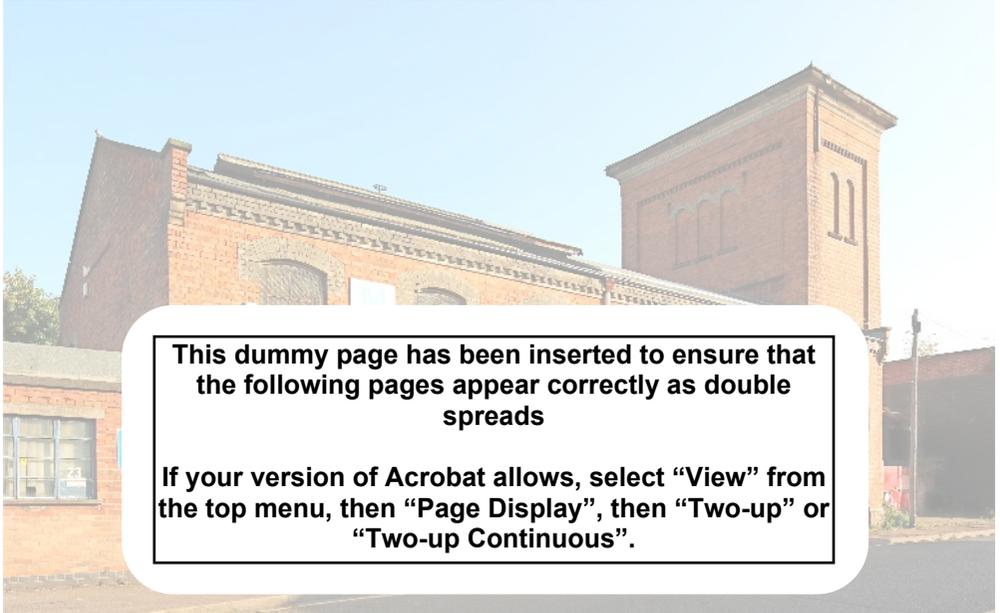


# THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY LEICESTER GROUP NEWSLETTER

The national charity campaigning for the  
Victorian and Edwardian historic environment

AUTUMN-WINTER 2020

## The Samuel Street hydraulic power station and tower



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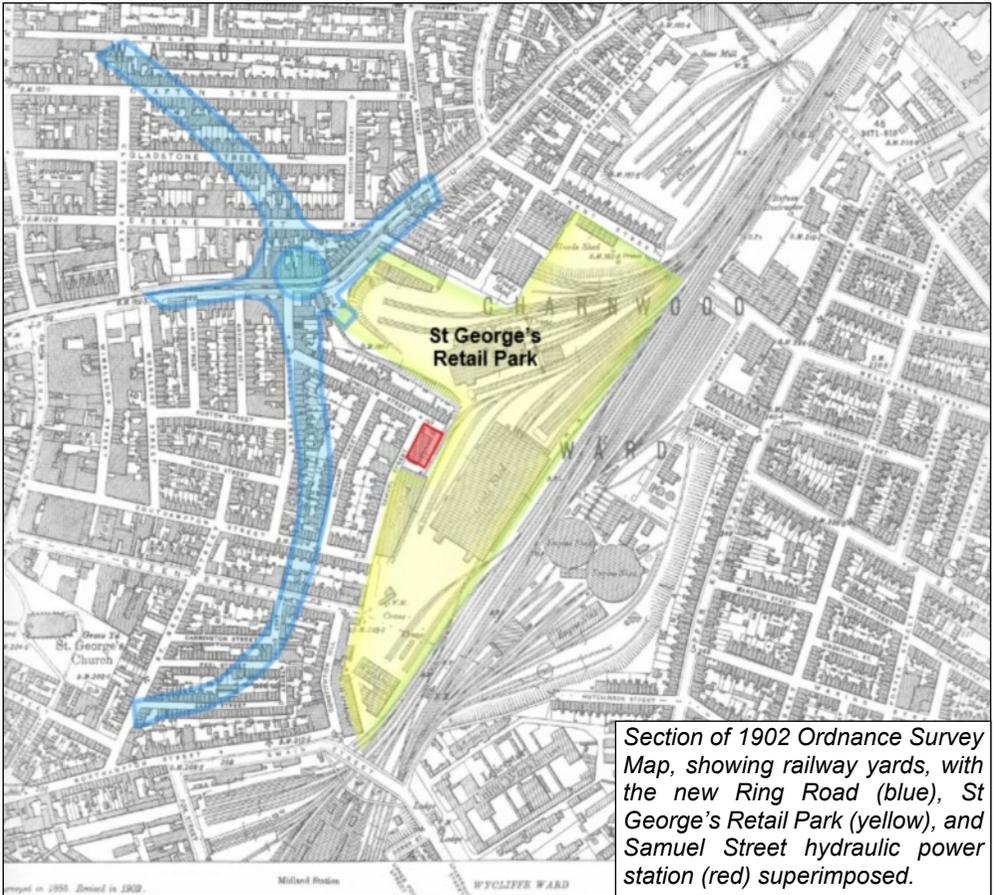
**AUTUMN-WINTER 2020**

