



NEWSLETTER NEWSLETTER NEWSLETTER NEWSLETTER NEWSLETTER

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Public Meeting 31 March 2005

Another good audience gathered to listen to Mike Davies-Shiel, who came to talk about the Bloom Smithies of the Vale of Eden. From references in a grant by King John in 1201 to iron ore deposits to descriptions of finding evidence of bloomeries and bloom smithies at Brougham, Dalston and Blencarn in more recent times, Mr Davies-Shiel spoke with authority and wonderfully detailed knowledge. His expert lecture on the geology and processes involved in getting usable iron was given with many illustrations, with humour and with boundless enthusiasm.

A report of the evening appeared in the Herald on 7 May 2005.

From the Chairman

Thanks

To the anonymous donor who left a typewriter ribbon at the Tourist Information Office, with my name on it!! Very welcome.

S..SH

Some things need to be kept quiet. For example, the Annual Town Meeting, where Town Councillors report on activities to and take questions from members of the public. This year's attracted just two members of the public. At the end of April Anne and I enjoyed two weeks walking and flower spotting in Southern Greece. On the morning of the day we left for this holiday, I contacted the Town Clerk to ask when the meeting was due to be held. There had been no notice in the Parish Newsletter and nothing in the Herald. I was told the date was to be 25 April. We would be away but I managed to get in touch with two people I knew would be interested, before we had to leave home. Two people attended the meeting. The 'official' notification of this statutory meeting was by way of a piece of paper stuck to the window of the Tourist Information Office – the Public Notice Board outside the Moot Hall having disappeared long ago.

Then there is the Society Exhibition in the Tourist Information Centre. It is worth recalling why we go to so much trouble each year. The Society was asked by the Town Council some years ago if we would put on a display of local interest at Easter in order to 'kick start' the tourist season by attracting residents and visitors to the T.I.C. It is now an annual event. It takes time and money to put it together. Both the *Messenger* and *The Herald* carried a press announcement; *The Herald* went so far as to send a photographer along. You may have seen the result in the paper. We were asked to supply a copy of our press release for inclusion in the Parish Newsletter. It was provided well in time to make the April edition. Nothing. I looked for it in the May edition. Nothing.

Some years ago I was told that “reality” can be defined as “a state of mind induced by a lack of alcohol.” “Reality” can also be defined as coming back to Appleby after a two week holiday.

S.ASH

Or, ‘Save Appleby’s Shire Hall’. In February this year, Councillor Morgan told the Town Council that the Council had not resolved to take any action concerning the Shire Hall. Its position was that of an observer. As we pointed out in a previous Newsletter, that comment sat uneasily with a Council resolution of February 2002 when the Town Council agreed to establish a working party to consider ways in which the Shire Hall could be retained as a public building. In April 2005, Councillor Langan reportedly said that the Town Council “continues to be very active in discussions on the future of the town’s Shire Hall.’ Appleby Alliance has written to the Town Council offering its services in support of the Council’s supposed campaign. The Council’s Finance and General Purposes Committee suggested that the Town Clerk should write to the Alliance and say, “If anything further develops, would they let us know.”

The Society has also been active. We have tried several times to find out what the Council is or is not doing, without success. We have no idea.

Sooner or later Cumbria County Council is going to run out of patience and who could blame it?

I am told that one or two Councillors expressed an opinion, hopefully personal, about the Shire Hall during the Town Meeting on 25 April. The fact that the Appleby-in-Westmorland Society succeeded in its bid to have the Shire Hall ‘listed’ has made the building less commercially attractive. For the record, the Society applied to have the Shire Hall listed because neither the Town Council nor Eden District Council was prepared to do it. We thought that a Georgian building, built and paid for by Westmerians as their Shire Hall, deserved to be protected. I must now express my own personal opinion. If we have Town Councillors who have a problem with protecting fine public buildings, I can begin to understand why the Moot Hall and Cloisters, both of which are owned by our Council, were allowed to deteriorate so alarmingly.

