

USK CIVIC SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

September 2005: Issue 32

Community Pride Plaques: Progress

Unveiling of first plaque by Lord Raglan

On Wednesday 13 July, our President, the Lord Raglan, unveiled the first of 27 plaques to be installed in Usk under the Community Pride project of 2005 –2006, which identifies historic sites and buildings in the Town.

As reported in the 2004 Newsletter (Issue 31) the plaque project was the subject of a Society submission in 2004 for grant aid. This was announced in February so the project is being financed by the Welsh Assembly Government and managed by the Welsh Development Agency under the Article 33 Rural Development Plan for Wales. All the plaques have to be bi-lingual and the Society has to fund 20% of the costs.

Our first plaque explains the origin of the word conigar as in Conigar Crescent – the mediaeval enclosure to provide rabbits for the table- and the Conigar Walk along the left bank of the River Usk. This was created in 1858 by local dignitaries to commemorate the marriage of Victoria, the Princess Royal, to Prince Frederick of Prussia.

This first plaque has been followed by two more. One adjoining Conigar Crescent at the end of the garden of Porthycarne House (by kind permission of two of our members, Tom and Felicity Crawley) commemorates the general location of the execution of St David Lewis in 1679 and can be seen over the wooden gate and fence at the end of the crescent. The other denotes the area of the Battle of Pwll Melyn in 1405 (recently

celebrated by the Pageant at Usk Castle). It has been placed alongside the pool in a quiet spot beneath the trees with the kind agreement of one of our members Lawrence Humphreys.

Both plaques are on large rocks of Millstone Grit from a farm at Bettws Newydd.

Later plaques will be on the site of the original 12th century Norman Market Hall, the site of Usk's mediaeval Hospital until 1402, the location of Usk's third gaol – the Old Bridewell – from about 1642 to 1842, and the first Grammar School founded in 1621.

Plaques at Owen Glyndwr Park, Usk Prison and at Usk Bridge will tell of their historical significance. The site of the second Japanning Works in Usk will have a plaque giving a brief account of its ownership and history from 1826 to 1860. The edges of the first Roman fort (55 - 65AD) and the second Roman fort (65 -120AD) will be marked by plaques in the pavement in Maryport Street and New Market Street.

The plaques are in Welsh and English and have been designed and manufactured for the Society by Ned Heywood of The Workshop Gallery in Chepstow. Ned got the commission in competition with three other suppliers on the basis of a keen price, his willingness to install the plaques and his proven craftsmanship in projects at Chepstow and Monmouth. The fact that he is locally based also weighed in his favour.

These plaques comprise Phase One of the project that extends into 2006 when the remaining 13 will be commissioned.

When all the plaques are in place, the Society will be producing a leaflet to be enclosed in the current Usk Town Trail Booklet, to note where plaques have been

installed so that tourists and visitors can follow the route around the town's picturesque streets.

At the unveiling of the first plaque at Conigar Walk were Assembly Member Lorna Jones, the Mayor of Usk Liz Fleming, County Councillor John Harrhy, the project co-ordinator Liz Thomas, Louisa Jones from the WDA, Ned Heywood the plaque designer and craftsman, the Civic Society Executive Committee and several interested members of the public. The event was featured in local newspapers and the quality and clarity of the plaques has been the subject of praise from many people and organisations.

Planning

The Planning Sub-Committee continues to peruse the weekly schedules of planning applications to keep abreast of proposals in the Usk and wider area, to submit objections where they are contrary to policy or fall short, in one respect or another. There has been over 50 worth attention and only three to which objection was sent.

Strong objection was registered to the Prison Service consultation on a new **activity centre for Usk Prison** on land at the rear of the Prison and adjoining houses in Priory Gardens. We thought the proposed walls and lighting were a brutal addition and pointed out that the site had a flooding history. The County Planning Committee has objected to the proposal and it remains to be seen whether the relevant Government departments will appoint an Inspector to hold an enquiry and recommend to them.

Objection was also made to the proposal for an estate of six houses on the flanks of a scheduled Ancient Monument at **Trelleck** that fortunately the applicant decided to withdraw.

We also thought that the application for a detached house in **Priory Street, Usk** had

no regard for the conservation area or the mediaeval street pattern and wrote to say so. The County Planning Committee has since refused it.

