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Newsletter January 2007

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Public Meeting 30 November 2006

Again our evening clashed with late-night shopping in Appleby but, again, it was a real delight to see a large audience of members and guests attending the special Christmas Evening. After showing the slides of this year's Society outings to The College, Kirkoswald and Newbiggin Hall donated by John Thompson, Graham and Brian treated us to another interesting and entertaining 'time travelling tour' of our town.

It began in 1799, with a slide of the earliest known engraving of Boroughgate. Then we saw the earliest known photograph of Boroughgate, taken in 1853. A plea went out for any earlier example. As well as images of aspects of several well-known parts of Appleby, there were examples of the series of photographs, by MacDonald, of Appleby characters, including Matthew Ewbank, William Birkbeck and Thomas Burrow. We visited Boroughgate, the Moot Hall, St Anne's, the Red House, the Church and Cloisters, Top and Bottom Crosses, Bridge Street, the Sands, Battlebarrow, Howgate Foot, Bongate, Scattergate, High Wiend, Doomgate, Holme Street, Chapel Street and Shiney Row. We saw exotic animals, pageantry, parades and celebrations. We learned about Appleby's water supply and Appleby's Fire Brigade, the Band of Hope and, as a tribute to Annie Graham, the Land Army. The finale brought us right up to date – pictures of Christingle and New Year fireworks.

There followed the drawing of the raffle and then everyone enjoyed the refreshments provided by Committee members. **Many thanks** to all those who helped in any way to make the evening another enjoyable and successful event.

A report appeared in *The Herald*, 13th January edition.

From the Chairman

With regard to the criticism of your Society (mainly of Graham and me) submitted by the Mayor of Appleby to the press during the last weeks, consideration is being given to a response. In the meantime, we have offered the Town Council space in our Newsletter in which they can express their criticisms of us at greater length and correct the "many inaccuracies" but, because our Newsletter deadline and the Council meeting schedule do not go together, any Council response will be in the next edition. That is, if the Council can get permission to offer such criticism from the monitoring officer at Eden District Council (Minutes of Appleby Town Council 13th December, Item C5/12/06).

I am not very interested in comments on our Constitution by non-members of the Society but, if any member wishes to discuss the Constitution and the Committee's interpretation of it, they should feel free to contact me or any Committee member. We are updating a questionnaire about the Society and where we want it to go, to be distributed to all members, which we aim to circulate in a couple of month's time.

I really want to deal with what I think are more important matters:

Precept

It has been agreed by the Council to recommend that the Precept for the Town be raised by over 30% to £47,000. In the accounts it appears that our total income comes to £88,000 when the income from Council property is included. Wages amount to nearly **£57,000**. Now, what do we get for this expenditure? We manifestly get a very good T.I.C. We get the Public Hall managed and cleaned. But how else do we, Joe Public, benefit from the wage expenditure? If the answer is, "Not very much", then it really calls into question whether or not this expenditure is prudent.

Heavy Traffic Count

Thanks to the several people who put their names down for the Heavy Traffic Count. Cllr Ian Potts and I are working on the details of the project and will publicise them at the next meeting and to each volunteer in person. We have to finalise the "rules" of the count and design a standard, simple form for you to fill in. Then we have to decide the "teams" of recorders, timings of the records and duration of the count. You will hear in due course.

Fair Guides

Thank you also to those couple of volunteers to man (or woman) the proposed "guide" posts during Fair week. This is a bit more difficult to arrange, but we are working on it.

Youth in Appleby

I am also planning to talk to Cllr Ian Potts about the various youth groups in the Town, to see if the Society can help. It appears that they may want to "plug into" expertise and experience of older people without relinquishing governance and control over their own organisation. The groups are welcomed by, among others, the police, so let us see what they need and what we can do to further their efforts.

We all wish Graham a speedy and complete recovery, to return refreshed to the fray.

IC

Current Affairs (Graham Coles)

Let me open with the traditional wishes for a Happy and Healthy New Year.

What did you get for Christmas? I was told I had cancer, which was a bit of a surprise as I only went to the doctor for a flu jab. Fortunately, she asked me if everything was OK in that nice way that doctors have and I said, "No, not really." By the time you read this I should be back home. Fingers crossed.

On to more important and far more amusing matters.

