



Newsletter – number 47 – February 2024

From our Chairman – Howard Borrell.



A warm welcome to your latest Civic Society newsletter. Unfortunately our committee weren't able to meet as normal in January, so this newsletter is something of an interim affair – between our last December meeting and our next scheduled meeting on 7 March. Never-the-less there's plenty to report.

Chief amongst my thoughts in this issue is the decision, for very understandable personal reasons, of our Secretary – Frank Gorman – to retire. I am pleased, however, that he will be continuing his role as Membership Secretary and Treasurer. I'd like to pay tribute to the work that Frank has done. Through the years of change in the Society he has been an ever-present 'steadying hand' and has always conducted our business very professionally, bringing us much credit. He will be missed in his Hon. Secretary role.

This means that we are looking for an Hon. Secretary and I would appeal to you all to possibly consider this role. As detailed on our next page, we have made interim arrangements to cover in the meantime, but we simply cannot continue as a society without a Secretary. Can you help us? If you feel you might please contact me for an informal chat.

We also need to renew and strengthen our committee generally. It is this body which oversees the day-to-day running of the society. For some time the existing committee has thought that it would be good to see some new members and I'm pleased to say that some of you have already expressed an interest in joining the committee. Anyone who has an interest in joining us is welcome to contact me to have an informal chat.

My other topic this month is around that of member benefits. Some years ago the society decided not to have a meetings programme. This was for perfectly valid reasons. Chiefly it was thought that other societies catered for historical matters and it would not be sustainable to hold a monthly meeting on other subjects aligned to our objectives. COVID has intervened and we have held some successful meetings on specific topics. But it's my view that we should perhaps start to have regular catch-up type meetings with the Borough Council. Here we could review what's happening in the town. To this end I have invited Neil Johnson, Head of Economic Development at the Borough Council, to a meeting, primarily for members, on 18 April at St Thomas Church Centre, Chatsworth Road, starting at 7.30pm. I hope you will be able to attend and that this will be the first of at least a yearly catch-up with the council. With the AGM this will then result in there being at least two timetabled meetings for members a year.

Please let me know your thoughts on this and how we can continue the work in making the area a better place to live. As always I welcome your constructive thoughts on how we can continuing to move the society forwards. Please let me know about your concerns and issues – contact details are at the end of this newsletter. And, of course, do consider whether you could fill our Hon. Secretary role.

Chesterfield & District Civic Society is a registered charity – number 507548

Website - www.chesterfieldcivicsociety.org.uk

Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100079777451157>

Society news

1 – Officer changes

Our Hon. Secretary and Treasurer – Frank Gorman – has decided, for personal reasons, that he cannot continue as the former. He will, however, be remaining as treasurer and membership secretary. We have put some interim arrangements in place to cover for the Hon. Secretary's role. For the meantime please use the existing email address to contact either the Hon. Secretary or the Membership Secretary and Treasurer - secretary@chesterfieldcivicsociety.org.uk.

To summarise these *interim* arrangements:

- For membership and finance issues Frank can now be contacted on a new telephone number – 01246 463326. His address has also changed to 20 Lime Tree Grove, Arkwright, Chesterfield, S44 5BU. Use email secretary@chesterfieldcivicsociety.org.uk
- To contact the Hon. Secretary use the email secretary@chesterfieldcivicsociety.org.uk or contact Howard Borrell, 1 West Lea, Brampton, Chesterfield, S40 3SL, telephone 01246 221400.

2 – More committee members required

We would like to have more members on our committee. If you fancy volunteering, either as a full trustee or just as an ad hoc member and would like more details please contact Howard Borrell for an informal chat. We will, hopefully, be able to co-opt three new non-trustee members to the committee at our 7 March meeting. These are Graeme Challands, Ed Fordham and Ray Russell. A warm welcome to them.

Generally, trustees have to be elected at the AGM, but our constitution allows ad hoc members to be co-opted by the committee itself (though they have no voting rights). Our committee meets every other month at Loundsley Green Community Centre for about two hours.

