

# **THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY LEICESTER GROUP NEWSLETTER**

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The national charity campaigning for the  
Victorian and Edwardian historic environment

**SUMMER 2012**

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# **THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY LEICESTER GROUP NEWSLETTER**

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## **Stoneywell for the National Trust?**

The National Trust is in discussions over the acquisition of one of Leicestershire's most important historic houses. Stoneywell is an Arts & Crafts cottage set in four acres of gardens and 11 acres of woodland at Ulverscroft, Leicestershire.

Stoneywell, a Grade II\* listed property, was designed in 1898 by Leicester-born architect, designer and craftsman Ernest Gimson (1864-1919). Gimson was a well-known contributor to the Arts & Crafts Movement in England in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, with many connections to other key members of the movement including William Morris. Gimson designed the cottage for his elder brother Sydney and wife Jeanie, and Stoneywell has remained within the family ever since. In 2010 the National Trust was approached by the Gimson family about the potential acquisition of the property.

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*Above: Stoneywell photographed during a Leicester Group visit in 2006*

**Summer visits programme - see page 10  
Autumn Lecture Series - see page 12**

## Stoneywell - continued from page 1



Ernest Gimson's father, Josiah, and his brother Benjamin, were also significant figures in Leicester during the nineteenth century when they set up the heavy engineering firm of Gimson and Co. It was one of the largest employers in the city and prided itself on being a model employer in terms of wages and conditions of work. The firm built the beam engines which can still be seen at the Abbey Pumping Station and cast two bridges over the Grand Union Canal in Leicester.

A spokesman for the National Trust said, "Acquiring Stoneywell would safeguard the property's future in its little altered state, which would be under severe threat if it was sold on the open market. Our ownership would ensure that the house, stables, gardens and woodland retain their conservation significance for future generations to enjoy. The property would be a wonderful addition to the National Trust's portfolio and a

significant acquisition for Leicestershire. We are extremely grateful for the generosity of the family in offering us the opportunity to acquire this special place."

Donald Gimson, the current owner and occupier of Stoneywell and great-nephew of Ernest Gimson, said, "I believe that the National Trust acquiring Stoneywell would be the best way for us to enable as many people as possible to enjoy the house, stables and grounds. It also provides an authentic setting for showing the works of Arts and Crafts designers, in particular Ernest Gimson and the Barnsleys, and to tell the story of how they came to be an integral part of our family history."

Should the acquisition go ahead, it is anticipated that Stoneywell will open to the public on a limited basis in 2013 whilst essential work is carried out.

The Leicester Group of the Victorian Society have long complained that Ernest Gimson has not been given due attention in the city of his birth. This splendid news, coupled with the recent announcement that the New Walk Museum may at last be about to display some of the Gimson furniture in its collection (see our Chairman's Notes opposite), suggests that Ernest Gimson may at last be receiving the recognition he deserves.

## Chairman's Notes

Welcome to the latest edition of our newsletter. I am hoping that a good spell of summer weather will eventually emerge - if only so that I can watch some cricket!

May I start by conveying the sad news that Carole Face, who does such a splendid job in arranging our monthly talks, unfortunately lost her husband David just before Easter. Obviously our sympathies go out to Carole and her family.

You can read about the buildings that we have been concerned with in the report from the Buildings Sub-Committee overleaf. As a general comment however it is pleasing to note that the City Mayor, Sir Peter Soulsby, is taking a keen interest in conservation matters. Indeed it was pleasing to see Sir Peter at our recent visit to St. George's church. He wishes to ensure that we promote the history of Leicester, not only to potential visitors, but also to our own citizens. As part of this he has established a Heritage Partnership with representatives from various interested parties which meets every three months. I represent the Victorian Society. We have discussed how we can make the most of Leicester's rich heritage which, alas, far too often has gone unrecognised and unappreciated. Inevitably there will be financial constraints but quite often fairly simple measures can be taken, often with the assistance of voluntary groups such as ours.

