

THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY LEICESTER GROUP NEWSLETTER

The national charity campaigning for the
Victorian and Edwardian historic environment

AUTUMN 2011



East Gates Coffee House listed ...

East Gates Coffee House listed ...

... and restored!



Detail of the gable end facing East Gates, before and after the recent restoration

After a long campaign largely conducted by Leicester Group Hon President Malcolm Elliott, the former East Gates (or Eastgates) Coffee House near the Clock Tower in Leicester city centre has been listed Grade II by English Heritage. At the same time, the present owners, JD Sports, have carried out extensive restoration and repair to the exterior of this building which had been deteriorating badly before the recent work was carried out.

Extracts from the English Heritage report supporting the listing:

Eastgates Coffee House, of 1885 and by Edward Burgess, was built to replicate elements of George and Peto's 1882 Ossington Coffee Tavern in Newark, Nottinghamshire (listed Grade II*) which is now considered to represent the high-water mark in Temperance architecture. Eastgates shares architectural characteristics with the Ossington Coffee Tavern, particularly in the design of the windows and gables with applied, close-stud, timber decoration. Eastgates, although built on a smaller scale, is more elaborately embellished with finely executed, carved and moulded decoration, which is visually assertive and places great emphasis on display. The building of Eastgates Coffee House in 1885 made full use of the prominent corner location at the heart of the arterial roads leading to and from

central Leicester. The central position is acknowledged by the adjacent Clock Tower, designed by Joseph Goddard in 1868 (listed Grade II), which was originally intended to provide a traffic-flow improvement to this busy junction.

Edward Burgess, who was the brother of Alfred Howard Burgess, the Leicester Coffee and Cocoa House Company's solicitor, designed six of the Leicester coffee houses. Burgess's work was widespread, but most evident in Leicestershire, and includes a total of 12 listed buildings, many of which make a significant contribution to the Victorian townscape of Leicester itself. Examples of his work in Leicester include the former Victoria Coffee House, the former High Cross Coffee House, the Reference Library, and Charles Keene College of Further Education, all of which are listed at Grade II. Eastgates Coffee House is an ambitious building with elaborate and well executed decorative detail to both main external elevations. The survival of the carefully moulded and carved decoration is uncommon, particularly in a commercial building, and despite alteration to the shop windows on the ground floor, helps to retain the overall ambience of the building as originally intended, and compensates for the level of alteration internally.

Malcolm Elliott comments:

Three cheers for the restoration of the Eastgates Coffee House! The fascia on the top of this building looked so precarious that many of us feared it would be past repair. So congratulations to Leicester Victorian Society for drawing attention to the plight of the coffee house, and to English Heritage for undertaking the detailed survey needed to persuade the Department of the Environment to add it to the official list. And, of course, congratulations to the owners, JD Sports, for having carried out the necessary work. No longer a cause for concern, detracting from the townscape in the centre of the city, we can all now admire and appreciate this splendid Grade II listed building.

It is interesting to recall that JD.Sports formerly occupied another of the coffee houses designed by Edward Burgess, namely, the Victoria Coffee House on Granby Street, which is now a Greek restaurant. These two premises were the most imposing of the dozen establishments of the Leicester Coffee and Cocoa House Company and attracted a more wealthy clientele. Most of the other coffee houses catered for working men and women who wanted a simple meal without being obliged to drink alcohol. For women, there was always a ladies room, and customers were able to enjoy a game of billiards free of charge. Indeed, I was told that some folk brought their own sandwiches, used the salt and pepper, helped themselves to a glass of water and enjoyed a game without paying anything at all. The company was the brainchild of mid-Victorian temperance workers, like Thomas Cook. It provided a popular and profitable service for over 40 years, till just after the Great War.

*Cover photograph - Bedford Lemere, 1885
Reproduced by permission of English Heritage / NMR*

Chairman's Notes

Welcome to the autumn edition of our newsletter, the second edition in the new format. There are just a few items that I should like to make you aware of. Firstly I am pleased to announce that Dr Melissa Thompson has volunteered to join our committee. She is currently working for English Heritage in their Eastern Territory and as such her expertise is sure to be most useful. I am sure that you will all give her a warm welcome.

