

SPALDING AND DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

February 2013



From left to right Chris Haines, Robert West, Ed Fordham, Sue Willetts, Joe Millington, Trisha Druce, Matthew Connolly - flanked by centurions from the Ermine Street Guard at the unveiling ceremony.

BLUE PLAQUE TWO

Over the heather the wet wind blows, I've
lice in my tunic and a cold in my nose.

The rain comes pattering out of the sky, I'm
a Wall soldier, I don't know why.

W.H.Auden: *Roman Wall Blues*

MINUS THE LICE, it had looked as if it was going to be the same sort of experience, fen-style, for the two Roman soldiers from the Ermine Street Guard resplendently on guard in Spring Street on 15 December, but the weather gods relented for the unveiling of the Society's second 'blue plaque' - in honour of Peter Connolly, who died last year.

Until quite recently few of us in Spalding had realised quite how eminent a historian we had amongst us: perhaps the world's leading authority on Greek and Roman warfare. The 50 or 60 gathered to honour Peter's achievements included representatives from the academic world as well as family, friends and members of the Society. Sue Willetts (Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies) described how records were "not good enough for Peter. He had to go and find out for himself, on the ground", walking over each ancient battlefield and photographing it from all angles. For Chris Haines and the Ermine Street Guard re-enactment society Peter's book *The Roman Army* had "switched on a light", he said, revealing how inaccurate their replica armour and weapons had previously been. Joe Millington (Head of Classics at Spalding Grammar School) told of his amazement at discovering that the author of his treasured collection

of ancient history books, with their superb illustrations full of meticulous detail and muscular vigour, lived just across the road from the school - in a house crammed with his pictures, relief maps, books, scale models and reconstructed artefacts from his workshop. And it was Peter's sister, Trisha Druce, who unveiled the plaque. Many thanks too to those behind the scenes: to Judy and Mike Chapman for managing the ordering and fixing of the plaque, to Joe and Julie Millington for organising the refreshments, to John Honnor for his neat unveiling device, and above all to Ed Fordham for assembling Peter's family and academic friends and colleagues, encouraging their generous donations to fund the plaque, producing the leaflet and generally orchestrating the event. (Copies of the recently reprinted *Greece and Rome at War* by Peter Connolly can be ordered from Bookmark.)

A.G.M.

Tuesday, 19 March
7.30pm
Business Centre
Spalding Grammar School

A virtual
tour of

GRIMSTHORPE CASTLE

illustrated talk by
Gerry Burrows

The remodelling of Grimsthorpe Castle was the last work of the great Sir John Vanbrugh (1664-1726), the architect of Castle Howard and Blenheim Palace.



F.I.T. AND THE HALLEY STEWART

THE SIR HALLEY STEWART FIELD was given to the people of Spalding "to be used in perpetuity as a playing field ... for the benefit of the inhabitants of the Town of Spalding" (Trust Deed, October 1952). The Council are the trustees. On the face of it, it would seem flatly wrong to consider selling off the Field to a property developer for retail development.

To many it would seem equally wrong that the Football Club has long had almost exclusive use of the Field.

Some months ago these concerns were put independently to the national body Fields in Trust (F.I.T.) by both the Society and the Community Campaign.

In response, their Deputy Chief Executive has drawn the Council's attention to an almost identical case in Arnold, Nottinghamshire, where the football club was required to vacate the playing field in question and the Council concerned to return it to public use. The Charity Commission's ruling was clear: "A trustee's first loyalty is to the charity ..."

Accordingly, F.I.T. has advised South Holland District Council (30 November) "to seek guidance from the Commission to clarify the position in regard to the possibility of a breach of trust". So far, we have been unable to find out whether the Council has acted on this advice or not.

Whilst the Community Campaign has recently been concentrating on the current use (or misuse?) of the Halley Stewart Field, no-one has forgotten that its possible sale remains the ultimate threat.

