

THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY LEICESTER GROUP NEWSLETTER

The national charity campaigning for the
Victorian and Edwardian historic environment

SUMMER 2018

80 Wharf Street - an early work by one of Leicester's finest architects



This dummy page has been inserted to ensure that the following pages appear correctly as double spreads

If your version of Acrobat allows, select “View” from the top menu, then “Page Display”, then “Two-up” or “Two-up Continuous”.



In our most recent newsletter we featured an application to demolish this interesting building at 80 Wharf Street South, and replace it with an 11-storey block of retail and residential units. We had very little information about the building, but believed that it dated from 1860-70, and was probably a boot and shoe factory. Research in trade directories and old maps confirmed that it was built for G Wilson & Co, boot and shoe manufacturers, and was later owned by Raven & Co, hosiery manufacturers.

Member April Booth has recently uncovered more interesting information through her researches at the Record Office. Although there are no drawings, the building applications register indicates clearly that the architect was Stockdale Harrison.

THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY LEICESTER GROUP NEWSLETTER

The national charity campaigning for the
Victorian and Edwardian historic environment

SUMMER 2018

80 Wharf Street - an early work by one of Leicester's finest architects



In our most recent newsletter we featured an application to demolish this interesting building at 80 Wharf Street South, and replace it with an 11-storey block of retail and residential units. We had very little information about the building, but believed that it dated from 1860-70, and was probably a boot and shoe factory. Research in trade directories and old maps confirmed that it was built for G Wilson & Co, boot and shoe manufacturers, and was later owned by Raven & Co, hosiery manufacturers.

Member April Booth has recently uncovered more interesting information through her researches at the Record Office. Although there are no drawings, the building applications register indicates clearly that the architect was Stockdale Harrison.

The first entry for this site is dated 1869, and is for a “warehouse” for G Wilson & Co, and over the next 40 years or so there were a number of applications for extensions and alterations, initially for Wilson, and subsequently for Raven & Co. In every instance the architect is given as Stockdale Harrison, suggesting that, as the designer of the original building, he was the architect of choice for any subsequent work on it.

Stockdale Harrison (1846-1914), was one of Leicester’s most distinguished late 19th century architects, originally articulated to James Bird of Leicester, he then moved to London to become an assistant to George Somers Clarke. In 1869 he returned to Leicester and set up in private practice. 80 Wharf Street (it became Wharf Street South when bisected by the Ring Road) was thus one of his earliest commissions after his return to Leicester.

In a long career he was responsible for Conway Buildings on Greyfriars (1878), Exchange Buildings on Rutland Street (1888), (both listed following applications by the Leicester Group), and buildings as diverse as the Westcotes Free Library (1889) on Narborough Road and the Abbey Pumping Station (1890). He designed several fine houses on New Walk and London Road, as well as some on the Park Estate in Nottingham. The Usher Hall in Edinburgh, Scotland’s premier concert hall, was probably his highest profile commission outside Leicester, won through an architectural competition entered in conjunction with Howard Thompson in 1911.



Conway Buildings, Greyfriars, designed by Stockdale Harrison in 1878. One of the photographs in our 40th anniversary exhibition at Bishop Street.

Photo Exhibition

Since its foundation 40 years ago, the Leicester Group has been active in securing listed status for many of the city’s finest Victorian buildings. Well over 50 examples have been protected so far, and to mark our anniversary, we have mounted a small exhibition showcasing a selection of our most important successes.

