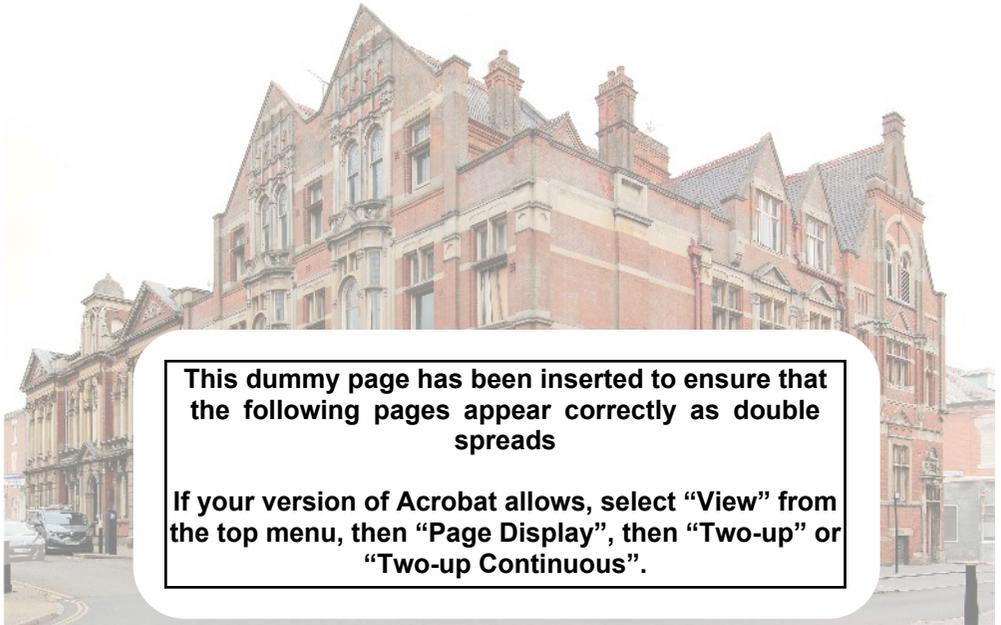


THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY LEICESTER GROUP NEWSLETTER

The national charity campaigning for the
Victorian and Edwardian historic environment

SUMMER 2019

Hotel plans for Constitutional Club



The Constitutional Club, with the Poor Law Offices beyond.

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The Club was built to the designs of the Leicester architect Frank Seale (1855-1940), and the Millstone Lane façade carries a plaque (see overleaf) indicating that it was laid by Lord Randolph Spencer Churchill on 21 June 1893. In 2002 the Leicester Group succeeded in obtaining Grade II listed status for this impressive building, which makes a fine group standing alongside the former Poor Law Offices (Redfern & Sawday, 1882) which was listed following a Leicester Group application in 2000.

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Access to the interior has been difficult for many years, and the list description makes no mention of interior features, but there are believed to be several impressive staircases with ornate cast iron balustrades as well as some fine rooms. An application (20190771/2) has now been submitted to convert this listed building into a 38-bedroom hotel. At the time of writing, plans have not been published on the City Council website, but we are cautiously optimistic that sympathetic conversion to a hotel could be the answer to a long-running problem.

The Constitutional Club is the only one of Frank Seale's buildings in Leicester to be listed, although another half dozen are on the City Council's Heritage Asset Register, 'the Local List'. These include houses at South Knighton, the former Uppingham Hotel (now Mandir Baba Balak Nath Ji)

on Uppingham Road, and several commercial buildings, including Fleet House, the splendid office building on Lee Circle vacated by British Steam Specialities a few years ago.

Fleet House Update



The latest application to demolish Frank Seale's Fleet House and replace it with an 11-storey residential and commercial development was refused by the Planning Committee at their April meeting.

