



Derby Civic Society

Report on the Buildings at risk Questionnaire

We are working with the Derbyshire Historic Buildings Trust (DHBT) to identify the most important buildings on the "at risk" register in our city.

The DHBT had drawn up a list of 10 buildings throughout Derbyshire that they considered priorities for restoration of which 5 are situated within the Derby City boundaries.

I recently circulated a questionnaire to our membership to obtain their views on these five buildings.

The first part of the questionnaire was to ask people to rate each building in accordance of the importance of that building to **them**.

The second part was to try and identify what characteristic of the building they regarded as important (i.e. Aesthetic quality, architectural importance, historic significance, setting, etc.).

The third part was to add comments about each building, and the final part was to suggest any other buildings that should be considered.

23 responses were received out of a total membership of 261 (just under 10%) which was rather disappointing. However, we must conclude that only those who responded had strong views on the matter.

The John Smith's Clock Works and the Friargate Bridge emerged neck and neck in terms of importance rating. Then came the Hippodrome closely followed by Allestree Hall with the Rowditch Barracks trailing in fifth place.

The greatest disparity of views was in respect of the Hippodrome. Its supporters rated it very highly, whereas its detractors rated it the lowest.

Allestree Hall and particularly the Rowditch Barracks were not rated at all by some respondents because they said they didn't know the buildings. However, of those that did know Allestree Hall, they rated it highly.

As to the second part, Friargate Bridge ticked most respondent's boxes for all four attributes, whereas John Smith's Clockworks was rated for its historic significance by all of the respondents, and some ticked the other boxes as well.

The Hippodrome was rated by its supporters mainly for architectural importance and historic significance, but it was a really mixed response.

Many of the respondents who were aware of Allestree Hall ticked all the boxes, but historic significance and setting were regarded as the most important. Many commented that this is the last of our great houses, its loss would change the character of Allestree Park.

As many respondents were unaware of the Rowditch Barracks' existence they felt unable to comment on its attributes. The few who did ticked mainly historic significance and architectural importance.

Respondents were very keen to comment on the buildings and offered some very inventive ideas for future uses. One or two even came up with detailed papers for Friargate Bridge and Smith's Clockworks. I don't propose to re-iterate all those views but here is a sample:

Frigate Bridge

"Fine bridge in a historically important area. Should at the very least be restored and maybe used as a restaurant/café with railway theme with exhibition area about the Friargate Line."

"One of Handyside's most decorative bridges. Whether it still enhances Friargate now is questionable."

"An elegant piece of engineering. An iconic Derby scene."

Hippodrome

"Restoration to a theatre but severe deterioration against it."

"This fine full sized theatre should be restored to good working order again."

"In completely the wrong place and would cost more to restore than to have a new multi-use theatre and concert hall with parking nearby."

Allestree Hall

"Good example of housing of local entrepreneur. Potential uses – an outdoor centre, field centre, community centre, café etc."

"Use as gallery and flats."

"Is part of our architectural heritage and an important building that we must preserve."

Rowditch Barracks

"One of the last of its kind; could be brought into use for recreational facilities."

"I didn't know of its existence until I looked it up on google. Sounds an interesting building being used by a tennis club."

Smith's Clock Works

"This should be preserved as a relic to Derby Enlightenment predominance."

"Could be a tourist office, or small museum relating to clock making with information about famous Derby people such as Flamsteed and Wright."

"Although truncated and minus workshops at rear, its historic associations make it very important, and its history as a town house."

"Possible museum of Smith's history, combined with townhouse history and links to famous people."

Finally, members were asked to nominate other buildings at risk that they are aware of. Very few respondents did so, and the only building mentioned was the Bonded Warehouse in Friargate Goods Yard.

The current state of play

Frigate Bridge – Listed Grade II

When the Friargate line was closed in the 1960s the bridge was acquired by Derby City Council for £1. Since then it has been left more or less to its own devices, gradually deteriorating. In recent years some of the decorative ironwork has fallen off requiring unsightly netting to be installed to catch any more bits!

A recent survey however has shown that, remarkably, it is still structurally sound. We were informed over 12 months ago that the Council were going to apply for a grant for its renovation. The outcome of that is unknown.

