RIPON CIVIC SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

Winter/Spring 2026

SOCIETY RECOGNISED BY REGION FOR ITS CAMPAIGNING WORK



The Society's Chair Richard Taylor (left) and Vice-President David Winpenny receive the award from Peter Spawforth (right) (photo John Clarke)

RIPON CIVIC SOCIETY has been awarded the Peter Spawforth Prize by the Yorkshire and Humber Association of Civic Societies (YHACS) for its campaigning work on the proposed Ripon Cathedral annexe.

The Prize, which sees the Society receiving the Spawforth trophy and a cheque for £200, is awarded annually to the local Civic Society that has undertaken outstanding work in the region; it is judged by members of the committee representing the 41 groups that are part of YHACS.

This is the second time Ripon has won the award; we were previously winners, in 2019, for the Ripon ReViewed photographic project, and runners up before that for activities around the Olympic Torch run and Civic Day in 2012.

In our two years of campaigning work the Society's approach was to agree that the Cathedral needs additional space but that the proposed building was not right for its location in Kirkgate Park *(below)*, an important public space in the city. ***continued on page 2***



We were pleased when the Cathedral withdrew its planning application in January last last year and look forward to supporting them in the search for a solution that will be right for the Cathedral and for Ripon. Margaret Hicks-Clarke, Chair of YHACS, said, 'Ripon Civic Society's entry for the Peter Spawforth Award was an excellent example of a Society tackling an important local issue in a measured and professional way. They used the expertise within their own ranks, as well as collaboration with outside bodies, to campaign for a better outcome for the city of Ripon. We felt that the Society was a worthy winner!'

Welcoming the Award, Rachel Wigginton, Planning Lead for Ripon Civic Society, said 'This was one of the largest and most sustained campaigns the Society has conducted for several decades and it occupied the attention of our entirely voluntary committee for almost two years. At no time was the Society against the Cathedral's principal aim, but we believe that the withdrawal of the proposal was the right outcome for the city of Ripon. We are very grateful to our fellow Civic Societies in the region for recognising and endorsing our achievements by awarding us the Spawforth Prize.'

PLANNING REPORT

THE LAST FEW MONTHS have been relatively quiet compared with the previous three or four years. The Society has commented on a number of planning applications in and around Ripon, including the following:

- The National Trust's major application on Studley Gates was passed and work has begun. We remain concerned about the adjacent car park, and we hope to meet with Trust representatives soon to discuss scope for improvements.



- A revised application for housing on the derelict Skellbank Garage site *(above)* has been approved; this was supported in principle by the Civic Society. We hope this will go ahead and remove a long-standing eyesore in the city centre.

North Yorkshire Local Plan

Members of the committee met officers from North Yorkshire Council in November to discuss the Society's comments on the new local plan. We were informed that the results of the call for sites will be available in the new year and that there will be a further issues and options consultation due to new Government policy on local plans.

Nidderdale National Landscape management plan consultation

Nidderdale National Landscape

The Society submitted comments, stating we are concerned that the National Landscape boundary does not include areas of highly sensitive landscape between the Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal World Heritage Site (FASR) and Ripon, including parts of the buffer zone. We consider that the boundary should be extended to include the FASR site buffer zone and the villages of Studley Roger and Aldfield to afford them the appropriate protection that the landscape quality merits.

Clotherholme



The Society is supporting the Ripon Military Heritage Trust in seeking to preserve the WW2 and cold war military heritage at Clotherholme. Homes England is progressing applications for the discharge of conditions attached to the outline approval for the Clotherholme site. They have produced a framework document for the military heritage strategy and work is progressing on recording the huts. Homes England now own the former Deverell Barracks site (approximately one third of the wider site) and we understand that they intend to submit a new application for housing on just this site in the Spring.

Rachel Wigginton

OUR COMMENTS ON RIPON CITY INVESTMENT PLAN



MEMBERS MAY RECALL that the Society contacted you in October last year to highlight North Yorkshire Council's development of a new Ripon City Investment Plan. The plan is intended to help guide future funding bids by ensuring they are targeted to local priorities. We encouraged everyone to have their say by sending in their comments.

