

# FRIENDS OF THE OLD TOWN HALL



## CASTLEGATE FESTIVAL

The first-ever Castlegate Festival will be held on Saturday 20 and Sunday 21 June. In venues including Castle House, Exchange Place Studios and Bank Street Arts, as well as out in the streets round Castlegate itself, there will be dozens of events and happenings over the two days, including exhibitions and on the Sunday a street party outside Castle House, the G2 listed former Co-op (inside if wet!) to give everybody a chance to have a knees up while learning about, and celebrating, the history of the area and its place in Sheffield's life, as well as its potential – this is an area that will be going up in the world. Needless to say, the Friends of the Old Town Hall will be taking part – Castlegate is the OTH's home! On both days we shall have a stall, along with other local groups, inside Castle House. We'll invite visitors to sign our petition, display images of the OTH in the past and offer some art activities for children. On the Sunday our resident artist, Sam Galbraith, will be out and about in Castlegate making pictures of the events.

If you are interested in helping out on the stall for a while please email us on [fothsheffield@gmail.com](mailto:fothsheffield@gmail.com) If we get an e-copy of the Festival leaflet we'll send it to you.

And we will be running two guided walks on Sunday 21 June. First up is A Short Walk Round an Old Building – an introduction to the OTH (from the outside, as we can't get inside), why it looks as it does and why it's in a mess. Led by Valerie Bayliss. Meet at 1pm at the corner of Castle Street and Castle Green (near the Hen and Chickens pub). There is a steep cobbled stretch to walk down. Later on there's a history walk, led by Brian Holmshaw, focusing on the history of the area round the OTH and Bank Street – centre for decades of the city's legal quarter – and the colourful characters who spent time here, whether by choice or not! Meet 3pm, junction of Castle Street and Waingate. Please note, places on both walks are limited – book on [fothsheffield@gmail.com](mailto:fothsheffield@gmail.com)

## HISTORY: THE KILLING OF WILLIAM WILSON: A DEATH IN THE (OLD) TOWN HALL

In the early hours of Thursday 27 January 1859 Peter Ross was passing the General Post Office in the Haymarket, on his way home, when he heard moaning and went to a man's assistance. The injured man requested him to help him and Ross accordingly helped him up. He found he was covered with blood. Mr. J Marshall, another passer-by, assisted Ross to carry him into the post office archway. Wilson was taken to the Town Hall and a surgeon called to attend found the man lying in the Town Hall in a very exhausted condition; on examination it was found that the intestines were protruding from a punctured wound on the right side of the abdomen, just over the region of the liver.



**General Post Office, Haymarket  
where William Wilson was found  
fatally injured**

Wilson's clothes were completely saturated with the blood. After the necessary surgical treatment the man was removed to a room in the building where he could be more comfortable, and where he died during the course of the day.



**John Newton Mappin,  
part owner of the Soho  
Brewery on Ecclesall  
Road where Plant  
worked**

The newspaper report said that the victim, a William Wilson, brass founder, had told police he had been set upon by four men. The police were dubious and felt that it was more likely that someone had taken Wilson's drunken behaviour for a threat. It was not explained why they drew that conclusion. Perhaps Wilson was known to them as a drunken nuisance.

It was found that about the time of the incident a man of gentlemanly appearance was seen near the Post Office with a stick and a dagger. Further investigations over the weekend by Inspector Sills of the detective force found the man was George Plant, a traveller for the Soho brewery, who lived at 85 Tom Cross Lane in Brightside. Sills asked Plant to come with him to the Town Hall.

At the Town Hall Sills asked Plant if he had not, on the previous Wednesday night, worn a hat with a round crown. He said he had, and further admitted he had a top coat, and carried a dagger in his hand. Sills then took him before the chief constable Mr. Jackson who asked where the dagger was. Sills went and found the dagger, the hat and the coat, and then told Plant he was charged with stabbing William Wilson who had died from his injuries. His reply was "Indeed! Then I must see my solicitor". Plant was detained in custody till the next day when the coroner's court convened.

(continued)

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George Plant having been duly cautioned made the following statement:

“Late last Wednesday night I was going home and when I had got down High Street, against Richards Drapers, I met a man named Wilson rushing out of a passage. He took hold of me and without saying a word knocked me down. I kept him off while I was down with a small stick which I had in my hand. When I got up I said ‘What have you done that for? If you don't be quiet I will give you something’. He replied ‘I'll let you see what I have done it for’. During that conversation the two gentlemen who have given evidence came up. I said this man has attacked me. While I was saying so he ran round me again and tried again to get hold of me. In doing so he made a rush at me and fell upon the knife which I held before me. He screamed out "Police" and I replied ‘I will stay until the police come. I stood up in my own defence; it was your own fault’. I then said to the two witnesses ‘I have only stood in my own defence as you see; I will stop until the police come and go with him’. They walked away and I, thinking it was no use staying by myself, went direct home. I communicated to my wife what had happened. I had next morning to go to Manchester on business, and did not hear anything of the occurrence till I saw an account of it on Friday morning in the Manchester Guardian. I returned from the journey at half-past eight o'clock on Saturday evening. My wife told me that the man was dead. I had been in Mr. Bradley's service a fortnight. I bought the dagger the day before I entered his service, and carried it with me for protection, having been once stopped on the Barnsley Road. On Monday morning I went to work as usual. I bought the dagger as protection, as I have to travel in country places with money”.

