

HINCKLEY CIVIC SOCIETY

www.hinckleycivicsociety.org.uk

NEWSLETTER

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NO. 2 – JULY 2007

The response to the first newsletter was very favourable. The newsletter is also proving to be a major tool in enabling re-formed Society to win a profile well beyond the town itself.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

MONDAY 24TH SEPTEMBER 2007

GREAT MEETING - 7.30pm

Members please note:

Voting papers for the election of officers and trustees for 2007-8 are included with this newsletter

NEW TRUSTEES REQUIRED FOR 2007-8

At least two new trustees will be required for 2007-8 as existing Trustees David Bill and David Inman have advised the Society they feel, as elected members of the Borough Council and subsequent roles on key Council decision-making bodies, they should stand aside from their roles as Society Trustees to avoid any potential conflicts of interest. Both have indicated they intend to remain members of the Society and the Officers wish to thank them for their valuable input into both the original working party group and the formative meetings of the new Society.

All the present Officers have indicated a willingness to stand as Trustees for 2007-8, though, based on a year's experience, it is thought there should be a revision and re-allocation of the workload in the Secretarial portfolio.

Trustees meetings normally take place on the Monday following the main Society meeting.

HINCKLEY'S BLUE PLAQUES - A QUESTION OF PASSION

Society Treasurer and Local Historian, **Greg Drozd**, offers some personal views and raises questions about the need for a scheme of Blue Plaques in the town.

There are many elements that contribute to the regeneration of a town centre – and Hinckley is crying out for them! I believe that you'll never convince or attract any outsiders to take your aspirations seriously to be a thriving and prosperous town centre unless you show how passionately you care about the place.

One way to show pride and passion in place would be to install a great many more blue plaques to our ancestors of note. Back in January 1993, the Borough Council agreed. It instigated a progressive programme of installation of blue plaques to men and women of achievement. We had Charlotte Brame at 35 Castle Street, William Iliffe at the Museum Cottages and Joseph Hansom at the National Westminster Bank as the first batch of worthies.

Somehow, somewhere the council lost the impetus, the initiative and the drive to see it through – the programme got lost in the lassitude of bureaucracy. Now the view seems to be that less is better than more – that there is more kudos in having less plaques than many more. I, for one, strongly disagree with this view.

Just in the town centre, let alone the district, we are missing a big opportunity. Considering that the New Oxford Dictionary of National Biography lists 22 people connected with Hinckley in its pages and also from my own research there are extra names to consider, it is surely time for the administration at the council to engage in a revitalised programme, create the budgets and work with the researchers to devise a short and long list of nominees for a prestigious plaque.

My shortlist would include: **Father Matthew Thomas Norton**, Roman Catholic priest and agriculturalist, he was responsible for the rejuvenation and reintroduction of the Dominican order for the whole country from his base in Priory Walk, Hinckley, following Henry VIII's reformation. I would certainly include two ladies of note: **Myra King Merrick**, born in Mansion Street, she became the first woman GP in the United States and **Elizabeth Coxhead**, national journalist, writer, biographer and daughter of the head teacher of the Grammar School, now Mount Grace School. Top of the list would also include **John Boulton Brooks**, inventor and manufacturer of the world wide renowned Brooks cycle saddle.

The founder of the brewery Mitchells and Butler, **William Butler** was from Hinckley. Of more modern times I would include John Gittins, a nationally known educationalist with delinquent children. We still have no blue plaque to **Dr Robert Chessher**, who brought the aristocracy and a future Prime Minister to Hinckley to receive orthopaedic treatments from him. The list goes on and the research has been done – it is being offered free to the council.

When will they embrace the offer? – Will they ever embrace it? Or will we forever be the “nearly” town, languishing in obscure mediocrity, with nothing to distinguish us from so many other places up and down the length and breadth of the country?

Blue plaques send out a wonderful message – we care enough to have sought out our worldwide connections and the men and women who as entrepreneurs, pioneers and leaders in their various fields bring glory to our town.

How passionate are you about where you live?

Sir Laurence Gomme (1853 - 1916), an early pioneer of the **Blue Plaques Scheme** and an instigator of the *Victoria County History* series, was honoured with the 800th Blue Plaque at a special ceremony on 12 May 2006 at 24 Dorset Square, London, NW1, where he lived from 1895 to 1909. (Ed)

Postal Issues and Station Road

The Society's June meeting had a topical flavour with a fascinating account of Hinckley's postal history from Hugh Beavin. After Hugh's talk, there was much ensuing discussion about the proposed move of the town's major Post Office on Station Road to a franchise arrangement elsewhere in the town.

The Society is supportive of the overall campaign against the closure of Station Road Post Office, but several members strongly felt the situation highlighted another, equally significant, long-term issue surrounding the future of Station Road's late Victorian / early Edwardian streetscape extending from Lancaster Road to the Market Place area.

Further discussion on the subject took place at the Trustees meeting at the beginning of July and a formal letter has now been forwarded from the Officers of the Society to the Heritage Protection Operations Department at English Heritage expressing concerns about the implications regarding possible future development to the area that the proposed relocation of the Post Office may precipitate.

This seems to be a case where a pro-active policy of prevention may avert a need for a reactive rearguard action at some future date.

Elm Lea

The last newsletter reported on the rejection of the Elm Lea development proposal, but warned the issue might return. This has proved to be prophetic and a revised planning application has been submitted.

The Society will again make a formal representation to the Council about this proposed development and express its views and concerns about the potential replacement of one of the town's most distinctive buildings with yet another bland and dismal block of flats.

Atkins Building

No further news at present as the various parties involved follow up on the financial deals required to ensure the plan becomes a reality. The Society will continue to watch closely the planned developments.

Hinckley & Bosworth Community Plan

Hinckley & Bosworth Local Strategic Partnership has published a 26-page guide

entitled Hinckley & Bosworth Community Plan April 2007-March 2012. The plan makes interesting reading, especially the vision of Hinckley & Bosworth in 2026 on pages 15-6; time will tell.....

Victorian Water Tower under threat?

It has recently come to the Society's notice that one of Hinckley's industrial buildings described in Pevsner's *Buildings of England* may be the subject of a proposed housing development. The Water Tower, off Highfields Street, dates from 1891-2 and, at 60 feet above ground with its ornamental iron cap, is a distinctive landmark and another part of the town's late Victorian heritage. Any views, comments to Society officers or of course please post on the Society's website 'blog' page. Originally used to store water pumped to the town from Snarestone, the Tower was the subject of an article 'Hinckley Parish Pump Politics' by local author, David J Knight, in the 1995 *Leicestershire Historian Vol 4 (3) pp23-9*.

Charitable Status

The Society's application to achieve charitable status from the Charity Commissioners is now being processed and it is hoped to report further on this at the AGM in September.

Heritage Open Days

This year's Heritage Weekend will take place from Thursday to Sunday 6th – 9th September. A pamphlet detailing local

properties participating in the weekend should be available soon, whilst a full list for the whole of England & Wales is available on the Civic Trust website.

A further reminder that the Society will be seeking membership volunteers for its role in the 2008 event at both planning and delivery stages; more details at the AGM.

Almost a year on

Late September will see our 1st AGM since the formative meeting in October last year. Hopefully, members will recognise a great deal has been done in the ensuing months to give the new Society both a working structure and firm foundation. However, any voluntary organisation is dependant on a vibrant membership. With this in mind, the Society will be launching a membership drive in the early autumn.

Please encourage any potential members to come along and get involved.

Remember Greg's words from page 2, "How passionate are *you* about where *you* live?"

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