

SPALDING & DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

July 2023

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

WHAT A DIFFERENCE an election can make. The local election voting for SHDC resulted in what could be classed as something of a political earthquake, with Conservative councillors reduced to majority of one and some longstanding members losing their seats. The Society would like to take this opportunity to thank those who served for many years for their service to the district. We should also like to wish the newly elected councillors, as well as those who were re-elected, all the best for their term of office.

The departure of one councillor who had frequently called for the establishment of a Town Council in Spalding has, along with other departures, ironically strengthened the case for a Town Council. The majority of those elected in Spalding town wards are Independents (c.80%). They now find themselves the opposition to a controlling administration made up of Conservatives – largely from the surrounding district. Does that seem fair? I am not sure that it does. As I set out in our newsletter last July, a Town Council could potentially have powers that, if used wisely, could make a significant difference to the town. Following the decision to establish a town council for Grantham, **Spalding will soon be the only town in Lincolnshire without its own council**, despite having a population approaching 35,000. Is it not time for Spaldonians to take control of their own destiny?

Over the past month or so, we have seen a number of initiatives getting underway to bring improvements to the town. Most of these have come about not as a result of the local election outcome, but as a result of discussions over the last year or so, leading up to successful bids made by the District Council to the Heritage Lottery Fund and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. One initiative, however, does seem to be the result of the political change. That is, that South Holland markets will be seeing the provision of new gazebo-style stalls, instead of traders having to provide their own stalls. This announcement came as a very welcome surprise. Thank you, Councillor Worth.

One of the reasons this newsletter is late is that the Society has been putting together a bid for funding from the South Holland share of UK Shared Prosperity Fund monies, so we can complete the next stages of our Market Art Project (*see p.5*). At present, we have not heard whether we have been successful. If we are, we will need some extra members on our committee. In particular, we are looking for someone to join the Planning Team and for a Membership & Publicity Officer – see below. We are also looking for ordinary committee members. If you are interested or would like to know more, please contact me, preferably by email at chair@spaldingcivicsociety.org.uk. Otherwise through the contact details on the last page.

John Bland

Planning Team - We are looking for someone to join our small planning team, whose main function is to review planning applications for Spalding and nearby submitted to the Council, and to make recommendations. An interest in architecture will be valuable and an eye for what makes places attractive to live and work in or to visit, even more so. Prior knowledge of the planning system is not required and will be picked up en route through working alongside members with more experience (who acquired it in the same way). What matters is a

concern that our built environment should be as attractive as we can help to make it.

Membership and Publicity Officer - We are looking for someone to help enlarge membership of the Society and so increase its strength. Engaging with the local press and developing events from time to time for members and the wider public would also be a valuable part of the rôle. And any experience of dealing with media organisations would be welcome, but not essential.

PLANNING MATTERS

I HAVE BEEN following the Government's proposals to house asylum seekers at RAF Scampton with considerable concern over the last few months. As many will know, the proposals would scupper longstanding plans to develop a £300m heritage centre there that will help to tell the story of the Dambusters, who were based at Scampton. Plans that would give tourism in Lincolnshire a considerable boost.

The Home Office have claimed that the requirement to house the asylum seekers has caused a national emergency. Whatever the merits of that particular argument, I cannot see that it can possibly be the case that, of all the possible locations available, no other site in the country is deemed appropriate. How come that Scampton is considered the only available location?

We all remember the speed with which the Government built some Nightingale Hospitals during the pandemic, so surely they could develop something similar for temporary accommodation at another site. Or perhaps repurpose those hospitals, some of which are unused.

It was pleasing to see West Lindsey District Council secure a judicial review of the Home Office's plans, and I hope that they are able to bring the proposals to a halt.

This case has exposed some flaws in planning rules. Development proposals coming from central Government or a utility company do not have to submit planning applications to the local planning authority, unlike everyone else, with the result that the very local people most affected by any proposal have no way to object to such development. This seems all wrong.

Halley Stewart Field

Proposals that would allow the Halley Stewart Playing Field to be leased to Spalding United raise important issues. Not least that it would seem to be directly at odds with the covenant entered into by South Holland District Council's predecessor. "*The Council shall stand possessed of the Field Upon Trust to allow the same to be used in perpetuity as a playing field for the benefit of the inhabitants of the Town of Spalding aforementioned*" (Clause 1). Further, the football club's aspirations to expand its use from simply football into a sort of social hub also seems to be flatly contrary to the terms of the covenant. "*The Council shall not use the field or any part thereof for any other purpose whatsoever other than the purpose specified in Clause 1 hereof*" (Clause 2iii).