The former Saracen's Head - by Carole Face

An occasional series in which members talk about some of their favourite buildings in the area

This fine Grade II listed building, now re-named the Knight and Garter, on the corner of Hotel Street and Market Place South, was designed by the Stockdale Harrison partnership in 1904, replacing an earlier inn, also called The Saracen's Head. There has been an inn on this site since 1312, and the name probably came into being after the Crusades. At this time, the safe return of the son of a landowning family from the Eastern Mediterranean prompted the addition of a Saracen's head to their coat of arms.

Following demolition of the brutalist 1960s Market Hall which for many years dominated its south side, this distinctive building can once again be properly appreciated.



The red brick façade, with sparing use of burnt headers for decoration, is built on a glazed brick plinth. The welcoming entrance is deeply recessed under a moulded round arch. There are stone mullion windows with leaded casements, and a canted oriel bay to centre left, repeated on the gable end to Hotel Street. The twin gables to the centre, with an elaborate lead gargoyle draining the valley, the dormer to the right balancing the partly truncated chimney stack to the left, give a cheerful asymmetry beneath the steeply pitched Swithland slate roof.

Everards and The Beautiful Pubs Collective are to be congratulated on the recent refurbishment and conversion of this splendid building into a boutique hotel, restaurant and bar. The only cause for regret is that, apparently, in 21st century Leicester, more people associate the name Saracens with a rival rugby team than with the Crusades, and this sad fact has, apparently, dictated the loss of the name carried by successive inns on this site for more than six centuries.

Recent Leicester Group Activities

Stoneywell Cottage and the Gimsons

A talk by Alan Tyler - Tuesday 5th February 2019

Stoneywell is a remarkable stone-built cottage near Ulverscroft designed by Leicester-born architect Ernest Gimson as a summer residence for his older brother Sydney's family and built between 1897 and 1899. Purchased by the National Trust in 2012 and open to the public since 2015, it is (with Staunton Harold church) one of only two Trust properties in Leicestershire.

Alan Tyler is Publicity Officer of the NT Leicester Association. He introduced us to the Gimsons, their engineering background and their affiliation with secularism which brought the younger generation directly into contact with William Morris. Morris stayed with the Gimsons after giving a lecture at the Secular Hall in January 1884 and their discussions later that evening prompted Ernest to leave his architectural pupilage with Isaac Barradale in Leicester and join the practice of JD Sedding. Morris's influence remained crucial but, as Alan pointed out, Ernest's vision was very much his own.

Created out of stones found in the immediate locality, and built onto an outcrop of exposed Charnwood bedrock, Stoneywell seems almost an extension of the natural landscape. As a visitor was overheard to say, "If nature had made buildings, it would have made Stoneywell".



Conditions were not luxurious and electricity was only installed by Sydney's son Basil, after his father's death. Unfortunately, faulty wiring caused the thatched roof to catch fire in 1939 whilst the cottage was let, and it was subsequently reroofed with Swithland slate. In 1947 Basil, retired and lived at Stoneywell until he died in 1953. From his widow it later passed to Donald, their eldest son whose own wife Anne laid out the decorative gardens in the late 1950s. It was Donald – now in his 90s – who sold the property and advised the National Trust on its refurbishment.

Interior photos from 1908 show the house's original craftsman-made fittings and furniture, including chests, beds and ladder-backed chairs. Much was subsequently sold, although some items have been traced and may be returned to the property in due course.

Ada Lovelace, the Calculating Countess

A talk by Hugh Beavin - Tuesday 5th March 2019

Ada Lovelace is now well known as a mathematician and pioneering computer programmer. The US Department of Defense has named its computer language Ada, The Association for Women in Computing confers the Ada Lovelace Award, and Ada Lovelace Day is held on the second Tuesday in October “to raise the profile of women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics”; but 30 years ago she was virtually unknown to the general public.

The Hon Augusta Ada Byron was born on 10 December 1815. Her mother was Anne Isabella Milbanke, known as Annabella, and her father was the romantic poet George Gordon Byron; Ada was his only legitimate child, but her parents’ marriage was strained and they separated little over a month after her birth. Ada went with her mother to the family home, Kirkby Mallory Hall, and never saw her father again. He died of fever in Greece when Ada was eight.