One especially good item to report is that, at long last, New Walk Museum has obtained funding to create a new gallery devoted to the work of Ernest Gimson - another one of Leicester's unsung heroes. He was of course born and brought up in Leicester and achieved international fame, especially for his furniture designs. The city owns many fine examples of his work but they are currently hidden away in the museum storerooms. The only acknowledgement has been a trail leaflet and a website. Our Group has for many years been pressing for the City to show a greater appreciation of his life and work and now, at long last, something is happening.

With this newsletter members will find the booking forms for the events in the second half of the summer. It seems that members have appreciated those that we organised earlier this year, because most of them sold out fairly quickly. May I recommend that to avoid disappointment you book up early for this second batch of events. Once these are over we shall of course resume our monthly series of talks, starting in October.

I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at our events. Remember, if you have any comments or suggestions please let either myself or any Committee member know.

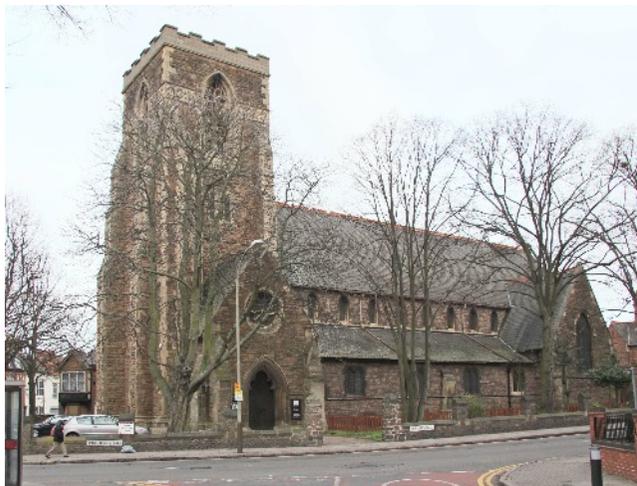
*Jon Goodall  
Leicester Group Chairman*

## Buildings Sub-Committee Report

Economic activity continues to be in the doldrums, with even plans for new student accommodation being subject to an embargo by the City Council. Below are brief notes on developments affecting some of the Victorian buildings in the city.

**All Saints Brewery, Highcross Street** The former brewery buildings have now virtually disappeared. The properties fronting Highcross Street had been the subject of fire damage, and the owners had been instructed by the City Council to restore them. However there has been at least one more fire and the buildings are now beyond repair. The City Mayor (Sir Peter Soulsby) made a site visit together with members of conservation groups and the state of affairs was deplored.

**St Peter's Church, Highfields (GE Street 1872-74)** In February representatives of the society attended a meeting of interested parties to discuss a potential re-ordering of the interior.



*St Peter's, Highfields*

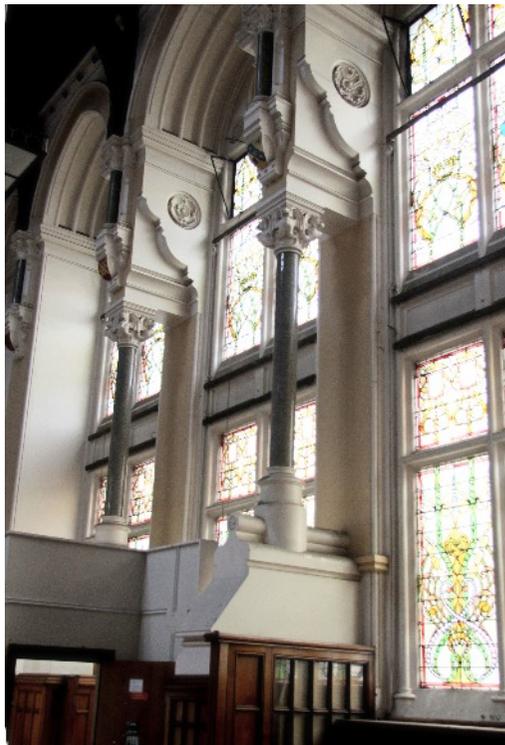
The outline plans do not appear too drastic, and more detailed plans and costings are to be drawn up for further consideration. The deplorable state of the adjoining vicarage was also discussed. Apparently this was sold some years ago, and is no longer under the control of the church. There were plans for conversion into a dental surgery, but these have fallen into abeyance, and the building is deteriorating rapidly.

