

SPALDING & DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

March 2023

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

THIS WILL BE the last Newsletter before the District Council elections. Already there are rumours as to who might be stepping down and who might be standing again. I'd rather wait and see, but I would ask anyone considering standing to familiarise themselves with the Councillors' Code of Conduct. *

In particular, the requirement to hold themselves accountable for their decisions and actions, and to submit themselves for appropriate scrutiny where it is required, and to be open about their decisions and actions taken. This will be particularly important over the next three years, as there are decisions to be made about where the money gets spent on making improvements to our town. I hope that such decisions will be taken as openly as possible, after proper engagement and consultation with stakeholders and the wider community. That means right at the start. We all want to see improvements, and the quickest way to achieve that is by securing a consensus *before decisions are taken*. Ideally, a decision should in effect be a rubber stamp after consensus has been achieved. Without consensus, a decision too often looks like a top-down diktat. We've all seen this over the Johnson Drinking Fountain, when Planning Committee members – quite without precedent – openly expressed their disquiet with the way it had been handled. "It's an example of how not to ingratiate yourself with the public" (Councillor Jim Astill). At a time when trust in politics is at record lows, the mould needs to be broken.

So how can candidates for election secure my vote? Well, firstly, I would like a commitment to champion the needs of the whole community, in ways that go beyond party politics. For local elections it should not be about the colour of rosette that someone is wearing. For those seeking re-election it should be about their record; for those standing for the first time, it should be the ability to demonstrate they have considered the needs of the community and have practical ideas that will make a difference.

My number one request would be a commitment to supporting the adoption and publication of a Statement of Community Involvement as one of the first tasks of the new Council. To have a written commitment to involve communities in plan making from the start would be transformative..

Secondly, now that Grantham is to have a Town Council, the absence of one in Spalding becomes even more noticeable. I set out how a Spalding Town Council could benefit our town in last July's newsletter. Perhaps the time has come for the new Council to investigate the possibility further?

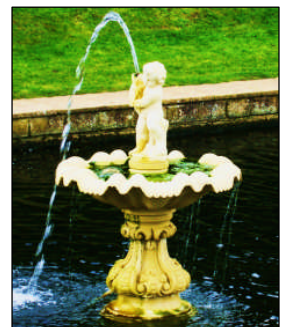
Whether you live in Spalding, or beyond, do reach out to the candidates standing in your ward and ask them what they will do to champion your local area, the town of Spalding and South Holland in general, and what in particular they will do to make a difference. This surely is the role of any community representative.

John Bland

* To be found at <https://www.sholland.gov.uk/article/5700/Standards-and-Code-of-Conduct>

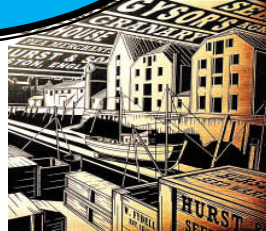
MUCH APPRECIATED

- The **small group of musicians** who enlivened three or four Saturday markets in the Market Place in late October and early November with their live music.
- **SHDC** for not only adding two further fountains to the lake in Ayscoughfee Gardens but also cleaning and restoring the three older ones to a more vigorous display after many years of mere dribbling. (One wonders if the jets fanned out more when the fountains were newly installed.)
- **The Red Lion** for a freshening up of the exterior, though it's a pity the Planning Department didn't insist on slightly warmer colours. They don't have to accept corporate colour schemes.



AGM

plus



ARTeFACT

illustrated presentation

by

NICK JONES

Programme Director for Transported Arts



Revealing the designs for an exciting new art trail to be installed in Spalding town centre showing what's possible when digital technology meets The Gentlemen's Society. Inspired by artefacts in the Society's collection, brass plaques will enable people to access animations of the town's history right there on the spot: woad production in the fens, skating on Cowbit Wash, WW II

The plaques have been designed by Electric Egg, a company founded in 2005 by two young men, Neil Baker and Steven Hatton, who use film, animation, photography and illustration to bring to life the stories that are important to local people about where they live. Their work can be seen small-scale in the *Etched in Time* series of plaques in Boston (*above*) and large-scale on ten of FreshLinc's lorry-trailers (*below*).

