

MAY 2009



HUDDERSFIELD CIVIC SOCIETY

# Newsletter

## The litter of shop fronts

by Professor Cedric Cullingford

People who design the interior of shops do their best to make them attractive. They are aware that it is not just the layout, the special offers or the gimmicks, or even the background music that puts the customer in the right, or preferred, mood but the aesthetics. But first they have to attract the customers to the shop.

This is where visual appeal disappears and advertising and branding take over. Whilst we know that the pleasure of shopping should include a complete visual experience, the shops along the high streets have ugly, brash and cheap looking frontages. They also destroy the houses they inhabit.

This visual illiteracy, this insensitive decor, is a peculiarly English (and in a different way American) phenomenon. One of the pleasures of town centres, those that are blessed with a blend of old buildings, some even distinguished, is to be able to see the whole streetscape, to appreciate how it looks. The presence of trees, and the absence of street clutter, make a difference; and of course, so do the scale and shape of the buildings.

In England, it is sometimes impossible to be aware that the buildings that make up a town exist. There are different colours shrieking brand names, each of the size almost deliberately designed to destroy the natural scale. There is neither any sensitivity to surroundings, nor appreciation of layout.



One of the reasons for this insensitivity is the belief that the brand image is all and that this must be uniform all over the country. The customer, like Pavlov's dog, is supposed to respond without thought. The result is that every town looks the same. Worse still, the towns are made to look as if shopping were a mindless, unpleasurable activity.

Perhaps the thinking behind such brash displays of advertising is that each one must stand out, so that the customer's mind can be triggered by the sight of the brand. The logic of this would be to make each sign so big that it can be seen from anywhere; an odd way to help people find out where they want to go, given the competition. The result could be billboards so big and brash that all would be obscured.

There are other ways to find a shop one is looking for, like the street plans that are available in some malls. All shops including specialist shops would welcome such information, and this would not be hard to achieve.

Meanwhile, we have a visual landscape that is nasty and ineffective. It is also insulting, not only obliterating the heritage of buildings, but demeaning the people there. Surely we could treat our high streets and the retail outlets with more respect?

Does one really need to go elsewhere to shop?

Photo of listed building on Chapel Hill by Christopher Marsden

# Planning News

by Frank O'Brien

Being asked to produce news from the planning scene at the moment is rather like the newspaper editor who was stuck for a story on a Monday during the "silly season". The best he could come up with was the headline "Small Earthquake in Nicaragua: No-one Hurt". During the current economic slump there is very little activity, apart from the usual domestic extensions which don't interest the Society. With the latest changes to planning regulations, there are even fewer of these requiring permission than heretofore.

## Colne Road student hostel

Since our last newsletter, the student accommodation and apartments at Colne Road have been approved by the council. This was a sympathetic proposal, using local stone and following a design which was in keeping with its location. The councillors liked it.

## University Business School

The university has been permitted to erect a four storey extension to its business studies school between Firth Street and the canal. When the plans were published we contacted the planning department and the Leeds based architects to clarify what they meant by the term "masonry" for the facings onto Firth Street. To most of us, masonry means stone, but when developers use the term it sets the alarm bells sounding: it usually means cheap concrete block work. Through gritted teeth the architects told me that they were now going to suggest local stone, which was what appeared on the planning permission.

## The Former University Riverside Studio Site

The totally unacceptable proposal for student accommodation on the car park site between

Wakefield Road, Somerset Road and Kings Mill Lane was due to be recommended for refusal at a recent planning committee.

The developers saw the writing on the wall and revised their scheme completely. These plans are now on the Kirklees website; my conversations with the officer concerned suggest that they may satisfy many of our objections concerning design, massing and facing materials: we shall see.

## St Andrew's Road

The only other major permission granted was for the office development on the car park site on St Andrew's Road. Again, this was seen to be in sympathy with the local vernacular, the adjacent listed Turnbridge Mill and the Windlass Bridge (also listed and a Scheduled Ancient Monument).

