

THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY LEICESTER GROUP NEWSLETTER

The national charity campaigning for the
Victorian and Edwardian historic environment

SUMMER 2013

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St Peter's, Highfields - wood and glass partition across the nave

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The Victorian Society have been consulted and kept informed throughout the discussions leading up to a final set of proposals, and we are confident that, if the work can be carried out as planned, the result will be something to be proud of. A number of unfortunate 20th century alterations will be swept away and the nave will be restored to its original 'harmony of proportions'.

All this will cost money, of course, and the Heritage Lottery Fund has been approached in the hope of a substantial contribution to the cost. Even the preparation of a bid for a project this size is expensive, and preliminary funds have been granted to enable preparation of a detailed submission. As part of this, a splendid film of the church's history and its role in the community has been produced, and was premiered at the Phoenix Square cinema on 26th October. It is hoped that the film will eventually be available on the church website <http://www.stpetershighfields.org.uk/>.

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AUTUMN/WINTER 2013

St Peter's, Highfields - refurbishment plans

As reported previously in our Newsletter, St Peter's, Highfields has ambitious plans for refurbishment and re-ordering of this impressive church. It was built at considerable expense as a memorial to Earl Howe of Gopsall Hall, to the designs of George Edmund Street in 1872-74. Street, designer of the Royal Courts of Justice in The Strand, was one of the most distinguished Victorian architects, but, apart from a few alterations and restorations, St Peter's was his only major work in Leicestershire.



St Peter's, Highfields - wood and glass partition across the nave

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Chairman's Notes

Welcome to the Winter edition of our Newsletter. Our Winter Lecture Programme is underway, and I hope to welcome you to our Christmas meeting on 3rd December, where in addition to the talk on Ernest Gimson we will be serving mince pies and wine from 7.15 pm.

The Lecture Programme covers a range of architectural and cultural topics chosen to appeal to everyone who finds 'things Victorian' of interest, often with a specifically Leicestershire aspect. In addition to our talented local experts, I am really pleased that we have been able to secure a talk from the eminent architectural historian, Gavin Stamp, to conclude our season in April 2014. Many of you may have seen him on the recent BBC documentary about the Victorian Society, *Heritage! The Battle For Britain* as well as other programmes. Gavin is the author of numerous fascinating books on architecture, including most recently, *Lost Victorian Britain*, and he also writes the *Nooks and Corners* architectural column in *Private Eye* under the pseudonym Piloti.

The lectures are all held in central Leicester at the Leicester Adult Education Centre, Wellington Street on Tuesday evenings. We make the very modest charge of £2.50 to help cover the room costs. Full details of the programme appear on the last two pages of this newsletter. (Please check details, as there have been a couple of minor changes, including one change from our normal Tuesday.)

John Aston was a familiar figure at our meetings for many years, and it is sad to report that he died earlier this year after a long illness. A valued member of the Victorian Society, he was actively involved in many other societies in the city. Amongst his many activities, he was deeply involved with the Friends of Welford Road Cemetery and I am pleased to announce that a bench dedicated to his memory was installed close to the Cemetery Visitor Centre on 19th October.

On a more cheerful note may I say how pleased I was to see the splendid picture and profile article on committee member Melissa Thompson in the Summer edition of *The Victorian* magazine.

On the retailing front it is pleasing to note that at long last Silver Arcade should finally have reopened for business by the time you receive this newsletter. Furthermore the internal fitting out of the former East Gates Coffee House for its new use is ongoing at the time of writing.

We continue to be involved with the Mayor's Heritage Forum which meets quarterly to discuss how to promote and conserve the city's environment. Inevitably much discussion continues to revolve around a certain pre-Victorian monarch, in connection with which the cathedral has unveiled proposals for some re-ordering of its interior and the new Heritage Centre is being constructed across the road. Let us also hope that Leicester wins the competition to be UK City of Culture 2017.

Should I not see you at the December meeting, may I, on behalf of the Committee, wish you a merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

Jon Goodall

Buildings Sub-Committee

St George's Church (William Parsons, 1827)

Although strictly pre-Victorian, this city centre church was extended and rebuilt in the later 19th and early 20th century. We are delighted to report that it has been upgraded by English Heritage from Grade II to II*. Additionally the war memorial in the churchyard has also been listed Grade II. A further grant has been received permitting completion of weatherproofing the building, and maintenance of the churchyard is now in the hands of the City Council.