The exhibition is at
Bishop Street Church, 10a Bishop Street, Town Hall Square
10.00am to 4.00pm Monday to Saturday (3.00pm Saturday)
Until 25th June

Abbey Pumping Station - by Peter Ellis

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



Whenever I am foolish enough to admit that I am interested in steam engines I expect to get patronising looks and to be dismissed as a trainspotter. However, it is generally accepted that the first practical steam engine was built in 1712, and that nobody thought of sticking one on wheels and using it to pull stuff until almost a century later – so there is obviously more to steam engines than trains and railway locomotives. The steam engine was the first power source that did not rely on wind, water or animals, and the stationary steam engine was the driving force of British industry for almost two centuries. The factory chimney is the emblem of Victorian industry. Factories had chimneys mainly because every factory of any size had engines, and thus needed coal-fired boilers to supply them with steam. But it was not only factories and mills – breweries, hospitals, hotels, and laundries all used steam engines, as did steelworks, coal mines and docks. Stationary engines almost certainly outnumbered railway locomotives, but they worked out of sight, so the term ‘steam engine’ came to be synonymous with the railway engines that people used to see every day - and it still is.

In 1968, when British Railways ran their last scheduled steam-hauled train, the event was attended with a great deal of publicity. Out of sight and virtually unrecognised, stationary steam engines lasted only a few years longer. Their demise, even their existence, went virtually unrecorded. The shelves of bookshops groan under the weight of books on steam railways – there is, as far as I know, not a single book in print about stationary engines.

As an engineering student in Sheffield in the mid-1960s, I ‘discovered’ stationary steam engines and became fascinated by them. Many were of majestic size – large factories frequently had a single engine driving all their machinery through shafts and gearing – and no two were alike. I realised that they were vanishing fast, and spent

the next few years scouring the country to see and record the last few hundred of these machines before they finally became extinct. My collection of some 2,500 photographs taken during this period, along with other archives and records, has recently been transferred to the Historic England Archive. Some of the most impressive engines were in public utilities, particularly water supply and sewage disposal, and I was lucky enough to see a number of big steam pumping stations still at work, as well as several others that had stopped, but still had their engines in situ.

My second visit to Leicester*, in November 1970, was to see the engines at the Abbey Pumping Station, which had stood untouched since they ceased working in 1964. They were not open to the public at that time, and although in the care of Leicester Museums no-one quite knew what was going to happen to them. Certainly there seemed no possibility that they would ever steam again, and although the original boilers were still in place in 1970, they were subsequently removed to create a display area before the station was eventually opened as a museum. I little suspected then that I would return, almost 50 years later, and see the engines restored to their former glory, and occasionally even running under their own steam, albeit from a modern boiler.

The number of stationary steam engines that have been preserved is infinitesimal in comparison with the number of preserved steam locomotives, and very few are as large and impressive as the four beam engines at the Abbey Pumping Station. Built in 1890 by the Leicester firm of Gimson & Co on Vulcan Road, and housed in a building designed by the Leicester architect Stockdale Harrison, they must surely be the jewel in the crown of Leicester's Victorian heritage. The city should be proud that it has managed to retain such a splendid example of the fusion of Victorian architecture and engineering.

Steam days at the Abbey Pumping Station, when at least one of the engines is running, are held at intervals throughout the year, normally in conjunction with some other popular attraction. The Leicester Group has arranged a special private steaming for the evening of Monday 3rd September. This will be a rare opportunity to see one of the engines running without the crowds that normally attend these events, and we hope as many



members as possible will support this visit. (See Green Booking Sheet)

Our November meeting will be addressed by Sir Kent Woods, Emeritus Professor of Therapeutics, University of Leicester. His topic will be the public health situation in 19th century Leicester, which forms the background to the construction of this impressive installation.

**My first visit to the city, in 1963, had culminated in a ride through Glenfield Tunnel on the footplate of a train from West Bridge Yard to Desford, but that's another story!*



Opposite: One of the beautifully restored engines today, and left, the boiler house (now the museum area) photographed in 1970.

GDPR - General Data Protection Regulations

Many readers, particularly those who make any use of electronic communication, will have heard of these new regulations, intended to prevent unwanted mail and to protect confidential information held in databases. How it affects societies such as ours is not entirely clear. If you have received this newsletter by post or by e-mail, information about you is held on our database - we could not function without it. If you are a member, either of the national Victorian Society or of the Leicester Group mailing list, you are deemed to have given your consent to our holding your information, otherwise we could not mail you or keep you informed of our activities. When your membership lapses we do not immediately cross you off the list - we may send you a few more newsletters with a reminder that you have not renewed in the hope that you will continue to support us.