## Waterfront

The Waterfront development appears to have hit the buffers, at least temporarily, as the Learning and Skills Council has got its sums wrong and can no longer finance the move of Kirklees College from New North Road to the proposed site. Any development needs a public funded anchor at this difficult time for private finance. The developers have said that without the college the whole scheme is in jeopardy: hard times indeed. Pouring over the minutes of the planning committee can be a tedious business, but sometimes an interesting detail emerges. At one recent meeting, councillors heard that four out of five appeals against planning decisions had been upheld by inspectors. This "failure" rate of 80% is remarkable: usually only the odd appeal goes against the council's decision. Perhaps it was a case of "bad day at the office" syndrome.



Above and right: Work on the university's business school building has started with bridge demolition. Photos by Christopher Marsden

# Huddersfield Civic Society Associate members; a position paper

by Professor Cedric Cullingford

Our civic society was started, like so many others, in reaction to the wilful destruction of towns and cities in the 1960s and 1970s. Whilst this is well documented (particularly recently by Gavin Stamp) the particular symbol for Huddersfield remains the pulling down of the old market hall and the removal of the Shambles. Many people regret the changes for the worst but it takes a lot of energy to object to planning applications in detail.

This is one of the reasons that the civic society is seeking out a more pro-active role in creating policy rather than just reacting to it, in striving for a collective vision for the future of the town rather than dealing with individual financial interests and in pressing for a strategic plan rather than competing schemes.

Of course, the overall plan and the attention to detail go together. It needs special interest groups to concentrate on specific issues, as Huddersfield Gem did with the Queensgate Market Hall, as is happening with Newsome Mills and with Edgerton Cemetery. There are good reasons for encouraging every sign of concern; but each group needs support as well as a focus.

If the Huddersfield Civic Society has an overall role, it also needs to be closely involved with all the developments taking place. For this reason alone it would like to have all the interest groups becoming associate members; not having to pay an extra fee (we assume that contacts are members of the society) but having the chance to have their voices heard.

One of the plans is to have a series of members' debates, and these would be opportunities to coordinate campaigns. There are, however, many other groups of people in and around Huddersfield concerned with the urban and rural landscape. All civic societies not only need members but need to encourage people's interest in their environment.

The civic society plans to entertain as well as educate, and therefore organises speakers and visits that celebrate the local environment and broaden the debate. This is emulated by a large number of local groups who preserve documents about their heritage, and who involve people in developing their curiosity about their particular part of the area. Many of these societies are particularly concerned with history.

These, too, are vital to our overall concerns. The future is dependent on what we now have and how it came about and this concern gives a real impetus to the desire of the civic society to improve the town as a whole.



**Civic society members and  
guests at Bradley Nursery**

Associate members should, it is proposed, be any group that is concerned with the local environment, its past, its architecture and its preservation. The fact that some of these groups simply enjoy their mutual interests, while others are concerned with campaigns, is a strength and all ought to be welcomed, for all have things to contribute as well as the need for support.

The question remains how wide the embrace of local groups should be. It does, however, seem obvious that the more mutual support and the more involvement of everyone, the better. The more such concern the more powerful would be the voice of the society in its dialogue with the council.

# Forthcoming Civic Society events

## **'Distinctiveness'; a talk by Irena Bauman, Mon. 8<sup>th</sup> June 8.00pm**

### **An evening not to be missed!**

Irena Bauman is a commissioner of The Commission for Architecture & The Built Environment (CABE), the government's advisor on architecture, urban design and public space.

Irena's experience includes;

- Co-founder of Bauman Lyons Architects Ltd. Bauman Lyons is committed to experimenting with new design processes.
- Has extensive experience leading complex projects and large regeneration teams. Her practice leads on low-carbon design with schemes such as Tower Works in Leeds.
- Author of the 2008 book *How to be a Happy Architect*.
- Sits on the Leeds architecture and design initiative, and acts as an external examiner for Sheffield and Newcastle Schools of Architecture.
- Advocate to Yorkshire Forward and design review panel member for Sheffield and Hull.
- Work has been widely published and received architectural awards.
- Has led several collaborative projects with artists, writers, photographers and sound artists.
- Chair of CABE's regional committee, a member of its operations committee, enabling commissioner and champion for Yorkshire & Humber.

