



TRUST TOPICS

Doncaster Civic Trust Newsletter ©

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Uncertain Future for Former Grammar School's Two Listed Buildings?



Doncaster Civic Trust : Registered Charity No. 508674 : Founded in 1946
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Good Bye Bight

The course of the River Don at Doncaster took the form of a large loop extending as far south as Dockin Hill. Gas works were constructed alongside the river in 1827 and the loop became known as the Gas House Bight. In 1934 a new cut was made across the top of the loop and the river at Dockin Hill was filled in. One arm of the river was retained to allow barges to reach the gas works. When North Sea gas took the place of coal gas, the gas works became redundant and were demolished.



Gas House Bight looking north towards the new cut

The arm of the Bight remained. The banks were colonised by native plants. The river became cleaner, fish re-appeared, fishermen took up positions on the river banks and swans moved in. The area became popular for people exercising dogs. However, the Bight is going and will be replaced by a marina with places of public entertainment.



The Bight looking south to Dockin Hill. New Cut to right, River to left

Eric Braim



Eyesore Corner

Right

The new Racecourse Grandstand has a glamorous face for TV and the glitterati on race days. Unfortunately, it also has an unsightly backside that Doncaster residents must endure every day.



Left

The rear of the Conservative Club on South Parade has recently gained a shiny new flue, hardly enhancing the character of this late C18 grade 2 listed building when viewed from Waterdale.

Summer Outings 2008

Cottesbrooke Hall & Gardens, Northants: Wednesday 18th June 2008



Full day outing leaving Waterdale at 9.00 am and travelling to Oundle for a lunch stop. Own arrangements for lunch.

Depart 1.00 pm for Cottesbrooke Hall.

This is a wonderful Queen Anne house of 1702, privately owned and with fine interiors and contents, especially the paintings.

The gardens were nominated as one of the best in the world by a gardens publication last year.

Own arrangements for afternoon tea, and there is a tea room.

Depart 5.00 pm

Cost: £22 per person

Thrumpton Hall, Nottinghamshire: Wednesday 16th July 2008



Half day outing leaving Waterdale at 1.00 pm and travelling direct to Thrumpton Hall.

A magnificent family-owned Jacobean house having connections to the Powdrill family, attainted in the Gunpowder plot. It has a fine Charles II staircase and good furniture.

Depart 5.00 pm

Cost, including afternoon tea: £25 per person

Winkburn Hall, Newark: Wednesday 6th August 2008



Half day outing leaving Waterdale at 1.00 pm for Winkburn Hall, Newark.

This is a family-owned eighteenth century house with charming interiors and fine plasterwork.

Depart 5.00 pm

Cost, including tea and biscuits: £17.50 per person



The Sand House - A Victorian Marvel

We were treated to an excellent talk in January when Richard Bell spoke to a packed room on one of Doncaster's most unusual lost buildings.

The story of the amazing building known as the Sand House is a complex one and cannot be easily summarised here. Indeed much of the first part of Richard's talk was explaining, in diagrammatical form, how the Sand House came to be.

In essence, though, in the early 19th century, one of Richard Bell's ancestors, one William Senior, bought some land at Balby including a sandpit. Later, a drainage tunnel was constructed through the land, and alongside it, in the early 1850s, he created more tunnels, later known as the Catacombs, which became a tourist attraction.

By the mid-1850s, possibly together with his son Henry, he decided to create a unique house within the sand quarry by excavating and hollowing out the sandstone. The first part of the house was completed in 1857 - we were told that it 'appeared out of the ground'.

By 1859 William had died and Henry had moved into the Sand House. He had also taken over his father's business and built some speculative housing with names such as Senior Street, Senior Terrace and so forth. He expanded the Sand House by further excavations, possibly in the 1870s.

We then moved on to the photographs of the Sand House, mainly taken in the last years of the 19th or the first few years of the 20th century. One of the most noticeable aspects of an interior photograph of about 1880 was just how normal it looked - just like an ordinary house in fact. The only clue to the fact that this was not a normal house was the deeply recessed seats in what was known as the Long Room.

The house had 10 rooms over two floors, one of which was a ballroom. Here dances were held regularly. Because the house was below ground level, guests arrived in horse-drawn carriages on Victoria Street and were able to go down steps straight into the ballroom at that level.

