



RIPON CIVIC SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2012

INTO THE FUTURE: A 10-point plan for our Society

The Civic Society has come up with a plan for how it – and Ripon – should face the future. Some of these points are already being addressed; others require considerable work. This is a rolling programme, so it's not set in stone – we fully expect new ideas to be incorporated and, we hope, some of the current points to disappear as they are achieved.

• *Contribute to preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan for Ripon.*

We shall take part with Ripon City Council (RCC), Harrogate Borough Council (HBC), North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC) and Greater Ripon Improvement Partnership (GRIP) using RCS skills and networks to identify and promote ideas and change.

• *Work with owners and HBC to secure a solution for all Ripon's 'Disgraces'.*

We shall use a range of direct measures, including encouraging and supporting use of HBC's statutory powers.

• *Promote better use of the Town Hall for visitors, residents and the heritage and civic affairs of the city.*

We shall publish a manifesto with interested partners.

• *Promote wider and continuous use of the Market Square.*

We shall work with partners to implement the proposals already identified, for example in the Portas Bid.

• *Seek appropriate additional/alternative car parking.*

We shall suggest options for additional parking and work with GRIP. We shall consider hold an ideas competition.

• *Encourage progress on developing the Cathedral Precinct (especially closure of Minster Road).*

We shall suggest options and approaches and support the Cathedral authority and partners as appropriate.

- *Continue working with HBC and others in planting of new and replacement Street Trees.* We shall try to have planted a total of 60 trees for the Diamond Jubilee.
 - *Work with NYCC to establish new public rights of way and encourage the creation of new footpaths including new footpath links from the Market Square to shops west of the Market Square.* We shall provide evidence of existing usage.
 - *Seek a firm commitment from HBC and NYCC to the Park Street – Low Skellgate link road.* We shall prepare a submission and seek a project champion.
 - *Review the Society's events, visits and publications, especially seeking attraction of new members from young people and new Ripon residents.* We shall look at RCS's contribution to Civic Day, including the possibility of introducing an annual exhibition, an annual writing competition for young people. We shall revive Ripon walking tours and run a campaign to refresh general membership. C.H.
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PORTAS: 0
PLAN: 10,000

Despite our optimism, the Government and Mary Portas decided not to send any 'Portas Funding' Ripon's way. This was probably inevitable, as, it transpired, we didn't meet the criterion of 40% empty shops – a hurdle that was never spelled out.

Nevertheless, it was a worthwhile exercise, for by bringing together people and ideas, the bidding process produced a rational and persuasive programme of works to encourage the development of the city, especially through its tourism.

That programme can now feed into the Neighbourhood Plan, on which work is starting – we were, of course, successful in getting £10,000 as a 'Forerunner' project to develop our Plan. There is much work to do – and a local referendum to get the finished plan to official status, eventually – but we are seeing progress through cooperation, which for Ripon is the only way we are likely to see it!

PLANNING MATTERS We keep a close eye on planning applications in the city of Ripon, and a watch on those in other areas around the city, too. Generally, the applications are small scale, and when possible we support them. Where plans conflict with

heritage or environmental protection, however, we make our views known.



The Maltings interior

Over the last few months we have opposed solar panels facing the street on buildings in the conservation area, large illuminated signs both inside and outside the conservation area, and the proposal to place camping pods on a gypsum-plagued field off Little Studley Road. We also objected to the demolition of the Maltings at Ure Bank Top – as did HBC’s conservation officers, the Ancient Monuments Society and others. Fortunately, the application was turned down. We now hope to work with others to get a design brief drawn up for imaginative use of the Maltings.

We are currently watching for proposals for the site of the former Cathedral Choir School, which closed in July. We believe that any development should take place only on the footprint of the existing building, and that the rest of the site should be protected. As it is not currently zoned for housing, any resolution could take a considerable time.



