



The Trust's 70th Anniversary Part Two

In the February edition of Trust Topics we wrote about how the Trust came into existence in 1946 together with details of its first major campaign: opposition to the building of the Crimpsall Power Station. In this second article we continue the Trust's history. From 1950 onwards we have selected items from each decade out of the huge number of activities in which the Trust has been involved since its foundation.

1950s

(i) In the early 1950s the Trust convened a meeting of Local Authorities with a view to Cusworth Hall being acquired and preserved for the enjoyment of the public. This 18th century house was the property of the Battie-Wrightsons but they no longer needed it. Major Farran, who was the Chairman of the Trust and who also worked closely with the Cusworth Estate was very keen to rescue the mansion. Unfortunately despite some interest from the Authorities no action was undertaken at that time.

Several years of uncertainty followed but in the late 1950s the Rural District Council made a determined effort to purchase it. A meeting took place which included Major Farran, who was also an RDC Councillor, Lord Rosse, President of Doncaster Civic Trust, the owner, Mrs Pearse and her London solicitor to agree the terms of the sale.

The purchase finally went through in 1961 and the grounds were opened to the public. In 1967 the house was opened as an industrial museum. This later evolved into a more general museum of South Yorkshire life.

Today Cusworth Hall is a much enjoyed facility and historic attraction known as Cusworth Hall, Museum and Park.

(ii) In the town centre, in 1956, the Trust made a successful appeal to the Magistrate's Court preventing Regent Square being made into a car park. Today the Square is sometimes referred to as a green oasis in the town centre. It is an important part of the Bennetthorpe Conservation Area.

1960s

Although some notable buildings were lost in the 60s, including the Guildhall, which the Trust actively tried to save, there were successes too and I will write about just one of them: Parkinsons.



Parkinson's – empty and unloved in the 1960s

Famed for its butterscotch, Parkinsons closed its High Street café and shop in 1960. The shop had been a feature of the town since 1817. Its future seemed bleak but the Trust campaigned vigorously over many years to save the building. In 1967 it was purchased by the Post Office for redevelopment. Finally in the early 1970s after a meeting between the Trust and the Regional Director the demolition plans were abandoned. It took until 1976 for the property to be restored and opened as Legards shop with a café upstairs.

This was the end of the Trust's longest ever campaign. The building is now the Georgian Tea Rooms which also includes a shop. It's come full circle and it has one of our plaques commemorating its past.

1970s

In 1970 a newsletter was introduced to inform members of the work of the Executive Committee. The first edition was only two pages but within a short time historical articles were added and the pages increased in number. For nearly 30 years it was largely written and edited by the Trust's Secretary Eric Braim who provided members with a remarkable series of articles on buildings, architects, streets, parks and much more. These well researched articles are prized by the Trust and can be read on line.

In 1970 we established a Tree Fund. At the time the town was desperately short of trees and far more were needed. Funded by donations from Trust members the scheme proved itself to be very effective. Over the following decades many trees were planted in central locations such as the Town Field, Church Way and East Laith Gate, as well as in other areas including Thorne and Campsall. Helping to finance tree planting remains one of our activities to this day.



As the decade came to a close we saved Belle Vue House from demolition by getting it spot listed. It was later sold and became the Grand St Leger Hotel.

The Grand St Leger Hotel in 2013

1980s

Doncaster Town Trail was published. For the first time it brought together accurate history, fine line drawings of buildings and an easy to follow trail through town. It has been revised many times but has never been out of print, remaining enduringly popular.

The most important matter of the 1980s was the Doncaster Common Case. A dispute with the MBC about whether the public had rights of access to Doncaster Common led the Trust applying to the High Court for a declaration that the common was open space. The Trust won. On 1st October 1986 the courts ruled that the public's use of the common was not only lawful but as of right.

1987 marked the beginning of our plaque scheme. Architects, residents and building histories are all recorded. There were eight to start with and two more were added in 1993. Most of the plaques were refurbished in 2014.



Two plaques after re-
furbishment

Far left: the plaque for The Hall or Denison House, 15 South Parade

Near left: the plaque for the Subscription Rooms. Only its portico now survives, and forms the grand entrance to Priory Walk

1990s



Christ Church: this town centre church is an important building forming a key part of the Christ Church Conservation Area. In 1986 it was declared surplus to requirements eventually resulting in the Trust issuing a leaflet in 1991 called 'A Church in Crisis' which received national press coverage. This was a difficult time but in 1995 the church was sold to the Reach Out Christian Fellowship for a nominal sum. The Trust made substantial donations to help with the restoration.



The Salutation: in 1991 'The Salutation Inn' was the first publication, apart from leaflets and newsletters, to be financed by the Trust. Yes, it was written by me, but it still has to be mentioned as a landmark!

2000s

A new century brought us a new newsletter, Trust Topics, under a new editor, Philip Mottram. This brought in shorter and newsier articles but historical articles continued too. A regular feature, Planning Matters, was introduced to highlight key planning and conversation issues. The magazine still continues today with Archie Sinclair as editor.

In the summer of 2000 a Millennium oak tree was planted on Bennetthorpe to mark 20 years of tree planting collaboration with the MBC. A ceremonial spade of engraved stainless steel was produced for the occasion by the Council and presented to the Trust.

2010s

Our website was launched on 25th November 2010, bringing newsletters, town trail and more. It was praised by the national organisation, Civic Voice. In 2016 it was re-launched with a new look.

In 2012 the Education Project was launched under the chairmanship of Jeff Prior.

The first stage included a bursary for students who wished to study architecture and design.



A separate scheme was the Toolkit, a learning package for schools in the form of a board game based on historical aspects of the town centre. By 2014 every school had a copy.

These have been followed by other activities (not all listed because of space constraints) including an architectural competition for primary schools. The winner receives monies for the school. This is the Eric Braim prize, in memory of our late Secretary who did so much for the Trust.

2015 marked the launch of the Heritage Walks under the banner of Doncaster Civic Trust. The leaders, Steve Kimber and Andy Ward, had led many walks previously which had been run by Doncaster MBC. Nine walks took place including a walk at Bawtry which was added to the walks of Doncaster North and Doncaster South. In 2016 a walk at Tickhill was introduced which has proven particularly successful.

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