Annabella developed an interest in mathematics and science, and encouraged Ada to do the same; she thought studying these subjects would prevent Ada developing her father’s traits. Ada was taught by correspondence, with tutors such as Mary Somerville and Augustus de Morgan. It was Somerville who introduced Ada to Charles Babbage in 1833. He was then working on his Difference Engine, a mechanical precursor of the computer.

A few years later, Babbage moved on to a new project – the Analytical Engine. Luigi Menabrea, a young Italian engineer (and future Prime Minister of his country) had produced some notes on the possible operation of this device. Ada translated these into English, augmenting them in the process. She discussed the use of cards for programming, and developed the idea of algorithms. Unfortunately, the Government of Robert Peel withdrew funding and the Engine was never constructed, but Ada’s work has led to her being recognised as the world’s first computer programmer.

In 1835 Ada married William, 8th Baron King, subsequently the Earl of Lovelace, Ada thus becoming the Countess of Lovelace. They had three children; the eldest son was called Byron. Her health began to deteriorate in the early 1850s: she was diagnosed with uterine cancer, and died on 27 November 1852, at 36; the same age as her father. At her request, she was buried next to him at St Mary Magdalen, Hucknall, in the Byron family vault. There is also a memorial to her adjacent to Kirkby Mallory churchyard.

Highgate Cemetery: A Great Garden of Death

A talk by Dr Ian Dungavell - Tuesday 12th April 2019

We were fortunate indeed to have Dr Ian Dungavell, former Director of the national Victorian Society, to give our April talk. He began by explaining the ideas behind the establishment of private cemetery companies in Victorian times. Highgate opened in 1839 and many of its features were echoed in our own Welford Road Cemetery of 1849. The city of the dead on a hill overlooking the city of the living was a common theme. The drama at Highgate was heightened by a steeply sloping site, curved

pathways, landscaping surprises and several architectural follies including an Egyptian Avenue, an obelisk and a cedar tree surrounded by catacombs. It was a picturesque public space, intended to attract 'tourists' as well as mourners. A guidebook was produced in 1845 and it was soon necessary to employ two policemen and to issue admission tokens on a Sunday.

The cemetery company collapsed in the 1970s and management is now in the hands of a trust of which Dr Dungavell is chief executive. Ninety-thousand paying visitors annually, together with new burials, allow the cemetery to continue in operation and to fund a programme of restoration. The talk was an excellent introduction, especially for members intending to join the Group's visit to Highgate in June. (See page 7.)

Meetings Programme - Autumn 2019

All meetings take place in the Bishop Street Methodist Church,
10a Bishop Street, Town Hall Square, Leicester LE1 6AF at 7.30pm.

Our meetings are open to all, but we ask all attendees, whether or not they are members to register in order to comply with Fire Regulations, and to make
a contribution of £2.50 per person towards the costs of room hire and other expenses.

Tuesday 1st October 2019

George Eliot and the Bird Grove Connection

A talk by John Burton, Chairman, George Eliot Fellowship

Mary Ann Evans (George Eliot) lived with her father at Bird Grove, Foleshill, Coventry following his retirement from the Arbury estate in 1841, until his death in 1849. This was a formative period in her life and, though she wrote little whilst living there, her experiences at Bird Grove proved a fertile source of inspiration for her later novels. Listed Grade II*, the house is in poor condition, and John Burton outlines its history and prospects in the year of the author's bi-centenary.

Tuesday 5th November 2019

These we have Listed

A presentation by Peter Ellis and Neil Crutchley

It is just over 40 years since the Leicester Group was founded. In that time applications made by the Group have resulted in over 50 buildings in the city being listed by English Heritage / Historic England. These include some of the best-known of the city's Victorian buildings, along with others a little more obscure. This presentation shows the contribution the Leicester Group has made to preserving the heritage of the city.