YHACS AT CLEETHORPES

Weather warnings of yet more downpours and floods didn’t bode well. In July we drove south-east into the rain and a very soggy York. The river pageant, part of the celebrations to mark the 800th anniversary of the city’s Royal Charter, had already been cancelled. In East Yorkshire low cloud hung in a thick mist across the Wolds; the unrelenting rain fell on saturated land and fed into watercourses that seeped across the roads.

With our business in Holderness done, late in the afternoon we crossed the Humber Bridge and drove towards brighter skies. In the evening Cleethorpes was bathed in sunshine and at the Beach Restaurant our hosts, Grimsby



and Cleethorpes Civic Society, welcomed delegates from Wakefield, Huddersfield, Scarborough and Ripon – members of Yorkshire and Humber Association of Civic Societies (YHACS). As we tucked into our Grimsby haddock, we caught up with each other's news, while a backdrop of tankers, North Sea ferries and other craft plied their way through the Humber estuary. A microlight buzzed past a few times and then came down with a bump on the beach by our guest house. Police sealed off the wreckage.

Next morning – warm and sunny – we were treated to a tour of Cleethorpes. It's pleasant enough, with a long, wide sandy beach, a good promenade, a truncated pier (because in 1940 it was feared that its original length would be too inviting for Hitler's troops) a quaint railway station and some interesting 1930s art deco buildings. The Memorial Hall, though, the venue of our afternoon meeting, is remarkably dull.



Veteran Labour MP Austin Mitchell, erstwhile New Zealand university academic then Yorkshire TV presenter, who has represented Great Grimsby for 35 years, spoke to the rather sparse audience of YHACS members. (Cleethorpes, it seems, is too far-flung for some people to venture.) It was a ragged and rambling rant. He railed against the monstrous size, influence and power of London and how it saps the lifeblood out of all the regions. 'Bring the British Parliament to Cleethorpes,' he cried.

His most controversial assertion, however, was that Grimsby's Ice Factory should be saved from demolition only if a sustainable use can be found for it first. Ripon Civic Society's Chairman profoundly disagrees with this utilitarian view – but a quick getaway for important personal business necessitated him avoiding a lengthy argument with the wayward Parliamentarian. The Ice Factory, listed Grade II*, is on English Heritage's 'At Risk' register. It's a relic of Grimsby's fishing heyday and contains machinery that is fixed within the large and unlovely building. Both building and machinery are part of the port's history and are of huge significance – probably unique in Europe: facts that Associated British Ports chooses to ignore.

The Great Grimsby Ice Factory Trust has asked York conservation architects Purcell Miller Tritton to assess the building. Its location and the presence of machinery puts it

at a disadvantage compared to Salt's Mill or Dean Clough Mills in West Yorkshire: Grimsby is not on most tourists' routes; it lacks a large population, and doesn't yet have a financial saviour or a well-known creative arts scene. But it can – and should – be argued that the building is intrinsically worth saving and that sustainable uses may be found in the future.

With those concerns very much in mind we made a quick exit when all the business of the meeting was done, to attend to more of our own in deepest Lincolnshire.

S.W.

The unassuming village of Escomb straggles down a hillside near Bishop Auckland. At the foot of the hill, just above the River Wear that's mostly screened by trees, is a semi-circle of stark modern white-rendered houses. They contrast sharply with the little stone Saxon church that is the centre-piece.

VISITS 2012

*Romans & Saxons, Prince
Bishops & Millionaires:
Escomb and Auckland
Castle, 16 April*



This Grade 1-listed church, with its circular graveyard, has stood there for more than 1,300 years. It incorporates stones used by the Romans at nearby Binchester Fort; in the north wall is a stone from the sixth legion, placed upside down. The walls are lofty and the nave long and narrow, with a square chancel through an imposing arch; here a slab of Frosterley marble serves as a grave cover. Martin Roberts, a former English Heritage expert, explained the building to us; inside there are lots of information boards and leaflets.



