

THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY LEICESTER GROUP NEWSLETTER

The national charity campaigning for the
Victorian and Edwardian historic environment

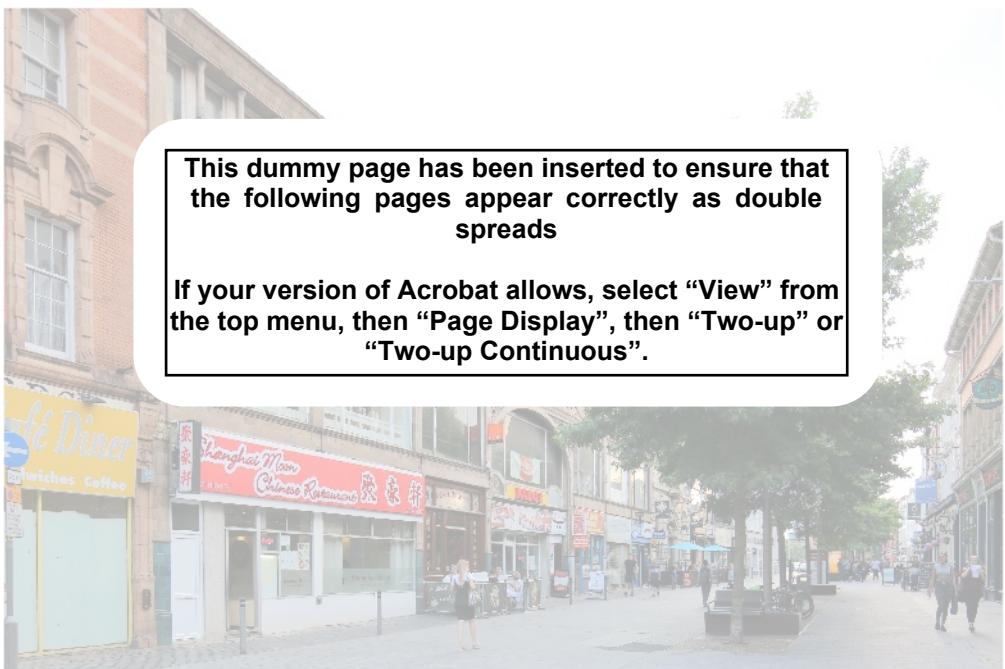
AUTUMN 2019

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Coronation Buildings on High Street, designed by Arthur Wakerley in 1904 as the Midland headquarters of the Singer Sewing Machine Company.

The project is part of the national High Streets Heritage Action Zone programme and will see at least 40 of the most important historic shopfronts in the area shortlisted for grants to help pay for repair, restoration and a general spruce up. Property owners and leaseholders will be invited to apply for financial support to repair building frontages, reinstate lost architectural features or bring empty floor space back into use. The scheme will run alongside the City Council's planned £2.8 million investment in public realm improvements to the three streets.

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City Mayor Peter Soulsby said: "This is fantastic news and I am delighted that Historic England has agreed so generously to support our ambitious plans. These important and busy shopping streets are rich in the city's architectural heritage and you only have to look up to see evidence of some truly remarkable buildings. This new funding will allow us to work with owners and businesses to preserve and celebrate that. We have seen how this approach can help transform parts of the city through the successful Greyfriars Townscape Heritage Initiative.* This has attracted new investment into the city's historic Old Town and helped make this area a real jewel in Leicester's crown.

"We have an excellent record of working with Historic England to help ensure we can continue to meet our responsibility to protect, retain and enhance Leicester's architectural heritage for future generations. The High Street Heritage Action Zone scheme is an extension of this and will complement major investment we are already making in improving these three important streets."

Louise Brennan, Historic England Regional Director Midlands, said: "It's fantastic news for the people and businesses of Leicester that it will receive much needed funding to help support its historic high streets. Historic England is looking forward to working with the local community and stakeholders on this exciting project, and we are hopeful for the future prospects of the area."

