

WHITBY  
CIVIC  
SOCIETY

# NEWSLETTER

## SUMMER 2021

**Welcome** to the latest issue of our members' newsletter. Whitby seems at least as busy as it was before the pandemic, and the Government has announced an end date for the current restrictions. We can now at least start to think about returning to our usual levels of activity – unless circumstances change, as they have so often in the last two years.

Meanwhile, your executive committee has tried to keep going as best we can. We have continued to refurbish some of our older blue plaques and to commission new ones, with plans for formal 'unveilings' of plaques at Fortunes' kipper smokery and at the home of Thomas Marwood of the Whitby ship owning family. We have also agreed to erect plaques in memory of Francis Haydn Williams, minister of the Flowergate Chapel and vigorous social reformer, and Dora Walker, fishing skipper, philanthropist and writer.

We now intend to pause our blue plaque programmes for a year in order to take stock of our overall collection of plaques. We will, however, continue our awards of Certificates of Excellence to recognise exceptional works of restoration and renovation, such as the outstanding conversion of the old Spa Pavilion Theatre Booking Office into Clara's coffee shop. We are emailing members to let them know the times of these awards, as well as the formal inaugurations of new blue plaques.

Another article reports on our plans for the Heritage Open Days 2021. We have contributed historical expertise for information boards to accompany the Walk with Heritage sculpture trail. Joyce Stangoe has represented us at meetings on the hospital refurbishment, and I've represented the Society on the Whitby Town Deal Board. Our treasurer Janet Kukk has kept our finances in good order, as well as representing us on a committee to promote more humane crabbing.

We try to communicate regularly with members by email, hopefully without over-loading your in-trays! Thanks to our energetic secretary, you will already know that our planning sub-committee has continued its work as usual, meeting by zoom and considering a large number of planning and licensing applications. And thanks to our indefatigable membership secretary, we now have over 140 current members – perhaps the clearest indication of how loyal and passionate you are about keeping Whitby special.

Some of our activities, though, have suffered badly from the pandemic. Most obviously, we haven't been able to organise lectures, and in the coming months we will need to consider their return very carefully. We have also decided to pause our publications programme, as sales have dropped dramatically. On balance, though, I can't help feeling that we are coming out of the pandemic in reasonably good shape. Hopefully we will see one another face to face again in the none-too-distant future!

**JOHN FIELD**

# Presentation of Certificate of Excellence - Clara's Coffee Shop



Photos by Michael W Kilpatrick



# BLUE PLAQUES

The Blue Plaque scheme in Whitby is administered by Whitby Civic Society. Blue plaques are historical markers installed on buildings to celebrate and commemorate links with well known people. Recipients must be considered eminent in their profession, be known to have made an important, positive contribution to human well-being, or have been a benefactor to the town in some way. They must also have resided or had an important connection with the town for some time.

Prior to lockdown, we were considering nominations for four new blue plaques. Two have been recently installed, Fortune's on Henrietta Street and Christopher Marwood on St Hilda's Terrace. The two remaining, Dora Walker and Francis Haydn Williams will be installed before the end of the year

## DORA WALKER

Dora Walker (1890–1980) was the first female fishing boat skipper on the North East coast. She was also an author, writing her memoirs of nursing in World War I and history and tales of the fishing community in Whitby and the North East.

Born 2 July 1890, Dora Muriel Walker was the daughter of John and Mary Walker, a textile manufacturing family in Mirfield, Yorkshire. At the outbreak of World War I she joined up as a volunteer nurse wanting to help the troops fighting in France and Belgium. She worked in the Queen of the Belgians Hospital at La Panne and then in the Duchess of Sutherland's Hospital at St Omer until the end of the war.

After the war, Dora suffered from bronchial problems and was recommended by her doctors to seek some sea air. She bought a cottage in Whitby where she became interested in fishing, going out with her brother James in the boats of local fishermen such as Bobby Harland and John Robert Storr. Dora was determined to become a skipper in her own right and had her own boat Good Faith built at William Clarkson's Dock End yard. She fished as Skipper with Lawrie Murfield as her crew and engineer.

Despite the initial adverse reaction of Whitby fisherman to a woman skipper, they came to respect and admire her capabilities. Adept in handing long lines and crab pots, and with fine navigational skills she became known as Skipper Dora and was accepted into the fishing community.

