

# ALL OVER THE TOWN

Autumn 2011

The Lyme Regis Society  
Newsletter



## Editor

John Marriage, Ware Lodge, Ware, Lyme Regis DT7 3RH - 443469  
email: john@tapestry.org.uk

### This Month's Contents

- |   |                                     |    |  |
|---|-------------------------------------|----|--|
| 1 | Your Committee                      | 11 | A Love of Lyme   |
| 2 | Planning                            | 12 | Health and Welfare in Lyme,<br>1900-1950                         |
| 3 | The Shelters                        | 14 | Book Review – Ebb & Flow,<br>The Story of Maritime Lyme<br>Regis |
| 4 | Bernard Spencer's Notes             |    |  |
| 6 | The Lerret                          |    |  |
| 8 | The Future of the Marine<br>Theatre |    |  |

The history and fortunes of Lyme Regis have always been inextricably linked to the sea. For seven centuries, trade flourished and faded through its port. Over the past 200 years the town has been a premiere seaside resort, the 'Pearl of Dorset'. Throughout this time, traditional trades of fishing and boat-building have continued, while Lyme's Cobb and its coast have inspired scores of scientists, artists and writers.

**Maritime Lyme 2011**, led by Lyme Regis Museum and involving many organisations in the town, celebrates the town's maritime life, culture and heritage with 12 months of events. Look out for, and support, events throughout the year!

Front Cover - "The Corinthians" set off for France on June 16th. leaving from The Cobb, and taking, amongst other things, some Lyme-brewed beer as a gift to the Mayor of Barfleur. In December they are to take on the "Atlantic Challenge", a 2500 mile row!

*Photo - John McCallum*

## Your Committee

Those of who were at the AGM in April will probably remember that we just elected members to serve on the Committee without specifically electing people to act as the Society's officers. This was because with Bernard Spencer standing down after so many years of valiant work for the Society, we did not have anyone who felt able to take on his role. We did briefly have a brave lady who was willing to help out as a short term chairman but the need for her to move out of Lyme eventually ruled that possibility out.

The elected Committee consists of eight members of the previous committee: Molly Spencer, Steve Wilkins, Keith Shaw, Janet & Mike Moyes, Roger Crabb and Margaret & Brian Dannatt plus Tessa Gilks who although only a member of the Society since August 2010 agreed to join the Committee specifically to help with the work of our Planning Officer.

As expected, at the first Committee Meeting after the AGM, no-one felt able to take on the role of Chairman in addition to the work they all ready do. It was therefore agreed that we would try to continue to run the Society with only an Acting Chairman with this role being taken on for 12 months at a time. Steve Wilkins agreed to be the Acting Chairman for the period up to the 2012 AGM.

The committee has also agreed the roles to be carried out by each member. These are:

Molly Spencer – Publications Officer

Steve Wilkins – Planning Officer and Acting Chairman

Keith Shaw – Treasurer, Newsletter Distribution and Acting Membership Secretary

Janet Moyes – Secretary

Mike Moyes – Minutes Secretary

Roger Crabb - Publicity Officer

Margaret Dannatt – Environment Officer and Newsletter Distribution

Brian Dannatt – Footpaths and Newsletter Distribution

Tessa Gilks – Assistant Planning Officer

The Committee feel that they form a good team able to carry on the work of the Society but are in urgent need of a full time Chairman and one or two extra members which would allow jobs not to be doubled-up. If you would like to help then please, please get in touch with one of the Committee. Contact details are at the back of this Newsletter.

# Planning

By Stephen Wilkins

Good news for Belmont: word has come from the Department of Culture Media and Sport (no less) that the Landmark Trust's radical plans can go ahead; so, meticulously and lovingly, Landmark will set about turning the house back into a Georgian maritime villa, a witness to Lyme's first flowering as a fashionable seaside resort. Fittingly close to its original, Belmont will become a short-stay holiday let for up to eight people.