I hope you enjoyed the pre-Christmas meeting as much as Anne and I did. I was feeling pretty lousy at the time but you cheered me up – thanks. I even got a drink for the first time. In previous years I've been too busy chatting to eat or drink any of the treats. Anne put a lot of thought into what you were going to watch and Brian's projection system added the finishing touch. There were very few 'new' slides added to our collection in 2006. The message is, as ever, if you want it to grow you'll have to beg, borrow or steal pics from those musty photo albums under granny's bed

and let us copy them before she notices. Remember the camels outside the Cloisters? Always raises a smile. Came out of a musty family album. There must be hundreds more like that. You find 'em – we'll copy them and Appleby's archive can grow.

A Re-cap

Following on from the Mayor's lengthy discourse on the role of the Society, I thought I should do a quick re-cap. The Society began in November 1990, after the late Dorothy Hinchcliffe had written to the then Mayor, Ella Langan. The Mayor invited a number of organisations to a meeting and this resulted in the formation of the Appleby-in-Westmorland Society. In February 1991, the first public meeting was called. It was held in the Schoolroom of the Sands Methodist Church on Friday 22 March 1991. Mike Langan, Chairman/Secretary, told reporters that the Society hoped to "encompass all aspects of the town from its ancient past to future prospects". It soon became apparent that the Society was satisfying a public need as, in November 1992, it was the Society and not the Town Council which called a public meeting to discuss crime and vandalism. The panel comprised our MP, David Maclean, the Revd Peter Norton and the local police inspector. It was well attended and changes to local policing methods followed.

At the Society's A.G.M. in 1993, members discussed the role of the Society. Some doubted whether we should be campaigning for ATMs at local banks or arguing against proposals for the Town's public loos. (Nothing changes.) Again, Mike Langan told members that the Society must concern itself with all matters affecting the town. Dorothy Hinchcliffe, then vice president, and Mike Langan, Chairman, reviewed the past year and spoke in glowing terms about the Society's achievements. Mike said, "We have either led the way or been involved with projects such as trying to get a cash dispenser at a bank and to have the county name of Westmorland restored. The Society is established as the premier organisation in Appleby." Praise indeed from a Town Councillor.

Mike was followed as Chairman by Keith Morgan, still a Town Councillor and, when he decided to hand over Dorothy, by now President, persuaded Graham Coles to take the reigns, pleading with him to "get things done" as the Society's influence was slipping. Early in Graham's chairmanship (1997) members were sent a questionnaire about the Society's role. Overwhelmingly, members wanted the Society to be more proactive in local affairs.

Since then, at three yearly intervals, the Council has objected to the Society. In 2000, Councillors wanted the Society the "work through the Council" and not write independently to the press; in 2003, *The Herald* reported on a "war of words" which began when the Council reminded the Society that it had a duty to support it and, now, 2006, the Council takes exception to criticism. In his address to Councillors on 13 December and, in his press release, the Mayor argued that our constitution did not permit us to criticise the Council. I disagree. As the town's civic society and, in the absence of any other local body capable or prepared to defend the residents of Appleby, I think the Society has a duty to point out when our Council is less than competent. The Mayor claims that all Councillors are motivated by a willingness to do their best for the town and that they give of their time freely. The Society is motivated by similar principles, as are many other people in the town. But the Mayor's support for his Councillors does not mean that his Council is competent.

Sadly, some Councillors have a determined mindset. The coincidental fact that our first two chairmen were also Town Councillors has lulled some into thinking that the Society was established as one of the Council's tame sub-committees. It was not, never has been and never will be.

Our Mayor, Stan Rooke, for many years a supportive member of the Society and a regular attendee at our public meetings, will know that the Council has asked for our help on many occasions in

recent years and that the Society has never failed to respond. As an example, we were invited to assist the Council with its campaign to save the public toilets and I have little doubt that the research undertaken by our members helped to save, not only Appleby's toilets but all of the toilets throughout Eden. Whilst on the subject of toilets, perhaps Stan forgot that two of the very small 'band of brothers' who stood with him when he protested against the District Council's closure of the Shire Hall toilets were the very same people he chose to mention by name to the Council as being particularly wicked. The Mayor might also know that the Society offered hard cash, if it was required, to save the Bull Ring. He might not know that his administration failed formally to acknowledge the offer. We are currently working with the Council on the Heavy Traffic Count, the New Fair Joint Committee, the Cemetery Chapel Committee and have liaised with Cllr Elliott over dealing with Eden District Council on the matter of river banks. Hardly a programme for a hostile Society. Perhaps the strangest part of the Mayor's press release was the invitation extended to members of the Society to go along to Council meetings and read Council minutes if we want to know the 'true facts' about how the Council works. It is **because** we sit in on many Council meetings and **because** we do read the minutes that we are able to report the true facts in our Newsletter.