The Leicester Group submitted a letter in support of the City Council's bid when it was first proposed. We would like to think that we have made a small contribution to this very welcome project. Members of the Group may have their own ideas on which buildings in the three designated streets they would like to see benefit from the scheme - how about Arthur Wakerley's Coronation Buildings, listed following an application by the Group in 1996? Its elaborate faience façade, with cartouches representing the countries of the Empire and the central feature reminiscent of the Crystal Palace are sorely in need of proper restoration.



Detail of the cracked Art Nouveau frieze and the 'Canada' cartouche on Coronation Buildings.

* The Greyfriars Townscape Heritage Initiative was supported by £1.1 million from the National Heritage Lottery Fund. Over the last five years it has supported projects to restore 19 historic buildings in the city's Old Town area. The scheme has recently been shortlisted for this year's Pro Con awards for its transformation of New Street.

Buildings Sub-Committee

There have been no major development proposals affecting the Victorian buildings of Leicester during the summer.

We were pleased that a proposal to demolish **Fleet House** (Frank Seale, 1902), the former offices of BSS on Lee Circle, was rejected by the Council Planning Committee in April. Our listing application for this fine office building was unsuccessful, and it seems likely that the developer will continue to submit revised proposals for the planned 11-storey block until he wears down the Planning Committee. In the meantime, Fleet



Fleet House - showing deterioration over the last two years.

House continues to deteriorate - it has suffered a number of small fires recently, and many windows are now broken or boarded-up. Had our listing application been successful, the owner would have had an incentive to seek alternative uses for this impressive and well-detailed building.

The former **East Gates Coffee House** (Edward Burgess, 1885, listed by the Society in 2011) was vacated by Cruise Clothing earlier this year, and the building has been taken over by Tim Hortons, the Canadian fast food chain, specialising in coffee and doughnuts. We objected to the excessive amount of signage that was originally proposed, and a revised scheme, slightly less intrusive, has now been agreed. In one of the most prominent positions in the city, with no shortage of street lighting, the need for such a large number of illuminated signs is questionable, and presumably dictated by corporate branding rather than any consideration for the building or its location - it is merely one of 5,000 Hortons' outlets worldwide.

The student accommodation blocks known as **The Mary Gee Houses** on Ratcliffe Road have always been a somewhat discordant feature of this part of the Stoneygate Conservation Area. Now that they are no longer used by the university, the proposal to replace them with a nursing or care home complex should be welcome. However we have been concerned that the design of the new buildings, particularly those facing Ratcliffe Road, is too monolithic and pays no attention to the grain of this leafy Victorian suburb, on a site diagonally opposite Gimson's II* listed 'Inglewood'. We have objected to the design and proposed that a scheme with a more varied roof line and plan form, set further back from the road on this large site, would be more sympathetic to the conservation area.

Recent Leicester Group Activities

Guided walk in Thurnby village

Tuesday 14th May 2019

We gathered at The Rose and Crown on a beautiful spring morning to be guided



around Thurnby by Brian Screamton, the author of *Thurnby Court: The Story of an Extravagant But Short-Lived Leicestershire Mansion*. Court Road perpetuates the memory of the mansion, as does Lakeside Court, a cul-de-sac of eleven houses grouped around the ornamental lake and gazebo, virtually all that remains of the extravagant house and its landscaped grounds.

Completed in about 1870, Thurnby Court was built for James Alexander Jackson and his wife Caroline. James was a wealthy American who made his money in cotton broking and blockade-running during the American Civil War. Built at a cost approximating to £20 million in today's money, the house had a short life. It was described by Pevsner, (who, of course never saw it), as "large and lavish, in a coarse renaissance style". The once extensive retinue of servants was progressively reduced until, when the Jacksons moved out in 1891, just five remained. The house was then let to a succession of tenants and became increasingly neglected until it was bought for a few thousand pounds in 1914. The new owner proceeded to strip it of all its valuable contents, before it was finally dynamited out of existence in 1916.

