

# Whitchurch Town Council



## Annual Report 2015/16

Published 12th May 2016

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## **Introduction**

### **Cllr Mike McDonald— Mayor & Chairman**

**Welcome to Annual Report for Whitchurch Town Council for the 2015/16 civic year. The end of the civic year naturally presents an opportunity for reflection but also a chance to consider the opportunities ahead.**

Throughout the year, events both large and small have allowed me to witness first-hand the groups, individuals and communities who strive to make Whitchurch a better place to live; people who hold this town dear to them and contribute selflessly to the vibrancy that I know we are recognised for within the wider county and beyond. Nothing brought this home more so than to recognise the contribution of Whitchurch's sons to their country with the unveiling of the King's Shropshire Light Infantry Memorial at the National Arboretum with The Lord Lieutenant of Shropshire last May, my first civic duty.

No-one sums up this community spirit more than people like our first "Citizen of the Year", Betty Jukes – who works tirelessly to help her fellow senior citizens at Pearl Yard; Ruth Hislop and the team at Relay for Life; The Rotary Club members; the Chamber of Trade; the Beechtree Community Centre and other local charitable causes or the organisers responsible for our hugely successful calendar of events - the Food and Drink Festival, Party in the Park, Blackberry Fair, the New Year and Easter Horse Parades ... the list could go on!

Civic Pride has continued to be a major cornerstone of my civic year - our sense of community, our heritage and our future. Naturally there is a personal pride, too – in that I have been honoured to be able to represent our town in this historic role, which boasts alumni including perhaps our most famous son, Sir Edward German.

But it's not about one individual, it's about a Council and a Community that act with one common purpose. Time and time again I hear visitors comment on how Whitchurch has changed for the better over the years, how many events we enjoy and how welcome they are made to feel ... many have remarked on the number of independent retailers within the town (and continue to attract if my 'ribbon cutting' hand is anything to go by!).

Whitchurch has a true sense of identity – and we will have the opportunity to celebrate that with our 12 namesakes from across the globe, as we host the second "Worldwide Whitchurch Weekend" in 2017; last July I accepted that honour on behalf of the town at the inaugural event in Whitchurch, Hampshire.

I was also fortunate to accompany another group of people passionate about reaching out beyond our town's boundaries with a visit to our friends in Neufchatel-en-Bray, our twin town, in September – the life-long friendships demonstrated during that visit were inspirational.

We have also received three separate messages of goodwill from Her Majesty the Queen throughout the year.

Looking forward the Town Council are continuing to negotiate with our colleagues at Shropshire Council regarding the return of the Civic Centre to the town's hands; we also continue to review our governance structures to ensure that we are fit for the future.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank the civic staff alongside my fellow councillors for their efforts and support throughout the year; but most of all I would like to thank you all, the people who make Whitchurch it is today – and long may our success continue!



## 2015/16—A busy but eventful year

# Heritage

**Committee Chair—Cllr B Duffy**

The Whitchurch Museum and Archives

(WMA) has had a busy and productive year and I am very happy to report that the reaccreditation of the Museum was confirmed, thanks to all the hard work put in by Curator Dr Judith Hoyle, Ian Garner and the team of dedicated volunteers.

It is worth noting that many museums across Shropshire are currently under threat due to lack of funding and The Whitchurch Museum and Archives is very successful due to Whitchurch Town Council funding and the large team of knowledgeable, hard working volunteers.

Until recently the charity Friends of Whitchurch Heritage had some involvement with WMA, but this folded and now WMA is run by the Whitchurch Museum and Archive Volunteers (WMAV). There are many volunteers working as researchers in the archives and stewards in the museum and between them they put in working hours equivalent to three full-time staff. One aim is to encourage involvement of members of the community of all ages. Last year two students from Sir John Talbot's School came to the Museum, one a Duke of Edinburgh volunteer doing community service and another doing work experience. Over the summer months there were two student volunteers: a sixth former and a graduate student.

There was also a Glyndwr University Placement student from January to March of 2016, who enjoyed it so much they have continued to volunteer on a weekly basis! The Museum had more than 2100 visitors in the last year and more than 240 visitors on Blackberry Fair day in October; for every month visitors are up on the previous year which is very encouraging. Trip advisor has complimentary reviews of the museum and during February and March the Museum took part in the Mystery Shopper program, the results are awaited. The Museum has not only its own website and Facebook page - frequently updated and maintained by Ian Garner (of volunteers) - but also a number of additional websites – Great War, All Our Stories and Whitchurch Workhouse.

There have been a series of successful events over the course of the year:

The Family History Group now meets upstairs every Friday, having moved from the Beechtree centre and all are welcome. On 9<sup>th</sup> July WMA hosted a talk for WHAG on Whitchurch people transported to Australia.