The stable block will become an interpretation space, working with local volunteers, and there will be regular opportunities for public access to view the house. The whole process of funding and repair will take several years.

Readers who have experienced a sojourn in a Landmark property will be aware of the care taken to recreate the aura of these historic places while at the same time making them pleasant to stay in.

At the other end of the conservation scale a contretemps recently unfurled in the town. New owners of a listed cottage went ahead with removal of internal doors and partitions and used modern gypsum-based plaster rather than lime-based before realising that they needed permission, which was not forthcoming. So for those who live in a Conservation Area and/or a listed building the moral is ask before undertaking anything.

The owners of the Bay Hotel are seeking permission to enhance the view from eight of their bedrooms by lowering the window apertures to floor level and adding juliet balconies. While applauding the owners' desire to improve their premises we would be concerned if the modest but attractive rhythms of fenestration across the facade were interrupted and the horizontal emphasis forgone in favour of an intermittent vertical one. We trust that the Conservation Officers and the Hotel will reach a satisfactory compromise.

Mark Hix is applying once more for the cantilevered balcony extension to his quirky and entertaining restaurant building, a plan we supported before and do again. There has been ample time to resolve the boundary uncertainties which held the project up last time.

A welcome large step has been taken towards tidying up the tangle of conflicting ownerships resulting from the piecemeal development of the town over the

centuries. Put simply Marine Parade is now the responsibility of the Town Council, the Cart Road of the County Council and the Beach of the District Council. We understand that this means the Town Council can now regulate the number and disposition of the burgeoning flocks of cafe tables and chairs the length of the Parade – and can charge rent from those deemed legal, while banishing the rest. We hope this won't lead to a rash of new official and officious signs.

A Society member has drawn our attention to the trampoline on Main Beach. When it is unfolded and in use by small happy persons briefly defying gravity it looks attractive and quite fit for purpose. When folded up however it looks like a boarded-up bit of mobile home or cattletruck – and it spends longer folded, inert and ugly than in use. Not having any invisible paint, and on the principle of *can't beat 'em join 'em* we have suggested to the Town Council that they ask the owner to paint the plywood ends in strong greens or blues to match the red of the sides. A sort of giant Rubik's cube. Well, almost. The Council are taking up our suggestion.

## The Shelters

By Bernard Spencer

**B**y the time you read this Newsletter the new shelters on the seafront, which are scheduled for their opening ceremony on Saturday July 9th, will be in use. Certainly congratulations are due to all who took part in this major design and building project.

It seems an age ago, in those far off heady days when it was thought the cost might be about £750,000, that the Council and their volunteers embarked on the project. First, a massive consultation programme had taken place and the public had spoken, naming their favoured requests primarily for good, sheltered seating and retention of the memorial clock. The development has expanded since into what looks to be a versatile building which will suit many uses, but the price to pay also expanded into an estimated £1,300,000.

Members of the Lyme Regis Society were active in the formation and running of the steering group that took this project forward, so Society members can be confident we played our part, particularly in the extensive survey of what the townspeople expected or hoped would be provided within the constraints of the money available.

## **A page of notes and pictures from Bernard Spencer**

### **Shelters 2**

Unusually with a commercial construction project, no peep holes were provided in the continuous fencing round the new shelters to enable the public to see the progress of the edifice under construction. Townspeople and visitors were therefore denied watching the growth of the shelters as our hard earned money was spent. But, a mischievous storm tore down some of the fencing and this provided a little temporary viewing. You will be happy to learn the police made sure the wreckage was secure and as far as is known no one was hurt.

### **Motorcyclists**

The Westland Vintage Motorcycle Club of Yeovil came to Lyme Regis as part of their annual Coast to Coast run. The official start is at Lyme and the riders parked their bikes at Cobb Gate so the spectators could look at the motorcycles and chat to the riders before they zoom off to Weston-Super-Mare. Local fans and many other enthusiasts as well as the riders braved the dank morning which clouded the gleam of their carefully polished machines. They were undaunted, however, putting on a display of the bikes before literally riding across Dorset and Somerset. They hope to raise money for charity in this, their Silver Anniversary year. Apparently there were over 200 entrants this year aided by 90 Marshals. Good luck to them all.

