RIPON CIVIC SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER - MARCH 2021

Reflecting upon recent newsletters it dawned on me how much of our concerns are to do with the built environment and heritage. So we start this year with a green theme.

Our first piece is still about buildings, but a 'green' one, with Irene and David Hall's experience with living in a Passivhaus. Then turning to the natural environment there's a summary of the natural environment and biodiversity organisations at work in the Ripon area. The Friends of Hell Wath are mentioned including the recent talk which, if you missed it, can be viewed.

A couple of comments were passed to me recently. One on 'think-pieces', the other pointing out a distinction between 'civic' societies and 'historical' societies (to which one might add conservation and architectural groups). You are invited to consider a 'think piece' on what Identity means to each of us. This is prompted by the suggested reorganisation of local government in North Yorkshire.

Then there is reference to the Spa Baths.

Finally, the last page takes you to see the Workhouse.

Enjoy and , as always, what would you like to hear about?

Christopher Hughes
Chairman

Living in a Passivhaus - five years on

Members of Ripon Civic Society will recall that Highfield Coach House enjoyed considerable success at the biennial awards ceremony in 2016. The house, a major retrofit of the Victorian stables behind Highfield House, was designed and converted to the Passivhaus standard. Five years on we can now respond to some of the questions which people have asked us.



Q: What is it like to live in?

Firstly, it is quiet. The triple-glazing fitted throughout means that the house is noticeably free from extraneous noise. It is also a very comfortable temperature, consistently throughout summer and winter – typically around 19-21 Celsius. And despite the extensive south-facing glazing, even during the various heatwaves that we have experienced, visitors have often commented on how pleasant the temperature is internally when it has been uncomfortably hot outside.

The air in a Passivhaus is constantly refreshed from outside (filtered and pre-warmed through a heat exchanger): this means that the house never gets stuffy. A couple of very useful side-effects of this are (1) there is not much dust (other than fluff generated by our cat!) and (2) laundry can be hung up on a clothes airer in the evening and it is dry by the morning. In addition it is the perfect environment for the new post-COVID world where the emphasis is on ventilation of internal spaces.

Whilst we can appreciate this benefit in our domestic environment, it is also particularly effective for those working in public buildings constructed to the Passivhaus standard – eg schools, where there is good ventilation without the requirement to open windows in the middle of winter: therefore not only do children not freeze, but studies have shown that they learn more effectively because the classrooms do not get stuffy.

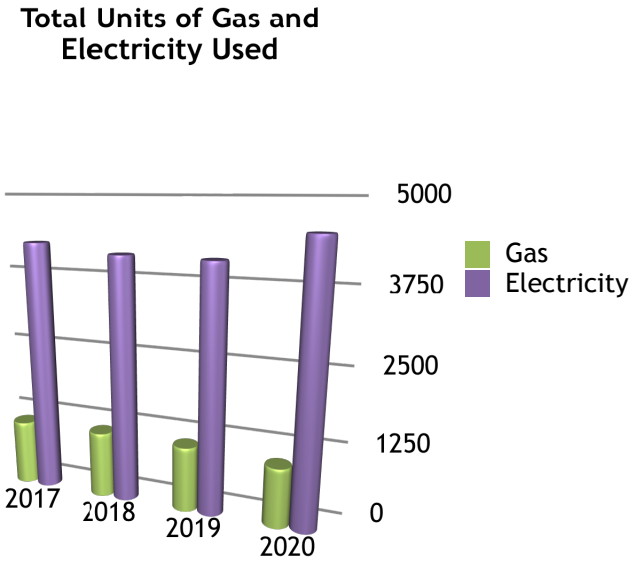


Q: How is the house performing from an energy perspective?

It has been an interesting exercise to compare the predicted actual energy usages. The design process for a Passivhaus building involves accurately calculating the energy balance for the building. This is where the building physics comes in. The annual energy gains (sunshine, people, appliances, etc) and losses (roof, walls, floors, windows, doors, ventilation, etc) are predicted and from this can be calculated how much the building will need to be "topped up" through space heating to maintain a given temperature.

For our house (approx. 200m^2) this was calculated to be 5496 kWh per year for a specified indoor temperature of 20C. The actual energy consumed for space heating (averaged over years 2017-2020) was actually less than 5000 kWh per year though we should also add one load of logs per year.