She fished throughout World War II with a pistol in her belt and a tin hat on the bench, the only woman skipper to hold her licence in the North Sea throughout the war. Many fishermen had been called into the Royal Navy. This led to a re-shuffling of crews and wartime restrictions meant daytime fishing only. After the war, she created a fish company with her brothers James and Ronald to buy fish from the local fisherman at a reasonable price, often selling at a loss to assist the struggling families without loss of pride. This was kept secret until her death in 1980. At the end of her fishing career in 1954 she gave Murfield and his son her boat, Good Faith.



DORA WALKER

Photo courtesy of Whitby Literary and Philosophical

DORA WALKER continued.....

She was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts in 1953, and in the same year became the Honorary Keeper of the Whitby Museum, as well as curator of the Museum's Shipping section. Dora was also President of the Whitby Women's Lifeboat Guild. During her lifetime she wrote three books, one about her experiences as a wartime nurse and others about fishing in Whitby, *They Labour Mightily* and *Freemen of the Sea*. Many of her extensive collection of ship models were bequeathed to the Whitby Museum and can be seen on display in the Shipping Wing.

For the last five years of her life, Dora lived in a retirement home in Ruswarp. She died at the age of ninety in December 1980. A memorial service was held at Whitby's Mission to Seamen on Tuesday 6 January 1981, and her ashes were carried out to sea aboard the coble *Mayflower A*.

Whitby's unique and truly remarkable lady, the coast's only female fishing boat skipper, Skipper Dora, finally returned to the sea she loved.



Photo courtesy of Whitby Literary and Philosophical Society

“From childhood I had yearned to own a Whitby coble and fish it, and as it often happens that, when you intensely desire a thing, you get it. I got my coble!”

**DENNIS BUCK**

### **FRANCIS HAYDN WILLIAMS (1836–1910) Minister and Social Activist**

Francis Haydn Williams became minister at Flowergate Old Chapel in 1888. Within a short time his concern for the poor became a campaigning issue. He attacked the unfair rating system where the poor living on the east side paid one shilling and sixpence in the pound and the more affluent on the west only eight pence. He argued for children to have the right to use their school playgrounds at weekends and during the holidays. And his most determined and prolonged campaign was against the lord of the manor, Sir Charles Strickland who extended the boundaries of his property on the Abbey Plain on a number of occasions - an encroachment on to common land which he referred to as “the only public playground for a town of 14,000 inhabitants.” He had some success in recovering parts of

the Abbey Plain and the West Cliff where he tore down railings enclosing land. His action led to the re-opening of a footpath to Mallyan Spout and the discontinuation of a charge of 2d per person for using it.

His early work in the Ordinance Survey department in Southampton equipped him with knowledge about public rights of way that were being disregarded by landowners in the Whitby area. He led walks through fields and farms where land had been appropriated. These occasions were very newsworthy: The Whitby Gazette reported him leading a group of local men through a kitchen extension built over a right of way at a farm near Saltwick.

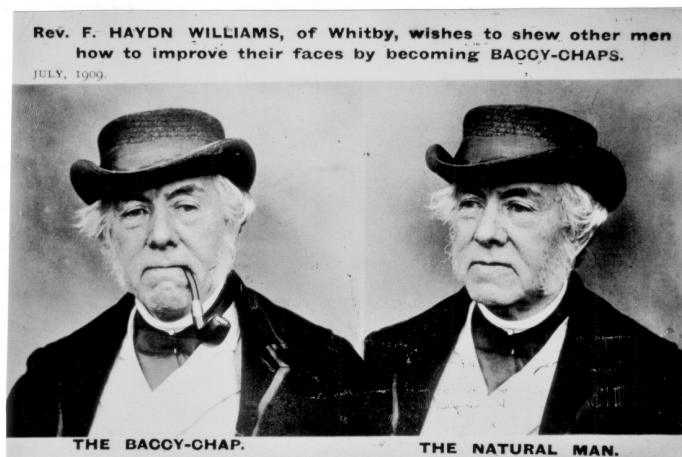
He became a celebrated character in the town but these exploits didn't endear him to those with property and power.

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Various injunctions were levelled against him by Sir Charles Strickland which resulted in 3 prison sentences.

