

# **The Living Memory Historical Association Annual Report for October 2015 to October 2016**

## **October 2015 – May 2016 "The Closed" Season**

Once again there were out of season visits from a number of schools and groups including Rendcom College Juniors and Cirencester Primary School. We also had what has become a regular visit from the pupils of the school connected with the Darvil Bruderhof Community in East Sussex who originally came as a Christian Commune to Ashton Keynes and Minety in the 1930s. In fact during the season we had two visits from this Community. Bill Irving and Peter Grace gave talks at various venues in and around Cirencester on a variety of Historical subjects to Clubs and Societies. (Those available as PowerPoint presentations are listed in Appendix 1)

In November we joined in discussions with the Cirencester Town Council, Civic Society and the Railway Society in connection with proposals to celebrate the 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the opening of Cirencester Town Station, planned for May 2016. To help with these proposals we sent the information prepared for the Cotswold District Council [CDC] with regard to previous proposals we had for the future of the Station building.

In early December on a BBC Radio Gloucestershire's programme hosted by Mark Cummings he interviewed Peter Grace on the subject of the rumoured tunnels under Cirencester Market Place. In late December a member of the CDC staff visited the Sheep Street facilities to take photographs in preparation for the drawing up of the new lease scheduled for January 2016. In January a new three year lease was signed. Unfortunately this meant accepting a 10% rental increase.

On January 19<sup>th</sup> Peter Grace accompanied a BBC Radio Gloucestershire reporter as part of a series of broadcasts pointing out historic places which might be missed by the casual visitor to the town. On January 26<sup>th</sup> Peter Grace accompanied members of the Cirencester Town Council, Civic Society and Railway Society on a tour of the Town Station Building by the CDC's Surveyor. The building seemed in better condition than was expected and the Surveyor said that it might be possible to open up the building in May for the public to visit. Later it was agreed by negotiation with the Civic Society that this would be the case on May 31<sup>st</sup> and we were asked to prepare a section of the exhibition to be presented on the day, covering the wartime activities of the station and our ideas for the building's future use.

In March we received the news that the Bingham Library Trustees were unable to give us the grant that they had generously provided over a number of years. This reduced our planned income by £1,500.

On April 19<sup>th</sup> as recipients of a grant last year from the Cirencester Town Council, we presented a display at the Annual Town Meeting held at Watermoor School. We took display boards, purchased earlier this year, giving information on the past present and proposed future work of the LMHA. On April 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, a week before the opening of this year's Exhibition, members and supporters of the LMHA took part in the GWR 1940's Steam Weekend on the Gloucestershire Warwickshire Railway again. We provided an exhibition of some of our WW2 artefacts on Winchcombe Station. The event was very well attended and once again was an excellent way of getting publicity out for our coming exhibition.

Much of March and April was taken up by preparation for the 2016 exhibition. The displays were cleaned and updated with additions to those in the shelter and the civilian displays in the cottages. At the same time the Railway Station Anniversary was being prepared for May 31<sup>st</sup>

On the day we provided an exhibition in the Great Western Committee Room on the first floor of the station. This covered the wartime evacuees, wartime toys related to the railway, original local railway documents of the period and the Home Guard Defence plans for the station and its environs. We also included boards on the possible use of the building in the future based on our original plans. The day included the unveiling of a new plaque on the station asserting that it was designed by Brunel himself. Over 700 visitors took the opportunity to enter a listed building which has been neglected for so many years. This points to the fact that given the opportunity it could one day fulfill a civic purpose again.

### **Annual Summer Exhibition May 7th to October 1st**

This year's exhibition was very successful once again with the number of visitors exceeding 3000 for the first time. They were of all ages, many local, but also from all over Britain and from overseas. As is usual for our exhibition, as well as passing on our information, we received a great deal of information from our visitors and a number of donations of artefacts from local people.

### **English Heritage "Heritage Open Days" 10th and 11th of September "Wartime life in the Cotswolds"**

Once again the Air Raid Shelter and the Old Hospital Cottages provided the setting for the LMHA's contribution to Heritage Open Day's. We had well over 200 visitors over the two days. Many were from the local area but also others from further afield.

As an "Old Grammarian", on the afternoon of September 11<sup>th</sup>, Peter Grace gave an illustrated talk in the Bingham Hall at the Old Grammarians' Reunion, marking 50 years since the closing of Cirencester Grammar School

### **Other activities**

Bill Irving and Peter Grace continued to be in demand, during the exhibition period, providing talks to various groups and organisation within the town and further afield in Gloucestershire and Wiltshire. History Walks were taken around the town including for Minchinhampton Historical Society. During the period we had a number of requests for information via our website. In October we had a visit from members and members of the staff of Cirencester Town Council so that they could see the nature of our work and be able to inform visitors to the town of the whereabouts of our facilities and what we offer. It was a very positive event. Amberley Publishers are republishing Peter Grace's book "Cirencester at War" which should be available in February 2017

### **Future**

Preparations are underway for the coming season with some alterations to the displays to ring the changes. Already Bill Irving and Peter Grace have a number of talks booked for 2017 and we have an annual commitment to support the town's involvement with English Heritage's "Heritage Open Days". Material will continue to be added to our website to help those interested in the local history of Cirencester and district and we will continue to entertain visits from schools and other interested groups.

We await further developments concerning the negotiations between the CDC, Cirencester Town Council and the Civic Society over the future of the Railway Station along with the outcome of deliberations of the CDC over the future of the Memorial Hospital site. As far as we are aware the future of the Air Raid shelter is not under threat. However we attempted to get the shelter listed but our first attempt was turned down, as Historic England put it together with someone else's application to list the Main building. We put an appeal in straight away on 30<sup>th</sup> June, but as yet have heard nothing. The main building however seems to be doomed to make room for car parking. Having had to urgently evacuate the building ourselves in 2012 it might be said that that the Memorial Hospital building in its present dilapidated state is a memorial to procrastination. The Old Hospital Cottages, the home of our Civilian Display, has not appeared on the threat list yet although the Cotswold Counselling Service moved out of the first floor in August 2016.

### **Finance**

We were once again able to meet our financial commitments this year thanks to grants from The Cirencester Town Council, The Langtree Trust and the donations in lieu of fees for talks and those given by the public in support of the exhibition. The lack of the Bingham Library Trustees' and Gloucestershire Community Foundation grants has left no room for manoeuvre and raising funds for running costs is a constant worry. Having paid the lease up until March 2017 we are left at the time of writing with a bank balance of £142.82p and cash assets of £35.99p. As always by far the biggest commitment is to the Cotswold District Council with payment of rent, rates and service charges amounting to around £5,000 annually. In addition there are electricity charges and insurance which all have to be met before financing other activities, providing publicity and sales material etc. Everyone involved with our activities is a volunteer with no expenses claimed and we are very grateful to those who give of their time to help man the exhibition and other events. It is imperative therefore that we obtain alternative sources of income in addition to applying for grants to those who have already offered them in the past. We are trying to cut costs where we can and are no longer using the services of a cleaning contractor preferring to keep our part of the premises clean ourselves. We also try to provide our own personal equipment and materials for LMHA activities.