We mentioned, too, that the planning team would be providing comments on behalf of the Society to put in the mix as part of the consultation process. We have now done so; if you wish to see what we said, our comments have now been posted on our website; ***www.riponcivicsociety.org.uk*** *under* ***Newsletters***

WINDOW ALTERED WITHOUT CONSENT - SOCIETY ACTS

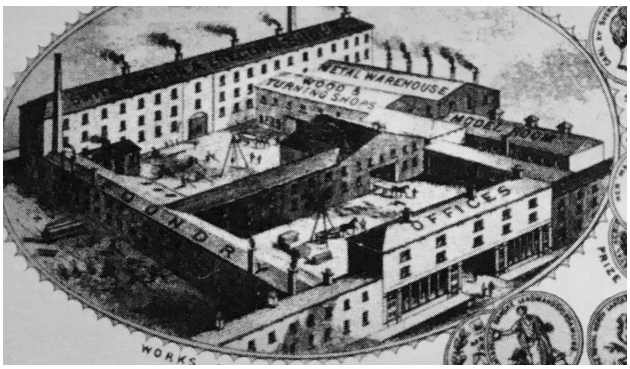


IN SEPTEMBER LAST year the Society was made aware of the unauthorised changes made to the window of the Grade II listed 21 North Street *(above)*. One of a pair of identical windows to each side of the archway that once led to Kearsley's iron foundry - from 1895 The British Iron and Implement Factory - had suffered the removal of all its glazing bars. The window was replaced by a single sheet of glass, presumably to reveal more of the interior of the vape shop that now occupies the premises.

The Society enquired at the shop about the change, and pointed out that altering a listed building without listed building consent is against the law.

We then alerted the North Yorkshire Council conservation team and provided images of the new state of the window.

We have been assured that action will be taken and we hope to have the damage rectified; inevitably legal arguments take some time, but the Council's officers have assured us that the case is being pursued strenuously.



An image from the letterhead of Kearsley's ironworks, showing the range along North Street (labelled 'Offices') where the windows are located.

LISTED BUILDINGS PHOTO SURVEY RETURNS AFTER 30 YEARS



The former Dispensary, constructed in 1850 and now part of Ripon Hospital, is a Grade II listed building

THE SOCIETY HAS been working on compiling an up-to-date photographic record of all the listed buildings in Ripon. This will complement both the historic photographs available in the Ripon ReViewed archive as well as that carried out by the Society in 1994 and 1995.

The city has been split into several zones and in the first phase, photographs of all the listed buildings in and around the centre of Ripon have been completed as well as all the Grade I and II* buildings such as the Cathedral and chapel of St Mary Magdalen. These photos, as far as possible, have been taken from similar viewpoints to those in the mid-nineties to allow comparison between the two sets.



Court Terrace, just north of Kirkgate, was constructed about 1820 and are Grade II listed

The next phase will involve taking photographs of the listed buildings further away from the Market Square and it is anticipated that this will be completed in Spring 2026. Once all the buildings have been photographed, each current photo will be geo-referenced along with its nineties counterpart and it is hoped that this may be made available as a digital map on the internet.



Grade II listed houses on Park Street

Whilst there is much work remaining to be carried out, we are very pleased to be able to say that on the whole, the listed buildings in Ripon are in a better condition than thirty years ago and much of the work that has been carried out on them has been done sensitively and to a high standard.

Ed Jagger

HERITAGE OPEN DAYS 2025 - A RIPON ROUNDUP

DID YOU MANAGE to enjoy at least some of our events for Heritage Open Days (HODs) in September? Here are a few highlights to remind you - or to whet your appetite for this year's events, which will run between 11 and 20 September 2026.

