

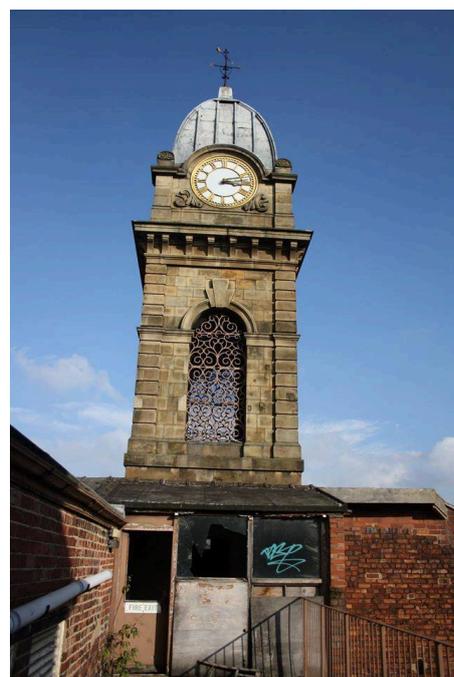


FRIENDS OF THE OLD TOWN HALL

A COMMUNITY ASSET FOR CASTLEGATE?

Welcome to the Friends' newsletter. It's a bit later than we had planned, for unavoidable reasons. However it means we can include details of the 2018 AGM, on 26 March, which is open to all and which we hope you'll attend. You'll find the agenda etc on the back page. We hope too that you will think about whether you'd like to join the committee and take an active role in running the Friends. There will be plenty of interesting things to do in 2018-19.

This is going to be the year when we have to reach major decisions about the best way to take forward our project to acquire and restore the Old Town Hall and turn it into the community asset we all want it to be. We have to get this right so as to maximise our chances of raising the very large sums of money we know will be needed. And we are going to need a lot of specialist advice. If you think you can help please get in touch via fothsheffield@gmail.com and we'll talk! There's more about helping later.



THE ROOF SAGA RUMBLES ON ...

We all know the OTH's roof is in a very bad way and years of rainwater and snow have created enormous damage to the interior (if it had been fixed years ago the ultimate cost of repair would be much less.....and we've just passed the tenth anniversary of the Victorian Society putting the OTH on its national list of the most endangered 19th century buildings in the country). So we were all pleased when the City Council announced in July that it had at last found the cash to pay for urgent repairs to make the OTH weatherproof - the owners having not done this. But at the time of writing - mid-February - the work hasn't been started and another winter's weather has got inside. What on earth is going on? Is it so very difficult to get up on a roof and fix it? We hear that some serious wrangling has been going on inside the Council about how to approach the task. Without going in to detail, and while we would never argue for unnecessary risks to be taken, it seems ludicrous that nothing has happened. Latest news indicates even more delay as no-one seems to be able to find a key to the building, not even the owners....you couldn't make it up.

UPDATE ON THE BUSINESS PLAN

We commented last time on the work under way over last summer and autumn, thanks to grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Architectural Heritage Fund. We now have the full outputs from this. The aim of the project was to get the Castlegate Preservation Trust off to a running start, armed with a feasibility study of our preferred options for future use of the Old Town Hall, and architects' advice on its condition and the likely cost of restoration. The outputs have moved us a very long way forward, and we're grateful to our funders.

We've come out of the work with an outline business plan for the new uses – a mix of managed and co-working space, performance/rehearsal space, meeting and conference space, all to let, and food and drink offerings. This has been matched to architects' plans for a phased restoration of the building. We have detailed costings for the repair work (ouch!) and a professional valuation of the building both in its present condition, and once restored. We have sound advice not to bother with 'meanwhile' use, a basic patching-up that would be enough to allow some of the spaces to be let out. That's because so much fundamental work has to be done before any use can be made of it at all, that it wouldn't be worthwhile. It's not just the roof that needs fixing; all the services – power, water etc – need replacing to modern standards, to say nothing of essential repairs to the parts of the OTH that are dangerous. So we'd do better to go straight for the ultimate use.