Room F035, Huddersfield Technical College

## **Liverpool Coach Trip, Sat. 13<sup>th</sup> June 8.15am - 7.30pm BOOK NOW!**

There are just two places left available on the society's summer excursion to Liverpool. The day includes a guided coach tour of the city with a blue badge guide, the chance to visit both cathedrals and a couple of hours for lunch and a stroll.

Later there will be a guided walk around Port Sunlight, the C19 model village built by "Soap King" William Hesketh Lever. Another attraction is the recently refurbished Lady Lever Gallery ([www.portsunlightvillage.com](http://www.portsunlightvillage.com))

Finally there will be a meal at the Seven Stars Pub in Thornton Hough. Thornton Hough has the 1868 All Saints Church, a school and 'Wilshaw Terrace' cottages built by Meltham man Joseph Hirst, his Huddersfield architects John Kirk & Sons and Meltham masons John Moorhouse & Sons.

For more details and to book contact Richard Huddleston ASAP. Cost £24 inc evening meal.

## **Civic Society business meeting, Mon. 15<sup>th</sup> June 7.45pm**

Includes a presentation by society member, Christopher Marsden on his society sponsored attendance at an Acapulco conference where he delivered a paper on the design of Queensgate Market to an enthusiastic audience of engineers and architects. Room F035, Huddersfield Technical College

## **Neaversons during Civic Society Week, Mon. 29<sup>th</sup> June – Sat. 4<sup>th</sup> July**

The society is planning to have exhibitions and events in the former Neaversons shop (see page opposite). Kirklees Council has offered us the premises rent free so we may promote the work of the society.

A working party is developing proposals, liaising with other groups and confirming arrangements. Details to follow.

**WE NEED VOLUNTEERS IN THE SHOP THROUGHOUT THE WEEK. Please contact John Lockwood if you can offer a morning or afternoon of your time.** You are, of course, will be welcome to come and take part at any time.

## **Evening Walk in Honley, Mon 3<sup>rd</sup> August, 6.30 – 8.30 & then supper BOOK NOW**

A two hour historically-themed walk around Honley led by Colin Hill, Chair of Honley Civic Society.

For more details and to book places contact Richard Huddleston by July 2nd. Cost £6.50 inc buffet meal.

# Neaversons

When the Neaversons China and Glass shop opened on 9 September 1935 it must have presented a novel modernist sight for Huddersfield. If the exterior was not interesting enough, on opening, the shop had a 'Jubilee Exhibition' display of Susie Cooper, Copeland Spode, Lalique, Wedgwood and other wares.

The shop at 4 Byram Street & 7 Wood Street has absolutely plain elevations in marble, glass, celluloid and metal. It is set into William Henry Crossland's 1880s Bulstrode Buildings. The contrast between the highly decorated building and the Neaversons frontage is striking.

On Wood Street the plain design is very neat and apparently very simple. On Byram Street, in place of the normal display windows, it has concave windows setback from the street. Looking through these the passer-by has the illusion of looking through clear space and not through glass. These windows are an ingenious way of avoiding reflections and displaying goods to best advantage.



Neaversons Byram Street facade

It is worth looking in detail at the facade. Note the two tones of marble, the black and white marble mosaic of the recessed porch, the oak door and symmetrical chromed door furniture, the frameless windows, the acid etched diminishing bands at the top of the concave windows, the mirrored oak linings of the display windows and the flat steel glazing bars holding dimpled rough cast glass.

Of particular interest is the projecting stylised lettering of all the shop's signs in zinc and celluloid. The letters are hand drawn rather than being a font. The designer seems to have stylised contemporary

san serif fonts. 'NEAVERSONS' is based on the 1932 Newport Classic SG Regular.



Detail of the Wood Street facade

and 'pottery' is Futura (a 1920s font) inspired with grossly exaggerated ascenders and descenders. The size and positioning of all the signs is both unusual and deliberate.

The shop's design is said to be derived from Le Corbusier's 1922 Maison Citrohan with a double-height living room with a bedroom tucked in above. This is best appreciated by looking up from the interior of the lower shop.

It has been suggested that the interior's design was based on a London showroom of the pottery decorators, Susie Cooper Productions. However I cannot find any evidence of the company's London showrooms (Audrey House, Ely Place and 42 Woburn Place) ever had such interiors.