SPA BATHS OPENING



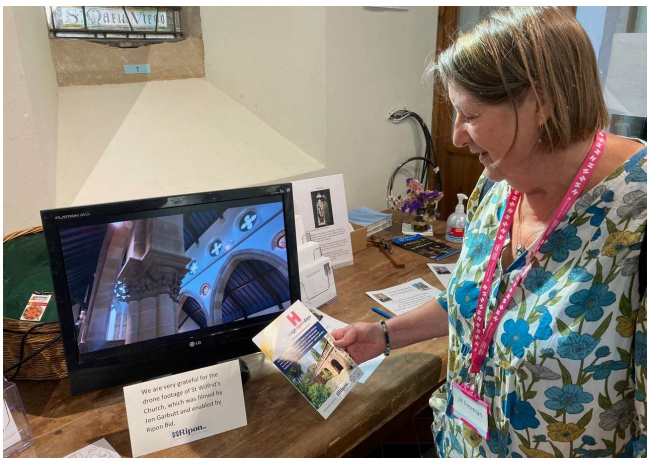
Martin Sterne of Sterne Properties, developers of the Spa Baths, outlines their plans to one of the hard-hat tours.

One of the most popular visits was to the Spa Baths building as redevelopment got underway. Groups of visitors were given information about the building and about the proposed development, and were able to explore its wonderful art nouveau tiling and stained glass; for some it was a nostalgic visit to the place where they learned to swim, before the 1930s brick pool hall was demolished.

We are grateful for the help of Ripon BID, and to Sterne Properties for making this memorable day possible.

ST WILFRID'S CHURCH

The recently-restored St Wilfrid's Catholic Church was open during the week of HODs. Below, Jill Freeman from the church looks are recently-taken drone footage of the building, sourced by Ripon BID. Among other events was a reprise of his talk 'In the Steps of the Marquess' by Society Chair Richard Taylor. We are grateful to Fr Jonathan and all at St Wilfrid's for participating in HODs so enthusiastically.



PLAQUES UNVEILED

As part of Heritage Open Days we unveiled two new plaques on the same day.



Hazel Smyth from the Women's Institute North Yorkshire West Federation and John Parker from the Ripon Housing Improvement Trust Ltd help the Society's Vice-President David Winpenny (right) to unveil the plaque on Alma House

A plaque was unveiled at **Alma House**. The plaque notes that, under its former name of Skellfield House, this was occupied by Thomas Stubbs. He was Master of the House of Correction and an avid collector, and was responsible for the construction of the first Alma Bridge.

In the early 1880s Skellfield became Skellfield School. The school moved to Baldersby Park in 1927. Ripon Housing Improvement Trust took it over, converting it flats and a commercial unit, which now hosts the area headquarters of the Women's Institute.

We are grateful to Ripon Housing Improvement Trust for agreeing to host the plaque and for contributing to its cost, and to the WI members who provided excellent cakes!

For a report on the unveiling of the plaque about the significance of Ripon's **Sewer Gas Lamp**, see page 6.

'WHAT'S UP IN RIPON' WALK

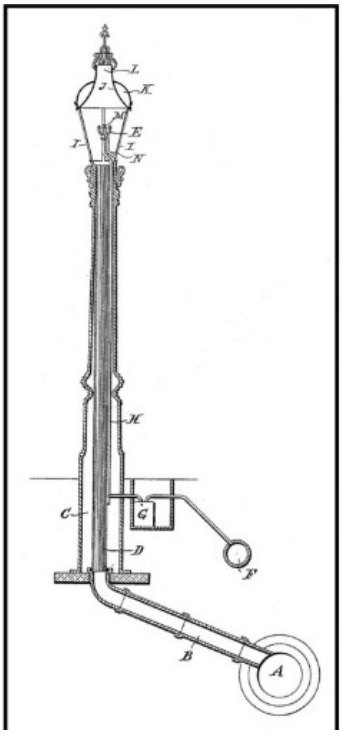


On a wet day an intrepid group was led by Richard Taylor and David Winpenny to discover details to be seen on buildings in the Market Square and on North Street by looking up above the shop fronts.

