

Truro Civic Society

Chairman's Report AGM 2011.

We have had a good year as a Society. Our public profile has been good – Daphne Worraker's 'Smile' campaign being a highlight, and the Local List feature (which remains to be finished off) being a contribution to the future of our heritage. We welcomed Richard Best, the West Briton editor, to a meeting and he spoke of 'being a platform for community conversations'. I think he is fulfilling his promise and the Society is clearly a thoughtful participant.

I'm sure you still recoil in distaste at the destruction of the Millpool Bridge. After the AGM you'll be hearing from Perran Gay, and I hope that you will probe him, as a representative of the Cathedral, on exactly what efforts are being made to replace the medieval clapper bridge which has been so unnecessarily removed, with something well designed which functions as a bridge and also contributed to generating energy, as did the Millpool Bridge during the working life of the mill – which was probably at least two centuries and probably more.

I remain hopeful that, as we come closer to the point of needing to select the means of generating renewable energy for the future (and events in Japan may propel us forward on this path more quickly than many have, as yet, assumed) the merits of harnessing Truro's water with undershot water wheels and turbines will come to the fore. I hope the Society will agree to pursue this line.

I hear that work is due to begin on 15/16 St Clement Street (hopefully to be known as Tapp's Row). 'Seeing is believing' but I was told this by Mr England, the Area Planning Chief – so we must trust that this will be the case.

The fight continues over the future of Agriculture House, although, the longer it goes on, the less likely will it be to retain the house. It has fallen victim to lead thieves, which is not good news!

I am beginning to hear that we may need to consider our position over the Alfred Cornelius tribute to Lutyens, which is Parklands, off Tregolls Road. I consider this to be one of the finest 20th century buildings in Truro, set in grounds which I believe were also designed by Cornelius as part of the scheme.

But, it is to the immediate future that we need to turn our attention. We have involved ourselves as best we can in the process of strategic planning, and we now find the town surrounded by applications (and pending applications) for housing, supermarkets, a stadium and other developments. It is incredible to think that these applications are coming forward whilst we are recovering from the rejection of the Carrick Core Strategy and are about two years from signing-off the Cornwall Core Strategy, and at least a year from completing the Truro and Surrounding Parishes Area Plan. Quite what the relationship between the horse and the cart actually is must be filed as 'Mystery' in the 'Enigma' section of the Library!

Perhaps the most controversial of these propositions is the outcome of the wierd 'marriage' between Cornwall Council and the Duchy of Cornwall, which is gestating a Waitrose Supermarket and a skyline, mock-Georgian crescent of 95 dwellings pointing towards Tresillian. I'm sure that John Crowther will describe his view of this – it is a view with which I fully concur. He is being both generous and forthright in his actions on this matter. We are lucky to have a retired architect of such reputation active in the Society and I have greatly appreciated his support as my Vice chairman over the past two years. If he tries to stand down, don't let him!!!!

I am appalled that, after ten years of developing a cogent case, the Transport Authority is abandoning its efforts to develop its relationship with Network Rail and to pursue a rail-based option for providing access to mainline towns between Camborne and St Austell. This is short-sighted and unpopular – increasing numbers of people and businesses are acknowledging to long-term desirability of developing this relatively low-carbon option, and the Council is not advocating Cornwall's case sufficiently clearly or loudly to the Government – it is merely doing what its told, which never gets Cornwall anywhere! I hope we will continue to fight for this.

There is much more to be reported. May I please thank everybody who has involved themselves in the life of the Society – Reg Bowyer and Armored Carlyon do sterling service at the Conservation Committee, and I'm heartened to see Daphne Worraker has (with a smile!) joined the committee. Michael Swift continues to look after the website and to engage with schools. Caroline Jones is nothing short of miraculous – she's the Treasurer, but she also comes round and helps me organise my head to do what needs to be done, and generally coordinates your Society.

We receive great support and regular updates on the commercial health and activities of the Truro BID Company from Neil Scott. He is making an essential contribution to the town and his sensibilities are of great value as we grapple with a complex future.

Most of all I would be neglectful in the extreme if I did not, on your behalf, extend a heartfelt expression of thanks to Edwina, whose dedication to the record of our business, her accuracy and her consistent cheerfulness make such a contribution to our meetings. In my rock 'nd roll days I would say: 'Wot a STAR!'

I'm very sorry to not be at the AGM – I've been appointed as a lowly member of the UK Delegation to the Council of Europe's Congress of Regional and Local Authorities and I shall be kicking my heels in Strasbourg as you meet. Strangely enough, the first item on the Congress agenda is a debate on the proposal by the Council of Europe to abolish the Congress – must be something I said!

I'm conscious that Peter Blake has been unwell and let us spare a moment to think of him. Let's also welcome all the new faces (and one or two long-distance returners, so I understand) who are joining us around the table – the more the merrier. We must deal with serious issues at our meetings, and I suspect that things are going to be quite difficult in the coming months – but it is, in my view, important to be cheerful and friendly and I hope that these values characterise our meetings.

One final thing – it has been great to see the Mayor, Ron Cooke, coming along to meetings, and also taking a lead in certain issues which he has judiciously selected. He has had an unexpectedly eventful Mayoralty, and I hope you will join me in a vote of thanks to him for his support of the society and for the manner in which he has occupied the role of Truro's 'first citizen' – let's hope he keeps coming, eh folks!!!??

Thank you all for your support and fellowship over the year. If you're prepared to have me I'm happy to continue as Chairman for another year. I think it is important to refresh things from time to time and not let complacency set in, so, it may be timely then for the Society to be considering a change.

Onwards and upwards
Gans gorhhemynadow a'n gwella
Bert