The Mayor has commented on our constitution. He also mentioned the rules which govern parish councils. Perhaps he will now insist that his Councillors comply with them. All Councillors will or should have a copy of 'Standing Orders and Chairmanship', 'Financial Regulations' and 'The Good Councillor's Guide' which, together with their Code of Conduct, comprise their constitution. Once the Society is satisfied that the Council can 'tick all the boxes' there will be no need for criticism. Once Councillors stop reporting each other to the Standards Board and once they can show a collective grasp of their responsibilities as employers, there will be no need for criticism. Once they can satisfy the public that they have a grasp of their fiduciary and financial responsibilities there will be no need for criticism. In the meantime, the Society will criticise when we think it appropriate.

The Mayor's job is a rotten one, defending his Council, especially at a time when it is at war with itself and has, in the words of its Responsible Finance Officer, been spending public money whilst "technically insolvent". But he is the Mayor and it is his job to put Humpty Dumpty together again.

GC

History Slot (Graham Coles)

Before telling you something about the Moot Hall, I can add a few bits and pieces to the story of the Public Hall. Firstly, we have found a photocopy of the public notice (reproduced below) which started the '1882' market ball rolling. The original size of the notice is 10" x 8". The Market Hall was built on what used to be known as Billy Tatham's Yard (papers deposited with the Society by Jean Clarkson).

Given the history and potential of the Public Hall, Appleby must try to save it. The Town Council says it will look at ways to “improve its profitability”. WHAT PROFITABILITY? It will lose over £10,000 this financial year, a loss forecast to rise to about £11,500 in 2007/8 and to almost £15,000 in 2008/9. These are the Council’s figures. This year’s £10,000 is exactly the increase Council precept we had to pay. We are paying our Town Council to run at a loss. The premises used to run at a profit but that was back in the days when it was a market hall managed by Trustees, half of whom were drawn from the townspeople. Appleby has residents who know a great deal about arts, management and fundraising. Not until the Public Hall is properly marketed and managed will it show anything but a loss.

Appleby’s Moot Hall

But where to begin? So much has been written about the ‘goings on’ in the Moot Hall that there seems little left to say. On the other hand, little seems to have been recorded about the building itself. This seems a shame as almost every music hall and place of entertainment throughout the land seems to be well documented – so why not the Moot Hall? Much of the material which follows has been garnered from a number of sources. I will credit the authors where practicable and apologise for any omissions.

Let me start with the words of a former Appleby Town Clerk, Guy Heelis, who ably managed the town’s affairs between 1925 and 1933 (See Newsletter 51 January 2004). He wrote, “I can find no record as to when the Moot Hall was built but it was certainly in existence in 1614 which was the year from which the council minute books now in existence commence.” An extract from that minute book, dated “15th day of February in the 12th year of the reign of his Lord King James by the Grace of God King of England and Scotland and of the Scots 48th year (1614/5)” refers to the “Chief Borough Court held in the Moot Hall in Appleby”. The dispute was over the ownership of a piece of land. For the purpose of this account, the reference confirms the existence of the Moot Hall and that it was, among other things, the local (not county) court house.

The most recent (and by far the most worrying) account was made to Appleby town council in September 2006 when Councillor Budding reported that his research had ‘confirmed’ that the Council owned the Moot Hall and that it came by way of gift ‘about 530 years ago’. As Council records are definitive and might well be cited as authoritative in years to come, the words “confirmed” and “about 530 years ago” rang alarm bells loud enough to put our flood defence siren to shame. 530 years ago (1476 or thereabouts) Appleby lay in ruins. It had been sacked by the Scots in 1388 (not for the first time) and ravaged by plague. In 1275 the town went to the King’s Court where a jury found that it owned no allegiance to the ‘Castle’, only to the monarch. Perhaps, not surprisingly, the ‘Castle’ did little or nothing for Appleby during times of crisis.

In 1445 even the town gate, with its associated chantry chapel, was ruinous as was the Church and much else besides. In 1515 a Crown Commission reported that ‘they found the said borough or town of Appleby was greatly diminished and fallen into ruin and that the burgesses of the same are so poor that they cannot satisfy or reply to the King for the said fee farm’ (annual tax). In 1539 John Leland wrote, “a shire town but a poor village having a ruinous castle where the prisoners are kept.” In 1586 Camden wrote, “It is seated in a pleasant field and almost encompassed by the river Eden but it is so slenderly peopled and the buildings so mean that if antiquity did not make it the chief town of the county and if the assizes were not held in the castle which is the public gaol for malefactors, it would be very little above a village. Its beauty consists of one broad street with an easy ascent which leads to the castle almost surrounded by the river. At the lower end is the church.” It will be noted that none of these authorities mentioned the Moot Hall which, had it stood where it is now, could hardly have escaped notice.

