
CHESTERFIELD & DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

No 1

February 2019

WELCOME BACK

Since the Civic Society is more than fifty years old, it has probably issued newsletters more than once in the past. Most recently, a series of six appeared between 2011 and 2014. The committee discussed a revival at our February meeting and we decided to give it a try. We are numbering this new series from 1, rather than 7, to save newer members wondering what has happened to their copy of the first six. It is also possible that more than six were produced in 2011–14, although these are the only ones to be found in Chesterfield Library. If any members have got other issues of the old newsletter, we would be glad to hear from to make copies for the library.

Newsletters are much quicker and cheaper to produce and distribute than they used to be before first word-processing and then email became available. Gone are the days of typing, duplicating, photocopying or small offset printing; stuffing and addressing envelopes; and spending a large amount of valuable subscription income on postage. It is now possible to draft the text in an evening and send it out to members by email the following day. This makes a newsletter much less time-consuming or costly to produce than used to be the case, and makes monthly publication perfectly feasible. This in turn means that the 'news' in a Newsletter will still be news of current and forthcoming events, not a record of what happened weeks or months ago.

We hope to produce the newsletter every month, as soon as practicable after each committee meeting. It will relay to the membership as a whole what the committee discussed and decided, as well as keeping members informed about forthcoming society events and other activities likely to be

of interest to Civic Society members.

Although the main distribution will be by email, we will be happy to send printed copies to members who are not email users. Contributions by members who are not on the committee will be very welcome, and if anyone reading the newsletter decides they would like to join the committee, they will be warmly welcomed.

DO WE WANT HS2 IN NORTH-EAST DERBYSHIRE?

Our next speaker meeting will be at 7.30 p.m on Thursday 28 February at St Thomas's church centre, Chatsworth Road. This will be a discussion meeting on the theme of 'Do we want HS2 in north-east Derbyshire?'. We were prompted to arrange this after HS2 Ltd held a series of what they described as 'consultation' meetings in various places (including St Thomas's), which for visitors proved to be less a chance to consult the promoters of the line as a sales opportunity for the company. The desirability of building what has been described as the most expensive railway ever to be proposed in Britain did not seem to be on the agenda. Since then there has been further press publicity concerning the ever-increasing cost of the project.

To give local people the chance to hear various points of view, we have arranged a meeting with four speakers:

- Coun. Mrs Tricia Gilby, the Leader of Chesterfield Borough Council, will explain why her authority supports the building of a link line from HS2b (the Birmingham–Leeds section) near Tibshelf to the Midland Main Line at Clay Cross,

which would itself be electrified to Sheffield, rejoining HS2b itself north of the city. Either as part of this scheme, or independently, the approach to the station at Chesterfield would be radically remodelled to create better vehicle access and an improved interchange with bus services.

- Glynn Waite, who is well known locally as a railway historian but is professionally a railway industry consultant, will explain his reservations about the project.
- Tony Mellors will speak on behalf of the HS2 Blackwell Group. This has been formed to oppose the building of the link line, which will sever the villages of Newton and Blackwell near Alfreton.
- Mike Rose, a chartered engineer, former partnership officer of the High Peak and Hope Valley Community Rail Partnership and a committee member of Railfuture Yorkshire, will speak about HS2 in the wider context of London–Yorkshire rail services.

This is a balanced and well-informed panel, and the evening will be arranged to allow ample time for questions and discussion. It should be an interesting event, which we hope Civic Society members will find helpful and informative. Come along prepared to ask questions and find out more about a project that could transform Chesterfield's railway service to London.

Members may wonder why HS2 Ltd themselves are not taking part. There is a simple explanation: the company was asked in November to provide a speaker and eventually, earlier this month, wrote refusing to do so. The Leader of North

East Derbyshire District Council also declined to be represented, and Stop HS2 Ltd stopped answering our emails several weeks ago.

FAMILY AND LOCAL HISTORY FAIR

Chesterfield & District Family History Society is once again organising a family and local history society fair, which will take place at the Proact Stadium on Saturday 18 May. Although the Civic Society is not a local history society, some of its interests are historical. We will therefore be having a stall at the fair, where we hope to attract some new members and will be happy to meet our present members. The event can be recommended as a showcase of what is going on in the local history world, not just in Chesterfield but more widely, including groups from South Yorkshire, whose work is not often seen in Derbyshire. The fair is a particularly good place to find new publications from all the societies represented.

VISIT BY GRANTHAM CIVIC SOCIETY

We were approached a few months ago by the Grantham Civic Society, who have summer fraternal visits to other societies in the East Midlands. We have arranged for them to visit Chesterfield on 21 May. The day will begin with a reception by the Mayor at the Town Hall and then probably two walks around the town. The Grantham Society proposes to invite us back to their town in 2020. There will space, we are sure for any Chesterfield Society members who would like to join us on the day.

CHESTERFIELD CANAL WALKING FESTIVAL

The Chesterfield Canal Trust is organising a programme of walks connected with the canal to coincide with the 'heritage weekend' in September 2019. The Civic Society has

been invited to devise and lead a walk, which will have some connection with the canal and with Chesterfield. We hope to do this and announce the date and route next month.

