
CHESTERFIELD & DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

No 26

www.chesterfieldcivicsociety.org.uk

January 2022

Campaigning to make Chesterfield a better place to live



IAN THOMASON 1950–2022

WE very much regret to tell members that Ian Thomason, who had been an active member of the Civic Society committee for several years, died on Tuesday 11 January, after a lengthy battle with serious illness. He was 71.

Ian was born in Chesterfield in October 1950 and grew up in New

Brampton. He started at Chesterfield School in 1962, took the five-year O Level course and entered the sixth form in 1967. There he excelled in English and won a place at Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge, one of seven boys who went to Oxford or Cambridge in the year that left school in 1970. He was one of two who came from very modest home circumstances and whose success emphasises how the post-war grammar schools greatly widened opportunities for children from such backgrounds.

Ian read English for Part 1 of the Tripos but switched to what was then Social and Political Sciences for Part 2. During the university vacations he worked for the fashionable Chesterfield men's clothing retailer Mr Six, and was responsible for sourcing stage-wear for many of the local rock groups of the time.

Ian was himself a good guitarist and a very accomplished harmonica player. He was for some time one half of 'Mac and Tomo', a blues duo in the style of Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, with his good friend Malcolm David Colton (Mac).

Ian graduated in 1973 and went on to make a career in information technology.

In retirement and living in Sheffield, Ian renewed his interest in Chesterfield and joined the Civic Society and the Local History Society, bringing to both a lifetime's knowledge of the town and enthusiasm for both its past and its future. He was also a member of Friends of Spital Cemetery.

Ian was a keen walker, especially in the Peak, and in recent years had become valued and much appreciated member of the 'Intrepids' Railway Walking and Archaeological Groups, contributing his considerable historical perspective to the Friday morning forays along old railway trackbeds and latterly canals too. He was forensic in his analysis of the existing geographical features surrounding their location, assisting considerably in the group's understanding of the railway system as it was before its demise.

Both the Civic Society and the Local History Society seized on Ian's IT expertise and asked him to take over their websites, which have be-

come a vital means of promoting all such organisations. He was very happy to do so and greatly improved both. For the Civic Society Ian photographed all our blue plaques and made them a valuable feature of the website. He also took photographs at our meetings, where he could always be relied upon to make sure that the digital projector worked properly.

Despite increasing health problems in the last few years, Ian remained determined to support both societies for as long as he could. He attended Civic Society committee meetings until he became unable to drive, and afterwards continued to send in detailed reports on the website every couple of months. When he it became obvious that he would have to give up the work, he ensured an orderly transfer to another committee member.

We send our deepest sympathy to Ian's wife Christine Merrick, a former pupil of St Helena's, whom he had known since their schooldays. He will be sadly missed by a wide circle of friends in Chesterfield and beyond.



REFURBISHING THE STEPHENSON MEMORIAL HALL

AS WE SAID we would in the last Newsletter, we have now submitted our comments on the pending planning application to remodel to Memorial Hall, with the aim of modernising and improving the Pomegranate Theatre and refurbishing the museum displays.

The whole of our lengthy and

detailed comments, which draw on the considerable professional expertise available within our membership in both architecture and history, have been mounted on our website. Essentially, we are broadly in favour of the proposed reconstruction of the theatre, although have some doubts about access arrangements to the upper level, but are very strongly opposed to the plans for the museum.

Few would argue that the permanent exhibition, which is now over thirty years old, would not benefit from remodelling, in the light of both widening knowledge of the history of Chesterfield and advances in museum technology and curatorial practice.

Where we differ fundamentally from the suggestions made by the Borough Council's consultants is in the proposed subject-matter of the new displays. These have been designed mainly around a limited number of individuals believed by the consultants (wrongly, in almost every case) to have been important figures in the history of Chesterfield since the late nineteenth century. To describe the choice as eclectic would be an understatement; for the most part it is completely misguided.

More seriously, the proposed displays would tell the visitor nothing about the history of Chesterfield before about 1870. Starting from the belief that it is the function of a local museum to describe the history of its community from the earliest times to the present through material evidence, we can only condemn unreservedly what is proposed, for the simple reason that it would not achieve that aim. The approach is the worst possible – it deals only with the last 150 years of Chesterfield's history (for the most part inaccurately and inadequately) and ignores the preceding 1,800 years, from the first permanent occupation of the site of the town by the Romans.

We hope very much that the council will think again about purpose of their museum and how that purpose can best be achieved.