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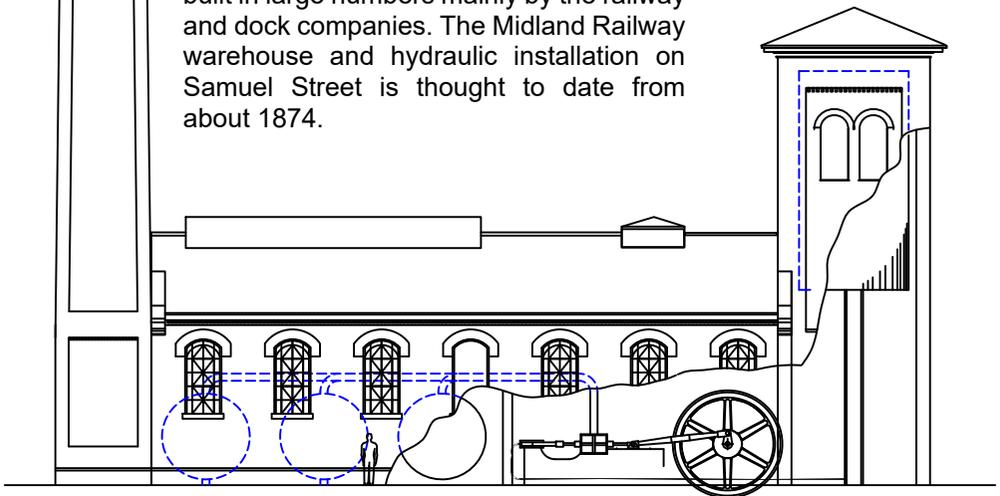
Throughout the 19th century, steam was the almost universal source of power for any purpose, but for applications where steam was not suitable hydraulic power provided an alternative. Water pumped to a high pressure by a steam engine could be piped to the various items of equipment and was capable of applying quite large forces. However, storage of hydraulic power is not straightforward. Unlike steam, water is not compressible and cannot be stored in a closed pressure vessel. Even at high pressure, any leakage from a closed vessel of water will cause the pressure to drop to zero, which is not the case with steam.

The 'dead-weight accumulator', invented in 1851 by William Armstrong (1810-1900), later Lord Armstrong of Cragside and Bamburgh, enabled water to be stored at high pressure for use when needed. The accumulator consisted of a vertical hydraulic cylinder with a ram protruding from the top of it. The base of the cylinder had an inlet from the pumping engine and an outlet which was connected to pipework feeding the equipment. The ram supported a large, usually cylindrical, container, loaded with several tons of heavy material. When the pumping engine forced water into the bottom end of the cylinder, the weighted ram was lifted by the pressure underneath

it, like a hydraulic jack. When the ram reached the top of its stroke, with the container of heavy weights suspended many feet above ground level, it tripped a valve, shutting off the hydraulic supply from the pump to the accumulator, thus effectively 'stalling' the engine. The massive dead-weight then sat there, supported on a cylinder full of water at high pressure that could be used for various applications. As soon as water was used, the weight started to descend, opening the supply valve and allowing the engine to start and more water to be pumped in.