Hippodrome – Listed Grade II

This building was owned by a property developer who initially wished to demolish it and build flats. When this planning application was rejected he applied for partial demolition, and erection of a multistorey car park. This application was also rejected, but in the meantime was beset by vandalism and a series of fires. The owner claimed it was unsafe and instructed a demolition firm to dismantle the roof. The council obtained a court order to stop this and did some stabilisation work themselves. The owner was declared bankrupt owing money to a finance company who have a mortgage on the site.

The Hippodrome Restoration Trust was formed to try to acquire the building with the backing of, among others, the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Theatres Trust.

Both the trust and the city council obtained consultants reports which confirmed that the building could be restored to a viable commercial theatre. In 2014 the trust obtained planning permission to partially restore the building as a coffee shop, together with exhibition space on the ground floor and office and meeting rooms on second, third and fourth floors.

The property has been valued at £50,000, but we understand that the finance company want £2m to release their mortgage.

The way forward would be for the City Council to compulsorily purchase the building with an agreement to immediately sell it on to the Trust. So far the Council have refused to do so.

Allestree Hall – Listed Grade II*

Once the home of the Derby banking and mill owning Evans family, it has been owned by Derby City Council for over 25 years but has stood empty all that time except for partial use by Allestree Golf Club. There have been various proposals over the years, starting with a nature museum and then gallery use, then various types of educational use, offices and residential and care home. The earlier public proposals were not funded, and later proposals by developers and outside organisations never proceeded to planning and listed building consent because no agreement regarding lease or sale was forthcoming from the council.

The Derbyshire Historic buildings Trust recently unveiled plans to acquire the building from the Council and convert it into luxury homes.

In response the Council said they would put the property up for sale.

Rowditch Barracks – Listed Grade II

Designed by Edwin Thompson of Derby and built in 1859 of red brick with ashlar dressings and shallow hipped slate roofs, the militia barracks are described by Historic England as "a very rare and well preserved example of a local volunteer barracks."

Apart from some tennis courts and a museum store the buildings are neglected and unloved. We are not aware of any proposal by the City Council to restore them.

Smith's Clock Works – Locally listed in City Centre Conservation Area

After being allowed to deteriorate for more than 15 years the former Smiths Clock Works on Queens Street Derby is in desperate need of repair.

Originally the site of a much earlier building which was built by the father of John Flamsteed the first Astronomer Royal, being later rebuilt by John Whitehurst in 1764 with a new frontage after designs by Joseph Pickford. Whitehurst was a noted Derby clockmaker and scientist who was an influential member of the Lunar Society who probably entertained other prominent citizens of the age including Benjamin Franklin, James Ferguson and Josiah Wedgwood at the property. In 1793 Derby's most famous artist Joseph Wright leased the property and following his death four years later the building was divided into a house and a pub, the Acorn Inn. By 1865 local clockmaker John Smiths business was proving to be a

success allowing him to move to the larger Queen Street premises and to undertake further alterations in 1908 which included demolishing the Acorn Inn. In 1928-29 the front of the building was altered again as part of a scheme to widen the road and these later designs were completed by the borough architect Charles Aslin including an interior which still survives.

Smiths Clocks moved out in 1999 and the workshop buildings to the rear were demolished when ownership was transferred to Joseph De Winter and subsequent planning applications were made. The last of these was for offices and apartments which was approved in 2003. Though not listed nationally, the building is included on Derby City Council's Local List of Historic Buildings.

With any planning applications now either lapsed or not pursued the building has remained unused for many years though kept watertight due to the actions of squatters who moved in shortly after the building became vacant.

Given its association (this site was proposed as the Zero Meridian before King George requested it be located at his Observatory in Greenwich) this building, though much altered, is really of National significance and could perhaps become a Museum of Time.

The Civic Society has been in touch with the representatives of the owner with a view to coming to some arrangement whereby the building could be transferred to a trust to turn into a library and museum to the enlightenment, but leaving the developer free to develop the land at the rear. We understand, however, that the current owner has decided to sell the site instead, although it doesn't appear to be being widely marketed.