**St Saviour's (George Gilbert Scott 1875-77)** There has been one serious expression of interest in buying the church and adjacent hall, with a view to converting it into a banqueting/meeting hall. The Church Commissioners have initiated a 'pastoral measure' which would facilitate this, but detailed plans are yet to appear.

**St Barnabas, New Humberstone (Goddard & Paget 1884-86)** Currently out of use. We understand that significant areas of dry rot have now been discovered.

**St George's, Rutland St (William Parsons 1823-27 - rebuilt 1912-13)** As will have been seen by those who attended our recent visit, preparations are in hand for major grant aided work on the roof and guttering to ensure that it becomes wind and weatherproof. (See articles on page 6 and page 8.)

**Highfields Synagogue (Arthur Wakerley 1889)** We understand that this has now been taken off the market, but the nearby hall/community centre is still up for sale.



**HSBC Bank, Granby St (Joseph Goddard 1872-74)** This has now been purchased by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) for conversion into a place of worship together with various community facilities. The Buildings Sub-Committee has been given a guided tour of the complete building and shown details of the plans, which appear eminently suitable. The superb former banking hall is to remain virtually untouched, other than the provision of underfloor heating and relocating the main counter. Other spaces in the building are not of great interest, and ISKCON hope to incorporate a library, reading room, cafe, yoga studio and other facilities around the principal worship space.

*The interior of the former HSBC Banking Hall - built as the Chief Office of the Leicestershire Banking Company*

**Silver Arcade (Amos Hall 1899)** Work continues, albeit slowly in preparation for its re-opening as a multiple retail unit.

**Former NatWest Bank, St Martins (Everard and Pick 1900)** Again work continues on conversion to a mixture of residential, retail and commercial use.

**Former Eastgates Coffee House (Edward Burgess 1885)** Although excellent repairs were carried out on this building, it is disappointing to note that, at the time of writing, the owners are no longer trading there. Thus it has joined the ranks of the many vacant properties in the city centre, which given its prominence, is unfortunate.

As usual may I request that you keep your eyes open for any threats to our built environment. Should you note anything of concern then let us know - don't assume that someone else will already have done so.

*Jon Goodall*

## William Parsons 1797-1857

*A Leicestershire Victorian Alphabet*



Parsons was a leading Leicester architect in the first half of the nineteenth century. He was born in Scraptoft and educated at Billesdon School. In 1809 he was apprenticed to William Firmadge (who was responsible for The Crescent in King Street) and was subsequently employed by Thomas Telford on improvements to the Holyhead Road - an experience which proved useful in his later career.

By 1818 William Parsons was in practice in Leicester and had various pupils/assistants, one of the more well-known being Thomas Brassey who later achieved fame as a major contractor involved in the building of railways.

Aside from his architectural work Parsons became surveyor to a number of turnpike trusts, including the Harborough - Loughborough Trust and the Leicester - Uppingham Trust. In 1823 he became surveyor to the county and was involved in much important work on various roads and bridges throughout Leicestershire.

Most of his architectural commissions were in Leicestershire but he also designed Caythorpe Hall in Lincolnshire and Bury House near Cottingham, Northants. In 1847 he and his then partner John Dain submitted an unsuccessful design for the Army and Navy Club in London. His most well-known surviving buildings in Leicester are the County Gaol in Welford Road (1825-28) with subsequent additions in 1844-46, the County Asylum - now the Fielding Johnson Building at the University (1837) with extensions in 1844 and St George's church in Rutland Street (1823-27). This was a 'Commissioners Church' and was the first Anglican church built in Leicester since the Reformation. It was reputedly the most expensive local church of the nineteenth century costing over £16,000. Its spire was destroyed by lightning in 1846 and Parsons was responsible for the subsequent rebuilding.

