



# TRUST TOPICS

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## The Future of the Mansion House?

**The town's premier civic building now finds itself remote from the new Civic and Cultural Quarter**

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Member of



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## Members Social Forum Thursday 19 April 2012

About 40 members gathered at St Peter's for the Members' Forum. This year the meeting was given over almost entirely to the Student Bursary and Education Projects which the Trust is sponsoring.

Chairman John Holmes (right) opened the meeting, saying he was particularly pleased that so much progress had been made on these projects since the previous Forum a year ago. The Trust was very keen to help young people from Doncaster to take up careers in the built and landscaped environment.



He handed over to Jeff Prior, who had led the team of members responsible for the projects. Jeff outlined the process of devising the Bursary scheme, then attracting and selecting local students to receive the awards. The team had selected three female students, two studying architecture and one landscape architecture. They had also identified a potential future recipient, a male sixth-former from McAuley School who should start university in September 2012.



Three of the four were able to attend the Forum and had brought examples of their work which they showed to members at the start of the meeting and during the break. Members were impressed by their enthusiasm and commitment, as well as being slightly “blown away” by their technical expertise with computer-aided design.

Jeff Prior also spoke about the Education Project, which the Trust would sponsor jointly with Sheffield University, who could access match funding. Jeff introduced Lisa Proctor (above right) whom the Bursary Team had appointed to develop a learning package or “tool-kit”. This would be used by both primary and secondary schools to promote learning about places and spaces, and why and how they developed. It's a very broad topic.



Lisa spoke about building people's ownership of their home place, in Doncaster's history, and of building interest in the townscape in young people.

She showed slides of her work in schools and the community, and clearly relished the challenge of the project which seemed, to use a very appropriate phrase, right up her street.

The latest news is that the contract between the Trust, Lisa and Sheffield University is now signed and she begins this work this month, finishing in March 2013. The first three bursaries will be paid in October 2012.

## Members' News

### Winter Programme 2012 - 2013

All events will take place at St Peter's RC Church Hall, Chequer Road.

All on Thursdays at 7.30 pm

**18 October** Christopher Margrave on Clumber Park's Walled Garden

**15 November** **Annual General Meeting**  
and Colin Bycroft on the Development of St Sepulchre Gate

**06 December** **Christmas Buffet Supper**  
and Archie Sinclair on Planning for Barnsley's Dickie Bird statue

### Colin Burley 1939 - 2012



Members of the Trust were saddened to hear of the death of Colin, Sue Burley's husband, in hospital on 16 March after a short illness.

Although Colin was a man of very many talents, he would be best known to most Trust members as a helper at the Christmas Buffet, where he was "drafted-in" by Sue as an extra pair of hands. Invariably, while the ladies organised the food, he was to be found with Malcolm Barnsdale doing men's work, looking after the drinks.

Colin (left) and Malcolm

We shall all miss him, and we send our belated condolences and best wishes to Sue, their two sons and their families.

### News from the Executive Committee

Five members of Executive Committee were at the well-attended launch of the "Elephant in the Room" initiative promoted by Richard Bell.

The Trust had made a small grant towards the project. The exhibition, at The Point, South Parade, was officially opened by Lord Scarborough on 1st May and featured a sand sculpture of the "Elephant and Mahout", a copy of the carving from the Sand House. The impressive centrepiece of the well-presented exhibition had started off life as 40 tonnes of sand which had to be barrowed into the building. It was then compacted before it could be sculpted.

It was an innovative and successful project, which received very good "live" coverage from BBC TV's Look North. There was a fascinating short film of the making of the elephant using time-lapse photography. The Trust would like to congratulate the driving force Richard Bell, sculptor Jamie Wardley, The Point and not least the Arts Council for successfully bringing a part of Doncaster's history to life.



## **The St. Leger: The founder and the origins of the race**

Horse Racing has been established at Doncaster since at least 1600. The arrival of the classic race, the St. Leger, first run in 1776, was an important factor in eventually establishing the town's national importance in the racing world. The race has been run continuously in Doncaster ever since, apart from war-time and other emergencies.

In this article I will be examining the origins of the race and trying to solve a mystery: the details of the location where the St. Leger was given its name.