### **The Three Wheeler**

The pictured, fine three wheeled machine, ensconced in Cobb Gate car park, was carefully treasured by its owner by being parked away from the sea. Although only across the road, it was enough to avoid the damp mist. What a fine machine this was to have for a spin on a sunny day. Sadly, these days, you cannot enjoy the wind blowing in your hair.

### **The Tree House**

Actually, this wonderful construction is nothing to do with Lyme Regis but is something I spotted in France on a recent holiday. Well! you could hardly miss an object this size half way up a tall tree. This large Tree House was accessed by perilous looking steps and rungs and had furniture as well as cooking equipment. It could also sleep six people in its lofty eyrie. Gosh! wouldn't the kids love to play up there. Well! I would anyway.



## The Lerret - A fishing boat built for Dorset

By Keith Shaw

2011 is the year of Maritime Lyme and one of the stars of the show is a lerret built by Gail McGarva. Until recently it is thought possible that only one traditional lerret was left. This was the *Vera* which was built in 1923. In 2009, Gail, a traditional wooden boat builder and a graduate of the [Lyme Regis Boat Building Academy](#), won a scholarship from the Queen Elizabeth Scholarship Trust to build a new generation lerret based on *Vera*. The new build, housed at the Academy, not only sought to preserve a boat in danger of extinction but also to preserve the art of building boats "by eye" without the use of design drawings or construction plans. The new lerret was named *Littlesea* when she was launched in Lyme Regis harbour in July 2010.



Littlesea Ashore

The lerret is a clinker built, flat floored fishing boat that dates back to 1615 or earlier. Lerrets were built for launching from the steep shingle of Chesil Beach on the Dorset coast and some of their features are very specific and very interesting. The boats are double ended and, therefore, do not have a transom at the rear as a standard fishing or rowing boat would. "Why?" you may ask. Well, when launched down the steeply shelving shingle bank, the bow enters the sea at speed and is quickly in deep water. As the boats buoyancy forces the bow up, the stern goes down and a boat with a transom stern would immediately become waterlogged and possibly even sink.



Littlesea Afloat

If you look at the first picture of the lerret (incidentally, this shows the stern of the boat) you will see the four oars, each of which was manned. What you can see is not the oar's blade; it is the end held by the crew. The blade is much, much thinner. Again, you may ask "Why?". Lerrets do not have rowlocks to hold the oars in position for rowing. They have 'hole-pins'. On the oars, you can see the holes through which the 'hole-pins' pass. The thick section of the oar, the 'copse', acts as a counter balance and the crew are able to let go of the oars without any fear that they will be lost; a very valuable capability whilst fishing or beaching. The copes, the pins and their method of use can clearly be seen on the picture above.

During the building of *Littlesea*, many people from along the Dorset coast came forward with their memories, stories, photographs and articles about the lerrets and it became clear that there was a wonderful story to tell. With funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, it has been possible to create an oral history to preserve the memories of the people who fished with lerrets. Moreover, it has also been possible to put *Vera* and *Littlesea* at the heart of a touring exhibition enabling people all along the Dorset coast to learn about and enjoy the stories of this unique vessel and its fishing communities.

As part of Maritime Lyme, it was decided to launch *Littlesea* in the traditional way from the steep shingled beach of Lyme Regis and this was done on Sunday 22 May 2011. A large crowd gathered on a blustery day. Gail McGarva said a few words, especially thanking Roy Gollop who acted as "lengthsman" and was Gail's mentor during the build. Dr Sue Beckers sang the shanty she had composed for the launch in July 2010 and a host of people helped with a very successful launch of *Littlesea*. The lerret was then rowed across the bay to "The Pool" where it was beached next to a yurt within which memories of lerrets were displayed in both a pictorial and an aural form.