Writing in 1720, the Revd Thomas Cox described Appleby as “a small market town memorable for nothing but its antiquity and situation, otherwise little superior to a village. The situation of the town is almost encompassed by the river Eden but is thinly peopled. The houses and other buildings are often so mean that, if antiquity did not set it above other towns of the county and the *Assizes were not held in the town hall*, as they were formerly in the castle which, in part was the common gaol for malefactors but is now removed to the end of the bridge, it would be of little more note than the best of villages.”

Clearly things had changed between 1586 and 1720. Let us take a closer look.

The definitive record of nationally listed buildings, kindly supplied to the Society in 2000, records the Moot Hall as a Grade II* building and gives it a date of 1596. Barry McKay (*Appleby-in-Westmorland An Historic Town Guide*, 2001) mentions a date stone RAW 1596 above the southern doorway “which probably came from a previous building”. Martin Holdgate (*A History of Appleby*, 1952) suggests that the building probably dates, in part, from 1596. Canon Mathews (*A Guide Book to Appleby in Westmorland*, c1890) describes the Moot Hall as an “unpretentious block of buildings in the middle of the Market Place standing over some rather mean shops and approached by iron stairs at the south end. It is an edifice of no very great age or any architectural pretensions.” Nicholson and Burn (1777) suggested that the removal of the town hall from the market place would greatly improve the appearance of the town. Probably the most definitive record can be found in *The Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, Westmorland*, 1936, which states, “It may have been built in the late 16th century though there is no evidence of this apart from the date 1596 found in an adjoining outbuilding now destroyed”. It also states, “Inside the building is some reset panelling of c1600 and some later panelling said to have come from Kirkby Stephen.” We can now begin to appreciate the uncertainty surrounding the origin of this building. To make matters worse, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport’s description of the building contains two further cryptic notes: “Bell turret at south end. Said to have been rebuilt 1769.” Whether that referred to the whole building or to the bell tower remains a moot point (pun intended!) However, had the entire building been replaced in 1769, Nicholson and Burn might just have mentioned it!

John Flavel Curwen, a prominent member of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society, was invited to advise on the history and potential of the building during the period 1922-24. Unfortunately, his report is undated but, as it refers to Mayor Williamson and those dates covered his period in office, we can be fairly certain. We will return to his report later. In the meantime, I would be remiss if I failed to record what he said about the age of the building. He thought it was of Tudor origin (1405 to 1603) but he based his assumption on the age of the door lintel. In his next paragraph he suggests that the new windows had been inserted in the Queen Anne period (1700 to 1720). His evidence for this is the shape of the panes of glass (each pane having its longer axis in a horizontal rather than a vertical direction). There is a reference to repairs to the Moot Hall windows in 1709 – perhaps this was when the Queen Anne windows were installed? Here we must remind ourselves that there would have been a plentiful supply of dressed and undressed stone lying about Appleby during the Tudor period whilst timber might have been in short supply. (All a bit reminiscent of my childhood in south London after the blitz.) Far from me to challenge an eminent historian, but I am more inclined to think that the door lintel in the Moot Hall was reclaimed. Interestingly, the ‘Queen Anne’ windows are still in situ – or at least they are of similar design.

What else do we know? Until the mid 17th century the castle housed both the county courts and the county gaol. There were no other county courts or gaols in Appleby. Much of this period has been covered in previous Newsletters, most notably those relating to the campaign to save the Shire Hall.

During the 1640s and 1650s, Lady Anne Clifford embarked on a massive rebuilding programme in the town – St Anne’s Hospital, the Castle, two churches and, probably, the top cross. There is no known record of when the crosses were built. The definitive national list describes ‘Top Cross’ as C17 and ‘Low Cross’ as an C18 copy. It makes sense. Placing Top Cross outside her front door to celebrate the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660 is just what Lady Anne would have done. In all the writings by and about her, I have found no record of any interest in the Moot Hall, save references in the writings of others to land she purchased at Temple Sowerby, the income from which was endowed to provide a fund for the upkeep of St Anne’s, St Lawrence Church, *the Moot Hall**, her own monument, her Mother’s tomb, the Grammar School and the town bridge. That fund still exists and I have lost count of the number of times I have drawn the town council’s attention to it!

*Her will clarifies this point for us – see later.

