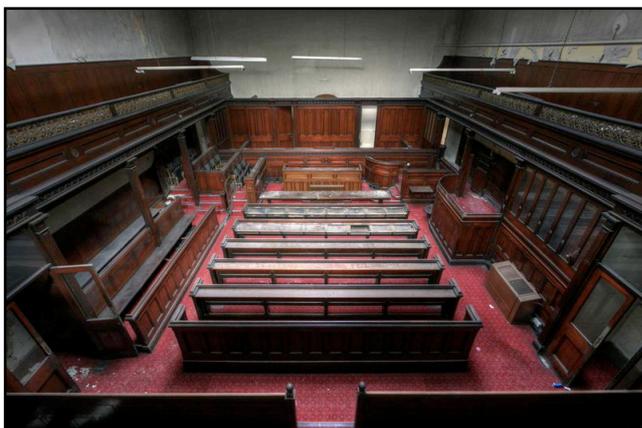


FRIENDS OF THE OLD TOWN HALL



Welcome to the second newsletter from the Friends of the Old Town Hall in Sheffield, and thank you for becoming a FOTH supporter. As you'll know, the Friends' group hasn't been going very long; just a few months. We set up an interim committee and adopted a constitution early on, as this has allowed us to get on and apply for grants. The constitution (a model suggested to us by the helpful people at Voluntary Action Sheffield) requires an AGM in March each year and particularly ensures we provide supporters with an early opportunity to stand for committee membership. We hope you will consider doing this. The formal notice of the forthcoming AGM, and a call for nominations, are in this newsletter.

COUNCIL SUPPORT

The committee had a second meeting with officers from Sheffield City Council in February. This was mainly for us to update them on our dealings (such as they are!) with the owners of the OTH – see separate report. We heard about the work the Council is doing to move ahead with the Castlegate strategy, in spite of the refusal last autumn of a Heritage Lottery Fund bid for the work. Positive steps are being taken to pursue alternative funding. The Council is very supportive of FOTH's work and we have been able to supplement their understanding of the state of the building. We'll be keeping in touch.

The story so far

The Friends of the Old Town Hall began a few months ago when people concerned at the continued neglect of this fine Grade 2 listed building. We've been busy since. Our online petition is steaming towards 1000 signatures. Lots of people are contributing to our Facebook page. We've been working on specifying the priority project to advise on potential new uses for the building, with valuable help from some friendly professionals, and once the full funding is in place we shall be ready to commission the work. And the committee has embarked on a series of meetings with councillors and other important Sheffield figures, to build support. Everyone we've spoken to is keen to encourage us! And we've organised our first open meeting at the Friends Meeting Room on **Tuesday 17 March, 6-8.30pm.** Make a note of the date!

AGM NOTICE

The first annual general meeting of the Friends of the Old Town Hall will be held on Tuesday 17 March 2015 at the Friends' Meeting House, St James Street, Sheffield. The Agenda is:

- 1 Report from the Chair on activities to date
- 2 Report from the Treasurer
- 3 Election of the Management Committee
- 4 Any other business



Call for Nominations to the Committee

An important item for the AGM is the election of a committee. The present one is an interim committee, as we are newly established (though the present members intend to stand for election). But nominations are welcome for any of the officer posts (Chair, Joint Secretaries and Treasurer) and for other committee places.

Anyone interested is very welcome to stand. We particularly need people with knowledge of fundraising for heritage projects and also marketing expertise. But don't let that put you off; enthusiasm for the cause is the prime need!

If you'd like to discuss what's involved with current committee members feel free to get in touch with any of them – contact details through Facebook or the FOTH website.

WHO DESIGNED THE OLD TOWN HALL ?

The Old Town Hall was in effect built by several prestigious architects. The initial Town Hall building was built by Charles Watson in 1809. Watson, then in his 30s, was a prominent architect from Wakefield who had won the contracts for several similar buildings throughout the West Riding. He had also built the much admired Nether Chapel in Sheffield.