The Halley Stewart Field, however, is not alone. Other green spaces under threat are the Castle Field, the Chiltern Drive Playing Field and the Grammar School's West Field. Indeed, it was this more widespread threat that led the Society to approach Fields in Trust in the first place. F.I.T. shares our disquiet.

So far as we can tell, the current situation is as follows:-

Castle Field - a commissioned report on the business case for refurbishing the sports provision at the Field/Complex has been repeatedly postponed. The last published site plan showed about a third of the area labelled as "surplus land" (and presumably therefore envisaged for sale).

Chiltern Drive - the Council's planning application to take about two-thirds of the field to extend the Cemetery is on hold, following objections from Sport England, the Society and local residents. Another extension site is being sought.

S.G.S. West Field - a local developer has been asked to prepare a planning application, but whether for the whole or a part of the field is not clear.

2012 was the year of the Olympics. Its community legacy a prime objective. South Holland has one of the highest levels of obesity in the country. Spalding has a mere half of the open green leisure space required for a town of its size. It beggars belief therefore that, rather than seeking to make good that shortfall, our powers-that-be are apparently bent on making it worse. (For a ray of green sunshine, though, see the end of 'Planning Matters' on page 4.) **Planning Sub-Committee**

MUCH APPRECIATED

- **The Friends of Chain Bridge Forge** for the particularly well-designed sign - colours and style absolutely right for this historic building and the Conservation Area.
- **LCC Highways** for gritting the town centre pavements as well as the roads during the snow and ice.
- Public-spirited **Philip Hall** of Turner's Fish Restaurant for independently gritting Swan Walk.
- **And the independent traders** who cleared the pavements in front of their shops on Slushy Saturday (26 January). It was noticeable that Salisbury's and the other multiples couldn't be bothered.
- The refurbishment of **10 Station Street**, a little late Victorian gem, under the PS1CA grant scheme.
- The refurbishment of **Revill's Shoe Shop** in Francis Street - also under the PS1CA grant scheme - with a traditional shop front like other historic ones nearby.

Unveiling of the plaque to



by

Sir Peter Hendy, C.B.E.

Commissioner for Transport for London

Saturday, 15 June **12 noon**
Halifax Building Society, Double Street, Spalding



SHARED VISION

EFFORTS ARE UNDER WAY to unlock the potential of the town centre. Wouldn't it be nice if all the premises -were as well-presented as Thomas Cook's (far right) or Austin John Interiors in the Crescent, or window-dressed as stylishly as Beale's or with the loving care of Floral Design in Herring Lane; or if all our public spaces were as -welcoming as Hall Place, or weren't splattered with fly-posting by King's Lynn and Skegness speedways or SHDC banners wishing us a "Happy Christmas" in February? The regeneration of the centre has long been a concern of the Society, and others have now come to share that concern. And there is, after all, over £1/4 million of 106 monies still available for town centre improvement. Accordingly, we have joined forces with the Chamber of Commerce to try to move matters forward. Our shared vision is set out below (slightly condensed), and two working parties are about to start work on more detailed provisions for the historic centre and the riverside.

SPALDING has three key selling-points: its riverside, its market town identity and its food industry.

Our objectives should be to enhance the quality of the town centre and to support developments which will complement and sustain the town centre, so that Spalding is a place where it is a positive pleasure to be - whether to live and work, to shop and go about business, to enjoy one's leisure, or just to meet and spend some time. And return to. In short, an attractive setting for a vibrant community.

First, the town centre itself. The historic centre has enormous potential, with its three inter-linked public spaces and historic street pattern. Many properties need upgrading, through landlords being encouraged to take advantage of the PSICA grant scheme and through improved shop fronts and window-dressing.

The three public spaces should each have a distinctive sense of 'place' (easily achievable for Hall Place, for example, by bringing back the Johnson Memorial Fountain to its original spot - *above left*). They should be clean and free of clutter, feel secure and welcoming, with clear sign-posting making it easy to locate carparks and leading shoppers round the centre.