To translate that into financial terms: as you can see from this chart the energy usage is remarkably consistent (like everyone else, we have been at home throughout most of 2020, thereby doing more cooking, baking, etc. We surmise that this is what has resulted in the increased usage of electricity during the past year!).
Gas is used for the domestic hot water and the central heating. In the cooler months the central heating (one radiator only plus heated towel rails in the bathrooms) is on for a limited number of hours in the day and controlled by a thermostat. Other than being switched off over the summer it does not alter and we rarely switch it on manually for "extra time". Everything else is powered by electricity.
Our total gas bill for 2020 was £335: this splits 60% domestic hot water / 40% central heating – giving a central heating figure of approximately £135. These figures include the standing charges and VAT. Our load of logs was an additional £170.
Suffice to say that we are delighted with the way the house performs and to know that we can expect it to continue to deliver similarly over the coming years.



Q: Why are more buildings not built to Passivhaus standard in UK?

An increasing number of buildings are being constructed to Passivhaus standard in the UK - a mixture of one-off private house builds such as ours, social housing projects and public buildings such as health centres and schools. Note that there are several Passivhaus schools in Leeds. The reasons why there are not more Passivhaus buildings are many and complex – each is a subject in its own right, but include: the power of large volume house builders; UK consumer's focus on superficial interior details rather than quality of construction; lack of skilled workforce; costs (currently 4-8% more expensive but the differential is decreasing as experience grows).

Here are some examples of UK Passivhaus projects of differing type and scale:
Norwich social housing
https://passivhaustrust.org.uk/news/detail/?nId=840

Large scale housing, London
https://architype.co.uk/project/agar-grove-1a/

Swillington School, Leeds
https://passivhausbuildings.org.uk/viewproject.php?id=341

Richmond Hill School, Leeds
https://passivhausbuildings.org.uk/viewproject.php?id=306

Lancaster private co-housing scheme
https://www.lancastercohousing.org.uk/



Note: It is recognised in the UK that the "Performance Gap" of buildings built to UK building standards is huge (that is the difference between how much energy a building should use versus how much it actually uses). Proposals are in the pipeline to ensure that future building standards include Quality Assurance steps, post-build, to ensure that buildings do perform as designed. However fixing buildings after they have been built is much more expensive than building them correctly in the first place - so the major developers are not keen on this proposal!
Ahead of any proposed change to building standards some public bodies are now contractually insisting that publicly funded buildings (schools, colleges, hospitals, etc) must meet the net-zero emissions commitments. This has resulted in many architects choosing to adopt the Passivhaus standard since, unlike many other building standards, this is a standard that has proven over decades to deliver what it promises. To meet the UK's committed Carbon Zero standards it is essential that money for Public Projects is spent wisely at the design stage on buildings that will not require retrofitting in the future. Home building should be taking the same approach.

Notes on the author: having studied and researched the Passivhaus standard during the design and build of Highfield Coach House, Irene has remained passionate about the subject. After taking early retirement at the end of 2019 she subsequently trained and qualified as a Certified Passivhaus Consultant.

Harrogate Borough Council has started the process for disposal of the **Spa Baths** (opposite).
The Society expects the Council to demonstrate that it has gone through the steps required by the Ripon Neighbourhood Plan and the Spa Quarter policy.



Ripon's Green Partners

The Society focusses these days on building heritage and development. In the past we exercised a wider environmental brief as at All Hallows Park.

Recent announcements of successful applications for funds for the River Skell project by the National Trust and for the Lower Ure Valley by the Lower Ure Conservation Trust suggest that it would be worthwhile noting the several organisations that care for our landscape and natural heritage, flora and fauna.

The National Trust has been mentioned and at national level the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has many members in the area. The Woodland Trust is also present, notably at Hackfall, and offers assistance to local projects.

The national network of regional wildlife trusts is very prominent in the area. The Yorkshire Wildlife Trust has reserves Ripon City Wetlands by the racecourse and Ripon Loop at Hutton Conyers and sites at Whitcliffe Woods and Little Studley Meadows.