Back in February 2002 your Committee discussed what role the Society could best undertake to help save the Shire Hall. We noted that the Town Council was taking action. We knew that Appleby Alliance was fundraising for a feasibility study (which duly happened) and we were pleased to learn that Appleby Legacy had been formed to consider potential uses for the building, once it was saved. We agreed to co-operate with and support each of those organisations. We also agreed to campaign to raise the profile of the building by alerting the general public, the media and opinion formers, such as our Member of Parliament. All of which we did.

Now the Society faces a challenge. We either accept that the Town Council will do what it recently resolved to do – write to Cumbria County Council to say that it (the Town Council) had not been able to raise funds to save the building – or we can take a stance.

Recent events and lack of positive action by the Town Council have left us with little option. Our constitution requires us “to secure the preservation, protection, development and improvement of features of an historic nature in the area” and “to develop a secure yet accessible museum.” The Society will form a sub-committee to which we will invite the President of Appleby’s Chamber of Trade. We will take action, hopefully before it is too late. We will ask Cumbria County Council to hold fire whilst we do our best. If we fail – we will have tried. If we succeed, the Shire Hall will be retained for public use.

SLASH?

Is it time to think the unthinkable and reduce the number of Town Councillors? Sixteen is far too many for a town this size. We need between six and eight who trust each other and who are prepared to work together. The indications are that they do not trust each other. If they did, why would they demand the right to sit on both of the Council's committees and turn up when they felt like it? That is what they agreed to in April 2005. That is not how committees work. In fact, such an arrangement negates the need for committees. Which takes us back just three short years when the present committee structure was introduced.

Prior to 1974, Appleby Borough Council had a job to do. In 1974 it had sixteen Councillors. In 1885, when the town became a municipal borough, the Council had a real job to do. It had sixteen Councillors. Then there was no County or other Local Government arrangement. Appleby Borough Council did everything for the town. It had committees for highways (it constructed and maintained our roads); water (it built the town reservoir, constructed the water mains and sewers and maintained them); policing (it appointed parish constables); markets (to run the markets, set tolls and enforce bye-laws); finance (it was a rating authority); and public health (it had its own medical officer of health). In later years it added a gas committee (when the town purchased the gas works) and a housing committee (when the town became responsible for providing public housing). All in all, Appleby Borough Council was kept busy. Its Town Clerk was legally qualified, it had a Borough Surveyor, Borough Engineer and a Borough Treasurer. There was a job for sixteen Councillors and a co-ordinated and disciplined committee system.

There is no doubting the public spiritedness of those who give it their best shot. Most people who enter politics really believe that they can change the system and improve the lot of their fellow men. But, all too often, they have to fall in line and conform to the 'system' or leave. Good intentions are eroded and replaced by scrapping for a place in the pecking order. A few years ago, when a former mace-bearer was appointed to the Council, he was welcomed with open arms as "he knows our ways and will fit in nicely". He didn't – he left soon afterwards.

At the April 2005 Town Meeting, the Mayor regretted the fact that it was difficult to get a response from either Eden District Council or Cumbria County Council. He used the expression "like beating your head against a jelly". A few months ago, I used similar words, when I suggested it was easier to nail a jelly to a ceiling. I know exactly what he means. A few months ago I also wondered why Town Councillors were content to leave most problems to District Councillors when they must realise that nothing would happen. Davina Osman raised the issue at the Town Meeting – good for her. "Perhaps you should try to make them follow through," was her suggestion. Of course they should, that's why they are there.

But its not easy. We asked the Town Council if they could assist the Society in its bid to tidy Coronation Park. (The flowers were strimmed on 29 April for the second time this year – Eden District Council is really active). We listed a number of 'wrongs' that needed putting right – damaged railings and dangerous paths are but two examples. In all, we asked for help with eight separate problems. The response received was no – sorry "NO" – the responsibility for action rested with others. We knew that – we only wanted support.