The pedestrian passageways are invaluable traffic-free short cuts binding the town centre together. These must be made vibrant and attractive in themselves, thus encouraging footfall along these vital links to the Crescent and the riverside and also from Broad Street to the Red Lion Quarter.

Remarkably within a mere stone's throw of the town's retail and business centre there is the prime asset of the riverside. The aim should be to make it a high-quality green linear park. A long-term vision for the riverside forms part of the



Environment Agency's excellent *Spalding Waterspace Study*. We should like to see the waterways opened up for leisure use and the riverside made more accessible for walkers and cyclists. Whilst carefully protecting the river and its wildlife, we do need to make much more use of this invaluable natural asset.

It is crucial that visitors are encouraged to discover the attractions of the town centre and its riverside. The 2.4 million visitors that come to Springfields every year need drawing into the centre of Spalding by much clearer signs, particularly from Springfields and the bypass, and by carparks that are cheap and easy to find.

Economically, the centre needs a retail and business sector that is vibrant and sustainable. It must feel lively and inviting, as we have to compete with other towns and cities for our customers. We are fortunate to have a core of independent retailers trading within the town. This is our strength and competitive advantage. We must therefore encourage and assist our existing independents, whilst encouraging others to join them.

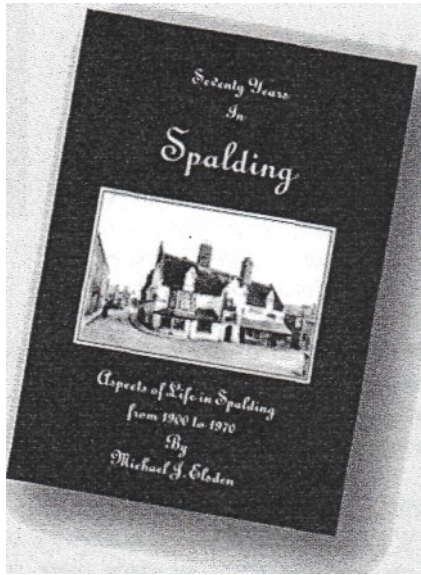
As a market town the Tuesday and Saturday markets must be re-energised and seen as a draw to bring customers into the town. The government's Portas Report is clear on the important role markets can have in reviving struggling high streets.

Distinctive shopping areas such as the Crescent should be encouraged to create their own identity within the lively variety offered by the centre as a whole.

At the same time we must be realistic: retailing has changed and will continue to do so. These changes must be managed. Supermarkets stock a huge range of non-food products, and the niter-net makes shopping easy for time-scarce shoppers. Maybe the viable shopping area needs to contract towards the centre, with some areas of the town previously designated for shops being allowed to change their premises to offices or residential use. The town centre must not be allowed to sprawl *outwards*.

As we are in the heart of a major food production and processing area, we should look to these companies to support the town centre. Equally, the [Page 6 >•

PLANNING MATTERS



FOR 25 YEARS Michael Elsdon has been putting local people in touch with their heritage through his six books on Spalding and its surrounding villages — the first two with the late Norman Leveritt. *Seventy Years of Spalding: Aspects of Life in Spalding from 1900 to 1970* is the most recent and probably the final volume.

As with its predecessors, the most fascinating feature is the old photographs, showing streets and buildings which are still our world, but inhabited by people, vehicles and advertisements from one that has vanished. Sadly, some of the buildings have vanished too. Two of the most poignant pictures in the new volume are of Harrington House, the grand 18th century house on the corner of Broad Street and Herring Lane, demolished in the 1960s by Spalding Urban District Council to accommodate a carpark. (Councils really were vandals in the 50s and 60s.)

Of almost equal interest have always been the excerpts from the local press, particularly in this volume details of happenings at the Workhouse (Pinchbeck Road) and accounts of the 1941 air-raids.