Below the ballroom were the stables. Also at ground level, on the outer walls were various carvings including "Summer", and Henry and his wife Mary. Outside, the now-disused quarry became a garden.

Although the talk was called "The Sand House", the most remarkable part was not the house itself but the adjoining tunnels, which were famous in their day. We were told that they had already been started earlier with the Catacombs, but in the 1870s more tunnels were excavated, particularly one called the Cloisters.

From the photographs, as Richard Bell pointed out, one could see that the tunnel had a strongly Gothic appearance, shown top right, hence the name.

Within the tunnel, we were shown photographs of high quality carvings, carved out of the sandstone by unknown people. There was a cherub, a figure called Pat the Irishman and another called Molly who was 9 feet tall, thus indicating the tunnels were an astonishing 11 ft high.

There was a pope, a very unflattering carving of an elderly Queen Victoria, and a younger more complimentary one.



There were others, including a clown, a king, a queen and most spectacularly of all an elephant with mahout, shown bottom left. We were told that one of the mysteries is that no one knows who created the carvings.

In 1900 the house and tunnels were sold to the Corporation which housed the head of the Sanitary Department there. However it was also a tourist attraction, as a sign on one of the pictures demonstrated.

However, by the late 1930s things were changing. The Corporation could not agree on what to do with the Sand House, so eventually they took the roof off and filled it in. By 1946 it had all gone. A lost opportunity to retain such an attraction, many of the audience thought.



Except it hadn't quite all gone. From the 1950s to the 1980s there were a number of subsidence problems attributed to the tunnels. Various excavations were undertaken and it was discovered that although the tunnels had been partly filled in, some of them and the carvings could still be seen. Eventually and after a visit by our speaker, the tunnels were finally filled in 1984.

This was a fascinating talk, very well presented and made more personal as our speaker was descended from the creator of the house.

Richard Bell is the author of 'The Sand House', published in 1988 but now sadly out of print. However, for those interested in learning more, you may consult a copy in the Reference Library.

Peter Coote

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Restoration of a Landmark: A visit to the Parish Room in Tickhill



Standing in the centre of Tickhill is a most unusual building - now the Parish Room, but originally St. Leonard's Hospital. It is dated 1470 so much of the building is over 500 years old.

It was altered in the nineteenth century but even this work took place over 150 years ago. For many years it served the local community well as the Parish Room, but in recent times it had fallen into a poor state and was little used.

Our former editor, and member of the Trust's Executive Committee, Philip Mottram, is Chairman of the Parish Room Management Committee.

He has been keenly involved in the restoration of the building, with a view to bringing it back into beneficial use. In the September edition of Trust Topics he wrote a progress report outlining the work still to be undertaken. Now, the work is complete.

A number of Trust committee members were invited to an Open Day on 19 January, which was held to show the people of Tickhill how the Parish Room had been improved. Everyone enjoyed the visit, and in this short article I have written about my impressions. I was certainly very impressed by all the hard work and enthusiasm that has gone into this project, and the results are excellent. I also liked the warm and welcoming atmosphere on this day, complete with tea and biscuits.

Some years ago I remembered standing outside the building and noting its sad condition, complete with holes in the door. Today it couldn't be more different. I had never been inside before, so I found it very helpful that there was a projector and screen system showing pictures of how the building looked before the alterations.

The main room, which occupies the full two storeys of the building, has great character, and care has been taken to ensure that this has not been lost. For example, a row of old coat-hooks across the width of the room have been retained, together with a pipe, which, rather quirkily, is believed to have been an umbrella rack.

This kind of detail dovetails in well with the important new changes which include new lighting, a new doorway, kitchen access and secondary glazing.



The new entrance area and platform lift

Philip explained that the entrance area was completely new and replaced an open courtyard. I found this oak-beamed space to be light and airy and well-planned. It also incorporates a lift, which, although it only rises a few feet, provides access for all.



New covered walkway

Beyond, and behind the main room, is the smart new kitchen. This part of the building existed previously but much work has had to be carried out to bring it all up to date. Indeed, just a look at the restoration of buildings never tells the full story. In this case the strengthening of walls and foundations, installation of under-floor heating in the kitchen, foyer and disabled toilet and insulating the roof of the main hall are examples of significant but hidden works.

A tour of the cellars was called for next - virtually a corkscrew entrance took me below for an exploration of the two empty, and low, rooms. The work here has been to keep it all dry for the future and to add insulation under the floor of the hall.