At the same Town Meeting, the Mayor paid credit to the work of Appleby Smarter on which the Society is represented. It has managed to achieve "some improvements in the appearance of the Town". True. Not enough, but some. The Society is finalising arrangements for voluntary litter collection. Two of our members have kindly agreed to act as co-ordinators and will attend future meetings of Appleby Smarter. Contrast Kirkby Stephen where the Town Council organises co-ordinated 'litter picks'. We have sixteen Councillors.

The Mayor claims that Appleby is not 'apathetic'. Again he is right. Appleby is down right frustrated!

I've probably written more than enough but I must mention Vital Villages. The Society took that topic off its agenda some months ago. Together with the Chamber of Trade, we assisted the Town Council with its application. The application made it just in time. Just in time after years of promises by Appleby Alliance that it was progressing the bid! The Town Council formed its own sub-committee to continue the work – after all, the Vital Villages scheme has to be run by a town or parish council.

On 4 April 2005, the Town Council's Finance and General Purposes Committee agreed to consider asking Appleby Alliance to produce a parish plan and to ask the Alliance how much it would charge to progress the Vital Villages application.

Its time for another holiday. Identifying some sub species of wild orchid is difficult enough – trying to understand the machinations of our Town Council is verging on the impossible!

History Slot

In order to highlight the Society's annual exhibition, we have selected a couple of personal recollections and they are to be found at the end of this Newsletter. They, and many others, are included with the material displayed at the Tourist Information Centre. The exhibition will come down at the end of May – still time to get along if you've not found time yet.

Committee Meeting

Outside Visits

Only one visit planned so far – that to Reagill with Ted Relph. Please see the enclosed 'flyer'. Monday 27 June will see the visit to Appleby of the Shap Local History Society. Suggestions for other outside visits include possible visits to Sedbergh to have a look at the Sedbergh and District History Society Resource Centre and to Newbiggin (Temple Sowerby) Hall.

Coronation Park

Despite a further letter to Eden District Council, no action has been taken to remove trees or prevent strimming. In fact, the area was strimmed on 30 March and all the green tops from this year's crocus and snowdrops went! Appleby council tax payers are being short changed. "*Eye on Eden*" is quite clear. Appleby's Band D (average) council tax payers pay an extra £43.93. £31.13 goes to the Town Council. The other £12.80 is a "special expense" levied by Eden District Council to pay for sports pitches, Castle Park, public open spaces, hanging baskets, bus shelters and town clocks. Penrith's council tax payers pay nothing for a town council and £15.80 "special tax". For an extra £3 per year Penrith residents get everything done for them. Good value or rip off!

Your Committee considered this when we were asked to combine our efforts to improve Coronation Park with the work of Appleby in Bloom. Along with many other organisations in the town we were contacted by the Chairman of Appleby in Bloom seeking our co-operation. We are quite happy to work under the general banner of 'Appleby in Bloom' but not until Eden District Council takes some action first.

We pointed out the long-standing problems of tree removal and wild flower destruction. But these are only part of the problem. A large tree was blown down in the January gales. Most of it was removed but huge pieces were left lying on the ground. These are far too heavy to be tidied up by volunteers. Several lengths of railing are in poor condition. Both paths need urgent repairs. There

is a dog litter bin, which is often not emptied for long periods, within feet of a children's play area. The public lamps (E.D.C.'s responsibility) are often unlit although, at the time of our Committee meeting, one was on all the time – by way of compensation? We do not feel that we could ask volunteers to work in the park until the area has been dealt with by the District Council. Firstly, there is little point. Secondly, much that needs to be done is costly and could not be undertaken by volunteers. Your Committee has communicated its thoughts to the Chairman of Appleby in Bloom seeking his support. Eden District Council is aware of all the items raised.