3 – And members too

We are always on the look-out for new members, so if you have a friend or family member who you feel might be interested in supporting the society's work, why not suggest they give us a look. Membership rates have remained unchanged for some time – at £7.50 under 25; £10.00 individual; £15.00 family or £25.00 corporate.

4 – Next member meeting – for Thursday 18 April

As our Chairman alluded to in his column, we are experimenting with what we hope will be at least a yearly catch-up meeting with Chesterfield Borough Council, primarily for our members and guests. This should give the opportunity to hear about and discuss some of the initiatives happening soon or those that are currently happening. You are therefore invited to St Thomas Church Centre, (in 'The Suite'), Chatsworth Road, Chesterfield on 18 April, commencing at 7.30pm.

Neil Johnson Head of Economic Development at the Borough Council will be presenting an update mainly on Chesterfield town centre initiatives. We hope that refreshments will be available afterwards. 'The Suite' is the room we normally use for our AGM – it is part of the 1970s extension, not the much newer building.

5 – Membership renewals

Our membership year starts on 1 April 2024. The vast majority of members pay by direct debit, so no action is required, particularly as subscription rates remain unaltered from last year. Our thanks for continuing to support us during 2023.



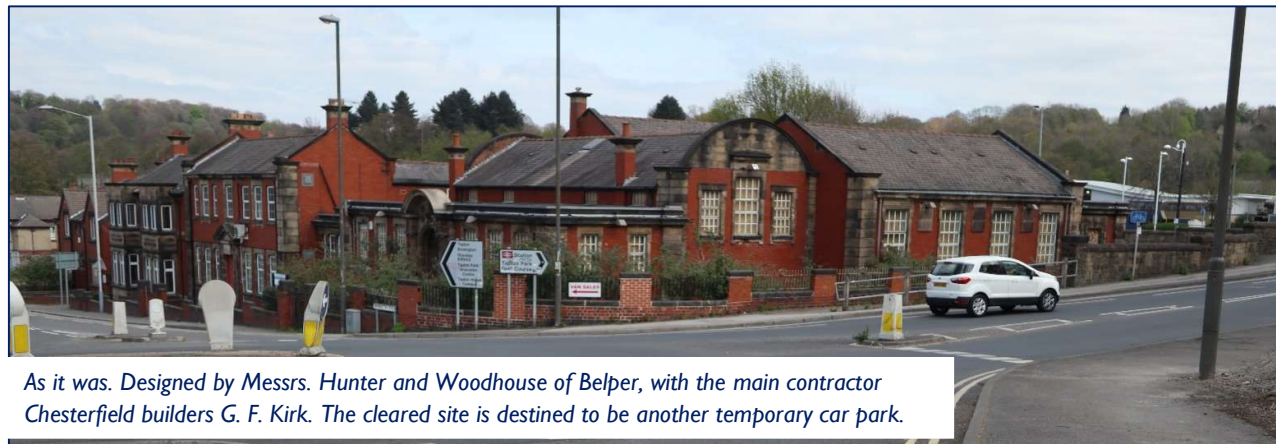
6 – Newsletter

We hope you are continuing to find this newsletter useful and thank you for your feedback on it.

Just a reminder on our current policy – copies of it are not posted on our website until around six months after publication and distribution to members.

As we have previously mentioned, we will let the news dictate the publication schedule, so you may not necessarily receive a monthly edition.

The sad fate of the Brimington Road courthouse complex



January saw the start of demolition on the 1914 opened courthouse and former county police station complex on Malkin Street and Brimington Road. It had been empty for some time but had previously been used as a martial arts centre (the courts complex) and for the probation service. It is sad reminder that even in the 2020s buildings such as this are still at risk and can be demolished. Its fate seems to have been sealed some years ago when retention was not mooted in both the Chesterfield railway station master plan and the Waterside master plan. The privately owned building was not listed nor was it a local heritage asset. We were not consulted about its demolition.

