
CHESTERFIELD & DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

No 3

April 2019

CHESTERFIELD STREETS AND HOUSES

After an unfortunate delay at the printer and binder, which has set back the publication date by a couple of months, we can finally announce the appearance of this new book, which we hope will be of interest to Civic Society members.

The book is an exercise in urban topography, which seeks to trace the history of ownership, and in some cases occupation and usage, of every plot of ground within the borough of Chesterfield as it was before the first boundary extension of 1892. This was an area of about 312 acres, bounded on the south by the Hipper and on the east by the Rother. The western boundary followed what is now Foljambe Road and the northern boundary followed a stream (now largely culverted) from roughly where Cross Street now lies eastward to Sheffield Road near the St Helens pub and from there to the Rother. This includes all the main shopping streets in the town centre, as well as some of the older suburban roads in the wedge of land between Saltergate and Sheffield Road.

Using mainly a combination of nineteenth-century maps (especially the comprehensive tithe map of 1849) and title deeds (especially the large collection now in the custody of the Borough Council), it has been possible to identify who owned each building (or parcel of land) in the town centre *c.* 1850, and for many properties to work backwards from there. In a few cases it is possible to take the history back to the thirteenth or fourteenth century; in rather more we can go back to *c.* 1600. Many of these plots have modern buildings standing on them today (or no buildings at all), but this does not detract from the interest of their earlier history. Apart from

the obvious attraction of tracing the history of the older surviving buildings in the town centre, this approach is also a way into the social history of the town and in particular the rise and fall of the leading property owning families in each generation since *c.* 1300.

The text runs to 212 pages, including an introduction on the general development of the town centre. The book is illustrated with sixteen professionally drawn large-scale maps, and twelve pages of colour plates.

The book has been produced by the Derbyshire Victoria County History Trust, which is working on a full-length history of Chesterfield for the main VCH series of 'red books' (of which one on Bolsover and adjoining parishes appeared in 2013). The material collected on individual properties in the town centre is too bulky to go into a VCH volume, which is why the trust is publishing it separately.

Chesterfield Streets and Houses will, the VCH Trust hopes, be of interest to many local residents apart from its own members. For this reason, it is holding a launching party for the book to which members of all historical groups in the town are being invited. This will be at St Thomas's Church Centre, Chatsworth Road, at 7.30 p.m. on Thursday 16 May. Civic Society members should already have received an invitation, and we hope many will join us on this occasion.

The book is being published at £20, but the VCH Trust will be selling it at the launching at a special offer price of £15. For a substantial illustrated hard-back (A4 format) this is excellent value.

BLUE PLAQUE PROGRESS

We mentioned in the last Newsletter that the committee was hoping to make progress on two new blue plaques. We are pleased to say that our approach to the Central Methodist Church on Saltergate has been warmly received and we have provisionally agreed the wording of a plaque to be erected on what was, when it was built in 1870, the main Wesleyan church in the town. We propose that the plaque should read thus:

Former
WESLEYAN METHODIST
CHAPEL
Opened 12 October 1870
Architect Edward Taylor, York
Schools added 1888.
The first chapel on this site
was opened in 1795 and
extended in 1822.

We hope also to place a plaque on the former Primitive Methodist chapel on Holywell Street, which closed many years ago and became a licensed club. For this we suggest the following:

Former
PRIMITIVE METHODIST
CHURCH AND SCHOOLS
Opened 8 June 1882
Architect John Wills, Derby
Extended 1902. Closed 1970.
Part of the school was occupied
by the YMCA, 1956–2002.

Thanks to research by our member Janet Murphy, and some checking in the local press, we are reasonably confident that all the dates on both plaques are correct. Where we do have a gap in knowledge is what happened to the Primitive Methodist chapel immediately following its closure in 1970. The YMCA used the former schoolrooms

behind the chapel and we have not been able to establish when the first of the licensed clubs took over the chapel itself. If any Civic Society members can fill in this gap, we would be glad to hear from them.

With luck, we should be able to get both plaques made and erected before the end of the year.

PLANNING MATTERS

In contrast with last month, this has been a quiet time for new planning applications on which we have been consulted by the Borough Council. Two have been drawn to our notice, neither of which seems likely to be controversial.