Tuesday 3rd December 2019

Sir Edward Elgar: The Man and his Music

A talk with musical extracts, by Sam Dobson, Secretary of the East Midlands Branch of the Elgar Society

Edward Elgar was regarded as something of an enigma even by those who knew him well. Sam Dobson attempts to capture the essence of the great man.

Summer Programme - 2019

All our activities, including visits, are open to all subject to space limitations.

Our booking form 'Green Sheet' is only sent to members living in Leicestershire.

If you do not receive a booking form, but wish to participate in a bookable activity, the form can be downloaded as a PDF from our website, or booking enquiries can be made direct to

Carole Face - 0116 267 5946 - caroleface@yahoo.co.uk

Please see 'Booking Conditions' on the Green Sheet

Tuesday 25th June 2019

Full day visit to Highgate Cemetery and St Augustine's, Kilburn

Ian Dungavell's recent talk on Highgate Cemetery will have left members in no doubt of the importance of this 'Great Garden of Death'. We will have a guided tour of the spectacular West Cemetery, with free time to visit the East section on the other side of the road.



After visiting Highgate we will aim to reach Kilburn by 1.30pm, allowing time for lunch - various options available - before visiting St Augustine's at 2.30pm.

St Augustine's, Kilburn, by JL Pearson (1870) has one of the most impressive church interiors of the period, and is often known as 'the Cathedral of North

London'. Finally, we will visit GE Street's St Mary Magdalene, Paddington (1868-78), where our guide will be Geoff Brandwood.

Coach will pick up at Glebe Road, Oadby at 8.00am and Braunstone Lane East at 8.30am (outside Brandon Tool Hire). Return approx 7.00pm.

Cost £40 including £12 admission to Highgate Cemetery (both parts).

There are a limited number of places available for this visit - please contact Carole Face as soon as possible if you would like to join this visit

Tuesday 23rd July 2019

Victorian Stamford Walk - Fully booked

Tuesday 6th August 2019

St Mary's, Humberstone and Garden Suburb

Though medieval in origin, St Mary's Church was largely rebuilt in 1857-58 with Raphael Brandon as architect (also responsible for much of the Victorian work at Leicester Cathedral). Inside, alabaster is much in evidence, taken from a local quarry owned by the builder, Benjamin Broadbent, including capitals and a font carved by Samuel Barfield (of Clock Tower fame). Amongst other features is a sequence of stained glass windows by Hardman & Company, installed between 1859 and 1895.

Summer Programme 2019 - continued

Tuesday 6th August - Humberstone - continued

Participants may also chose to join a guided walk of about a mile to Humberstone Garden Suburb, the pioneering housing estate begun in 1908 which was developed on co-partnership principles. The spacious 'garden city' layout, designed by Parker & Unwin, the original cottages (by George Hern) and the integral communal facilities are still clearly visible.

Meet at the Church car park in Lidster Close (LE5 1AD), off Main Street, Humberstone at 6.45pm for the Garden Suburb walk or 7.45pm for the Church visit only.

Cost: £5. Please indicate on the booking form if you wish to join the walk.

Closing date for bookings: 26th July (see Green Sheet).

Wednesday 4th September 2019

Afternoon visit to Leicester Town Hall and Grand Hotel

An opportunity to visit two of the most prominent Victorian buildings in Leicester. Members should meet outside the main entrance to the Town Hall to join the public tour (numbers limited - first come first served). We will then walk to the Grand Hotel on Granby Street, where we have been offered a guided tour of Leicester's premier Victorian Hotel (Cecil Ogden with Simpson & Harvey, 1896-8, with additions by Amos Hall). The afternoon will end with cream tea at the Grand Hotel.

Note: at the time of writing the main rooms in the hotel are available to visit on this date, but how much we are able to see will depend on commercial bookings and arrangements may have to be changed at short notice. Please ensure that we have contact details with your booking.

Meet at the main entrance to the Town Hall, Town Hall Square, at 1.45 pm.

Cost, including cream tea at the Grand Hotel £10.00.

Closing date for bookings: 21st August (see Green Sheet).

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