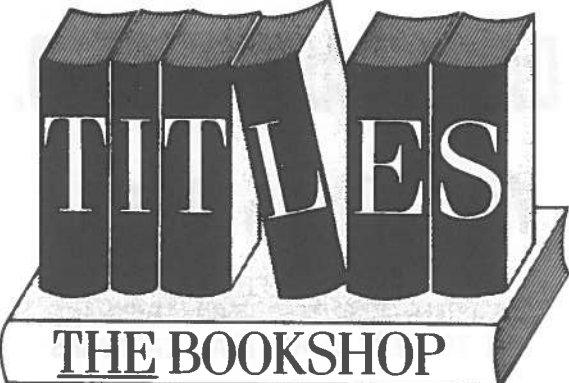


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The water authorities, of course, say that they do not have unlimited budgets. Nevertheless they can give remedial measures a higher priority than they have in the past - and are at last starting to do so, thanks to public pressure. People are willing to pay more for cleaner beaches.

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At Weston, Woodspring District Council and other bodies, including the Civic Society, have made strong appeals to the Wessex Water Authority for improvements, and have won a promise of action before very long. Woodspring is also trying to tackle the dog problem. The prospect of a cleaner beach and less polluted water is a real one. Weston must not let it slip. After all, the sea is the whole reason for the resort. All other tourism schemes could prove futile if we do not sort out this most fundamental of our image problems.

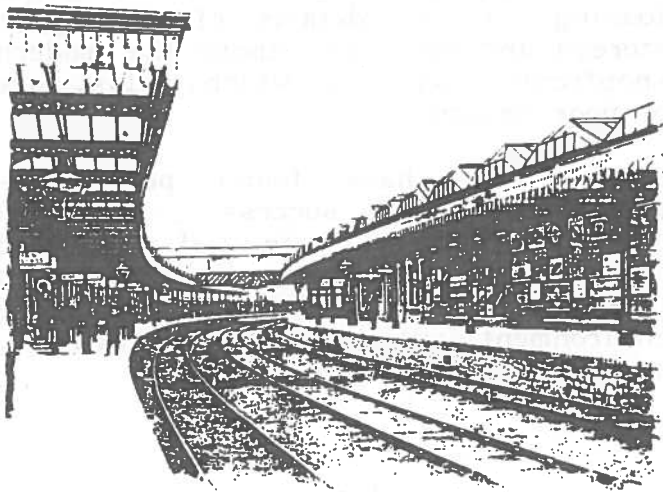
If you are a Civic Society member, have you paid your subscription for 1988/9 yet? If you have, you will have received, or will find with this edition, a current (grey) membership card. If not, please act now!

IN THE NEWS

GREEN LIGHT FOR WESTON STATION

Earlier fears about demolition of part of the Railway Station have turned to optimism following a series of talks between British Rail, Woodspring District Council and Weston Civic Society. There is now real hope that the station will be preserved intact, and indeed substantially improved.

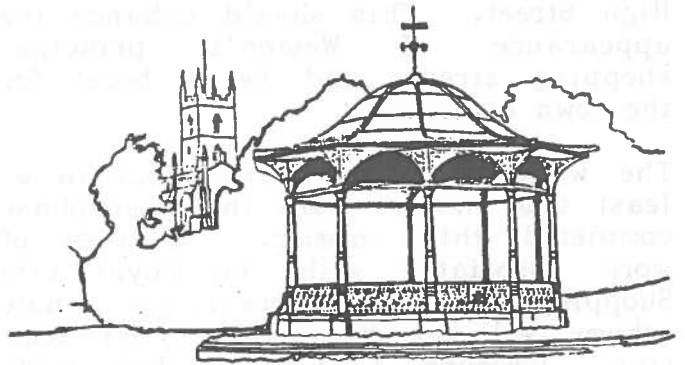
British Rail has now agreed not to demolish the free-standing canopies on the 'up' platform beyond the foot-bridge. A grant of £25,000 from the Council, matched by the Railway Heritage Trust, has closed the gap in British Rail's budget. Now *all* the canopy on this platform is to be preserved, and the glass roof renovated using appropriate modern materials. British Rail is now also committed to spending substantial sums on other works, including a new slate roof.



This is very good news indeed, for it would have been a great shame if the station had been reduced from its present size.

Talks continue about finding alternative uses for redundant accommodation on the 'down' platform, to avert the need for demolition there. So far there has been an encouraging response from British Rail to ideas put forward by the Society, the Weston-super-Mare Trust, and the Weston and Woodspring Enterprise Agency. Creating display space and work space for new local businesses, and providing tourist information, are among the suggestions. Progress will be reported in future editions of *Weston View*.