Kitchen and cellar steps

The Trust has followed the restoration of this building with great interest, helping financially at one point, so it is really pleasing to see that it is now once again a great asset to Tickhill, ready to be used by local groups.

Very appropriately, a local history day was planned the week following my visit.

An excellent and worthwhile outing.

Peter Coote

Christ Church Update (I)

Members may have been watching the progress made repairing the churchyard railings and gate piers, fitting new gates and, most recently, fixing railings to increase the height of the stone boundary wall. Excellent !





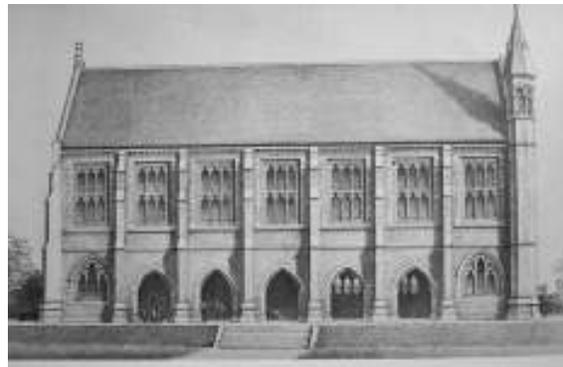
Uncertain Future for the Grammar School?

It was recently announced that the Council was considering options for the future of Hallcross School. The changes are being driven by the government's initiative to build schools for the future, everywhere, and the need to match school capacity to student numbers. The former Grammar School currently houses the Hallcross Upper School for 14-18 year olds.

The Lower School is at Bessacarr, off St Augustine's Road, adjoining Lakeside. One option reported is that all the upper schools and their catchments could be re-organised to create a smaller Hallcross School which could then be housed entirely on the present Lower School site.

This would render the present Upper Hallcross School redundant. In most cases, the school buildings are demolished, and the sites sold for development. The receipts help to fund the new school building programme.

However, both major phases of the Grammar School buildings are listed grade 2. The old school of 1869, by George Gilbert Scott, right, has a medieval guildhall plan with a first floor hall, originally over an open ground floor. It was first listed in 1988. The original schoolroom is now the Hallcross library. This is a wonderfully crafted neo-gothic building, inside and out.



The modern school was begun in 1938 after an open architectural competition won by Julian Leathart. Its design has echoes of the Dutch modernism of the time, but manages to pay some respect to the gothic of Scott in its windows and main entrance. However, its main curved staircase and circular windows are pure "Thirties". The later buildings, right, were spot-listed in 1997, after a request from this Trust.



To demolish the buildings would require listed building consent, and for total demolition the decision would have to be made by the Secretary of State. It is inconceivable that such an application could succeed.

As well as the buildings' historic and architectural merit, there is also the landscape value of the tree-lined approach, the social value of the swimming pool and even the benefit of use by local groups, like us!

When the local authority is evaluating options for the future of Hallcross Upper School, it must consider fully the future plans for the use of the site and buildings. Abandonment and sale cannot be a justifiable course of action. It did not work at the nearby Christ Church.

The irony is that the Scott building is the nearest thing we have to an Oxbridge college. Education at the highest level seems to be compatible with historic architecture, there. Why not Doncaster?

Archie Sinclair

Burton Agnes Hall



On 13 March a full house enjoyed an inspirational talk about the Hall and its gardens from Mrs Susan Cunliffe-Lister. She is a member of the family which has occupied the house for 400 years.

Having told us something about the buildings generally, we were taken inside to see the sumptuous interiors. In the reign of Elizabeth I, the Queen and her courtiers would arrange to visit country estates, and would have to be accommodated in the appropriate style. This meant expensive redecorations and alterations for owners, but a legacy of fine 400 year old interiors today.

English furniture was influenced by Chinese design for a period in the 18th century. There are fine examples of this “Chinoiserie” at Burton Agnes, and an American company has been making accurately-measured copies for sale in the United States. Following the recent downturn in the American economy, they have, ironically, successfully developed a new market in China.

This is a fine historic house, listed grade one and one of the top 20 English houses, according to the journalist and author Simon Jenkins. To enhance it further, the owners have added C 20 Impressionist and contemporary art and furniture to the collections. The long gallery, which had earlier been sub-divided to form bedrooms, has now been restored to its designed use. A modern embroidery depicted the garden in full flower.



