

# SPALDING & DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

February 2014

Why Spalding needs a

## TOWN CENTRE MANAGER (Pt.1)

**W**E ALL KNOW an attractive town centre when we see one. We want to take a photograph or revisit it. But even in picture-postcard centres things deteriorate with age or get damaged. So who, in Spalding, is responsible for putting things right exactly?

Damaged seating in Hall Place? That's County Highways. Block paving bodged with tarmac? Not Highways this time, but BT or Anglian Water or whichever utility company dug it up four weeks ago. Black sacks dumped at the corner of the Sheepmarket? Not the Council: it's private land.

The more one looks the more bewildering it becomes. Seating may be a County Highways responsibility in Hall Place, but in the Market Place it's the District Council's. The cycle stands in New Road are the County's; those by the Sheepmarket toilets the SHDC's. The litter bins in Red Lion Street are the County's, but not those in the Market Place. Why? (Much of it seems to be a question of land ownership.)

And the big planters in Hall Place? The wooden planters themselves are a County Highways installation, but the plants ...? Are they the responsibility of the SHDC Parks Department, Spalding in Bloom, or Spalding Round Table and the other charities with plates on the sides?

Traffic signs are dealt with by County Highways – unless, that is, they're illuminated, when they come under its street lighting sub-division. But if it's the poles that support the Christmas lights festoons, then they're the District Council's. And although they're obviously part of the overall appearance of the town centre (like everything else here), graffiti and fly-posting come under different SHDC departments – unless the graffiti are on private property, when “we can't do anything” ..... Enough! Starting from scratch, who on earth would devise such a system?

Most people care about their urban environment. It is easy to grumble about shortcomings, but if one tries to do any more, one is faced by all this bewildering fragmentation. How do you know who

to contact? There are almost a dozen different local authority departments and utilities to choose from.

**The need is for a single port of call**, a single contact for any concern about the town centre, whatever its nature. The District Council does provide such a service, Customer Services, who should see your concern passed on to the department responsible, including LCC departments.

And if the matter is not dealt with? Then you have to go through the whole process again ..... and again ..... By when even the most public-spirited may give up, due to the hassle. (Case study on p.6.)

It's more than a single port of call that is therefore needed. You need to know that the person to whom you are reporting your concern will personally pursue it, and *keep on pursuing it* with the relevant department, until it has been addressed. Someone with a **direct responsibility for the town centre as a whole**. Co-ordination. Overview. And, equally important, someone to whom one can put suggestions for improvements: a tree here, a cycle rack or a seat there, a rearrangement of the market stalls.

In short, **a town centre manager**.

Only if there is an easy, direct route to a known person are ordinary people likely to play an active and positive part in helping to create and maintain a lively, handsome centre for the whole community.



### A.G.M.

Tuesday, 18 March  
7.30

Spalding Grammar School  
Business Centre

+

illustrated talk by  
Keith Seaton  
on stories behind his  
recent book

on Spalding's heyday as a port. (See p.5.)

## Planning Matters

In December **Holland Market** was sold to another large property company. Whether they will have grandiose schemes for its redevelopment and expansion like Corbo or things will remain pretty much as they are now remains to be seen.

**Town Centre Regeneration** - The allocation of the S106 monies gets more and more like passing-the-parcel. Since the last Newsletter it has been referred back to the Town Forum, forward to the Cabinet, then back to a Cabinet sub-committee. The front-runner now seems to be a Town Centre Manager, the only really relevant proposal, though the job-description would need very careful formulation to ensure tangible improvement to the centre.

The **Rugby Club's** application to relocate to farm land between Spalding and Cowbit has been joined by a Council proposal for a **travellers' site** nearby. We have expressed our strong concern at this erosion of the clear division between Spalding and Cowbit.

An application to convert **Halmer Grange** into 17 flats (with 6 semis) would be gross over-development, with virtually no amenity space. The Society had warned that this sort of thing might happen when the sale of part of the site to Spalding High School was allowed before it was known what might be proposed for the former care-home.

On the brighter side, the Council's planning committee have refused the 286-dwelling scheme for **Wygate Park**, and told big developer Keir Homes to revise the design of part of its proposal. Would that they had earlier rejected the whole characterless, might-be-anywhere agglomeration of boxes and demanded something better.