One advantage of the accumulator was that it could cope with fluctuations in demand – the volume of water stored (accumulated) under pressure would probably take the pumping engines several minutes to pump, but it could be used much more quickly than that if required. Installations frequently had more than one accumulator (there were two at Samuel Street, indicated by the rectangular plan of the tower), and this further increased the flexibility of the system. Armstrong installed accumulators at his works at Elswick on the Tyne that were reported to be 24 inches diameter, and to have a stroke (lift) of 40 feet. Working at 750 psi, these would each have supported a dead weight of 150 tons, 80 feet above ground level. The tower at Samuel Street is about 50 feet high, suggesting a stroke of about 20-25 feet. An aerial photograph taken in 1949 shows no sign of the chimney, and it is likely that all the original equipment had been removed long before this date.

Armstrong had invented a hydraulic crane in the 1840s, but its use was restricted by the limited pressures available until his invention of the accumulator in 1851. This revolutionised mechanical handling, and mechanised warehouses equipped with hydraulic hoists, bollards and lifts were built in large numbers mainly by the railway and dock companies. The Midland Railway warehouse and hydraulic installation on Samuel Street is thought to date from about 1874.



*Sketch of the Samuel Street hydraulic power station, showing the boiler house with the long-demolished 120 foot high chimney, engine house with 80 horse power steam pumping engine and the accumulator tower (right).*

Many machines made use of another of Armstrong's inventions, the hydraulic 'jigger', in which a hydraulic cylinder was fitted with pulleys at each end, round which a chain or rope would pass multiple times. As the cylinder was extended by hydraulic pressure the distance between the pulleys increased, pulling the rope or chain which could be used for lifting or hauling.

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Year	No. of Gallons Pumped	No. of Lifts in operation
1905	18,000,000	5,581
1906	19,000,000	6,000
1907	20,000,000	6,187

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INJECTOR HYDRANTS mounted on each floor of the building. Water Works supply the water and the apparatus is so arranged that it can be used for fire fighting and for the purpose of saving water in the event of a fire. The hydrants are so arranged that they can be used for fire fighting and for the purpose of saving water in the event of a fire.

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**LONDON HYDRAULIC POWER COMPANY, Police Chambers, 9, Bridge Street, Westminster, S.W.**

London Hydraulic Power Company advertisement, c1907, showing two alternative designs for hydraulic passenger lifts: with the lift cage supported on a direct-acting cylinder (left), and suspended on a rope actuated by a vertically mounted jigger (right).

Hydraulic power was so successful that companies were established in several cities, including Hull, Liverpool, Manchester and Glasgow to run high pressure hydraulic pipes under the streets to supply customers who did not have their own power station. The largest of these was The London Hydraulic Power Company which eventually had over 180 miles of pipes in the capital. By 1907 they boasted of supplying 20 million gallons of high pressure water each week, powering over 6,000 machines of various types.

As well as the industrial applications for lifting and hauling, high pressure water had many other uses. The invention of hydraulic lifts allowed offices, and some of the new residential 'mansion blocks' to be built higher than the previous limit of four or five storeys, having an immediate effect on the architecture of cities where there was a power supply available. Theatres used hydraulic power to raise and lower the heavy

Safety Curtain (the 'iron'), during each performance, as required by law, as well as for trap doors and other items of stage machinery.

The spread of electrical power distribution in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, along with the availability and convenience of small powerful electric motors, caused the rapid decline of hydraulic power. By the 1920s it was all but obsolete except for a few specialist applications, leaving just the impressive towers in which the massive accumulator weights once slowly and silently rose and fell as reminders of a now almost forgotten branch of technology.

Other than the good news concerning the listing of the Hydraulic Power station on Samuel Street, there is very little to report. We keep an eye on the proposed development of the former BSS offices at Fleet House, and we continue to hope for a satisfactory scheme to incorporate Stockdale Harrison's early building at 80 Wharf Street South.

Although at the time of writing we have no idea when we may be able to resume our regular series of evening meetings, or whether there will be any possibility of outdoor visits during summer 2021, we have a number of arrangements in the pipeline, ready to activate when the situation returns to something like normal. We hope to be able to organise a couple of short summer evening walks in various areas of the city - these have the advantage that they can be arranged or cancelled at short notice if necessary. Our planned programme for 2020 had included a full day visit to sites of interest in Market Harborough, using members' own cars for transport. All being well, we will try to revive these plans for September 2021.

