



# THE WORTHING SOCIETY

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## NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 2011

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### FORTHCOMING QUARTERLY MEETING 27 SEPTEMBER 2011

**The next Quarterly Meeting of The Worthing Society will take place on Tuesday 27 September 2011 at 7.30pm in the Worthing Library Lecture Theatre.**

Our Chairman, David Sumner, will be giving a talk on his specialist subject, the **History of the Connaught Theatre**. At a time when the future of the Connaught is in doubt, it is particularly appropriate that we highlight this much loved entertainment venue in the town.

#### **Editor's Note on the future of the Assembly Hall:**

Mr Paul Yallop, Leader of Worthing Council, recently had a letter published in the Worthing Herald responding to our appeal for the Council to retain ownership of the Assembly Hall. Mr Yallop stated in his letter that there has been poor audience attendance at Wurlitzer Organ events, and as a result, concerts were being subsidised by local taxpayers. The Sussex Theatre Organ Trust have advised us that there has been *no loss* to the Council when they have held Wurlitzer Concerts in the Assembly Hall as the Trust meets the *full* cost of the concerts including the cost of Publicity and the Box Office. On this basis, even if no one had attended, the Council would suffer no loss!

Whatever the truth may be, there is no doubt that large audiences would help to persuade Worthing Council that it is not in the interests of the town to lose this famed concert hall with its celebrated acoustics. The hall is home to the largest concert organ in Europe and on 25th September there is an unmissable treat when Carlo Curley, dubbed the "Pavarotti of the Organ", will be performing. It is often said of public facilities that we should use them or lose them. This concert gives us an opportunity to demonstrate that the citizens of Worthing are **not** prepared to tolerate the loss of such a unique venue and instrument. We urge all our members to attend on 25th September and support our campaign in defence of the Assembly Hall. Inside this Newsletter you will find more information about the history of the Assembly Hall, the Worthing Wurlitzer and their importance to the town.

**The Worthing Wurlitzer Celebrity Concert  
Featuring the World Famous Carlo Curley  
Sunday 25th September  
Assembly Hall  
2.30pm**

### A REMINDER FROM YOUR MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

Subscriptions for the year 2011/12 were due on 1 April at £9 for a single person and £14 for joint membership. These may be paid at the meeting or cheques can be sent to the Membership Secretary, Susan Miller. Cheques to be made payable to The Worthing Society. Please enclose a stamped addressed envelope.

## THE WORTHING SOCIETY EVENTS FOR 2011/2012

SEP Saturday 24th a COACH OUTING - a morning visit to the 15th century timber framed yeoman's cottage known as THE PRIEST HOUSE, West Hoathly and in the afternoon a visit to HAMMERWOOD PARK, East Grinstead, an amazing stately home and park built in 1792 and once owned by Led Zeppelin – viewing this property is an outing not to be missed. Lunch can be taken at the Cat Inn or Intrepid Fox, alternatively you may bring your own picnic.

The cost of the coach is £16.50 per person.

The morning visit to The Priest House, the walk through the village and the visit to the Norman Church is £2.70 for the tour. Tea/coffee and cake is £2.50

The visit and tour of Hammerwood Park, including tea and cakes, is £9.00

Please indicate if you plan to do only one visit and travel by car.

ALL TO BE PAID IN ADVANCE OF THE OUTING.

Please make your cheques payable to The Worthing Society, enclosing a stamped addressed envelope to receive arrival and departure times and directions, and send to Christine Roberts, 24 Marine Crescent, Goring by Sea, BN12 4JF. Telephone 01903 700 325, e-mail [travel\\_editor@btinternet.com](mailto:travel_editor@btinternet.com)

SEP Tuesday 27th at 7:30pm QUARTERLY MEETING in the Worthing Library Lecture Theatre Our Chairman David Sumner will give a talk on 'The History of the Connaught Theatre'.

NOV Tuesday 22nd at 7:30pm QUARTERLY MEETING in the Worthing Library Lecture Theatre when Emily and The Hares will entertain with a collection of Sussex Songs and Readings. At this meeting mince pies and mulled fruit punch or coffee will be served at a cost of £1 per person. The pre-Christmas raffle will also take place this evening. Donations of raffle prizes will be very much appreciated on the night!

DEC Saturday 10th COACH OUTING to The Royal Albert Hall to see John Rutter's CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION CONCERT with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. Tickets will be on sale at the September meeting or alternatively telephone Mascha Richards 01903 214 519. Inclusive ticket costs £33 (same price as 2009).