Signs, too, of positive moves on the **Sir Halley Stewart Playing Field** with the setting up of a Council task group to make it clearer that the Field is available for individual hire and, more fundamentally, to consider how it can be made more generally accessible for informal recreation.

Finally, a streetscape success for the Society. The re-positioning of the **cycle-stands** at right-angles to the Sheepmarket toilets has freed up each side of the stands for use. Thank-you to the case officer and Councillor Roger Gamba-Jones for acting on the Society's suggestion.

**Planning Sub-Committee**

## Visit to Peterborough's Faizan-e-Madina Mosque

Thursday, 24 April, 2.30



Own transport. From Bourges Boulevard turn **L** at the Toys'R'Us roundabout into Taverners' Road, then first **R** into Gladstone Street. The Mosque is on the **L** after Cobden Street. Parking at Mosque.

Modest dress: visitors are asked to have arms and legs covered, and ladies may also cover their heads to show respect. Shoes will need to be removed in certain specified areas.

Numbers limited. Please secure your place by phoning Marion Brassington (01775 767923) or e-mail [philip.mar@virgin.net](mailto:philip.mar@virgin.net).

## Much Appreciated

- **The Moorings**, Commercial Road (formerly The Anchor). It is good to see this historic riverside pub has reopened *as a pub* after the fire two or three years ago that destroyed its roof and an application to convert it to flats. Good too to see the high quality signs.
- Excellent Christmas window-dressing at **Hill's Furniture Store** and **The Grocer's**, the tiny green-grocer's in Francis Street. Although not the most stylish, the most imaginative display was again at **Hill's Department Store** – with 'The Twelve Days of Christmas' as this year's theme.
- The **Environment Agency** for the otter 'platforms' it has installed on the river towards Little London Bridge, where the long stretches of sheer sheet-piling would make it impossible for otters to get ashore. (After near extinction, it is encouraging to find the otter's recovery reaching this part of the country and this elusive animal now re-establishing itself in South Holland.)
- Nice to see the name **The Prior's Oven** back in use again, as the name of the micro-pub now operating from the building.
- The upright re-establishment of the **tree in Red Lion Street** that had been increasingly out-Pisa-ing the Leaning Tower for months.

### BLUE PLAQUES PROJECT

General William Booth, later founder of the Salvation Army, began his ministry in Spalding (1852-4). He lodged in Red Lion Street (house unknown) and in Bridge Street next door to what is now Boot's Opticians. But was it on the left-hand side or the right? We should be most grateful for any information at all that might lead to pinning down an exact location. Please phone **Judy Chapman (01775 680404)**. For example, the name of the householder with whom Booth lodged could be pursued in the 1851 census.

## Wanted or Unwanted?

A town council for Spalding

**A** MISTAKE was made over 40 years ago when the Westminster government last reorganised local government in our area. The whole of the new South Holland District should have been treated uniformly. A town council should have been created for Spalding.

However, that is history. The mistake was made at a time when local government was expanding.

Local government has changed dramatically since then, particularly in recent years. We now live in a country where the whole public sector has shrunk significantly. The present government promotes the idea of “localism”. At the same time it does little to encourage our confidence in local public services.

What would be the consequences of creating a town council for Spalding now, as advocated by our Chairman in the Society’s last Newsletter?

It would need its own staff and premises. They would have to be provided at public expense, either by increasing our council tax bills or by diverting already-scarce resources away from projects and services which benefit the public directly.

It would create another forum for debate, and possible disagreement between this new third tier of local government and the existing local authorities – Lincolnshire County Council and South Holland District Council – and offer more scope for party-political muscle flexing.

It would add to the uncertainty which already exists in the minds of many people about which authority does what, who to approach for service, and who to hold accountable when the need arises. [See p.1]

In Spalding we elect four councillors to Lincolnshire County Council and eleven to South Holland District Council. Surely we have enough councillors to look after Spalding’s interests, if they give priority to working together (whatever their political party loyalties) for the good of the whole town.

The relationship between the elected councillors and local interest groups such as the Civic Society and the Chamber of Commerce should be based primarily on constructive partnership, resorting to opposition, reaction and criticism only when necessary.