With thanks to Andrew Curtis for leading on our HODs events

GAS LIGHT PLAQUE UNVEILED - AND HERE'S WHY IT'S MORE THAN JUST HOT AIR







The new plaque beside the gas light on Victoria Grove, with details from Webb's patent. On the right, Neill Clayton (left) and Robert Addyman who, along with committee member Richard Willis prepared both this plaque and the Alma House plaque

The Society's Chair, Richard Taylor, reported on the unveiling of the Sewer Gas Light in this article first published in the Newsletter of the Yorkshire and Humber Association of Civic Societies.

WHILST THE BIG picture is important for civic societies, it's sometimes the small features of our towns and cities which attract most public interest. So it has proved for one of the strangest structures in Ripon, our Webb's Patent Sewer Gas Destructor.

I first became aware of these unusual items of street furniture when I lived near Sheffield in the 1970s. What looked at first like a conventional Victorian gas light on West Street turned out to have had a different main purpose, that of venting the sewers. In the 19th century when dealing with waste was more primitive than today there was a problem of foul gases collecting in the sewerage system with the risk of dangerous (not to say distressing!) explosion.

The ingenious solution developed by Joseph Webb in Birmingham was his Patent Sewer Gas Destructor. This was a street light with a wider than normal hollow column positioned over a high point in the sewerage system to allow the products of decomposition to escape. Powered as elsewhere by a town gas supply fed by a separate pipe in the column, the light served not only to illuminate but to safely burn off the sewer gas, largely methane, by mixing it with the town gas supply. Webb patented his light in 1892.

When I came to work for the Civic Trust Ripon Project in 1989, I knew only of the Sheffield West Street light. How gratifying then to discover that Ripon had one too! Finding out about them was not easy as this was in the days before the internet but, armed with some basic information, we put the structure forward for listing and this was accepted. That gave the impetus for the light to be restored and Harrogate Borough Council technical officer duly delivered, with the column being repainted and the gas light made to function once more.

Expert work

With the passage of time and changes in personnel and indeed local authorities, the Ripon light was first converted (without listed building consent) to electricity, then neglected with its light ceasing to work and its column once again looking shabby. An ugly plate with parking times was added, again without Listed Building consent.

A change in fortune came in 2025. The new North Yorkshire Council was now responsible for the structure and Neil Jackson, their lighting engineer, agreed to repaint the column, to remove the parking plate and to get the light functioning once more.

The Civic Society was given permission to repaint the lettering on the column base and this expert work was done by our volunteer, Neill Clayton.

Owners of the nearby holiday accommodation, appropriately now called Gas Light Cottage, approached the Society about having one of our historic plaques. With a generous contribution from them, this we were able to arrange and the plaque was unveiled during September's Heritage Open Days. Passers-by can now learn about this curious feature on Ripon's streets.

Our thanks to Janet and Steve Anderson, owners of Gas Light Cottage for hosting the plaque and contributing to its cost.

PETER HILLS



We were greatly saddened to hear of the passing of Peter Hills. He was such an inspiring man who contributed so very much to so many aspects of the life of the City. His research project on the bridges of Ripon was truly amazing in its breadth and depth. He was a kind and modest man and we have valued so much the generous way he has quietly offered his knowledge and expertise to support many aspects of the work of the Society over the years. He will be very much missed.

HAVE YOU BEEN TO OUR NEW VENUE?



Alex Harvey was the first to present one of our monthly talks in our new home at Allhallowgate Methodist Church

IF YOU HAVEN'T been to one of our talks since last summer, you will not have experienced our comfortable new venue. We are very grateful to Allhallowgate Methodist Church for taking us in when the Dining Hall at the Workhouse Museum, where our talks were previously held, became unavailable because of development. Particular thanks to Diane Gaskill from the Church for her generous and on-going help - we are delighted to welcome her as a member of the Society!

The church is an ideal place - not least because of the comfortable chairs! - and we have been made very much at home. If you haven't experienced it for yourself, come along to the next talk, and bring your friends! Entry to the church is via the entrance in Victoria Grove.

BUS LINK TO STATION?



