
CHESTERFIELD & DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

No 4

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CHESTERFIELD STREETS AND HOUSES

This new book was launched, as we announced in the previous Newsletter, at a successful and enjoyable meeting on 16 May, attended by members of several local history societies as well as those attracted by an advertisement in the *Derbyshire Times*. Sales at the meeting and since have been gratifyingly good, and the book is in stock at both the Visitor Centre on Rykneln Square and the Musuem.

BLUE PLAQUE PROGRESS

We are continuing to make progress with the proposed plaque at the Central Methodist Church on Saltergate. At the request of the church we have slightly changed the text, which will now read:

Central Methodist Church
Opened as a
Wesleyan Methodist Chapel
12 October 1870
Architect Edward Taylor, York
Schools added 1888.
The first chapel on this site
was opened in 1795
and extended in 1822.

The Property Department of the Methodist Church will make a Listed Building Application to the Borough Council on our behalf and we hope shortly to ask our suppliers, Leander Architectural of Doveholes, near Buxton, to produce a final design for the plaque.

We are still hoping that it may be possible also to install a plaque at the former Primitive Methodist chapel on Holywell Street.

FORMER COUNTY COURT OFFICE

The developer who proposes to convert the former County Court Office on St Mary's Gate into flats has applied for consent to erect a new block on the Spa Lane frontage of the site which will contain three additional flats. The planning application reference is CHE/19/00229/FUL. At our May meeting the committee agreed to support this scheme for the reasons we set out in the last Newsletter.

Among the other comments that have been made about the application are two that do not seem helpful.

One is from the Coal Authority, warning that the area may have been subject to mining in the past (of which they have no record), and may therefore be liable to subsidence. This appears to be a standard response for almost any development in or near Chesterfield. In this case, it is clearly misleading. Coal was mined close to the town until the late nineteenth century but not in the back gardens of houses on St Mary's Gate. This site, which was occupied in that period by a row of three cottages, cannot possibly be at risk from the discovery of unrecorded shafts.

The other comment was that the site was close to the south-eastern corner of the Roman fort and should therefore be archaeologically investigated (at the developer's expense) before building began. What has not been noticed is that the area on which it is proposed to build, at the junction of Spa Lane and Statoon Road, was fully excavated by the North Derbyshire Archaeological Trust in 1976, when a ditch was found, containing Roman pottery. This appears to have been part of the boundary of an enclosure around a settlement just outside the fort. The work was reported in the *Derbyshire Archaeological Journal* in 1989. Nothing more would be discovered by excavating the site again.

FORMER SPREAD EAGLE INN

The committee also discussed a planning application to refurbish the Spread Eagle Inn (7 Beetwell Street), retaining the bar and lounge areas on the ground floor and creating six letting bedrooms above. This we welcomed, since it will bring back into beneficial use an attractive building, no longer viable as a traditional town centre pub, and add to the supply of good quality overnight accommodation in Chesterfield. The planning application reference is CHE/19/00258/LBC.

In this case, however, we feel that the developer should be required to commission a detailed survey of the building before work begins. The Spread Eagle is listed grade II as a three-storey building of c. 1800, but the statutory list suggests that parts of the structure may be older. This we believe may well be the case, and the proposed rebuilding offers an opportunity to establish more of the pub's history which may not occur again for some time.

The front range facing Beetwell Street, built of brick with a slate roof, is probably no older than the early nineteenth century, when much of the town centre was rebuilt on similar lines, but the Spread Eagle has a rear wing, running part of the way down the yard, which could be considerably older. This is clearly the case with other houses elsewhere in the town, for example 81 Saltergate and, until the creation of the Pavements shopping centre, was true of several properties on Low Pavement.

The Spread Eagle seems to have been a pub since about the middle of the nineteenth century, but there has obviously been a house on the site for much longer. It is possible to identify 7 Beetwell Street as one of the burgage plots in the town which belonged to the Gild of the Blessed Mary, the wealthiest of Chesterfield's four medieval gilds,

which were dissolved in 1548. It is not known for certain who gave the property to the gild, nor what happened to it between 1548 and the early nineteenth century, when it was owned by a man named Thomas Harvey (see *Chesterfield Streets and Houses*, p. 54).