BRAMPTON MANOR: PROGRESS AT LAST

THE Borough Council has finally made a decision on the planning application to convert the public house at Brampton Manor on Old Road into four flats, and have granted permission for the scheme to go ahead.

The consent is subject to a number of important conditions, which we are pleased to say reflect the arguments put forward by the Civic Society in three separate submissions which we made while this matter was under consideration. They also go some way to meeting the views of Historic England.



Essentially, the owners of the site, whose long-term aim is to develop a nursing home at the property, cannot go ahead with the conversion of the pub (a grade II listed building) until they have carried out repairs (under a Scheduled Monument Consent granted by Historic England) to the cruck-framed barn (a scheduled monument and a grade II listed building) at the rear of the pub, which is currently in very poor condition. They must also make a full assessment of the condition of the gazebo (listed grade II*) in the front garden of the pub and carry out repairs found to be necessary.

These conditions meet the two points we pressed most strongly – that the future of the property as a whole should be considered before work is done to any individual building; and that the future of the two more important listed buildings should be secured before the owners are allowed to convert the pub into flats, much less erect new buildings on the site.

The one snag that remains unresolved is that the owners have yet to obtain vacant possession of the pub, and have been in dispute with their tenant for well over a year. Until that

matter is resolved, no building work will presumably take place on any part of the property, which leaves the two more important listed buildings still at risk.

HURST HOUSE: HOPE OF ACTION BY FEBRUARY

THE long-running scandal of the gross mismanagement of the Chesterfield Schools Foundation by its sole trustee, Derbyshire County Council, may be drawing to a close.



We have been advised by the Derbyshire Community Foundation, the umbrella organisation which is to take over the trusteeship of the Foundation, together with some 45 other educational charities which have for many years been mismanaged by the county council, that it hopes to complete the transfer of the real property belonging to the Chesterfield Schools Foundation to the DCF by the end of February. The property comprises the Foundation's freehold interest in Hurst House on Abercrombie Street and the greater part of the site of Brookfield School on Chatsworth Road.

This transfer has been in progress since 2020. We have never been able to establish the exact reason for the delay, but we believe it may arise from an error by the county council, which in 2013 is understood to have registered the title to the Brookfield site as belonging to the county council. The title does not belong to the county council but to the Chesterfield Schools Foundation.

This seriousness of this error was greatly compounded by the execution of a purported 'lease' of the land by the county council to the academy trust which then ran Brookfield School for a term of 125 years at a

peppercorn rent.

Not only does the county council not own this land, but by granting the lease at a peppercorn rent for a lengthy term the county council has deprived the Chesterfield Schools Foundation of a significant income stream for the next century and a quarter.

Members will recall that the Civic Society complained some months ago to the Charity Commission about this latest example of the county council's misconduct as a charity trustee, and that the Charity Commission found several reasons to refuse to take any action in the matter.

The best we can hope for is that the Derbyshire Community Foundation does succeed in completing the transfer by the end of February, and then takes prompt action of dispose of Hurst House. It cannot possibly be in the best interests of the Chesterfield Schools Foundation to retain ownership of this property, since it is producing no income for the charity, and it is certainly not in the best interests of building for it to remain empty, as it has done since 2014. Hurst House should be sold, ideally for conversion back to a private residence, as it was until 1928.

We also hope that, once it acquires the trusteeship of the Chesterfield Schools Foundation, the Derbyshire Community Foundation will administer the charity in accordance with the Scheme of 1991 (i.e. lawfully). Since that date, not a single young person in Chesterfield has benefited from the charity as the Scheme intended.

CROW LANE REOPENED

MEMBERS may have read in the *Derbyshire Times* that the county council, after some delay, have reopened the section of Crow Lane that was closed to motor vehicles about eighteen months ago.

The closure was ostensibly to encourage more people to walk or cycle to the Royal Hospital, but there is little evidence that anyone did so. In reality, the closure was part of the county council's plan to extend the existing Hipper Trail from the railway

station to the hospital – the eastern leg of the East–West Walking and Cycling Route, previously more accurately described as a 'Cycle Super Highway'.



The temporary closure of the road expired on 1 December. Utterly predictably, the county council failed to reopen the road on 2 December, the day on which the Civic Society wrote to the council asking for details of the statutory authority under which the road remained closed.

There was, of course, no statutory authority and a few days later the Civic Society received what was presumably intended to be an email for internal consumption within the council admitting as much. The road was eventually reopened on 15 December, after an unlawful period of closure lasting a fortnight.