In my view the way forward should be to make the best use of the existing local government arrangements for the benefit of Spalding, rather than creating another costly, confusing and potentially divisive layer of government.

**Roger Smith**

[Let debate continue. Further contributions welcomed on whether Spalding should have a town council.]

□

### SUBSCRIPTIONS

... are now due (£8 single; £12 for two at same address; students in full-time education free). Please return with the enclosed slip to Melvyn Price, 34 Avebury Gardens, Spalding, PE11 2EN. If you get the Newsletter by e-mail, please print off the slip and return as above.



## Willow Tree Fen

**T**HE FENS have an image problem! For at least a hundred years people have been regarding them as flat, boring, full of cabbages, wildlife-free and of no interest whatsoever.

We do not have pretty uplands scenery – because we’re not uplands. We are a dried-out wetland, and everyone looks in the wrong place. No, there’s not an awful lot of wildlife interest in a cabbage field – and even less in a wheat field – though you might find quite a lot of bird life in a rape field (and not just wood pigeons). The place to look is in the dykes and drains where, apart from fish, you will find small, humble creatures living out their quiet lives amongst the mud and water plants, many of which are rare elsewhere.

Consequently, this area is massively under-recorded, and no-one really know what is here. But all this is changing. We have only 2% of actual fenland left, and all of that is in nature reserves, but experts from both within and outside the county are surveying our water-courses, and getting very excited about what they are finding. At the same time, in 2009 the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust bought nearly 300 acres of farmland near Tongue End, between the road and the River Glen, for “re-wetting” and conversion back to fenland. They have called it Willow Tree Fen.

The habitat is quite varied, with ponds and plantation woodland as well as arable fields. Turning fields into wet grassland and woodland isn’t an overnight job, and it’s still very early days, but a number of rare plants and ‘bugs’ have already been found. Recently I heard of signs that otters have been visiting, and when we were there before Christmas there were a few wigeon and mallard on the ponds.

The reserve is now open to the public. The entrance is opposite Bank House Farm (TF 182213). There are two carparks, one at the entrance, with an interpretation board, and one at the other end of the track. There are hides, where you can look out over some of the wet fields, and another hide has been converted from a farm building. The fen is full of life in the summer, though pretty bleak at this time of year, but easy walking and well worth a visit to see work in progress. For an idea of what it is hoped it will be like in a few years’ time, however, you also need to visit the Wildlife Trust’s Baston Fen reserve the other side of Tongue End. **Annette Faulkner**



## Inside the Workhouse

“A SUCCESSFUL WORKHOUSE was an empty workhouse,” said Stephen Perry in his talk on the Peterborough Workhouses (17 October). Charged by the Poor Laws with the duty of relieving their poor, parish guardians had an obvious interest in keeping the costs as low as possible. The harshness of the Victorian workhouse regimes was designed to deter as many of the destitute, starving and homeless as possible from knocking at the workhouse door.

The most brutal feature was the splitting up of families, with men, women and children consigned to separate wings. The only time the members of a family would catch sight of each other – nothing more – was on a Sunday across the aisle of the workhouse chapel.

Grim, bare day-rooms, dormitories congested and some with beds coffin-shaped so that when laid alternately head-to-foot more could be crammed in, the toilet a mere hole in the ground in a corner of the yard .....

Food was an obvious target for economy: a bit of boiled meat occasionally, and bread and gruel every day - that is, a thin slop of oatmeal in water (or flour in water under a really cost-cutting workhouse master).

In return for this minimum of food and shelter, the women worked in the laundry and the men at stone-breaking, bone-crushing or oakum-picking (i.e. obtaining fibre by untwisting and unpicking old rope). On the positive side, the children were given basic schooling, the better to offer them (with a premium attached) as apprentices or into domestic service, thus getting them off the parish’s hands.

One of the particularly interesting aspects of Stephen Perry’s talk was that his research enabled us to follow the ‘career’ of three or four particular inmates whose names cropped up at intervals in the workhouse records.