We also have a number of interesting speakers lined up, who had originally agreed to talk to us in autumn 2020 or spring next year. These include:

- Andrew Shepherd on  
*The Restoration of Darnall Works, Sheffield*
- Nils Feldmann on  
*Knighton House: The Transformation of a Victorian Villa*
- Geoff Brandwood on  
*The Greatest Goth? The Architecture of Temple Moore*
- Tony Kendall and Paul Sole on  
*Treatment of Leicester's Sewage and the four Gimson Beam Engines.*

All have agreed that they are still ready to talk to us when it is judged safe to resume indoor meetings.

**AGM 2021** In addition, we need to hold an AGM in the early part of 2021. This will inevitably have to take place using 'Zoom', the virtual meetings program that has been a lifeline during the pandemic. The meeting will take place on Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2021, at 7.30pm. To attend a Zoom meeting you need some form of computer with a microphone, and ideally a camera - many laptops have these fitted as standard, but a tablet (iPad etc) or even a smartphone will work quite well, and the program is very easy to use. You should find Minutes of the previous AGM, and an Agenda for 2021 with this newsletter. The financial statement (balance sheet) cannot be prepared until after the year end, so copies will be emailed to members together with an invitation and link to join the meeting a few days before the AGM, or a hard copy will be posted to anyone who requests one. (Members who receive this newsletter by post, and think we may not have a valid email address for you, please contact Peter Ellis at [ellisdesign@talktalk.net](mailto:ellisdesign@talktalk.net), or phone 01455 291694.)

In view of the fact that we have been unable to arrange many activities for members in 2020, it has been decided to waive the local mailing list subscription for 2021. All 2020 subscribers will be automatically renewed free of charge until December 2021.

We have some sad news to relate concerning prominent figures in the world of local history and conservation, whose deaths took place earlier this year.

**Chris Sawday** was the fourth generation of his family to run its successful architectural practice in Leicester. His great grandfather was Albert Edwin Sawday, the founder of the practice, who, with his son Tom Trevor Sawday and his sometime partner Francis Redfern, was responsible for many prominent town centre buildings including the former Register Office in Pocklington's Walk (1883), the City Fire Station and firemen's houses on Lancaster Road (1927), the former Cripples' Guild in Colton Street (1910), Methodist churches on Clarendon Park Road (1900) and King Richard's Road (1881) and hundreds of terraced houses and larger villas throughout the suburbs. It would be difficult to fault Chris's architectural ancestry as his other great-grandfather was the renowned Arthur Wakerley, the architect of prominent local buildings including the Turkey Café on Granby Street, Coronation Buildings on High Street and much of the suburb of North Evington. Both Arthur Wakerley and Albert Sawday were active in local politics and both were mayors of Leicester.

Chris studied architecture at the Leicester College of Art and Technology. After some years in London he returned to Leicester and entered into partnership with his father. During his professional career Chris won awards for many of the conservation projects he had designed. He was also a local magistrate, a member of the city's Conservation Advisory Panel, a former president of the Leicestershire Book Society and a former chairman of the Leicester Squash Club.

**Dr Helen Boynton**, who died in September, was a geologist by training but developed a strong interest in local history, which was encouraged by her father. A former pupil of Wyggeston Girls' School, Helen obtained a BSc in Geology at London University in 1956 and gained a PhD from Manchester University in 1961. She was a Fellow of the Geological Society of London and has published many geological papers. She wrote her first local history book, *A Prospect of Oadby*, in 1993 and over the next 13 years produced eight more including: *From Tollgate to Tramshed – The History of London Road 1860-1940*, with Derek Seaton (1999); *The History of Victoria Park, Leicester* (2000); *The Changing Face of London Road, Leicester* (2001); *The History of New Walk, Leicester* (2002); *Knighton and Clarendon Park* (2003); and finally in 2006 *Leicester and its Suburbs in the 1920s and 30s*, written in conjunction with Keith Dickens.

Her books are written in an accessible, entertaining style and have proved enormously popular with readers who want to know more about Leicester's suburbs. In fact a number of her publications sold out and are now highly collectable. Always generous with her help and encouragement, Helen Boynton left a remarkable legacy that has proved an inspiration to others who have followed in her footsteps.