After that it gets a bit more complicated. We do hold information for a few years longer, believing that, if you were sufficiently interested in what we do to have joined in the past, you may still be interested to hear what we are doing, even though you have not kept up your subscription. E-mail, and programs like EventBrite enable us to send out information free of charge, and there is always the hope that you will decide to re-join.

Whatever your membership status, current or lapsed, you have our assurance that we will never pass on your information to any other person or organisation, and that any request from you to remove your information from our records will be acted upon.

Recent Leicester Group Activities

The World for a Shilling - The Great Exhibition of 1851

A talk by David Jones on Tuesday 9th January 2018

The Great Exhibition was the brainchild of Prince Albert and Henry Cole, a council member of the Royal Society of Arts (and also inventor of the Christmas card). They wanted to showcase the industry of all nations under one roof, and make it accessible to all, and took their inspiration from the French Industrial Exposition of 1844.

The Hyde Park building, known as The Crystal Palace, was designed by Joseph Paxton and constructed in glass and wrought iron. It took around 5,000 workmen to erect the building, which covered 19 acres. Exhibits included many marvels of the Victorian era including a massive hydraulic press, a steam hammer, carpets, ribbons, printing and agricultural machinery, musical instruments and even stuffed animals, which were one of the most popular exhibits. Approximately half of the exhibits were British in origin. A bell from Taylor's Foundry in Loughborough was exhibited; it is still in use today at St Mary's Church, Scarborough.

David Jones chose to concentrate on the social aspects of the exhibition, describing how local savings clubs were formed all over the country, and members paid a small sum each week towards the cost of accommodation, transport and the entrance ticket. It was a life changing experience for many ordinary people. For some it would be the first time that they had left their home town, travelled on a train or slept away from home. The accommodation ranged from the luxurious to the barely adequate. Caterers at the exhibition provided non-alcoholic drinks by Schweppes, tea, coffee and sausage rolls in vast quantities. Despite misgivings over possible antisocial behaviour among such large crowds, these fears were mainly unfounded.

In five and a half months, over six million people visited the exhibition, almost a third of the population of Britain at the time, with an average daily attendance of over 40,000. The railway companies, and 'travel agents', especially Leicester based Thomas Cook, made possible this mass movement of people to and from London, and were amongst its principal beneficiaries.



Thurnby Court - an extravagant but short-lived Leicestershire mansion

A talk by Brian Screaton, Tuesday 6th February 2018

Local historian Brian Screaton recounted the incredible but sad history of Thurnby Court, from its inception in the 1860s to its demolition in 1916.

It was built for an American, James Alexander Jackson, the younger son of Washington Jackson, an Irish born emigrant who thrived and prospered in Philadelphia. He moved to Liverpool in 1851 and carried on his business as the principal owner of Jackson Todd and Co, transatlantic traders. His sons followed him to England a few years later. Washington Jackson died in 1865, and his estate passed to his children, one of whom, James, decided to retire from business, at the age of 35.

A keen horseman and huntsman, James admired the calm and attractive village of Thurnby, and bought 6.4 acres of land with a cottage there at auction. By 1867 he had started to build an ostentatious mansion to the designs of an unknown architect. The style was an eclectic mix of Gothic and Scottish Baronial, with French and Italian influences. Pevsner (who, of course, did not see it) described it later as 'large and lavish in a coarse Renaissance Style'. Evidence of the exterior of Thurnby Court comes mainly from postcards, but there is scant evidence of the interior, except for a photograph of the winter garden, and written accounts from people who knew it in its heyday. There was a marble hall, handsome reception rooms, 17 bedrooms, a winter garden or ballroom with a swimming pool under boards, a billiard room, racquet court, groom's house, coach house, stables with a resident blacksmith, gas works and greenhouses. In the grounds there was a lake with an island and summerhouse.