In 1935 the Neaverson's ground floor showrooms were described as having streamlined shelves and tables in oak giving the whole interior a complete and harmonious form. The effect was said to be heightened with oak surfaces with sprayed silver paint in the upper showroom and gold in the lower one. The metallic touches are not now apparent but the fixtures remain intact. The basement showroom has been comprehensively altered and is now a storeroom. No evidence of the original lighting is visible.

The entire 1935 design and fitting was carried out by the Bradford shopfitters Sharp & Law (the firm's trade plates are still on each facade). It would be interesting to see other examples of the firm's contemporary designs.

Neaversons was listed Grade II in 1978 just 43 years after opening. No other Huddersfield shop, excepting Queensgate Market (35 years), has matched this speed of recognition. The rest of Bulstrode buildings are still not listed.

**Text and photos by Christopher Marsden**

# Bradley is blooming

By Richard Huddleston

Taking advantage of the strong connections between the Society and the Huddersfield In Bloom initiative, on May 18<sup>th</sup> 30 members and guests visited Kirklees Council's Leisure Service's Bradley Nursery, where growing operations were centralised in 1989.

After briefly taking a wrong turn we were greeted by the Manager, Paul Marshall. Paul has been at Bradley for 10 years and shares his time with Calderdale's similar facility, managing three full-time and up to eight seasonal staff at Huddersfield alone.



**A Bradley Nursery greenhouse**

We were amazed at the amount of work done by so few staff – at least 135,000 geraniums alone are grown from seed each year, and although they have a seed-planting machine which accurately sows 560 seeds in less than a minute, all the potting-on is done by hand.



**Paul Marshall and sowing machine**

Not surprisingly Paul is keen on buying an automated transplanting machine as well.

In addition to growing for and looking after 42 towns and villages throughout Kirklees the team

produces nearly 1,400 hanging baskets each year, which are a major contributor to the success of Huddersfield In Bloom as well as the rest of Kirklees's civic buildings.



**Paul Marshall with hanging baskets**

These are sold to other council departments as well as traders, the £39 purchase cost includes watering (or, as last year, draining!) the pots all summer. This practice reflects the nursery's commercial working methods – everything has to be paid for. As Paul uses three loads of compost annually at £4,000 each it's understandable why he needs to keep an eye on costs. On a hot summer day the nursery can use 15,000 gallons of water; we're all aware of the rising cost of that. Although some is collected from the roofs it doesn't last very long during dry spells.

The greenhouses have automated blinds and watering with vents which even open differently depending on wind direction and the gas boilers are modern condensing ones, far different from the huge old cast iron ones that most of us associate with greenhouses (and very efficient apparently, now the flames all stay inside).

A national concern in parks and gardens departments is an ageing workforce. Paul was please to inform us that with an average age of 52, Kirklees is forward-looking and has taken on 12 gardening apprentices for the last couple of years, who follow the modern style of career.

Another modern practice is the use of parasitic nematode-type pest control in the greenhouses at Bradley. No chemical spraying takes place and though this doesn't save money it's no more expensive and provides a more pleasant working environment.

Society Chairman Cedric Cullingford thanked Paul for his hospitality and congratulated his department on the fine style in which it keeps Huddersfield. Next time we are at a concert in the Town Hall we'll be much more aware of the efforts involve in its decoration, inside and out.

All photos by Christopher Marsden

# St Luke's Hospital, on the critical list

Huddersfield Civic Society's application for the listing of St Luke's House was recently refused by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport following a recommendation for refusal by its advisor, English Heritage.

The 1870 building, a former workhouse, was considered to be too ordinary of its type and too altered to be worthy of listing. Fair enough.

In early 2008 our chairman, Dr Hill, was researching the building and assembling the documentation needed to make the application. He wrote to Frank Gibbons, Director of Estates for Calderdale and Huddersfield NHS Foundation Trust, seeking permission to take photographs of the interior. Dr Hill received this reply.