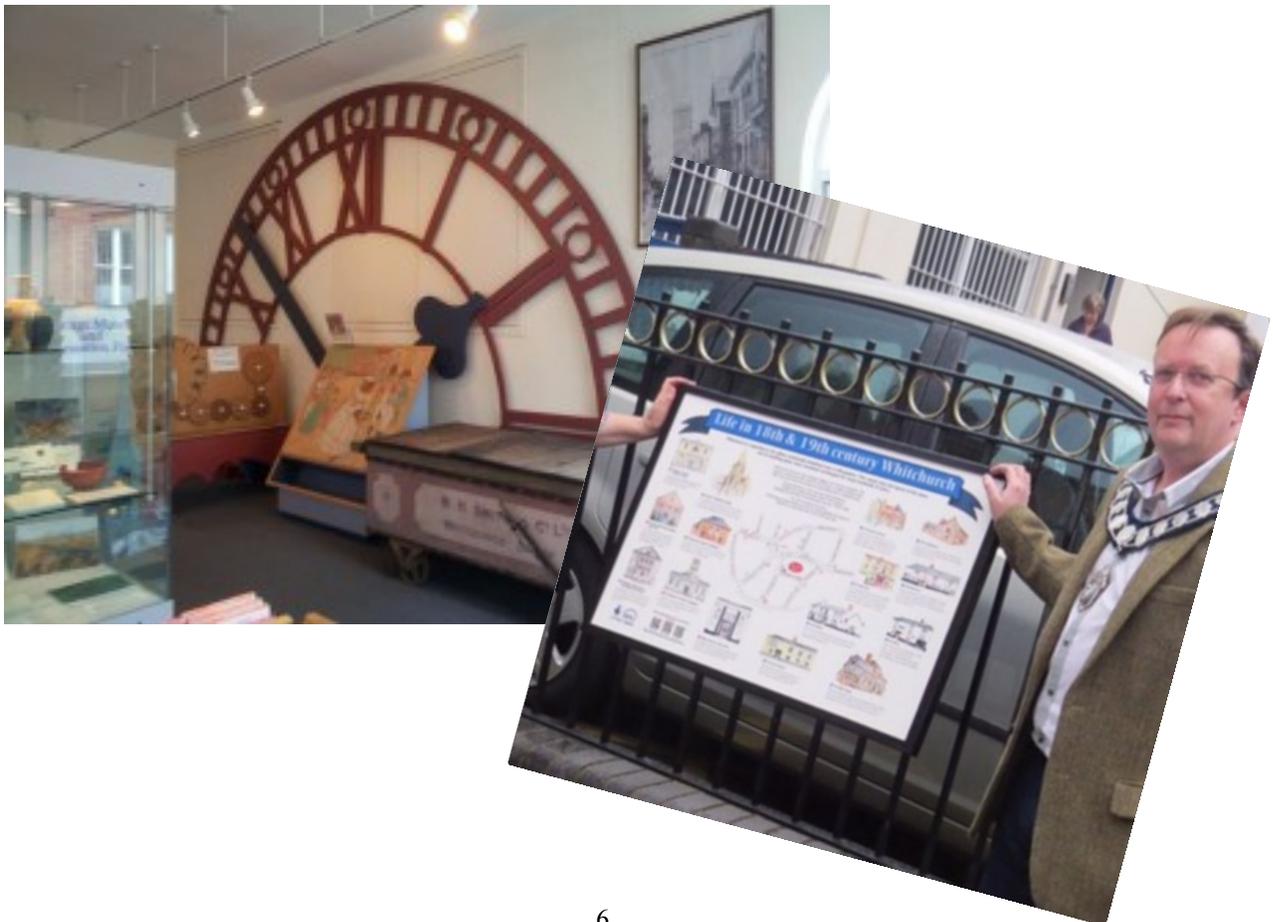


WMAV organised and manned the Heritage Open Days on September 11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> which included access to St Alkmund's church tower, the ice house, the tithe barn with 'y' station WW2 re-enactment and the Railway walk. The volunteers hosted an Evening Open Evening event on 17<sup>th</sup> November as part of National Archive Week. The launch of the new Town Trail board took place on 27<sup>th</sup> October. A very successful and well attended coffee morning, with a World War II theme and a book signing by Ron Cope, was held in the Civic on 20<sup>th</sup> November to raise money for the Museum. The Museum also held a special opening day on the Christmas Lights switch-on day at the end of November.

The launch of the Acquisition of the 9<sup>th</sup> Century Hooked Tags took place on 1<sup>st</sup> December. WMA was host to a one day course on collection care for 14 volunteers, provided by West Midlands Museum Development and run by The Birmingham Museum Trust. There have been many different interesting exhibitions, created by the volunteers, in the Museum over the year.

Whitchurch Museum and Archives is recognised by the British Museum, which has offered valuable artifacts for purchase by our museum – quite an accolade! Recently acquired were the silver hooked tags, amazingly found separately, but quite close together, on Prees Heath and are now on display, following a grand opening event of the launch of the Acquisition of the 9<sup>th</sup> Century Hooked Tags on 1 December 2015.