HARMONIC TONES



Focus of much pleasure and entertainment - embodiment of the spirit and quality of the resort - and emblem of the Civic Society! - the Grove Park bandstand has recently undergone repairs and now stands proudly forth in its new livery! Well done, Woodspring, for this timely piece of conservation. Well done, too, the local bands who continue to bring pleasure to those in the park on summer Sunday afternoons. How pleasant to have this elegant piece of Victoriana restored, to enhance the scene and gladden the eye as well as the ear!

Nearby is the park shelter which our MSC team repaired recently. The hooligan element that often congregates here must not be allowed to detract from the pleasure which hundreds of people take in this lovely park, a gem in the heart of town.

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TOWN CENTRE - PAVING THE WAY

It is good to see that work has begun on the new surface of pedestrianised High Street. This should enhance the appearance of Weston's principal shopping street, and be a boost for the town centre.

The work is to be carried out in at least two phases, with the first phase completed this summer. Because of work associated with the Royal Life Shopping Centre development, the whole scheme will not be completed for some time. However, a start has been made on an improvement for which Weston has waited for many years.



Pedestrianised High Street - illustration by courtesy of Technical Services Department, Woodspring District Council.

Woodspring has faced many problems in arranging for the project to begin. We congratulate all involved and look forward to this face-lift for the High Street.

Work on the Royal Life development itself should begin this autumn, with completion due by autumn 1990. This should include new landscaping for the Italian Gardens - Putting Green area, creating a handsome and more useful space in the heart of town.

Finally we hope all members have noticed and applauded the trees planted in South High Street and Alexandra Parade, the result of co-operation between the Society and Woodspring. Altogether there is plenty going on, the biggest changes in the town centre for a long time.

The High Street is one of our most historic streets. It was the principal lane of village Weston, long before there was any town, and was known simply as 'The Street'. So its slightly meandering line perpetuates centuries of local history.

When the first form of modern local government appeared in 1842, with the creation of a Weston Board of Commissioners, one of the first improvements was the widening of High Street. Previously the old village lane had been so narrow that carriages had been hard put to it to pass each other.

Traffic increased, but it is amazing now to stand in High Street and realise that it took two-way traffic - including buses - until modern times. A one-way system was followed by partial limits on vehicular access in the early seventies.

High Street contains an interesting variety of buildings. It is worth looking at the details of the upper storeys and rooflines, above the modern shopfronts (some of which, alas, are of poor design).

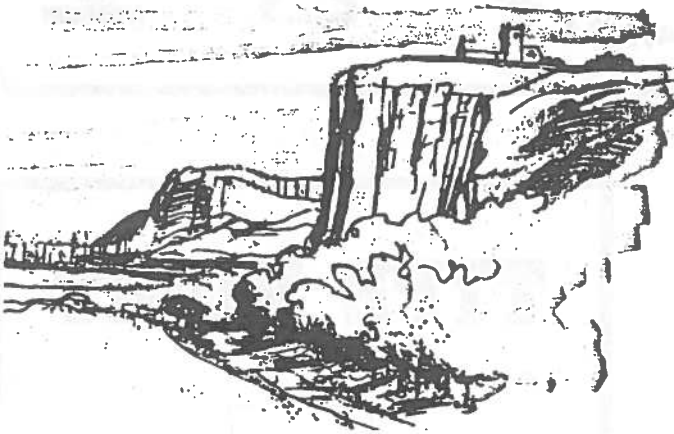
Other towns have found pedestrianisation a terrific success. The local heritage combined with well designed modern improvements produces an interesting and pleasant shopping environment, with real local character, and suited to modern needs.



High Street in the 1860s.

TRAILING UPHILL

The second in our series of Countryside Trails is now available - **Uphill**, price 30p from the Heritage Centre. The trail was written by Paul Lane and designed and illustrated by Raymond Dwerryhouse. It tells the story of this fascinating and historic area on Weston's doorstep. The series, which began with **Kewstoke and Sand Bay** (published in April), is designed to encourage awareness and enjoyment of the rural areas around Weston. We believe that part of the attraction of our town is its natural setting and the proximity of varied countryside.



The trails highlight easy routes on public footpaths, and point out features of interest as well as discussing the special character of each area. Funds for Paul Lane's work have come principally from the Countryside Commission and the Ernest Cook Trust.

Just to show how big our market is - over the last ten years the Society has sold over twenty-five thousand local trails! Clearly environmental interpretation is catering for a real public need. Visitors and residents are interested in the local story and the local scene.