FEB Tuesday 28th at 7.30pm QUARTERLY MEETING in the Worthing Library Lecture Theatre Speakers: Bill Avenall – Retired Deputy Head of Christ's Hospital will give an illustrated talk on the origins and 500 year history of the school.

**Please remember that prior to quarterly meetings Committee Members will be available from 7pm to talk to members wishing to discuss matters of interest or concern.**

Visitors/Guests are welcome to attend the lectures – fee £3

Don't forget to look at our new website for the latest news – [www.worthingsociety.org.uk](http://www.worthingsociety.org.uk)

## **CHAIRMAN'S COMMENT**

### **Localism – Is It Just Smoke And Mirrors?**

"Well, I think if you say you're going to do something and don't do it, that's trustworthiness" – George W Bush in 2000.

I am in suspect company. Bob Neil, the Local Government Minister, accused the National Trust and the Campaign to Protect Rural England of mounting a carefully choreographed smear campaign drawn up by left-wingers within their national headquarters. Me – left wing? Suspected by some of being to the right of Genghis Khan, over the years suspected of being a libertarian, worse a liberal and long ago a libertine!

The row is over the proposed National Planning Policy Framework which slithered into light in time for the recess. It simplifies the regulations from more than 1000 pages to 52. Among the reforms of the Town and Country Act 1947 is the idea that there should always be a "presumption" in favour of allowing sustainable development. Alarm bells rang for me when George Osborne, in his Budget Speech said "We will introduce a new presumption in favour of sustainable development, so that the default answer to development is "Yes"." He also claimed that planning was a "chronic obstacle to economic growth". Debateable.

Developers have massive land banks waiting for a change in the economy.

Local people will not be allowed to appeal against pro development decisions.

The Treasury has resurrected the idea that growth can be drummed up through construction.

I thought it was the last lot with fat controller Prescott who wanted to concrete over S.E. England. Now we have a new fat controller's inspectors telling us the "pressing need" for houses in an area outweighs the need to protect green spaces.

The notions of the Big Society – people taking more responsibility and Localism seem ethereal. We were promised less top down planning and more local decision-making. Neighbourhood plans could even initiate development. In practice, these plans have to fit with the Local Development Plans which has primacy. The Worthing Society was almost alone in taking part when Worthing's LDF had its Examination in Public.

If the new proposals are just a variation of the old model of central control, the row will go on.

So often, Ministers speak out in knee-jerk reaction. Politicians complain of being misunderstood. To me, the thing that matters is not presentation but policy. Clear and simple, thought out with intellectual rigour, drawn up carefully by the executive and scrutinised by Parliament.

Meanwhile, as things go, we could say goodbye to Goring Gap and anything else that is green

## **OUR MEMBERSHIP OF CIVIC VOICE**

**The Society is a member of Civic Voice, the national charity which champions and supports the work of the civic movement. Membership of Civic Voice gives our members the opportunity to obtain free passes for National Trust and English Heritage properties.**

The free National Trust pass is available to download from - [www.civicvoice.org.uk/nationaltrustcivicvoiceoffer](http://www.civicvoice.org.uk/nationaltrustcivicvoiceoffer) - This pass is transferable to friends or family if you already have NT membership.

The free English Heritage pass can be used 1 September 2011 and 31 January 2012 and is available from:- [www.civicvoice.org.uk/englishheritagepassoffer](http://www.civicvoice.org.uk/englishheritagepassoffer) - This pass is not transferable.

Members without internet access can obtain passes by request from Civic Voice, Unit 101, 82 Wood Street, Liverpool L1 4DQ enclosing a stamped addressed envelope, and mentioning membership of the Worthing Society

## **CHAIRMAN'S MISCELLANY**

**The Connaught Theatre** Just a potential development site? The future of the town's theatres hangs in the air. At the time of writing, the interested parties submitting proposals to take over the running of the theatres is due to be short listed and after 22 August 2011 the chosen will be invited to present detailed plans. What is clear is that WBC want rid of the lot, and behind closed doors, those who do not know what to do will try to choose someone who does, no doubt aided by consultants paid for by the £20,000 Contingency Fund.

With the Connaught, the Assembly Hall, with its great Wurlitzer organ and world-class acoustics, is also vulnerable. Meanwhile, the Pier Pavilion is getting a new tin hat.

Fifty or so years ago, when the population was about 70,000 souls, Worthing had a thriving theatre of national repute, four cinemas, an all year round Municipal Orchestra, concerts and variety, Balls and dances and a fine variety of shops.