Secondly, the Mayor of Leicester (Sir Peter Soulsby) has set up a Heritage Partnership with representatives from the amenity groups, universities and other interested parties. Its broad aim is to encourage and promote a wider appreciation of Leicester's heritage. At the time of writing only the inaugural meeting has been held and I am pleased to say that I am the Society's representative.

As mentioned in the last newsletter, Dr Joan Skinner's archives are now in the safe hands of the University of Leicester. On 17 September a day school was organised by the University Library to record this handover officially and also to give an overview of the other data held regarding the history of Leicester. Members may be interested to know that they can join the library free of charge, to access this information (although borrowing will incur a charge).

Finally, should we not see you at any of our meetings, may I, on behalf of the committee, wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Jon Goodall

Building Sub-Committee Report

Economic activity remains at a low level and consequently significant developments (other than for even more student accommodation) are fairly sparse.

On a general note, you may be unaware that from earlier this year, there has been a change in planning law regarding the demolition of buildings. A court of appeal judgement on 25 March means that demolition of all types of building, now comes within planning control and application to local planning authorities is needed for demolition consent. This is in addition to any other consent required for demolition, eg listed buildings and conservation areas.

With regard to specific buildings I set out below some brief notes:

Former Eastgates Coffee House (Edward Burgess 1885) This has now been listed by English Heritage following an application by our President (Malcolm Elliott). It is pleasing to see that it has now been externally refurbished. (see cover photo and details on pages 2-3)

Silver Arcade (Amos Hall 1899) and Natwest Bank, St Martins (Everard and Pick 1900) Work continues on the redevelopment of these two buildings as previously noted.



Former HSBC Bank, Bishop Street

HSBC Bank, Granby Street / Bishop Street (Joseph Goddard 1872)

This has recently appeared on an English Heritage list of buildings at risk, largely as I understand it, because of the length of time it has stayed empty. However it is understood that the Hare Krishna movement in Leicester are preparing to submit plans for conversion into a temple.

We await further details.

Leicester Station (C Trubshaw 1892) Planning permission has recently been granted for reconfiguration of the forecourt of the station. This will include introduction of some retail units and consequent reduction of the area available for taxis and dropping off or picking up passengers. One cannot help feeling that this is a case of trying to squeeze a “quart into a pint pot”.

Great Central Carriage Shed, Upperton Road (1898) This attractive single storey building is one of the last remaining buildings relating to the Great Central Railway within the city. It is now threatened with demolition by the owners of the adjacent tower block in order to build yet more student accommodation! We and other conservation groups together with the local residents’ association are completely opposed to this.

Synagogue, Highfield Street (1898) It has recently been announced that this is to be put up for sale due to the dwindling congregation in the immediate area. Unlike the Church of England they have no objection to its use by members of another faith. However it is a listed building so one wonders how adaptations to the splendid fixtures and fittings might be carried out.

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

Jon Goodall



Sir Jonathan North 1855-1939

All cities have their great men and women and Leicester is no exception. Some become household names, others remain virtually unknown beyond the borders of their county but are remarkable nonetheless, and one of Leicester's most remarkable men was Sir Jonathan North. It could be said that if you wanted to see a memorial to Sir Jonathan "look around you" as there are many visual reminders of this modest but inspiring figure in our city today.

Jonathan North, the son of a farmer, was born in Rothley, Leicestershire in 1855. His father had an interest in the boot and shoe trade which was then emerging as one of Leicester's major industries. Young Jonathan took up that interest with spectacular results that led to him ending his working life as the chairman and managing director of one of the most successful companies in Leicester.

As a young man Jonathan North learnt all aspects of the boot and shoe trade. He gained a reputation for hard work and perseverance that caught the eye of James Leavesley, who had a factory in Erskine Street. The two men formed a business partnership and Leavesley and North soon became one of the most successful boot and shoe manufacturers in Leicester.