It is a pity also to have to report the collapse of a promising partnership for enhancement of the Uphill Quarry area between the Society, Woodspring District Council and local people. A scheme was agreed several years ago, following the damage to the area caused by the 1981 flood. The Society's

Heritage Project, following its work on the Windmill tower, moved in to clear rubbish, repair the boundary wall by the footpath, and of course restore the limekiln. The Society worked hard to raise grants, and local people, led by the Uphill Village Society, raised money in the community.

Trouble started when Woodspring unilaterally changed the scheme. Local people had simply wanted to restore this much-loved area to what it had been, but Woodspring decided on 'improvements'. The council chose to lay a road of second hand tarmac alongside the ancient footpath. Council workmen began dumping the material on the quarry floor.

Crisis talks led to this idea being withdrawn, and the Society's workers removed the tarmac. But Woodspring would not back down on another bright idea. It arranged to carve new steps up the hillside beyond the cliff, creating a new route where there was no footpath. Many interesting plants grow here, some quite rare. The soil was eroded near the bottom of the hillside.

The other parties to the scheme wanted the steps removed. They believed the erosion could easily be dealt with, but that actively encouraging use of the new route was a mistake (there is an alternative nearby). The steps were an intrusion in the open, natural scenery, and a scar on the hillside.

At a meeting in 1985, attended by Cllr. Ivor Keel, the Chairman of the Planning Committee, it was agreed that the steps should be left for two years so that the effects could be monitored. After two years a further meeting would review the position.

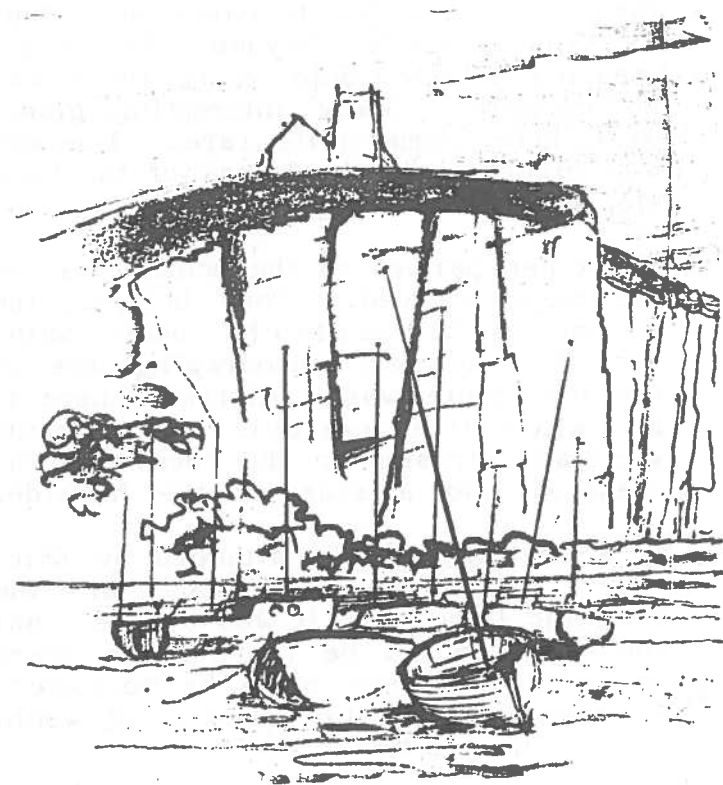
The Civic Society had reluctantly gone along with the compromise for the sake of the scheme as a whole, and refrained from making any public comment on the matter. We were - and still are - willing to carry out and pay for our preferred strategy for dealing with the erosion problem.

Recently, having designated the hillside a Nature Reserve, Woodspring has decided to vote money to repair its steps. A majority of the organisations

in the Management Committee still wished to stick to the original scheme, but Woodspring overruled them.

Naturally we feel both hurt and let down by the way we have been treated. The original aims - and the proper idea of what conservation means in this situation - have been lost.

The landscape itself has been a casualty of this affair. So has public goodwill, for, understandably, local people have become quite dis-



illusioned. Now, it seems, ratepayers' money is to be wasted again, to compound earlier mistakes.

We still believe in the partnership approach whenever possible, but it is hard to build up trust and goodwill when power is wielded in this way. One does not want to blow the issue up out of proportion, but small things like this are significant and symptomatic.