There will also be an update on the Council's proposal to enliven the troubled Abbey Passage with murals inspired by the Tulip Parade.



SPALDING AND DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY

I enclose a cheque for:- ☐ £8 for individual membership; ☐ £12 for 2 persons in the same household;
☐ Free if in full-time education; ☐ Details of a standing order mandate

Please send to **Melvyn Price, 3 Morus Close, Spalding, Lincolnshire, PE11 2QL**

Name Address

Post Code Telephone Email

Gift Aid

☐ I am a tax payer and I wish to Gift Aid my annual subscription . Please send me the appropriate form.



CHRISTMAS FAYRE

IT HASN'T PERHAPS REACHED the very high standard yet set by Spalding's Pumpkin Festival, but the Christmas Fayre improves year by year. There were more stalls this time, more hot food, a majestic tree perfectly-shaped, music, plenty for children, balloons, light wands, toys that twinkled on and off

Carefully chosen, it doesn't need hi-tech attractions to generate fun and excitement for children at a fair: 'snow' to fling up in armfuls in the snow-bubble, traditional swingboats and a hand-cranked roundabout. What matters is that rides and attractions should be special, unusual, things you won't find in your back garden or the local park. Even the colour patterns are different, not the sort that come up in a supermarket or television studio or on your smart phone. It may not be Hull's gigantic fair or Nottingham Goose Fair, but clearly the Council's Community Team is establishing the right contacts and sources for what makes a fair a *successful* fair.

What hasn't been cracked, though is the lights. The essence of any secular winter festival is light and warmth, to defy the darkness and the cold. But not quite yet in Spalding. By nightfall the stalls are lit too dimly to really see what's on offer. The set-piece illuminations, elegant though they may be, are cold and harsh in their blue-tinged LED monochrome. It was a lovely idea to have the tree lights switched on by the little girl who won the fancy dress competition, but sad that the results were so sparse and tiddly when the button was pressed. Without the larger hand-made decorations from our

kind Latvian friends it would have looked very thin indeed. And the pop-up stage – when the only lights are fixed *behind the performers*, then you don't see anything of their faces.

More generally, it was good to see more town centre shops and businesses dressing their windows for the season, even when their nature doesn't involve goods that can be displayed festively, as with ladies hairdresser's, for example. Even Murker Slots had a lit-up tree for a few days. Needless to say, the big multi-nationals such as Boot's and Sainsbury's contributed nothing, despite their resources. It was almost entirely the local independents who made the effort.

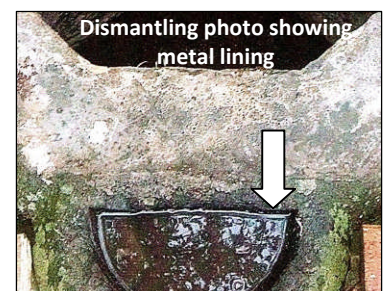
My prize this year would go to Hughes Electrical in the Sheepmarket for the thought and imagination that had gone into their centre window: The scene created was of Father Christmas back home after delivering his sleighful of presents. A snowy bootprint on the floor and scattered snow round the discarded wellies; Santa dozing in his chair before the fire, the cat asleep in his lap, and a table at his side with a half-full beer glass, an empty mince-pie plate, and a very very long list of presents to be delivered, all ticked, all done. On the mantelpiece a photo of himself and Mrs. Christmas and a little model of one of his helpers. And a stock of logs in the hearth ready to replenish the blaze. It felt warm to the imagination, even if it was cold and dreary outside.

So thank-you to the members of the Council's Community Team and the shops and local businesses that joined in. As with the Pumpkin Festivals, we are beginning to sense what can be achieved when the community pulls together to defy the cold and darkness of the times we seem to be living in at the moment. And it has the prospect of being multiplied many times over when the revived Flower Parade emerges from its long hibernation in May.

John Charlesworth

JOHNSON DRINKING FOUNTAIN – POSTSCRIPT

WE TRIED OUR BEST. The choice of site was shamefully handled from the start, and roundly condemned by members of the Planning Committee. The Fountain may be back in Ayscoughfee Gardens again, but questions remain. Between its dismantling in January 2018 and expert inspection of the stones in January 2022, the following parts disappeared: the cross, the topmost pinnacle stones and the lead(?) lining to the four basins. The cross had been located by June 2021 and the pinnacle stones had reappeared by January 2023. But not the basin liners. They are still missing. So where was the cross found? Who removed and then returned the pinnacle stones? And why? Where *were* they? Where are the still-missing basin liners? These are questions that need answering in the interests of openness and transparency.