Secular Hall (W Larnar Sugden, 1881)

The Secular Society has now achieved its fund raising target so that the upgrading and refurbishment of the Hall can start in the near future.

St Saviour's Church (George Gilbert Scott, 1875-7)

Regrettably the plans for the refurbishment of the church for conversion into a banqueting / meeting hall have been withdrawn. It is rumoured that the costs of conversion were more expensive than originally estimated.

St Barnabas Church (Goddard and Paget, 1884-6)

Plans have been submitted for some small scale alterations to allow this to be converted to a banqueting / meeting hall.



Stained glass window in the former HSBC banking hall

Former HSBC Bank, Granby Street (Joseph Goddard, 1872-4)

This splendid building is now owned by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. Revised plans for the construction of new access from Town Hall Square have been agreed with the Council. This will have no impact on the marvellous former banking hall. Following the granting of this permission, a public open day was held on 28th September which was very well attended.

Workshops for the Blind, Gwendolen Road / Margaret Road (Arthur Wakerley, 1898)

This block has now been put up for sale.

Silver Arcade (Amos Hall, 1899)

This has now opened for business although not all of the units have been let.

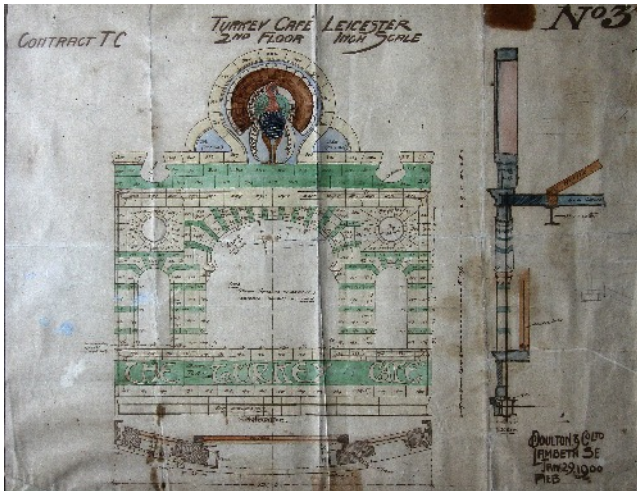
Finally may we make the usual plea that you keep your eyes open for any threats to our Victorian and Edwardian buildings. If you do see anything then please let us know - don't assume that someone else will have already done so.

The Turkey Café

Turkey Café, designed by Arthur Wakerley, is one of the most distinctive examples of Victorian architecture in the city centre. It was built in 1901 on the site of the old Jolly Miller Inn, which itself replaced a cock-pit reputedly visited by James I The client was John Winn who owned and operated a number of cafés in the city, and he chose the ‘turkey’ theme to contrast with the Oriental Café, one of his other establishments nearby.

The Grade II listed building is iron framed and the exterior is covered with matt faced carraraware tiles in cream and green. These were specially produced by Royal Doulton, whose signature can be found at the foot of the turkey above the top window. Original tiles exist throughout the building, with beautiful mosaics, sculptures and murals in the Art Nouveau style being the main features. Protective coverings have been put in place over the most precious and fragile examples by the present owners.

Viewed from across the road, the cream and green tiles on the upper storeys of this attractive building look as vibrant as ever, enhancing the street scene with its quirky appearance.



One of Doulton's contract drawings for the Turkey Cafe

In the past the building has had various uses since Winns closed down, including an ice cream parlour, another café and an opticians. Sadly, at the time of writing, the ground floor façade has a rather neglected appearance, and the building seems to be occupied by a nightclub. Whilst it is obviously good that the café is occupied, it is regrettable that this delightful building is not more accessible to the general public.

The Turkey Café was the final property added to several owned by John Winn in the city, many of which did not survive after World War II. How appropriate it would be, if an enthusiastic entrepreneur re-opened it in the future as a traditional daytime café and removed the protective coverings from the walls. Customers would then be able to take refreshments in elegant surroundings once more, reminiscent of a bygone age.

Carole Face

Recent Leicester Group Activities

Full day visit to Cheadle and Leek

Thursday 16th May

This was one of those memorable occasions when everything worked superbly, thanks in no small part to the meticulous planning of the organiser, Paul Griffiths. There was plenty of time at each destination, generous hospitality from our hosts and the weather was perfect!