*Spalding’s workhouse was in Pinchbeck Road, where the Chappell Centre and Garth School now are. It was an enormous building, with 407 inmates in 1851 from Spalding and eight surrounding parishes. Opened in 1837, it survived until 1929, when it became a hospital. The building was demolished in the early 1960s.*

*“Please, sir, I want some more” – top as drawn by George Cruickshank, Dickens’s original illustrator (1837), and bottom as portrayed in the film of Lionel Bart’s Oliver! (1968).*

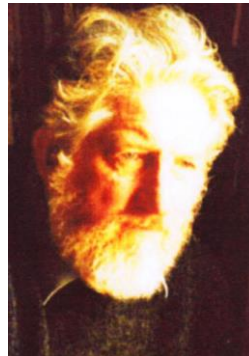
Members interested in seeing what Spalding looked like years ago will find a wealth of old photographs simply by googling **PICTORIAL HISTORY OF SPALDING** Many are unpublished anywhere else and they are being added to all the time.

## Behind the Plaque

“I HAVE BEEN OBSESSED by ancient Rome ever since I was 10,” wrote Tim Holland in *The Guardian* three months ago. “Two books served to fuel my passion. The first was Peter Connolly’s all-action survey *The Roman Army*. The second was .....

 It was very much the same for Ed Fordham, too, whose illuminating talk on Peter Connolly in November showed us “the man behind the plaque” which the Society had installed on Peter’s house in Spring Street in December 2012.

Ed got to know him and the inside of his workshop as a young lad for, as well as being a superb illustrator, Peter Connolly was an experimental archaeologist too, not an academic. Not only had every detail in his pictures to be accurate, but it also had to *work*. Written accounts, archaeological remains and carved reliefs were not enough. Roman armour had to be forged, straps and leggings riveted and stitched, and javelin shafts adzed and sanded. He crossed the Alps in Hannibal’s footsteps, and walked over and photographed ancient battle sites from every angle, in order to reconstruct exactly how the legions had attacked, retreated and manoeuvred. More than once he was arrested and taken in by police.



As a result, scholarly understanding of various aspects of the Ancient World came to be revised and, without ever intending it, he found himself being recognised as a world authority on Roman and, later, Greek warfare – much in demand by television and film studios, but constantly frustrated by directors’ carelessness over detail.

Peter started as an illustrator of children’s books, drawing anything from dinosaurs to spacemen. After hours of research for a book on Roman life, he presented his illustrations, which were much applauded, and then added: “But the text’s rubbish. I could do better myself.” “Then do it,” snapped the editor. “Yes, I will,” said Peter. The book was a great success.

The illustrations in his books are not only full of graphic detail, but swirl with vigorous life. “In every corner,” said Ed Fordham, “there’s someone *doing* something. And mischievously he would often incorporate family and friends in the scenes, looking out from a shop in Pompeii or stooping to pick up a helmet dislodged in combat.” The man behind the plaque.

(And the second book that fuelled the 10-year-old Tim Holland’s passion for ancient Rome? *Asterix the Legionary* ! Peter would have enjoyed the incongruity.)





## REVIEWS

*Oliver Green: Frank Pick's London. £25 at Bookmark*

IT ALL BEGAN with posters. Appointed to the failing Underground Group company in 1906-7, Albert Stanley (general manager) and Frank Pick (publicity & advertising) saw the immediate need was for more passengers. For off-peak travel – to shops, theatres, matches, exhibitions, events and the countryside around London – not just to work. Pick chose posters to do it.

Posters then were mostly dense clutters of text and warring type-faces. But Pick had other ideas. “In a mere passing glance,” he said, a poster’s “idea must slip through the eyes into the brain”; and gifted young designers were commissioned to come up with posters using a single striking image and a brief phrase. In the same vein, station entrances were stripped of their smother of commercial advertising and the new Underground Group posters given space to breathe.

The easier it was to get about the underground system, Pick reasoned, the more people would use it. Hence the simple roundel logo, big and bold, immediately identifying every station entrance; and the repetition of station names along the platform instead of just once at each end. Hence also the famous stylised map. Escalators were installed as a more efficient way of moving people vertically. Pneumatic doors needed sleeker carriages.

It was Pick’s passionate conviction that good design was not a matter of applying pretty decoration to mediocre products, but grew out of making an object utterly “fit for purpose”. Thus, modernist and clean-lined, the underground was rapidly establishing its image, its brand.