This success did not go unnoticed by other local businessmen, not least Sir Edward Wood, then chairman and managing director of Freeman, Hardy and Willis, who chose North as his successor. The company had recently moved from manufacturing to retail and by the time of North's succession, had a chain of 450 shops throughout the country.

Despite this great success in his chosen career, Jonathan North is better remembered today for his work as a local politician and philanthropist. His first position in public life was as a member of the old Belgrave School Board. Soon after this he became a member of the Leicester Board of Guardians and was twice elected its chairman. He was elected as a councillor in 1897 and ten years later he became a magistrate. In 1909 he was made an alderman.

Two things stand out in North's political career: his lifelong interest in education and his wartime leadership. He was a member of the town's new education committee from its inception in 1903. Two years later he was elected its chairman, a post he held with outstanding success for thirty-two years gaining for it a national reputation for progressive thinking and decisive action at a time when important developments were taking place in education.

Jonathan North had been offered the mayoralty of Leicester more than once, but had always declined. However, three months into the First World War, "it was to Jonathan North that the council turned to for guidance", and he was offered the post

again. This time he “accepted the honour without hesitation”. He was re-elected three times and served as mayor throughout the duration of the war. For his outstanding service, he was knighted by King George V in the De Montfort Hall on June 10th 1919 and he was also made an Honorary Freeman of Leicester – which in the same year, was once more given the status of a city. Sir Jonathan felt that Leicester should have a memorial worthy of those local lads who had lost their lives in the war and through his vision and tenacity – not to mention personal generosity, the city was able to commission Sir Edwin Lutyens to design one of the finest war memorials in the country which now stands in Victoria Park. Six years after the memorial was unveiled two sets of beautiful wrought iron gates and the pavilions at the London Road entrance to the park were presented to the city as a memorial to Lady North who had died in 1930.

Sir Jonathan also wanted to give practical help to those who had been wounded in the war. He felt they deserved dignity and respect for their sacrifice and to this end he was the driving force (and once again, a major contributor) to the North Memorial Homes in Stoughton Road, Oadby. This idyllic small estate for ex-servicemen survives to this day. North was also responsible for saving the YMCA building on Granby Street. In 1918, the creditors had called in the mortgage and the association was given notice, but through North’s swift action in setting up an appeal, the building (still in use by the YMCA today) was secured.

With his lifelong interest in education it is not surprising that North was chairman of Leicester’s University College and a driving force behind its creation, giving a handsome donation towards the project, which was intended as a “living” memorial to those who died in the 1914-18 war. He was also a vital link between the college and the city council. Today Leicester University is one of the finest in the country. His name is permanently linked to education through the Sir Jonathan North School in Knighton Lane East.

On his 70th birthday the staff and employees of Freeman, Hardy and Willis showed their appreciation and affection for their distinguished chairman by presenting him with a cheque for several thousand pounds. Instead of putting this to personal use, North placed the whole amount on trust for the “higher education of those showing ability and fitness to benefit thereby”. Also on his 70th birthday Sir Jonathan gave £1,000 to the Leicester Royal Infirmary. His generosity continued into old age: in 1929 he gave £1,000 to the newly consecrated Leicester Cathedral and £1,000 to the building fund for the new church hall at his parish church, St. Peter’s Oadby.

Sir Jonathan lived for many years at “Brackendale”, 213 London Road, Leicester, prior to moving to Glebe Mount in Oadby, where he died in 1939 aged eighty-four. He was described in 1989 as “one of the most distinguished, if not THE most distinguished of all Leicester citizens during the 20th century”, and there’s no doubt that Leicester would have been a great deal poorer had he not given so much of his time and wealth to the city he loved.

Reports of Recent Leicester Group Activities

Sheffield Visit — 31st May 2011



Sheffield Town Hall

Arriving in true Victorian fashion at Sheffield Midland Station, we were whisked up to the city centre in a tram (albeit a modern one). Here, within a few hundred yards, we were able to look inside five major nineteenth century buildings, all still serving Sheffield as originally intended.

