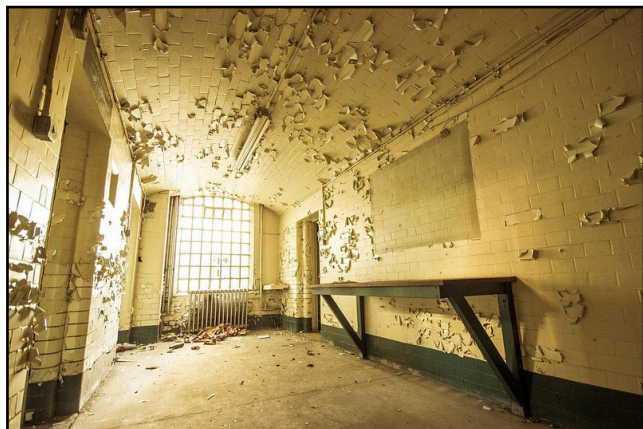


# FRIENDS OF THE OLD TOWN HALL



A lot's happened since Newsletter 2. Last month we held our first open meeting. Some 36 people came along, a good number as a result of our press publicity which worked well – both Sheffield papers carried news reports as well as the Listings entry in the Telegraph. They were able to see displays of work by our student friends in the University's Architecture Department, showing ideas and visions for the future use of the OTH building. Thank you David Graham and Iqbal Mihashim for taking part. We also held our first AGM, as required by our constitution. You'll find a separate report on this.

Most of the evening was taken up with two items. Jennie Beard gave a talk on Charlie Peace, the notorious Sheffield murderer (Jennie told us she'd discovered he was a collateral ancestor of hers!). Charlie was one of the more famous 'customers' of the courts in the OTH, having been arraigned here for murder in 1878. The baying crowd out in Waingate and Castle Street frightened the magistrates who, perhaps with reason, worried that using even the large courtroom, with its public gallery, would not be conducive to an orderly hearing so Charlie, after some more hours in the (still-existent) cells was brought into an internal corridor where the magistrates sat in relative peace (see illustration above right). The outcome is unlikely to have been different; he was remitted for trial to Leeds and in due course convicted and hanged. Jennie reminded us that Charlie Peace was not just a local notoriety; his 'fame' spread over the whole country and the national press pursued the case avidly. Maybe not quite what we'd like Sheffield to be known for....

After that came an open discussion on the work of FOTH, where things stand with the owners and what we could do in the coming months to pursue our aims. Pretty well everyone took part and we have collected numerous thoughts and ideas we'll be following up. There is no mistaking the strength of feeling about the condition of the building and the apparent absence of any serious plan to get it into better shape. We've lots of work to do. It will be helped by the people who came along to the meeting and signed up as supporters.

## MAKING CONTACTS

Committee members have been out and about talking to Sheffield's politicians. Our campaign is not party political, of course. But we do want to build cross-party political support at both council and national levels for our aims – and in the end it's only the Council that can take serious action if all approaches to the owners fail. We have prioritised politicians who have the OTH in their patch. So we've met Paul Blomfield, who was MP for Sheffield Central, and is hoping to win again; and Jillian Creasy, Green Party councillor for Central until she leaves the Council on 6 May, and also a Parliamentary candidate for Sheffield Central. We've briefed them both and got their support.

We are seeking a meeting with Cllr Penny Baker of the LibDems, and have a meeting later this month with Cllr Isobel Bowler who is council Cabinet member for Culture, Sport and Leisure. No doubt there will be more!

## WHAT COULD YOU DO WITH IT?

The first question we usually get asked is who owns the building (the answer often surprises, as many people still think it's the Council). After that, it's 'What on earth would you do with it?' The short answer is that we don't know though we have quite a few good ideas. But we need expert advice on the possibilities, taking account of the size of the OTH, its listed status, its condition and the costs of restoration, and especially the need to come up with ideas (we don't want just one) which would give it a sustainable future. In other words it will have to earn its keep once restored. There are many ways of skinning this particular cat. We've planned from the beginning to get that expert advice and are pleased to be able to say that the first stage of an options appraisal will shortly start; we hope to be in a position to get on to the second stage by early summer. Creative Heritage, an architecture-based firm with much experience in evaluating future use for heritage buildings, will be advising us. Their findings will be shared and publicised and there will be opportunities for FOTH supporters to contribute; watch this space.

