

Neighbourhood News

from the Bell Tower Community Association

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www.bell-tower.org.uk



info@bell-tower.org.uk



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Celebrating our area's character



ORIGINAL FEATURES: EP Collier School with its distinctive bell tower, and terraced houses with patterned brickwork in Swansea Road

The Bell Tower Community Association has been working on getting a special designation to reflect the area's Victorian character. We are pleased to announce that we have been able to get a stage further with this recognition.

Many towns, particularly in south-east England, have Local Areas of Special Character (LASC) or similar designations; examples of these are in Kingston, Woking and Croydon. These areas are not quite eligible to be designated as conservation areas but have a character that is considered worth preserving.

At present Reading does not have any such areas, but we have now succeeded in getting the council on board and have helped draft a formal planning document that councillors will consider later this year.

We hope the LASC document will be adopted by the council into its planning policy, at which point two areas will initially be proposed for LASC status – the Caversham Road area, which includes the Bell Tower area, and Northcourt Avenue, near the university. It is likely that further areas will be suggested later.

When an LASC is proposed an appraisal document is submitted describing the character of the area.

While this has less statutory weight than a conservation area appraisal, the LASC appraisal provides a useful reference document for planning officers when considering applications in the area and nearby, to help determine whether a proposed development is in keeping with the area's character. For example, planning officers might ask for computer-generated views of a proposed large-scale development from viewpoints in the LASC which might otherwise not be required.

We have also been working on an LASC appraisal document for the Caversham Road area, and hope to provide an update on the progress of this project later this year once the council has agreed in principle to the introduction of LASCs in Reading.

Would you like to find out more? We will be giving a talk about the proposal to create a Local Area of Special Character and explaining its benefits at our AGM on Wednesday 27 March, 7.30pm at the New Hope Centre.

David Neale

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0118 939 1144

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News in brief

- The former Cox & Wyman printing works site is up for sale with planning permission for 96 homes. The agents mention the possibility of applying to build more - councillors are aware of this, and we will work with them to advocate refusal of an application that increases the density of the development.
- Mediation to resolve the noise and pollution from the train depot has broken down, so the council's court case will continue later this year. Bell Tower has written to our MP, Matt Rodda, seeking a meeting with Health Secretary Matt Hancock over noise and pollution concerns.
- Thames Valley Police have been having difficulty staffing the 101 non-emergency number recently and call volumes have been high, leading to trouble getting through. If you need to make a non-urgent report to the police this can now also be done by email, to AbbeyWithBattleNHPT@thamesvalley.pnn.police.uk

From maltings to mallets

Part 2 of our history of the Drews building. **Julia Wink** looks at events on the site from the early 20th century onwards.

After the death of Henry Pendlebury Dowson the premises were converted from a malthouse providing malt to Reading brewers H&G Simonds to shops. The first business to occupy one of these was Stransom & Cheney, corn, hay and straw merchants. They also had offices and retail premises in Broad Street and were on the Drews site from 1905 until just before the outbreak of World War I in 1914.



THEN AND NOW: the Smallbone works in Caversham Road in the 1940s, and the malthouses in Northfield Road as they are today.

GW Harrison's works survived the fire and until the early 1930s shared the premises with Reed and Partners, electrical engineers. In 1925 Percy Smallbone, motor engineers, moved in and remained there until 1947. After Reed and Partners left around 1930 and Harrison in 1933 Smallbone took over their premises. One can still see the signage 'Smallbone Ltd' faintly on the side of the building. Following Smallbone Ltd the building was occupied by Brown Bros, motor accessories providers and later electrical wholesalers, for around 30 years. On their departure Drews took over the premises in 1979.

In spite of the changes of use the Drews building retains some features of a malthouse in the shape of its roof



There was a grocer, William Orchard, for a short time and a boot-making and repairing company, W Cummings, which was there from around 1909 and was still there at the outbreak of hostilities. A long-standing presence was that of GW Harrison, a firm of manufacturing chemists that occupied the premises from 1913 for around 20 years. During the war a tailoring firm, Album and Solomon, briefly had a shop on the site.

In 1915 a new business, the Goblin Toy Factory, took over premises next to the site. This was set up to provide work for returning servicemen, offering them training in toy-making. It started well, but a few weeks after the Armistice a passer-by noticed flames coming out of the roof. He made his way over to the GWR signal works where he called for help. By the time the fire brigade brought the fire under control much of the building and the entire Christmas stock had been destroyed. The fire also spread to Harrison's chemical works and beyond to the premises of a W Barkus. Without stock or a means of production Goblin could not continue and the business closed.

and the spacing of the windows, seen on the wall adjacent to Puregym and the one in Northfield Road. There are a couple of other surviving features worth noting: the green bricks on either side of the blocked-in doorway on Northfield Road that are typical of turn of the century architecture, and the narrow path of grey diamond paviour bricks that were used since Victorian times to prevent slipping. The fact that these are still there while the rest of the pavement has been tarmacked suggests that they have already been acknowledged as being of historical interest.

BELL TOWER: A LOCAL AREA OF SPECIAL CHARACTER

A talk on the area's architecture and our application for recognition as a Local Area of Special Character.

Wednesday 27 March 7.30pm
New Hope Centre

To be followed by the Bell Tower Community Association's AGM

All welcome

Cast iron lamp posts to be refurbished



We finally have a date for refurbishment of the remaining cast iron lamp posts in our area. This will start on Monday 25 February, so should be in progress as this newsletter goes to press. Addison Road is top of the council's priority list as three street lights there have not been working. York Road, Newport Road and Barry Place should follow in a few weeks.

Lamp posts will have new swan neck brackets fitted and will be converted to LED, and the former gas columns such as those in Addison and York Roads will have a small bollard installed nearby. The council also plans to start repainting all the remaining cast iron lamp posts in the spring.



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