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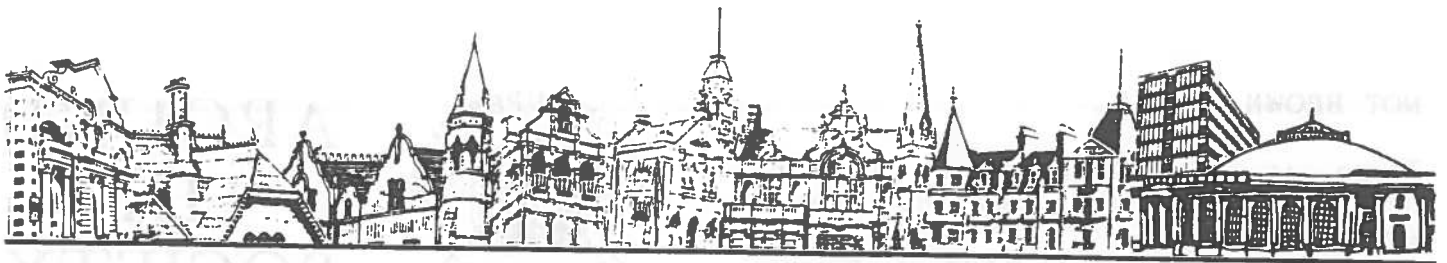


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Ah, well! You win some, you lose some. Sorry, Uphill, we did our best.

Our illustrations are taken from the new Uphill Trail, and can be better appreciated in colour! Buy your copy at the Heritage Centre, 30p.



PLANNING MATTERS

URGENT ACTION REQUIRED

A packed meeting of local residents at the Heritage Centre protested at plans to demolish Eastgrove House, number 23 Montpelier.

The latest of our fine Victorian villas to be scheduled for bulldozing has been bought by developers who plan to use the site for a block of 18 two-bedroom flats.

Many people living in or near Montpelier feel that if this plan goes through the floodgates will be opened and one by one the fine houses in this road, and with them its distinctive character, will rapidly disappear.

It was agreed that new blocks which have already appeared in the locality have been of inferior design and have made no positive contribution to the street scene.



Protest letters had been sent to the local press and to district councillors, but it was felt that the council could do little to resist this wave of destruction of our local heritage until it extended the conservation area.

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Once again, local opinion at street level is demanding conservation in preference to reconstruction. As on earlier occasions, we urge Woodspring District Council to heed such pleas and take the necessary preliminary step of designating a conservation area before it is too late.

Such a move would be popular, and would demonstrate a genuine resolve to allow Westonians to keep the town they love.

WESTON VIEW is published by Weston-super-Mare Civic Society, 3-6 Wadham Street, Weston-super-Mare, Avon. Telephone 412144.

NOT BROWN BRICK!

There is a strange object standing near the front of the former Bus Station site in Beach Road. It looks like a notice board, but it is made of bricks. What is it for?

The answer is that this is a sample of the bricks proposed for the new development on the site. The bricks are a shade of brown. Is this colour suitable for new buildings in the old part of Weston? NO. IT IS NOT!

We have already seen similar colours used in recent buildings such as the new Tesco store. The colour is not a success, and we don't want any more of it. It has been defended as being a 'natural' shade that will 'blend' well, helping new developments to 'merge' into the local scene.

Well, it isn't and it doesn't. It isn't natural round here, and it makes buildings stand out more than ever.

Weston was a stone town, and the local limestone is predominantly grey. Bath stone was used. Walls were also rendered. On the few occasions when local brick was revealed it showed an orange-red tone; it was used in combination with Bath stone (as at the Library or the Heritage Centre).

Grey, red, and Bath stone colour should give a large enough choice for new building. Roofs were Welsh slate or red-orange pottery tiles, and similar colours can still be used. But please, no more brown or yellow - it jars as much as green tiles!

● BLACKSPOTS ●

This edition's Black Spot goes to the Ashcombe Pharmacy, by the Ashcombe Road - Milton Road traffic lights. An attractive period shopfront has been replaced by a box-like modern affair with smoked glass. The loss of a favourite shopfront was regrettable, but the new one just does not suit the distinctive detached building, and, because of its prominent position, it detracts from the character of the locality. What was the point?



AROUND THE SOCIETY

BROAD THOUGHTS FROM A TOME

By the time you read this, the latest addition to the growing catalogue of interpretive materials about Weston's past will be available in print.

Philip Beisly's readable and informative new book **Weston-super-Mare: A History and Guide** is to be launched at a reception at the Heritage Centre during July. This is a major contribution to the resident's and visitor's understanding of just how and why Weston evolved from a tiny fishing village to become a fashionable resort.