## ELECTION RIOTS 1832

On 12 December 1832 the first ever election for Sheffield MPs was held under the Reform Act. This Act, ostensibly to give better representation across the country, was controversial. The new voting eligibility was based on the rent you paid for the premises you lived in. Shopkeepers were included but the Little Mesters and Grinders who paid considerable rent for grinding wheels and forges were told they were not eligible.

By the time election day came round frustration and anger were rising. The election organisers set up a hustings across from the Old Town Hall where the 4 candidates for Sheffield's 2 seats made their election speeches. They then took a show of hands. One of the losers on the show of hands, a Whig solicitor called John Parker, of Bank Street, objected to this manner of election and demanded a poll. Accordingly polling stations were set up and the results came in on 15 December. When the papers were counted John Parker, instead of being last, came first. The crowd that had gathered to hear the results outside the Tontine Inn (now where B&M stands) were furious and started stoning the Inn and attacking anyone with Parker's electoral colours. The magistrates and electoral organisers fled to the Old Town Hall to swear in the special constables and from an upstairs window read the Riot Act.

The crowd however took no notice and despite the special constables marching through the streets what was now a mob showed no sign of dispersing, and answered more readings of the Riot Act in other streets with a hail of stones. The magistrates then called in the Militia from the local Barracks in Hillsborough who rallied in the Tontine Inn Yard. The mob would still not disperse so the Yeomanry were summoned from Rotherham. Shots were fired within 5 minutes of their arrival and five demonstrators lay dead: John Grimes, of Orchard-street, aged 23, William Howard, of Lambert-street, 14, David Ogden, of Eyre-Lane, 14, James Turton, of Wheeldon-street, (married) 36, and James Jackson, Brown-street, (married) 36. The editor of the Independent newspaper said 'Alas....our eyes have seen five of our townsmen, all pale and ghastly and bloody, lying dead upon the floor of our Town Hall....oh Horrible, most horrible, event'. The inquest verdict was justifiable homicide.

## MEDIA COVERAGE

The Sheffield media have woken up to us! The Star devoted its front page and one inside to the OTH and FOTH, as well as its leader column which commented that the neglect of the OTH was something that should 'make people sit up and take notice.....the OTH deserves to play a key part in Sheffield's future as well as its history'. Thank you, Star; signatures on our petition have gone up! And thanks to Chard, our explorer friend whose evocative photos of the interior of the building were used in the Star to such good effect. So good that the piece has been syndicated in the Mail Online and in the Metro.

The links should work for awhile yet – see <http://metro.co.uk/2015/03/30/erie-pictures-from-inside-a-building-forgotten-for-20-years-5127438/?ito=facebook>.

After all the welcome press coverage, Radio Sheffield decided to get in on the act too, and interviewed FOTH chair Valerie Bayliss and Sheffield University architecture postgrad David Graham in a very chilly Castle Street – the interview went out on a Saturday morning and you can catch it on <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02mb654#auto> until around the end of the month. Coverage starts about 17 minutes into the programme.

## FOTH COMMITTEE

At our AGM on 17 March the current committee members (Brian, Joy, Valerie and our treasurer Pam Vardy, who came on board last month) were formally elected and we were joined by 2 more: Neil Berry, from Locality North, and John Clarke of Bank Street Arts. Welcome to them.

## FUN DAY

There's a 999 Family Fun Day on The Moor on Sunday 19 April, organised by our friends at the National Emergency Services Museum. It runs from 11am to 4pm. Lots of rides for the children, emergency vehicles, climbing wall...and stalls to look at. FOTH will be there too – it's a good opportunity to let people know what we're doing, and get more names on the petition. We're grateful to the Museum for providing us with a stall.

We'd love some more people to volunteer to help for an hour or two in running it and asking people to sign. Contact us via our Facebook page if you'd like to help

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

There are two more dates worth noting. The first is on Wednesday 27 May when there will be an Environment Weeks guided walk round Riverside City, starting outside Castle House at the top of Castle Street and taking in the OTH on the way to Lady's Bridge and The Wicker. Meet at 6.30 pm. Free. Not suitable for children, regrettably.

Also advance notice for 20-21 June for the Castlegate Festival; full details to follow, but we plan to make an appearance.

## 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, kindly 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://sheffieldoldtownhall.co.uk> Our grateful thanks to Richard Hennessy of Focused Hypnosis on Campo Lane for his help with this. It has the necessary background information like the constitution and this year's plan, some more on the OTH's history and images of the outside and inside.

## 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 including Heritage Open Days. 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.