Other notable buildings no longer with us are the Union Workhouse (subsequently Hillcrest Hospital) rebuilt by Parsons in 1851 and the Midland Counties Railway Station, Campbell Street (1840) - replaced by the current station in the 1890s. He also designed the first five stations on the Midland Railway's Syston to Peterborough line. His many other works included police stations at Melton Mowbray, Market Harborough and Market Bosworth - this last is now a private house.

He married Elizabeth Berridge in 1820 moving to their final home at 21 St Martin's by 1827. He became an Associate of the Institution of Civil Engineers in 1830 and was appointed a magistrate in 1841. He was also an accomplished amateur artist with three of his drawings being lithographed and published in 1842 in a series entitled "Sketches in Leicestershire".

He died at his house in St Martin's in January 1857 after a long illness and was buried in Scraptoft churchyard. His widow survived him by another 30 years.

*Jon Goodall*

## Recent Leicester Group Activities

### **The Bogus Baronet**

Talk by Malcolm Elliott - 7th February 2012

Malcolm told the story of Sir Roger Tichborne, who was lost at sea in 1854 but who apparently re-appeared 13 years later to try and reclaim his lost inheritance. The saga created huge interest among our Victorian forebears, hence the two Leicester streets that bear his name. Despite his popularity, he was convicted of perjury and spent 14 years in prison. Was he the real Sir Roger or the despicable scoundrel that he was painted in the press? Oh had we but the chance to take a few samples of his DNA!

### **Art and Grog -**

#### **- the making of a Gallery for Art in Liverpool 1874-77**

Talk by Suzanne Macleod - 6th March 2012

The foundation of a gallery for 'modern art' was a considerable achievement for the City of Liverpool, and a source of great prestige. Suzanne Macleod described how the idea had been discussed for several years, but had foundered on the reefs of political in-fighting among the aldermen. The Liberal party were in favour of promoting the arts, but they were also supporters of the temperance movement. The Tory party saw an opportunity to present themselves as practical, as opposed to esoteric, favouring commerce and industry over the arts, and resisted attempts to spend public money on such a project.

Among the wealthy industrialists who represented the Tory faction were a number of prominent brewers, chief amongst them Andrew Barclay Walker (1824 – 1893). When Walker offered to present £20,000 towards the cost of a gallery to commemorate his term as mayor, the Gallery project was taken out of the hands of the Liberals and run as a private project. Walker was not noted as a patron or collector of art. He did, however, erect public houses of high architectural standards and gave generously to many good causes. The Liberals saw his philanthropy as propaganda and disapproved of the source of the wealth he was able to distribute so freely. The establishment of the gallery was condemned in a series of vitriolic pamphlets and the elaborate opening ceremony was picketed and boycotted by some and used as an opportunity to distribute a libellous cartoon by the temperance reformers

### **Shakespeare - the authorship question: a Victorian 'who done it'**

Talk by Malcolm Elliott - 17th April 2012

The earliest known scholar to question whether the plays of Shakespeare were in fact written by the glover's son from Stratford did so in 1785. However it was another 50 years before the Shakespeare authorship question really took hold, and then for the rest of the century conflicting theories of authorship followed one another in quick succession. The rival supporters of Oxford, Bacon, Marlowe,

Raleigh, Donne, Cecil, Sidney and even Queen Elizabeth could only agree on one thing, and that is that whoever did write the plays, Shakespeare certainly didn't.

Malcolm Elliott's entertaining talk ranged widely over the subject. By means of parlour games with the audience he managed to demonstrate that Shakespeare's language was often remarkably similar to that of his contemporaries. He showed us cypher wheels and acrostics that sought to prove the existence of hidden messages and signatures in Shakespeare's works, whilst failing to explain how language forced into such a straitjacket could be so fresh and so vital that literally thousands of quotations have remained in common use to this day.

The controversy rages on, though perhaps not with as much fire as once it did. The believers believe, the disbelievers disbelieve. The audience were entertained by Malcolm's theories, but the tone of the final questions suggested that few were convinced by them.