We were welcomed to St Luke's Church by Rob Frearson. This fine building was faithfully rebuilt by Slater & Carpenter in 1870-73, using the original materials where possible. Some members expressed regret at the banks of over-sized and insensitively placed loudspeakers which detract from the atmosphere of this attractive church, but it is clearly well used and much loved. We admired the stained glass window dedicated to the Jacksons of Thurnby Court, though this is eclipsed by the impressive window dedicated to Charles Bennion of Thurnby Grange, who donated Bradgate Park to the people of Leicestershire. Charles Bennion's art deco headstone stands outside in the churchyard, together with many finely engraved Victorian Swithland slate memorials, looking incredibly thin and fragile.

The listed village school, dated 1865, was built with funds provided by the Powys-Keck family, who also financed the restoration of the church. The red brick façade is enhanced by extensive blue brick diaperwork and moulded brick window hoods. Brian pointed out several more buildings of interest until it was time to return to The Rose and Crown for lunch.

Coach trip to London: two churches and at least one cemetery

Tuesday 25th June 2019

The journey down the M1 in the rain was not the most promising start to this summer outing. Things brightened up as we reached the capital, however, and the weather was merely humid and a little misty by the time we arrived at Highgate Cemetery. The Cemetery, opened in 1839, was run by a private company. Since 1975 it has been run by the Friends of Highgate Cemetery Trust, who are attempting to reverse the ravages of neglect and vandalism.

The weather added to the atmosphere of our tour of the West Cemetery with visitor manager Nick Powell. This part of the Cemetery is open only to guided parties and there are few new burials. Interred there are a number of now forgotten Victorian heroes like menagerist George Wombwell, whose tomb is topped by a sculpture of his favourite lion, and prize fighter Tom Sayers who is forever accompanied by a life-size sculpture of his very large dog. Romantically overgrown as it seemed on a damp and misty morning, the West Cemetery and its buildings have been the subject of considerable restoration work over several decades. But what seems romantic is in reality decay and much remains to be done, not least the removal of hundreds of self-set ash trees.

From Highgate we drove to Kilburn to take advantage of a short break in a recording session there to visit the Church of St Augustine. Founded in 1870, St Augustine is one of the greatest works of JL Pearson. With its dramatic internal structure it was a key influence on Joseph Goddard for his design for Leicester's Church of St John the Baptist in Clarendon Park Road. St Augustine's is breathtaking: it is built on a much bigger scale than St John's and has a wonderful decorative scheme of paintings and glass described to us by Glyn Williams, the churchwarden. We also had the advantage of an expert introduction by Geoff Brandwood.

After lunch Geoff accompanied us to St Mary Magdalene, Paddington, by GE Street, roughly contemporary with St Augustine's, and newly restored. Geoff is writing a book on Street and considers St Mary to be his masterpiece. Certainly the design required an ingenious response to the constraints of the site and to London building laws. This includes a north aisle less than a metre wide (see photo overleaf). As Geoff pointed out, the church perfectly illustrates the revolutionary nature of the Gothic Revival. Today it is managed by Paddington Development Trust and has both secular and religious roles in the local community.

Finally we made our way through the London traffic back to Highgate to visit the East Cemetery. This is a much more conventional cemetery with lawns and relatively well-managed tree planting. Burials still take place here, for a considerable fee. Most people took the opportunity to visit the grave of the cemetery's most famous occupant, Karl Marx. The grave of George Eliot nearby proved another attraction for many.

Peter Ellis had the idea for this day packed with interest and treasures. Thanks to Peter for organising a trip which turned out to be truly memorable in spite of the early morning weather.



St Mary Magdalene, Paddington, looking west, with the vestigial north aisle to the right.

Victorian Stamford Walk - Station to Station

Tuesday 23rd July 2019

Described by Sir Walter Scott as “the finest stone town in England”, most people see Stamford as he did, as a quintessentially pre-Victorian market town. Those of us who accompanied committee member Mike Taylor on his excellent guided walk in July now know there is more to the story.

Victorian Stamford was fortunate. Local supplies of honey coloured oolitic limestone, perhaps England’s most beautiful building material, enabled new buildings to harmonise with older ones. It also had talented and civic-minded local architects, including Bryan Browning (1773-1856), his son Edward Browning (1816-1882) who was Mayor 1862-63, and later the Brownings’ pupil JB Corby (1835-1913), and JC Traylen (1845-1907). But equally significantly, Stamford learned to cherish its smallness and built heritage; something that persists to this day. Just two months after the passing of the Civic Amenities Act in July 1967, Stamford became England’s first designated conservation area; thanks largely to the work of Dr Kenneth Fennell of Kesteven County Council.