Some of the matters mentioned in the 2004 Newsletter are still live. The proposal to demolish **Railway Cottage** on the Raglan Road and build a pair of semi-detached house was refused and the applicants have appealed (to be dealt with by written representations including those submitted by the Society).

We did eventually receive a reply to our protest to BT about the siting of telegraph poles in **Church Street and New Market Street, Usk**. BT asserted that they had acted in keeping with their responsibilities and legal requirements. Our only recourse would be an appeal to the County Court but the grounds for appeal did not apply to the Society. We decided to leave it at that.

We expressed support for the conversion to three holiday units of buildings at **Trostrey Court** but asked that account be taken of the risk to children of the state of an adjoining building which itself is of unique historic importance.

The STOP PRESS report last year that an Inspector had dismissed the appeal at **Penyaemawr** for a stable block and manege to which the Society had objected has lead to the service of an Enforcement Notice by the County Planning Authority requiring conformity with the original permission. So far, the developer has reduced the area of the manege. We understand that the Enforcement Officer has appraised him of the next steps so as to conform to the original permission for a smaller stable block and there is the possibility of the matter appearing before the magistrates.

Representations were made about the clutter of signs and notices on the frontage of the **Castle Inn**, a listed building in Towyn Square. Action by County Officers has

resulted in the repositioning and reduction of some of them.

A Memorial for the birthplace of Alfred Russel Wallace OM FRS (b. 1823 in Llanbadoc)

In association with the Wallace Memorial Fund, the Executive Committee, through the Secretary and Anne Cluysenaar, a member of the Society, have embarked on a project to erect a memorial to commemorate the birthplace of this eminent Victorian. He was a naturalist, biogeographer, author and co-discoverer with Charles Darwin of the process of evolution by natural selection. A site at the rear but outside Llanbadoc Churchyard has received planning permission for a memorial stone and plaque. The stone is a large rock of carboniferous limestone that has been donated by Hansons plc from a quarry at Ogmere near Bridgend and at present lies at stonemasons in Cardiff. Preparations are in hand for the design and commissioning of a plaque with Wallace's portrait and a dedication.

The aim is for the memorial to be unveiled next spring by some of Wallace's descendants.

Usk Priory and Gatehouse

The Society has long been concerned about the parlous and deteriorating state of these historic buildings. The Executive Committee made representations to the County Planning Committee at the same time as the County Conservation Officer reported on his inspection of the buildings. We also wrote to CADW about the state of the Gatehouse – an Ancient Monument in their care. The Chairman and Secretary met the Planning Committee Chairman and County Officers and were advised that authority had been given for the serving of a Repairs Notice on the owner of the Priory. To date, the Conservation Officer has been supplied with a schedule of repairs to be undertaken by the owner in a fixed time-

scale and is monitoring what is happening. The Executive Committee is also being appraised and will represent again to the County Council if necessary.

CADW has assured the Executive Committee that they are pursuing the matter of the condition of the Gatehouse.

Traffic in and around Usk

Two matters of concern were the subject of letters to the Gwent Police and the County Highway Authority – heavy lorries through Usk and traffic speeds, notably along the Pontypool Road and from Usk Bridge southwards towards Llangybi where new speed restrictions have been introduced.

On the former, we received a lengthy explanation from Mr Roger Sweet on behalf of the Chief Constable about the traffic orders that the police have to enforce. The Committee thought that it was so important in clarifying the nature and purpose of the control measures that the content should be included in full in the Newsletter for the benefit of Society members.

You may be aware that The (Routes A472 and B4598 at Usk) Prohibition of Commercial Vehicles) Order was made and formally came into operation on 1st August 1995. However, due to certain signing deficiencies it could not be enforced by my officers until much later that year.

At the outset I should point out that the Order prohibits commercial vehicles exceeding 7.5 tonnes gross metric weight from using certain parts of the A472 and B4598 roads only. There is no suggestion the bridge over the river at Usk is weak and the Traffic Order was not introduced to protect that structure – it was made purely on environmental grounds.

It is often quite difficult, or even impossible, for individuals to accurately estimate the gross plated weight of a vehicle by observation alone. This is sometimes the case with some of my officers and I am sure the same applies to the majority of the members of the public who see large vehicles in a restricted area. The

police are required to produce documentary evidence to satisfactorily prove the plated weight of vehicles at Court.