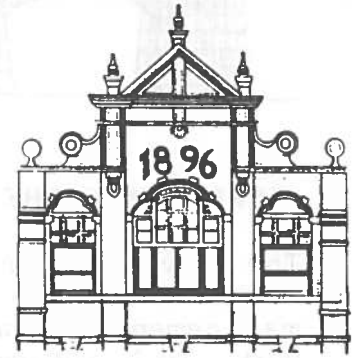
Britain invented the seaside and Weston is a classic example of the seaside resort: a 'boom town' whose growth mirrored that of inland manufacturing centres, but one dedicated to leisure. This book is about the people and the places that figure in Weston's story, from the days of the fishing village to the late Victorian and Edwardian heyday. Using prints, maps and photographs it forms a guide to the sites and monuments that can still be seen today: traces of the village; estates of handsome stone-built villas; the shopping streets and public buildings; and the piers, parks and pavilions that form a distinctive seaside heritage.

While dealing cogently with the past, this book is firmly grounded in the present, and looks to the future, by bringing to the fore the continuing implications of our local heritage. Like all worthwhile interpretation it tells a good story, but it also helps us to understand that the story is far from over: we in our generation are responsible for the current chapter.

Copies of this absorbing book will be available at the Heritage Centre and other good bookshops. In hardback format with over 100 illustrations, it is published by Alan Sutton Publishing and costs just £6.95.



HERITAGE CENTRE NEWS



REMARKS FROM BERKS

A glorious Saturday in June was the occasion of a visit to Weston by a party from Maidenhead Civic Society. The group came to visit our Heritage Centre and discuss matters of common interest, as well as to enjoy a visit to the seaside. We welcomed our guests with coffee and our audio-visual presentation in the Countryside Room. After a look round the displays, and lunch in Cornish's Coffee House, most of the group signed up for a guided walk around Weston, which included Grove Park, the Town Quarry, the Shrubbery, and Knightstone and the sea front. Tea back at Wadham Street set up the party for their return trip up the motorway.

It is always interesting to compare notes with societies from other towns. Maidenhead is experiencing far greater development pressures than Weston, being in the London orbit where property values are much higher. We heard tales of developers' agents roaming the town to ask householders if they would like to sell their gardens!

It is also interesting to 'see ourselves as others see us' and look at Weston through other people's eyes. The general reaction was one of surprise at Weston's hidden charms and the quality of the local environment. 'We didn't realise Weston had so much going for it.' One feels quite proud of the town after such a visit!

The Maidenhead Society is considering trying to establish its own Heritage Centre. We hope the visit to Weston was helpful. A number of other societies registered with the Civic Trust are booking to send us parties - our Centre is becoming quite famous!

GREEN FINGERS

A word of thanks to Mary Calder, whose mission is to look after the plants in the Heritage Centre. She has watered, fed and pruned various sickly specimens back to health this year, and the Centre looks better for it.

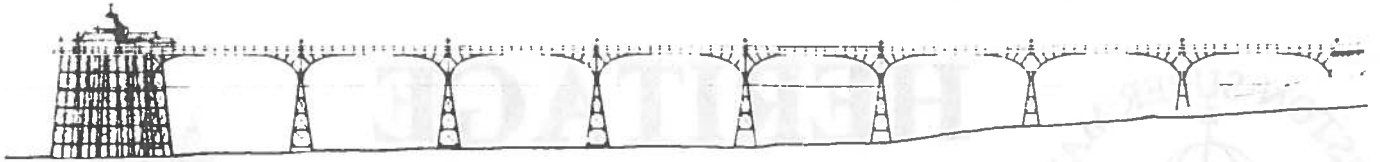
Thanks also to the volunteers who planted the hanging baskets that adorn the outside of the building and brighten up Wadham Street.

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PIERING INTO THE FUTURE

The Clevedon Pier Trust has announced that the pier is to be reassembled this summer. Success is now in sight for this major restoration project. A new management contract has been placed with Ernest Ireland Construction Ltd. of Bath, with sub-contractors Christiani and Nielsen of London being responsible for the marine work.

Clevedon Pier - perhaps the most graceful of all our piers - partly collapsed under test loading in 1970. During the 1970s fund raising efforts chased inflation. A Public Inquiry in 1979 found in favour of a renewed attempt at restoration. The Trust finally took a lease on the pier from Woodspring District Council, which agreed to pay over a sum equivalent to the cost of demolition.

The Trust raised major grants, reflecting the national importance of the structure, and a contract was let. The pier was dismantled and moved to Portishead Dock. However, the bankruptcy of the contractor brought further delay. Now increased grants, and a loan from the Architectural Heritage Fund, have made completion of the project possible.



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