CHESTERFIELD STREETS AND HOUSES

Members will remember that our chairman gave a talk on this subject at the AGM in 2017. The book promised then has finally gone to press and it is hoped to launch it in March. We will arrange a joint meeting of the Derbyshire VCH Trust (the publishers), the Civic Society and all the local history societies in the district to mark the occasion, when signed copies will be available at a discount to the full price of £20 (for a hardback of 200 pages with 16 maps and 12 pages of colour plates). The book includes a general account of the development of the built-up area of the borough down to the first boundary extension of 1892, and then a short (or in some cases not so short) history of each property within that area (roughly speaking bounded by the Rother, the Hipper, Foljambe Road, West Street and a boundary (now lost) between West Street and Stonegravel.

DRAFT LIST OF LOCAL HERITAGE ASSETS

Three Civic Society committee members attended a meeting with the Borough Council last month to discuss this list, which the council has drawn up, of buildings and other structures which, although not meriting statutory protection as listed buildings or scheduled ancient monuments, are of some local interest. This has been largely compiled by the council's conservation officer, Scott Nicholas, and represents a huge amount of work by him on top of his regular duties. The draft can be downloaded from the council's website and the Civic Society (and others) have been invited to suggest additions to the list, or to supply more historical information about any of the buildings included. This we hope to do over the next couple of months.

ST ANDREW'S CHURCH, BARROW HILL

Two of our committee members attended a meeting convened by the Archdeacon of Chesterfield last month at St Andrew's, to discuss its rather uncertain future. The church, well known as an early work by the local architects Parker and Unwin, has a very small congregation and is facing huge repair bills. A future as a 'community' building with a reserved sanctuary is a possibility, but the village also has a Methodist church, with a hall, both of which have been modernised, and a former workmen's institute, which provides another meeting place. At present it is difficult to see where either the capital cost of repairs, or a revenue stream for its maintenance, could come from. Conversion to commercial or residential use might make it difficult to retain a reserved sanctuary.

PROGRESS AT CHESTERFIELD WATERSIDE

During what has been a fairly quiet month for planning applications on which the Civic Society has been asked to comment, one stands out. This is further application by Chesterfield Waterside to build 177 flats and houses on the site around the canal terminus which was cleared some time ago. In other words, there are finally signs of real progress with this important scheme. The two applications are available on the Borough Council's website under the following references:

CHE/19/00007/REM
CHE/18/00083/REM

The Civic Society committee will be making its views known to the Borough Council but if any other members would like to comment they can of course do so direct to the council. Once these houses and flats are up and occupied, the Waterside project will obviously make a much bigger impression on residents and visitors, and should mark the first stage in the rehabilitation of this part of the town – the one which those arriving by train see first.

BLUE PLAQUES

An important part of the work of any civic society is the installation of blue plaques, drawing attention to the architectural merit or historical interest of local buildings, or identifying the site of features which have disappeared. Photographs of our existing stock of plaques appear on our website.

Progress in this direction has been frankly slow over the last year. Several property owners whom we have approached about having a plaque on their building have not replied to our letters (much less said yea or nay) and since the plaques cost about £500 each, we really need outside sponsorship to progress very rapidly. We are considering whether it would be worth applying to the Heritage Lottery Fund for, say, £5,000 to put up ten or a dozen plaques quite quickly, probably including some replacements for those which have not worn well over the years, or where the historical information is now known to be inaccurate (or both).

The one bright spot is that, thanks to the generous support of Chesterfield Co-operative Party to mark their centenary, a plaque has been made for 55

West Bars (now the Co-op Funeral Service), which when opened in 1905 was the first big town centre store owned by the Chesterfield Co-operative Society. We hope to announce a date for the unveiling of this very soon, following the refurbishment of the Funeral Service building. This will include a rededication of the chapel of rest there.

If any members have suggestions for where we might try to erect blue plaques, do please let us know and we will investigate; equally, any suggestions about famous Chesterfield men or women who might be commemorated would be welcome, as long as we can identify a property with which they were associated for a reasonable length of time.

COULD TAPTON HOUSE ONCE AGAIN BECOME A SCHOOL?

As most members probably know, Chesterfield College have now vacated the former school premises at Tapton House, i.e. the mansion itself (a grade II* listed building) and

the buildings added in 1930, when Tapton House senior selective school was opened. The mansion was also occupied by a private girls' boarding school for some years in the mid-nineteenth century. The Borough Council remains the owner of the freehold of the site.

Although Tapton House is not yet 'at risk', the building is clearly not going to improve if left standing empty. It is probably suitable for several uses, although the adjoining school rooms are perhaps less easily adapted, and at the same time limit the attractions of Tapton House as a private residence.

One possibility is that it could become a school again – perhaps an independent academic secondary school of the sort Chesterfield has lacked since 1940. The buildings remain admirably suited for this purpose and would require minimal adaptation, compared with any other use. What is important is that a fine eighteenth-century mansion with interesting historical associations as the home of Chesterfield's first bankers and of George Stephenson, the builder of Chesterfield's first railway, does not stand empty for longer than absolutely necessary.