Due to this background it appears that demolition did not require prior approval by Chesterfield Borough Council, though the developer did give notice of this. Separately, a planning application was submitted and the site is destined to become yet another temporary car park until a suitable future is determined. We issued a press release expressing our disappointment at the demolition, which received coverage in the Derbyshire Times. (This is available on-line here - <http://www.chesterfieldcivicsociety.org.uk/2024/01/society-regret-over-old-courthouse-demolition/>. It includes some more history about the building).

The whole episode perhaps gives renewed importance to our review of at risk and unloved buildings (see below), but also about actually trying to do something about those properties in danger.

Buildings at risk list – not too late for some

As mentioned in our last two newsletters we are looking to revise our buildings at risk and unloved buildings list.

We have had quite a few new suggestions and were due to look at these at our January committee meeting. As this meeting has been postponed until the beginning of March there is still time to make more nominations. Let us know your thoughts by contacting us – details at the end of this newsletter. The existing list can be found on our website at <http://www.chesterfieldcivicsociety.org.uk/unloved-buildings/> and was in our last newsletter. Once a building is added the challenge is to actually do something about it.

As reported above, unfortunately one building that we were due to consider adding, following a suggestion from a member of the public, has only these last few weeks been demolished. This was the former courthouse complex on Brimington Road.

Another boundary review

County divisional boundaries are set for another review by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) who have recently published a set of recommendations. Society members might like to take a look at proposals to see if they are impacted.

As an example, one suggestion is that the Brimington division would have Hollingwood transferred out of it (after being transferred in at the last review some twelve years ago). Transferred in would be an area to the west of the A61 with the south side of Stand Road as part of its border (the north side voting for a different councillor) along with parts of Peveril Road.

There is an overview at the LGBCE website: <https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/derbyshire>. The consultation runs until 1 April 2024. It is not currently planned for the society to make comments on the suggestions.

Visitor centre to go amongst other cuts



The town's popular visitor and information centre (VIC) will close and further cuts will inevitably be made, including those in the town's cultural and civic life, as a result of Chesterfield Borough Council's budget cuts.

In November the council announced that, as part of work to produce a balanced budget, they were looking to hold a 'conversation' with the public on how they would achieve the necessary savings. We contributed extensively to the council's conversation document – including calling for an effective replacement for the current VIC – at least an information point in Chesterfield Library – but favouring its retention.

At the beginning of February it was decided that the VIC would close and that community buildings would also be reviewed – including closure of Hasland Village Hall and the Revolution House. Earlier it had been announced that car parking charges and the residents' car parking scheme would also be reviewed – of concern to us as it will probably impact town centre footfall.

We were originally led to believe that the council would be offering up their original 'conversation' proposals for further consideration. At the beginning of January the society called on the council to enter into dialogue with key stakeholders so that effective evaluation could take place. This, though, does not appear to have happened in many cases – the VIC included – though did happen in the case of possible (now agreed) charges for green waste collection.

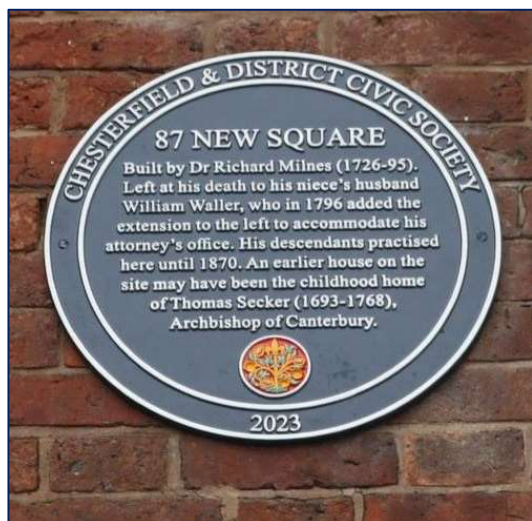
The Council has expressed the view that VIC services can be provided by 'digital delivery'. We have disputed the viability and effectiveness of that proposal. How, for example, would publicity leaflets from local organisations about their activities and simple tourist information be made available? What about those who have no internet access? We are disappointed that some form of at least an information access point in, say, the foyer of Chesterfield Central Library jointly with the County Council, could not have been made.