This is not the first time the issue has arisen. Between 2012 and 2014 it was rarely out of the local press. The Council was ready to *sell off* the field that time – to a developer who saw it as a prime site for more stores and supermarkets, in an expansion of Holland Market. Opposition was determined, and eventually the Charity Commission ruled that, far from selling it off, the Council was already at fault in allowing Spalding United almost exclusive use of the field, and instructing it to "review the way in which the Playing Field is currently managed, with a view to re-establishing clear public benefit in the way it is operated." The Council modified the field's booking form and undertook to make it more generally accessible. Whereupon the Charity Commission softened its stance and said that, although the use of a field may be restricted to sports clubs, it is regarded as being available to the general public.

Councillor Redgrave has recently said that the Council has taken legal advice and is for the first time able to lease the field to a tenant – for seven years, on the proviso the land should still be open to all. However, he does not say whether the Charity Commission has been consulted. This is surely a necessary enquiry before the full Council makes a final decision.

Roman Bank

The application for a large block of 'extracare' apartments on the former Jewson's site on Roman Bank has not yet been determined. We were impressed by the careful thought that had been given to meeting the needs of the intended residents; also by the placing of the car-parking underground; and by the eco-friendliness of both the energy system and the landscaping.

With 69 identical apartments, a major challenge is to avoid the block looking warehouse-like or institutional, especially as the building will be so prominent when viewed from West Marsh Road. The Council's planning department was rightly concerned about its monolithic appearance. The applicant made some modifications, but we felt that they did not go far enough and made some further suggestions. We are pleased that additional modifications have now been made, incorporating some of our ideas. It's good to know we can sometimes make a difference to a major project. (See also *Quoins* on p.3.)

Railway Heritage.

The Station Master's House has been saved. After much to-ing and fro-ing involving a developer wanting to demolish it and put flats on [Page 5 ►

QUOINS

THE ARCHITECTS of the large new building proposed for Roman Bank assert that: quoins “are not part of the local vernacular.” Really? They don’t seem to have looked very far. The town centre has at least 16 buildings with quoins:-



Cross Steet



A

Abbey Buildings (Priory Road)
7-8 The Crescent
The Old Police Station (Crescent)
13 The Sheepmarket
The Pied Calf (The Sheepmarket)
The Prior’s Oven (Sheepmarket)
Molsom’s Opticians (Hall Place)
14 The Market Place

The White Hart (Market Place)
Spalding Travel (Market Place)
Sunshine Café (Market Place)
Halifax Building Soc. (Bridge Street)
The Lincolnshire Poacher (Double St.)
The Limes (Double Street)
The Old Parsonage (Church Street)
The Drill Hall (Haverfield Road}

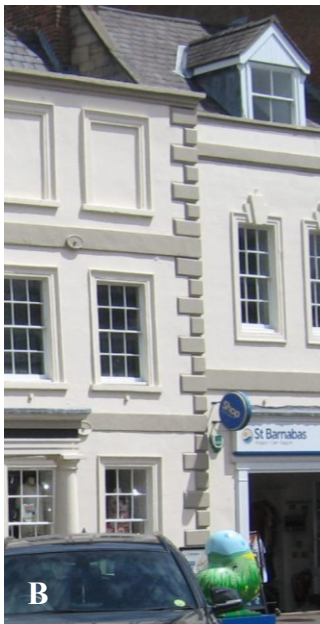
And there are more.

Quoins came into the English language from the French *coin*, meaning *corner*, and indeed the corner of buildings is where many quoins are to be found, such as on The Lincolnshire Poacher (A) and The Old Police Station. They are stone blocks used at the external corners of buildings to emphasize their solidity and strength. But they also serve as a protection, as the corners of a building are otherwise most exposed to the eroding forces of wind and rain on the softer brickwork and, at street level, vulnerable to being clipped by carelessly driven carts and wagons in the days before pedestrian pavements and sidewalks existed.

What about the buildings with no external corners, though? Buildings in a solid row as in the Market Place. There are quoins on plenty such buildings in the town centre, such as Molsom’s and the White Hart. Here their function seems partly to be simply decorative (B, C), but also they make a clear vertical division between one property and the next, even though they are joined together in an unbroken line. Thus, the street reads as a series of distinct houses or shops, not a terrace.

