

REPORT OF THE MEETING ON TUESDAY 10 OCTOBER 2023

Present: Cllrs Hilyer (Chair) and Webster

In attendance: Victoria Johnson (Administrative Assistant)

Apologies: Cllrs Nicholls (Vice-Chair) and Powner

The meeting was inquorate and no recommendations were made.

GENERAL PROGRESS

In noting the considerable improvement that had and was being made to the war memorials it was recognised that this is largely down to the work of Denise Wheat, Victoria Johnson and Ash Lovatt.

LEEKBROOK WAR MEMORIAL

It was reported that

- the lengthsman had pruned the trees, removed dead bushes and vegetation, replanted, put down bark, and weeded the rear enclosure;
- the stonework will be jet-washed before Remembrance Day and it will then be repointed (quotation awaited);
- a proposal had been invited from a trusted supplier for a harness arrangement (to hang wreaths), of wood or of metal, to enhance the appearance of the memorial; a sculptor/maker, suggested by the Outside initiative, was also being approached; a choice will be then be made;
- neighbour Carol Adams had provided a photograph of the memorial in 1933 – ‘officials and workers from Wardles waiting for the cortege of Horace T Wardles on its way to Cheddleton Church’: an appeal had been issued to the History and Heritage of Leek Facebook page for a photograph of the Leekbrook War Memorial from earlier days;
- the Committee would like to include images of the memorial in publicity material, along with those of the Nicholson memorial and that at Ball Haye Green etc.
- the Committee is working to brighten the memorial and make it a more visible asset for Leekbrook, better able to focus remembrance on the sacrifice of local people”;
- Alan Bate of Cheddleton RBL, which organises remembrance at the memorial, has invited representation of the committee to the remembrance event at 9:30 on 12 November 2023 (Cllr Nicholls will take up this invitation): we are keen to liaise over improvement of the Leekbrook memorial.

BALL HAYE GREEN WAR MEMORIAL:

It was reported that, after the last meeting of the committee, notice had been received from English Heritage that the memorial is now listed at Grade II. EH has advised that “listing helps (them) to mark a building’s significance and celebrate its special architectural and historic interest. It brings specific protection so that its special interest can be properly considered in managing its future. Listing does not mean, however, that no alterations can be made - in fact in the vast majority of cases applications to make changes to a listed building are approved”.

NICHOLSON WAR MEMORIAL

Advent project

It was reported that the NWM element of the 24 Doors Live Advent Calendar initiative organised by Outside will take place on 20 December between 4 and 7 pm, at the rear door and in the lobby.

Current thinking for the event includes:

- a screen on the left-hand wall with a presentation of about 5 to 7 minutes comprising clips from the 1925 MWM dedication plus Imperial War Museum newsreel of the Somme, accompanied by a soundtrack of, perhaps, a carol (with WWI connotations) and popular song of WWI loss/separation,
- sound and smoke effects;

- at least two stewards in attendance, one provided by Outside plus Cllr Hilyer in uniform;
- sandbags and other war paraphernalia;
- a gazebo to be erected at the rear to regulate entry and to provide a simple brochure about remembrance in Leek;
- while safety electrical work is being undertaken the provision of power points will be improved.

It was noted that the advent initiative would be a trial run for future Memorial events, including the centenary in 2025.

Maintenance of NWM

It was reported that to the Monument was being prepared for the commemoration of the battle of El Alamein (24 October), Remembrance/Armistice on 11/12 November, and the Advent initiative.

The following actions had being undertaken:

- extinguishers had been located on the ground and first floors (only the lengthsman and the clock winder normally ascend to the higher floors and they will take an extinguisher with them);
- fire notices had been installed;
- an electrical inspection has recommended emergency lighting (in the event of a fire) and other safety critical work, together with increased power point provision on the ground/first floor (there are issues of using non-heritage elements, which need to be discussed);
- Nixon and Reeves were repairing the steps;
- benches had been painted (wood and metal) and the railings are being painted;
- the interior had been thoroughly swept.

This will be followed by:

- thorough de-cluttering of the lobby;
- pressure washing of outside flooring/paving/steps;
- reconsideration of insurance provision for the Monument (we are advised that it needs increasing above £750,000);
- improving the fairy lights on the two trees at the rear of the Monument;
- estimates for more significant cleaning and maintenance of the structure will lead to bids for funding for such work, all to take place in 2024 – a decision will be taken in 2024 about how much work is necessary/desirable (that is, should cleaning reach the top of the building or just the pediment level).

Tours of the Monument

It was noted that tours of the Monument had not been possible since the covid interruption as necessary risk assessment/safety provision work has not been undertaken. Proposals are received for one-off visits but these will only be possible once all safety-critical work is completed.

Centenary of the NWM in August 2025

There should be rededication of the memorial, a renewal of remembrance of those who made sacrifices, and a commitment to peace and reconciliation. See the report to General Purposes in July 2023 for suggested activities.

The opportunity should be taken to celebrate all aspects of Leek, including its industrial heritage (building on the Brough Park Centenary in 2024 which is to have that emphasis), the beauty of its surroundings, and the vibrancy of its culture and communities. Every effort should be made to improve the town (eg with bright banners on the lamp standards down Derby Street, art provision, on-going street activity) and to hold events (eg special market, theatrical/musical performances) to generally cheer people up. A steering committee should be established to organise the centenary and the larger event(s) with a remit embracing the responsibilities of all Leek Town Council committees (and those of SMDC and the county council), together with other partners.

Meeting Ended.