The decision made by the council's February Cabinet to close the VIC was also accompanied by reference to developing the building as part of a 'Crooked Spire Experience'. This was referred to in the council's fairly recent tourism strategy as an attempt to further develop the church and its precincts as a visitor attraction.

Financial savings will, out of necessity, have to occur but we feel that it is important for each area of change to be examined in order to ensure that the civic good is not seriously damaged and potential mitigations worked up. Local government finance is clearly in a mess across the country. Our approach has not been to simply 'blame the council' as this is unhelpful, but to try and encourage a full and open debate about what options there really are to try and maintain the civic good. Our thoughts are also with the council's affected staff.

Latest blue plaque unveiled – 87 New Square

Our latest blue plaque was unveiled by the Mayor and Mayoress of Chesterfield in rather snowy weather on 8 February. Unfortunately this was not an open event and we were unable to invite members. Committee member Diana



A snowy unveiling. Our thanks to Diana Allen for this photograph of the unveiling party which included the developers and the Mayor and Mayoress of Chesterfield. Left, a picture of the new plaque.

Allen represented us. The latest plaque has been kindly sponsored by Leverton UK Ltd., who are responsible for the restoration of the plaque's destination – 87 New Square – and its conversion into high quality flats.

The new plaque replaces an earlier one which inaccurately described the property as the home of a former Archbishop of Canterbury – Thomas Secker (1693-1768). Various historians, including the late John Bestall and latterly our former Chairman Philip Riden, have looked for a direct link between the present 87 New Square building and Archbishop Secker but have not found one. It is thought that he attended a free school in Chesterfield, staying with his half-sister and her husband, Elizabeth and Richard Milnes, but he could not have stayed at number 87 as the house was built some years after he departed the town. Our former Chairman, Philip Riden outlined the property's history in the Civic Society's newsletter for June 2023. Additionally Committee member Janet Murphy writes as below.

Number 87 New Square was probably built between 1777, when Chesterfield Canal was opened, and 1795 when the owner, Richard Milnes, died. It is a brick building and, because of the problems of transportation, it is unlikely that bricks were used for buildings in Chesterfield before the opening of the canal in 1777. Milnes was one of the promoters of the canal. It was not until the advent of coal mining on a large scale and the development of associated brick works that bricks became commonly used in the town.

Mistakenly it has been referred to as the childhood home of Thomas Secker when he attended Chesterfield Grammar School, and who died in 1768. The father of Richard Milnes, another Richard, was married to Elizabeth, sister of Thomas Secker, and it was with them that Secker stayed. On his death in 1795 Richard left the bulk of his estate to his niece Elizabeth Waller, the daughter of Revd James Heywood, minister of Elder Yard Chapel and Elizabeth, Richard's sister, and wife of William Waller.

Although William carried out alterations to the building and built additional rooms to serve as offices, he did not want to live there and passed the property to his brother Robert, leaving it to him on his death. Robert was clerk to the corporation from 1791-1818 when he was replaced by his son William until his death in 1857 when it ceased to be the town clerk's office. It remained the solicitor's office of the Waller family until the last one, another Robert, died in 1870 and then it was let to doctors until 1883 when it was described as having '15 rooms and two good kitchens. Stabling for three horses. Coach house, harness-room, wash-house, & garden, tennis ground, hot-house, and vinery'.

In 1884-5 it was the Chesterfield and District Liberal Club. By 1902 it had become the town's telephone exchange until that moved into the newly extended Post Office in 1926. It was converted into the Borough Treasurer's Department until the new town hall was completed in 1938. Part of the property made way for the new Rose Hill.

We have three other plaques in our current series to erect – at North Midland House, The Portland Hotel and the Stephenson Memorial Hall. We are actively pursuing others and are due to discuss some further suggestions at our next committee meeting. Progress firstly depends on an acceptable site and then external sponsorship.

A new look at the ‘Robinson’s site’ required?