We know that Lady Anne removed the court and gaol from the Castle – why would she not? She had made the Castle her home and who would really want to live next door to the county gaol? The gaol went into the old chantry chapel above the town bridge and a new House of Correction was built on the Sands (1639). Assizes were moved to the Moot Hall. James Naylor, a prominent Quaker, was tried there for blasphemy in 1652 and Capt Atkinson (of the infamous Kaber Rigg plot against Charles II) was tried and convicted of treason in 1664. That trial took place in the Moot Hall but his hanging, drawing and quartering is said to have been undertaken at the Castle. There is evidence of a viewing or public gallery at the north end of the Moot Hall chamber (now enclosed). Curwen would have wished for it to be removed so as to restore the original aesthetic balance of the hall. The Revd Cox (1720) tells us that the assizes were still being held in the Moot Hall during the early eighteenth century. Whilst Lady Anne Clifford (Castle) did great things for the churches, elderly widows and the all-important town bridge, there seems to be no compelling reason for her to have provided an income to maintain the *Moot Hall*. All this is pure conjecture but it is a possibility to ponder. On the other hand, Blake Tyson suggests that Lady Anne might have built a Shire Hall (court house) on Boroughgate and went so far as to identify possible locations for it. Other authorities have doubted this and there is no empirical evidence to confirm or deny either view. In his authoritative work, *An Architectural History of the Gaols and Courthouses at Appleby, Cumbria*, 1975, Blake floats the tantalising prospect of a decrepit Shire Hall, probably in Boroughgate, which served as a court house until the town’s Moot Hall provided more desirable accommodation for a century after 1673. But had Lady Anne built a court house on Boroughgate, why would trials be held in the Moot Hall?

I am now indebted to the Cumbria Record Office and to Lance Thwaytes, our Vice President, for making valuable records available and for painstakingly transcribing them so that even I can make sense of them.

In 1718, John Harrison, barber and wigmaker, was permitted to “take up the ground to the foot of the Moot Hall stairs and to have it for four years rent free”. He was permitted to build on it at his own expense and keep it in repair for four years. We have learned two things. There were steps leading to an upper hall as far back as 1718 and the buildings (there were two, one on either side of the stairway) were built after the Moot Hall. Interestingly, a 1754 map shows just one small building at the south end. A photograph in the Society’s archive clearly shows a small, lean-to building on either side of a central stairway. We also know that one of these buildings, occupied by Chatterley, ‘fell down’ in 1882. The central staircase was removed and replaced by some ugly iron steps shortly afterwards (c 1886). In 1743, it was ordered that the stocks and pillory now opposite the house formerly Knots? shall be immediately removed to the ‘*open end*’ of the Hall facing the Low Cross that being deemed the proper place for the same and that there be a whipping post and convenient place for burning criminals in the hand erected there. The italics are mine – was there an ‘open end’? Was Curwen right when he surmised that the building was originally a series of

open arches over some 'low pent' fronted stall'? His report concluded that we might never know unless the building was torn apart. If he was right, then he thought it probable that the original market roof, together with its flanking wooden supports would have been removed during rebuilding so as to widen the thoroughfare. Food for thought? Unfortunately, Curwen was not always reliable as is evidenced by his question, "But was the present doorway the original entrance? There are no signs of masonry or any flight of steps and I would rather fancy that the door merely led out onto a wooden gallery from which all proclamations would be made." Sadly for Mr Curwen but fortunately for future generations, we know that there was a flight of masonry steps leading to the front door of the Council chamber.

The story now moves on to the period (also well-documented in previous Newsletters) when everyone recognised the need for a new gaol, house of correction and court house but no one seemed prepared to pay for it.

The minutes of the relevant Council meetings are available for perusal at Kendal (Graham has extracts) but, as Court Clerks were paid by the word at the time, they tend to go on a bit! I will try to paraphrase. In November 1768, the Clerk to the Peace, writing on behalf of the Court of Quarter Sessions (remember we are pre 1888 and County Councils, that magistrates sitting in Quarter Sessions were akin to County Councillors and the Clerk to the Peace was a man to be reckoned with), reminded Appleby that, as it had been customary for Judges of Assize and Justices of the Quarter Sessions to sit in the Moot Hall with permission of the Mayor, it might make sense if the Borough was to contribute to the cost of a proposed Shire Hall and then to use it (court requirements permitting) as its Council house. One might think that this was an excellent proposal, especially since the town had long been aggrieved by the space taken up by the Moot Hall, which seriously incommoded the market place.