But you have to look up to see some of these town centre quoins. When plate glass became readily available well over a century ago, many shopkeepers extended their windows sideways to provide more display space, losing the ground floor quoins as result, although they remain decoratively there on the floors above (C). If you do look up, many buildings turn out to be far more interesting architecturally, quoins or no, than the usually bland, featureless shop-fronts at street level. The ornate eaves at Molsom’s, for example, the extraordinarily elaborate brickwork of the Lloyd’s Bank chimneys, the sphinx on the Drill Hall (now what’s the story there?), the fake second floor of the White Hart, the way the big bay window of the South Holland Centre echoes the little curved bay to the right, and so on. There are also plenty of first floors that are neglected, too, but that’s another story.

John Charlesworth



B



C

- A The Lincolnshire Poacher, Double Street (Photo: Gordon Fawley)
B The White Hart, The Market Place
C Molsom’s Optician’s, Hall Place

BLACK CAT

I AM LUCKY, but I'm not the only one. I am a pensioner, so I have a free bus pass. I used to cycle, but some nasty falls have taken away my self-confidence. I am reasonably fit, so I am able to walk a mile or so comfortably. I also have a car, which I use as little as possible, so I have a choice as to how to get around Spalding.

I try to avoid using the car, because there are already too many cars on the road, and I have seen how driving can foster bad habits and attitudes, such as impatience and selfishness and an unrealistic sense of entitlement. I also don't like uncertainty as to where I can park conveniently and safely (and legally!).

We are fortunate in Spalding to have quite a good bus service for a town of our size. In addition to the routes to King's Lynn and Boston, the recently reduced service to Peterborough and the Delaine buses to Stamford, there are the IT1 and IT2 routes serving the town itself. The routes have changed since the days of Brylaine, the timings are improved, and more stops are served. The Brylaine 'little buses' ran on a commercial basis, and after lockdown were not financially viable. The Black Cat services are financed by Lincolnshire County Council, which has made other improvements – for instance, each town bus stop now has a timetable of all departures with all bus companies. Also, the bus stop at the Johnson Community Hospital used to show only the times when the buses left Boston and Spalding bus stations, but now the posted timetable is much more user-friendly.

The bus station has been improved, but not enough; I am working on it! I have persuaded LCC

Transport Services to post departure timetables in the individual shelters, whereas previously the bus station was the one stop where no timetables at all were displayed – possibly making it unique among bus stations nation-wide!

I am also working on persuading the Councils to improve signage there; a pictorial town-centre map is needed to welcome passengers, like the one in Herring Lane, though ideally with fewer errors. Also a finger-post pointing to key destinations, like the railway station, the sports facilities, the public conveniences, the shops. I have found LCC Transport Services a joy to deal with.

So what is not to like with our town buses? Why am I so often the only passenger? The most popular picking-up points on the old Brylaine services were on Thames Road/Severn Road, but Brylaine had to cease operating there because of the difficulty of passing inconsiderately parked cars. The sense of community on those buses was great, and that can be revived if more people use the buses on the new routes. They are safe and generally punctual, and if we don't use them, some politician may well decide not to fund them any longer. Many people who haven't used a bus for ages don't realise how user-friendly they have become – no steps to climb, and the drivers wait till you have sat down before moving off. Lockdown got many of us out of the habit of riding the buses, or even going out at all, but that is now over. As I said at the AGM, you will be doing the town a service, even if you just go for rides on the buses, just for fun or to pass the time! You may well discover parts of the town you've never seen before.

David Jones

MUCH APPRECIATED

- The fullest of full marks to **SHDC** for its determined campaign to make sure everyone knew about the new need to present ID proof in the local elections in order not to be deprived of their right to vote: information came with the council tax bills, banners on railings, wrap-around spreads in the local press, enormous on the side of waste-collection vehicles, popping up on the Council website Expense and enormous effort in response to the government's solution to a 'problem' that does not exist. Voter impersonation is effectively nil.