In our last newsletter we reported on the receipt of a planning application for a 72-bed care home to the west of Factory Street. Literally as we had just closed for press we received another – for access arrangements to the home. This is coupled to recent discussion about the police station possibly relocating to another part of the site and the recent arson attack on an empty property on Chatsworth Road – that latter not now owned by Robinsons and recently demolished. We are concerned that this large area of land – ripe for regeneration – is now being developed piecemeal without reference to a previously devised master plan.

There is nothing wrong with sensible incremental development of the site, which also includes the listed and important former Walton Mill (for which there are apparently no current restoration plans). But such development must take into consideration the requirements of the whole site. These include such issues as public footpath and cycle routes, landscaping and other public amenity issues. The site is also important in Chesterfield’s industrial past – a fact recognised by the original now over ten year old historical assessment of the site – which stressed the need for archaeological investigations.

The society’s response to the current two planning applications included:

- The application site and the whole site needs to have a full archaeological investigation.
- It is unclear whether a submitted presumably indicative ‘masterplan’ for the whole of the former Robinson’s site represents an attempt to create a new vision for the area.
- It is unclear whether or not the applications might have any detrimental (or indeed positive) impact on the wider site development.
- Any phased approach to site development, that the current applications might suggest, must take into account the whole site requirements for infrastructure, pedestrian and cycle routes, etc.
- The flood risk assessment pre-dates the November 2023 floods in the area.
- There are questions about some landscaping elements to the Factory Street care home access.

As a starter we feel that it is perhaps time for a new and open public dialogue about the future of this site and will do all we can to help facilitate this.

Buildings and sites update

Chesterfield Borough Council regularly asks us to comment on significant planning applications or those involving listed buildings and conservation areas (this also happens, to a much lesser extent from North East Derbyshire District Council). The committee normally deals with these via internal email circulation, with our Chairman then summarising our committee’s views. In this section we take a look at some of the more significant applications that we have commented on. There is also an update on some of the buildings and sites we are currently interested in or of snippets of news on them. This is not, though, a complete list.

I – Hurst House

We understand that this property could well be on the market soon, by auction, with Graham Penny Auctions Ltd. We will keep our members posted on progress.

2 – Staveley



There are some important developments happening as part of the ‘Staveley Town Deal’ project. We have, perhaps, not have been as active as we ought to have been in this suite of proposals. They have been the subject of some debate in both political, business and residents’ circles – some positive, some less so. To keep up-to-date with proposals there is the inevitable website - <https://www.chesterfield.gov.uk/business-and-economic-growth/regeneration-and-economic-growth/staveley-town-deal.aspx>

3 – Chesterfield canal

It might look relatively quiet at the Chesterfield end of the canal, regarding developments, but work is certainly progressing at Staveley – most of it now part of the Staveley Town Deal. Managed by the Chesterfield Canal Trust, the work enables a major length of restoration for the next 2.6 km of canal, from Eckington Road to the Chesterfield Borough Council boundary just south of Renishaw. Planning permission has also been applied for (by the County Council) for built facilities at the canal basin, off Hall Road. The Canal Trust have a website with more details and periodically publish a newsletter - <https://chesterfield-canal-trust.org.uk/restoration/27087-2/> for more details.

4 – Brimington High Street

Grade II listed building number 12 High Street has recently been subject to an application for bringing back into use as a nursery – its former use. We welcomed this and raised no objections to the general application, but though it would, if at all possible, be nice to retain the shadow of a rendered former shop front site – which was let into the property when it was used as a post office during the early years of the 20th century.

5 – ‘Cannon Mill’

The community interest company formed to regenerate this grade II listed building has been revealing its directors and plans. Members are encouraged to follow developments via their website - <https://www.cannonmill.org/> and Facebook page - <https://www.facebook.com/cannonmilltrust>.

6 – Former North East Derbyshire District Council Offices, Saltergate



There is nothing positive to report on this property. Unfortunately, and apparently in plain sight, being widely publicised on social media, most of the copper roofing material to the 1970s office block has been removed – we presume stolen, during January. This means that if the removers were unauthorised that they may have gained access to the building to climb to the roof area. It also means that the 1970s building is not now anything like watertight. If the copper was stolen it also underlines the vulnerability of buildings to metal thieves.