Sills found several witnesses, including two who were present when Plant stabbed William Wilson: George Norton and Joseph Hawksworth. Neither witness saw any evidence of Plant having been knocked to the ground, or heard Wilson threaten Plant, other than try to take the stick and knife off him. Wilson said he had initially mistaken Plant for a friend who was a cab driver. Norton knew Wilson from when he had worked in the same street, and felt Wilson was sober. Plant told Norton and Hawksworth that he had been stopped, but didn't suggest he was being robbed. Wilson on being struck appeared stunned and then screamed, reeling like a drunken man, and then sat down on the causeway. Norton and Hawksworth were not sure whether Wilson had been stabbed or whether it was some sort of hoax designed to draw them in and then demand drink from them. Hawksworth said he had had been stopped in the street several times on all kinds of pretences by people seeking liquor. It was raining hard and Plant seemed like a gentleman, so they started off home leaving Plant to wait for the police. However, Plant soon overtook them on his way home. Wilson was left lying on the ground bleeding heavily till Ross found him.

PC George Smelter had seen Plant in Hanover Street earlier on the Wednesday evening, on the opposite side of the road, with a naked dagger in his hand. He seemed excited to the PC but he wasn't sure whether he was drunk. Plant had also drawn out his knife earlier to show a Mrs Emma Marples outside the Fitzwilliam Inn at the corner of Broomhall Street and Fitzwilliam Street. She was able to pick him out in a line up at the Town Hall.

The Coroner in summing up referred to the deadly nature of the weapon. The jury after deliberating for nearly four hours found George Plant guilty of the wilful murder of William Wilson.

Plant's case was transferred to the York Assizes where the verdict was guilty of manslaughter. The judge felt that the nature of the weapon meant that Plant should be dealt with severely and sentenced him to transportation to

Australia for life. Plant was transported on the 8th March 1860 to Western Australia. He was given a conditional pardon in 1872 and died in Australia in 1884 leaving an Australian wife and 2 children.



## MEETING WITH CITY COUNCIL

FOTH committee members met Cllr Isobel Bowler, Cabinet member for Neighbourhoods, last week to tell her about what we've discovered about the state of the Old Town Hall and update her on FOTH activities, including the petition. Simon Ogden, Head of City Centre Regeneration, was also present – Simon has welcomed our activities from the outset. It was a very useful meeting which confirmed the City Council's preparedness to work with the Friends on finding ways to bring the OTH back into productive use and become a benefit to the people of Sheffield rather than an eyesore. They are looking forward to seeing the results of our study of potential new uses, which as we've reported is already under way.

## OPTIONS PROJECT

Creative Heritage Consultants have started on their assignment for us, looking at possible future uses for the OTH. We hope to have a report from them in July. The committee have had a set-up meeting with the 3 person team – a very interesting discussion, which on one hand challenged us, quite properly, to clarify our thinking and on the other gave us a first insight into some possibilities and issues. This is a really important piece of work which we expect to help open numerous doors for us.

## FOTH PETITION

We have collected over 2000 signatures, some on line and some on forms we've made available for events and just canvassing people you know locally. We could do with more names before we approach the Old Town Hall's owners with this evidence of the concern of Sheffielders at the mess they've allowed the building to get into. We'd also like to get the petition in front of the Council, for which we need 5000 names. A copy of the petition form has been sent to you with this newsletter – we hope you'll print it off and get more names. Then send it to FOTH at:

30 Muskoka Avenue  
Sheffield  
S11 7RL

## COMMITTEE

Welcome to Diana Stimely, who has joined the committee as a co-opted member. Diana has long experience in local government, which should be useful. And she is a tenacious collector of signatures for our petition!

## THE OLD TOWN HALL OWNERS

Still no reply to our letters ...

### 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 **Juan 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://sheffieldoldtownhall.co.uk>

Finally you can always email us at: [fothsheffield@gmail.com](mailto: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 volunteers for several community groups and designs this newsletter. In any spare time he runs his own

heritage consultancy - [sheafvalleyheritage.co.uk](http://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 cover photograph of the Old Town Hall.