### **Anthony St Leger: Military Career**

Firstly, let us look at the life and career of Anthony St. Leger. He was born in 1731 in Kildare, Ireland into an aristocratic family. He was the fourth son of Sir John St. Leger, a Baron of the Irish Exchequer. After completing his education at Eton and Cambridge, he commenced a career as a soldier, joining the Grenadier Guards in 1753. Eight years later, in 1761, he married Margaret Wombwell, co-heiress to a Yorkshire estate, thus establishing a link with the county. In the same year he became Lt. Colonel of the 124th Regiment of Foot. It was usual at this time to purchase commissions, the reason given by the establishment that it was "to ensure officers were gentlemen not enthusiasts". This explains his change of regiment. Purchasing a Lieutenant-Colonelcy in the Guards would have cost £6,700 whereas purchasing the same rank in a line regiment would have cost £3,500. It was still a terrific sum of course particularly as the regiment was disbanded in the following year, 1762. Nevertheless it was finding himself without a military post that gave him time to spend on other activities including horse-racing.

### **Park Hill**

Anthony St. Leger rented Park Hill, a country estate at Firbeck near Rotherham, which he eventually purchased in 1765, soon adding another 500 acres of land. Here he commenced a new career as a farmer and race-horse breeder. He was first involved in racing at Doncaster in 1763. From 1768 until 1773 he was also MP for Grimsby but continued to live at Park Hill, though, and from 1773 to 1779 he devoted his time wholly to the estate. On the edge of his land he constructed a race-course, the outline of which can be discerned in aerial photographs. The distance round this course was around two miles, a standard length for the time and the same as the race that was to become the St. Leger. Some historians believe that the first wagered 'St. Leger' race was run at Firbeck, although there is no record of this. What surely must have happened is that this course was used for training and preparing the horses. It also probably gave Anthony St. Leger his idea for the eventual format of the race to be run at Doncaster.

### **Doncaster –1776**

Most people agree that the first race that was to become the St. Leger was run at Cantley Common, Doncaster, in September 1776. It was a 25 guinea sweepstake for 3 year olds to be run over two miles and settled in one heat unless a dead heat occurred between two or more horses in which case there was to be a run-off. This arrangement was very different from most races at the time which were run over several heats. This first race had no name, nor did the winning horse which was owned by Lord Rockingham. It was tradition for racehorses to be listed under the owner's name, as this was a game for aristocrats. Later the horse was given the name of Allabaculia. Two days after this first race the Corporation decided to move the races from Cantley Common and create a new course and stand at Doncaster Common, where the racecourse has been established ever since.

The race was run again in 1777 but still without a name. Finally, in 1778, by which time the course had moved to Doncaster Common, it was called The St. Leger Stakes.



The 2nd Marquess of Rockingham

We turn now to a book called 'St. Leger - The Family and the Race' by Moya St. Leger. She tells us: "Before the September 1778 meeting, the story goes that the stewards of the race club, together with the Mayor of Doncaster, Alderman Rickard, and some distinguished owners and supporters, met at the Red Lion to discuss the stakes for the meeting.

The subject of a name for the new race was raised and someone suggested it should bear the name of the most prominent person present - Lord Rockingham. But his lordship demurred, remarking 'it is my friend St Leger who suggested the thing to me - call it after him'. While no concept of a classic yet existed, the Marquess had unknowingly named the first of its kind."

Unfortunately there are no records of the dinner and many variations of the story have appeared over the years. Some versions mention only 'sportsmen' meeting at the dinner or refer to Corporation members. Others state that the dinner took place in 1777 immediately after the race. Sometimes 'an upper room' is mentioned. The location also varies - sometimes it's the Salutation, Warmsworth Hall or Wentworth Woodhouse. We are now going to look at all these locations to consider which of them is most likely to have hosted the dinner.

## The Salutation

The Salutation, on South Parade, was rebuilt on its present site in around 1778. The idea that this was the location of the dinner is a relatively new one. Indeed, throughout the 18 years that I lived at the Salutation, it was never suggested.

The first mention of it was probably in 1990 when it appeared in a book on Yorkshire pubs. Since then it has been attributed as the location on various web-sites, in a display in Cusworth Hall Museum and even in The Encyclopaedia of British Horse Racing. So, are they correct?



In 1778 the inn was small - the part with the bow window on the first floor which contained the large and impressive dining room was not built until 1831. Originally there was an upper room on the first floor, larger than the others, but this could only have accommodated a small dinner party.

