

# THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY LEICESTER GROUP NEWSLETTER

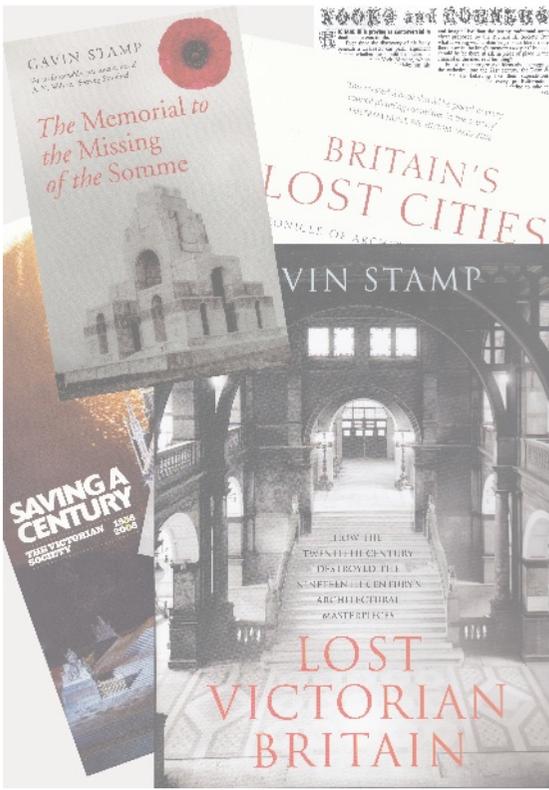
The national charity campaigning for the  
Victorian and Edwardian historic environment

SPRING 2014

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Tuesday 1st April 2014**

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

has a particular interest in 19th and 20th century British architecture and has written about the work of Alexander 'Greek' Thomson, the Gilbert Scott dynasty and Sir Edwin Lutyens, amongst others. He has also written on the earliest photography of London and the history of telephone kiosks.

His most recent books are *Britain's Lost Cities* ('This masterful book should be placed in every council planning committee in the country' - Tristram Hunt), *The Memorial to the Missing of the Somme* ('An unforgettable, passionate book' - AN Wilson), and *Lost Victorian Britain*. He is an honorary Fellow of both the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland and the Royal Institute of British Architects - and considers that one of the greatest boons to civilisation which originated in England is the railway.

*Continued ...*

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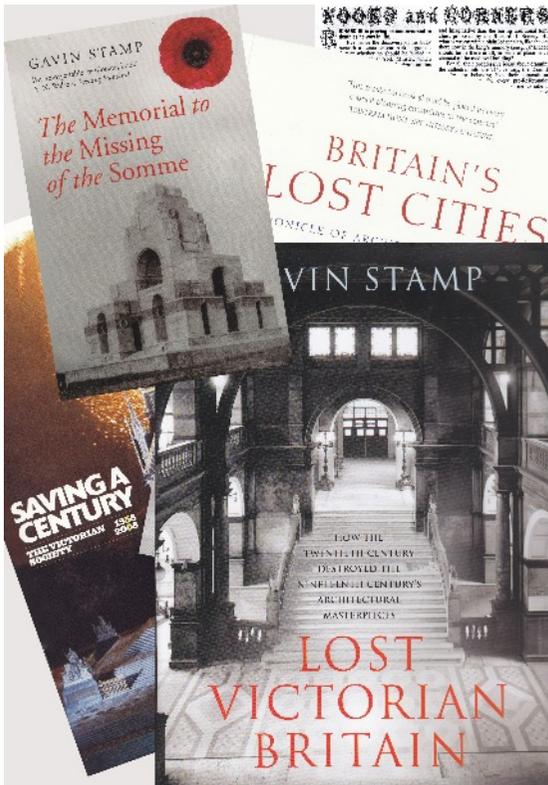
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Gavin Stamp read History and then the History of Art at Cambridge. For most of his career he has been a freelance writer on the history of architecture, as well as teaching, organising exhibitions and architectural journalism. For a dozen years he taught the history of architecture at the Mackintosh School of Architecture, Glasgow School of Art, and is now an honorary professor at the University of Glasgow.