PLANNING MATTERS

THERE HAVE BEEN a number of applications over the last year to convert the upper floors of town-centre shops into flats. In many ways it is good to see such spaces being used and, who knows, it might help reduce incidents of anti-social behaviour, or at least result in the quicker reporting of such incidents. Examples include the former Calthrop's offices and former travel agent's at 14 Market Place.

An application for solar panels on the roof of 33 Red Lion Street was refused. This is a newer building but is in a key part of the Conservation Area. As we face higher energy prices, using roofs in our town centres for capturing solar energy may become more desirable. Indeed, both Salisbury and Gloucester Cathedrals have installed solar panels on parts of their roofs not visible from the ground in recent years, whilst, closer to home, St.Hugh's Church in North Hykeham and St.Denys's in Sleaford have had solar panels for over ten years.

My view is that if the roof is not visible (as with a flat roof), solar panels may be acceptable. However, I feel that they are unacceptable on pitched roofs in

the Conservation Area, as they affect the visual amenity of a building. Solar *tiles* (which are more expensive) may be acceptable, depending on the roof. Are there any strong views either way out there?

An application has been made for a huge care accommodation block on the former Jewson's site on Roman Bank. The applicant stated that they had circulated 750 letters to local residents, businesses and councillors in November 2022 as part of a pre-application consultation exercise, but received no responses. Well, we were never consulted as a stakeholder. (Did anyone out there receive a letter?) We commented of course, however, on such a major development. In many ways it is most thoughtfully designed to meet the needs of both the elderly or infirm and the environment. The problem, though, is its monolithic appearance. We have recommended some rethinking here, as it is important for both residents and visitors alike to avoid any impression that the elderly are being warehoused. Also we felt further attention to the positioning of the green space was needed.

John Bland

PAUL WALLS

WE WERE SORRY to receive the news in January of the death of Paul Walls, former chairman and long-serving committee member of the Society. Paul was well-informed and with a detailed knowledge of the wider background of the various local issues that have concerned the Society. Indeed, one often felt he knew more about a particular topic than the government ministers who were introducing or overseeing national legislation at Westminster. He performed a most valuable service in enabling us to see

local issues in a national context. Although a Conservative member on the District Council for several years, he was no party yes-man, being ready to speak out, often passionately, on matters about which he felt strongly and where he believed national policy was going astray. More directly, Paul used to go for long walks. He is said to have walked every path in Spalding, when he would have made his observations on their qualities and maintenance, with the needs of the blind and partially-sighted community particularly in mind

ANGELA NEWTON

IT WAS with a great sense of loss that Spalding people heard of the death of Angela Newton, after many years as a county councillor, district councillor and leader of the Independent opposition in the latter. Amongst the many causes she championed during these years or went into battle for, the Society is particularly grateful for her tireless work at the helm of Spalding in Bloom, which won the town several gold awards and commissioned its first public art work, near High Bridge. Although not a member of the Society, her convictions often coincided with ours – most recently in arguing for

an Into Town bus-stop at the Prior's Oven lay-by as a way of getting passengers into the heart of the town without destroying the whole purpose of the pedestrianised area, and in urging a return to the town centre for the Johnson Drinking Fountain. In a characteristic gesture a few years ago, after a brief chat with the Society's planning officers about the application they were examining in the Council Offices atrium, she opened her purse and handed the Society a donation – as a personal thank-you for sending her a copy of the Newsletter each time. (The other Spalding councillors get one, too.)



With a revived Flower Parade only a few weeks away, a few glimpses of former parades from both the street and behind the scenes seemed appropriate.

See also p.7.

THE DRAGON STOPPED BREATHING

MID-MORNING – and a quietness starts to settle on the town, like the hush you get after a fall of snow. The central roads are being closed down and the under-growl of traffic fades into silence. The town is holding its breath – until, faintly in the distance, the sound of a band begins. One o'clock. The Tulip Parade is under way.