The inn does have a long-standing connection with the St. Leger: William Hurst, the second landlord, had been Colonel St. Leger's racing stud groom and his appointment marked the beginning of a long association between the inn and the world of horses and horse racing. Many winners were stabled there. However Hurst did not arrive until 1784, so the dates don't match. Lastly, some writers may have been misled because the St. Leger family did have connections with a Salutation - a tavern of that name in London, not Doncaster.

It is very unlikely that the Salutation was the venue for the dinner. Indeed, if it had taken place in 1777 as sometimes suggested, the inn had probably not even been built and its old predecessor would not have been suitable. I believe that in 1990 someone simply made a mistake and unfortunately others have copied the error.

## Warmsworth Hall



Some people think that the setting of a country house would have been more appropriate for such a dinner. Warmsworth Hall, now known as The Old Hall, stands today in the grounds of the Holiday Inn and is used for meetings and conferences. Yet it was once a country house re-built in 1703 by John Battie. His grandson, also called John, married Isabella Wrightson, daughter of the builder of Cusworth Hall and when he inherited Cusworth in 1760 the family name soon became Battie-Wrightson. The family owned both houses until Warmsworth was sold in 1917.

In the 1890s a magazine called The Doncaster Review published an article on the origins of the St. Leger. It attracted a letter from Mr W H Battie-Wrightson who wrote:

Dear Sir

I have read with some interest the article in your Review on Colonel St. Leger and I can give still another story as to the origin of the St. Leger Race, which was told me by my late uncle, Mr W B Wrightson, who was born in 1789. It was as follows:

Doncaster Races had fallen in so low a condition about the year 1776, that it was feared it would soon become only a second or third class meeting. To obviate this, therefore, Colonel St. Leger, who was living at that time at Warmsworth Hall, which he rented from Mr Wrightson's father, invited a number of influential gentlemen to dine with him there, and discuss what could be done to set the Races upon a better footing. After dinner Lord Rockingham got up and said 'I think, gentlemen, the most gracious thing we can do would be to collect a sweepstake amongst ourselves, and institute a Race to be called after the name of our host, Colonel St. Leger'.

My uncle has often told me that it was in the old dining room at Warmsworth that this dinner was held, and I believe his father was present at it.

I still possess Colonel St. Leger's Silver Ticket for the Grand Stand, which he is supposed to have left behind him when he vacated Warmsworth.

It would be interesting to know Mr Taylor's authority for his version - but I firmly believe mine to be the correct one.

Yours faithfully

W H B-Wrightson  
Cusworth Park, Doncaster

The writer was a keen historian and had lived at Warmsworth Hall, so one would expect him to have been knowledgeable. Unfortunately though, there are some problems with this story. Firstly, the races were in fact in good health in 1776. The course's Gold Cup was already attracting a prize of 100 guineas and the Corporation was beginning to take a keen interest in developments.

Also, why would Anthony St Leger be living at Warmsworth when he had his own house a few miles away? Unfortunately the rent records for Warmsworth for the period have not survived for this to be checked. However, a deed of settlement strongly indicates that the widowed Isabella Battie-Wrightson moved into Warmsworth Hall to use as a dower house in September 1776 and remained there until December 1783. The St. Leger did not receive its name until late 1777 at the earliest, when Colonel St. Leger could not have been living at Warmsworth. I suspect that the family story in this letter had become confused and distorted over the years. If there was a dinner there of any sort in 1776 perhaps it was to discuss racing, but not the naming of the St. Leger.

## **Wentworth Woodhouse**



We are now going to look at another country house, Wentworth Woodhouse, near Rotherham. Dan Cruickshank, in a television programme, 'The Country House Revealed', broadcast in 2011, described the house as "just about the biggest classical country house in Britain". It was largely constructed between 1724 and 1750 and is, in essence, two grand houses built back to back. The estate was inherited in 1751 by the Second Marquess of Rockingham who became leader of the Whigs and served as Prime Minister on two occasions.

Apart from his political career, he also loved to socialise and enjoyed gambling and horse-racing. He kept 80 thoroughbreds, including some big winners, in the enormous stables and also commissioned paintings of horses by George Stubbs for the house. We know that Lord Rockingham and Colonel St. Leger were friends. Rockingham owned the horse to win the first unnamed St. Leger and, after that race, he was asked to be part of a group including Anthony St. Leger as well as Childers Walbanke Childers and James Farrer to organise the new course and stand on Doncaster Common. Also, he declined the offer to have the race named after him at the dinner.