One doubts if the full-page photographs of each of the Spalding Urban District Council chairmen justify their place, but otherwise this final volume valuably fills in gaps in the earlier volumes, and we are all indebted to Michael Elsdon for making his local knowledge and extensive collection of historical photographs accessible to us as he has been doing over the last 25 years. *Seventy Years of Spalding* is available from Birchgrove Garden Centre.

BUILD on the green belts, slash the regulations, don't refuse anything, let householders put up whatever extensions they want. And don't you dare design a state school with a wide corridor or a large window or a curved wall (October 2012) - or Mr.Gove will be after you! It's not much of an exaggeration. One might be forgiven for thinking that ministers' standard answer to our present economic difficulties is to blame the planning system. Or the architects. Whatever its shortcomings, our planning system has evolved over many hard-fought years to provide a blue-print for decent, comely surroundings for all of us, not just the rich. And it is now under attack. Our vigilance and voices are needed more than ever. It works: witness the rewriting of the *National Planning Policy Framework* after widespread protest and the U-turn on the proposed sell-off of our national forests.

Locally, the publication of the draft *East Lincolnshire Development Framework*, which will replace the *South Holland Local Plan*, is only weeks away. It will need detailed scrutiny. (The only aspect we have been consulted about has been the allocation of possible housing land.)

Even more locally, there is still no reliable information about the redevelopment of the **Holland Market** area, as the Council signed an "exclusivity agreement" with the developer at the start not to reveal any details. The agreement runs out at the end of March.

Meanwhile, having failed to make a start on its ugly mock-Georgian care home, the company that owns the **Bull and Monkey** site has applied to demolish the existing building and turn the site into a "temporary" carpark. We have asked for a strict time-limit to be put on the "temporary", for stringent management requirements and for the interim planting of substantial trees on the boundary. Another prime riverside site is the former **Tax Office** on High Street. Though not yet applied for, demolition and redevelopment are the intention here too. At the moment both these key sites are blights on the Conservation Area.

The lack of any overall vision for the town centre and riverside leaves them prey to sporadic, unco-ordinated interventions. We hope this can be remedied - *see p. 3*.

Finally, two rays of sunshine. First, the refusal (at last) of a take-away in New **Road**, as over half of the premises there are already hot-food take-aways. Second, the withdrawal of an application to build on amenity green space next to **Rainton Court** after a huge number of objections from local residents, the M.P. and ourselves.

DISABLED RAMBLERS

It was a pity Anne Smith's talk in October on the countryside and the disabled was so sparsely attended, as it was an illuminating, eye-opening evening. Who would envisage tackling the Cornish Coastal Path or Yorkshire moorland above Settle on a motability scooter? Yet there were the pictures to prove it. And there's certainly no question of seeking to cover unspoilt countryside in tarmac tracks. It's stiles and kissing-gates that are the problem; the solutions easy and undamaging ... with planning awareness and will.

Mill Green level-crossing, with its new automatic barriers and the signal box due to be demolished in March 2014.

ALL CHANGE ON THE JOINT LINE

IN A PROJECT expected to cost £285m, Network Rail is undertaking a major upgrade of the former Great Northern and Great Eastern Joint Line, i.e. the Peterborough to Doncaster line via Spalding and Lincoln.

This will increase the line speed and allow longer trains, to provide an alternative route for container traffic from the East Anglian ports and relieve the congested East Coast Main Line north of Peterborough.

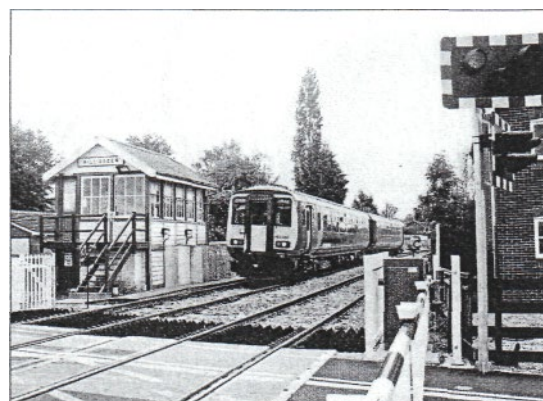
A complete modernisation of the signalling will see the end of traditional mechanical signalling, including the closure of 13 signal boxes and changes to many of the 160 level crossings.