The demography of Worthing has changed and we face a decade of austerity. Some inspiration is needed otherwise our town will be diminished.

**The Teville Gate** dream continues with a revised scheme due to be considered by the Planning Committee on 21 September 2011. The revisions are minor and the two residential towers remain the dominant feature. Viability of the project in the prevailing economic climate remains to be seen. Hanson-Capital Management, which is behind the scheme, also has the option on the town centre site south of Union Place. A lot of the town's eggs are in their basket.

**West Durrington** consortium development plans for 700 houses on the site, excluding the ancient woodland, is now included in the Local Development Plan despite our representations. We will oppose the application because the site is on an area which soaks up water flowing from the South Downs and helps prevent flooding. The Consortium's solution, using a series of balancing pools, is unproven.

**Castle Goring** which is Worthing's "at risk" Grade I building will be surveyed again by English Heritage to gauge any further deterioration since the 2006 survey. Do not expect WBC to act. We have alerted the new South Downs National Park Authority's, Historic Buildings officer to the structures perilous state.

**Lemo Launch** On 11 April 2011, accompanied by Tony Malone, I attended the official opening of the new Lemo building in North Street. The encouragement and help of the Society was acknowledged in speeches. After drinks, we toured the building and met staff. Lemo is the type of business Worthing (and the country) needs with its specialised added value products. We are fortunate to have companies like B & W Speakers and Ricardo Engineering here. More needed.

## **THE WORTHING SOCIETY WITH CIVIC VOICE**

**The South Coast Conference** on 18 June 2011 at the St. Paul's Centre was attended by nearly 60 representatives of civic societies from as far away as Hunstanton, Margate, Brighton, Hove, Shoreham by Sea, Littlehampton, Chichester, Portsmouth and Torbay. The success of the event was due to the organising ability and persistence of Mascha Richards. Planning was the hot potato. Speakers covered the forthcoming Localism Bill, regeneration of coastal towns, the threats to the Green belt. The adoption of the Cabinet system by some Councils was criticised as well as the notion of elected mayors. Our website carries a fuller report. It was apparent that all civic groups have similar concerns to make the place where we live more attractive, enjoyable and distinctive.

### **Natalie Cropper – An Appreciation**

The eagle-eyed reader will have noticed that the Society has welcomed a new Hon. Secretary, Gill Tucker. Natalie decided it was time to stand down following some ill health, though she remains a member of the Executive Committee.

The Society owed much to Natalie. Her indefatigable and indomitable spirit, and sense of mission, has helped to make the Society the force it is. She was on the Committee of the original Worthing Civic Society in the 1970s as was I, for a short time too. That Committee was there to add legitimacy to whatever the formidable Pat Baring decided should be the next campaign.

Natalie joined the Committee of the newly constituted Worthing Society in 1982, eventually becoming Secretary and, for a while, Treasurer, as well. At one time, the Society may have ceased to exist but for her efforts to find replacement Committee members. She roped me in during 2000. Her network and contacts spread far and thankfully they will not be lost to the Society. She will have something to say at the next meeting of the Committee.

**David Sumner**

**Listings & Conservation Sub-Committee report from Vice Chairman Tony Malone**

Our Sub-Committee has continued to be very busy since the last newsletter. Unfortunately, two (Ted Kennard and Natalie Cropper) out of the five Sub-Committee members have had health issues this year which, naturally, has restricted their involvement in Society activities. We all wish them a speedy recovery.

We submitted a case for listing The Connaught Theatre in late June. Listing has been attempted in years gone by but without success, however, we now have substantially more data and photographs to back-up a new submission. English Heritage haven't yet given their response but we remain hopeful. In the current uncertain climate for Worthing's entertainment venues we believe that listing would give The Connaught a degree of protection.

Because of the threat to the world-renowned Wurlitzer organ housed in the Assembly Hall we requested an upgrade of the Hall's listing to 2\* in order to give the Wurlitzer greater protection. English Heritage turned this down - we have lodged an Appeal.

We are waiting for a response from English Heritage to review their decision not to list Marine Gardens. We are also waiting to hear English Heritage's response to the 'Candia' (St John Ambulance HQ) and Alexandra Tavern listing applications. Other potential listing candidates 'on our books' include the Spiritualist Church in Grafton Road and the WWI war memorial adjacent to St Paul's church.