These links may have led to the suggestion, which apparently dates from the nineteenth century, that the dinner was held in the dining room at Wentworth Woodhouse. As Lord Rockingham was so important this could be a possibility, but if it included the Mayor and other people from Doncaster why would it be held so far away? The mansion was a centre of political life, meetings and banquets for many years but I suspect the St. Leger dinner was not amongst them.

## The Red Lion

The most popular suggested location for the dinner is the Red Lion, situated close to a corner of Doncaster's Market Place. I set out to explore its history. Firstly I wondered if there was any recorded link between Colonel St. Leger and the Red Lion. It is known that, due to Colonel St. Leger's influence, theatre-manager Tate Wilkinson was given the opportunity to manage the new Doncaster Theatre from 1775. The Red Lion was nearby so no doubt Colonel St. Leger would have seen it at least.



Red Lion: note how you can see that the inn was constructed in two stages by the different levels. The building was faced in artificial stone in 1911.

The only other possible link may be found in the records of 'The Club', a gentleman's club which existed until 1999 and whose origins can be traced back to the eighteenth century. It has been suggested that the St. Leger may have been named at a meeting of this club, so I perused its records for clues. It is not known when the Club was founded but the records commence in July 1783. General St. Leger (which was his rank by that time) first appears in the list of members in November of that year, but this was at least five years after the dinner.

Lord Rockingham had died the previous year. The Club is known to have held its meetings at the Red Lion but the first record of this is not until 1797. Indeed for the first five years there is no mention of a location at all. The first reference to an inn occurs in 1788, when the Club was meeting at the Angel, on Frenchgate - 'all notices to be abolished and each member absent to pay one shilling for port after the next club meeting at the Angel Inn'. I think that any links to the naming of the St. Leger with The Club must remain uncertain.

I have also examined the history of the Red Lion. In a Victorian book, 'Historical Notices of Doncaster', author C.W.Hatfield refers to a John Jaques as an innholder in 1742. He is later noted as a tenant of the inn. In May 1775 the Corporation drew up an agreement between Thomas Woodcock and itself giving him permission to pull down various buildings in the Magdalens that had been leased to 'the late Mr Jaques'. Mr Woodcock was advised that he could pull down the buildings and take any material for his own use. Although the Red Lion inn is not specifically named, nevertheless this would suggest that it was demolished at this time, but it was probably quickly re-built which might date it to 1776.

What is interesting here is that Mr Woodcock was an Alderman and in 1776 served on the Corporation's Race Committee, giving us a link between the races and the Red Lion. The inn was clearly not large enough, for in 1789 landlord Robert Stanuall advertised in the paper that '.....he has now completely finished his New Buildings, and furnished the rooms with new furniture in an elegant manner'. This has been interpreted as a complete re-building by some people, but I don't think this was the case. I think it refers to a new extension. Indeed if you look at the Red Lion today you can clearly see that it was built in two stages. In 1911 an attempt was made to unify the two parts by cladding them in artificial stone which remains today.

It is worth noting that if the Mayor was present at the dinner, then the Town Hall was only a few yards away at the time. It was normal for Corporation members to adjourn to inns for discussions anyway and as they apparently owned the Red Lion at one time then this would have seemed a good choice for a dinner.

## **Conclusion**

There is no definite proof about any of the locations being the place where the dinner was held but, based on the information above, my vote goes to the Red Lion.

It is pleasing that all the suggested locations for the dinner have all survived. The three Doncaster buildings are all listed Grade 2 as well as being key parts of conservation areas which should protect them for the future. The two inns, retaining their eighteenth century names, are still serving food and drink as they would have done over 200 years ago. Further away, Wentworth Woodhouse is listed Grade 1. Although no longer owned by Lord Rockingham's descendents it remains privately owned.

## **A Myth Dispelled**

This might be the end of the matter, but not quite. A plaque unveiled at the Red Lion in September 1978, says 'This Inn was the Birthplace of the St. Leger. The race was proposed by Lt. General A. St. Leger at a supper party here in 1776, was first run in that year and was given its name at a dinner party at this inn in 1778'. The first part of this statement is incorrect but unfortunately it has been copied as fact into Council leaflets and even into the town's bid for City status. Yes, the dinner probably took place here but the story of the earlier supper must surely be fanciful, and has certainly added to the confusion about the origins of the race.

