

Neighbourhood News

from the Bell Tower Community Association

Issue 63 - March 2021



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Drews application goes to appeal

The owner of the Drews building, S2 Caversham, has decided to appeal Reading Borough Council's decision to reject its application to demolish the Drews building and replace it with a seven-storey block of flats.

Bell Tower has made a submission to and asked to take part in the appeal hearing with a planning inspector. We have argued that the building is a rare surviving maltings both in the town and nationally and that the developer has shown no evidence it looked into the viability of retaining

it. A national expert on maltings, Amber Patrick, says the complex marks the transition of the malting process in the 19th century from a traditional to a pneumatic one. This, we have said, re-enforces the heritage argument. Our statement also outlines how the proposed tower block would clash with the Victorian and Edwardian character of the area, particularly in terms of height, whereas the existing structure is in harmony with the way buildings in the area were used for residential, commercial and industrial purposes.

The council, the Conservation Area Advisory Committee and Caversham and District Residents Association, have all written to the planning inspector in favour of retaining the building.

Jonathan Dart

New Hope displays community art



Calling all artists (and anyone interested in art!) The New Hope Centre is displaying works by local artists in its windows, and you are invited to take part - and make a contribution if you like. Please stop and take a look when you are passing - if you'd like to display your art or photography in the windows please email newhope@greyfriars.org.uk.



UNDER THREAT: The former Drews buildings that were originally a maltings

These local businesses support Bell Tower and are currently open - please give them your support if you can:



0118
375 0767

THE
Moderation

Pub and Kitchen


CROWNE PLAZA
HOTELS & RESORTS



**STANDARD
TANDOORI**

0118 959 0093



READING DRIVE - IN

0118 957 3649



211 Caversham Road
0118 939 1144

A second century of printing

In the second part of this series of articles **Jo Alexander-Jones** looks at the history of the Cox & Wyman works in Reading.

By 1907 Wyman & Sons Ltd held contracts for more than a thousand railway stations, principally those on the Great Western Railway. These contracts would include railway timetables, enamel station and direction plates, pictorial adverts and general advertising. They also held bookstall contracts for the Great Western, the London & North Western, North London and Bakerloo railways, many of which they had won from WH Smith.

Much of the Reading site was also laid out for magazine and periodical printing using rotary machinery specially built for producing half-tone illustration (as used in newspapers). The site also had the largest installation of monotype composing machines in England which were used for book printing. Book binding was also carried out on site.

The Reading site first appears on the 1913 OS map, and this first building would have comprised the four southernmost pitched single-storey workshop bays that were visible from Addison Road. The design of the façade was of a high architectural quality, and it is thought that the materials were provided by S&E Collier, a local brick and tiling manufacturer. On the corner of Addison Road and Meadow Road was a small two-storey red brick building which was used for stabling.

The company survived World War I and its impact on staffing levels and carried on in similar style until in 1930 when the Great Western Railway decided it would take its advertising and printing in house, which made a big dent in Wymans' profits. To fill the void the company acquired retail newsagents around London and became more recognised as newsagents and stationers than as a printer. Wymans were relatively unscathed in the war except for the death of managing director Henry Burt in 1940.

In the 1930s the site expanded towards Meadow Road with the

addition of two new bays. They were probably not added at the same time as the fifth bay was consistent in style with the earlier bays but the sixth, while similar, was less ornate.

After the war the company acquired small retail newsagents, stationers and booksellers along the Great Western Railway lines, notably in Devon and Dorset. While the printing continued, a large percentage of shares was being taken up by Clarence Hatry and his associates. Hatry had recently been in prison for company fraud and wanted to build a publishing empire. However, he had not noticed that the Wyman contract with the railways prohibited the company from having a direct



OLD STYLE PRINTING: the Wyman & Sons Reading works in 1908

interest in publishing, and when made aware he sold his shares. To save the company Wymans had to approach the Eagle Star insurance group, which insisted on having representation on the board.

In 1959 Scottish newspaper distributor John Menzies made an offer for Wyman & Sons to gain a foothold in England. As part of the deal they offered Eric Burt, the son of Henry, and the Eagle Star directors the option to buy out the printing assets of the company. It was not possible to keep the name Wyman & Sons, but Eric Burt found that they had retained the ownership of the name Cox & Wyman Ltd, so this name was used once again after a hundred year lapse.

Cox & Wyman transformed into book printers by purchasing specialist paperback machinery for the Reading site. The company made reasonable profits and in 1969 attracted the

Thomas Tilling Group who took them over as a conglomerate with Heinemann and Bookprint Ltd.

By 1971 37 million paperback books per year were being produced for the seven leading British publishers. To achieve these high production rates the process became highly mechanised. The text was set by keyboard operators who produced punched tape from special perforated keyboards. This would then be processed by a computer into a new tape including justification and hyphenation for the typesetting machines. The flexible plastic plates then produced allowed the type to be wrapped around the printing cylinders of the rotary presses, which could print and fold 64 pages at once and would run at about 16,000 copies per hour, later upgraded to 25,000 copies per hour.

The 1971 OS map of the area shows the Reading site filling the space between Addison Road and Milford Road, with the main entrance moved from the east side to the south on Cardiff Road. The new entrance was a two-storey brick structure with stone capped parapet and flat roof.

August 1999 saw Cox & Wyman Ltd sold to the French printing group Chevrillon Philippe Industries (CPI). Even with Cox & Wyman being the UK's largest dedicated paperback producer, the Graphical Paper and Media Union (GPMU) was concerned for the continued employment of its 170 represented workers in Reading.

In 2015 the union's concerns were realised when the contract with its main paperback client, Penguin Random House, was lost. Until their final days Cox & Wyman continued to focus on paperback production and were producing around 50 million books per year covering a wide range of topics. Well-known titles included EL James's *Fifty Shades of Grey*, and after the 1960 trial of the publication of DH Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* the quick production of an extra 300,000 copies to meet demand.

From 2015 the site was leased as a warehouse storing film sets. In 2018 planning permission was granted for a new housing estate on the site, and in 2020 the works was finally demolished. Original finials are to be included in the new development's design.