The Council replied to the effect that, whilst it would be pleased to continue with its assistance to the Judges and Justices, it would not be convenient to remove the Moot Hall to a place remote from the market place. However, if the Justices could find a piece of land within the main street it might be amenable notwithstanding the fact that the Corporation would stand to lose some £10 per annum by way of rents.

Five years later, in 1773, the Justices appeared to have taken up the challenge and asked the Council to identify a piece of land near to the Moot Hall, which might be used for the courts. The Corporation did not recall its earlier stance and said that it did not feel itself able to grant land 'adjoining the Shire Hall' for this purpose as the present Moot Hall and buildings (presumably the shops below and at the south end) were improperly situated and inconvenient. Furthermore, it was considered that it would be better for the town if the Moot Hall was removed altogether. Question – was 'Shire Hall' a slip of the Clerk's pen and the source of later confusion? At that same meeting, 4 March 1773, the Corporation resolved to have the present Town Hall pulled down and rebuilt in a more convenient situation. The Mayor was authorised to spend up to £100 for this purpose and an approach for additional funding was made to Lord Thanet, Sir James Lowther, General Honeywood and Fletcher Norton. (Note the Clerk has used Moot Hall, Shire Hall and Town Hall in the same minute. This is an example of why Council records are so very important.)

We are entitled to presume that nothing came of this. The Shire Hall was built between 1776 and 1778 and the Moot Hall remained exactly where it was (and is). In 1800 the Corporation agreed to build a dwelling house at the north end of the Moot Hall which was to provide accommodation (we know that various mayors made use of it over the years – some because they were absentee mayors who only came to Appleby infrequently and some because they preferred the solitude of the Moot Hall to the company of their wives and families!) The new building was also to accommodate the public scales, weights and a granary. Almost hidden in a Council minute dated 15 October 1810,

which is mainly about the Cloisters, of which more in a subsequent Newsletter, is the formation of a committee “to treat for and purchase a parcel of ground or any tenement within the Borough which may be thought eligible for a site to build a new Moot Hall on”.

By 1815 the Moot Hall and Shambles were declared to be dilapidated and a great nuisance to the market. The Council ordered it to be pulled down and rebuilt on land owned by Lord Lonsdale but in the possession of Ann Lamb and Richard Ivison. It was agreed that its removal would greatly improve the beauty of the town. Public subscriptions were to be called for. We have not been able to identify these burgages but, in 1754, an Ann Lamb held a burgage behind Red House.

Parson and White’s Directory (1829) records, “The Moot Hall, where the Mayor, Aldermen, etc hold the Borough courts and transact the town’s business, is an ancient and incommodious edifice with a row of butchers’ shops on each side of it, standing in the middle of Boroughgate where it has long been considered a great public nuisance which it is hoped will soon be removed from the busy and spacious street which it so much obstructs”. Mannex (1851) tells us that, “the shambles and town hall stand in the middle of the (main) street which they greatly incommode”.

In 1873, a complaint was made to the Easter Court Leet at the Moot Hall alleging that Mr Pearson (publican and Councillor) was supplying intoxicants and that the chamber was used as a tavern. Pearson argued that the Moot Hall was a private house – which, to all intents and purposes, it was and had been for several years! Interestingly, the same court agreed to draw on the Temple Sowerby Trust for repairs to the Moot Hall windows. Two years later Pearson was appointed Mayor – the first tradesman to attain this exalted rank. Contemporary newspapers would have you believe that the end was nigh and that life in Appleby would never be the same again.

The earlier Borough records show that the Corporation was fond of a tippie at the town’s expense. And not only ale! A typical entry in 1704 reads, “Ale at the Moot Hall, tobacco and pipes - £1 11 shillings 2 pence. No small sum in those days.

Unfortunately, the Town Council has always regarded the Moot Hall as its club house. In 1978, Councillors did allow it to be used by an Agricultural Land Tribunal but refused to permit the presiding barrister to use the Mayor’s parlour as a retiring room. In 1998, in response to a Society suggestion that members of the public should be able to ask questions at council meetings, it was claimed that the Moot Hall was not a public forum and never had been. Anyone who has ‘sat in’ at a Council meeting is made to feel most unwelcome. A new seating arrangement means that you have to stare at the back of a Councillor sitting no more than two feet in front of you. Members of the public, the few who bother, can see very little and hear even less. A few brave souls who, in their ignorance, have sat in a seat reserved for a Councillor, even if it was not going to be occupied, have been threatened with the stocks or even worse.