The influence of the Cecil family of Burghley House was strong. It kept Stamford out of the Victorian mainstream but also helped create a thriving market and service centre for the surrounding rural areas in which the existing built heritage was sympathetically added to rather than swept away. We saw much evidence of this; in the restoration of the mainly 13th century All Saints church by Edward Browning in 1857; Willoughby House, a 17th and 18th century building in Broad Street re-fronted

with fluted giant pilasters in 1870; and Barclay's Bank extension of 1860 opposite, in free Renaissance style. One of the highlights of the day was a fascinating tour by the warden of the 15th century Browne's Hospital, endowed by a Stamford-born merchant of the Calais Staple, and restored and enlarged in 1870.

More commercial styles and a more eclectic choice of materials were on show in the High Street; polychromatic stone and Minton tiles at Albert House (No 58); an 1849 Tudor-style façade by Charles Collins at the Gothic House (No 10), and the Italianate palazzo and panels of the 1880 Lloyds Bank building designed for the Northamptonshire Banking Company by William Talbot-Brown of Wellingborough.



Victorian shopfronts at 11-14 St Mary's Street.

The shopfronts in nearby St Mary's Street were delightfully Victorian, particularly the 1849 Ionic columns and entablature with anthemion frieze at Nos 13 and 14 built for Richard Newcombe, proprietor of the Stamford Mercury, planned as part of an abortive scheme to extend St Mary's Hill (then the Great North Road) through to High Street. Next door at Nos 11 and 12 is Stamford's finest Victorian shopfront dating from 1873.

There were new church buildings too, in an era of growing religious toleration. St Augustine's Roman Catholic Church by George Goldie was built in 1862-64 and described by the *Stamford Mercury* as "the prettiest modern Gothic building in town" (Pevsner disliked it, particularly its "unbelievable bell-tower, asymmetrically placed and most crudely detailed"). Also on Broad Street, Edward Browning's Corn Exchange of 1859, one of the key institutional buildings of Victorian Stamford, with sculpted panels of wheatsheaf and plough and delightful cut lettering, and the Italianate 1894 Technical Instruction School (now a museum) by JC Traylen.

And there was, of course, the engineered infrastructure. At Vence Walk in the town meadows early in our tour, we had stopped to view the Town Bridge, rebuilt in 1849 to the design of Edward Browning to carry the Great North Road over the River Welland. Our penultimate point of interest was the Albert Bridge, built in wrought iron in 1881 by architect/engineer JB Everard of Leicester to replace an earlier bridge washed away when the Welland flooded. The walk was entitled 'station to station' and we ended, as we had begun, at that essentially Victorian building the railway station. After starting our walk at the 1848 Midland Station with its distinctive weathervane, we finished at the East Station of 1856, the former terminus of the Stamford and Essendine Railway in Water Street; both – this being Stamford – built in Tudor style.

Evening visit to St Mary's, Humberstone and Humberstone Garden Suburb

Tuesday 6th August 2019

This summer evening walk was as informative as it was enjoyable. First, Mike Taylor led us round Humberstone Garden Suburb and then we gathered at St Mary's Church for refreshments and a talk by historian Jan Zientek on the church's impressive Victorian renovations.

Although modest in scale, Humberstone Garden Suburb was a pioneering workers' venture based on co-partnership and the 'garden city' movement. The idea came from a group of employees at the Anchor Boot and Shoe Company (who became known as the Anchor Tenants). In 1902 they sought to improve the quality of life for the working man by providing decent, well-appointed housing in attractive surroundings, complete with social amenities. Pre-empting better known developments at Letchworth and Hampstead, Humberstone Garden Suburb was inspired by Brentham Garden Estate in Ealing - a co-partnership suburb developed by Henry Vivian, who was invited to advise the Anchor Tenants on the Humberstone project.