The site was on a slope so James had the stables built underground. This massive undertaking reputedly took two and a half million bricks before it reached ground level. It was not a success as the damp atmosphere was not conducive to the health of the horses.

James and his partner Caroline, who had no children, lived at Thurnby Court in a grand style. At the 1871 census they employed 15 resident servants. Shockingly for Victorian times, although Caroline is described as the wife of James on the census, they did not marry until 1875, in the majestic surroundings of St George's Church, Hanover Square.

The Jacksons involved themselves with village life, but by the 1881 census they may already have been feeling the pinch; their staff had dwindled to seven, and James had sold off 14 of his hunters. By the time they moved to London in 1891 their servants were down to five, and their grand carriage had been replaced by bicycles. James died in 1896 aged 66, and the now tenanted property was transferred to Caroline. James left an estate valued at £5,634.16s.2d.

There followed a succession of tenants, some of whom may not even have moved in. Eventually, in 1914, a Mr Heath bought the house for £6,000, although some reports claimed that only £3,000 was paid. He started to strip the building of lead and saleable fixtures and fittings. By 1916 he was tired of the slow progress of the demolition, so on a quiet Sunday morning the remains of Thurnby Court were blown up with dynamite, causing an enormous explosion and dust cloud.

Few traces of the great mansion survive. The former coach house is now three dwellings which incorporate some original fixtures from Thurnby Court. Elegant houses surround the lake, where the island and summerhouse still exist.

Brian has contributed to a Thurnby and Bushby Heritage Trail with references to Thurnby Court and its grounds, which would be an interesting follow up to this excellent talk.

Cathedrals, Rooftops and More: restoration of old buildings.

A talk by Dr Jonathan Castleman - Tuesday 6th March 2018

Norman and Underwood is one of the oldest family businesses in the UK. Founded in 1825 by plumbers Thomas Norman and John Underwood, the company operated from Highcross Street for 190 years before moving to Braunstone to make way for the Highcross shopping centre.

The company works in a wide range of specialised building trades including roofing, glazing, stone masonry and bell founding (through Taylors of Loughborough) and in new build as well as conservation work.

Norman and Underwood is one of the few suppliers of sand-cast sheet lead, produced by a process little changed since Roman times. The company and Jonathan himself, in his 36 years with the firm, have worked on many cathedral restorations, the Royal Albert Hall, Chequers, Chartwell and the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. Other overseas contracts have taken the company to Bermuda, Kuala Lumpur, Hong Kong, Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands. Norman and Underwood is an adviser to English Heritage, the National Trust and the Prince's Trust.

The scale of the work is extraordinary. Reroofing Lincoln Cathedral required 7 acres of sheet lead. In 1966 390 tons of lead, most of it recycled, was used for the dome of St Paul's Cathedral. For St Paul's 'code 12' lead, 5mm thick, was used; the normal specification for churches is 'code 7/8' lead which is 3.5mm thick.

Jonathan has made and repaired many lead coffin linings and had the task of sealing the remains of Richard III into the casket before interment in the cathedral.

Dr Castleman also outlined the company's other work in roofing in copper and zinc but also in specialised roofing materials such as Collyweston stone tile. The company repairs statues, rainwater goods and leaded glass. The order book is full and the apprentice training scheme well subscribed. Jonathan himself has moved on to a further phase in his career but his lecture on Norman and Underwood was a fascinating account of a great and historic Leicester company.

From the Blitz to the Big Bang: The post-war redevelopment of the City of London

A talk by Christopher Costelloe, Director of the Victorian Society

Tuesday 10th April 2018

Christopher guided us skilfully through the changes which had taken place in the Square Mile of the City of London from pre-war to the present day. Before the war, living, working and shopping in London took place among quirky buildings and irregular street patterns, which bombing and destruction by planners would change forever.