St Giles, Cheadle - S aisle arcade and chapel

many civic buildings designed by William Sugden and his son W Larnar Sugden, well-known to us as architect of Leicester's Secular Hall. After a guided visit to the parish church we made our way to Sugden's grandly municipal Nicholson Institute, with its art gallery and library, before finishing the day at the magnificent All Saints, Compton (1885-87), considered by many to be Richard Norman Shaw's finest church. Reinforced by more excellent refreshments served by members of the church, we were able to view the impressive Burne-Jones and William Morris stained glass, Lethaby designed reredos and pulpit, alongside the exquisite designs of the Leek School of Needlework.

Our first stop was the Pugin Centre in Cheadle, where we were given a warm welcome and delicious refreshments. The centre has many impressive examples of Pugin's work, along with drawings, letters and plans. It provided an appropriate introduction to a town that Pevsner described as 'Pugin-land'.

A short walk brought us to the jewel in Cheadle's crown, the Roman Catholic Church of St Giles, designed by Pugin in 1841 and described by him as 'a perfect revival of an English parish church at the time of Edward I'. It is an unforgettable building, with its tall spire and interior full of colour and exquisite decoration. It was erected at the expense of the Earl of Shrewsbury, who gave Pugin a free hand with seemingly no limit on the budget and his reward was Pugin's masterpiece; standing alongside the School and Convent. Pugin-land indeed.

In Leek we were able to wander round at leisure, some of us taking in the

Recent Leicester Group Activities - continued

Evening walk round the Westcotes area

Thursday 20th June

At one point it looked as though this walk would have to be cancelled, so heavy was the rain. But it was decided to persevere, and a surprisingly good turnout of members and friends enjoyed an eye-opening stroll around some of the varied Victorian architecture of Westcotes.

We concentrated on the grand villas of the professional and business class on Westleigh and Ashleigh Roads, and, on the opposite side of Narborough Road, the smaller palisaded houses of Eastleigh Road and the working class flat-fronted terraces on Western Road.

Our guide was our President Richard Gill, who, with his legendary erudition and presentation skills, showed how the area had evolved with all social classes living close by one another; but with clear demarcations between them.

In Ashleigh and Westleigh Roads, the leading local architects of the day were commissioned to design handsome, well-built villas: some in terraces and some standing alone. Such firms as Redfern & Sawday, Harding & Topott and Isaac Barradale, were employed to create impressive houses notable for their expert use of timbering, exterior plasterwork and distinctive fenestration, that resulted in a pleasingly varied and aesthetically satisfying townscape.

Although the architects of the smaller palisaded villas of Eastleigh Road and other similar roads in Westcotes are unknown, there is an attractive symmetry and rhythm to their skilful design that incorporated such features as charming decoratively tiled porches, substantial bay windows and small, walled front gardens.

Our walk ended with a look at a one of Edward Burgess's finest Board Schools, which provides a sizeable landmark at the corner of Narborough Road and Upperton Road. Viewed from 'behind' in Bruce Street, Westcotes School is impressive indeed: its imposing tower and double length assembly hall windows giving the intended impression of quality and permanence.

Visit to Mount St Bernard Abbey, Coalville

Tuesday 16th July

The tranquil and inspiring Mount St Bernard Abbey, set high on a hill in the Charnwood Forest, has the distinction of being the first abbey to be built in England since the Reformation. It was originally (1835) housed in a cottage, then in a small monastery designed by William Railton (of Nelson's column fame), who did much work for Leicestershire patrons. Railton's building no longer survives, having been replaced by Augustus Pugin's spacious, simple and beautiful Abbey we see today.

The building of the Abbey was protracted. In fact it wasn't completed until a century after work began. Pugin was enchanted by the site and in an article in the *Dublin Review* he described the immediate surroundings as 'exceedingly wild and romantic, more, indeed, resembling Sicilian than English scenery'. Who would have thought that our familiar county landscape could evoke such feelings in one of the 19th century's greatest architects! It certainly inspired him to create a masterpiece of restraint and elegance; quite different from his jewelled casket of intense colour and florid decoration: the Church of St Giles, Cheadle (see report on page 5).

St Giles and Mount St Bernard have a benefactor in common: the Earl of Shrewsbury. He came to Leicestershire to visit his friend Ambrose Phillips de Lisle of nearby Gracedieu Manor, who told him of his desire to create a new monastery on land he owned in the Charnwood Forest. The Earl was impressed and offered a substantial donation towards the cost of building and Pugin, who was a friend of both de Lisle and the Earl, gave his services free of charge.