## **Visit to St George's Church, Rutland Street**

24th April 2012

St George's was the first Anglican Church to be built in Leicester since the Reformation. It was designed by William Parsons, funded by the Church Building Commissioners and completed in 1827 (though major alterations followed). St George's ceased to be used for Anglican worship in the early 1970s and is now a Serbian Orthodox Church. It stands massive and mysterious - and a little forlorn, perhaps - on the edge of the city centre.

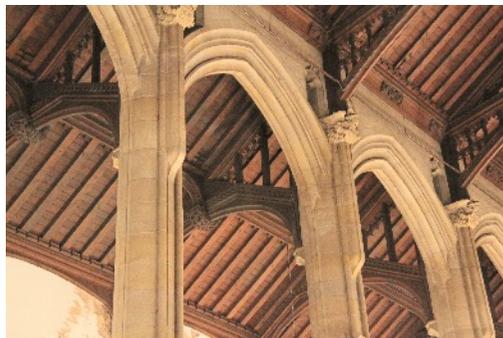
Our visit confirmed its size. Built to seat 2,000 people, it originally had galleries on three sides of the nave and retains ample space for them. The current congregation is fighting bravely to maintain the building and now has the offer of a Heritage Lottery grant to, at least, make it weatherproof.

Some of the mystery dispelled was re-awakened by the presence of a colourful iconostasis (or icon screen) which almost fills the chancel arch, hiding the sanctuary beyond. Trees in the churchyard add to the air of mystery, especially at dusk, but there are plans to make the area less forbidding. The City Mayor, Sir Peter

Soulsby, joining us for the evening, was able to share his ideas for increasing public access.

We were grateful to our Chairman for organising the visit and to members of the congregation for their welcome and special refreshments.

*Paul Griffiths*



*St George's Church  
part of the north aisle arcade and roof*

## Mailing List Announcement

This Newsletter is sent out three times a year to all current members of the Victorian Society living in Leicestershire, and to non-members who have paid a small subscription to join our local mailing list. It is also sent out to representatives of other organisations who may be interested in our activities or who may be able to promote them in some way. The recent massive increase in postal prices, and the increased cost of producing the new-style Newsletter have prompted us to look again at our distribution strategy.

All members of the society are entitled to receive our Newsletter, but a number have now opted to receive it by e-mail as a PDF document; this obviously represents a considerable saving for the Leicester Group as distribution by this method is effectively free.

Subscriptions to our mailing list are nominally to cover the costs of printing and postage, so we can no longer justify charging local subscribers if they opt to receive our information by e-mail. However, the difference between these costs and the subscription is a valuable contribution to our funds, and we hope that local subscribers may continue to support us by way of a donation.

From time to time events may be organised at short notice, or we may be invited to join activities promoted by other societies. If we have your e-mail address we can contact you between Newsletters in these circumstances. If you have not already registered your e-mail address with the Membership Secretary, please contact Peter Ellis. You will, of course, continue to receive hard copies of this Newsletter unless you specifically request otherwise.

If you are not a member of the Victorian Society or a subscriber to our mailing list and this Newsletter is of no interest to you we would appreciate notification that you no longer wish to be on our distribution list. Please contact the Membership Secretary, Peter Ellis, either by e-mail at [ellisdesign@talktalk.net](mailto:ellisdesign@talktalk.net), or on 01455 291694.

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## **Forthcoming Events - Summer/Autumn 2012**

### **Summer Visits**

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 Mrs Marion Hare (see previous page).

#### **Previously advertised:**

#### **Tuesday 12th June - additional date announced**

##### **Visit to the stained glass workshop of Norman & Underwood, Leicester**

This visit is now fully booked, and an **additional** visit has been arranged for 18th September. There are just a few places left for this visit - please contact Marion Hare as soon as possible on 0116 273 9710.

#### **Tuesday 19th June**

##### **Guided walk around Leicester's Cultural Quarter - Fully Booked**

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#### **Tuesday 17th July**

##### **Evening walk around the Belgrave area, led by Richard Gill**

Before the development of Stoneygate, Belgrave was amongst the most desirable areas of Leicester. There are still a number of attractive and substantial properties in the suburb along with some quiet and surprisingly unspoilt corners.