Many bombed buildings were lost and forgotten, although many churches were beautifully restored. In the late 1940s Lutyens produced designs in which church spires were still the tallest buildings. We saw pictures of notable Victorian buildings which had been given an extra storey and reconfigured for modern use.

The Locust Years, 1960 to 1975, saw changes of biblical proportions. The magnificent Coal Exchange, Barclays Bank head office and Westminster Bank head office were demolished. Thanks to a campaign by the Victorian Society, the National Provincial Bank head office in Bishopsgate is still extant.

The society was involved in one of the greatest battles of the period; trying to save the Mappin and Webb building from destruction, to be replaced by a building designed by Sir James Stirling, to be known as Number One, Poultry. After an appeal to the House of Lords, permission for demolition was granted; sadly, eight additional listed buildings would also be destroyed. The design for Number One, Poultry, was described by Prince Charles as looking like 'a 1930's wireless set.' The building became the



A campaigning leaflet from our friends at SAVE Britain's Heritage, showing the Mappin & Webb building opposite the Mansion House.

youngest to be listed, being awarded Grade II* status in 2016. Ironically, the destroyer became the conservator, when the developer Lord Palumbo, described in Wikipedia as "former chairman of the Arts Council of Great Britain and architecture connoisseur", had the elegant cupola from the Mappin and Webb building transported and re-erected in his garden in Pennsylvania; a tangible reminder of what is lost forever.

Despite the best efforts of the Victorian Society, sadly, more buildings were lost to the wrecking ball than to the skill of the German bombers. What the Luftwaffe had started, London's post-war planners continued with redoubled vigour.

Summer and Autumn Programme - 2018

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

Please see 'Booking Conditions' on the Green Sheet

The June and July events, advertised in the previous newsletter are now fully booked

Wednesday 15th August

Visit to St Paul's Church, Woodhouse Eaves

St Paul's (1835-37) was built by William Railton (Beaumanor Hall and Nelson's Column), to a design that was also used for St Peter's, Copt Oak. After nearby Maplewell Hall was bought by Sir William Salt, son of Titus Salt of Saltaire, he commissioned Ewan Christian to remodel the chancel and then to build transepts in memory of his wife. Stained glass and fine memorials, including those of the Salt family. Our guide will be The Reverend Lisa Temperley-Barnes.

Refreshments will be provided.

Meet 2.00pm in the church car park.

Cost £5.

Closing date for bookings: 31st July - see Green Sheet

Monday 3rd September

Private steaming at Abbey Pumping Station

See article on pages 6-7

By special arrangement, one of the massive 1890 Gimson beam engines will be running for members of the Victorian Society. There is parking on site, and also adequate street parking nearby.

Please wear sensible footwear.

Meet 7.00pm at Corporation Road entrance.

Cost £5.

Closing date for bookings: 31st July - see Green Sheet

Published by the Leicester Group of the Victorian Society

Joint Chairmen: Neil Crutchley and Peter Ellis

Membership: Peter Ellis - 01455 291694 - ellisdesign@talktalk.net

Events Bookings: Carole Face - 0116 267 5946

Website: <http://www.victoriansociety.org.uk/leicester/>

Follow us on Twitter



@LeicVicSoc



The views expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent those of the Editor or of The Victorian Society.

The Victorian Society, 1 Priory Gardens, London W4 1TT

Registered as a Charity No 1081435 and a Company limited by guarantee

Registered in England, No 3940996. Registered office as above.

Forthcoming events organised by the Leicester Civic Society



Saturday 4th August: Guided Walk: 'Old London Road – The Romance of Leicester'. From The Barley Mow, Granby Street at 10.30am. 2 hours 30 mins. £4.50. Advance booking.

Thursday 6th to Sunday 9th September: 2018 Heritage Open Days. Leicester Heritage Exhibition at Iskcon, Granby Street. 10.00am to 4.00pm daily. Free admission. Marvel at Joseph Goddard's breath-taking Leicestershire Bank of 1874.