Since 2003 he has reverted to being an independent scholar. He has a particular interest in 19th and 20th century British architecture and has written about the work of Alexander 'Greek' Thomson, the Gilbert Scott dynasty and Sir Edwin Lutyens, amongst others. He has also written on the earliest photography of London and the history of telephone kiosks.

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Continued ...

Gavin Stamp is an indefatigable supporter of the Victorian Society, and has contributed to many of its publications, as well as curating the travelling exhibition *Saving A Century*, assembled to commemorate the Society's first half century in 2008. (The Leicester Group is keen to host this exhibition in due course, but to date no suitable venue has been found.)

Professor Stamp will discuss the changing attitudes to Victorian architecture in the early part of the 20th century, leading up to the formation of the Victorian Society in 1958.



*A Leicestershire Victorian Alphabet*

## **The Union Workhouse**

Union Workhouses were set up by 'Unions' of parishes following the passage of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. The original Leicester Union Workhouse building in Sparkenhoe Street was designed by local architect William Flint and opened in 1838. The design was a variation on the hexagonal 'Y' plan published by the Poor Law Commissioners in 1835. Designed to accommodate 600 inmates, the new building replaced six parish workhouses around the town, which were deemed by the Board to be more expensive to run. A severe depression in the winter of 1841-2 resulted in around 5,000 claimants being given out-relief in return for daily manual labour. Violent riots resulted, which were only quelled after military intervention.

In 1847-8 Leicester again suffered severe distress and unemployment, with even more people needing help. A suggestion to erect a larger workhouse was thwarted, but by the end of 1848 the Board of Guardians accepted the proposal. In 1850-51 the workhouse was substantially rebuilt on the same site to designs by W Parsons and MJ Dain of Leicester. The new building had a large main block in the shape of an elongated 'H' running from west to east. The buildings were grim and intimidating, for life was meant to be harder on the inside of the workhouse than outside.

On admission to the workhouse, paupers were stripped, washed and had their hair cropped. Inmates had to wear a prison style uniform and women were housed separately from men, even their husbands. Children were kept separately from adults and were given basic lessons. The diet was very meagre, consisting of pottage, gruel, broth, bread, cheese and, occasionally, meat and potatoes. Stone crushing work was found for able bodied inmates, as well as outwork for local hosiers. Illness, disease and overcrowding took its toll on the inmates, although over the years the buildings were extended to accommodate the rising numbers needing help.



Malcolm Elliott

*Leicester Union Workhouse (later Hillcrest) shortly before demolition*

Today, many workhouse buildings of architectural merit still survive, having been adapted and modernised for different uses. A fine example of this is the Southwell Workhouse, now a National Trust property. Paupers destined to enter this workhouse over a hundred years ago would have approached the grim building with fear and dread in their hearts. But as we walk up to the same building today, we see an attractive, symmetrical façade of red brick, promising us an interesting and informative visit.

There is a scene in *Far From The Maddening Crowd* by Thomas Hardy, in which a young girl is forced to seek the cold charity of the workhouse. Sadly, she dies there, giving birth to Sergeant Troy's baby. She is laid to rest in a coffin of roughly hewn timber, with an inscription written on the lid in chalk, 'Fanny Robin and child'. No doubt similar tragic events took place in the Union Workhouse, Leicester. The Social Security system finally removed the fear of the Workhouse, and, no longer required for its original purpose, the Leicester Union Workhouse was used as Hillcrest Geriatric Unit until 1974, and was finally being demolished in 1977, taking with it dreaded memories of a not too distant past.

*Carole Face*

*See also the report on page 9 of Malcolm Elliott's talk, 'The Deserving and Undeserving', for more background on Victorian Workhouses.*

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.

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## Chairman's Report - Year Ended December 2013

Once again I am pleased to be able to report that the Group continues in a healthy situation. We continue to liaise closely with the national Victorian Society and we were pleased to welcome the new Director of the Society, Chris Costelloe, to Leicester in 2013. Four members of the Committee also attended the Annual General Meeting weekend held in Harrogate in July.