Throughout the year many local organisations are taking part in Maritime Lyme. Your Society has arranged a talk by Yvonne Green, the Principal of the Boat Building Academy to tell us about the fascinating work carried out by their students. The talk will be on Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> December at Woodmead Hall. We hope very much to see you there at what will be the final event of Maritime Lyme.

*This article is based on text previously produced for the Lyme Regis Museum's web-site and blog. Further pictures of the Lerret Day event can be seen at [www.lymeregismuseum.co.uk](http://www.lymeregismuseum.co.uk) on the Previous Events page.*

## What Future for Small Theatres?

By John Bartholomew

At the end of March this year, Phil Whitehead, recently Creative Director of The Marine Theatre, with some assistance from John Bartholomew, then Chair of The Trustees, spoke to the Lyme Regis Society about how his experience at The Marine had shaped his views about theatre in the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This short article is an attempt to capture and in some ways, develop, what was said at the meeting.

Based on the simple notion that 'the arts' and exploration of our cultural heritage is generally 'a good thing', a tradition of subsidy for the arts has grown up over time in this country. The Arts Council are the principal arbiters and benefactors in the UK, augmented by a whole host of public and private arrangements for individual organisations and events. Until 2002 The Marine Theatre was owned

and managed by Lyme Regis Town Council. In common with a lot of local authorities around this time LRTC decided that the theatre could be better run by a trust of interested and appropriately qualified individuals and therefore handed it over to The LymeArts Community Trust with an arrangement for a declining annual subsidy, and these broad expectations: that good provision would be made for the local community; the tradition of professional theatre would be maintained and that additional financial support would be sought from elsewhere. While this brief was essentially adhered to over a period of eight years, the financial crisis and general economic retrenchment impacted on the arts as painfully as any other sector of activity and it was certainly felt by LACT.

In common, therefore, with every other arts organisation in the country (if not the world) LACT began a debate about what its theatre was 'for' and Phil's talk was a central part of this debate. He began with a basic challenge to his audience to consider what art was for. Essentially he asked what benefits audience members could divine from their own direct experiences of the arts and how these might be replicated for others, not least in The Marine Theatre. Given the self-selecting nature of the audience there was, unsurprisingly, a pretty well universal commitment to the benefits of the arts. Most people were able to reflect on experiences which they had felt were



"Timossi" at the Marine Theatre in 2008

improving and had shaped them in some way but, of course, the very nature of the subject defeats any attempt at the refined, or scientific, analysis which is beloved of hard-nosed policy makers.

Both of us took away from the meeting a very clear sense that our audience felt that Lyme would be the poorer without its theatre and that the way forward would ideally put education and community at its heart. It is absolutely clear to all of those engaged in the arts that energy and imagination will have to be exercised to maintain provision on relatively small budgets. Phil Whitehead spoke about the pressure that would be felt by artists to provide more for less, with less income guaranteed; but also for venues, the benefits that could accrue from collaboration and generating economies of scale.

In practical terms, therefore the future might see: a mission to involve local people in live music and drama both as audience and participants; engaging quality performers on realistic terms; finding ever more imaginative ways to bring professionals and audiences together through workshops, discussion based around performance, shifting performances to more amenable times (afternoons specifically requested) and involvement of visiting professionals (actors and technical support) in advancing the knowledge and understanding of local amateur groups.

The vision encapsulated by Phil might be of a venue which is truly seated in the community; where every individual within the catchment might genuinely be able to say that they used and valued the theatre. With relatively modest development the theatre could be seen as a place to gather for a coffee and another venue for local artists to exhibit; and applying the principles both of sound economy and community development a future engagement might well look something like this: a visiting company is engaged to tour a number of theatres in the area, manage workshops in schools in the morning, a matinee in the afternoon and technical workshops for local groups in the evening.

Very little in life stands still, still less in the arts. The climate out there will not be particularly favourable for small organisations for some time to come. The only certainty is that if small theatres are to survive they will need to become very closely identified with the communities they try to serve.