## **Colonel St. Leger - later career**

The year after the first named St. Leger had been run, Anthony St. Leger rejoined the Army becoming Colonel of the 86th Regiment of Foot (Rutland Regiment). In 1781, as Brigadier General, he was appointed Military Governor of St. Lucia in the West Indies. Three years later he was back in his native Ireland as a Major General, or possibly Lieutenant General. He died in Dublin in 1786.

## **Postscript: The Paintings**

Anthony St. Leger left Park Hill to his nephew, John Hayes St. Leger. Unfortunately this has also caused confusion amongst historians. Many racing books feature a painting of a military man purporting to be Anthony St. Leger. In fact no known likenesses of the race's founder exist. The paintings are actually of his nephew, John. One of these, painted by Joshua Reynolds in 1778, depicts him as a Captain in the 55th Regiment of Foot (Westmorland Regiment), which Anthony never joined. The painting most often claimed to be Anthony though is by Gainsborough, which also shows John, again in military uniform with a horse standing behind him.

Unfortunately it has not been possible to identify the regiment. The picture is at Buckingham Palace, a legacy of the fact that John was friends with the Prince Regent.

**Peter Coote**

I would like to thank Lt.-Colonel John Holbrook MBE, formerly Coldstream Guards, for his assistance with the military aspects of this article.

Full details of sources used are available on request to the Trust.

## The Salutation Sign Revisited.



In 1996 Doncaster Civic Trust celebrated its 50th anniversary with a series of events. As part of the activities we made a donation to the Museum and Art Gallery to help secure the future of the former inn-sign to the Salutation, ensuring that it was kept for the town.

This article is an update on the sign, but firstly I will tell you about its history, which I originally wrote about for our earlier magazine, the Doncaster Civic Trust Newsletter, in 1996. The following is an extract from that article:

“The origin of the name ‘Salutation’ is religious. It refers to salutations to the Virgin Mary by the Angel Gabriel. During the Commonwealth this went out of favour and was often altered to the ‘Soldier and Citizen’, represented by two people politely bowing to each other. The local sign of two gentlemen offering salutations is clearly derived from the latter.

We turn now to William Sheardown, a local historian who published many informative pamphlets in the Victorian era. He wrote of the picture ‘It is painted on wood, within a frame, and bears the date of 1766, and is said to have been executed by a Dutch artist when, on a visit to Sir Bryan or Sir George Cooke, Bart. at Wheatley, and at the request of the baronet, in consequence of an old servant of his being landlord of the inn.’ It is not known if this is true but it would appear that it was already an established local legend when Sheardown decided to commit the story to paper. What is certain is that the picture is painted on wood - in fact it is painted in oils on three pine panels and these are held in place by wrought iron plates to each side. This was quite normal for inn signs of the period. The sign would have been fastened to an outside wall.

The date of 1766 is also interesting. The present Salutation was built around 1778, but its predecessor had stood nearby. If the sign’s suggested date is correct then it must have been moved when the ‘new’ Salutation Inn was built. The date of 1766 is just about visible on a late Victorian photograph of the inn. Interestingly a recent professional assessment has suggested that the painting dates from 1760-90.

The name of the artist is more difficult to ascertain. There is a story that Hogarth was the painter but this tale was probably invented in the 1940s and can be discounted. If there was a Dutch artist, as Sheardown says, his name is lost to us. Nor is there a signature for us to ascertain the artist's name, but perhaps this is not surprising for an inn-sign. There is, though, one possible clue. It has recently been suggested that the two noblemen offering salutations are in Masonic stance and, therefore, that the artist had knowledge of the craft. I have attempted to identify the artist from this information, but only one possibility has emerged. A John Scott, painter, lived in a house next to the White Swan in Frenchgate in 1796. He may well be the same J Scott, a painter, who was initiated into the local Masonic lodge in 1786 and became master in 1802 and again in 1809. There is nothing to connect him with the Salutation sign, but he may be a possibility, despite the date discrepancy and lack of any other firm stylistic evidence.

Another legend about the painting may also be read in Sheardown. He tells us, 'Some years since it was carefully repainted by the late Mr. Herring, animal painter, when a resident here, who has preserved all the character of the original'. This story is well known and has been frequently repeated over the years, but this does not mean that it is true!