First stop was the Town Hall, a massive civic palace standing proudly at the top of the hill. It was designed by E W Mountford and opened by Queen Victoria, without leaving her carriage, in 1897.

Next came the Lyceum Theatre, more sensuous and intimate in style, but still capable of seating over 1,000 people. The architect was WGR Sprague, who had worked with Frank Matcham, before designing many of London's finest theatres, including the Aldwych, Ambassadors and St Martin's (home of 'The Mousetrap'). Also opened in 1897, it was rescued

from life as a bingo hall and refurbished 20 years ago. It is now in fine fettle and much improved from the days when our Treasurer could have been found operating the lights.

From stage to altar, we moved on to St Marie's Roman Catholic Cathedral, by Weightman and Hadfield (1847-50) and reputed to be the finest Gothic Revival church in the city. The Lady Chapel, high up on the south side of the sanctuary, was especially memorable.

Back in classical style - "what Sheffield really liked", according to our guides - we walked across to Upper Chapel, a Unitarian Church still recognisable from its last major "re-build" in the 1840s. Finally, we were treated to a guided tour of the Cutlers Hall, home of the Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire. The present hall, again solid and classical, was built in 1831-32 but was greatly extended on two occasions before 1890. Ever since, it has been a venue for large formal events and currently offers a choice of at least five grand banqueting halls! It also boasts a silver



Decoration in the Sheffield Lyceum Theatre

collection which includes one piece from every year since the Sheffield Assay Office was established in 1773.

Throughout our time in Sheffield, we greatly appreciated the care and knowledge of our guides, Judy and Graham Hague from the South Yorkshire Group. Our own Peter Ellis' enthusiasm and careful preparation was also evident in the "seamless"

arrangements for the day. Even the sun shone for us.

Paul Griffiths

Visit to South Wigston – 21st June 2011

This most informative visit shed a new light on this familiar, yet underrated, suburb of Leicester. Members of the local Civic Society and church members were on hand to guide us around the splendid church of St Thomas and two equally impressive non-conformist chapels. We were led on a guided walk where much of the economic and social history of the area was explained, including the contribution of Orville Wright to its development and the fact that South Wigston once possessed the longest bar in England!. Returning to the church we enjoyed refreshments and the chance to view the many excellent publications written by local historians.

Marion Hare

Aylestone Park Walk – 26th July 2011

On this evening a group of about 20 members had another excellent guided walk led by Richard Gill. This focused on the streets around the current library (and its adjacent former police station) on Richmond Road. We were also given a tour of the ecumenical Church of the Nativity on Cavendish Road. Built for the Primitive Methodists, it was a surprise to see six big candles on an altar table, until it was explained that the church had merged with the nearby Anglican St James' in 1988.

Jon Goodall

Three North West Leicestershire Churches – 27th August 2011

As our coach climbed out of Leicester, Richard Gill (guide for the day), described how geology has given north west Leicestershire its distinctive history and appearance. At Ellistown, a village created by coal mining, we visited St Christopher's church. This is a compact structure of 1896 in local orange brick, its simplicity beautifully expressed in the architecture of Goddard, Paget and Goddard. The chancel, dark and mysterious, surprised us with furnishings in sandalwood.

At Hugglescote, in contrast, our next church was always intended to be a show-piece. St John's was designed by JB Everard between 1878 and 1888 and is set on a hill top surveying the countryside for miles around. In dark Bardon Hill stone, each part of the building is separately articulated and builds up to a massive central tower. Inside, the feeling of great height and space is enhanced at the east end by a delicate wooden reredos and a splendid window in blues and greens.

The final church, St Peter's at Bardon, is smaller and more whimsical. Another design by J B Everard (1899), it was built as a memorial to members of the Everard family, owners of the nearby quarry. There are grand features – a saddleback tower with flèche, an altar placed seven steps above the nave and a narthex – but, collecting them together in a small church hasn't been completely successful.

The day was full of surprises. We were grateful to Richard for his fascinating and lively commentary and to Grahame Lees for making all the arrangements.