This a year there has been 378 donations which have been added to the collection; notably these included donations from the Angling Club and research from local historian and author Joan Barton. The owner of The Red Lyon building on the High Street kindly donated the stained glass windows from the Red Lyon and they will be used to create a decorative display in the museum.



# Parks

**Committee Chair—Cllr T O'Neill**

Many thanks are due to Nobridge for an excellent year in maintaining our parks and the vibrant floral displays that we have had in the parks and also hanging baskets and floral planters.

This year, 2016, we have also again extended the planting of new trees in the park, which hopefully will be an on-going program of renewing previously lost trees.

I am also very pleased to announce that in consultation with Nobridge we have come up with a new design for the pole planters; as the old ones were past their sell by date. We hope these will be pleasing to the eye. In conjunction with the new pole planters we are introducing new hanging baskets to the frontage of the Civic together with the improving the rear aspect of the Civic using wooden-based planters and also pole planters on the car park periphery.



We are pleased to reintroduce the pole planters on the Smithfield site after chatting with the new owners.

For 2016 we have applied for a verge licence to enable Whitchurch Town Council to take over the unkempt raised beds by the side of the Heritage Centre together with the grass area at the top of Bluegates passage; this will involve new signage for the Heritage, to create a floral approach in this area.

It is with regret that the recently Town Council supported Whitchurch Skateboard Park has unfortunately stumbled due to outside factors; there are still avenues open to us which we will investigate.



# Finance

Committee Chair—Cllr A Chesters

The pressures on costs and the running of the revamped Civic Centre have been the main financial focus of the year. The living wage legislation is an important feature in considering any costs and whilst it did not apply to any of the council staff, who already enjoy wages over and above the living wage, it did mean Admin wages were over budget. However the savings made in the Civic Centre wages offset the shortfall.

The Council considered it essential that public toilets closed by Shropshire Council were kept open, the cost of approximately £15,000 per year for them to be cleaned and maintained helps provide an important service for visitors and the local population.

The market is still thriving but stall income has declined, to a large degree however this loss of revenue has been offset by significant above budget letting income of the Civic Centre and augers well for the future of the venue.

Several local organisations benefited from Council grants which this year totalled £11,384. A fund of £12,000 for the year 2016/2017 has been allocated and awaits the approval of the Council before distribution.

IVF foal gives new hope to breeders

INSIDE: Money-off vouchers for McDonald's See Page 12

**WHITCHURCH Herald** WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 28 2015 PRICE 75p www.whitchurchherald.co.uk

# ANGER AS HSBC SHUTS TOWN BRANCH

CLOSING DOWN The HSBC branch in Whitchurch.

THE announcement of the closure of HSBC in Whitchurch in January has been branded "disgraceful", "appalling" and "a great shame" by loyal customers and senior town figures.

The banking giant confirmed this week that the High Street branch was due for closure after a significant fall in numbers in recent times.

Town Mayor, Councillor Mike McDonald, said he was disappointed with HSBC's decision, and suggested people thought of switching accounts to a bank that has shown loyalty to Whitchurch.

Full story - Page 2

dearnford **Bonfire, Fireworks & Lanterns** Thursday 5th November

Ticket Information: Advance - Up to 4pm Wednesday 4th November: Adults £8.50, Children (4 and under) £1.50, Family (2+2) £18. All booked tickets to be collected before the event. Available from the cafe on 01948 465914. On the night: Adults £4, Children £3, Family £14. Children 3 and under free. www.dearnford.com SY13 3JQ

Fairground Rides Candy Floss Hot Drinks Food Licensed Bar Gates Open 5pm • Bonfire Lit 6pm Sound Sensitive Display 7pm • Main Fireworks 8pm Fizzgigs Lantern Procession 8.20pm



We may have lost some national names from our High Street, but Whitchurch continues to thrive despite current

# Council 2015/16

**Mayor and Chairman**  
Mike McDonald

**Deputy Mayor**  
Tony Neville

**Councillors**  
Alan Chesters  
John Ebbs  
Bev Duffy  
Ticker Harris  
Terry O'Neill  
Malcolm Rigley  
John Sinnott  
Brooke Slater  
Graham Stockton  
Lester Stones

**Town Clerk**  
Stephen Platt

**Town Centre Manager**  
Zoë Dean

Civic Centre, High Street, Whitchurch, SY13 1AX

Tel 01948 665761

Website: [www.whitchurchcouncil.uk](http://www.whitchurchcouncil.uk)

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**Council Responsibilities**

The responsibilities of the Town Council in respect to Whitchurch and the surrounding area.

[Read More](#)



**Community Hub**

Contact: 01948 665761 for services available at the hub and opening hours.

[Read More](#)



**Hiring the Civic Centre**

You can book the Civic for a major event, a room for a meeting or hold your charity coffee morning.

[Read More](#)



**Food and Drink Festival**

We are excited to announce that Whitchurch Food and Drink Festival will be on 28-29 May 2016.

[Read More](#)