

HINCKLEY CIVIC SOCIETY

www.hinckleycivicsociety.org.uk

"striving for a better Hinckley"

NEWSLETTER

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NO. 4 – JANUARY 2008

NEXT MEETINGS

MONDAY 28TH JANUARY 2008

Hugh Beavin - 'The Hungry Forties'

TUESDAY 26TH FEBRUARY 2008

Dr Bramwell Rudd 'A History of the Hosiery Industry'

Both at GREAT MEETING - 7.30pm

A revised programme of dates for 2008 incorporating changes to the March and
April meetings is enclosed with this letter.

Separate pdf file if receiving by e-mail

**A HAPPY & PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR
TO ALL OUR MEMBERS AND READERS**

SUBSCRIPTIONS for 2007-8

**A reminder that outstanding Subscriptions for 2007-8
(Held at £5 per membership) are now due.**

HINCKLEY'S HERITAGE OF HARDSHIP

Hugh Beavin searches for a brighter future for Hinckley's 21st century workforce than that experienced by the town's 19th century workers

Hinckley until recent times attributed its wealth and prosperity to the links with hosiery, but in the early nineteenth century before the coming of the factories this was very far from being the case. Framework knitters were described as 'pale faced, narrow-jawed, herring-gutted stockings'.

In the period just after the Napoleonic Wars one anonymous poet, quoted by Francis in his 'History of Hinckley', expressed the following sentiments in vernacular verse:

A weaver of 'inckley sot in 'is frame
'is children stood mernfully by,
'is wife pained with 'unger,
nearly naked with shame,
as she 'opelessly gazed on the sky.
The tears rolling fast from 'er famished eyes,
Proclaimed from 'unger not free,
And these are the words she breathed with a sigh,
"I weep poor 'inckley for thee".

The ending of the wartime contracts had resulted in grinding poverty with nearly two-thirds of Hinckley people applying for poor relief. Although there was some improvement in the 1830s, by the 1840s poverty again plagued Hinckley. It was the only time in the town's history when the population declined – by nearly ten per cent! A poster for a public meeting for the inhabitants of Hinckley at the Holy Well in 1842 had the heading, 'No Work, No Bread, No Hope!'

The government of Sir Robert Peel responded to a petition from framework knitters in the Midlands by setting up a commission under Richard Muggerridge. He collected around eighty pages of evidence from Hinckley and it paints a grim picture of the town in 'The Hungry Forties'.

Mr Eales, the only pawnbroker in Hinckley, claimed that around ten per cent of the population pawned goods every week – nearly always the women who would take the shoes of their feet for a few pence. The Rev. Salt said, "I have a decided conviction that there is not a town in England worse off than this".

Further poverty and distress descended on the town in the 1860s when a cotton famine took place with exports from the Confederate States being interrupted by the American Civil War.

The Atkins Building stands as a symbol of the prosperity that new factories brought to the town one hundred and fifty years ago. Let us hope that the spirit of that symbol may be rekindled by the regeneration and new employment opportunities will bring to those who are '*striving for a better Hinckley*' at the beginning of the 21st century.

Hinckley to host Regional Meeting

Hinckley Civic Society is to host one of the quarterly East Midlands Regional meetings of Civic Societies. This is a considerable achievement for a Society that, by then, will just have celebrated its second anniversary. The likely venue is at the Great Meeting and the date will be either in October 2008 or January 2009; more details to come in the next newsletter.

Blue Plaque Campaign

Since the last newsletter, the Society's campaign for more Blue Plaques in the town has won substantial and favourable press coverage from all the local newspapers and also from Fosseway Radio. Alas, sad to relate, we still await any official response from our council officials, other the comments quoted in the press, some of which seems to conflict with earlier information.

One of our proposed plaques provides a wonderful opportunity for Hinckley to gain publicity way on an international level. 2009 marks the centenary of the birth of author, **Elizabeth Coxhead**, daughter of the headmaster of Hinckley Grammar School in the early years of the last century. She has links with Ireland (in particular, Dublin's renowned Abbey Theatre), whilst other archive material is held at a University in Southern Illinois.

Let us hope Hinckley seizes this opportunity – of which many towns would be very envious – to promote the town's heritage to a potentially international audience.

A Latent Literary Heritage

The Elizabeth Coxhead story is just a small sample of Hinckley and Bosworth's amazing literary heritage. There is a huge variety of authors with links to the area though many, like Coxhead, are not household names, but many do deserve to be better known and their local links promoted. Another literary milestone coming up in April this year is the 350th anniversary of the death in 1658 of poet, John Cleveland, whose father was Vicar of Hinckley.

Let us hope Hinckley can grasp these opportunities..... the Society Trustees would be very interested to discuss with any interested parties how these literary anniversaries might be marked to win positive publicity for the town.

Heritage Open Days 2008

Sadly, progress on the 2008 Heritage Open Days project has been moribund for reasons totally outside the control of the Society. Despite persistent attempts from the Society, a key, local partner has simply failed to enter into any effective or meaningful dialogue. The situation has been causing the Trustees considerable

concern ever since our AGM in September and, reluctantly, it has been decided it would be more prudent to redirect the Society's scarce time and resources into a project that the Society is able to drive from within and control.

Interpretative Heritage Boards

Congratulations to Burbage Heritage Group on establishing the new interpretative boards at Pughe's Paddock in Burbage. They provide an interesting insight into Burbage's horticultural heritage. It also highlights the fact that Hinckley is virtually devoid of any similar initiatives to recount its heritage and traditions to visitors to the town. Most other towns and cities in the area have made some attempt to sell their heritage to their citizens and visitors. Look at the various boards around the Castle Trail in Leicester, initiatives taken in villages such as Stoke Golding, and, dare the name be spoken, informative displays in Nuneaton.

Station Road

As you may have seen in the Leicester Mercury just before Christmas, the Society has formally asked English Heritage to consider the listing of two buildings on Station Road. Included is the original part of the Post Office Building, which will be closing after over a century of service to Hinckley as this newsletter goes to press. The concern now is what will become of yet another empty building in a prominent town centre position?

John Street Water Tower

The Society now understands a revised planning proposal has been submitted. It is thought the revised plan envisages the retention of the water tower but possibly refurbishing the building into residential accommodation.

Atkins Building

Demolition work on the 1972 building is due to begin early in the January. It is expected that this part of the site will be cleared by March. However, firm details on the overall project still remain scarce.

Hinckley's musical heritage as an endnote

Hinckley's choral heritage will be celebrated, one hundred years to the day, on **Wednesday 30th January in St Mary's Parish Church, Hinckley (7.30pm)**, when Hinckley Choral Union will stage a commemorative concert for the 'First Grand Concert' of Hinckley Choral Society on 30th January 1908 in the old St George's Hall. The evening will include some narrative history in addition to the choral input. All are welcome, entrance is free, though a collection will taken for St Mary's funds.

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