Originally, the Parade started from the Halley Stewart Field and finished there. By 2010 it had for some years begun and ended at Springfields. The route ran along Queen's Road, Halmer Gate and Love Lane, turned right along the river to the tricky crossing of High Bridge, then through the town centre to Pinchbeck Road and West Elloe Avenue to return to Springfields.

The procession was headed by a troop of mounted police, then came the 20 or so large floats and several smaller ones, with about 10 marching bands at intervals. The large floats were sponsored by local firms such as Geo.Adams, Lingarden and Geest's and nationals such as the East Midlands Electricity Board, British Rail, and the Halifax Building Society. Each has its crew, costumed and cushioned amongst the banks of tulip heads or walking alongside. The smaller floats are the work of local clubs and organisations: the Gleed School, churches, the Young Farmers and a village or two. It takes about two-and-a-half hours to get round.

The marshalling of the vast and varied assemblage, over 700 in all, is little short of a miracle. One o'clock approaches. A late child is lifted onto a float. The Parade starts. On time.

Then stops. A float is discovered to have two flat tyres. The Parade's breakdown vehicle is called up – everything has been thought of – and two men disappear under the float's skirting. Re-inflated, the procession gets under way again.

Queen's Road, Halmer Gate It's roasting hot. Everyone has a bottle of water. When emptied, there are some walking the route with large bottles, three or four to a bag, to refill the empties. A young tiger on the *Jungle Books* float takes his head off and wipes a paw across a streaming face. Toilets? Oh dear, yes. toilets. "Miss, I can't wait." People living along the route are kind and understanding, and will let a desperate little Goldilocks or Grumpy or Sneezzy use the toilet in their house. Relieved, Goldilocks runs to catch up with her Three Bears. Love Lane, the river and the councillors' grandstand

Another pause. Another flat tyre. This time at High Bridge. And that's where the dragon stops breathing as well. A quick bit of adjustment to the smoke machine somewhere in the flowers. And then the dragon is on his way again up Bridge Street and through the Market Place, nostrils puffing contentedly each time the button is pressed.

The floats had begun life months before, their skeletons hammered and welded into shape one by one by Geoff Dodd at the Chain Bridge Forge, and then fleshed out with layers of polystyrene glued together. With them eventually all gathered in a large auction shed on Winfrey Avenue, it is a race against time now. Cropped a few days before, the tulip heads have been brought in from all over the district, sorted by colour into the sort of huge canvas bags you find in builders' yards – red, purple, pink, yellow, white Then, with two or three days to go, the pinning begins, a thousand heads per square yard.

It is all entirely voluntary. Workers from a sponsoring firm work on *their* float, drawing in family members, neighbours, friends, friends of friends, mates from school, all recruited by word of

mouth in these pre-Facebook days. Most come along after tea. There is no reward, not even a special viewing space reserved for those who've pinned their fingers almost red-raw. It's partly competitive, of course, but there is a great feeling of community spirit. It was felt to be more an honour like to be part of it, an event famous throughout the country and beyond.

And flock from far and near people did, 100,000 or more when the parade was at its height, some year after year, like the London Underground driver and his wife we chatted to. British Rail laid on special trains. The Grammar School's West Field was crammed edge to edge with coaches. Caravans, campervans and tents filled its Memorial Field. And it was the same at the Gleed. Pop-up carparks popped up on brownfield sites. The Gleed School opened up its kitchen and canteen to serve breakfasts for those on its fields who'd stayed overnight. The Rugby Club did the same for the campers and camper-vanners on the Memorial Field.

It was not only spectators who flocked in either, but stall-traders from all over as well. By 8.30 any space too small to park a car had its array, most noticeably between the bus station and the town centre: giant teddies and pandas, potted plants, cheap shoes, baseball hats, trumpets and trinkets, the latest playground craze, hot dogs, plastic toys, mugs with the Lincoln Imp and tea-towels with the Cathedral, fizzy drinks, parasols or umbrellas according to the forecast, sparkly things, T-shirts with slogans, balloons, and little folding canvas stools – it's a long time to stand.