Locally we co-operate with other conservation Groups, in particular the Leicestershire Industrial History Society, the Friends of Welford Road Cemetery and the Civic Society. Such co-operation is strongly assisted by our participation in meetings of the Heritage Partnership. This group, established by the City Mayor, Sir Peter Soulsby, meets quarterly to exchange information and to ensure close liaison with the City Council conservation team.

I represent our Group on the Heritage Partnership and also on the Conservation Advisory Panel which advises on planning applications relating to listed buildings and conservation areas.

Throughout 2013 we have held regular meetings during the winter months at the Adult Education College and during the summer we arranged a series of trips and guided walks. These seem to have been popular and we always welcome fresh suggestions for future speakers and visits. Unfortunately, despite the popularity of our activities, we made a small financial loss in the year although our reserves were able to cope with this. Further information on our finances can of course be seen in the Treasurer's report below.

As has been widely reported, Ernest Gimson's cottage in Ulverscroft has been acquired by the National Trust. Planning permission for minor alterations to make the cottage more 'visitor friendly' was finally obtained and it should open this year. Coincidentally, it was especially pleasing that at long last the New Walk Museum opened a new 'Arts and Crafts' gallery in 2013. This features some splendid examples of Ernest Gimson furniture (previously buried away in the Museum store rooms).

The Group could not of course function without the work of the Committee and I would like to thank its members for their hard work and support. All have expressed a willingness to continue in office with the exception of Cliff Dunkley our Minutes Secretary. His duties are to be taken over by Paul Griffiths. Also Marion Hare who continued to look after activities bookings after standing down from the Committee a year ago, has now handed over these duties to Grahame Lees. As ever, may I appeal for those of you who feel that you might be able to help out on the Committee to step forward.

Finally I should like to thank our new President, Richard Gill, and our four Vice Presidents for their help during the year.

*Jon Goodall  
Chairman*

## **Buildings Sub-Committee Report - Year Ended December 2013**

Despite the economy being supposedly on the road to recovery, there is still a shortage of significant new developments. Several planned meetings of the Conservation Advisory Panel this year have been cancelled due to the shortage of agenda items. Even the market for student accommodation seems to have eased off and staff from the City Council tower blocks are to be re-housed in existing properties (albeit suitably refurbished). One piece of good news has been the lack of arson attacks on unused buildings during the last year - long may this continue!

### **Significant Areas of Activity or Concern**

#### **PLACES OF WORSHIP**

**St Saviour's (George Gilbert Scott 1875-77)** Plans to convert this into a banqueting/function hall have seemingly lapsed and there is evidence of vandalism.

**St Barnabas (Goddard and Paget 1884-86)** Planning permission has been granted for conversion to a banqueting/function hall, subject to some possible concerns over parking.

**St Paul's Kirby Road (Ordish and Traylen 1870-71)** Plans to convert this into offices show no sign of coming to fruition.

**St Peter's Highfields (G E Street 1872-74)** Plans to reconfigure the internal layout (in effect restoring the original layout) are progressing and funding applications are in progress. One of our Committee members, Paul Griffiths, is compiling a history of the church.

**Leicester Cathedral** This was subject to various modifications during the Victorian period and again when it became the cathedral. Now plans have been drawn up for reconfiguration of the interior, mainly to accommodate a proposed new tomb for Richard III. These plans have been the subject of adverse comment from all the national conservation bodies, and no approval has yet been given by the Church of England authorities.

#### **OTHER BUILDINGS**

**Silver Arcade (Amos Hall 1899)** At long last this finally re-opened in Autumn 2013. It is disappointing however that not all of the units (especially on the ground floor) have been let.

**Former Eastgates Coffee House (Edward Burgess 1885)** After a prolonged period, it was good to note that a new tenant moved in during December 2013.

**Former HSBC Bank, Granby Street (Joseph Goddard 1872-74)** Having been acquired by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, work continues on its interior. Additionally planning approval has been granted for a new entrance leading from Town Hall Square.

*Continued ...*

**Guild of the Disabled, Colton Street (A E Sawday 1910)** This has been converted into a worship centre for the Shri Shirdi Barda Temple Association.

