



# FRIENDS OF THE OLD TOWN HALL



## WORKING WITH OTHER PEOPLE

In the absence of any constructive dialogue with the buildings owners the key to the future of the Old Town Hall lies with us and with our allies in Castlegate and in the heritage community in Sheffield. In that spirit we're pleased to say that we are working with both the University of Sheffield and with the National Emergency Services Museum. Last time we mentioned that we had offered a couple of projects to the History Department at University of Sheffield. We are delighted that Kathryn Webb, postgraduate student, has started work on a project that will chart the way the OTH building was developed and extended to cope with the rising, and competing, demands of three different functions - local government, the justice system and the police.

Kathryn will pursue her research

over the winter and we look forward to seeing the results around May next year. FOTH have also had stirring support from the Office for City and Cultural Engagement at the University of Sheffield and the Castlegate Research team based there.

We have also been working with the National Emergency Services Museums at West Bar. Our joint window display in Pinstone Street over the summer attracted a lot of attention. If you lingered and listened there were some great comments to be heard, from 'Didn't know that place was still standing!' to 'What a disgrace it's not being used'. It's clear many people love the building, but also that just because it's in a bad way it has become for some just a large bit of wallpaper, taken for granted. Let's hope we can change that in the next few years.

## “UNDER THE CLOCK AND IN THE DOCK”: Sheffield Town Hall Prisoners 1845-1846

In reference to Sheffield’s old town hall on Waingate, the phrase “under the clock” entered common parlance in the town in the 19th and 20th centuries and would send a shudder through many a Sheffielder - the grim euphemism for a night’s lodgings in the dark, dismal lock-up cells underneath the building (which doubled up as court-house). A stone staircase originally led from the basement cells up to the prisoners’ docks whilst underground passages connected the court-rooms to adjacent police offices.

A document held at Sheffield Archives sheds light on some curious mid-19th century criminal offences which led to Sheffield-folk (as young as 9-years old) being shoved in the town hall lockup cells whilst they awaited sentencing by magistrates. A Sheffield Town Hall prison list dated September 1845 - September 1846 (Sheffield Archives Ref: SY295/7/2) (part of the Sheffield Police archive collection) documents hundreds of cases of felony, pick-pocketing, vagrancy, assault, illegal gambling, drunk and disorderly offences, etc. but also records some more unusual infractions. These include those accused of the following: “drunk and furiously riding a horse”, “drunk and ringing bells”, “bathing in a public situation”, “a wandering lunatic”, “killing a duck”, “pigeon stealing”, and even “ill-treating a monkey”!

Newspaper report detailing Peter Creesy/Crusey’s ill-treatment of a monkey, *The Sheffield Independent*, Saturday 2 May 1846 (taken from the Sheffield Local Studies Library: Newspaper Collection)

Peter Creesy, an Italian, was charged with cruelly ill-treating a monkey. Mr. Ray, surgeon, said that, yesterday evening, his attention was attracted to the defendant who had an organ and a monkey with him in West street. A large crowd were round him, and he was beating the monkey in a most cruel manner with a whip, and endeavouring to make it dance. The monkey appeared quite exhausted, and its cries were dreadful, and raised the whole street. He went to the defendant, and endeavoured to dissuade him from beating the animal, but he still persisted in doing so for some minutes. The officer belonging to the Society for the Prevention to Animals coming up at the time, the man was brought to the Town-Hall. . . . The defendant admitted that he beat the monkey, but said this was the first time that he had done so. — Fined 20s., and in default of payment, committed for fourteen days to hard labour.

Children are amongst the inmates listed in the town hall prison record. Three teenage prisoners: William Webster aged 16, Henry Raynor aged 16, and John Hodson aged 15, were charged with “bathing in the canal”, whilst a 14-year old girl Charlotte Smith was charged with “maliciously setting fire to furniture”. One of the prisoners listed was just 9 years old - William Cecil charged with “garden robbery”.

Details of these offences can be fleshed out in local newspapers (held at Sheffield Local Studies Library) which reported on the court cases. For example, a report on the case of the three teenagers charged with bathing in the canal (*Sheffield Independent*, Saturday 8 Aug 1846) records how they were fined 2 shillings 6 pence each and includes an interesting postscript to the affair, detailing how two young females, Elizabeth Birks and Priscilla Beard, were also charged with “raising a mob” in an attempt to rescue the boys from police custody!

*More on this fascinating subject in the next newsletter*

## OPTIONS APPRAISAL

The final part of our options appraisal project – looking at potential new uses for the Old Town Hall – is now under way and we are grateful to the Sheffield Town Trust for the grant that has made this possible. We expect the conclusions of the work by Christmas and that will set us up for some serious effort in the new year to chart a practicable way forward.

## MEETINGS

Committee members have had two meetings with Councillors in the last couple of months, one with Cllr Leigh Brammall, deputy leader and the other with Cllrs Lewis Dagnall and George Linders-Hammond. Lewis represents Central ward so is one of the OTH's representatives! Discussions ranged over how the OTH has come to be in the state it's in, what we in FOTH would like to see happen to stop the rot, and how the Council and FOTH can work together in the coming months to get things to happen. The meetings have been very constructive and we are pleased that the need for co-operative working is fully recognised inside the (present) Town Hall. The central place of the OTH in Castlegate is very much in people's minds.

## PETITION

The committee has been pondering how best to make use of our petition, which has garnered well over 2000 signatures – thanks to all the people who have worked hard to get here. We are planning to go for some publicity around the petition in a month or so, so look out for that. We may ask for supporters to turn out and help – nothing onerous – and will be in touch if we do.

## NEXT FOTH OPEN MEETING – ADVANCE NOTICE

We shall have our next open meeting, and AGM, on Wednesday 16 March 2016. We'll have time for discussion as well as the AGM, and of course a presentation on a topic of interest – details next time but keep the date!

## THE OLD TOWN HALL OWNERS

Once again we have no response to report from the OTH's owners. But they did put the building in sale, again, at the end of August, for all of 10 days. Then it disappeared from the listings, only to return later in September; and it's still there. At £2m for a building that's been allowed to rot, maybe that's no surprise. Sheffield property agents are having a laugh, though it's no joke for the building.

### 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://shefieldoldtownhall.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)

### TIM KNEBEL

Many thanks to Tim for this article on Old Town Hall prisoners of the 1840's. Part two of his piece will be in the next newsletter. Tim works at Sheffield Archives.

### CHARD REMAINS

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