
CHESTERFIELD & DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

No 9

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APOLOGY

We owe members an apology for not keeping up the promised monthly production of a Newsletters. This is the first issue since the one dated October last (which actually appeared in November) and I can only blame pressure of other commitments for the gap. In fact, there has not been a great deal of news to impart since then, but we hope to keep up the monthly sequence this year.

FORTHCOMING SPEAKER MEETING

The Don Rivers Catchment Trust has kindly agreed to provide a speaker for an illustrated talk to the Civic Society on Wednesday 25 March at 2.30 at St Thomas's Church Centre, Chatsworth Road. This is the first occasion we have arranged an **afternoon**, rather than an evening meeting, which we feel may appeal more to our members.

The Don Rivers Catchment Trust is a charity which has received funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and others to study the ecology and history of both the Don itself and rivers that flow into it.

About a year ago the trust secured funding to extend its work into the Rother valley (between Rotherham and the source of the river near North Wingfield), including its tributaries. The Hipper and Doe Lea are probably the two most important, although some others, such as Trickett Brook and Redleadmill Brook in Wingerworth, have been extensively used in

the past to provide power for several different industries.

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.

We will give fuller details of the talk in next month's Newsletter and hope to see a number of members at the meeting.

BLUE PLAQUES

There is at present no further news about the blue plaque to be erected at the Central Methodist church in Saltergate. The drawing is currently with the Methodists' Manchester headquarters, which will make the listed building consent application on our behalf.

Now that the Spread Eagle pub on Beetwell Street has reopened after refurbishment, we hope to follow up the interest expressed by the new owners in having a plaque on the building, which appears to date from the 1820s.

Another suggestion we are following up is for a plaque at what is now the bar named GAS... on Chatsworth Road, a building with a varied history. Built as a Congregational church, it later became one of Chesterfield's earlier cinemas (the Coliseum) before being taken over by the motor trade and was for some time the home of Chesterfield's Lada dealership. This was perhaps not the

most memorable phase in its history but its earlier use is worth recording.

We are also looking at the possibility of a plaque on the former Eastwood Rooms next to the United Reformed Church on Rose Hill, recording their connection with Miss Blanche Eastwood, the niece and heir of Alderman G.A. Eastwood, whose family were prominent benefactors to the town for much of the twentieth century.

THE LATE JOHN LILLEY (1935–2019)

A number of Civic Society members will have known John Lilley, who died on Christmas Day, not least for his unfailing helpfulness as a librarian.

A former pupil of Chesterfield Grammar School (1947–52), John spent the whole of his professional life at Chesterfield Library, first as the reference librarian and later (after the library moved to its present building) as the local studies librarian. The very fine local collection at Chesterfield (by far the largest in the county library service) was, down to the date of his retirement, very much his creation. John was also instrumental in establishing the Chesterfield & District Local History Society and had many other interests.

John's funeral took place at the United Reformed Church on 14 January and tributes to him can be found on the Old Cestrefeldians' website.

CHESTERFIELD HOTEL

Early in November the owners of the Chesterfield Hotel, a shell company based in Bushey (Herts.) named Prestige Hotels (Midlands) Ltd, which appears not to own or operate a single hotel, prestigious or otherwise, in the Midlands or elsewhere, sought planning consent to demolish the building. This has been granted and the building will come down in the next couple of months. The current owners never showed any sign of reopening the hotel or reusing the building, which they have charged with a mortgage of just over £1m. Local people may feel that this is a generous estimate of the value of the site, without or without a building.

The Civic Society committee was not consulted by the borough council about the demolition but we nonetheless discussed it at our January meeting. Our view was that the hotel, while a memorable feature of Corporation Street since 1877, the venue for innumerable important gatherings, was beyond economic re-use. The building was neither listed nor listable, given the extent to which it had been altered and extended, and had no future either as a hotel or anything else. If left standing, it would frustrate the borough council's plans to redevelop the approach to the station, which have generally been welcomed.

Given the prominence of the site, we are concerned that whatever is built in its place enhances this part of the town, rather than detracting from it. The owners have mentioned an office block, which is also shown on the current (schematic) drawing for the new station approach. This seems to us rather unimaginative and we have floated the idea of retaining a smaller-scale hotel and catering operation on the site, possibly combined with serviced apartments. We feel that its proximity to the station makes this an idea worth considering.

A longer paper on the future of the

site has been mounted on the society's website and we would welcome comments from members about the ideas set out there.

BIRDHOLME HOUSE

Two proposals on which we have been consulted concern Birdholme House, the three-storey seventeenth-century house on Derby Road near the junction with Langer Lane. This lies just inside the borough boundary, marked here by Birdholme Brook.

One application is for improving the internal layout of the house, which we are happy to support. The other is an attempt to tone down the office block of c.1970 which stands alongside the house. This involves cladding the side and front elevations visible from Derby Road with expanded metal mesh.

After a good deal of discussion, the committee has decided to oppose this. We are not against bold modern ideas but we do not feel this one would enhance the setting of Birdholme House, which the present owners have greatly improved. We think it would in fact draw attention away from the older building, which was probably built by a lead merchant, Joseph Bloodworth, but for much of its life belonged to the Hunloke family of Wingerworth Hall. Our feeling is that a much more modest scheme, possibly involving no more than painting the brickwork a less obtrusive colour and growing climbing plants, would be a better idea.

BAR 35, STEPHENSON PLACE

This micro-pub was created last year in a former shop unit on the corner of Stephenson Place and Holywell Street.

The planning consent for the con-

version specifically told the applicant that she must apply separately if she wished to erect a sign on the premises and cited the relevant legislation. Apparently believing that this law did not apply to her, she erected a large illuminated sign and has now applied for retrospective planning consent to retain it, as she has presumably been told to do by the borough council.

The committee has written in fairly strong terms to the borough council opposing this application. Not only do we dislike the size and appearance of the sign, which disfigures an attractive and prominent Edwardian building lying within the Town Centre Conservation Area, if anything we like even less the idea that occupiers of such buildings can ignore planning law.

This is not a minor technical error or a misunderstanding, which can be remedied by waving through a retrospective planning application on the nod. It is a flagrant breach of a statutory order, whose terms were clearly explained to the person concerned when she was allowed to open a bar at 35 Stephenson Place. We hope the borough council will insist that the sign is removed.

SADLY NO FURTHER NEWS ...

There is no further news about Tapton House, although a piece has just appeared in the railway magazine *Back Track* about the property, which might conceivably stimulate some interest.

We are also waiting for the long-promised news that Derbyshire county council has finally sold Hurst House on behalf of its owner, the Chesterfield Schools Foundation.

Better news concerns the house on the opposite side of Abercrombie Street, Ashton Lodge, where we have supported a planning application for restoration as a private house.