We were also sorry to hear of the death of **Keith Hamilton** in a cycling accident earlier this year. Keith was an architect, based in Loughborough and specialising in conservation work. For many years he was a member of the Diocesan Advisory Committee, and he was also actively involved with the Leicestershire Historic Buildings Trust, a subject on which he gave a talk to the Leicester Group in November 2013.

## Former Home for Penitent Females, Stoneygate Road

This unlisted building of 1881 on the corner of Stoneygate Road and Aber Road, in the Stoneygate Conservation Area has been used for a variety of purposes, it was latterly a Montessori School and is now unoccupied. Designed by the Leicester architect William Beaumont Smith, its principal interest lies in its original purpose, as a 'Home for Penitent Females': unmarried women or girls 'of good character' who had fallen into prostitution. It was paid for and administered by a group of local philanthropists. The Duke of Rutland was a patron and the list of lady 'visitors' included the wives of prominent local industrialists.



'The Home' was deliberately built in the centre of an area being developed at that time as a high class suburb then on the edge of the town of Leicester. The houses opposite and adjacent were designed by two of the town's best architects, Isaac Barradale and James Frank Smith. It was not intended to be isolated and hidden from the view of polite society, rather to be part of it; a reminder to the wealthy that, "there but for the grace of God go I". It incorporated a chapel and workshop, and was intended to equip the residents with skills which would eventually allow them to support themselves as independent citizens (usually in domestic service).

Recent proposals to convert it into self-contained flats are largely welcome, but we have objected to a proposed unsightly extension and plans to replace the windows with uPVC 'replicas'. We have also expressed our view that soil pipes and flues servicing the self-contained units should be routed within the building rather than externally.

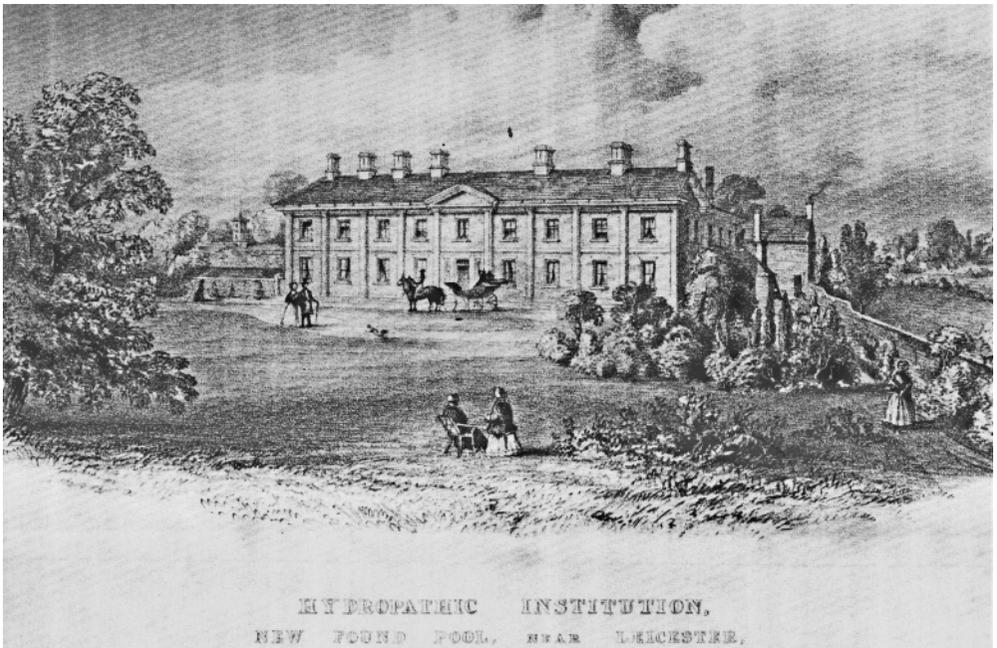
Following representations from ourselves and others, the latest proposal is for 15 flats rather than the original 17, which obviates the need for the extension, but it is not yet clear whether our other concerns have been addressed.