Let me now turn to the practical difficulties associated with the enforcement of this type of traffic order. The extremities of the regulation extend from a point near the junction of B4235 Road to the east of Usk to the junction of A472/A4042 Roads near Little Mill. The length of the B4598 from its junction with A472 near The Three Salmons at Usk, in a generally northerly direction to its junction with Route 64 at Llanfinhangel Gobion is also included, so you can see the vast area covered.

It is worth noting at this point that a second Traffic Order known as The Gwent County Council (Various Roads, Caerleon and District) (Prohibition of Commercial Vehicles) Order 1985 exists and similarly prohibits commercial vehicles over 7.5 tonnes gross metric weight using certain roads. These roads are B4236 from a point on the Newport side of Caerleon river bridge to the junction with A4042 at Croesyceiliog, and the length of the Caerleon to Usk Road which extends from the Newport side of Caerleon river bridge to the junction with A472 on the Caerleon side of the Usk river bridge near the Woodside garage.

The same conditions apply with both Traffic Orders. In each case commercial vehicles over 7.5 tonnes gross metric weight are prohibited from using the specified roads in the restricted area. However, several exemptions to the regulations exist and the one which is probably taken advantage of the most is where vehicles are used for the conveyance of goods, persons or merchandise to or from premises situated on or adjacent to the lengths of specified roads. The exemption legally allows commercial vehicles over 7.5 tonnes gross metric weight to enter the restricted area to deliver to, or collect from, premises along the roads.

In an effort to successfully prosecute contraventions of the Order, police officers must be in a position to prove the vehicle entered the restricted area at one point and exited at another without stopping for one of the specified purposes, if the officer(s) stops the vehicle in the restricted area, by obtaining a confession from the driver that it was his/her intention to enter, pass through and exit the restricted area without stopping for one of the specified

purposes. In each case it is necessary to show the vehicle had a plated weight exceeding 7.5 tonnes, irrespective of whether it is laden or not.

It is plain to see from the examples I have given that a great deal of time and effort is required to satisfactorily prove just one violation of the Order. Other things such as crime, vandalism, drug abuse and attending public order situations already place a tremendous strain on my limited resources and unfortunately, in line with other Chief Constables, I find it necessary to prioritise the deployment of my officers.

I can assure you that the whole of the areas covered by the Usk and neighbouring weight restriction Orders are regularly patrolled by my officers, and they will continue to do so. In spite of the practical enforcement issue connected to this Order, we have not in any way attempted to ignore them.

I see little point in Society Members making notes of vehicle registration numbers with a view to passing them on to the police because of the evidence required to prove individual cases as I have described.

In the reply thanking Mr Sweet for his lucid response, the Executive Committee took some comfort from the penultimate paragraph of his letter. Our concern about the issue of speed enforcement along the Pontypool Road northwards and the Caerleon Road south from Usk Bridge produced a response from both Mr Sweet and the Safety Camera Unit. These replies undertook to monitor speeds along these roads as 'sites of community concern'. Society members may have seen the mobile cameras in operation at the start of a six-month period when a review will take place.

Imposition of car parking charges in Usk

The Executive Committee submitted objections to the proposal by the County Council to introduce charges to park in Usk car parks. Our objection included;

1. serious doubts about the estimates of expenditure and income which omitted the costs

- of enforcing street parking by the police;
2. the detrimental effects on the economy of the Town through the reduction in shopping trips, diversion to other centres where parking is free; the adverse effects on the Farmers' Market; contrary to, and undermining the County's own policy of Rural Regeneration;
 3. the detrimental effects on the street scene and the Conservation Area of the posts and signs needed to introduce residents' parking schemes.

Society Members will know that the County Council Cabinet on 10th August decided to proceed with the making of a Traffic Order to introduce charges. There seem to be different accounts about what was decided in detail and until the official minutes of the meeting are published, it is unwise to report on the effects. The Executive Committee will be considering whether any further action is open to them when they meet in early September.

New Licensing Laws

Society members will be aware from press coverage that new licensing laws come into effect from 1st September. These transfer the responsibility to grant licences to pubs, restaurants and places of entertainment from magistrates to local authorities such as the County Council. They also enable such premises to submit applications to vary the present licensing hours. These are advertised in the press and a notice displayed on the premises. The licensing authority is statutorily required to consult the police, environmental health, child protection, planning, trading standards, and the fire authority. Statutory consultation does not include Town and Community Councils nor the general public or bodies such as the Civic Society. All these have to rely on the press announcements or the

notice on the premises and submitted within 28 days from the date on the notice.