Pugin's original concept for Mount St Bernard Abbey

The story of the Abbey was told by our guide, Father Joseph, until recently Abbot of Mount St Bernard. He also gave us some of the history of the Cistercian order and described life at the Abbey with its contemplative round of worship, prayer and hard work. He showed us a number of pictures, including original concept drawings by Pugin. Father Joseph answered many of our questions, explained the financing of the Abbey and took us to see some of the areas not normally open to the public. Refreshments and a visit to the Abbey shop completed a memorable afternoon made all the more enjoyable by the glorious summer sunshine.

Recent Leicester Group Activities - continued

An evening walk round the Western Park district

Tuesday 13th August

We assembled beside St Anne's Church, perched dramatically on a ridge above the Hinckley Road. Although not built until 1933-34, the church reminded us that the legacy of the Gothic Revival lasted well into the 20th century. Behind the Church was another reminder of Victorian days – a 'tin tabernacle', complete with small pointed windows, which has been incorporated into the current parish hall.

From here, we explored Letchworth Road, surely named after Letchworth and the Garden City movement which clearly inspired it. The individually designed houses display many features of an English vernacular style – overhanging eaves, gables, hanging tiles, bay windows and elaborate chimneys. We were able, unexpectedly, to visit one of these houses, designed by Beddingfield and taking full advantage of its steeply sloping site. Local people we met confirmed the area's continuing popularity with its residents.

We were grateful to Richard Gill for his commentary, fascinating as ever, and to Neil Crutchley for arranging the evening.

A walk around Leicester University Botanic Garden

Tuesday 3rd and 10th September

This memorable afternoon guided walk took us through the 16 acre site of Leicester University Botanic Garden, which comprise four Edwardian 'mini estates', once owned by some of Leicester's leading industrialists. These estates were created with no expense spared and operated along the lines of country houses, with a large number of servants and gardeners.

Our guide was Rowan Roenisch, one of our Group's Vice Presidents, who has



spent many years researching these fine houses and gardens and it is doubtful that anyone else could have given us so much insight into their history. The gardens took years to create and now, more than a century on, we can enjoy the results of their original owners' foresight and creative ideas.

The Knoll, by WH Bidlake of Birmingham (1907)

All four houses: Middlemeade (now Beaumont Hall), Southmeade, Nether Close (now Hastings House) and The Knoll, were designed by leading architects; the first three by Leicester's Stockdale and Shirley Harrison, and The Knoll (the grandest of them all) by WS Bidlake of Birmingham.



Finely detailed woodwork in The Knoll

The afternoon ended with tea and cakes in the impressive yet intimate surroundings of Middlemeade's drawing room.

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A Blessing to the Town - the History of Vaughan College

A talk by Cynthia Brown - Tuesday 1st October 2013

Cynthia Brown, one of the Group's Vice Presidents, described how the College started life in 1862 at the instigation of David James Vaughan, the vicar of St Martin's (now the cathedral). It was originally described as a working men's institute with a library and reading room. Classes in basic subjects were held at St Martin's Infants School in Union Street, and small fees were charged from the outset. Steady expansion in numbers ensued and in 1908 a purpose-built college opened in Great Central Street, the title being changed to Vaughan College in honour of its founder.

The College ran into difficulties during and after the Great War. Its salvation came in 1929, when it came under the control of the fairly recently formed University College of Leicester. In 1962 new premises were opened adjacent to the Jewry Wall. The site of the previous building was swallowed up by the new inner ring road, appropriately named Vaughan Way. In 2000 Vaughan College became the University's Institute of Lifelong Learning.

2013 saw further change, with the closure of the 1962 building and relocation to the main University campus, and it is greatly to be hoped that this change does not signal the demise of this valued asset and the loss of its historical associations.

Leicester Local History books for sale

Long serving committee member Eileen Chambers wishes to 'down size' by selling some of her 40-year-old collection of books. These include Leicester and Leicestershire local history books by, among others, Malcolm Elliott, Derek Seaton, Robin Jenkins, Geoff Brandwood, Hugh Collinson, Shirley Aucott, and many out-of-print *Leicester Mercury* publications, full of photographs of old Leicester. There are also some general history hard-back books, as well as a few on sporting subjects, mainly cricket, and all are in excellent condition.

Eileen has generously offered to make a donation to the Leicester Group from the proceeds of the sale.