OUR TASKS AHEAD

So where next? There are 2 huge tasks ahead. One is to get **ownership of the building**. We don't think the owners will sell it to us. They've been asking what you might see as a silly price, £3m, for a property we know - from the valuation we've just had – is basically worth nothing in its present state because of the restoration cost. As we reported in Newsletter 12, that extraordinary asking price was dropped from the agents' on-line ad, and it hasn't gone back. The very latest news – hot off the press - is that, we understand, the estate agents Colloco are no longer handling the sale (though the OTH is still on their website) and have instead appointed a very upmarket London-based agent. We've seen this film before, and it's never had a good outcome. The rumour that the owners are preparing a planning application has surfaced again too. Don't hold your breath; we heard the same 18 months ago.

We are seeking high-level discussions with the City Council, to come to agreement on the broad strategy for the next stages. Put simply, they've got powers to acquire the OTH but don't have the money. We don't have the powers but can try to raise the money. So **the second task is fundraising**. This won't be easy given the sums involved. It is very hard to predict what it will cost to acquire the OTH, but we do know now what it will cost to save it. At least we know it's feasible to bring the building back into use in stages, and we should be able to fund-raise in stages too; and we have to mesh these two tasks together. We shall need a lot of help, of many kinds. Elsewhere in this newsletter you can find out how you might be able to help.

WORKING WITH HERITAGE LOTTERY FUND

It may be unfortunate that as we move to this next, critical stage of our project, the Heritage Lottery Fund has been under review and has already announced reductions in some of its programmes, and especially the ones that offered the largest grants. And they've made clear that they are receiving far more really good-quality bids than they can accept. This will be a challenge for us as the HLF is an obvious source for some of the funding we'll need. But we aren't too downcast; we still have a lot of preparatory work to do, new HLF rules won't emerge until some time next year, and we'll work out our strategy in light of what's practically possible at the time. HLF have already committed to giving more of their budget to local teams and projects and who knows, that might actually help us!

ASSISTANCE NEEDED ON COMMUNITY SHARES

It's all getting a bit technical now. We've been looking at structures for owning the building, in the context of FOTH's policy (which we know has lots of support in the city) that the OTH should become a community asset, and if possible in community ownership. Ownership by our new charity, the Castlegate Preservation Trust, would be one way of making sure that the OTH could never fall into commercial ownership; the law ensures that a charity's assets must always be in the hands of a charitable body. There's more than one way of managing things however.

We are looking seriously at the possibility of becoming, or setting up, a Community Benefit Society and launching a community share issue to raise funds to buy the OTH and to provide working capital for the business we want to operate in it. This is now a tried and tested way of rescuing heritage assets. It gives local people the opportunity to buy a community share – which need not involve a large sum for individuals – and to have a say in the building's future. It's an attractive option which we believe would be welcome to many in Sheffield. But it isn't a simple operation; Community Benefit Societies are, rightly, regulated and there are strict rules for mounting a share issue. It would take a lot of work – but then, so would any way forward.

We haven't completely ruled out a partnership with other organisations – that could include some in the private sector – to acquire and restore the OTH. There is one HLF funding stream, the Heritage Enterprise Grant, directed at exactly this kind of structure. So far no serious prospective partners have come forward. If they do we'll evaluate any proposal seriously. But the Enterprise grant will end next year and we don't know if there will be another round. So if there's a business out there that wants to talk, please say so very soon. **If you have experience of running a community share offer and are willing to discuss that with us – whether to talk through the process or take a more active part – please get in touch via fothsheffield@gmail.com**

THE STORY OF CASTLE GREEN

The Old Town Hall stands on Sheffield Castle's Green. It was unnecessary to dig a moat on two sides of the mound, for the rivers Sheaf and Don provided good defences. However to complete the moat a ditch would be dug along the lines of what are now Waingate and Exchange Street, thereby allowing the two rivers to flow round the castle. Previous archaeological surveys show that the moat, perhaps 35 ft. wide at original ground level, splays inwards to 18ft. in the first 10-20 ft. of depth. Below, vertical rock-cut walls carry it to depths between 30 ft. and 40 ft. Several roads around the castle site, such as Castle Folds, Waingate and Exchange Street, appear to have developed along the courses of the former castle ditches.