When completed, in March 2014, the line will become the main route for freight from Peterborough to Doncaster. So how will it affect Spalding?

Besides the existing passenger service, there will be the capacity for two freight trains per hour each way, each up to 775m long, running at up to 75 mph.

The signal boxes at Winsover Road and Mill Green will be closed, with all signalling and crossings controlled from Lincoln. Winsover Road and Hawthorn Bank will be CCTV monitored; other crossings will be 'Manually Controlled Barriers with Obstacle Detectors' (i.e. Lincoln-controlled, rather than triggered by an approaching train).

At present the passenger service is limited because the boxes and crossings are manned for only two shifts southwards and one northwards, which means the line to Lin-



coln opens round about 9.00am and closes about 4.30pm. A

poor service. There are no Sunday trains. The automatic signalling, however, will allow the line to be open 24 hours a day, with the possibility of additional services, particularly to Lincoln and on Sundays.

Nothing, however, has been promised on this.

There is concern about the level crossings being closed more often. This will be so, but the trains will pass through more quickly. There will be two freight train 'paths' each way per hour, but paths are not actual trains, and full-line capacity will not be achieved for many years, if ever. There are likely to be 16 freight trains a day initially. There may also be more main line diversions, especially at weekends.

From once being threatened with closure, the line will now be a vital freight route and our passenger service should be secure and easily capable of improvement. There may also be opportunities to put some of Spalding's ever-increasing road freight onto rail.

Very good news indeed!

John Honnor

(With acknowledgements to Today's Railways, October 2012)

SOCIETY NOTES

IT IS WITH SADNESS that we record the death of long-standing member Roy Trawford. He was a keen supporter of the Society's work, kept a sharp eye open for harmful developments (large or small) in the centre of the town, and for the last few years generously made his lovely garden available for the Society's annual strawberry suppers. His warm, appreciative encouragement will be much missed.

Congratulations to member Judith Withyman on the publication of *Geese, Gowts and Galligaskins*, her recent book on life in Pinchbeck from 1550 to 1660, a momentous period in English history.

A warm welcome to new member Mrs. Barbara Connolly.

Notelets with the watercolour of St. Paul's Church still available (£5 per pack of 10 with envelopes) from Melvyn Price, 34 Avebury Gardens, Spalding, Lincolnshire, PE11 2EN, Tel. 01775 722908. (Please make cheques payable to Spalding and District Civic Society.)

Meanwhile, annual subscriptions are now due (£8

single and £12 for two at the same address; students in full

time education free). Please return with the enclosed slip to the Treasurer at the address above.

SIR PETER HENDY ~

..... has been Commissioner for Transport for London since 2006. He was awarded the CBE that year for keeping public transport in London running during the July 2005 London bombings, and was knighted in the New Year's Honours List this year for his flawless handling of London's transport above and below ground during the Olympics. We are greatly honoured that he has agreed to unveil the Society's plaque marking the birthplace by High Bridge of Frank Pick, his London Underground predecessor in the 1920s and 30s, whose fine eye for design stamped on the Underground its unmistakable image. Please make a note of the unveiling date in your diary and come along to welcome our distinguished guest on this important occasion in the Society's history. (*Details onp.2.*)

Robert West



**FRANK
MATCHAM**
(1854-1920)
THEATRE ARCHITECT

WHO WAS HANNAH SOUTHGATE?

Designed OR MRS.HUMPHREY? However this theatre regrettable, at £250,000 a year it is not perhaps surprising that English Heritage was considering suspending its Blue Plaques scheme for two years. These are straitened times. Whilst apparently similar plaques can be found on the inter-net for £175, the official English Heritage plaques are much more expensive. They are not cast aluminium but ceramic, 19.4" wide and 2" thick, requiring two firings and having to be built into the fabric of the building, not merely screwed on.