Alterations have taken place over the years. The central flight of steps was removed in about 1886; the ugly iron staircase which replaced them was, in the words of the then Town Clerk, “fortunately” destroyed by a lorry in 1931; the present stairway was provided by a retiring Town Clerk Mr Hewitson (a painted-over plaque recalling his contribution can be found on the verandah wall of the ‘viewing platform’); the castellated top of the verandah was smoothed off by ‘royal’ decree in the early 1960s; the soon-to-be-defunct Borough Corporation seemed to have given itself planning permission to alter the ‘1800’ house and extension in 1970. The general public was unimpressed and the North Westmorland Rural District Council complained officially that the building was being ruined.

In 1911, the Corporation provided a gents’ toilet in what had been the weighing machine room (where the T.I.C. toilet is now). It was put there at the request of Corporation tenants who had

nowhere to go to the 'loo' during working hours. In this context, it is worth noting that the government refused consent to cut into the ancient fabric of the building due to its architectural and historic importance. Knowing that makes one feel sorry for an ex-Councillor who put a year of his life into drawing up proposals for major structural alterations to the lower part of the Moot Hall. His proposals were aborted for want of cash – but my information is that no one had so much as bothered to approach English Heritage first. Someone should have spoken to Chris Nightingale who might have been able to advise the Council on English Heritage's approach to structural alterations to historic buildings.

Mind you, these were not the only proposals for change which got nowhere. In 1965, the County Archivist, when asked if the Moot Hall could be modified for the safe storage of archive material, said not under any circumstances!

In 1983, the Council discussed two letters from members of the public. One, from the late Jack Marshall, expressed concern at the state of the roof. The other, from the late Jean Clarkson, was a suggestion that the ceiling and some of the panelling should be removed to expose the old beams and the viewing gallery. Councillors thought this was a jolly good idea and put her, a non-Councillor, in charge of a fund-raising committee!

In 1996, the Council's Surveyor prepared a report on the building's condition and suggested works which should be undertaken immediately. In 2006, a committee of Councillors was formed to look at the building to see what, if anything, had been done.

In his report, Curwen made a number of suggestions as to how the Moot Hall might be restored to its former glory. He pointed to its role in the history of Appleby and how "the Countess Anne has given towards its maintenance". He thought no effort should be spared to preserve its honour and character. All that was seventy years ago and all we can hope for now is that the Town Council does not allow it to deteriorate further. There is no evidence to suggest that Lady Anne gave hard cash towards its upkeep and her records are so precise that there would surely be mention of her spending £x on the Moot Hall. On the other hand, her will, dated 1674, the year before she died, does refer to the Temple Sowerby Trust, which she intended to provide, inter alia, for the upkeep of the "court house in Appleby". That is how she saw the Moot Hall – as a court house. She was High Sheriff and responsible to the Crown for the proper administration of justice throughout the county of Westmorland. Given the legal separation of town and castle, Lady Anne would have no interest in the building as a Moot Hall and she probably could not have cared one jot about what went on in it.

So there you have it. A building of extreme importance not only to Appleby but also to posterity is in urgent need of tender loving care. At the last count, Councillors were opposed to a full survey of the building, preferring to see if the gutters leaked.

GC

Committee Meeting

Matters Arising from minutes of 24 October: Litterpick – Graham had been in contact with Barbara Wilson who has not been able to progress this matter to date but is willing to organise another litterpick. Shire Hall – a response had been received from Steve Adcock indicating that discussions with occupants was currently underway and that Eden District Council's Local Housing Needs Survey may have some bearing on future plans. It was agreed to keep the matter on the agenda. Cemetery Chapel – nothing to report. Judith will attend a Council sub-committee meeting being held 8 December. No invitation to the meeting had been received by Ian. Penrith Museum – nothing received from Town Council so Ian will write direct to Dr Chapman at the Museum. Memorial Trees – Judith to continue with contact with Playing Fields Association, copying her letters to Eden District Council. Future programme – another idea for speaker/evening out added to

the list is Elizabeth Davy, Winton Hall. Society Archive – Jim Grisenthwaite, Head of Culture for Cumbria County Council, had responded to Vivienne's expression of interest in the Society occupying premises in the old medical centre on Low Wiend. He is not in a position to discuss anything in detail at present but our interest has been noted. Matter to be kept on the agenda. Living Churchyards – the owners of St Michael's Church have indicated their willingness to host a meeting to learn more about this. Ian's Problem – concern expressed at the amount of coverage given to this in the Newsletter. 30 November meeting – another great success, thanks to the efforts of Graham, Anne and Brian on the pictures front and of the Committee (and partners) on the refreshments. Sincere thanks to all who contributed. There were a lot of new faces in the audience and it was suggested that Committee members having identifying badges might be helpful at future meetings. The new Chairman of the Cumbria Local History Federation, Richard Brockington, attended and managed to speak with some Committee members and others. Projects – 6 volunteers had come forward for the heavy goods vehicle counting. Ian will get together with Cllr Ian Potts to work out methodology and devise a pro-forma. River Bank – Ian is working with Cllr Elliott, who has now read the last comprehensive report on the state of the river bank. There is no provision in Eden District Council's 2007/08 budget for any remedial work but a request has been made for such provision in 2008/09. The Environment Agency has advised E.D.C. that concrete cannot be used. The item is to be removed from our agenda.