One of only three complete Anglo-Saxon churches remaining in England, it became roofless and near-derelict in the mid-1800s, when a new church was built. The Saxon church was later restored, the new one was eventually demolished and today the original is in regular use – it's certainly much loved by the locals and is often open to visitors. Across the road, the Saxon Inn gave us coffee and biscuits and, later, a leisurely lunch.

We arrived early in the afternoon at Auckland Castle and watched with interest as our guides struggled to unlock the building. At the same time a kindly, bespectacled gentleman strode out of a wing of the castle and greeted us warmly. 'I'm Jonathan Ruffer', he said. 'Welcome to Auckland Castle.' Mr Ruffer is the nicest sort of millionaire investment banker; seeing the crisis engineered by the Church Commissioners, he has been eager to part with his



money and put it into creating a visitor and study centre at the castle for Christianity and other religions; he recently established the Auckland Castle Trust which has this July bought the building (the historic seat of the Prince Bishops of Durham) and its remarkable Zurbaran paintings from the Commissioners. He has also moved in there to live: the current Bishop lives elsewhere. The castle and the paintings having been saved from a terrible fate; Jonathan Ruffer sees them as a catalyst in the formation of a saintly tourist route in the north-east that can incorporate Durham Cathedral, Hexham Abbey, Holy Island and Bede's World at Jarrow. This should be a boost for what is quite a deprived area – and Ruffer now has the support of Prince Charles.

We split into two groups for a tour of the castle. Those of us who got the diminutive lady guide with the resounding voice who knew everything did rather better than the other group, whose guide eventually abandoned them. Both the paintings and the chapel really are special. Our visit in April was one of the last before the redevelopment of the castle; already there is a new programme of public and private events in place. It will be good to see Auckland Castle's profile raised.

Visit its new website at www.aucklandcastle.org

It was dodgy weather and we thought we might get soaked in the cemetery. We arrived early, but soon there was coffee ready for us at the lodge. Again we split into two groups for our tour; this time both our guides knew their stuff.

Bradford's Undercliffe Cemetery is big! It has 23,000 graves and altogether 124,000 burials, set in 26 acres, so we couldn't see them all. Opened in 1854, the cemetery was vital for a town with a population explosion; deadly disease and epidemics were rife and fatal accidents were common-

*A monumental legacy:
Undercliffe Cemetery and
Saltire, 4 July*



place in the mills. The Bishop of Ripon (Bradford was then in the Ripon diocese) consecrated the western side of the cemetery for the burial of Anglicans; the smaller eastern section was left for nonconformists. Two mortuary chapels were later designed by Lockwood and Mawson.

Wealthy, influential Bradford families bought plots ready

for their demise and some went in for the most elaborate monuments. Egypt was a common inspiration: there are finely decorated obelisks, huge columns and extravagant mausoleums – some complete with sphinxes, like that of the Illingworth textile magnates. Elaborate decoration was full of symbolism. At the other extreme, the Quaker burials are predictably simple, with months of the year never written out, only given in figures. There are also veterans of the battle of Waterloo, the Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny. Elsewhere there are paupers' graves – officially called 'company' graves. And the cemetery belies its name – it's actually mostly on the cliff, giving brilliant views across Bradford and out over the Aire Valley.

Managed by the Undercliffe Cemetery charity, much conservation and ecological work goes on, but preventing vandalism and theft is always a challenge. Hosting school visits and other educational work, as well as regular open days, are all part of the Registrar's efforts to engage with the community.



After lunch in Saltaire we assembled at the church for a short talk on its history and restoration. Alas, there had been a double booking, so we joined a party of ladies from Knaresborough and were first treated to a fire and brimstone homily by the Rev. David Cowan. Our members are far too grown-up for all this pretence, but they didn't object! The lovely Italianate building is far removed from the austere style of most nonconformist churches and we peeped inside Salt's elaborate mausoleum that is attached. There was time afterwards to look around the shops and galleries in Salt's mill and to have the necessary cup of tea. And we wandered in Roberts' Park (named after Salt's successor as benefactor) and admired the interesting colours of the newly-painted bandstand, pavilion and seats. Finally – we almost dodged the rain!

