
CHESTERFIELD & DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

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A REMINDER OF OUR FORTHCOMING SPEAKER MEETING: HIDDEN SECRET STREAMS

An illustrated talk by Rachel Walker, project manager, Don Catchment Rivers Trust (DCRT), on Wednesday 25 March at 2.30pm in the Suite at StThomas's Church Centre, Chatsworth Road.

DCRT is an independent charitable trust, aiming to improve rivers in the Don catchment area including locally the Rother and the Doe Lea. The trust is currently working on a project in and around Chesterfield, which includes volunteering to help clean up streams, working with local groups to research the history of the area, and make improvements to river habitats. Visit their website at dcr.org.uk for more information.

As part of this new study the North East Derbyshire Industrial Archaeology Society is surveying all known mill-sites on the Rother and its tributaries, somewhat on the lines of the late David Crossley's work on the use of waterpower on Sheffield rivers. This has not been done for any other Derbyshire river and should yield interesting new information.

Apart from the well-known example of the Hipper, the power provided by some of the smaller streams in the Rother valley, such as Trickett Brook and Redleadmill Brook in Wingerworth, has been extensively exploited over a long period by several different industries.

HURST HOUSE: THE SAGA CONTINUES

Derbyshire county council's questionable conduct as sole trustee of the Chesterfield Schools Foundation (i.e. the endowment of the former Chesterfield Grammar School and funds given to St Helena School) continues. On 11 February Frank Gorman, Tom Roberts and I attended a meeting at County Hall at which Alex Dale, the cabinet member responsible for the county's council's duties as a local education authority, accompanied by two solicitors, an estates officer and a finance officer, attempted, with a complete lack of success, to persuade us that his authority's conduct as trustee of no fewer than 46 educational charities was in the best interests of those charities.

Most of the matters discussed were not directly related to the work of the Civic Society (although at least one is sufficiently serious to be brought to the immediate attention of the Charity Commission) but we did learn that the county council has still not sold the Chesterfield Schools Foundation's freehold interest in Hurst House.

As Civic Society members are aware, Hurst House is a listed building in a conservation area. It has stood empty since the Foundation's last tenant vacated in 2014.

In May 2018 Coun. Dale, acting on behalf of the county council as the Foundation's sole trustee, resolved to offer the property for sale by private treaty for six months and, if unsold at the end of that period (i.e. November

2018), to offer it for sale by auction. Neither Coun. Dale nor the officers present on 11 February were able properly to explain why the county council has failed to abide by that resolution. Nor, in the intervening sixteen months since the deadline of November 2018, has it achieved a private treaty sale of Hurst House, which therefore remains a building at risk. At the same time the county council continues to expose the Foundation to the risk of serious loss through a fall in value of one of its main assets. No responsible body of independent trustees would behave in this way.

BRAMPTON MANOR

Most Civic Society members have probably read the article in the *Derbyshire Times* (27 February) concerning Brampton Manor, the house set back from Old Road which has for some years been used as a members' club or a pub-restaurant. The article mentioned that the owner of the property (who is not the operator of the current business) wishes to convert the main house and an outbuilding into six retirement flats and build a care home with 60–70 beds in the grounds. Only the first of these objectives is covered by two current planning applications (CHE/20/00017 and 00018), which also provide for the conversion of a cruck-framed barn behind the house into a garage.

The main house is listed grade II, a gazebo in the grounds (not the subject of the current applications and in poor condition) is listed grade II*, and the barn is not only listed grade II but

(most crucially) is also a scheduled monument. Any work on or beneath the barn therefore requires scheduled monument consent, which takes precedence over listed building consent and can only be granted by Historic England, not a local authority. The current applications must, therefore, be rejected. Apart from showing a lack of understanding of the law relating to scheduled monuments, the applications were poorly prepared in other respects, notably in failing to include a proper assessment of the historical or architectural importance of the two protected buildings.

More seriously, the owner's plans for new building within the curtilage of the property would substantially affect the setting of all three protected buildings. What is needed, before consent is given either to alter the existing buildings or erect new ones, is a full historical and architectural assessment of the entire property. The Civic Society committee hopes that the Borough Council will make this clear to the owner when it rejects the current applications.

As an aid to a better understanding of the history of Brampton Manor (which has nothing to do with the manor of Brampton), we have mounted on the Civic Society website some text, taken from a future Victoria County History publication on Brampton. Briefly, the house dates from about 1600 and was built by a lead merchant named Godfrey Watkinson. It was originally called New House because it stood on a previously unoccupied site on Brampton Moor. The cruck-framed barn is contemporary with the house (and has been closely dated by dendrochronology, i.e. 'tree-ring dating'); the gazebo appears to have been added in the early eighteenth century.

BLUE PLAQUES

There is no definite news on the blue plaques front this month, although the committee did discuss at its last meeting the case for finding a building somewhere in Chesterfield to commemorate Violet Rosa Markham CH (1872–1959), arguably the most distinguished woman native of the town. One possibility is the present building on the site of the (long demolished) Chesterfield Settlement on Church Lane. This was founded by Miss Markham, originally in imitation of the French *écoles des mères*, as part of her efforts to raise working-class living standards in the town.

McCARTHY & STONE'S PLANS FOR SALTERGATE

Observant readers of McCarthy & Stone's lavish advertising in the weekend property supplements may have noticed that the name 'Chesterfield' dropped out of their list of proposed new developments some months ago. The company has now revived its plans to demolish the former Chesterfield rural district (later North East Derbyshire district) council offices on Saltergate and build a large care complex on the site. The Civic Society's view at the time of the original planning application was that the loss of the original RDC building was regrettable but unavoidable if the site was to be comprehensively redeveloped.

The amended application appears to be little changed. It has attracted opposition from residents of the recently built houses behind the old offices, because of fears of loss of light and overlooking. Set against this is the argument that the site cannot

sensibly be left as it is and no-one has come up with a better idea. A development on this scale will also bring more residents back into the town centre.

The Civic Society committee has not yet formed an opinion on the application but will in due course make its views known to the Borough Council. Meanwhile, a full set of drawings is available on the planning website (still under the old reference CHE/17/00769/ FUL).

MANOR FARM, HASLAND GREEN

On the opposite side of Chesterfield from Brampton Manor stands Manor Farm, at the southern end of Hasland Green. This is an important house, both historically and architecturally. It is the only house in the borough (as far as anyone knows) to retain a medieval open hall within later (seventeenth-century) additions; and is notable as the birthplace of Bess of Hardwick's mother Elizabeth Leake. Superseded c.1800 as the main house on the former Leake estate by Hasland Hall (i.e. the nucleus of the school of that name), Manor Farm was modernised to a very high standard some thirty years ago.

The present owners wish to re-roof the house using blue-grey Spanish slates in place of the existing synthetic slates. The Civic Society committee has suggested to the Borough Council that the owners be asked to use Derbyshire stone flags instead, since these would have been the original roofing material. They are no longer quarried but reclaimed stone is available, admittedly at a high price.