The 1930s part of the building, linked to the 1970s section, is a candidate for adding to our buildings at risk register. As we have remarked for some time, both buildings and their grounds are looking increasingly shabby in this prominent part of town.

7 – Chatsworth Road cycle-way

The Society was against the Chatsworth Road cycleway proposal on a number of issues – poor public consultation and practicality being just two. The County Council, however, decided to push on with its proposals – part of a wider plan which also involved the closure of Crow Lane at Tapton. Not surprisingly the Chatsworth Road cycleway construction has caused issues with traffic hold-ups and (as reported in the Derbyshire Times) inconvenience to Holymoorside residents. Various problems of safe access to property are also occurring and there could well be issues with the project’s construction costs. We are grateful to members for keeping us in touch with ‘progress’ along the route and hope to be featuring these developments in our next newsletter.

8 – Former Rose Hill Congregational Church

For a number of months the former and listed Congregational Church on Rosehill has had its roof encased in scaffolding, with roofing works either taking place or planned. We do not believe that the situation regarding this building has fundamentally changed. This is that its ownership and control is with the United Reformed Church

Regional Synod and that it will be put up for sale. Chesterfield Studios are keen to purchase it as they are currently renting the old Eastwood Hall building from the Synod on a lease and are running a fund raising campaign.

9 – Stephenson Memorial Hall



Work is now progressing apace on this project by the Borough Council which will see the museum reconfigured, new entrance arrangements (basically using the former library entrance to Corporation Street) and various works to modernise the Pomegranate theatre. The planned demolition of the former caretaker's flat to the rear of the building took place late last year, scaffolding has been erected and the building made secure against unauthorised access, with site cabins erected nearby on the old Derbyshire Times car park. We understand that work was somewhat delayed as much more asbestos was found inside the building than had originally been envisaged.

The work totals some £19 million of which around £11 million comes from the Levelling Up Fund, with a further £695,000 from Arts Council England's Capital Investment Programme. The work is due to be complete before the end of 2025. Our blue plaque destined for this building will not be fitted until the works are completed.

Together with plans for the rejuvenation of Kilblean House (3 Corporation Street) by its private owner (last newsletter), this will undoubtedly be a major boost to this side of the town. One of our concerns is actually ensuring the facilities envisaged are able to be run completed – a particular issue given the current round of spending cuts.

There is much further information about the plans on the Borough Council's website accessible here - <https://www.chesterfield.gov.uk/business-and-economic-growth/regeneration-and-economic-growth/revitalising-the-heart-of-chesterfield/stephenson-memorial-hall-development.aspx>

10 – Dunston Hall 'Deer Park'

On 30 January Dunston Hall Garden Centre released a statement on their Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/dunstonhallgardencentre>) that 'Dunston Hall has acquired the land known as the Deer Park which is approximately 17 acres of land at the front of the hall.' We had covered the possibility of this in our last newsletter. Apparently the coming year will see 'various work undertaken including new paths, enabling safe easy access for our local community to access the Deer Park, Hall, Gardens, Heritage Centre, Walled Garden Centre, Bistro and the Farm Shop and Deli.' The Facebook post also stated that it was hoped the park would become a useful community resource. We will be keeping our eye on this development over the coming months.

DON'T FORGET OUR NEXT MEETING!

**The Suite, St Thomas Church Centre, Chatsworth Road, Chesterfield
on 18 April, commencing at 7.30pm.**

Discussion and update on Chesterfield town centre issues with Neil Johnson Head of Economic Development from Chesterfield Borough Council.

We hope that refreshments will be available afterwards.

This is primarily a meeting for members and guests, but members of the public can attend.

Non-members – small admission charge; members – free.

Contact us

Please get in touch with us if you have any news to share, want to comment on the Civic Society's activities or have any concerns that you think we should be pursuing.

Email: chairman@chesterfieldcivicsociety.org.uk or secretary@chesterfieldcivicsociety.org.uk

Write to us: Howard Borrell, 1 West Lea, Brampton, Chesterfield, S40 3SL.