**Secular Hall (W Larner Sugden 1881)** Following planning permission for upgrading of certain areas, particularly with reference to disabled access, funds have been obtained for this work to proceed.

**Stoneygate Tram Depot, London Road** This was opened in 1904 but closed in 1924, since when it has had a variety of uses. However the structure has remained remarkably sound. It has now been leased to the Leicester Transport Heritage Trust who wish to convert it into a museum to house some of their preserved vehicles and artefacts. Fund raising is in progress to allow necessary adaptations to be completed.

I continue to represent the Group on the City Council's Conservation Advisory Panel.

Current members of the Buildings Sub Committee are Jon Goodall, Peter Ellis, Gwyn Jones, Janet and Richard Lawrence, Grahame Lees, Rowan Roenisch, Mike Taylor and Melissa Thompson.

Thanks are expressed to Janet and Richard Lawrence for hosting the Sub Committee meetings.

*Jon Goodall*

## **Treasurer's Report – 2013**

A copy of the 2013 Balance Sheet was presented to the AGM on 6th February. This showed that the Group made a loss of £319 during the year. Reserves are still healthy at over £5,000, and a loss of this amount can largely be accounted for by a number of exceptional items purchased during the year.

Many of you will have seen the publicity leaflets which we have produced in an effort to raise awareness of the Leicester Group. These have been well received at the various museums, libraries and information centres at which they have been displayed, certainly the racks seem to empty quite quickly, but we have yet to see any tangible results of the extra publicity. We also made a couple of small donations, including one to Welford Road Cemetery in memory of our old friend John Aston. He was a keen supporter of the Victorian Society in Leicester over many years, and although it is some time since his familiar figure was regularly seen at our activities, I am sure many of you will remember him with affection. We also gave a small donation to the Leicester Secular Society. Their Hall on Humberstone Gate is one of the city's iconic Victorian buildings, and we are pleased to be associated with their restoration appeal.

The donations which our members make on the door at each meeting are the most significant source of income, closely followed by the small surplus that we try to make on each of the trips, walks and other activities that we organise.

Mailing list subscriptions are down on last year, but this figure fluctuates from year to year depending on the speed with which our members renew their subs. In addition, an increasing number of people are opting to receive the newsletter by e-mail, which saves the group a considerable amount of money. Each newsletter costs nearly £1 to print, and, once we run out of 36p stamps, will cost 50p to post. Although the mailing list subscription has always been nominally to cover printing and postage, it does also make a contribution to the running costs of the group. Whilst it does not seem reasonable to continue to ask for the same subscription from those who do not have printed newsletters posted to them, we hope members who take the newsletter this way will still make a contribution on a voluntary basis.

Our biggest expense remains the hire of a room for our meetings, and although we have not been advised of another increase the price seems to have gone up inexorably every year that I have been Treasurer, and it seems unlikely that that trend will not continue.

We do need more members – both local mailing list subscribers and members of the national Society, both of which show a slow but steady decline in numbers. Although members of the national Society are in one sense a drain on our resources – we send out our newsletters and receive no subscription in return – they do contribute by attending our events and activities; and providing a recruitment vehicle for the national Society should be one of our main objectives. If anyone knows of someone who might be interested in joining the Society, or has ideas for recruitment, please let a member of the committee know. We would particularly like to increase our profile at the two universities in Leicester, and any assistance in this regard would be very welcome.

*Peter Ellis*  
Treasurer



*Stonesby House, Princess Road - see page 10 for details of evening walk on 15th May.*

## Recent Leicester Group Activities

### The Work of Building Preservation Trusts

A talk by Keith Hamilton - Tuesday 5th November 2014

Keith Hamilton, a conservation architect and Chairman of the Leicestershire Historic Buildings Trust, described the role of this and other trusts in the preservation of the built heritage. Whilst listing, conservation area designation and other statutory measures identify buildings deemed to be important, these schemes do not actively contribute to their preservation. If buildings are to be preserved successfully, they must be occupied and kept in use. Each local Building Preservation Trust operates a revolving fund to buy and restore suitable property in its area, having first identified that it can be given a viable future. As Charitable Trusts, they are eligible for various grants and low interest loans, and these, together with sponsorship and public donations enable Trusts to pay for restoration of our threatened heritage. Restored buildings are then sold and the loans repaid ready for a new project, the emphasis always being on finding new uses which can make historic buildings viable without destroying their historic character. Keith illustrated his talk with a number of examples, both local and national.