One is for a minor internal change at the Town Hall, which is a listed building, involving the insertion of a new door between two rooms at the back of the ground floor (not, as the heading to the application might suggest, the much more serious suggestion of making a new exterior door in the building). The details can be found on the council's planning website under the reference CHE/19/00233/LBC

The second is for an extension to the former Labour Exchange (later the County Court Office) on St Mary's Gate, as part of the conversion of the building into flats. A scheme to create eleven flats within the existing structure has already been approved; this new application will allow another three to be built.

The Civic Society committee's general view is that residential conversions in the town centre are a good idea, since they make for fuller use of buildings that might otherwise stand partly or wholly empty, and by bringing people into the centre probably increase footfall in shops, cafés and pubs, reduce anti-social behaviour, and modestly increase the supply of affordable housing.

The scheme for the former Crown offices, built in the 1920s, does not affect the appearance of the front of the building, which is a standard neo-Georgian design of the sort widely used in that period by the Office of Works throughout the country, especially for the Post Office and the Ministry of Labour. The building is not listed but lies within the Town Centre Conservation Area. Details of the application can be found at CHE/19/00229/FUL.

The Civic Society committee has yet to discuss this application but will probably not raise any objections.

WHAT'S HAPPENING ON ABERCROMBIE STREET?

Members will be aware that the committee invested a good deal of time and effort over much of the last two years into pressing Derbyshire County Council, as sole trustee of the Chesterfield Schools Foundation, to dispose of the charity's only remaining real property, Hurst House on Abercrombie Street, which the council had left empty for several years. These efforts, modestly assisted by the Charity Commission, were eventually successful. Last year the property was sold to a private buyer who applied for listed building consent to restore Hurst House to a private residence, as it was until 1928, when it was bought by the governors of the Grammar School.

We are rather less happy to see no sign of any activity at Hurst House since then. No building is improved by being left empty and we hope that, sooner rather than later, the promised work will begin, preferably before the onset of another winter.

By contrast, attempts to sell Ashton Lodge, on the opposite corner of the Abercrombie Street–Sheffield Road junction, with planning consent for conversion into two houses and the erection of a third in the garden, a scheme which the Civic Society supported, have failed. Instead, we understand that the property, named after its first owner, Jacob Ashton, the 6th Duke of Devonshire's mineral agent, has been bought by one of the Moslem societies in Chesterfield for use as meeting-rooms and an education centre, presumably without any additional building in the grounds.

We now await a planning application for change of use and whatever alterations the new purchasers wish to make to the house, which lies within a conservation area. As with Hurst House, we feel that it is important the property should not be left empty for longer than necessary.

FLY-POSTING AND MECCA BINGO

The connection between these two may not be immediately apparent, but there is one. Our member Darrell Clark has asked the committee to look at two problems.

One is the unsightliness caused by the failure of those who put up notices on lamp-posts and elsewhere to take them down after the event they are advertising has taken place, or (in the case of statutory notices displayed by local authorities) after the appropriate consultation period has elapsed. There is no easy answer to this problem, although there is presumably no objection to public spirited Civic Society members carrying a pair of sharp scissors around with them and cutting down expired notices they walk past. We are asking the Borough Council if they can take more formal action.

The second matter Darrell has raised concerns the cut-out steel art installation on Chatsworth Road at the start of the Holme Valley footpath, which clearly needs repainting. With some difficulty, the borough planning department established last year that Mecca, as the owners of the adjacent bingo hall, are responsible for maintenance, and the company has accepted this. Attempts to arrange a meeting with their surveyor to decide what needs doing have, we will admit, slipped somewhat, but this is something we hope to pursue over the summer.

The committee is always happy to hear from members who would like us to investigate any problem affecting the built environment of the town. That's what we're here for.

REMINDER: FAMILY, LOCAL HISTORY, HERITAGE AND CRAFT FAIR

A quick reminder of this event, to be held at the Proact Stadium on Saturday 18 May, 10 a.m. to 3.30 p.m. Organised by the Chesterfield & District Family History Society, this is a very good chance to catch up on what is happening locally. The Civic Society will be there!