Waingate appears to follow the line of the castle's western defences.

Properties along Waingate were described as being 'in the ditch' in early 19th-century leases. A berm or pathway may have been present along the edge of the west ditch prior to the mid-17th century. This appears to have followed the present-day eastern frontage of Waingate.

Although the buildings on Castle Green post date the initial Old Town Hall Building, there is clear evidence of buildings on that site since the 15th century and it was certainly occupied before then. Two documents in Sheffield's archives list properties on Castle Green which belonged to the Church Burgesses (later to become Town Trust).



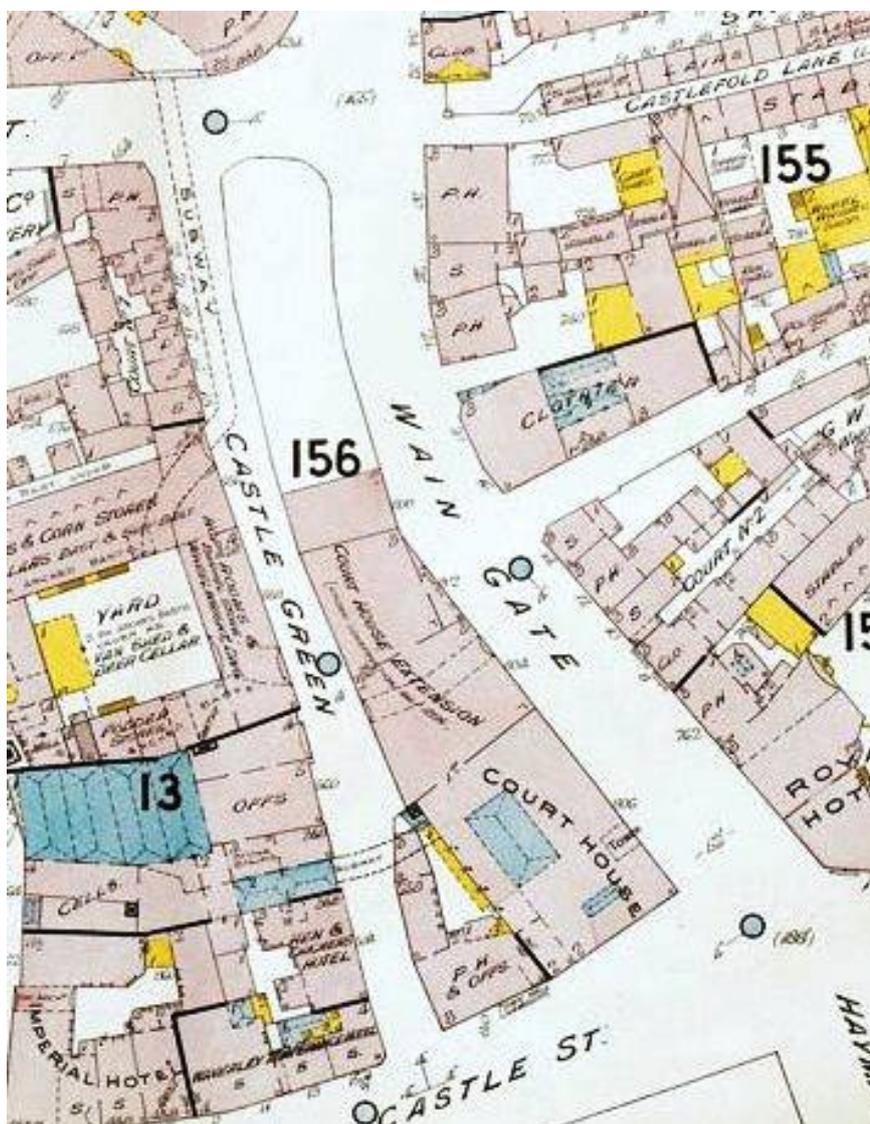
The ground at the bottom of Waingate was called "Under-the-Water" and the bridge, Lady's Bridge was approached by a flight of steps. "Under-the-Water" was the low ground at the bottom of Castle Green and Water Lane, where Bridge Street has supplanted what was only a footpath. The little bridge near unto the Ladye Bridge" is often mentioned. Sometimes it is "the Iytle brydgd at the foot of Castel Grene". It was not until 1784 that there was any access for wheeled traffic from the south-west side of Lady's Bridge. The main entrance to Sheffield, for everything on wheels, from the direction of Rotherham, was on the south-east side of the Don, and over the narrower Sheaf, at the bottom of Dixon Lane.