The previous Town Hall in the High Street had been deemed unsafe, damp and inadequate, and this was also true of other civic buildings throughout what was then called the West Riding of Yorkshire. The Yorkshire justices embarked on an ambitious program of new court provision, first by obtaining an Act of Parliament, (46 Geo.III 1806) being: "An Act to enable the Justices of the Peace for the West Riding of the County of York to provide convenient court houses for holding the General Quarter Sessions of the Peace within the said Riding". This Act enabled the Justices to "erect, build or otherwise provide...proper court houses" in Wetherby, Wakefield, Doncaster, Pontefract, Skipton, Bradford, Rotherham, Knaresbrough, Leeds, Sheffield and Barnsley: "Whereas the court houses or buildings in the said towns...are for the most part very ancient buildings greatly out of repair".

The Act gave the Justices the power to raise local rates to pay for the new works and to purchase land for new buildings. The Sheffield Town Trustees made a substantial contribution. Money was still tight nevertheless and Sheffield's new town hall was smaller than many of the others even though it was larger than originally planned. £4000 was allocated for the building of the new town hall and 139 [square] yards of land was given for the purpose together with the whole of Mr. Bromley's and Mr. Pearson's premises in Castle Green. The eventual land acquisition was 684 [square] yards of ground and the cost had risen to £5600. Watson was urged to recycle material from the previous Town Hall, in Church Street, to reduce costs but it is not known whether he did that.



West Riding Asylum in Wakefield also designed by Charles Watson



St John's, Wakefield; another Watson architecture project

WHO DESIGNED THE OLD TOWN HALL ?

By the 1830s it was realised that the building was too small and Sheffield was told that unless it made better provision for the barristers they would remove to Rotherham. So a re-arrangement of the interior, as well as some clever expansion of the building, was made without the loss of too much of Watson's original design.

The architects appear to have been Woodhead and Hurst from Doncaster. Watson had been articulated in Doncaster before moving his practice to Wakefield. One wonders if Watson, now retired and in poor health in York, possibly suggested them? However they came to be chosen, an interesting fact is that Matthew Ellison Hadfield who founded one of Sheffield's major architectural practices was articulated to Woodhead and Hurst in 1834 and he may have worked on the improvements.

By 1862 there was again great concern that the building was inadequate. Flockton and Abbot built a police station across the lane which must have relieved things a little. But although the Town Clerk still had offices in the building the council was for the most part camping out. Some new work was carried out by Flockton and Abbot to extend the building once more. Around that time the lease was offered to the Council but because of legal complications was turned down.

The Local Government Act of 1888 meant the Council needed a lot more office space and officers to administer their new duties, so it became obvious that a much bigger, separate corporation building was needed.

A large extension was added down the hill in Waingate to improve court facilities and a new Town Hall built in Pinstone Street, opening formally in 1897, leaving the Old Town Hall as purely a courthouse.

THE OLD TOWN HALL OWNERS - WHAT NEXT?

In our last newsletter we mentioned we are keen to meet the owners to find out about what plans they might have for the OTH. And we said we'd had no success! Sadly, that is still the case. Two polite letters, over nearly 3 months, to the directors of Gt London Properties Ltd have brought no response whatever. We have to assume this is deliberate. What a pity; an open discussion with us could we believe be helpful all round. We've told them of the rising concern in Sheffield about the consequences of long-term neglect of the building and the need for urgent repairs. Unfortunately the owners have something of a track record in not responding to approaches. We know of another Sheffield organisation with a serious potential interest in the building which has tried repeatedly to contact the owners in recent years, and got no answer. The City Council has had a similar experience on occasion. It can't be right that the custodians of a heritage asset in our city just ignore people with a genuine interest in that asset who want to see it restored to its former glory and contributing positively to Sheffield life, rather than rotting away. FOTH is considering the next steps; we'll keep you posted.

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://shefieldoldtownhall.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



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.