Seventeen acres of land in open countryside to the east of Humberstone village were purchased and the celebrated architect of the garden city movement, Raymond Unwin, was chosen to provide a master plan. The scheme comprised four new roads: Lilac Avenue; Chestnut Avenue; Laburnum Road and Fern Rise, along with part of Keyham Lane. These were surrounded by open space for recreation and gardens. There were shops, tennis courts, a bowling green, a cricket pitch, a community hall and a church.

Leicester builder George Hern designed many of the houses, which are semi-detached and pleasingly varied. Hern also offered an element of individual choice in the layout of the interiors. Initially there was no electricity, storm drains or sewers, but the well-built houses were regarded as "heaven on earth" by those who were lucky enough to occupy them. Even today, when much of the amenity land has been lost to the surrounding estate, turning from the stark Nether Hall Road into the garden suburb, the atmosphere changes and tree-lined tranquillity becomes the dominant feature, recapturing the vision of those enlightened Leicester working men of more than a century ago. If the estate looks unremarkable today it is because it was a progenitor of the many semi-detached developments of the inter-war period.

Raphael Brandon was the chief architect of the Victorian work in Humberstone Parish Church. He was also responsible for the renovations at Leicester Cathedral and it isn't difficult to spot a family likeness. Much of St Mary's he rebuilt between 1857-8 using

Humberstone alabaster for arcade capitals, font, chancel windows, door reveals and an excellent series of panels with terracotta flowers in a frieze above the choir stalls, all superbly carved by Samuel Barfield. Giant sized roof bosses, in the form of gold painted carved heads, look down on the congregation. There is also an excellent series of stained glass



windows in glowing colours made by the renowned firm of Hardman and dated between 1859 and 1895. These are complemented by two outstanding windows by the Arts and Crafts designer AJ Davies. The impression of being inside a jewelled casket is further enhanced by the splendid brass chandeliers (now converted to electricity), which were also from Hardman's workshop.

Thanks for this delightful evening go to Paul Griffiths, Mike Taylor, Jan Zientek and churchwarden Les Michelmore, who welcomed us to the church and provided the delicious refreshments.

Visit to Leicester Town Hall and the Grand Hotel

Wednesday 4th September 2019

Regular public tours of Leicester Town Hall take place on the first Wednesday of each month, and we joined one of these before enjoying a private tour of the Grand Hotel.

TH Wyatt, then President of the RIBA, was the adjudicator of the competition for the design of a Town Hall for Leicester in 1872. Five plans were selected by Wyatt, and in July 1873 they were submitted to the Council who reached a final decision by a sort of 'Dutch Auction'. Councillors voted for the one they disliked most, and the design with the most negative votes was eliminated before the next round – after four ballots the remaining design was that by Francis Hames, who was awarded the prize of £200. A design by George Gilbert Scott Junior and his brother John Oldrid Scott, was placed third.



Leicester Town Hall - frontage to Town Hall Square.

Hames was born in Leicester in 1849, and had worked in the office of William Millican before moving to London. In 1871-72 he was working with Eden Nesfield who, with Richard Norman Shaw, had developed the new 'Queen Anne' style. Leicester Town Hall was the first municipal building to be built in this style. Hames is known to have

submitted designs for Leeds municipal buildings and Darwen town hall, but these have not survived. Apart from one or two minor works from his early years, only one other building by Hames is known: an impressive Head Office for William Harris, 'the Sausage King', at 3-5 St John Street, Clerkenwell, built in 1897. He died in London in 1922.

The Town Hall was opened on 7th August 1876 and the Council finally moved out of the medieval Guildhall, where they had met for 381 years. The competition had specified a cost of £25,000, but Hames' estimate was £31,285 and the final cost was £52,911-2s-8d – a relatively modest over-spend compared with many major projects of the period. The new Town Hall incorporated magistrates' courts and a police station, with a large parade ground on Bowling Green Street. There was also an 'Engine House' for fire engines, but no provision for horses – in the event of a fire, suitable horses would be commandeered from the surrounding streets and pressed into service. The Temperance Hall on Granby Street was the main venue for concerts and public meetings, so there was felt to be no need to incorporate the grand public hall which is such a feature of many Victorian town halls.