*The men who made Halifax,
18 August*

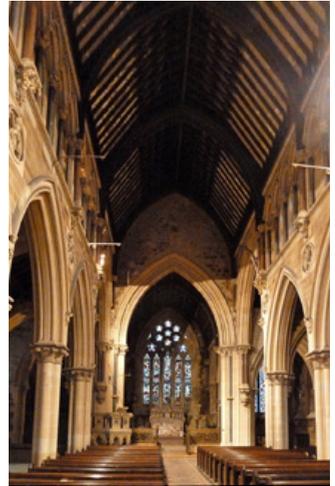
The weather was promising this time and we had a busy day ahead in Halifax: the town has a glorious array of fine buildings. Sadly, our approach from the A58 highlighted a massive blot on the landscape in the form of the new Broad Street 'Plaza' that obscures the previously clear view of the Town Hall. How could the planners allow such a monstrosity in such a position? Home to a Premier Inn,

cinema, fast-food restaurants, gym, NHS centre and multi-storey car park, this Plaza is a horrible hulk.

Forty years ago the new, brutalist headquarters of the (then) Halifax Building Society provoked the same reactions. Now it is accepted. The origins of the world's first Building Society lie in the fine panelled Oak Room in the Old Cock Inn. Here, in 1852, was its inaugural meeting, with Edward Akroyd one of the instigators. Akroyd was a man of High Anglican principles, who not only built a model village – Akroydon, which we visited – for his mill workers, but also encouraged them to buy their houses. For himself, Akroyd built a fine Italianate mansion (now the Bankfield Museum) and for his horses, grand castelated stables.

But Akroyd's greatest architectural legacy is All Souls Church, designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott. From its elevated position on Haley Hill the spire soars above the town. Within, there are Italian marble and Derbyshire marble columns, Aberdeen granite piers, Minton floor tiles and Nottinghamshire red sandstone steps. A wrought iron chancel screen by Skidmore stands on an alabaster plinth. The alabaster reredos has statues of the Virgin Mary and other New Testament figures, whilst between the nave arches the heads of eight saints are carved in relief. The octagonal pulpit is in Caen stone on a pedestal of Derbyshire marble. The font is made in serpentine from The Lizard and stands on a pedestal of Aberdeen granite. There is stained glass in all the windows designed and made by most of the best Victorian craftsmen. This is a building of real quality but, sadly, we could only see all this exquisite craftsmanship through a thick film of dust – the building has long been redundant and still awaits a new role.

It's a different story for Square Chapel (unusually for Halifax, built in red brick) – now a flourishing arts centre. This lovely Georgian Chapel flourished for nearly 80 years and then became a Sunday school in 1857, when the adjacent new Square Church – in Gothic style, with a tall spire – opened. This flourished for a century, but by the 1960s both church and chapel had declined. The church burnt down in an arson attack, but the spire survived; the chapel was eventually bought for £25 by six theatre enthusiasts and was partially restored.





Dome over staircase, Halifax Town Hall

John Crossley, who built Dean Clough Mills, the world's biggest carpet factory, was a staunch Congregationalist, and gave money for the building of Square Church. Crossley then bought more land in the town and developed fine buildings there, the best of these being the Town Hall, designed by Sir Charles Barry. It has Italianate features and a fine spire, around which are carved figures representing Europe, North America, Africa and Asia. Inside on our guided tour we saw the central galleried hall, the council chamber and the Mayor's Parlour.