Reports: Treasurer/Membership – the raffle at the November meeting raised £66.50, visitors' entrance fees raised £14.00 and two new members joined. Oral History – Davina has written to Mrs Freeman. Nothing has been heard from Judith Nicholson or from the U.S.A., but it was pointed out that he would only just have arrived home. Vivienne reported that another volunteer had come forward to help the Oral History group. Planning – no action taken on plans for No 7 Chapel Street, Red Lion, Bongate or 56 Boroughgate. John to write to letter encouraging the Town Council to follow up on the various dilapidated buildings. Townscape – no immediate action will be take on any of the 'snags' with the townscape works as, so that everything can be dealt with in one go, we have to wait a year. The flooding on Bridge Street, however, does need immediate action and the Town Council is trying to get something done about this. Concern was expressed about the deep ruts at the posts and chains on Boroughgate. Appleby New Fair Joint Committee: Ian attended the Media Working Group and reported that some good ideas for advertising the event had been put forward. He also reported that he had written to the Chairman of the NFJC, pointing out that there is no management structure for the Fair, but had had no response. Graham reported that he had attended a meeting of the NFJC Infrastructure Working Party on behalf of the Society. He was surprised to learn that the working party, chaired by Keith Morgan, is not looking at the infrastructure but is limited to bogs and bins. It soon became obvious that past problems had been due to Eden District Council's inability to ensure that contracts it had entered into were properly enforced. When Graham asked Brian Lee, E.D.C., if it might be a good idea if some of his staff were in Appleby at Fair time to see what went on, Brian Lee was shocked. He claimed that none of his staff would have time and that, if they were not in the office, the work of his department would suffer. He made no reply when it was pointed out that his department was responsible for enforcing contracts.

Martin Holdgate's Book Launch: to take place at St Lawrence's Church, 11 January.

Any Other Business: Davina reported she had written to the Town Council enquiring about the source of various documents from Appleby which are appearing for sale on the Internet. Ian reported a request for any assistance (ideas and people to work with) Society members might be able to give to Appleby Youth Groups. More details to be given at a later date. Venue – concern was expressed at the capacity of the Supper Room for the popular 'Christmas' evening. Enquiries to be made about the cost/availability of the meeting room at the Methodist Church.

From the Secretary

The Story of Appleby-in-Westmorland: Sir Martin Holdgate's new book is now available in bookshops and other outlets. Hardback, 268 pp, £15.95. It is an enlarged updating of his earlier work and should be a 'must' for lovers of Appleby.

Calling All Local Historians

Lancaster University is looking into the feasibility of a new Victoria County History (VCH) project for Cumbria and Lancashire. Since 1899 the Victoria County History has been creating an encyclopaedic history of England's counties but coverage of the North West's historic counties remains incomplete. To date, Cumberland has two introductory volumes only; Westmorland has none. It is envisaged that a new VCH project would involve volunteer local historians in the process of field work, documentary research and writing, under the supervision of a professional county editor/leader and so we would like to know whether there is local interest in such a project and whether there would be sufficient volunteers to make it viable.

If you are interested, please contact Ian or Vivienne by 27 January 2007.

Next Meeting

Thursday 25 January 2007

7.30 p.m. Supper Room, Market Hall

"Traditional Food of the Lake Counties"

Speaker – Ivan Day, a local food historian with an interest in the social history of food and dining and we look forward to hearing about food traditions in our region from late medieval times to the time of the First World War.

Website: www.applebysociety.force9.co.uk

Please Note

If you have enjoyed reading this Newsletter and are not already a member of the *Appleby-in-Westmorland Society*, you could have it delivered free to your home six times a year simply by joining the Society. A £6 individual/£10 family subscription also entitles you to attend six bi-monthly meetings free. These are usually held in the Supper Room of the Market Hall on the last Thursday of January, March, May, July (our A.G.M. meeting), September and November at 7.30 in the evening. Application forms are available at the Library.

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