

Report for the September 2016 meeting of the Malvern Civic Society

On Friday 9th September we welcomed Dr Ian Cawood to talk about the Landmark Trust and, in particular, its restoration of Llwyn Celwyn, a unique medieval hall house in the Brecon Beacons. Ian is head of history at Newman University, Birmingham and describes himself as an avid "Landmarker".

Founded in 1965, the Landmark Trust is a charity that rescues significant historic buildings at risk and gives them a financially secure future by offering them for holidays. They are not significant enough to be rescued by other, bigger charities like the National Trust. Unlike other bigger charities, the public do not "join" but, instead, stay in one of the many properties that are available even for a weekend retreat. Income taken from such stays is used to restore and maintain the buildings owned by the Trust and the Heritage Lottery Fund has been a significant financial aid to the Trust's work. It prides itself on its sensitive restoration work and offers 195 "Landmarks", which include forts, follies, castles and fishermen's cottages in addition to homes of famous people. The buildings are conserved using traditional craft skills working to the highest quality of repairs and materials, and are furnished well, including having modern bathrooms. In the last 50 years the Trust has saved nearly 200 special historic places in Britain, one in Belgium and some in France and Italy.

The form of tenure preferred is freehold and the Trust has partnerships with charities like the National Trust and English Heritage. Its philosophy of conservation is to put repairs before renewal and is based on historical evidence only. Sometimes later additions are removed or changes are undone. The building comes first but the setting is important. The Trust does not purchase buildings on the open market and does not take buildings out of the general housing stock if they will survive without the Trust's work. It finds its buildings through 120 to 140 approaches a year to rescue them. The buildings can be privately owned, donated, or public buildings.

Ian took us through a delightful selection of photographs of established sites, showing their uniqueness, for example Alton Station in Staffordshire (the railway line closed in the 1960s), where you can sleep in what was the First Class Waiting Room or in the stationmaster's quarters. A building in the shape of a forty-foot stone pineapple in Scotland is one of the special places where Ian himself has stayed. Lundy Island in the Bristol Channel was discussed and illustrated leaflets as well as a beautiful book of all the sites showed examples such as Kingswear Castle, Devon, Lengthsman's Cottage, Warwickshire and Luttrell's Tower, Hampshire. The restoration of Astley Castle in Warwickshire took from 2007 to 2013 and was winner of the RIBA Stirling Prize for Architecture on completion.

A major current project is Llwyn Celwyn and of particular interest are its original ceilings, which are rare to find. As Late-medieval, it is stone built and is substantially intact. Probably built towards the end of the fifteenth century and before the dissolution of Llanthony Priory, it was built on what was then still Priory land. It went through a long decline in the eighteenth century when rents increased and tenants could not afford repairs. The restoration price was calculated as £4.2m, of which £2.5m came from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Funding has also been provided by some charitable trusts, statutory grants and private donations.

Chairman Clive Hooper gave the vote of thanks for this delightful talk and concluded that it had given us ideas for somewhere fascinating, pleasant and inspiring to spend a

holiday. In response to a query about the cost of a holiday, Ian suggested that it compares favourably with other types of hotel stays, e.g. £1,000 a week for a family of four.

Mark Young gave a short talk about Malvern Soup, a community crowd-funding event designed to draw people together locally, the first of which will be on Sunday 25 September at the Malvern Cube from 3 to 6 pm. The idea started a few years ago in Detroit to address the problem of decay and lack of civic pride. People pay £4 to listen to four people pitching for four minutes each on behalf of different charities about a project or an idea that will benefit Malvern. The one voted the winner receives the money for that charity. There is soup available, and people can bring and share their own food and enjoy the company of others. For further information, see www.malvernsoup.co.uk.

Clive Hooper talked about the Malvern Hills District Council's plans for the Council House: it is looking to reduce costs and bring office staff into one building and to put up a new building in the place of the Council Chambers, (aka Priory Lodge) which are no longer fit for purpose.

The Civic Society is looking for more volunteers to take on roles such as coordination of the monthly country walks, and coordinating the gardening project at Malvern Link Station. For more information about the Society, including forthcoming events and trips, please visit: <http://www.malverncivicsociety.org.uk>.

The next talk will be at 7.30 pm on Friday 7 October, entitled "*From Pens to Particle Physics*" by John Berkeley. It will be held as usual at the Eden Church Conference Centre, Grovewood Road (off Townsend Way, next to the Malvern Spa Hotel). Entry is £1 for all.