The story of Halifax and of its best buildings owes much to its two powerful nineteenth-century industrialists. Both Akroyd and Crossley held strong religious principles: both poured money into their churches, Akroyd also into his model village and Crossley into his public buildings and into his orphanage – now a school. But our day began with the Piece Hall, where, before these men built their great mills, domestic hand-loom weavers came to sell their pieces of cloth – each 30 yards by one yard. We also visited the mediaeval Minster, then admired the façade of the newly-restored Somerset House, and finally we relaxed at Shibden Hall, a lovely manor house that in the early 1800s was the home of the extraordinary Anne Lister.

We packed a lot in – and left a lot out! We really needed a long weekend – and a bulldozer for the Plaza. s.w.

SELLING THE SOCIETY

We tried to 'sell' Ripon Civic Society to the people of Ripon by manning a stall on the day the Olympic torch came to Ripon. We had leaflets to give away, books to sell, walks to publicise and our new pop-up banner to display! We hoped to recruit new members and achieve some sales. It brought a modest amount of money in, but the Market Square was strangely quiet. Unfortunately we were told to pack up just as everyone started arriving to see the torch!

REVEALING RIPON

We were keen to highlight our new publication about the green plaques – 'Ripon Revealed' – so we organised some guided walks around the plaques, also describing other interesting features in the city. Two separate routes were taken simultaneously, twice on a Saturday. Only a few people signed up for it each time, but it was worth trying – and it will probably be repeated next year.



Our stall, our walks and the Markenfield Hall evening (see below) all took place in the same week (Phew!) and were entered for both the Civic Voice and Yorkshire and Humber Association of Civic Societies (YHACS) civic societies competitions. Thank you to all our members who helped and supported us in these events.

If this newsletter reads like a round-up of recent weather, it's hardly surprising, given what we've had to contend with this summer. We planned a pleasant evening at Markenfield Hall in June for our corporate members and potential corporate members, hoping to take advantage of the long light evening and the beautiful moated setting; strolling outside and making new acquaintances over a glass of wine...

We managed some of that, of course, but not the strolling outside. Arriving in a thunderstorm, with a dash to the front door through torrential rain, we stayed indoors for the evening. It was enjoyable and cosy and we were given interesting guided tours of the mediaeval manor house, with our two groups doing a clever Box and Cox. And at the end there were the inevitable forgotten umbrellas!

We are extremely grateful to Lady Deirdre and Mr Ian Curteis for kindly allowing us the use of their lovely home. We should also like to thank the Hall's Administrator, Sarah Robson, for all her help both before and during the evening, and our two excellent guides, Caroline Eason and Keith Jones.

Coming up...

MARKENFIELD INCORPORATED

HODS COMES ROUND AGAIN



On Sunday 9 September we shall again be opening the Gazebo, off Blossomgate, for the national Heritage Open Days. If you haven't been to this 18th-century hidden gem, now's your chance; if you have, you'll probably want to see it again. As always, we need volunteers to help us open it – it will be open from 2.00pm to 4.00pm, so if you have an hour to spare that afternoon we'd be glad to hear from you! The Cathedral bell tower and the Masonic Hall in Water Skellgate will also be open at the same time.

NEW TWIST TO AWARDS

On Thursday 4 October at 7.30pm it's our Awards Ceremony at the Spa Hotel. This should prove to be a very interesting occasion, especially as, for the first time, the invited guests will know only that they have been shortlisted, and not what they have been awarded! We look forward to seeing our own members there, to see the surprise and joy when we (metaphorically at least) open the gold envelopes!

DIARY DATES: SEPTEMBER TO DECEMBER 2012

Thursday 6 September

TALK: *The Light of a Stained Glass Artist*: Helen Whittaker

Thursday 4 October

Awards Ceremony: Spa Hotel, 7.30pm

Thursday 1 November

TALK: to be confirmed, followed by the Annual General Meeting

Thursday 6 December

TALK: *Gypsum affects lives – the Geology of Ripon*: Mick Stanley

Meetings (apart from the Awards Ceremony) take place on the first Thursday of the month at Allhallowgate Methodist Church Hall, Victoria Grove, Ripon, at 7.30 pm.

www.riponcivicsociety.org.uk

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