The Sub-Committee's 'Buildings at Risk' register includes REPS studio in Portland Road. A planning application has just been lodged with Planning Department for houses in the Grafton Road courtyard side; flats inside the main building and renovation of the exterior. As it falls within our remit, the Sub-Committee viewed the plans. We felt that, although it was good news that the deteriorating exterior would be restored, the height and mass of the planned houses on the west side did seem to intrude upon the setting of the Grade II listed REPS building. Our Executive Committee has not yet met to discuss this but we anticipate that either we, or the Executive Committee, will comment accordingly to Planning Office. English Heritage recently held a 'Heritage Angels' competition for individuals or Societies such as ours, with awards for saving, or attempting to save, important 'heritage assets'. Given our involvement over many years in negotiations to preserve Castle Goring the Sub-Committee decided to submit this on behalf of The Worthing Society. We should know the result by the time this newsletter has been distributed. If we are successful, we felt that the resulting publicity (which will be on television and in the national press) could only be a good thing for our Society.

Councillor David Chapman contacted the Sub-Committee recently to ask for our assistance in a fund-raising 'Edwardian Tea Party' at St Paul's Centre on 14 Sept (13:00 to 16:00) in aid of the restoration fund for the WWI war memorial adjacent to St Paul's. It appears that neither the Council nor St Paul's church have responsibility for its maintenance. We felt that we should play our part so we came up with the idea of identifying as much detail as possible about the 100 or so individuals of that parish who are named on the memorial. We have so far managed to document some details on about 80 of the fallen, with the intention of advertising this well in advance of the 'Tea Party' so that interested parties (e.g. descendants) will, hopefully, want to come along on the day to look at the documentation.

Meetings every few months with the Council's Conservation Architect, in order to address agenda items in common, have proved valuable. The next such meeting will be 26<sup>th</sup> August 2011.

We have implemented an on-line archive of our listing applications. Those applications that succeed will be accessible to anyone logging-on to our website. Confidentiality rules demand that those items that are still under consideration by English Heritage are only accessible to Executive Committee members. The archive also contains other important data and will not only provide a secure back up for important data but will also facilitate the sharing of that data between Committee members.

On our various site visits around Worthing it has become increasingly obvious that, at some stage, it would be valuable for the Sub-Committee to undertake a phased walking tour of the Borough in order to properly document listed buildings at risk; buildings that may be suitable for listing or inclusion on the Local Interest Register and commenting (in a positive manner) on the state of the (currently 26) Conservation Areas within Worthing. This will be no mean feat, so it will take a lot of time and 'person-power'. Our resources continue to be stretched so this may be one for 'the back-burner'.

## NOTES FROM 'NEWCOMER'

The Worthing Herald recently published a letter from our Society, appealing for Worthing Borough Council to retain ownership of the Grade 2 listed Assembly Hall as an entertainment venue. We have also submitted an application to English Heritage for the Hall to be upgraded to a star rating so as to further protect to its future.

At a recent meeting of the Society's Executive, we had a visit from Mr Jim Buckland of the Sussex Theatre Organ Trust. Jim is the owner of the Wurlitzer Organ installed in the Assembly Hall and has produced a dossier of information which demonstrates that the combination of the Hall's famed acoustics together with the largest Wurlitzer Organ in Europe is a "match made in heaven". World famous artists regularly come to perform on this famed instrument. Sadly, rather than nurture this unique Worthing combination, our Council has issued notice to Mr Buckland that he must remove the organ before April 2012. This order has been issued despite the fact that removal costs could be as high as £1,000,000 (and may have to be met by the Council !) In addition, the organ structure is so substantial, the removal process would create unavoidable damage to the fabric and structure of the Assembly Hall.

Do the Council have the right to get rid of the Assembly Hall? Have they considered how this valuable facility came to be built? Research into the origins of the Hall reveals that the Council is turning its back on one of Worthing's most venerable and generous benefactors, Alderman J G Denton who was 4 times elected Mayor and a Freeman of the town.

Mr Denton was a local businessman who served on Worthing Borough Council and in 1922, presented as a gift to the town, the Denton Gardens Park, he also gave the town Denton Lounge adjacent to the Pier Pavilion. Towards the end of his life, Mr Denton donated the then huge sum of £40,000 (£2,000,000 at today's values!) for the building and furnishing of the Assembly Hall. The Town Hall in Chapel Road and the Assembly Hall were designed by the architect C C Voysey to be complimentary to each other but the Council deferred the building of the Hall due to cost factors. Without Mr Denton's generosity we may not have had the Assembly Hall.

Set out below is the edited text from two letters sent to Worthing Council by Mr Denton. They reveal not only his generosity but also his request that his wonderful gift to the townsfolk of Worthing be held in the guardianship of Worthing Borough Council, so that its facilities could be enjoyed by the citizens of the town "*in perpetuity*".