J F Herring senior (1795-1865) was a fine painter of famous race-horses and is reputed to have painted various inn-signs to supplement his income as a coach driver. None of the other inn signs associated with him survive. The modern wisdom is that he did not repaint the picture, for it is not representative of his work in either style or quality. Of course restoration by another hand may well have taken place at this time - many years of exposure to the elements may have rendered this necessary".

For a number of years after my article was written the sign was kept in a glass case just inside the Museum's entrance. Then, when the Museum was extensively altered and modernised to improve the presentation of artefacts, the Salutation sign was cleaned and restored. Thick dark varnish was removed and we can now see it as the painter intended.

It is presented now in a different section of the Museum headed 'Georgian Coaching'. The history of the sign is printed alongside it and the Civic Trust is also mentioned. Nearby, a depiction of the old Great North Road lists the town's main inns of the past - the Angel, the Reindeer, the Ram, the Red Lion, the Black Boy and the Salutation. All have gone except the Salutation and the Red Lion. There is also an interesting model of the Ram, made by the late historian, Bernard Cuttriss. Of interest, too, are some bottles which were official measures of both wine and ale, also dating from around 1766. These were used by the Corporation to make sure that landlords were not giving their customers less than they paid for!

The Salutation sign is not a valuable painting. Its value and interest lie in the fact that it is a social and pictorial record of how inns advertised themselves in the past. There were a great many hostelrys in Doncaster and many of them would have had signs originally, but the Salutation sign is the only one left.

We have reproduced the painting in this article but it is also worth going to see it. Whilst there please have a look at the rest of the Museum which is open every day except Sunday. It is very interesting and well-presented.

## **Peter Coote**

Author of 'The Salutation Inn'

The photograph of the painting is reproduced by kind permission of Doncaster Museum and Art Gallery.

## **Safeguarding the Peak District National Park**

### **Anthea Rawlence Thursday 16 February 2012**

Although Anthea lived in Derbyshire and was a trustee of the Friends of the Peak Park, she was familiar with the Doncaster area and some of its environmental issues. So her talk included a few local images.

She asked how the new bridge near the BTCV head office at Potteric Carr was progressing. She knew the contractor had 48 hours over Christmas to crane in the beams over the main railway line. We were able to tell her it had been done, but it had taken about 5 weeks! The new bridge would, for the first time, have footways and cycle tracks, in a move which she called “joined-up green thinking”.

In Doncaster, Thorpe Marsh Power Station was closed in 1994, but its cooling towers were still standing. A new gas-fired plant had been approved. Andrea would like to have seen a greener installation, something renewable, and possibly employing heat recovery.

The Peak District National Park was the 3rd most popular in Britain, with 22 million visitors. It sometimes got quite literally “full up”. The Park was 60 years old last year, and Julia Bradbury, president of the Friends of the Peak District and CPRE, had come and led a walk. The Friends group was launched in 2002, and had a lot of support from people living outside the area, who presumably visited. The Friends of the Peak District had local groups who formed plan review panels which looked at hundreds of planning applications each year.

The problem of off-road motorcycles and 4x4 vehicles was a real issue. They were quite legally allowed to use some lanes, and all parties were working to an agreed code of conduct to try and limit the damage being done by these vehicles. It was essential to try and maintain a reasonable surface for walkers.

Despite the idyllic setting, there were problems in the affluent areas, where houses were very expensive and local working people were priced-out. Affordable housing had been developed to enable local people to buy their houses through shared ownership: part buy, part rent.

There had been some successes: on a site where fluorspar was being extracted they were mining huge amounts of limestone in order to access the fluorspar, quite legally, it was claimed. The case ended up in the European Court before the operation was stopped. We saw hydro-power schemes in the Peak Park where electricity was generated on former mill sites and fed into the grid. On renewable energy, we saw images of wind turbines in groups - we agreed the collective term was a (wind) farm. Turbines were getting larger, and the Friends assessed them on a case by case basis. There were very few in the Peak District, or in the Home Counties, it was suggested, but South Yorkshire had quite a few, the most recent locally being at Marr.

We saw examples of practical conservation, including dry stone walling and “rhododendron-bashing”, which showed us that the wider environment was made up of many small elements with which people and communities could engage.

It was a thought-provoking talk, ranging from the big issues of sustainability, Green Belt and renewable energy policies to smaller problems such as educating visitors to the Peak District to take their litter home if a bin is not to hand. And we were interested to be shown that some countryside issues were just as relevant to the Doncaster area as they were to the Peak District.