One consideration which the borough planning committee will take into account in determining this application is how any changes to the Spread Eagle will affect the setting of the house next door (9 Beetwell Street). This is listed grade II*, and is one of the few domestic buildings in the town centre which appears to date from before 1600. It was for many years the home of the Hall family, who had a gunsmith's shop and antique shop in different parts of the ground floor. The building has been empty for some time (considerably longer than the Spread Eagle) and would also benefit from sympathetic refurbishment, again preceded by a careful examination of the fabric.

This house also has a recorded history going back to the Middle Ages. It was the home in 1479 of a stonemason named John Williamson. He left the property to trustees, who were to use the income for the upkeep of the parish church. Their successors were still doing so in the nineteenth century.

HURST HOUSE

There have been further developments, not entirely welcome, concerning the two early Victorian houses at the Sheffield Road end of Abercrombie Street, since we mentioned them in the last Newsletter.

The Chesterfield Jamia Mosque Education & Welfare Trust was unsuccessful in its attempt to purchase Ashton Lodge, which we understand has been sold to a private owner.

More seriously, we understand that the sale of Hurst House to a individual (who applied for planning consent to restore the property to a private residence) has fallen through. Although the

county council website continues to describe the property as sold subject to contract, Hurst House has been put back on the market as a commercial property by the county council (acting as sole trustee of the Chesterfield Schools Foundation) through W.T. Parker at an asking price of £420,000. Full details are on the firm's website.

The Civic Society committee hopes that the county council, having failed to do anything with this building (which, it must be stressed, it does not own) for several years, will proceed as quickly as possible to complete the sale of Hurst House. If it proves impossible to sell the property by private treaty, it should be auctioned. The building has been allowed to stand empty for far too long and it would be very undesirable for it to remain so for another winter. It seems unlikely that a group of private individuals entrusted with the running of a charity of this sort would have neglected an asset of this value in this way.

HOLLIS LANE LINK

On 22–23 May the county council and AECOM, a firm of consultant civil engineers, held a poorly advertised public consultation exercise at Chesterfield Library in connection with a proposed new road to be built from Hollis Lane (near the Bridge Inn) to the railway station.

This will run from opposite the existing junction of the slip-road from the Inner Relief Road with Hollis Lane, through Jewsons' builder's merchant's yard to the present station car-park. It will not affect Leonide Interiors, next to Jewsons, nor the pub. A second, later phase is also proposed, extending the new road to join Malkin Street, Brimington Road and Crow Lane.

The aim of the scheme is to improve access to the station and relieve pressure on the two current approaches, via Durrant Road, Brewery Street and Malkin Street from the north or Piccadilly

Road and Crow Lane from the south. It should particularly help to remove traffic from the second of these routes, which includes a low bridge on Crow Lane. Stopping up Crow Lane to motor traffic completely would improve the quality of life for residents of Piccadilly Road and the adjoining Riverside Estate even more.

Details of the scheme, with plans, are on the county council's website.

HISTORIC PUB TOUR

Members may like to know of a series of walks around Chesterfield under this title on Saturdays from 29 June until the end of August, starting at the Pig & Pump (the former White Swan) on St Mary's Gate. The walks will visit eight of the 'best pubs' in the town and 'some other historic sites along the way', with a thirty minute stop at each venue (the last at 4 p.m.). No booking is required and the fee for the walk is £5, payable in cash to the guide on the day.

A NEW TOWN TRAIL?

We discussed briefly at our last committee meeting the idea of issuing a new town trail, which would provide an illustrated guide to buildings of interest in the town centre. This was done in the mid 1980s, with a text written by the late Mrs Win Hope, accompanied by a map and some attractive line drawings. Now that the town has a well positioned Visitor Centre (and hopefully more visitors), this is something which we could well consider doing. It would be possible to draw much of the text from *Chesterfield Streets and Houses*, as well as other publications on the history of the town which have appeared over the last thirty years. We will report further in a later Newsletter.