Burton Agnes Hall 1601-3, south front

We heard how an earlier owner had sent the Hall’s collection of 300 cases of stuffed birds to Hull for safe keeping, but it became a victim of the city’s wartime bombing.

Our speaker told us about the continual battle against thefts, and the criminals’ efforts to evade the security beams and cameras.



The Gatehouse c.1610

Mrs Cunliffe-Lister’s personal passion is designing and developing new gardens. She showed us the potager (vegetables), the maze (the farm workers were asked to help unload 700 young yews – they expected ewes) and the national collection of campanulas. We learnt how to dry tall herbaceous plants like delphiniums for the long-life displays which they prepare each year for the room settings.

It was fascinating to see the transformation of paddocks into quite mature gardens within a few years, and to learn some of the tricks of the trade to cut down on maintenance.

We had been entertained and educated by a well-illustrated talk from a real hands-on expert and enthusiast. I think we all admired her ambition and endeavour.

Archie Sinclair

A stroll through Old Doncaster with Malcolm Barnsdale



Malcolm introduced himself on 21 February as “purely an amateur historian” and explained that his career in property had taken him inside very many buildings, with their various nooks and crannies. One old lady client had allowed him to copy her collection of old photographs, and from that day he has been a collector, a “swapper”, and, as we were to discover, a real enthusiast. He said he would not show us the town’s traditional star attractions, the Mansion House and Parish Church, but instead a variety of other interesting streets and buildings.

He began with Bawtry Road by the Racecourse, a narrow carriageway between rows of fine trees, very regularly spaced. This avenue of trees extended into the town centre all the way to what we still call Gaumont Corner, as we saw in images of its precursor, the Majestic, including one of its demolition in the 1930s to make way for the Gaumont.

The view looking west into Waterdale was unrecognisable, but a later shot of the same buildings after conversion and signing as Claybourn’s The Car People was much more familiar.

There were more well-known local names in 1950s Hallgate: Meller’s Dolls Hospital and Field’s TV and radios. How very different from today’s national and increasingly international retailers.



Looking north towards the town centre from the Racecourse, with the Horseshoe Pond on the left. The building is now the Grand St Leger Hotel.

A consistent theme was that almost all the buildings in the town centre started off life as private houses, some of them very fine. The Hallgate building which was Francis Sinclair’s for many years, and is now Pronuptia, had been Dr Wilson’s very elegant town house before having display windows inserted some way below its ground floor level. Malcolm explained that the street had been lowered in this area which is why the buildings have a number of steps up from pavement level.

A series of images showed changes in Waterdale. Railings were lost and the houses went into commercial use, with shopfronts and signage. When Malcolm referred to a temple-like building at the east end, the audience, with one voice, cried, “Toilets!”

It was interesting dating the photographs from the trams’ tracks and single overhead wires, or the trolley buses double wires (my grandparents called them tracklesses, for obvious reasons). Early images had very few cars or even people in them, but we were helped by the Morris Minor and Austin Cambridge from the 1950s

There were good shots of the development of Town Moor Avenue in Edwardian times, where the new buildings started at the top, with the largest houses, and the road was laid out complete with its avenue of lime trees in their wrought iron tree guards.

Some images were entertaining, like the overhead cashier system in Morris's wallpaper shop, and the motorcycle club preparing to set out from outside the Woolpack in the Market Place. I hoped they hadn't spent too long at the bar.



Others were traumatic, like the aftermath of the Holmes Market gas explosion, which took out Mr Parish's sweet shop, and the burning down of Carr House, done purposely to be rid of any infection lingering on from its use as an isolation hospital.

Doncaster Motorcycle Club's first meeting on 25 March 1910 in the Market Place, outside the Woolpack Hotel

But what was seriously disheartening was the number of good buildings which were lost often for very mediocre re-development: the houses cleared in Priory Place for the telephone exchange, The Elephant Hotel in St Sepulchre Gate for the new Yorkshire Bank, The Wellington pub for the new Bowers Fold; Wheatley Hall, Finningley Hall, and Sprotbrough Hall, all now gone.



On the more positive side, Malcolm had a picture of the seldom-seen Cantley Hall, once the home of the Darley family, but after a few changes of ownership now safely in the care of Lord Kirkham.