## When Leicester was a Spa - by Neil Crutchley

There was a very brief time, just as Victoria came to the throne, when Leicester enjoyed a reputation as a fashionable spa town. It was the vision of one man, Isaac Harrison, who in his youth had inherited a considerable fortune as well as land and properties. His legacy made him one of the largest landowners in Belgrave and he also inherited land and property in other parts of the town and the county, including several acres to the north-west of the centre of Leicester, which was to become known as Newfoundpool.

Newfoundpool seems rather an odd name until you delve into its history. In the late 1820s a mineral spring was discovered on this land, just beyond Fosse Road North. It was believed that the water from the spring had medicinal properties. The land was owned by Harrison who at the time lived in a grand house in Belgrave. He was keen to cash in on his good fortune and decided to develop the area as a centre for water cures along the lines of Bath, Leamington and Ashby de la Zouch.

The first sign of the new scheme came with the building of the hydropathic institution and if you've ever wondered why the recently demolished Empire Hotel on Fosse Road North looked so imposing, it is because it was intended to be the centrepiece of this fashionable enterprise. Adjacent to this there were smaller houses for the doctors and staff.



*"The Hydropathic Institution - New Found Pool near Leicester" from a contemporary engraving.*

Since the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, 'taking the waters' had been a fashionable pastime for the well-to-do, who would spend lengthy periods in one or more of the established spa resorts, and the enterprising Harrison thought he could develop Leicester into a spa town with his hydropathic institution as its money-making focal point.

For a few years the enterprise flourished but success was relatively brief and, by the early 1840s the novelty had worn off and the Hydropathic Institution closed. The centrepiece, renamed Newfoundpool House, became Isaac Harrison's home. Here he lived with his sister Catherine until his death in 1855.

## **The later development of the Newfoundpool area**

Isaac Harrison left the house to his nephew, also named Isaac and on his death it passed to his daughter Beatrice, who, shortly after becoming the owner, sold Newfoundpool House and the surrounding land to Orson Wright, the wealthy builder, land developer and creator of the suburb of South Wigston. By then the whole area had become known as Newfoundpool and Orson Wright laid out a series of streets and sold off parcels of land as building plots, which were soon bought and developed. The area comprises mainly two-storey terraced houses of different styles with a number of shops on corner sites. When completed, the development housed over 4,000 people.

At that time Newfoundpool was a rather isolated part of the town surrounded by open fields. To this day, it still retains a strong sense of identity as a self-contained and largely intact Victorian suburb, although the area's most impressive building, the original spa centre, later Newfoundpool House, was demolished a few years ago, despite a vigorous campaign to save it. It was sacrificed for a supermarket – as was the neighbouring St Augustine's Church (RJ & J Goodacre, 1900-01), which had fallen victim to arsonists after being declared redundant.

The Newfoundpool development features nine streets that run between Pool Road – so named because of the proximity of the mineral spring and Beatrice Road – which is named after Harrison's daughter; the names of the other streets form an acrostic, which is a series of words whose first letters make another word or name. In this case it is 'I Harrison'. The streets are: Ingle, Hawthorn, Alma, Rowan, Ruby, Ivanhoe, Sylvan, Oban and Newport.

The Harrison family were not only substantial landowners, but were also the proprietors of a large market garden in Belgrave, so it's no surprise to find they gave their name to one of the longest streets in that area, Harrison Road. The second Isaac's son married Mary Marfitt in 1888 and this accounts for Marfitt Street, which runs from Harrison Road to Melton Road and Catherine Street is named after Catherine Harrison, the first Isaac's sister.

So the Harrisons were responsible, directly or indirectly, for the naming of 14 of Leicester's Victorian streets!

## ***The former High Cross Coffee House - by Carole Face***

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

Crossing Jubilee Square from the direction of St Mary De Castro Church, you will see the remaining pillar from the medieval High Cross, just a few yards away from its original site. Standing behind it, on the corner of High Street and Highcross Street, is a fine three



storey red brick building with cream pargetted panels beneath the first and second floor windows and surmounted by a small cupola. This is the elegant High Cross Coffee House.