7 March 2008

Dear Dr Hill

## Application to have St Luke's House Listed

Thank you for your letter of 5<sup>th</sup> February 2008 and the Foundation Trust notes your intention to apply to have St Luke's House listed.

The Foundation Trust is surprised that you did not consult with ourselves as to whether or not this was an application we would support.

Unfortunately we are unable to consent to you or English heritage, taking interior photographs of the building due to patient confidentiality and health and safety and operational liability.

As we are sure you appreciate, once a building has been given listed status, the requirements in relation to maintenance and upkeep become more onerous than at present. The Foundation Trust would not consider it a valuable and cost effective use of NHS money to utilise precious resources maintaining a building to a higher standard than is currently required.

Because our core duty is the provision of patient care it would be inappropriate to co-operate with your application for listing.

Should English Heritage approach the Foundation Trust direct in relation to this, we can confirm that the application will be resisted.

Yours,  
[Signed]  
Frank Gibbons  
Director of Estates

## Enlightened & delightful *n'est-ce pas?*

NB from [www.cht.nhs.uk/about-us/our-hospitals/st-luke-s-hospital/](http://www.cht.nhs.uk/about-us/our-hospitals/st-luke-s-hospital/): "St Luke's Hospital is situated at Crosland Moor to the west of Huddersfield...In 2007, following a consultation, it was decided that the services provided by the different organisations on the site would gradually be relocated and then the site would be disposed of."

Left, St Luke's House (photo, Christopher Marsden)



# Another view – New Street

## An anthology

“Not unnaturally the “developers” have moved in and there are plans afoot for destroying most of the old centre of the town...The little alleys with their individual shops, to which people have gone for generations, are to go. The brutal facade of the new branch of Boots’ in King Street is an earnest of what is to come. So are the Co-op and the new Civic Centre, Technical College and chain stores” John Betjeman in ‘Huddersfield Discovered’, *Weekend Telegraph Magazine*, 2 October 1964

“There are, however, limits to the number of shops which a town like Huddersfield can support, and careful consideration has been given not only to the shopping habits of the present population, but also to its future size, and anticipated spending power. Were the town to have too few shops, people would deteriorate as they struggled for survival, one against another.” Roy Brook in ‘The Story of Huddersfield’ 1968.

“Huddersfield’s little bit of pedestrian precinct. Too straight, unsheltered seats, unnecessarily open-ended. This is the end of the long yawn.” Ian Nairn in ‘The Towns behind the teams’ *BBC1*, 21 August 1975

“Rather than call it a yawn I would say it was a majestic and broad boulevard, and suits the town because it is a very open place anyway” Dr Cecil Shaw of Huddersfield Civic Society in *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 22 August 1975

“New Street in Huddersfield epitomises my greatest fears for the British high street. There’s a Lidl, a Primark, Wilkinsons, a handful of frozen food, jewellery and homeware discounters, a couple of neglected charity shops, a few vacant premises, plus Poundland and Poundworld. It felt desolate and desperate.” Mary Portas in ‘Mary Portas takes a cut-price tour of Poundland’, *Daily Telegraph*, 29 April 2009

“I know Mary is retailer specific not location centric but some recognition of the other retailers in Huddersfield seems appropriate. The Kingsgate Centre, the main shopping mall in the city is home to more than thirty stores and half a dozen cafes and bars. It was very busy three weeks ago when I took a train trip to

Huddersfield and went home laden with books. Close by is The Packhorse Centre, comprising a dozen budget jewellery, clothes and gift stores. The Byram Arcade is a shopping and office complex, with units currently occupied by creative businesses, independent publishers and music, gift and art stores.”

Brian in ‘Credit Crunch Retail – Huddersfield’ at [www.godsowncounty.co.uk](http://www.godsowncounty.co.uk), 5 May 2009

New Street Huddersfield,  
Saturday 16 May 2009 Photo,  
Christopher Marsden



The Huddersfield Civic Society Newsletter welcomes contributions from all society members and friends of the society. The next edition is planned for mid June 2009.

Please send your ideas, proposals, comments letters and articles to the editor by email to [c\\_marsden@hotmail.com](mailto:c_marsden@hotmail.com) or by post to 106 Lamb Hall Road, Huddersfield HD3 3TJ