It was a marriage of commercial drive and aesthetic ideals. And just as Stanley expanded the Underground Group to take over the other remaining underground companies, pushing their lines out into the suburbs and beyond, and then took over the capital’s bus companies, so Pick’s control over design quality extended its reach too. By the time the now huge Underground Group was taken into public ownership as London Transport in 1933, the company was manufacturing its own buses and rolling-stock.

There is a remarkable photograph in Oliver Green’s book, in which everything – except the passenger - has been designed by the Underground Group or London Transport: the bus, signs, map, posters, staff uniforms and characteristic new art-deco station. All had passed over Pick’s desk and needed his approval.

Frank Pick emerges from Green’s pages as a man increasingly driven by a vision of good design as a civilising force, spread by the daily contact of millions of underground users with the work of the outstanding artists, sculptors, designers, architects and engineers he commissioned, such as Graham Sutherland, Paul Nash, Eric Gill and Jacob Epstein.

The book is lavishly illustrated with pictures on every page – though there might perhaps have been fewer posters and more photographs of fittings, furniture and station architecture.

Pevsner called Pick “the greatest patron of the arts whom this century has so far produced in England.” He “made transport an art and sought beauty and good design in all things,” says the memorial plaque at his old school in York. Frank Pick was a son of Spalding, too.

**John Charlesworth**

*Keith Seaton: The River Welland, Shipping and Mariners of Spalding. £16.99 at Bookmark*

KEITH SEATON has written an excellent book on the history of the port of Spalding. He was born and bred in Spalding and many of his antecedents were mariners or connected to shipping. He is also closely associated with the Chain Bridge Forge and its recent development.

In its heyday Spalding was a busy commercial port with a shipping industry that affected a large majority of the local population. Today that rich history is almost forgotten and little remains of the working port except for the Georgian homes of its well-off owners. Keith Seaton seeks to recover that lost port, beginning with the River Welland of Roman times and traversing its history up to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when river traffic began to decline.

Special attention is given to the types of vessel, with drawings and photos, and fascinating details of names and owners from the Boston Ships Register 1824-92. Master mariners and their families are described and extracts from censuses and directories show the surprisingly large number of people employed in shipping and what they all did.

Best of all are the illustrations. Many have not been published before and are clear and sharp. They show all aspects of the port activities and the shipping. We can now appreciate what a huge influence the port was on the development, the prosperity and the shape of our present town.

All Spaldonians should read Keith Seaton’s book.

**John Honnor**

*[Keith Seaton will be speaking at the AGM – p.1.]*

Town Centre Manager  
**Case Study**

Members may recall these two plastic barriers loafing about late last year between the Pied Calf and the Prior's Oven – sometimes standing yards away, sometimes leaning against the tree, sometimes blown flat by the wind, but nearly always blocking the seating. All to no discernible purpose. After two months I raised the matter at the help desk in Priory Road, where a succession of phone calls eventually produced the response that there was some uneven paving, but the market traders kept moving the barriers, and it was a County Council matter anyway. The help desk then kindly put me through directly to the relevant LCC department, which, after a few minutes' scrolling, said they'd no idea what the barriers were for. They would get back to me. (They didn't.) Inspection revealed no sign of uneven paving. It was another month before the barriers went – just when I was winding myself up to try again.



5 December, 2013

Three months of visual clutter in the town centre. An effective town centre manager would have noticed the problem after a week and set the necessary wheels in motion. And anyone raising such a matter could be confident a single phone call, e-mail, letter or visit would see it being dealt with firmly and promptly. **J.C.**



**Streetscape**



Halmstad, Sweden

The tree on the left is not a tree. It is a fast-growing Russian Vine planted inside a metal framework. In no time at all the visual equivalent of a small tree has graced the streetscape. A yearly prune keeps it to the size and shape required for its situation. It is not hard to think of places in the town centre that could be rapidly enhanced in this way.

**J.C.**

The photographs below are from member Roger Smith's collection, and show some of the interesting ways other towns and cities enhance their public spaces. From the left:- **Gloucester**: a performance platform doubles as seating; **Bellac, France**: abstract sculpture in a historic setting; **Manhattan, USA**: community history, the commemoration of a dramatic rescue (see kneeling figure).



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