### Stoneywell Cottage and Ernest Gimson

A talk by Rowan Roenisch - Tuesday 3rd December 2013

Given the gathering excitement over the imminent opening of the first National Trust house in Leicestershire, this lecture generated a large and lively audience for our Christmas meeting in December.

Although born in Leicester in 1864, Ernest Gimson, 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 and built six dwellings, including two town houses in Leicester, and Stoneywell Cottage designed for his favourite brother, Sydney.



*The rear elevation of Stoneywell Cottage photographed during the Leicester Group visit in 2006.*

Using archival photographs, reminiscences and Ernest's own letters to family, friends and colleagues, Rowan outlined the evolution of Gimson's philosophy, politics and the influences behind the design of the cottage and its setting. The lecture illustrated the distinctive and unusual built form and contents of the original cottage, and indicated some of the ways in which these have changed in over a century of use by his brother's family and descendants.

Stoneywell is due to open to the general public for the first time in late summer this year and it will now be of tremendous interest for members to go and see for themselves the way in which the National Trust presents the house to the public and what further material they make available to help everyone both enjoy and appreciate the work of Leicester's most famous designer.

## **The Deserving and Undeserving**

A talk by Malcolm Elliott - Tuesday 7th January 2014

Malcolm Elliott, a past President of the Leicester Group of the Victorian Society, reminded us of the reality behind the concept of the Deserving and Undeserving poor. Some provision for the poor had been enshrined in English law since at least the 16th century, but after the Dissolution of the Monasteries the burden of looking after the poor devolved from religious houses to local parishes.

During the course of the 18th and early 19th centuries the Parish Poor Rate, levied on property owners, became increasingly onerous. Victorian social reformers, such as Edwin Chadwick, brought the distinction into prominence: those deemed Deserving were given outdoor relief from private charities, but the Undeserving were put to work in prisons and the newly established workhouses, breaking stones or picking oakum.

The New Poor Law of 1834 was based on the model established at Southwell in Nottinghamshire (now in the ownership of the National Trust) where it had led to a dramatic fall in the poor rates, however harsh it was on the rural poor. It was a different story in the industrial towns like Leicester, where large numbers were thrown out of work during trade recessions. Added to the shame of entering the workhouse was the fact that, under the Anatomy Act of 1832, the bodies of paupers could be made available to medical schools for dissection. Horrific stories were revealed in the Andover scandal of 1845, when men were found to be fighting over scraps of meat and gristle attached to bones intended for crushing as fertilizer.

By the 1870s, public opinion was becoming more sympathetic to the poor. Charles Dickens and Mrs Gaskell described workhouses and their inmates in their novels (Dickens had lived close to the Cleveland Street workhouse in his youth). Charlie Chaplin went into a workhouse with his mother and brother, and HM Stanley, the explorer, was an inmate of St Asaph workhouse in Denbigh, from the age of 6 to 15, when he finally beat up his brutal schoolmaster (an ex-colyer with only one hand who taught from the bible and nothing else), and ran away.

When Lloyd George brought in the old age pension in 1908, the single most important cause of poverty disappeared, and the elderly poor were no longer obliged to end their days in the workhouse.

## Summer Visits Programme - 2014

### Thursday 24th April

#### High Street and Shaftesbury Hall - guided walk led by Richard Gill

Leicester's High Street is a treat for lovers of Victorian and Edwardian architecture. From the flamboyant baroque of the former Grand Clothing Hall to the innovative barrel-roofed design of the Coronation Building, the street displays virtually every style fashionable at the turn of the 20th century. It's a street that has been underrated for many years, but with the creation of Highcross, the time is ripe for a major reappraisal and revaluation.