The Yorkshire Dales River Trust has worked on the River Laver near Doublegates. The Lower Ure Conservation Trust set up in 1997 manages and develops the Nosterfield Nature Reserve and the Well Wetlands project for biodiversity and habitat protection. There is the privately owned and managed High Batts nature reserve at North Stainley

Community groups play and important role. Mention is deserved of the Ripon Museum Trust's Workhouse Kitchen Garden, the Allhallowgate frontage and the initial work creating the Master's Garden.

The Friends of Hell Wath formed in 2017 have taken the lead in management and conservation of the 28a green space. Community involvement and volunteers are essential elements necessary to move forward with riverside protection, habitat creation and vegetation management. Jeremy Dunford, Secretary of the Friends gave a well-received presentation to the Society's March meeting. (If you would like to see a video recording of his talk, please use the contact details on our website.)

By no means least, there's Quarry Moor as well.

Identity

Someone recently introduced me to the term ‘think-piece’. I didn’t pick up that this was a gentle nudge to refrain from putting my thoughts on paper. Indeed, it did just the opposite.

What I’ve been thinking about over the past couple of months or so is how a change to unitary local government might turn out in North Yorkshire. According to Government intentions, we’ll get to know this year.

I don’t want to write about what I think of the options being promoted. You’ll have your own views, I’m sure. The reality will be that our Society will need to find ways of working with whatever arrangement comes about.

Yet this has prompted me to think specifically about how we identify with places (as distinct from family, faith, trades, professions, sports teams and so on) and how this influences the choice we might prefer for North Yorkshire. I’m not carrying out a poll but I would expect that many Society members have arrived in Ripon, rather than being born here. I should expect that there is a group of you who have resided in this part of Yorkshire for a substantial part of your lives. Others of you are here through choice yet may well have been far and wide. Isn’t there a view that society currently comprises the ‘somewheres’ and the ‘anywheres’. Whilst I’ve lived in Yorkshire continuously for forty-five years, my first ten years were spent in five different places. I have vivid memories of four of them but no need to go back to ‘my roots’ in any of them; a true ‘anywhere’ I suppose.

Where is this leading? Simply that I identify with many places yet for different reasons. My nomadic childhood taught me that there are different places and that the journey between each was probably as much fun as living in any one, and significantly that no one place was inherently superior to another.

I shall always identify fondly with those big cities where education and career have taken me. Cities in general I feel have an honesty about them which reflects on how we live with the contradictions, prejudices and stresses of modern life.

That is until I came to Ripon and began to learn a little more about the ‘space’ *between* cities, towns and villages, or should I more properly describe this as the ‘place’ between them.

So what now of identity of place? There’s no one place. There are levels, and they’ll be different for each one of us. I guess I’m pitching for each one to do its best in partnership with others, not in competition.

If you’re interested, my levels are Ripon, and then Yorkshire. Not just North Yorkshire, although I do read its rural footprint as one from coast almost to coast, but the whole of the Yorkshire province from Humber to Tees. Five million people or thereabouts, similar in scale to Scotland and larger than Wales and Northern Ireland together. I’ll take the North next, all 17 million of us: as big as many European nations. Every now and then I catch talk of UK regions and have to accept that this means England and the other three; not the North, the Midlands, the South West or the rest of what at times I fear is what England means for some. (I might add western Europe but let’s not over-complicate the basic premise.)

Hopefully a way will be found for Ripon and the Ripon area level to express its identity in whatever local government arrangements come about. There should be nothing to fear about other market towns (or even Scarborough and Harrogate) working together to provide a single voice, not just for themselves, but for the rural footprint that makes Yorkshire complete.

Think-piece? Over to you.



As dusk falls in March …

After the success of their Christmas 2020 lighting display, which ran throughout the festive period, Ripon Museum Trust are again lighting up the Workhouse Museum with a new display “Serving Our Community – Images from Ripon’s Past”,
The new display uses historic photographs from the Ripon Re-Viewed collection which feature civic leaders, emergency services and voluntary groups who have provided community service in the City in the past.
Mandy Whitehead, a member of our committee and Project Lead for Ripon Re-Viewed has said a big thank you to the Workhouse Museum and to Fusion LX, the locally based audio-visual and lighting specialists, who created the design and installed the display.
Sharing some of the fabulous images from Ripon’s past of local people serving our community we hope will give the local community an insight into life in Ripon across the years.”
The display can be viewed for two hours each evening just after dark.