In 1922 the City Council, as it had become in 1919, resolved to provide additional office space along Bowling Green Street, sweeping away the fire station and parade ground and replacing them with new offices of a design "to correspond with the existing building". Further work in 1932 marked the end of Hames' ornate Council Chamber, with its barrel vaulted plaster ceiling, replaced by a more sober chamber, leaving the magistrates' court as almost the only surviving Victorian interior.



Cecil Ogden's design for the Granby Street façade of the Grand Hotel.

Work on Leicester's Grand Hotel commenced in 1896. It is, says Mike Taylor, "in a mix of styles including Flemish as well as Baroque, developed over several stages of construction." The Granby Street façade was designed by Cecil Ogden, along with the corner tower, whose upper stages are reminiscent of some of Wren's City churches. The Belvoir Street elevation, incorporating the windows to the main hall, was added a couple of years later to the design of Amos Hall.

Sarah Francis of Mercure hotels met our party and showed us round the principal rooms. Although painted in light modern colours, the hotel retains many of its Victorian interiors, and some fine woodwork. Amos Hall's grand ballroom, decorated with marble and mirrored panels, is particularly impressive. The visit ended with scones and afternoon tea in the ground floor bar area.

Meetings Programme - Winter-Spring 2019-20

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. We recommend parking in the City Council's Newarke St car park - standard charge £2 for arrival after 5.00pm

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.

Tuesday 7th January 2020

A Colourful Look at Victorian Times through the Prints of George Baxter

An illustrated talk by Roger Smith, former Chairman of The New Baxter Society

In 1835 George Baxter patented a printing method that made affordable coloured pictures available to the masses for the first time. After exploring how George Baxter's patented 'Baxter Process' prints were produced, examples of these prints will be used to tell the story of the important people, places, and events of the day.

Meetings Programme continued overleaf

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Contact Peter Ellis (as below) with your email address to register your preference.

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Winter-Spring Meetings Programme - continued from overleaf

Tuesday 4th February 2020

The Return of the Exiles - the Leicester Homecoming of 1910

A talk by Cynthia Brown

This meeting will be preceded by the Leicester Group AGM

Local historian and Leicester Group Vice-president Cynthia Brown sheds light on this fascinating but little known event in Leicester's history, when some 300 natives of the city returned from all over the world for a week of receptions, public meetings, dances and gala balls.

Tuesday 3rd March 2020

At the Mighty Organ

A presentation with music by Neil Crutchley and Thomas Keogh

The second half of the 19th century was a golden era for the building of both town halls and large-scale pipe organs. Often the two came together, as few Victorian town halls were without a grand public hall, the centrepiece of which was invariably a magnificent organ. Through concerts given by the leading players of the day, these giant instruments helped to raise funds for the maintenance of the halls. There was a profusion of music written for these events, and much of it is still heard today.

In this joint presentation, Leicester Group co-chair, Neil Crutchley will feature the town halls and their often magnificently decorated organs and Thomas Keogh, organist of Holy Cross Priory Church, Leicester, will play a selection of music of the period using the splendid 3-manual organ of our meeting venue, Bishop Street Methodist Church in Leicester's Town Hall Square.

Tuesday 7th April 2020

The Restoration of Darnall Works, Sheffield

A talk by Andrew Shepherd

The Crucible Furnaces at Darnall Works in Sheffield were built between 1835 and 1872 for the Sanderson Brothers. It is both a Scheduled Monument and a listed building. 48 crucible hearths allowed large cast articles to be made, using the continuous teeming method, despite the relatively small amount of steel produced in the individual crucibles. In addition there are ancillary spaces for the manufacture of clay crucibles.

The crucible shop fell out of use in 1943 and became derelict before repair of the external envelope in 2006, but reuse has not happened, and the future of this rare surviving industrial complex is thus uncertain.

Andrew Shepherd is a conservation architect who has lived and practised in Sheffield for over 40 years, primarily being involved with ecclesiastical and historic industrial buildings. He has been engaged with professional education, being the former Director of the postgraduate Buildings Conservation course at the Architectural Association School of Architecture in London, and various training courses in Eastern Europe and the Balkans.