**Archie Sinclair**

# Planning Matters

Members of the Trust's Planning and Conservation sub committee get together each month to decide whether objections or comments should be made on planning applications, mainly those related to listed buildings or within conservation areas. Other major applications are also considered.



The HSBC building at 1, High Street is one of the town's finest banks. This is a listed building which is situated on a prominent corner site within a conservation area. Built of Portland stone, it was designed by Demaine and Brierley in 1897. A recent application for the installation of 2 ATMs (cash-points) and one night safe proposed significant loss of the historic fabric and architectural detail. We objected to these plans and the application was changed to only a single ATM, with minimal damage to the façade. Restoration of earlier damage was also proposed.

Left: the installation of the proposed ATMs would have involved the loss of the elegant Portland stone keystones and voussoirs beneath the window sills

(Some time ago we made similar objections to proposals by the adjoining bank, Barclays. This too was later improved and detailing restored). Banks have to adjust to incorporate modern technology but it would be nice to see them giving consideration to their architectural heritage before putting these proposals together.

In the past few months we have objected to three applications for proposed advertisements. In February we were not happy with a proposal by the Racecourse to erect 18 signs of various types. We felt that this was an excessive number and would have looked particularly cluttered near the Racecourse Roundabout.

Another advertisement that resulted in a Trust objection was a proposal for a very large LED screen to be erected at first floor level on the former Gas Showrooms building at the bottom of Hall Gate. We felt that this was unacceptable in a conservation area. The application was refused but it is now subject to an appeal.

Thirdly, in June we objected to a proposed new sign – a giant bicycle on a roof! This was in connection with a new cycle shop at 7-9 Bennetthorpe. Signage such as this might be acceptable on a retail park or industrial estate but it isn't appropriate in a conservation area.

Right: the large bicycle sign was proposed to sit on the parapet



We always strive to ensure that our historic residential areas remain free from serious commercial intrusion. We objected to a proposal to change the first and second floors of a house in Regent Square from a flat to a hairdresser. The building is situated close to the centre of a group of town houses, all residential.

To our dismay this application was approved, albeit restricted to the named applicant. This joins the approval for commercial use of the ground floor, which we also opposed.

Above: the terrace of town houses in Regent Square where the commercial use was allowed

It is difficult to see that there was any reason to approve this application, especially as there are so many empty commercial properties available. The Trust believes that this decision will now make it very difficult to refuse further commercial applications in the residential part of the Square.

The cases above were all in and around the town centre. We do cover all of the Borough and indeed we have recently perused applications relating to Warmsworth, Conisbrough and Cusworth amongst others, but we made no objections in these cases.



We did, however, study the Mexborough Conservation area in close detail, including a site visit. The DMBC are appraising all the Conservation areas and Mexborough is the latest in this series. We help with all of them, at their request. The Conservation area in Mexborough is essentially Bank Street - one long street, from the edge of the pedestrian area to the Royal Electric Theatre at the other end. We provided information on building materials and conservation as usual, but on this occasion our knowledge of the history of the buildings was more limited. Fortunately Mexborough and District Heritage Society were able to provide information on the history of the buildings for the report.

Left: The NatWest Bank, built for the Sheffield Banking Company in 1874, is a key unlisted building in the Mexborough Conservation Area

## The Planning and Conservation Sub-committee

### Mr Leader and his Mystery Box

Leo Leader      Thursday 19 January 2012

Thursday evening was quite the jolliest I think I've ever experienced in a long line of Civic Trust talks. Tina and I tried out a new format for the seating, which brought us all nearer to the speaker.

This being Mr Leo Leader (& brother) who was all affability and geniality as he distributed pen and paper.

He then proceeded to bring forth a series of antique small domestic objects from the mystery box, or box of mysteries, if you prefer.

These intriguing articles were displayed, circulated, and little hints given. The rest was up to us. Winning was not the objective, merely guessing correctly gave great satisfaction.

Objects varied from a silver needle case to a brace of mahogany double-armed dress hanger for early C19th dresses, to a billiard cue end replacer, well, what else could one call it? And who knew what a penny lick glass was?

Seldom, in the annals of the Trust, was a more enjoyable evening passed; and, completed with Tina's delicious shortbread and sherry, I'm still recovering!