The Civic Society committee initially supported the closure of Crow Lane to motor vehicles, for which it is ill-suited because of its narrowness and steep gradient. We then became aware of the petition signed by 711 residents of Calow and Brimington Common objecting to the closure, and decided that in the interests of local democracy we should support the petitioners.

At the same time we also discovered that residents of a number of streets near Crow Lane had not received the circular concerning the Cycle Super Highway which the county council wrongly claimed had been delivered to those streets.

The Civic Society appears to have been the first to notice that Crow Lane was not reopened when it should have been, and so can probably claim some credit for getting it reopened. Reasonable people may differ as to whether the road should be closed to motor traffic. Where we hope there will be no difference of view is that local authorities should obey the law. In his case, the county council appears to have had no inten-

tion of doing so, until their unlawful action was exposed.

We understand that the county council intends now to seek legal authority to close Crow Lane permanently. This may well involve a public inquiry, at which opponents of the proposal will be able to put their case.

CYCLE SUPER HIGHWAY UPDATE

ALTHOUGH there has been little happening publicly since our very successful public meeting in November, the Civic Society and others have been continuing their campaign to get the western extension of the Hipper Trail along Chatsworth Road abandoned.

The strongest (but by no means only) argument against the county council's decision to go ahead with this part of the East-West Walking and Cycling Route is that the consultation conducted last March was fatally flawed and is therefore an unsafe basis on which to proceed.

As we have repeatedly stated, we have clear evidence that the county council's contractors failed to deliver a circular announcing the consultation to at least eighteen of the 117 streets (containing a total of 4,041 households), including Chatsworth Road and roads leading off it, as well as roads at the Brimington end of the route.

We find it depressing that the county council continues, through its press office, to make the demonstrably false claim that these circulars were delivered correctly. We laid before the council as long ago as last October a detailed statement showing that this claim was untenable. This paper, and a number of other documents relating to the scheme, are available on the Civic Society website.

We have also complained to the Local Government Ombudsman concerning the consultation. His response was that the county council must be given twelve weeks in which to reply to our complaint. That period expires

early in February, when we will press the Ombudsman to investigate our complaint.

In the meantime the Ombudsman has accepted for investigation a similar complaint by a local resident, and another resident has submitted a complaint to him. We remain hopeful that the county council will be prevented from going ahead with a scheme that is very strongly opposed by local residents and is widely regarded as a complete waste of public money that will achieve nothing.

We have also been in correspondence with the Department for Transport, it must be said to little effect. A clue as to why our objections have been ignored appeared in the *Sunday Times* on 16 January, which announced that Grant Shapps, the transport secretary, is to appoint a 'national cycling and walking commissioner' for England, who will oversee a new inspectorate, Active Travel England. This is too early in the year to be an April's Fool joke, although some members may think that we are moving into 'You couldn't make it up' territory. The new inspectorate, we are told, will be responsible for ensuring that 'new schemes are properly planned and built'.

Leaving aside the question of whether setting up this body is a good use of public money (is it any wonder that the DfT is often referred to as 'Daft'?), we suspect that it will be more concerned with getting schemes implemented than deciding whether they are a good idea in the first place.

HERITAGE OPEN DAYS

THE society has registered with the national organisers as the coordinating body in Chesterfield for Heritage Week in September, after establishing that the Borough Council was not able to take on the task.

We are going to do our utmost to get as many heritage buildings open to the public on this occasion and have drawn up an initial list. We

would welcome further suggestions from Civic Society members of any others (especially secular buildings) which might be added. Our provisional list (which include some buildings that are normally open to the public but we would like to advertise all of them as a group) includes:

The Parish Church
Holy Trinity, Newbold Road
St Thomas's, Chatsworth Road
St Leonard's Mission, Spital
St John's, Newbold
SS Augustine, Derby Road
Eyre Chapel, Newbold

Elder Yard Meeting House
Central Methodist Church
Ragged School
Catholic Church of the Annunciation
The Mosque, Newbold Road

Town Hall
Winding Wheel
Market Hall
Spital Cemetery

Masonic Hall, Saltergate
Court House, Brimington Road
Barnett Observatory, Newbold
Tipton House
Nissen Hut off New Square
St Helena Building, Sheffield Road
West Studios, Sheffield Road

Clayton's Tannery
Brampton Brewery
Chesterfield Football Club

Some of these may prove impractical, but the list represents a starting point. The next stage will be to discuss opening with the owners or custodians of buildings which are not normally accessible.

The theme for Heritage Week this year is 'Great Inventions'. This is particularly appropriate for Chesterfield, with its important industrial heritage, and we are exploring the possibility of mounting an exhibition on this theme.