NB In the 1930's, what we now call the "Town Hall" was referred to as the "Municipal Buildings or Offices". The term "Town Hall" was used when referring to an *actual* hall or meeting place. Mr Denton's gift therefore relates to the Assembly Hall only and not to the whole Council building complex.

1. ***"To His Worship The Mayor Councillor T Ernest Hawkins  
21st July 1933***

Dear Mr Mayor

Municipal Offices and New Town Hall

I have been considering for some time past whether it would not be in the interest of the Ratepayers for this scheme, as originally proposed, to be completed without further delay. I believe the Hall or Assembly Room which it is contemplated erecting, form part of a plan prepared by the Architect, and though it was decided by the Town Council not to proceed for the present with the Assembly Hall, this decision was arrived at as the Council considered the ratepayers could not, at that time, bear the cost in addition to the cost of erecting and furnishing new offices, council chamber, etc.

I feel very strongly that an Assembly Hall would answer a very useful purpose not only for the present townspeople but in years to come. If the Town Council are of the opinion that the completion of the scheme would be of advantage to the Borough I am willing to contribute the sum of £40,000 for that purpose. I understand this amount should suffice for the erection and equipment of the building.

Should this offer be acceptable to the Council I would desire to express a wish that there should be no undue delay in proceeding with the matter. I am getting on in years and am anxious to do something for the town of my adoption and with that object in view, I should like if possible to see the completion of the scheme during my lifetime.

Yours faithfully

J G Denton"

2. "27th April 1935

Dear Mr Mayor

I much regret, owing to illness, I shall be unable to attend the formal opening ceremony of the Assembly Hall on Wednesday. I shall therefore feel obliged if you would kindly explain to the company assembled, the cause of my absence. I expressed in my letter to the Mayor of Worthing on 21st July 1933 the reasons which prompted me to make the offer of £40,000 for the erection of the building now completed, and I may say my views have not changed in any way. I sincerely hope and trust the Ratepayers will appreciate and use the building and that it will prove beneficial not only to the present but to the future inhabitants of the Borough.

I would like to add it is not my desire or wish for any restrictions or condition should attach to the Gift. I hand it to the Town Council as representing the governing Authority of the Borough and their successors *in perpetuity* in order that they may in their discretion determine at all times the purposes and the charges to be made in respect thereof.

Yours faithfully

J G Denton

#### From the Finance and Law Committee Minutes 10th May 1935:

At a great assembly of Worthing citizens and distinguished visitors held on Wednesday the first day of May 1935, convened to witness the opening of the New Town Hall, the gift of Alderman James Gurney Denton.

RESOLVED: That this great gathering of Worthing citizens and distinguished visitors congregated to witness the opening of this New Town Hall the gift of Alderman James Gurney Denton, unanimously tender warm thanks to him for his splendid generosity.

It has learned with profound regret that Mr Denton's health will not permit him to be present on this auspicious occasion and earnestly hopes for his early and complete recovery.

Valuable as the gift of this hall is from a financial point of view, this meeting is satisfied that it will prove of even more lasting worth, not only in providing for the needs and convenience of meetings of the citizens for many generations to come, but as an inspiration and incentive to Worthing people to serve the town in their day as Alderman Denton has so worthily done in his time.

Certified and dated this first day of May 1935

J. B Bennett – Mayor of Worthing “

J. Kennedy Allerton –Town Clerk of Worthing.

#### Newcomer's comments:

I have no doubt that our current Council are also committed to serving the needs of Worthing residents and fully understand the meaning of the phrase 'in perpetuity'. The Collins Shorter English Dictionary interpretation for "**in perpetuity**" is, quite simply "**Forever**". Are the citizens of Worthing prepared to tolerate their Councils plan to ignore the sentiments of Alderman Denton's generosity and his magnificent contribution to Worthing's built heritage?

(I am indebted to the Worthing Society Secretary, Gill Tucker for her research in Worthing Library which revealed Mr Denton's letters and also for the helpful assistance she received from Library staff.)

N.B. It is ironic that the above Council minute was signed by Town Clerk J. Kennedy Allerton. At the time of writing this article, the house Mr Allerton built at 44 Marine Parade (to match the style of the adjacent Marine Gardens) is being demolished to make way for a development which will be out of keeping with its surroundings. In addition to this, by the time you receive your next newsletter, we will also have lost the Beach Hotel. Are the residents of Worthing aware that bit by bit their architectural heritage continues to disappear?