He died after a short illness aged 74 years having battled against injustice in his fight to alleviate the extreme poverty of many of those that he lived amongst

Whitby Civic Society has commissioned a blue plaque in memory of Francis Haydn Williams which will be installed on the entrance to Flowergate Old Chapel at a small ceremony during Heritage Open Days weekend, on Sunday 19 September at 2pm.



**NEIL SWANNICK**

## HERITAGE OPEN DAYS – what's the plan this year?



In normal times, Heritage Open Days are one of the highlights of the Society's year. In 2019, we opened 15 local heritage sites, including Abbey House, the Victoria Spa Well and Flowergate Old Chapel, as well as offering a guided walk. , all coordinated by a small and hard-working committee under Betty Bayliss. Last year, we responded to the pandemic by restricting ourselves to a small online programme, comprising three films of historically significant properties, which proved far more popular than we expected.

So what's the plan for 2021? Most important, the Society's Executive decided to focus on a small-scale programme of real visits, to be held over the weekend of 18-19 September.

The three buildings we are concentrating on are the Victoria Spa Well, Flowergate Chapel, and the Fish Market, where there are plans for a lobster hatchery and a marine discovery centre.

This is obviously a much smaller programme than we'd have liked. The Executive were balancing the fact that on the one hand we will no longer be limited by the government's restrictions, while on the other hand there is still a significant risk from Covid, and many of the public will have reasonable concerns about indoor events.

We still have a number of decisions to make. We will organise stewards for all the venues, but visitor numbers will have to be limited. We will need to decide whether to prioritise Society members, and if so how. We will need to decide whether we ask visitors to wear masks. We will need to decide whether some venues will require advance booking.

We will take those decisions in August, and write to members with the details. In the mean time, please let us know if you have any suggestions or questions about this year's event.

**JOHN FIELD**

# WHITBY HARBOUR UPDATE



Whitby Town Council (WTC) was given an update on Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> June by two of our Society Members, with reference to item 4c on WTC's agenda, about Scarborough Borough Council (SBC). They confirmed that Scarborough's Annual Accounts have not been signed off by their External Auditors, for the last five years, and during that time, the Auditor has been considering objections, first raised by the Fight4Whitby group. The claim is that SBC's accounting treatment of the Whitby Harbour Undertaking is in breach of the law – namely the Whitby Urban District Council Act of 1905.

The key part of the objection, based on the 1905 Act, is that any surplus income from the car parks on the Upper Harbour land should be ring-fenced for reinvestment in Whitby harbour – and not used to cross-subsidise other SBC service areas, as has been the case since at least 2005/6. Under the Audit Regulations, this whole issue has had to remain in the strictest confidence until the Auditor issued his final decision. A final decision was issued on 26 March this year for the 2015/2016 accounts, recommending that SBC should apply to the Courts by 26 September this year, for a judicial ruling on the extent of the harbour land and its correct accounting treatment under the law. The copy of the decision letter sent to the Objector by the Auditor states *"We accept that if you are right, there are significant sums of money, looking retrospectively, which should have been put aside for harbour improvements."* (i.e., before 2015/16)

Under the Audit regulations SBC was required to convene a full Council meeting by 26 April, to decide whether or not to accept the Auditor's recommendation, with all of the proceedings – and the supporting papers being made publicly available. Nothing had happened by 26 April, and it emerged that, at the Council's request, the deadline for holding a full council meeting had been extended to 26 July. No such meeting has been called until a Whitby Scarborough Borough Councillor raised the point following the WTC meeting, with SBC at their Full Council Meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> July, resulting in briefing sessions to be held for Councillors prior to the SBC meeting called for 23<sup>rd</sup> July when it was recorded that SBC hoped a resolution could be reached.

There are millions of pounds at stake here for Whitby Harbour, yet 3 months after the Auditor issued his final decision, SBC had taken no action towards settling this long-standing issue, until it was raised by a Whitby SB Councillor. Fight4Whitby consider that the Town Council and the Whitby community have a right to know what is going on and have sent electronic copies of the Auditor's recommendation, together with the Objector's summary of evidence, to the Whitby Town Clerk for circulation to WTC Councillors.

Whitby harbour is vital to the Town both from an economic and heritage point of view.