Paul Griffiths

Ada Countess of Lovelace and Charles Babbage: C19 Computer Pioneers

David Herbert – September 6th 2011

Augusta Ada Byron (1815-1852) was the daughter of Lord Byron, but her parents separated when she was a few months old, and she had no further contact with the poet, being brought up by her mother at Kirkby Mallory Hall in Leicestershire. After her marriage she became Ada Countess of Lovelace, and it is by this name that she is generally known.



Ada, Countess of Lovelace

She was taught mathematics from an early age, and developed a lasting interest in the subject along with other scientific matters of the day. She met and corresponded with eminent scientists, in particular Charles Babbage, and took a keen interest in his 'Difference Engine' and 'Analytical Engine', two early attempts to build a calculating machine. Babbage was impressed by her intellect and encouraged her to make a translation of a treatise on the 'Analytical Engine' written (in French) by an Italian, Luigi Menabrea, to which she added copious notes of

her own, including what is frequently regarded as the first computer program.

Ada died in 1852 shortly before her 37th birthday. David Herbert took us through her life story and described the interaction with Babbage, which profoundly influenced the development of his machines, and her lasting legacy to the science of computing.

Jon Goodall

History of St Andrew's Church - request for information

St Andrew's on Jarrom Street is the only one of George Gilbert Scott's four Leicester churches which survives as a 'working' church. It will be 150 years old in 2012 and, as part of the celebrations, Paul Griffiths is writing a short history. He would like to hear from anyone with memories to share. Paul can be contacted on 0116 2702121.

Other dates for your Diary

(Our own forthcoming activities are listed on the back of this Newsletter, but, space permitting, we are happy to publicise other events and activities which may be of interest to Victorian Society members)

Leicestershire Industrial History Society

Secretary: David Lyne – 0116 2919706 – www.lihs.org.uk

Meetings: 7.30pm - at Community Hall, St Mary's Avenue off Braunstone Lane.

15th November – Re-roofing prestigious buildings : John Castleman from Norman and Underwood

20th December – Christmas Social – members' contributions

Vaughan Archaeological and Historical Society

Secretary: Gerry Stacey – 01455 636686

Meetings: 6.15pm - at Vaughan College

25th November – Secret listeners of Beaumanor Park – Mike Coleman

13th January – Lost houses of Stoneygate – Neil Crutchley

(Another opportunity to hear this excellent illustrated talk given to the Victorian Society at our March meeting.)

The Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society

The Guildhall, Leicester, LE1 5FQ – www.le.ac/lahs

Meetings: 7.30pm at New Walk Museum

8th December - The Evolution and Secularisation of the Funeral in Leicester 1830-2011 - Eleanor Davidson

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

Published by the Leicester Group: For further details please contact
Chairman: Jon Goodall - 0116 239 3744

75 Kings Drive, Leicester Forest East, Leicester LE3 3JE

Membership enquiries: Peter Ellis - 01455 291 694

Events Bookings: Mrs Marion Hare - 0116 273 9710

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

Lecture Programme – Winter 2011-12

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
A donation of £2 is requested to cover costs

Wednesday 9th November 2011

Professor Brian Allison Memorial Lecture

The Mysteries of Northanger Abbey:

Jane Austen and Victorian Gothic Architecture

Richard Gill

7.30 pm, Hansom Hall, Leicester Adult Education College, Wellington Street

please note change of date and venue

Tuesday 6th December 2011 (Christmas Event)

The Splendours of Victorian London

Derek Seaton

Tuesday 10th January 2012

Leicester's Musical Architecture Past and Present

Neil Crutchley

Tuesday 7th February 2012

AGM – followed by

The Bogus Baronet

Malcolm Elliott

Tuesday 6th March 2012

Art and Grog - the making of a Gallery for Art in Liverpool 1874-77

Suzanne Macleod

Tuesday 17th April 2012

**Shakespeare - the authorship question: a Victorian 'who done it' ...
... still unsolved**

Malcolm Elliott

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.