## A Love of Lyme

By Karen Clode, Bristol resident and visitor to Lyme.

*And a very strange stranger it must be, who does not see charms in the immediate environs of Lyme, to make him wish to know it better.* Jane Austen.

I have been visiting Lyme Regis for the past twenty-five years - often up to five times per year. Here are some of the charms that attracted me to this magnetic town-

\* The taste of the first crab sandwich of the visit, washed down with a pint of thirst quenching Palmers beer. After this treat I know that I have arrived in Lyme. My favourite spot for this delicious lunch is the Royal Standard sun terrace.

\* The literary connections of the town. Everyone knows about Louisa Musgrove's fall from the Cobb and the intensity of Sarah Woodruff's vigil on the Cobb. Colin Dexter's "Way through the woods" gives an enchanting and accurate description of Lyme during Morse's stay at the Bay Hotel. Also who cannot be stirred by the true incident whereby Henry Fielding attempted to abduct Sarah Andrew in 1725. A Blue Plaque marks the spot - finding Blue Plaques in Lyme is great fun.

\* When feeling slightly peckish what can beat a tub of whelks from Wason's Stall? Splashed with vinegar these shellfish delicacies are best eaten on the Cobb whilst watching the local fishing trawlers bobbing in the harbour.

\* At the end of a glorious day, in Lyme, watching the crimson sun set over Monmouth Beach knowing it will rise over Portland the following morning.

\* On moonlit nights, when the air is crisp with frost, hearing the roar of waves as they clash along the shingle beach lining Marine Parade.

\* Taking my Jack Russell dog on an early morning walk along to Black Ven Beach. Here I observe the play of light on the sea and sky and plan my next water-colour painting.

\* Searching for beautiful earrings made from local gem stones. Wearing them always reminds me of my visits to Lyme.

## Health and Welfare in Lyme Regis 1900-1950

Lecture by Martin Roundell Greene, reported by Bernard Spencer

The title could leave the reader to suppose that this might not be a very entertaining subject and he would be wrong, for the content is a factual account that should be read by everyone, telling - amongst much else - what life was like for many people in the 19th century.

For example, in 1890, Dr Bangay, Lyme's Medical Officer of Health wrote, he had visited a house with, "two small, ill constructed sleeping spaces upstairs, with a sunless aspect and no fireplace, and in the bottom room was the only fireplace in the house where two sick children had their beds made-up on chairs. The door to the outside was ill-fitting and opened and shut several times an hour by the rest of the children going in and out of this dank lean-to." He added "That both children died could not be a matter of surprise."

In his talk Martin Roundell Greene spoke of the changes in health and welfare over the years as well as in basic matters like water, food, sanitation, housing and medical support; paying particular attention to the sick and elderly. He reminds us that the "Poor Law" was introduced in 1834 and with it came the Workhouses. This savage law was not repealed until as late as 1948. There was little or no help available for the poor and conditions were kept harsh to discourage people from seeking relief. To talk of Health and Welfare in Lyme Regis at the turn of the century is to paint a sorry picture. The first Medical Officer of Health was the aforementioned Dr Bangay appointed in 1882. His first task was to combat the poor urban living conditions. It is clear that some areas of Lyme were crowded with small cottages popularly called one up one down where as many as ten might share the two rooms

However, there was a big improvement after Dr James Spurr became Medical Officer and he started reforms that benefited the town. A move helped by a new water supply from Rhode Barton. A happy event somewhat countered by the introduction of flushing toilets that used up much of the water. There were, apparently, no typhoid or cholera outbreaks in Lyme over these troubled times but child mortality was high.

By 1900 Dr Spurr found matters much improved; for example, working conditions in factories and workshops showed no evidence of overcrowding, working

conditions were good, with acceptable sanitary arrangements. Martin gave his audience precise information on these matters but there is not room to detail more here. He also described Almshouses, Council Committees, diet and schools. In all an exhaustive research of his subject that was as interesting as it was informative.