Wheatley Hall, in use as the Golf Clubhouse around 1925, before its demolition

A striking and elegant image was one of Christ Church from the east end showing its original stone spire. That building is a survivor. It has recovered from the loss of its spire and the threat of demolition, thanks to Reachout, English Heritage and Doncaster Civic Trust.

It was a full house of 70 members and guests, who were treated to an excellent presentation. A lot of ground was covered as Malcolm allowed us to share his collection of Old Doncaster photographs. We learned a great deal and our speaker learned one or two things from us. It had been an entertaining and interactive evening.

Archie Sinclair

Buffet Supper David Adgar of the Churches Conservation Trust

What a lovely evening on Wednesday 12 December at the rather appropriate venue of St Peter's Church Hall!



St Peter, Old Edlington

A very interesting talk was given by David Adgar. His gentle humour and easy manner made his presentation about the work of the Churches Conservation Trust most enjoyable. To think that the church at Old Edlington (left) was the first church to receive their attention and that we have such an unusual treasure in our very midst. The early 13 century gravestone with the cross bow is one of only three in Europe! Perhaps a visit will be included in one of the Civic Trust's future trips.



St Oswald, Kirk Sandall, another local church in their care

As David talked us around the various gravestones particularly those from the church at Wentworth, I could almost feel the chill of the crypt; but that improved once the heating got turned up! Thomas Wentworth, obviously a very influential man in our history, began to come to life and I'm looking forward to digging out Black Diamonds. *

Christmas is always a great opportunity to unearth a good book!

We were all certainly given a terrific Christmas spread; a veritable feast! Thank you so much to all those who obviously worked so hard, not just in making all the delicious food but also in putting the whole evening together, it was a great success and I for one am already looking forward to the next social event!

Rosemary Rogers

* *Black Diamonds* by Catherine Bailey - *The Rise and Fall of an English Dynasty*
The book tells the story of the unravelling of the Fitzwilliam family, one of Britain's wealthiest dynasties, during the twentieth century.

Members' Page

Special General Meeting 13 March 2008

The meeting approved the resolution from the Executive Committee to raise membership subscriptions from 1 September 2008.

The new rates are:

- Annual:** Single £3.00
Joint (two members at same address) £5.00
Junior £1.00
- Life Membership:** Single £30.00
Joint (Lifetime partners) £45.00



Winter Programme

The talk on Burton Agnes Hall which followed the SGM was the last in the current winter programme. This year's events have been very well presented and exceptionally well attended.

We have to be very grateful to Tina Anderson who devises the programme, and makes all the arrangements – as well as baking the cakes and making the drinks, with her helpers.



Satisfied customers

Christ Church Update (2)



After the completion of the new fencing on top of the stone perimeter walling, to secure the churchyard, it has now been painted black and looks very smart.

A further welcome improvement is that the clock is now working for the first time in many years (the building was abandoned in 1989, and this caused the Trust to campaign to save the building from demolition).

Not only can people enjoy the views of the clock's three faces, but they can also hear its chimes on the hours and the quarters.

Planning Matters

The Planning and Conservation sub-committee meets every month to consider applications affecting listed buildings and the character of the conservation areas. The last few months have been very busy because, in addition to perusing the planning applications, we have also commented on a number of development plans which were put out for public consultation. We will look at these first. We should explain that these were not planning applications, but outlines of ideas for the future.

Firstly we looked at the proposals for Belle Vue, the Rovers' former football ground. This is a sensitive and important site as it will be seen by everyone using the main road as well as by people nationally, viewing the races on television. The proposals are mostly domestic and we were pleased to see the proposals to limit properties adjacent to the existing houses to two storeys. Those nearer the road will be 3-4 storeys. Overall this seemed generally satisfactory and certainly a vast improvement on the tower block that had been previously discussed in the press.

There was a display in the Frenchgate Centre where the public were asked to make their suggestions for the development of the Minster precincts site. This is a very different area from Belle Vue, presenting different problems. We recognised the need to upgrade and improve the area surrounding the Minster, one of the town's most important buildings, listed grade one and currently being restored. We felt that it was important that the former college building was retained.

We were pleased to see that the authority wants to tackle issues relating to anti-social behaviour by making it a much pleasanter area to visit. However we had some serious doubts about the proposals to put blocks of buildings on a relatively small site to the east of the church which would provide glimpses of the church through the gaps between them. Whilst we understand the proposals for the Great Street we would question why it is necessary to close off the present view.