Cost £5.00

Meet 7.00 pm at corner of Windsor Avenue and Loughborough Road  
(Closing date for bookings - Friday 29th June)

#### **Tuesday 14th August**

##### **Evening visit to Huncote & Narborough, led by Richard Gill**

All Saints, Narborough, (listed Grade II) has origins which may date to pre-Norman times but is predominantly Perpendicular in style. Major alterations, including a new chancel in Early English style, were carried out in 1883 by F Bacon of Newbury. The east window, of 1883, is by Heaton, Butler & Bayne. St James the Great, Huncote, was designed by Bacon in 1898. Only the chancel and two bays of the nave were completed. The 'Gothick' organ case came from an earlier church.

Cost £5.00

Meet 7.00 pm at All Saints Narborough  
(Closing date for bookings - Friday 13th July)

## Tuesday 4th September

### Afternoon visit to Beaumanor Hall, Woodhouse Eaves

This elaborate Jacobethan mansion was built in 1845-7 for Robert Herrick, whose family had acquired enormous wealth from coal mining on the lands they had owned since the 1550s. It was designed by the London architect, William Railton (1801-1877). Mainly famous as winner of the competition to design a monument to Lord Nelson in Trafalgar Square (1839), Railton seems to have established a connection with Charnwood, designing churches at Woodhouse Eaves and Copt Oak (both to the same design) as well as work at Grace Dieu and Mount St Bernard nearby.



*Beaumanor Hall*

The imposing ground floor rooms surround a spectacular central staircase with elaborate strapwork ceiling and a vast stained glass window incorporating the arms of every family with whom the Herricks had any connection. The house is now owned by the County Council, and used for meetings and conferences as well as a variety of educational purposes

Cost - £12.50 per person, to include afternoon tea

Arrive at 2.30 pm, guided tour of Hall and gardens starting at 2.45 pm, followed by afternoon tea at 4.00 pm

Participants should use their own transport for this visit, but we will attempt to arrange lifts for any members who need them

(Closing date for bookings - Friday 17th August - Numbers limited)

#### BOOKING CONDITIONS

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.

## Autumn 2012 Lecture Series

**Tuesday 2nd October 2012**

**A Much Sought After Location - The Houses of Leicester's West End**

*Brian Johnson*

Before the industrial expansion, the Westcotes and West End area of Leicester was very rural with a number of very desirable large houses occupying prime positions. Solicitors and industrialists had elegant homes with views across Leicester and the Soar Valley. Many of these houses disappeared to make way for streets of terraced houses, particularly along the new route of the Hinckley Road, but some are still in existence, if you know where to look.

**Tuesday 6th November 2012**

The Brian Allison Memorial Lecture

**Mr Straw's House, Worksoop**

*Trevor Parr*

Step back in time to the 1920s and find out how a grocer's family lived in the market town of Worksoop. This ordinary semi-detached house, with original interior decorations from 1923, was the home of the Straw family. For 60 years the family threw little away and chose to live without many of the modern comforts we take for granted.

**Tuesday 4th December 2012**

**Christmas Meeting**

**Drawn Towards the Heathen – The Victorian Missionaries Abroad**

*Cynthia Brown*

What sort of people became missionaries, and what were the perils and rewards of missionary life? Cynthia Brown will discuss these questions and attempt to assess how successful they were and the part played by missionary wives.

All lectures take place, unless otherwise stated, in the Small Hall (Room 3) of The Leicester Adult Education College, Wellington Street, Leicester at 7.30 pm. 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 per person** towards the costs of room hire and other expenses.

Late News:

**St Andrew's Church, Jarrom Street (George Gilbert Scott - 1862)**

The church will be holding an open afternoon on Saturday 23rd June between 2.00 and 4.30 pm

to commemorate the 150th anniversary of its dedication.

Copies of a new history of St Andrew's by Paul Griffiths will be on sale