Richard Gill will lead us from Cheapside, along the length of High Street, examining the rich variation of design and structure the street has to offer. Our journey will finish at one of the best kept secrets of the period, Shaftesbury Hall in Holy Bones; the sole survivor of a fine group of buildings that included Stockdale Harrison's Vaughan College and the Hotel Victory. The hall was built as an educational and recreational charity (the Mablethorpe Children's Holiday Home charity still operates from its original offices in the building). The present occupier, who runs a period fireplace business there, has retained many of the original interior features and colour schemes to preserve the character of this surprisingly extensive building.

Cost: £5.00

Meet outside Silver Street entrance to the Silver Arcade at 7.00 pm  
(Closing date for bookings - Friday 4th April - see green sheet)

### Thursday 15th May

#### West of New Walk - guided walk led by Richard Gill

Now predominantly part of the professional and university quarter of Leicester, the area west of New Walk comprising Princess Road, West Walk, Regent Road, De Montfort Street and Salisbury Road was once one of the most desirable and sought-after areas of the town. Wealthy business and professional families made their homes there and commissioned Leicester's leading architects to design handsome and spacious houses. A glance at old directories shows families whose names have gone down in Leicester's history once lived here: Faire, Lorrimer, Wykes, Corah, Morley, Gimson, Kempson, Ellis, Clephan, Pickard and Gittins, are just a few.

The Society's president, Richard Gill, will lead us on what promises to be a revealing journey of discovery, as this area, despite its great interest, both architecturally and socially, was soon eclipsed by the burgeoning suburb of Stonegate where larger plots and even grander houses became irresistible to those who were able to afford them.

Cost: £5.00

Meet outside St Stephen's URC Church on De Montfort Street, opposite the Belmont Hotel at 7.00 pm  
(Closing date for bookings - Friday 25th April - see green sheet)

## Wednesday 11th June

### Edgbaston - Birmingham's affluent suburb

Details of this tour are still to be finalised, but we intend to visit the Birmingham suburb of Edgbaston. Developed on the Calthorpe estate from the early 19th century it was intended for 'those people who, having acquired a moderate competence, wish to retire to a small country house'. Among the residents, from 1850 until his death in 1890, was JH (later Cardinal) Newman, and the Oratory Church (1903-09 by Doran Webb) with its sumptuous interior, was built as his monument. Refreshments may be taken at the Botanical Gardens, with its cast iron and glass Palm House of 1871. Time permitting we may also take in the university buildings of c1900 by Aston Webb & Ingres Bell, which Sir Hugh Casson said 'can even look as magical as the domes and spires of Istanbul or Moscow'.

Cost: £26.00

Coach departs from Glebe Road 8.30 am - return 5.30 pm approx  
(Closing date for bookings - Friday 16th May - see green sheet)

### General notes about visits

Please note that our visits may present a variety of hazards including uneven surfaces and stairs, low head heights, low lighting and building or demolition works. There may be stairs or uneven surfaces which cannot be avoided, and long periods of walking or standing. Should you have any questions about your ability to participate in an event, please contact us. Children under 18 must be accompanied by an adult. Participants are reminded that they participate in events at their own risk, and neither the Society nor its officers or servants accept any liability of any kind whatsoever, howsoever arising. The Victorian Society reserves the right to cancel, alter or postpone events if necessary.

Cancellations: No refunds will be given for cancellations for events costing £10 or less, but as a courtesy to others we ask that you let us know if you cannot attend an event for which you have booked. In other cases, cancellations will be accepted and fees returned up to a month before the date of the event, but will be subject to a £10 deduction per ticket for administrative costs. Separate arrangements may apply for weekend visits and foreign tours and terms will be clearly stated on the printed details in each case.

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 (see below) or booking enquiries can be made direct to Grahame Lees.

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



# Lecture Programme - Winter 2013-2014

**Tuesday 4th March 2014**

## **Writing a Year - 1859**

*Professor Gail Marshall, BA (Durham), MA (Leeds), PhD (Cambridge)*

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 2014**

## **The Fall and Rise of Victorian Architecture**

*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 the future if a suitable venue can be found.

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.