Following on almost immediately from the Minster exhibition, we had to comment on the plans for St. Sepulchre Gate West. A fairly comprehensive re-development of this area is proposed, although the traditional line of the main street would be retained. Overall we do not oppose this redevelopment as many buildings are undistinguished. However there are some issues.



Two public houses would be retained in the development: the Leopard and the Railway, above. We were very pleased to see proposals to retain the Leopard which was well designed and of good quality.

However we were disappointed that there were no proposals to retain the Horse and Jockey, below, a building of considerable architectural merit. We have strongly urged that it be retained. The architect was Norman Masters, son of F W Masters, architect of a number of important Doncaster buildings.



All of Norman Masters' town centre buildings have been swept away in the cause of comprehensive re-development. One example was the Wellington Inn which stood in the corner of the Market Place and was demolished in the 60s to be replaced by an uninteresting Bowers Fold. It would be a great shame to lose the Horse and Jockey too.

The fourth plan to be studied was the Civic and Cultural Quarter. The proposals are quite detailed and it is not clear in some cases what the use of the proposed buildings will be. In many ways this is a revival of a plan by Sir Frederick Gibberd which was commenced in the 60s but never completed. It will include a new town hall, library and performance venue. We were disappointed by some of the proposals. In particular the civic buildings seem very close together with only minimal open space in the form of a new square on the existing car park.

We were pleased to see that a suitable new use is proposed for the former Girl's High School, in the form of a hotel. However we felt that the proposed siting of a multi-storey car park adjacent to it is insensitive and also inappropriate for the character of Chequer Road. Instead we have suggested that the car park would be better sited closer to the ring road and near a proposed new store.



The plan proposes some office development, mainly on Chequer Road. We have commented that we are very doubtful if this will be needed in the area shown.

We noticed that there are proposals to allocate 15 South Parade, left, known as The Hall or Denison House, for housing. This is a building of distinction, with its history written by the Trust. We were amazed that this is not being retained as a flagship office building by the Authority.

If new offices are required, why convert an existing one to housing?

We noted the proposals to use the site presently occupied by Scarborough House for housing. Whilst we have not objected to that we have urged caution with the height of any proposed buildings. High rise properties would adversely affect South Parade, one of the town's most attractive conservation areas.

We have also had time to comment on a number of planning applications:

There was a recent application to build some houses on the former Rossington Motors site on Station Road. In the centre of the proposed development stands an unusual building with an overhanging roof, part of the Old Rossington village. The application proposed some alterations to this property in connection with a change of use. We raised no objections but asked that the ornamental tiled roof be retained and any repairs carried out with matching tiles. Although latterly the building had been used as a service station, it once served as a butcher's shop linked to Ivy House farm. There was some press interest in the building's history and a photograph of the old shop was used.

We have looked at a number of applications without raising objections, such as the proposal for a new visitor centre at Brodsworth Hall, or for a new single house at Stonebridge House, Tickhill, a sensitive site in a conservation area.



At Handley Cross, on Cantley Lane, above and below, we raised no objection to an amended residential scheme which retains the main house, now listed. However, we did suggest that improvements could be made to the design of a proposed lodge-type house.



The vernacular-styled garages and outbuildings form a courtyard on the north side



The Tudor door and window surrounds are actually of pre-cast concrete.

Planning and Conservation sub-committee



Doncaster
Civic
Trust

Summer Outings 2008 : Booking Forms

Please enclose remittance and make cheques payable to “**Doncaster Civic Trust**”.
Also, please add your telephone number in case we have to contact you.

Cottesbrooke Hall & Gardens: Wednesday 18th June 2008

Return to John Holmes, 53 Thorne Road, Doncaster DN1 2EX by **11th June 2008**
I enclose £..... for.....places at £22.00 each

Name.....

Address.....

Telephone no.....

Thrumpton Hall, Nottinghamshire: Wednesday 16th July 2008

Return to Mrs S Barnsdale, 16 Bawtry Road, Bessacarr, Doncaster DN4 5NR by **9th July 2008**.

I enclose £.....for.....places at £25.00 each

Name.....

Address.....

Telephone no.....

Winkburn Hall, Newark: Wednesday 6th August 2008

Return to Mrs S Burley, 17 The Oval, Bessacarr, Doncaster DN4 5LJ by **31st July 2008**.

I enclose £.....for.....places at £17.50 each

Name.....

Address.....

Telephone no.....