- **LCC Highways** or their sub-contractors for renewing narrow primrose-yellow no-waiting lines in the Conservation Area like-for-like. They might

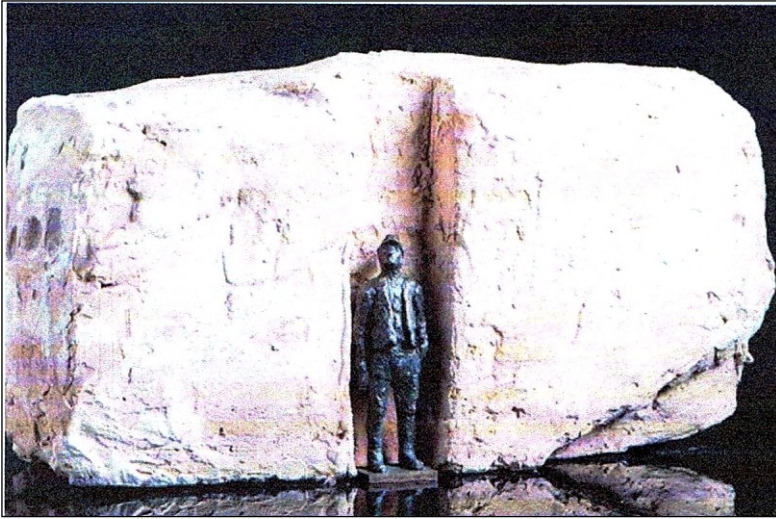
so easily have been intrusive, broad and buttercup-yellow, as they have been with one or two bits of marking lackadaisically renewed in the past.

- **William Hill Bookmaker's** for replacing the garish corporate paintwork on their listed building in the Sheepmarket with something less strident.

- **SHDC** for the long-needed repainting of the Hall Place seating circle and planters.

- **Steven Timewell** and all who rallied round to revive the Flower Parade.

- The **Town Forum** for arranging a piece of genuine public consultation: on the town centre, with particular emphasis on the long-running blatant vehicular flouting of the pedestrian area.



THE MARKET AND THE MINER

IT'S OVER TEN YEARS since the Society came up with its Market Art Project. It was always ambitious, though none of us thought it would take quite so long to get so modest a distance

along the way. For newer members, the column on the left outlines the vision:- .

The celebration of Spalding's market in its livestock heyday – along with the annual hiring fair – by way of a group of sculptures, mosaics and murals in the town centre, sited where the animals were traditionally sold.

The project was extended to take in the present day, when most of Joseph Hillier's small bronzes turned out to figure people nearly all related in some way to the area's present-day food production and processing.

As well as enhancing the attractiveness of the town centre for all who live and work here, the project has the potential to become a visitor attraction, increasing footfall in the town.

The Committee has recently been putting together an application for grant-funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, one of several government funds in its 'levelling up' programme. Completing the form, however, has been a rather dispiriting exercise in filling in boxes with information which some civil servant in Whitehall felt to be important, but which does not allow for the unpredictability – i.e. creative imagination – of a gifted artist.

The statue above is in Doncaster, where they wished to celebrate their proud mining heritage with a work of public art in the town centre. It is simple. And, I think, brilliant. Be honest, though – which of us, given the commission, would have come up with this? The statue of a miner, in bronze perhaps, black to symbolise the coal and the dust and darkness in which they workedbut not the huge slab of hewn rock. I guess. The narrowness of the niche in which the figure stands, suggesting the claustrophobic constriction in which they worked. The massiveness of the confining rock, emphasizing the frightening vulnerability of the living body the unimaginable weight of the rocks and earth above them, ready to fall and crush, every time they descended the pit-shaft the danger the courage

The sculpture was crowd-funded. The sculptor? Laurence Edwards. An artist's imagination cannot be "bounded in a tick-box," as Hamlet might have said. This is why the arts matter. **John Charlesworth**

◀ Page 2] the site, it was purchased by the Council. It is a fine Victorian villa, rather grander than the usual station master's house, and therefore, as Ian Marshman, LCC Historic Environment Officer, has pointed out, a clear reminder that Spalding was once a major rail junction. (The station had at least six platforms, with lines to King's Lynn, March, Peterborough, Bourne, and two to Lincoln and beyond via Boston or Sleaford, and a vast goods yard

covering what is now Sainsbury's carpark. At its peak in about 1900 about 200 passenger and freight trains passed through the station each 24 hours, amongst them the Liverpool-Harwich boat train.) Built sideways on to King's Road, the house faces the railways tracks, enabling the station master to keep an eye on both up and down trains, even when not on duty at the station itself. We hope the Council will be bringing the house back into residential use.