IT'S HEARTENING TO see some good news coming out of Ripon in the form of a new blog created by the Ripon Business Improvement District. Seasoned writer Tim Flanagan has taken on a new role of covering positive news stories under the banner of Rejoice in Ripon. The blog is accessible from the BID website at https://visitripon.co.uk/bid-blog/

One recent item struck a particular chord with the Society's planning team - the imaginative suggestion of giving Ripon a better connection to the national rail system by providing a shuttle bus to Thirsk Station.

BID manager Lilla Bathurst said, 'Ironically, at a time when multi-billion Northern Powerhouse Rail prospective long-term developments have been grabbing the news headlines, we have an affordable and readily implementable solution just 11 miles and 20 minutes away in Thirsk, which could be delivered with the pull of a lever. The idea that we and other city stakeholders have put to [York and North Yorkshire] Mayor David Skaith is for a shuttle bus service linked to the 13 daily arrivals of trains from King's Cross at a station that would be re-named Thirsk for Ripon.'

The Society was recently invited by Grewelthorpe Primary School to talk with their Year 5 and 6 children about why Ripon doesn't have a railway station any more. Our Chair, Richard Taylor, met with an enthusiastic and well-informed class keen to learn more about the Beeching cuts of nearly 60 years ago. To provide an optimistic end to the talk he mentioned the idea of the shuttle bus to Thirsk and this was well-received by the audience of future rail passengers - who might also eventually benefit from the proposed lifts to be installed in the notoriously step-laden Thirsk Station.

OUR PROGRAMME

HERE'S THE PROGRAMME of talks and events until the summer. We hope to see you there! All meetings are in Allhallowgate Methodist Church, at 7.30pm; tea, coffee and biscuits from 7.00pm

- **February 5th – 'I'VE GOT A LITTLE LIST …….' – taking stock of historic buildings. What is a listed building, when did the system start and what's now included in the national list? –** Richard Taylor



Ripon Town Hall is a Grade II Listed Building*

- **March 5th – MANAGING LAND-BASED BUSINESSES IN AN EVER-CHANGING POLICY LANDSCAPE** – Harriet Ranson, Country Land and Business Association
- **April 2nd – THE ENGLISH CIVIL WARS, referencing families local to Ripon –** Gillian Waters
- **May 7th – HARROGATE'S SAVIOUR: Edward Wilson Dixon** *(below)* **and the Roundhill Reservoir –** Graham Seel



PAY UP! (PLEASE. . .)

SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE DUE now for 2026.

Please pay promptly to make the Membership Secretary's work easier! As a reminder, our current rates (which may be different from what you remember!) are:

- Individual (£20)
- Joint Double at same address (£30)
- Young Adult 18-25 (£6)
- Young Person under 18 (Free)
- Patron (£30)

AWARDS NEWS (OR NOT)

IN THE LAST issue of the Newsletter we were anticipating that our two-yearly Awards would be held again in April this year. Keen-eyed readers will have already have spotted the change in the programme (*see left*).

The Committee has decided to pause the Awards this year; in a relatively small place like Ripon it is not always possible to find sufficient candidates of appropriate quality for the several categories of the Awards. Rather than dilute their value, the Awards have been put on hold.

We hope to be able to resume in future years, and we are always on the look out for suitable projects that can be 'banked' for the next time we make presentations. Please let us know of anything you spot that is Award-worthy.

RIPON CIVIC SOCIETY

Registered Charity No: 517434

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THIS YEAR'S COMMITTEE

- **President** - Nigel Rawlinson
- **Vice-President** - David WInpenny
- **Chair** - Richard Taylor
- **Vice-Chair** - Ed Jagger
- **Treasurer** - David Wilson
- **Membership** - Alison Brayshaw
- **Planning Lead** - Rachel Wigginton
- **Talks -** David Hall and Richard Willis
- **Heritage Open Days** - Andrew Curtis
- **Uredale Community Partnership, Ripon ReViewed, Ripon Together** - Mandy Whitehead
- **Plaques** - Richard Willis
- **Members** - Rachel Greenwood, Peter Goldsbrough, Michael Exley
- **Website** - David Hall
- **Communications, Newsletters and External Relations** - Richard Taylor and David Winpenny