It is a glorious fund-raising opportunity for churches and charities, too. Circulating amongst the crowds and along the route, conspicuous in their clown's get-up, South Holland Rotary regularly collect £10,000 in their collecting buckets, to be shared half to the Parade organisation and half to the charities Rotary supports. The charity stalls tend to cabbages and cauliflowers, onions and rhubarb, fresh from allotments and back gardens and home-made cakes and marmalade, and, particularly welcome as the afternoon wears on, a cup of tea and a sit-down in the church hall.

With up to 100,000 visitors in the town centre and along the route, public order and security are an obvious concern and neighbouring police forces have

been called on for support. Their surveillance vehicles have TV cameras on tall masts at two or three particularly crowded spots – across from the Lincolnshire Poacher, for example – but there's rarely any serious trouble. Some drunkenness and shop-lifting inevitably – so that some shops think it wiser to stay closed on parade day – and lost children to be restored to their parents.

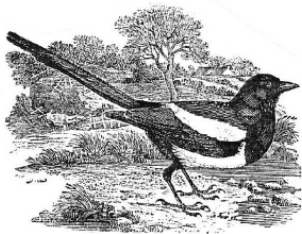
With the parade over, the trains and coaches and cars and the crowds begin to depart, with their balloons and souvenir programmes and rhubarb, leaving a floating layer of drinks cans and plastic 'glasses' at High Bridge and a town that feels oddly empty now as evening settles in. Not silent, though. There's laughter from the pubs and music from the Radio One disco in the South Holland Centre. On the darkening school fields the tents are scattered baubles of light. And on a hundred kitchen and committee room tables the good-cause takings are being counted.

Visitors who like things a bit quieter would come into Spalding on the Sunday to view the floats set out in the Springfields arena and, as they drive home, stop perhaps at one of the village churches to marvel at the imaginative displays in the flower-filled interiors, and take back with them a little something of South Holland, home-grown or home-made.

Andrew and Marianne Upton.
(as told to the Editor)



Marianne was one of those who walked the route with the refuelling bottles of water in 2010 and it was Andrew who got the dragon breathing again. The dragon float is one of the few surviving from past parades and will be part of the show again this year – with smoke!

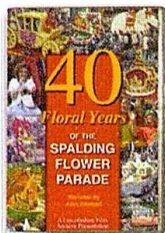


The award-winners in our midst

The seated statue of Virginia Woolf at Richmond-upon-Thames, where she lived for 10 years, was unveiled in November. It is (half) seen here with her great niece (*centre*), friends, family and the sculptor, Laury Dizengremel (*right*). It was Laury who created our *Hiring* bronze in Hall Place. I wonder if Spalding has fully woken up to the fact that, thanks to the Society, the town has the work of two award-winning artists, Joseph Hillier and Laury Dizengremel, enhancing the town centre. Both have made national press headlines since their Spalding work. *The Hiring* and Joseph's 14 mini-bronzes are the first two commissions in our Market Art Project, in partnership with Transported Art, whose programme director is the guest speaker at our AGM this year. (See p.2)



Photo courtesy *The Guardian*



THE SPALDING FLOWER PARADE

Features colour film of the first Spalding tulip parade in 1959, film coverage of the next two decades' events, with highlights of more recent ones including the 40th Anniversary flower parade. Narrated by Alan Stennett.

039D DVD £10.00

SPRINGFIELDS – THE ORIGINAL

A fascinating colour film following the development of empty grass fields to the north of Spalding into the beautiful showground gardens of the British Bulb Industry, finishing with scenes from the first tulip

VIDEOS

For further information about these two DVDs or to order, contact
Primetime Video, Merrywood Studios, PO Box 140, Boston, PE22 0ZP or 01205 750055 (9am to 6pm Mon - Sat)



Development v. Heritage

Our near-neighbours Peterborough Civic Society and Peterborough City Council have played a key part in a national research project looking at the problem of development in historic cities, where the two often conflict. Funded by Historic England, the project was carried out by a partnership of national heritage bodies, with a major input from civic societies..

Now completed, the report – *Towards a Better Balance between Heritage and Growth* – can be found on Peterborough Civic Society's website. The Executive Summary, despite the label, is readable – and short.

https://www.peterboroughcivicsociety.org.uk/news_and_views.php#ACTreport

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