John Bland

A BOAT MISSED

TODAY I ATTENDED the reopening of a beautiful Victorian gothic water fountain..... that has just been restored. Its ribbon was cut by local children involved in its current purpose: to urge people not to buy plastic water bottles but to refill their own bottles here.” No, not Spalding, alas, but it might have been. This gothic fountain is in Wimbledon in south-west London. The fountain had been erected in 1868 in gratitude to a local benefactor. (Sound familiar?)

“Once there were a thousand or more drinking fountains in London, and many more around the country, built from the 1860s onwards to provide clean piped water for those with access only to dirty public pumps.” (Exactly the same as with Mary Ann Johnson’s munificent donation in 1873 to the Spalding Water Works Company.) “Many beautiful and often eccentric drinking fountains were built by private subscription all over the country, but they fell into disrepair, with many demolished after the 1950s.

“The Drinking Fountain Association is trying to track each one around the country, and the Heritage of London Trust, with no public funds, is in the process of restoring 100 of them. Local authorities are far from cooperative

Do they work? “When the St .Paul’s recreation ground fountain in Brentford, west London, was restored a year ago, 94% of park users drank and refilled from it, with 55% saying it had stopped them

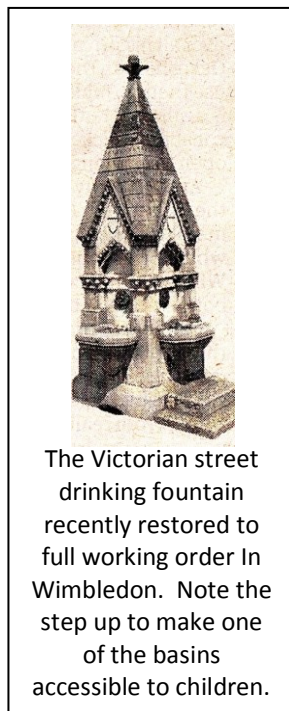
from using plastic bottles.” It’s the same story when accessible public taps are provided: “Bournemouth city council has said its introduction of 150 free refill taps last year reduced waste on its beach by 19,000 bottles in July alone.”

Other local authorities have made water available in their buildings. “Last week, Manchester city council and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority announced they were becoming ‘refill destinations’, opening up their buildings so people could fill up water bottles for free, Sunderland, Southend, Norfolk, Waltham Forest, Hounslow and Cardiff have all signed up.” But not South Holland.

“In 2015, just 20% of people in the UK used a refillable water bottle That figure is now almost 60%.” And it’s not just plastic bottles that are being retained and reused, refillables are even becoming fashion accessories, with insulated bottles available in a variety of colours, which can be customised if you wish.

In confining our waterless drinking fountain – there’s a contradiction! – to Ayscoughfee Gardens, instead of restoring it, fully functioning, to the town centre, a great up-to-the-minute opportunity was missed. We’ve been left on the quay, while other places sail away towards the future.

Even so, there’s still a long way to go. “10m single-use bottles [are] bought *every day* in the UK, 700,000 of which are discarded as litter.”



The Victorian street drinking fountain recently restored to full working order in Wimbledon. Note the step up to make one of the basins accessible to children.

[Adapted from two recent articles in The Guardian: Polly Toynbee reported on the Wimbledon event (8 March 2023) and Esther Addley provided the statistics (22 June 2023).]

CORONATION CORNER

MANY THANKS to the Council for the large-screen TV transmission in the Market Place. Shop-window dressing, however, was a little disappointing – almost as if inspiration had been exhausted by the succession of occasions crowding after each other through the autumn and spring: Pumpkin Festival, Hallowe’en, Christmas Fayre, Platinum Jubilee, the end of the Queen’s long reign

Flowers-‘n’-Things was as always quick off the mark and innovative, but the most inventive was Simpson’s with their centre-piece ‘crown’ (i.e. two or three racks of

lamb on end, points upwards, in a circle). One or two other Coronation displays were a bit puzzling. Three teddy bears – three? – in golden crowns seated on a union jack? (W.H.Smith). A small round table in the Station waiting room covered by a white table-cloth bordered with union jacks, bare except for two brown crowns of the paper sort you get rolled up inside a budget Christmas cracker, labelled ‘E.M.R.’ Maybe there had been a few biscuits for early morning passengers or a plate of Coronation Quiche. Or maybe not. Elsewhere in town Coronation Quiche was on offer at £3.75 a slice.