Public Toilets

Nothing heard.

Spring Exhibition

The exhibition went up on the agreed date. Both local newspapers carried an item by way of publicity. Despite supplying a copy of our press release to the editor of the Parish Magazine, nothing was mentioned in the April edition. (The information was supplied in time to beat the deadline.) Local residents, including several non-members of the Society have responded by supplying more photographs and information. Space will always be found for a special item and everything we get will form part of our archive in due course.

Townscape

Our application to Eden District Council under the Freedom of Information Act was responded to within the 20 day limit. We were told that Cllr Morgan had referred to Appleby's townscape during a meeting and we were assured that the Council's Planning staff were aware of the current proposals. We knew that. What we wanted to know was what was said at the meeting? We also wanted copies of correspondence, etc which had passed between Cumbria County Council and Eden District Council on the matter. We had hoped to learn what the District Council's Conservation Officer had communicated to Capita. We have a legal right to know. We agreed to write again.

Graham and Carl Bendelow (Chamber of Trade) have corresponded with Jim Smith (Capita) trying to find out when we might have something to look at.

Chairman's Note: As so often happens, Capita's reply was received the day after our meeting. Capita has promised to discuss their latest ideas with "Appleby's Task Force" early in May. By "Task Force" we presume they mean the representatives from the Town Council, Chamber of Trade and this society.

Shire Hall

Now that we no longer receive copies of Town Council minutes, we, like everyone else, are reliant on the Parish Newsletter. We discussed the 'Shire Hall' report (Parish Newsletter April 2005). For the benefit of members and readers who do not get the Parish Newsletter it reads: "An item had been raised by Cllr Langan at the February 9 Council Meeting regarding deterioration of the building. Cllr Langan had also received two letters from the Appleby-in-Westmorland Society. In addition, a letter had been received from the Appleby Alliance regarding usage of the Shire Hall. The Committee discussed what must be done. Resolved to recommend to Council that the ILerk write a letter to Cumbria County Council to ask for suggestions of what could be done to include wording around the fact that we haven't been able to raise the finance but we are still interested in retaining an option on the toilet block – dependant upon EDC plans."

We doubted whether this was a verbatim extract from the Council minutes. However, in the absence of more accurate information, we considered our response. Our first concern was the ease with which Councillors could combine the future of the Shire Hall with an option on a toilet block.

Councillor Langan has, in fact, received three letters from the Society. We have not received a response to any of them. Appleby Town Council knows exactly what Cumbria County Council has in mind for the building. Even before the Magistrates' Court finally closed, Cumbria County Council issued a prospectus outlining the possible uses to which the Shire Hall might be put. A copy was supplied to the Town Council by our County Councillor. It was dated 15 May 2000 – five years ago. In October 2000, Appleby Town Council contacted Cumbria County Council to enquire of the county's intentions. In April 2001, the Town Council was informed that the future of the Shire Hall would be considered at a meeting of the Upper Eden Neighbourhood Forum and that, if no practical interest was shown, the Council would sell the building. The Forum met in January 2002. The Shire Hall was declared redundant. The County council gave 'Appleby' six months in which to save the building. This deadline was removed following an appeal by the Appleby-in-Westmorland Society, which was supported by our Member of Parliament. In February 2002, the Town Council required its Financial and General Purposes Committee to consider ways in which the Shire Hall might be secured as a public resource. In March 2002, the *Herald* carried an item which began, "Appleby Town Council has agreed to work with both Cumbria County Council and Eden District Council with a view to retaining the town's Shire Hall in public ownership."

Towards the end of 2004 we learned that the Town Council had not considered the future of the Shire Hall. Worse than that, Councillors were told that they had not been asked to consider it. Now, in April 2005, we read, "we haven't been able to raise the finance"; "we" being the Town Council.