If you are interested or need any further information, please give Eileen a call on (0116) 2925824.

May we have your e-mail address?

Sending our Newsletter and notification of events electronically is convenient, green and saves the Victorian Society postage.

The Leicester Group Newsletter is available in PDF Format, which can be read on any computer with Adobe Acrobat Reader (available as a free download).

If you would be happy to receive the Newsletter as a PDF file please contact Peter Ellis (ellisdesign@talktalk.net) with your e-mail address.

E-mail also allows us to send details of events that may be arranged at short notice.

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

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



Lecture Programme - Winter 2013-2014

Tuesday 3rd December
Christmas Meeting

Stoneywell Cottage and Ernest Gimson

Rowan Roenisch

Born in Leicester in 1864, Ernest Gimson, often called England's 'greatest artist craftsman', chose to migrate permanently to the Cotswolds in 1893 to escape urban life. Nevertheless during his first 15 years there he regularly returned to the county of his birth where he built six dwellings for family and friends. Stoneywell Cottage, built in 1899 by Gimson for his brother Sydney, has recently been acquired by the National Trust and is due to open to the public for the first time in 2014. Rowan will discuss the significance of these Leicestershire properties, highlighting the special qualities of Stoneywell, a country cottage which she has visited regularly for over 30 years with her students and has been shown round by Sydney Gimson's grandson, Don Gimson.

Seasonal Refreshments will be available from 7.15 pm

Tuesday 7th January 2014

The Deserving and Undeserving

Malcolm Elliott

Malcolm Elliott is a distinguished local author and lecturer, and a past President of the Leicester Group of the Victorian Society. After studying Economic History at the University of Nottingham, he obtained his PhD for a thesis on the Leicester Board of Health. Although the concept of 'deserving and undeserving' had been enshrined in English Law since at least the 16th century, it was Victorian social reformers such as Edwin Chadwick who brought the distinction into prominence in the 19th century.

Thursday 6th February

Hansom and the 'Pork Pie' Chapel

Neil Crutchley

Neil is a writer and lecturer on music and local history, contributing to Leicestershire magazines and newspapers. He was the *Leicester Mercury* music critic for 30 years, and has recently published *The History of Leicester Symphony Orchestra, the First Ninety Years*.

***This Lecture will be preceded by the Annual General Meeting
of the Leicester Group***

***PLEASE NOTE: THIS MEETING WILL BE HELD ON THURSDAY EVENING
INSTEAD OF THE USUAL TUESDAY***

Lecture Programme - Winter 2013-2014

Continued from previous page

Tuesday 4th March **Writing a Year - 1859**

Professor Gail Marshall

The year 1859 saw an extraordinary output of literary works which continue to define the Victorian era. From Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* to FitzGerald's *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* and from Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* to George Eliot's *Adam Bede*, the range of works which first saw the light of day in this single remarkable year is astounding. Professor Marshall examines how it might have felt to encounter these seminal texts in 1859, before they accrued the significance that they have for us, and indeed before the Victorians really knew that they were 'Victorian'.

Gail Marshall is Professor of Victorian Literature and Director of the Victorian Studies Centre at the University of Leicester. She is the author of *Actresses on the Victorian Stage* (1998), *Victorian Fiction* (2002), and *Shakespeare and Victorian Women* (2009). Her research interests are the Victorian novel, women's writing and history, and the theatre. She is currently writing a literary and cultural history of 1859.

Tuesday 1st April **The Fall and Rise of Victorian Architecture**

Professor Gavin Stamp, MA, PhD, Hon FRIAS, Hon FRIBA, FSA

The lecture will examine the changing fortunes of Victorian architecture from its being execrated as 'hideous Victorian' to its re-evaluation by the likes of HS Goodhart-Rendel, John Betjeman and Nikolaus Pevsner, culminating in the foundation of the Victorian Society in 1958.

Gavin Stamp is an architectural historian. He has written studies of Alexander 'Greek' Thomson, George Gilbert Scott junior and Edwin Lutyens. His recent books include *Lost Victorian Britain* and *The Memorial to the Missing of the Somme*.

Gavin Stamp curated the Society's 50th anniversary exhibition *Saving A Century*, which we hope to display in Leicester some time in 2015.

Lectures take place in either the Small Hall (Room 3) or the Hansom Hall of
The Leicester Adult Education College, Wellington Street,
at 7.30 pm, unless otherwise stated.

(See Notice in the Foyer to indicate which room is being used)

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.