Saturday 8th September: Free guided walk as part of Heritage Open Days: 'The Last Journeys of King Richard III'. From the Bow Bridge at 10.30am. 2 hours 15 mins. Advance booking only.

Sunday 9th September: Free guided walk as part of Heritage Open Days. 'Seven Great Banks'. From corner St Martins/Loseby Lane at 2.00pm. 1 hour 30 mins. Advance booking only.

Saturday 15th September: English Landscape Coach Tours: From Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate and Premier Inn, Narborough Road, to the historic City of Chester. Explore the Roman and Medieval Walls, the Rows and Chester Cathedral. Prices and times to be published in July Leicester Citizen. Discounts for Leicester Civic Society members.

All enquiries and bookings for the society programmes of guided walks and coach tours to: Stuart Bailey, 48 Meadow Avenue, Loughborough LE11 1JT. (01509) 266818. Cheques to: 'Leicester Civic Society'.

Victorian Society Meetings Programme - Autumn 2018

All lectures will 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 2nd October 2018

William Timpson, a Victorian Boot and Shoe Man

Carole Face

Born in Rothwell, William left school in 1860 at 11 years old. At the age of 20, he opened his first boot and shoe shop at 97 Oldham Street, Manchester. Marriage to Elizabeth Farey followed; they had five daughters and three sons. A further four children were born to his second wife Katharine. More shops were opened, boots and shoes were manufactured in Kettering, helping to replace the old silk weaving industry. In 1903 William opened boot and shoe repair factories. The name 'Timpson' is still very evident on the high streets today, with the shop fronts bearing the legend 'Established 1903', providing a myriad of services, including shoe repairs.

Carole is a long standing committee member of the Leicester Group of the Victorian Society, with a keen interest in local and family history.

Autumn Meetings Programme - continued

Tuesday 6th November 2018

Leicester's Debt to a Victorian Engineer: Joseph Gordon, 1832-1889

Sir Kent Woods - Emeritus Professor of Therapeutics, University of Leicester

Infant mortality in Leicester was the highest of any major town in England throughout the Victorian period, due to high rates of summer diarrhoea.

Research done on cholera by Dr John Snow in London showed the importance of sewage contamination in transmitting disease and was one of the drivers of sanitary reform. Leicester was slow to implement change until the appointment of Joseph Gordon as borough surveyor in 1881. In the following decade he drove forward a remarkable programme of civil engineering, including the re-laying of sewers and the building of both the Beaumont Leys sewage farm and the Abbey Pumping Station. Infant mortality in Leicester fell rapidly to the national average.

Tuesday 4th December 2018

The History of Western Park

Dr Susan Barton

The suburb now known as Western Park was carved out of the area of New Parks at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Before that it had been rural and agricultural in character, despite being close to the industrial town of Leicester, which sometimes caused conflict between the needs of farmers and the urban population's need for leisure and even food. Western Park itself was created as a place of recreation for the newly expanding West End, accessed easily by tram. The presence of the tram also made the land near the park an attractive prospect for residential development. A few late Victorian-style villas appeared on Hinckley Road, then from 1908 plans were laid out for a new garden suburb estate, based on large plots of land with architecture strongly influenced by the Arts and Crafts Movement, many by distinguished local architects, notably Ralph Bedingfield who designed many of them, including the first in 1908 and the last in about 1932. These houses demonstrate the change in domestic arrangements over a short time in the early 20th century, evidenced by the layout of the houses. From the mid-1930s the Western Park Estate was bordered by more dense, mass-produced semi-detached housing.

Susan Barton is an historian whose interests cover a wide range of themes. She is probably best known for her work in the history of leisure, travel and tourism in the UK, package holidays in Spain and the development of the Swiss tourism industry and winter sports. She is the author of several books and many other publications, the latest being about wounded prisoners of war in World War I who were interned in Switzerland. She makes regular media appearances on radio and television. She is an honorary visiting research fellow at De Montfort University and represents Western Ward on Leicester City Council.