It was one of 14 coffee houses operated by the Leicester Coffee and Cocoa House Company, formed in July 1877. The object of this company was to provide an alternative to the numerous inns, taverns and beer

houses available to working men. Open daily from 5am to 11pm, these beacons of light provided coffee, tea, cocoa, soup and hot meals at reasonable prices. An 1889 menu offers “a plate of potatoes 1d, hot sausages 1d, college pudding 2d and half a basin of soup 1d”. No alcoholic drinks were served. An added attraction for customers was a bagatelle room, where chess, draughts and dominoes could be played.

The High Cross began life as a meat store, belonging to the Leicester Co-operative Society. In 1878 the property was purchased from the society for £2,600 and was considerably altered by the Leicester architect Edward Burgess. Most of the coffee houses in Leicester were designed by Burgess, who was also architect to the Leicester Schools Board. We are indeed fortunate that several of the schools designed by him are still extant, having been adapted for today’s needs, together with three of his most impressive coffee houses, all Grade II listed following applications by the Victorian Society.

The High Cross Coffee House was formally opened in December 1878 in the presence of the Reverend James Went, the headmaster of Wyggeston Hospital Boys’ School. After the decline of the Coffee House Company in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the building became the home of an insurance company and various retail outlets.

It is pleasing to know that this fine building serves the hospitality industry once again, being carefully maintained as part of the Wetherspoon’s pub chain and again bearing the name ‘The High Cross’. Prices are different from those of 1889, and alcohol is definitely served, but in the ethos of the Coffee House Company, hot drinks were 99p with a free refill at the time of writing, and fish and chips were available at £3.99.

# THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY NEEDS YOU!

In common with most other amenity societies, the Victorian Society has been badly hit in 2020 by the exceptional circumstances generated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Many of the Society's sources of income, such as visits and lectures, have been impacted, but expenses carry on. The Leicester Group is grateful for your continued support, but we are really just a 'supporters' club' for the national Society, and one of our original objectives was to boost membership of the Society in Leicester.

At the 2020 AGM, held on-line, the new Director, Joe O'Donnell, stressed the need for more members, and asked all existing members to consider asking friends if they might like to join. The Leicester Group is unusual in welcoming 'subscribers' who are on our mailing list, but are not members of the Victorian Society - now might be a good time to think about joining! Membership of the Society automatically makes you a member of the Group at no further cost if you live in our area.

Go to <https://www.victoriansociety.org.uk/join> and listen to our President, Griff Rhys Jones, on the value of membership.

## Victorian Society on-line Lectures

If the present pandemic has any redeeming features, one may be that we can attend lectures organised by the Society's head office without travelling to London. For just £5 (probably no more than the cost of driving into central Leicester and parking) anyone can 'attend' these lectures on-line by using 'Crowdcast' which is free to download. Better still, the lectures are recorded and remain available, one hopes indefinitely, so if you missed the 'live' presentations, you can still catch up for just £5, and once you have booked you will continue to have access to the recordings.

Go to <https://www.victoriansociety.org.uk/events> to find details of the latest lectures in the series, as well as the recordings of earlier ones still available.

All the lectures listed overleaf have taken place, but that does not stop you watching the recordings. More will be announced in the New Year.

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## **Victorian Society on-line lectures**

**Queen Victoria's Railways** - Dr Stephen Brindle

**A Passion for Pattern: Victorian Wallpapers** - Joanna Banham

**The Pub Unwrapped - the Golden Age of Pub Building** - Geoff Brandwood

**The Edwardians and their Houses** - Timothy Brittain-Catlin



*King's Close, Biddenham, Bedfordshire by MH Baillie-Scott, c1909 - one of the Edwardian Houses discussed by Timothy Brittain-Catlin in his lecture.*

**Not All Lutyens: Another look at Victorian and Edwardian Surrey** - Charles O'Brien

**Ernest Gimson: Arts & Crafts Designer and Architect** - Annette Carruthers

**The New Vauxhall, Southwark and Lambeth Bridges** - Benedict O'Looney

**Arts and Crafts Churches** - Dr Alec Hamilton

**Liverpool - Mercantile City** - Joseph Sharples

**The David Parr House - An Extraordinary Cambridge Home** - Tamsin Wimhurst

**An American Trilogy: Richardson, Sullivan, Wright** - Neil Jackson

**Mr 'Brass' Benson: The Unassuming Genius of the Arts and Crafts Movement**  
Professor Ian Hamerton