Quick snippets that might interest you are - 1925 brought the first woman councillor to Lyme. In 1926 there were 25 legitimate births and 5 illegitimate. By 1930, 44 new houses had been built on Colway Mead. After the war it was decided that all new homes should have electricity.

In darker days the former Chairman of the Lyme Regis Society, Dr Joan Walker, was so concerned about child mortality and public health she wrote a paper on the subject "The Children in the Cemetery."

Dr Walker's most telling comment came after the 1940 war when she said "Through wise rationing during the Second World War, nutrition in England was markedly proved. The obese adult grew slim, and school milk and dinners produced a generation of outstandingly healthy young people." Good advice we largely ignore today.

*Martin Roundell Greene also wrote the popular book, "Electric Lyme - The coming of Electricity to an English seaside town," which is on sale at the Museum and good bookshops.*

Coombe Street in 1903 - picturesque, but one of the more deprived parts of town.  
Photo courtesy of Lyme Regis Museum.



# Book Review – Ebb & Flow, The Story of Maritime Lyme Regis

By Keith Shaw

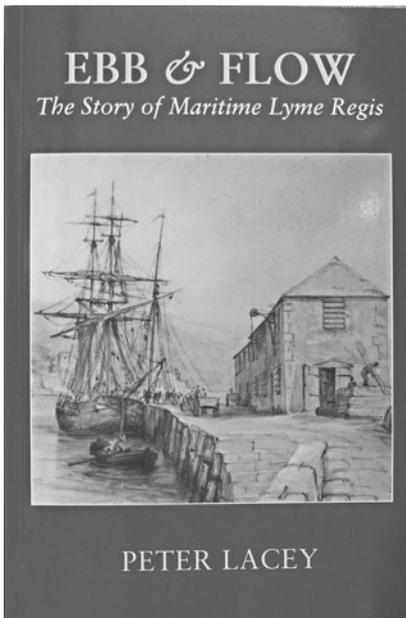
One of the two objectives of the Society is “To promote interest in [Lyme Regis’s] cultural life and history”. How could we not, therefore, acclaim this new book by Peter Lacey which is a maritime history of the town? We have two earlier great historians of Lyme: Roberts in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century and Wanklyn in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Now in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, in Lacey they have a rival.

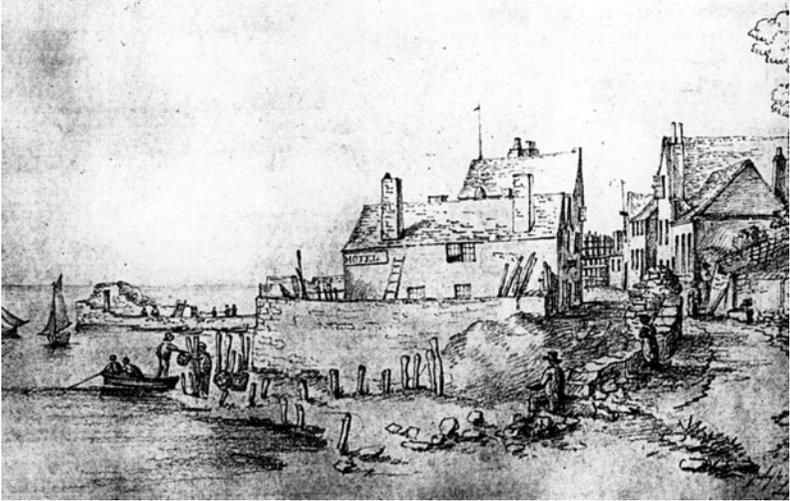
From the title you would believe that the book concentrated on ships and the sea. It does but, as much of what is interesting about Lyme over its history involves ships and the sea, the result is a quite comprehensive history.