Your Committee accepts that the future of the Shire Hall as a potential tourist and local facility is bleak. Neither Eden District Council nor, it seems, Appleby Town Council has done anything for more than three years. Cumbria County Council has been very patient and cannot be faulted.

We agreed to write to Councillor Langan who is, after all, the Bongate Ward District Councillor, for a fourth time. We want to know what the Town Council has been doing about fund raising. We want to know why no Councillor has taken up our offer to look at the Society's file on the Shire Hall. (We felt this was an important offer since we were told that the Town Council cannot trace any previous papers.) Even a glance at the file would have enabled a more meaningful discussion when Councillors met.

Our letter will be copied to the Town Clerk and the Mayor. If we do not receive a satisfactory response, your Committee will consider an application under the Freedom of Information Act.

Oral History

More interviewers needed. The "more the merrier". We now have two recording machines. It was agreed that an item would go in the Parish Newsletter, seeking help.

Membership/Treasurer

No bank statement available. Olive requested all outstanding invoices to be paid and claims for expenses by the end of April for inclusion in the accounts for 2004/05.

Appleby Smarter

The 'big' problem confronting the town is the amount of debris deposited round the river by the January flood. The Society was not alone in contacting both the Town Council and Eden District Council urging both to do something before the Easter holiday. Nothing was done. Neither the Town Council nor our District Council was prepared to organize a skip (or similar). Everyone seemed to agree that the amount and size of some of the rubbish meant that much of it could not be removed by volunteers using blue bags – it was a bigger job than that. Eventually, one or two frustrated residents set about doing what they could. We agreed to drop a 'thank you' to those we

know about but there will be several members who did their 'bit' without being 'spotted'. To all of you – thanks from the Committee. The need for self-help became evident when residents who contacted Town Councillors were advised to send their complaints direct to Eden District Council! Er – how much do Councillors claim?

Planning Matters

The application for extensions and alterations at the Training and Heritage Centre is in. We have supported the generality of the application. There was no public notice of the fact that the development would affect a Conservation area. We drew this to Eden District Council's attention.

Coffee Morning 11 June 2005

All offers to help gratefully received. Please contact Olive on 51660 if you can help in any way. Contributions of cakes, etc for the cake stall will be particularly welcome.

Public Meeting 26 May

Olive reported an approach by the Manager of the Market Hall, asking that we change the date or time of our next meeting. Parish Council elections will take place that day and the main body of the Hall will be required. This means that the Weight Watchers' meeting will have to move to the Supper Room and we were given to understand that, because they have a weekly booking, their arrangements take priority. It was decided we could not change the date. A suggestion was made that the Weight Watchers could bring forward the start of their meeting. This would be easier for them to arrange – because they meet weekly, rather than for us to try and alter the start time of our meeting. Olive to revert to the Manager with this suggestion.

From the Secretary

Help wanted

We have received a request for information that we thought members might be able to help with – can anyone let us know the whereabouts of properties called HOMELEIGH (? spelling) and MYRTLE BANK?

Spring Bank Holiday Events at Orton

Please note that the newly-formed Orton and Tebay Local History Society is holding an Open Day Exhibition on Saturday 28 May in Orton Market Hall. Exhibits will show **“What We Know So Far”**. The Hall will be open 10.30 a.m. – 4.30 p.m., entry £1.

Throughout the weekend (Saturday, Sunday and Monday) All Saints' Church is holding the annual exhibition and gift event. This year's theme is **“Water – The Fountain of Life”**. Refreshments available, including cream teas in the afternoons.

It is also the weekend of the **Orton Scarecrow Competition**.

Next Meeting

Thursday 26 May 2005
7.30 p.m. Supper Room, Market Hall

Speaker: Mr Mike Mapleton

“Westmorland Postal History – Part II”

Mike makes a welcome return visit to develop themes touched upon during his first talk and will talk on post office buildings and people working for the Post Office.

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; from our Secretary – tel: 017683 51597; from our Chairman – tel: 017683 53063.

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