

**BRIDGNORTH AND DISTRICT TOURIST ASSOCIATION AGM
NOVEMBER 24 2011
AT THE SWAN, KNOWLE SANDS, BRIDGNORTH**

The present Board have been busy working on your behalf and I want to thank them all for their constant support. I think it's important to mention that the Board are all volunteers. Also my appreciation goes to the officers and staff from the various organisations who give us their expertise. My particular thanks must go to Jodie Stephen from Shropshire Tourism who is our secretary and administrative support.

We rely on your membership to pay for this support from Shropshire Tourism. As we do to produce the annual Where To Stay Guide, the constant updating of the website and promotional advertising in Telford and Ironbridge Guide, and Shropshire and Welsh Borders Guide which is produced by Shropshire Tourism. There were some concerns about this year's Where To Stay and we are addressing those concerns.

Membership fees are not enough for all of this, so we need to go to other sources for funding. We have a Service Level Agreement or contract with Shropshire Council and they have given us £3000 for 2011-2012 towards the costs of our activities, we had £10,000 from the old Bridgnorth District Council. We fulfil that contract by promoting this area. With the cutbacks by Shropshire Council I feel sure this figure will not be forthcoming for 2012-2013 but we will continue to put our case to Shropshire Council. When you think of the £89 million tourism brings into the economy of this area, and the Council are duty bound to help sustain the economy of the county.

One positive move which I am really pleased about is that Bridgnorth Town Council is now very much on board with the Association. They have given us a grant of £2000 towards our costs, and we have our meetings in the Town Council Offices. I want to thank the present Mayor, Councillor Connie Baines and the Acting Town Clerk, Anne Wilson for helping to consolidate this relationship; which hasn't always been so.

We really do need to make the shops, pubs and eating places realise that they are an important part of the tourism industry and we all need to work together. Visitors shop, eat and drink and we do rely a great deal on our day visitors.

Yesterday, November 23, at the Birmingham Hippodrome there was one of a series of road shows being held around the country promoting the 2012 Olympics. This was the West Midlands event and the great and the good were there. I attended along with Tim King, Tourism Officer from Shropshire Council, Karen Crick from RAF Cosford and representing Shropshire Tourism was Glen Lawes, ex chief executive of Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust. The big guns on the panel included Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt, Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport, John Penrose, Minister for Tourism, James Berresford, Chief Executive for VisitEngland and David Moorcroft.

I was impressed with Jeremy Hunt; he wasn't pushing the party line. He spoke for 15mins or so about the West Midlands, with authority and quoted figures, companies and towns without the aid of notes or auto cue.

The audience of several hundred included representatives from major hotel chains, travel operators, attractions small and large and many others connected to the tourism industry, and I can tell you Shropshire featured really strongly. In a presentation given by Bill Morris, a member of the Olympic organising team, the first three slides were Shropshire scenes. These were shown before any other West Midland landmarks. He started by talking about 'a small beautiful market town in Shropshire called Much Wenlock' He mentioned his attendance at the launch of the mascot, Wenlock, in Much Wenlock. Love it or hate it, the mascot is being produced by a Telford firm and a big play is being made about it. He then went on to tell the history of the modern Olympics and about William Penny Brookes and Baron Pierre de Coubertin. This was in front of a very influential audience. There were those, even from Shropshire, who had not heard the story.

A great deal was said about the cultural side of the event, Ironbridge is playing a part in that. Also about schools across the country participating in Olympic type games. Of course the Torch Relay was mentioned and the 8000 participants involved. It is coming from Shrewsbury to Much Wenlock through to Broseley and Ironbridge, sorry Bridgnorth.

Because of the Olympics the Government is putting a great deal of money into tourism, they seem finally to realise the importance of it. We need to capitalise on this and make it sustainable, this is an opportunity. There is of course a website for further information and it tells you how to get involved, www.visitengland.org/2012offers

Finally, I would like to thank you for supporting the Association and wish you all a successful 2012.

Carol Cooper
Chairman, BDTA