**John Holmes**

#### **Nostell Priory :**

There will be an article on Nostell Priory, the subject of John Hoare's excellent talk on 15 March 2012, in the next issue of Trust Topics.

## The Future of the Mansion House



The building illustrated in Miller's History of Doncaster 1804

The Mansion House has been the town's premier civic building for over 250 years, but it will soon find itself remote from the new Civic Quarter. With the planned transfer of many of its local government functions to the new Civic Offices in Waterdale, the future role of the grade one listed Mansion House has come under the spotlight.

It is vital that its historic fabric is preserved. As well as the architecture of the exterior, the building has very fine interiors and contents which include chandeliers, paintings, furniture and clocks.

It is important that the Council is committed to maintaining the civic function of the building, possibly continuing as a base for the Civic Mayor, and a venue for civic functions and public celebration. It could be developed as an historic attraction in its own right as well as offering a wonderful historic setting for all kind of events.

The Trust wrote to the Mayor, Peter Davies, earlier in the year, making these points. We had hoped that plans were already being made to secure the future of the Mansion House and the adjacent Priory Place buildings. As far as the Trust was aware, there had been no official statement made about its future.

The Mayor responded in February, agreeing with the Trust on the Mansion House being the town's premier civic building, and he confirmed that a full condition survey of the building would be carried out in April. This would identify the work needed to repair and repaint the exterior of the Mansion House and the adjacent Priory Place buildings. The Mayor had asked that substantial funding be set aside to ensure that this work went ahead.

The Mayor told us that Council officers were already in the process of preparing a report on the future usage of the Mansion House, which would include the extent to which the Civic Mayor might use it for engagements, and the scope for using the building for civic and other functions. Once this had been completed Mayor Davies would be in a better position to advise local interested groups and the public.

The Trust was pleased to hear that the Mayor was keen to concentrate in the short term on the maintenance of the building's historic fabric. This work needs to go ahead irrespective of any decisions on the future role of the building. But it is vital that the building does become a well-used venue for functions and events to which the public have access. As well as a public hall, parts of it might be set out as museum/art gallery devoted to showing the building's role in the town's history.

Doncaster people do deserve to see and enjoy the interior of the finest building in the town, and its contents.

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# The Back Page : a Letter to the Editor

## The High School for Girls

I have been a member of the Civic Trust for two or three years as I am interested in what you do, trying to preserve the old buildings in Doncaster. My grandfather, John Wilkinson, was the foreman joiner on the Girls' High School building, when it was built in 1910. He was 33 years of age, and I was a pupil there from 1938 to 1943, so I knew the place quite well.



The school when quite new, with a single storey wing facing Waterdale

Walking down Chequer Road quite a lot in recent years, I have been appalled at the state of the building. Last year I spoke to one of the workmen on the site, and he told me that the parquet floors, put down by Grandfather and his team, were wonderful. In fact, he was ecstatic about them, but he also said that the maple sprung floor in the upper Hall had ballooned due to the water leaking through the roof.

I feel that the Council have just let it go to rack and ruin over the years, so it could be pulled down. They want to get rid of all the elitist schools in Doncaster, including Percy Jackson's and the Grammar School.

Unfortunately, my grandfather died in 1918, just after the Armistice was declared, aged 41 years. He was discharged from the army – a sapper of course – with heart problems, so I never knew him. Incidentally, my son has followed in his footsteps and is as good at his job as his great-grandfather was in the old days.

Grandad also worked on the Old Palace Cinema in Silver Street and the Coliseum building on Bentley High Street which has been partly converted into small flats. I had a look around them with a friend and the handrails on the staircase were just as solid as ever. Good workmanship!

**Joyce Burgin**



Joyce's wonderful letter demonstrates very clearly why buildings are far more than just bricks and mortar; they are monuments to the skills of the people who built them, as well as to those who commissioned and designed them.

In the case of the Girls' High School, there are also the tens of thousands of girls, and latterly boys, who spent what many of them might call "the happiest days of our lives" there. Doncaster families often have strong bonds with Doncaster buildings, something that newcomers to the town cannot always understand.

The building failed to become "listed", but it is a key corner building and landmark in the town. In the master plan for the Civic and Cultural Quarter, now being developed, it was proposed that the building, or its façade, be retained and the site redeveloped as a hotel. The building stands fenced off and boarded up but, so far, no detailed planning application has been submitted for its re-use.