The story starts in 774 when Cynewulf the West Saxon King granted land on the west bank of the river Lym to Sherborne Abbey and runs through until 2010. Through most of this time one feature of the town, the Cobb, is mentioned time and time again. In Peter Lacey’s words, it is “Lyme’s umbilical cord and unites and binds the town to its maritime heritage”. Some of the detailed topics that are

linked by this cord are expected: commerce with the rest of England and the world, ship-building, the lifeboat to name but a few. For some, at least to me, the connection was less obvious. I’ve read about the siege of Lyme and the “Western Women” but, until now, it had never really got through to me how vital the Cobb was in enabling the town to be provisioned and thus survive during the siege despite the Royalists, sometimes successful, attacks on it and the shipping in it. Lacey states that “The key to Lyme’s survival was the Cobb, it was paramount that the town’s sea supply line remained open and that the harbour was held by the defenders.”

Whilst reading, I was interested to note how often Peter Lacey wrote about topics that I





A rare illustration of the Cobb Hamlet in 1825

had first learned about at one of the Society's monthly talks: salt production at Lyme, Mrs Bowditch's Coffee shop which was Lyme's first Post Office and the Cobb Ale (not a beer) organised to raise funds to repair the Cobb. Perhaps that gives an interesting idea for a future talk!

How comprehensive a history *Ebb & Flow* is can be judged by what is not included. Lyme's literary links are barely touched on, the railway is mentioned in passing and electricity supply (the subject of another very readable modern history – *Electric Lyme*) not at all. But why would they be included? These topics are not connected to the sea or ships and that is the essence of what the book is about. One thing is for certain, you will learn something when you read this book because the maritime history is covered in such great detail with many ships, ship-builders, masters and seamen connected to Lyme mentioned in some way. I learned a great deal but, perhaps, my starting point was low.

*Ebb & Flow* is a book that really should be on your shelf if you are interested in Lyme's history and want a good book to read on a winter's evening or just want a book to dip into to discover an interesting fact or three. Peter Lacey must be congratulated on the extensiveness of his research and also on his decision to donate his royalties from the first two hundred copies sold to both Help the Heroes and the Lyme Regis Museum, where the book may be purchased.

# The Lyme Regis Society

## Subscriptions

Most members have now paid their subscriptions for 2011. If you are due to have paid then you will have received a personalised letter with the December 2010 Newsletter.

Single membership remains at £7 and Family membership at £11 per annum. If you are due to pay a subscription and have not yet done so then please remit it to the Treasurer at the address on the following page as soon as convenient.

Members who do not currently pay by Standing Order may like to consider doing so. This should be a lot easier for everyone, especially me as it will reduce the number of cheques I have to deal with. If you wish to start paying by Standing Order and can't find the Mandate Form that was included with the December 2010 Newsletter then please phone the Treasurer and one will be sent to you post-haste for you to complete and send to your own bank.

## The objects of the Society

The objects of the Society are to safeguard the natural and architectural beauty of Lyme Regis and its neighbourhood, in accordance with its civic requirements, and to promote interest in its cultural and historical associations. The Society is registered with the Charity Commission and affiliated to the Campaign to Protect Rural England.

# Diary Dates

Tuesday 27th September

**Helen Mann** *Property Manager, National Trust West Dorset* will talk about the Future for the National Trust in West Dorset.

Tuesday 25th October

**Simon Ratcliffe**, *deputy Town Clerk*, with David Gale, Chris Boothroyd and Stephen Wilkins - The Marine Parade Shelters: Past, Present and Future.

Tuesday 22nd November

Joint meeting with Dorset Wildlife Trust - a speaker from the Barn Owl Trust.

Tuesday 13th December

**Yvonne Green** *Principal of the Boat Building Academy* - Life at the Boat Building Academy

Friday 27th January 2012

**Coffee Morning** at the Alexandra Hotel, 10.30 - 12.00

Tuesday 28th February

**David Johnson**, *Manager of the Regent Cinema*, on Films with a connection to Lyme Regis & Dorset - venue to be announced

All meetings start at 2.30 pm at the Woodmead Hall,  
Lyme Regis, except where noted.