

Neighbourhood News

from the Bell Tower Community Association

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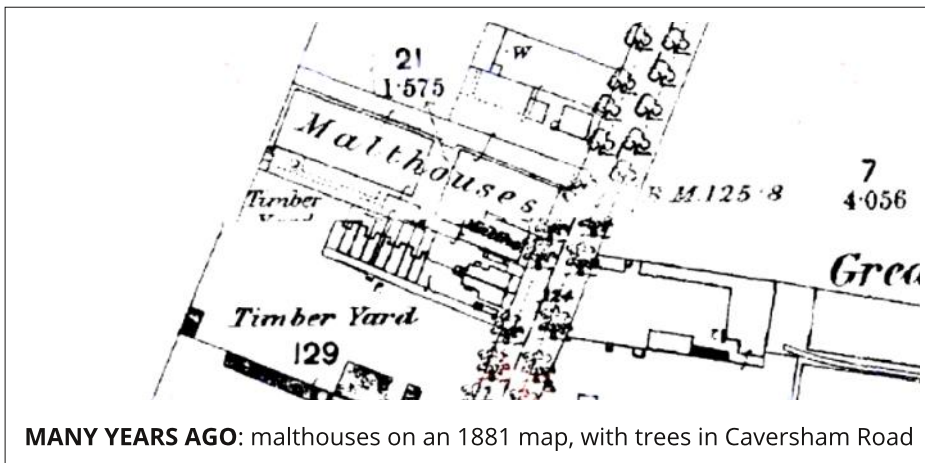
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Season's greetings to all our readers

BEFORE DREWS...



MANY YEARS AGO: malthouses on an 1881 map, with trees in Caversham Road

Many of us will be sorry to see the closure of Drews Ironmongers in Caversham Road, and the Bell Tower Community Association is particularly grateful to the company for its support over the years. *Julia Wink* looks at the rich history of the Drews building and its occupants over the years.

The Drews building dates from the Victorian era, and has had various different uses.

We need to go back to 1870 to trace the origin of Northfield Road and the Drews site. At that date none of the side roads off Caversham Road north of the railway crossing had been built. Where Northfield Road would be was an arable field called, unsurprisingly, North Field. It belonged to John Weldale Knollys, who owned a large estate encompassing much of the area north of Great Knollys Street, some of which had already been leased by 1870.

In 1871 a new 99-year lease at £32.10s a year was drawn up for a rectangular plot of land that included the Drews site and the area west of it, extending as far as today's residential houses on the south side of Northfield Road. The lease required the lessee, within

two years, to build two or more brick houses or other approved buildings to a high standard. Knollys himself would build the street that would become Northfield Road.

The lessee, Henry Pendlebury Dowson, was a maltster with two other malthouses, one in Tudor Road and another in Malthouse Lane. Ordnance Survey maps of the late 1870s show the new malthouses already in place. Within two years of signing the lease Dowson had borrowed £5,000 from The Reading and County Permanent Benefit Building Society. Another £1,000 loan followed in 1877. Translated into today's prices, the total amounted to around £650,000; the loans would have probably been used to finance the construction of the malthouses and other buildings.

Things did not always go smoothly. Caversham Road was vulnerable to flooding, and for a business much of whose activity was conducted at ground floor level this was a disaster. More than once in the early 1880s complaints were made to the council about the losses sustained, which the council acknowledged but for which it did not accept liability.

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Business continued, but in the mid-1890s Dowson retired and left Reading, the business then being supervised by a manager. Dowson died at the end of 1902 and all malting activity on the site ceased very shortly afterwards.

In 1903 the remainder of the lease together with the malthouses, a dwelling house, stabling and other buildings were assigned to three men, Arthur Cooper, Robert Curtis and William George Lewton, who were, respectively a surveyor, a builder and an architect (Lewton designed the York Road Presbyterian Church). Cooper lost no time in putting in planning applications to the council. These involved the building of stables, stores and lock-up shops in Northfield Road, alterations to the malthouse on the corner and the conversion of one of the existing buildings into more shops.

The building was then converted to shops, which is how it was laid out at the start of World War 1. We will continue to tell the colourful history of this building in a future edition of *Neighbourhood News*.

Electric car charging on the way?

Go Electric Reading is a Defra (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) funded project run by Reading Borough Council to look at providing electric car charging for people who have to park their car on the street.



The initiative will install the chargers using the existing electrical supply to street furniture, such as lamp posts, allowing residents to charge their vehicles on street and outside their own homes.

The first stage of the council initiative is to identify residents without off-street parking who may be able to benefit from the scheme. This could benefit residents in the Bell Tower area – so if you have an electric vehicle or are thinking of getting one now is the time to tell the council.



The council has opened a survey to gauge demand – if you are interested please visit www.reading.gov.uk/goelectric for more details. The survey is open until 14 December.

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for only £1 and claim some great discounts from local businesses.

You can join by contacting Len or Andy at 89 Addison Road.

New Caversham Road development plans revealed

Hermes Investment Management, the owner of the former post office land between the retail park and the station, is proposing a new development of up to 650 flats with offices, associated shopping and other infrastructure.

'Reading Metropolitan' will make a significant impact on the skyline around the station and could affect the Bell Tower area too. Blocks rising up to 24 storeys are proposed, and concerns have been raised about overshadowing of the area.



TOWERING ABOVE US: the proposed development

Details can be viewed online at www.readingmet.co.uk, where there is also the opportunity to make comments on the proposals. A detailed planning application is to be expected during 2019.



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News in brief



• We had a lively and fun quiz night in October at Richfields. The quiz was chaired by Bell Tower secretary David Neale and we had a packed house with over 30 participants.

The £50 prize was won by Anglo-American team the Token Americans. Many thanks to everyone that took part, to Richard for arranging the event and to Dan and Suzy at Richfields for their warm welcome and excellent buffet. We hope to hold our next quiz in January.



• We also held our annual Big Skip day in October, and this year we managed to make trailer collections from local households again. Many thanks to everyone that helped make this another successful event, particularly to Festival Republic for their continued sponsorship and Mel from Sandbag Ltd for permission to use the company's car park in Milford Road.

• In an effort to avert a full-scale court case in 2019, mediation has been offered in the dispute between Cardiff Road residents and the train operating companies over noise at the depot. The first session with a mediator and residents has taken place, with more likely to follow.