THE STORY OF CASTLE GREEN (continued)

By the 18th century, with Sheffield Castle long gone, most of the properties in Castle Green and Waingate seemed to belong to the Town Trust. Records show a mix of tenants: a publisher who wrote & published songs & religious literature but also published for the Town Trust; a cutler; several pubs, a tea merchant, the post office and a cementation works.

The expansion of industry and trade due to Bolsover and Huntsman innovations in steel making, and the increase in population, created a demand for better hotels and better and bigger markets.

In 1793 the grand Tontine Hotel was opened on the corner of Dixon Lane. There are still some buildings in Dixon Lane and the Haymarket, and one in Fitzalan Square, from that time.



It is quite possible that the Town Trust looked on the removal of their facilities to Castle Green as part of the regeneration of the Castle area as well as loosening the Trust's ties with the Church and moving towards Sheffield becoming a Corporation. The Trust allocated 684 yards of ground for the new Town Hall. This meant displacing several businesses but no doubt the Trust counted on the loss being made up by the rise in demand for their other properties and subsequent rise in rents.

To the left is a C19th fire insurance map of the Castle Green area

FRIENDS OF THE OLD TOWN HALL ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2018

This is to give formal notice that the third Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the Old Town Hall will be held at 7.15 pm on Monday 26 March at the Friends' Meeting House, St James's Street, Sheffield.

Third Annual General Meeting
Monday 26 March 2018

AGENDA

1. Minutes of the last AGM (available at the meeting)
2. Report from the Chair
3. Report from the Treasurer
4. Election of Committee
5. Any other business

To be followed by a talk and presentation on community share issues, by 2 directors of Portland Works Little Sheffield Ltd. Portland Works was purchased, and hence saved from residential conversion, through a community share issue.



How to contact us

We are on Facebook – <https://www.facebook.com/OTHSheffield> – and have a blog at <https://friendsofthsheffield.wordpress.com/>

We have a video, now with over a 1000 Youtube views and shot by **Juun Loh** of Sheffield University's Department of Journalism Studies. View it on the Locality website at <http://locality.org.uk/our-work/campaigns/cado/town-hall/>

We now have our own website: <https://sheffoldoldtownhall.co.uk>

Finally you can always email us at: fothsheffield@gmail.com

Contributors

VALERIE BAYLISS

Valerie Bayliss is a former civil servant and consultant with a long-standing interest in Sheffield's historic buildings.

BRIAN HOLMSHAW



Brian chaired the Making History for a Successful City conference (part of Year of Making 2016) and designs this newsletter. In any spare time he runs his own heritage interpretation consultancy - sheafvalleyheritage.co.uk



JOY BULLIVANT

Joy Bullivant, MA. joint secretary of FOTH is a local historian and co-ordinator for the Sheffield based Timewalk project.

CHARD REMAINS

Thanks to Chard for the page 1 photograph of the Old Town Hall.