Moreover, English Heritage has very strict criteria. The person commemorated must have been dead for at least 20 years, for example, and be recognisable by the well-informed passer-by, the inscription must use no more than 19 words, and it must be on the actual building lived in, not the site where it once stood; and so on.

Begun in London in 1866, the scheme has since been widely copied by civic societies and local history groups up and down the country.

Perhaps the most obvious reason the idea caught on is simple pride: that your town or street once had a famous resident - such as George Orwell or A.A.Milne. Or visitor, however briefly. There's one plaque that reads: "While filming in Bognor in 1962 Tony Hancock, comedy actor (1924-1968), stayed at the Royal Norfolk Hotel." Another: "Paul Mac-Cartney met Linda Eastman here on the 15th May, 1967." And a third: "The Jimi Hendrix Experience first played here on the 27th November, 1966" (Soho).

Sometimes, however, the plaques will commemorate someone very few will recognise - such as "Barry Wilkinson (1923-2007), artist and illustrator, lived here" or "Nicholas Carter (1953-1985), flautist, lived here 1972-1981".

However obscure the name, though, the addition of just a few extra words can sometimes have a remarkable effect. "This was the Post Office (c.1815-1851), Postmistress Hannah Southgate" (Wells, Somerset) - and one begins to sense a small community where everyone knew everyone else, with the post office as a hub for news, gossip, scandal, and the airing of local concerns, watched over so benignly for 36 years as to have left an affectionate record of the postmistress to be discovered by the Wells Local History Group, who put up the plaque.

At the other end of the country, in Stromness (Orkney), "Mrs.Humphrey's House - temporary hospital (1835-1836) for scurvy ridden whale men who had been trapped in the ice for months" speaks loudly of the hostile elements and punishing hardships of those trying to wrest a living from the sea, and of community self-sufficiency

and compassion. It is often the most purely local of plaques that give the strongest feeling of the nature of a place and its past way of life - something that the buildings alone cannot do.

It is the same with the green plaques that mark out particular buildings of note. Knowing that "Frank Matcham (1854-1920), theatre architect, designed this theatre" (Richmond-on-Thames) makes one look at this great Edwardian theatre architect's ornate ulterior far more attentively than one might otherwise do and not just the programme. "The Croft - An 18th century house [is] named after Christ Croft, a wide medieval ditch at right angles to the street" (Ludlow). And nearer home: "The Greenland Fishery - Built between 1605-8 for merchant John Atkin (Mayor 1607, 1615), this house is probably the last jettied timber-framed building to be erected hi the town. Its name recalls the local Greenland Company of merchants, whose whaling ships were based nearby between 1774 and 1821" (King's Lynn).

Finally, a word of warning. English Heritage's blue plaques are meticulously researched and, so far as one can tell, the same care has been shown by civic societies and local history groups subsequently carrying out their own

BEQUEST

We have been touched to receive £1000 recently, bequeathed to the Society in the will of the late Mary Waters of Cley Hall Drive, Spalding. We are most grateful.

schemes. But the Victorians also put up plaques, and on the Society's guided tour of Stamford in 2011 we were warned that Victorian plaques often owed more to "romantic fancy than historical fact". As: "In the house on the site of No.9 Barn Hill King Charles I slept for the last time as a free man (4 May, 1646). Through the gateway of the house leading to the north he passed disguised as a servant. Two days afterwards he surrendered to the Scots army." Victorian plaques are almost never blue or green. John Charlesworth

•4Page 3] traders should support these businesses and provide good services for their employees. The town should develop a cafe culture with good quality eateries using local produce.

We need events to showcase our history, riverside, food and hospitality, which will entice visitors to return to find out more.

DDD

"An attractive setting for a vibrant community." The one encourages the other. A lively retail and business community produces the extra capital for enhanced shop fronts; enhanced shop fronts and stylish window-dressing increase footfall and custom. The economic and the environmental are inter-linked and inseparable.

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