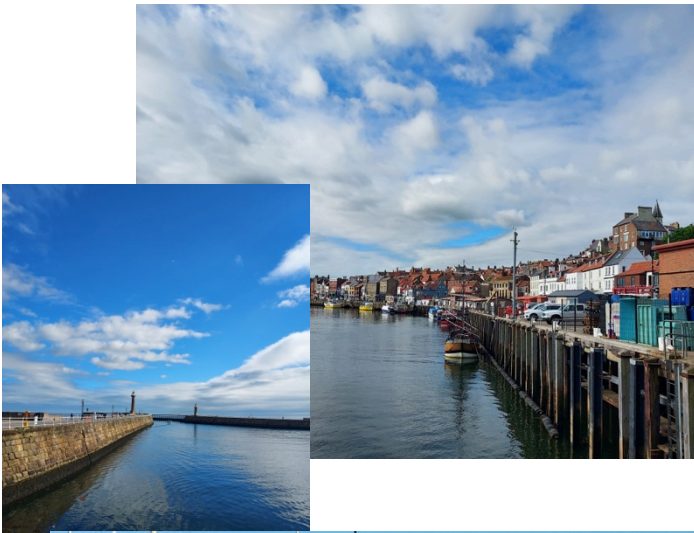
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It would appear our Statutory Harbour Authority – SBC – has failed to implement the Municipal Ports Review recommendations that local authorities should manage their ports with ring-fenced accounts and much enhanced local stakeholder involvement in the management of municipal harbours.

Whitby must ensure that this lack of expertise in the running of our harbour must not continue under the new Unitary Authority and that suitable financial, management and maintenance procedures are in place for the future success of our Town and its heritage assets.

**JOYCE STANGOE**

*Planning and Conservation  
Groups Coordinator*



## Congratulations

to our Executive member Becky Tucker and to  
Chris Sellors on the birth of their daughter  
Nellie Mae.



**WHITBY CIVIC SOCIETY - 2021 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

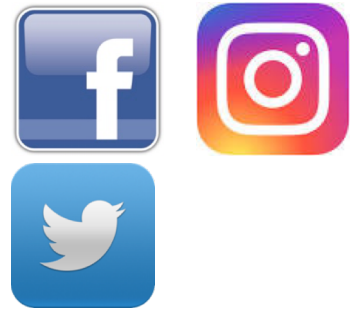
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**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

**Mike Dawson    Joyce Stangoe    Sue Boyce**  
**Nick Fardon    Rebecca Tucker    Fiona Cielow**

**NEWSLETTER**

**Pam & Chris Whitlam    01947 811808    [preven16@msn.com](mailto:preven16@msn.com)**



The Civic Society has a good presence on Facebook, Twitter, and more recently, has begun to build up a following on Instagram. Our Instagram account has been noticed by Civic Voice and we have been asked to speak at a national webinar in October to encourage other civic societies to use social media. If you don't already have an Instagram account, all you need is an internet connection and about two minutes.

Thank you for following us!

Should you wish to join Whitby Civic Society please complete this Application Form and send it with a cheque made payable to **Whitby Civic Society** to: **Mr. Chris Whitlam, 16 Carr Hall Gardens, The Carrs, Ruswarp, YO21 1RW. e-mail..... [cjwatchg16@gmail.com](mailto:cjwatchg16@gmail.com)**

Alternatively, by **BACS to Yorkshire Bank, sort code 05 09 79, account number 28118870** or bring this completed form along to one of the Society's monthly meetings. If you are a taxpayer the Society will be able to claim back the tax that you have paid on your subscription at no cost to yourself. To allow us to do this, please sign the declaration below. Thank you

**Membership Application**

I would like to join **Whitby Civic Society**, Registered Charity No.1055396      Membership cost is **£10** per calendar year.

Full name .....

Address .....

..... Post Code .....

Telephone .....

E-mail .....

I enclose £10 ..... being this year's subscription. I enclose £ ..... an optional donation towards the work of the Society. Total .....

Signature .....

Date .....

I am a UK tax payer

Please tick box if appropriate

I would like Whitby Civic Society to claim back tax on my subscription & donation from the Inland Revenue from the date on this form until further notice.

I understand that I must pay an amount of Income Tax or Capital Gains Tax at least equal to the tax the charity reclaims on my donations in the tax year.