Representations about the already submitted applications for changes to licensing hours have to be sent to the licensing authority by 1st September on a form obtainable from them. Such representations have to relate to one of four licensing 'objectives,' viz:

- to prevent crime and disorder
- public safety
- to prevent public nuisance
- to protect children from harm.

Clearly, the closing date to submit representations on the present applications will have passed when this Newsletter is published but Society members should be aware of the procedure for future occasions. It is understood that representations can also be made about the experience and effects of extended hours on the locality, and if sufficiently serious, licences can be altered or revoked.

The Executive Committee will be considering at its meeting in early September what role the Society should have in these matters.

Awards

Each Autumn, for the last few years, one of the more enjoyable tasks for the Committee has been to consider suggestions for the Society's Award for Environmental Management and Improvement. Last November we decided that four Awards would be made and the certificates were presented, as usual, by our President, Lord Raglan, at the Christmas Party, this year held at David Guy's house in Porthycarne Gate. Receiving the Awards were: Graham Harris from Usk Environment and Conservation Group for Jane's Meadow, the wild flower garden opposite the Sessions House; Kay Peacock and John Murphy for the Environmental Trail at Usk Church in Wales Primary School; Brian and Araceli Bird for the restoration of Bertholey House

and finally John Bruce for the design and construction of Usk Castle toilets.

Now is your chance to make a suggestion for this year's Awards which should reach a Committee member by 31st October 2005 at the latest.

Social Events

Our thanks are due to David Guy for opening his lovely home to over sixty of us for the Christmas Party and thanks also to Lynne Baldwin, Kath Collis and Jan Cooke for the wonderful supper. A presentation of the Awards was photographed and reported by the local press, good publicity for Usk Civic society. The raffle was so successful that we ran out of tickets, thanks mainly to two large trout, caught and donated by our secretary John Barrow.

This year's summer party was at Cefn Tilla where we had the usual warm welcome

Subscriptions

There will a special general meeting at 8 pm on Wednesday 12th October 2005 at the Royal British Legion Club in New Market Street, Usk to consider a recommendation from the Executive Committee that the annual subscription be increased to £6 for individuals and £10 for two people at the same address. If agreed the new rates will take effect from 1st January 2006. This short meeting will be followed by the first talk in our Winter Programme: "The Story of ROF Glascoed" by Glen Chapelle.

For a variety of reasons, the Executive Committee has decided to transfer the Civic Society's bank accounts from Barclays to HSBC in Usk. A consequence is that, those of you who currently kindly pay your membership subscriptions by Standing Order, will have to cancel your existing Bank Mandate to Barclays. It is, of course, extremely convenient for the Society to receive subscription payments automatically and we would like you to continue to do so or, if you currently pay by cheque or cash, to now consider paying by this method. New forms will be sent to you once we know the outcome of the special meeting. Subscriptions are due at 1st January each year, but we are willing to accept any payment date convenient to you between 1st January and 31st March each year, to ensure that you are fully paid up in accordance with the Constitution by the time of the Annual General Meeting in April.

Stop Press

Guided tour of Allt y Bela on 1st October 2005. A chance to see this wonderfully restored sixteenth century house near Usk. If you are interested please ring Stella Collard on 01291 673655 for details.

from Lord Raglan and enjoyed good food, wine and conversation in a beautiful setting. Douglas Brown, our Treasurer, retired at the AGM in April so he and his wife Angela were our guests for the evening. A presentation was made in recognition of all Douglas's hard work for the Society over the years. Douglas has been Treasurer for so long that even he couldn't remember how many years. We also welcomed our new Treasurer, Tony Fleming who came with his wife Liz, presently Mayor of Usk.

In June we had an evening walk on the Gwent Levels with Kevin Dupé from the Wetlands Reserve as our guide. Though it had rained heavily before we set out, the weather was kind to us and there was a wealth of interesting things to see and hear, different varieties of Orchid, as well as other wild flowers and plants, butterflies, a rare warbler (heard but not seen), evidence of otters and (from the Goldcliff hide) lots of water birds including avocets.