

ROTHERHAM DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY

Newsletter - September 2010

BOSTON CASTLE - TEN LOST YEARS

It is now more than ten years since our Society, with the support of the council, started campaigning for the restoration of Boston Castle, one of the most interesting historic buildings in the borough, as a visitor and educational centre.

It started with a well attended public meeting addressed by Guy Kilminster, the libraries, museums and arts manager, and everyone was quite optimistic. Nearly a year later, we called another public meeting to consider a feasibility study. Now the council wanted to include the park, the cemetery and Canklow Woods in a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). We thought this would cause a delay but we started recruiting for a "Friends" group and soon passed no fewer than 80 names and addresses to the council.

The Friends of Boston Castle and Parklands came into existence in 2002 and has campaigned for eight years, ably led by its secretary Janet Worrall, to secure the restoration of the castle. As the years have gone by, hopes have been raised and shattered but, following a successful HLF bid for £580,000 in January 2010, work on the restoration of the castle was to start at the end of August.

Then, a few weeks before the key date, things went wrong again as the castle became a casualty of the council's cutbacks and the match funding of £1.2 was withdrawn. A much reduced scheme has now been produced and a new cash bid will have to go to HLF. This concentrates on renovating and conserving the castle with only a limited amount of learning facilities.

Bearing in mind that £120,000 from HLF and a lot of council money has already been spent, what a sad story it all is. We think the council should have tried harder.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Our Society is still looking for volunteers to take on key posts in the organisation.

For three years, we managed without a secretary - a post now very effectively occupied by Peter Hawkrige - but we are needing a new chairman, Stan Crowther having stood down after 18 years in office. No-one so far has been willing to accept a nomination to succeed him.

Stan has been appointed to the vacant post of honorary president, a title last held by the late Jim Muntus who had previously served as both secretary and chairman.

The other big gap in our officer ranks is the social secretaryship. Rita Eddington stood down at the last AGM after organising successful social events for a good many years and no one has yet been willing to take on this very important role. Social events, as well as being enjoyable occasions, provide opportunities for members to discuss topical issues in an informal atmosphere.

IN MEMORY OF SHEILA

The executive committee has responded to the decision of the last AGM to purchase a trophy to be awarded in memory of Sheila Cameron, who died earlier this year.

It takes the form of a shield and it will be presented annually for service to the community in accordance with the Society's principal aims which, of course, include encouraging high standards in architecture and planning and stimulating public interest in and care for the beauty, history and character of the area of the metropolitan borough of Rotherham.

Sheila had been a member of the Society from its formation more than 40 years ago and served as a member of the executive committee for many years including a lengthy spell as secretary.

Nominations, please, to Peter Hawkrige (phone 0114 246 4703).

POLICIES IN THE MELTING POT

The change of Government following the last General Election has left a big question mark over the future of housing and planning policies.

Last year, we expressed strong opposition to the council's Core Strategy Revised Options document, under which a huge increase in housing "requirement" was to be imposed on Rotherham through the then Government's Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), resulting in the loss of hundreds of acres from the designated green belt.

The new Government has scrapped the RSS and the council, we are told, is "awaiting further guidelines" before it can determine what sites will be needed for future housing development. We are promised further consultation when the position is clearer.

Meanwhile, however, we have received the 234-page South Yorkshire Residential Design Guide which, in our view, represents a welcome return to fundamental principles of good planning, such as location of housing in relation to community facilities, bus stops, open spaces, etc. We have expressed our surprise that the document does not include any reference to the Government's decision, already announced, to deal with the problem of "garden grabbing" by classifying domestic gardens as "Greenfield" rather than the present "brownfield." Our executive committee will closely monitor developments.

ENVIRONMENT TROPHY

Our executive committee is anxious to receive entries for the next round of our environment trophy competition.

The trophy is awarded biennially for the environmental treatment of a new building or refurbishment and the new round is for developments completed during the calendar years 2008 and 2009. Anyone wishing to suggest a scheme for consideration should contact Peter Hawkrige (0114 246 4703) before the end of November.

FIRBECK HALL

The future of Firbeck Hall, a building with a very interesting history, has long been a matter of concern to our executive committee.

After many years in the ownership of a Mr. Saint, who appeared reluctant to keep it in a good state of repair, the hall and the 40.89 acres of land in which it stands were sold to Mr. Jason Cooper, of Georgia and India Trading Co., for £350,000, exceeding the price offered by a consortium of local villagers by £30,000.

The council's conservation officer, Peter Thornborrow, has been in touch with the new owners about the need for re-roofing.

ANYONE FOR LUNCH?

Although - as reported elsewhere in this newsletter - we now have no social committee, the executive committee has decided to organise a lunch gathering at which our secretary, Peter Hawkrige, will give a talk on "History Trails of Rotherham."

It will be an informal event at the Brecon Hotel on 29th October, starting at noon. Members wishing to be there should contact our treasurer, Bernard Fletcher, on 01709 585311 for details.

Printed and published by Rotherham District Civic Society, 15 Clifton Crescent South, Rotherham, S65 2AR