ART-e-FACT

THAT'S THE SNAZZY TITLE of the new town centre trail put together by the Gentlemen's Society and Transported Arts and unveiled on 15 July. It consists of eight brass plaques inspired on the one hand by the monumental brasses found in churches and on the other by exhibits of particular local interest in the Gentlemen's Society museum. It is the latest aspect of what Society President Petronella Keeling described as "taking the museum into the town", an undertaking that has been evident for several years now in such initiatives as loaning artefacts to the Ayscoughfee Hall Museum, opening its annual lecture series to the general public, taking a monthly market stall and, most recently, in opening the museum to the public five days a week.

The plaques can be found at various points in the centre: on The Punchbowl, for example, The South Holland Centre and The Chain Bridge Forge and in Herring Lane and Ayscoughfee Gardens. The plaque designs have been drawn digitally by artists Neil Baker and Steven Hatton before

being etched into the brass. Each depicts a montage assembled round a central artefact from the museum: ice skates (skating on Cowbit Wash), early cameras, the local wood farming industry, eels, and so on. It is hoped residents and visitors will try their hand at brass rubbing, to take away their own version of the art work, thus reviving a once popular pastime.

And that little lower-case 'e' in ART-e-FACT? That's the 'e' of e-bikes and e-mails – as the plaques have animations incorporated in them that can be viewed on a smartphone or tablet. The skaters skate!

Copies of a leaflet about the trail can be picked up from the Gentlemen's Society – Tuesday to Saturday 10am to 4pm. Also, it's hoped, from inside the buildings where the plaques are situated.



AGM

THIS YEAR'S AGM was held at the Baptist Church on 14 March, though attendance was rather disappointing.

In reviewing the past year Chairman John Bland covered the community spirit shown by South Holland people in their support internationally for Ukraine and her people and locally for the return of the Flower Parade; the Johnson Fountain re-siting; and our efforts to secure government funding for our Market Art Project. After the remarkable local election results in South Holland, he urged our new council lime-up to commit to the principle of openness and to support the preparation of a fresh Statement of Community Involvement.

The inevitable centre-piece of John Charlesworth's report on our Projects and Campaigns was the Council's shameful handling of the Johnson Drinking Fountain – installed in Ayscoughfee Gardens rather than the town centre, despite the latter clearly being the public's wish. This high-handed pursuit of his own preference by the councillor chairman

of the Town Centre Regeneration Steering Group, without consultation of any kind, had seriously undermined the Steering Group and was roundly condemned by fellow councillors on the Planning Committee. The Fountain had occupied a lot of time, so other projects had found themselves mostly on the back burner.

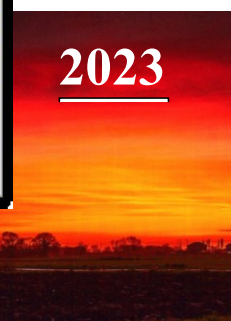
Our finances are in healthy order, reported the Treasurer.

The officers and committee were re-appointed en bloc: *Chairman* John Bland, *Secretary* Marian Boxall, *Treasurer* Melvyn Price, *Committee*: Graham Boor, John Charlesworth, David Jones, Alwyn Roffe, and Robert West.

The guest speaker was our invaluable friend Nick Jones, Programme Director of Transported Arts, who gave us the inside picture of the hi-tech brass-plaque trail recently prepared for the Gentlemen's Society (*above*) and of the Flower Parade murals planned for the Abbey Passage, at the Council's request.



CALENDAR 2024



We hope to produce a calendar for 2024 with photographs of Spalding and its surrounding villages and landscapes, including some by members.

We're looking for pictures that capture the countryside, heritage, nature or beauty of the area, whether well-known views or fascinating details that few people may have noticed. Pictures that have a clear seasonal feel, too. They may have been taken a year or two ago or next week. Please send them to John Charlesworth at the address below – as soon as possible – on either disc or memory stick or as prints.

SPALDING AND DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY

I enclose a cheque for:- ☐ £8 for individual membership; ☐ £12 for 2 persons in the same household;
☐ Free if in full-time education; ☐ Details of a standing order mandate

Please send to **Melvyn Price, 3 Morus Close, Spalding, Lincolnshire, PE11 2QL**

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