

SPALDING & DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

October 2015

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

SINCE THE LAST NEWSLETTER my personal activity in the name of the Society has taken a new turn. Being 'of a certain age', I was invited to join Probus and enjoy a free welcome meal. Unfortunately, the meetings would clash with my sports-teaching work. However, I was offered my free lunch nevertheless, if I would like to "talk about the Civic Society".

But what should I say? Not much scope for witticisms, or a climactic punch-line either. With 2015 being the 20th anniversary of the opening of the bypass, our fight for a bypass and to save Spalding from the disastrous 'Inner Relief Road' seemed a good place to start. This proposed highway would have smashed the town apart to permanently entrench the A16's heavy traffic in the centre. [*Below and pp.4&5.*]

It also put me in mind of some of the Society's other contributions to the community:- the restoration of the crumbling historical quays on High Street that would otherwise have been replaced with sheet steel piling; the muddy, overgrown towpath converted into a properly landscaped riverside walk, now such an essential public space in Spalding; our campaigns to save green spaces like the Castle Field and, more recently, the Chiltern Drive Playing Field; and with more green spaces apparently under threat [*p.2*], the campaign continues.

One major failure was over Holland Market, where we tried to get the shops to face the town centre rather than turn their backs on it. (Everyone now admits they're facing the wrong way.) And there are ongoing issues that we need to continue addressing, like the derelict sites that are such a disgrace to our town.

z I had to field criticism – particularly a perception that the Society had single-handedly blocked any building on the Bull and Monkie site. Not so. We can only ever offer informed advice. Equally critical were the comments on the original overbearing designs made by the Council's own Conservation Officer and the professionals at English Heritage and the Georgian Group. If the site is still vacant, the sole culprits are the present owners. Their new design, a gaunt, barracks-like care-home, was approved six years ago and they have sat on their hands in Gibraltar ever since and done nothing – apart from getting permission to turn it into a temporary car park, about which they have done nothing either.

Doing nothing is not the Society's way. Our fifth 'blue plaque' will be unveiled shortly [*p.3*]; artist Joseph Hillier is at work on the first of the town-centre public art works we have commissioned along with Transported [*p.3*]; we are planning a historic buildings trail; and hope to contribute to the riverside enhancement project recently reported in the press.

It was pleasing to see so many people at Joseph Hillier's presentation about his past work and ideas for the Spalding commission. Clearly there are plenty of people 'out there' who care as we do for the appearance of Spalding, not all of them members of our Society. People who would enjoy getting 'stuck in' to a fight when necessary against damaging developments; people who have ideas and would like to be actively involved in enhancing our built environment; people who would like to plant trees; people who support us. £8 per person or £12 per couple is all that's asked. (Not much more than the £3 surge of interest in the Labour Party.) The best recruiting is by word of mouth, and out of increased membership will come the active campaigners that we need to continue our work for the community.

David Jones



How the town centre would be if the A16 Inner Relief Road had gone ahead – river-side destroyed, The Poacher demolished, Broad Street car park and Consti Club bowling green bulldozed, and eventually The White Horse demolished to make room for a double bridge roundabout. Full story reprinted pp. 4&5.



Playing fields at Queen's Road (L) and Severn Road (R)



A FEW MONTHS AGO it was the Chiltern Drive Playing Field. Now it's the Holbeach Road/Queen's Road field and half of Severn Road. And it's not developers trying to get their hands on these playing fields either, but the Council itself – or rather, its Housing Department.

In July the cabinet approved the Department's proposal "to appropriate [the two pieces of] existing Council owned land from the Housing Revenue Account to the General Fund."

A bit of financial adjustment, it seemed. Just accountancy – if only it wasn't for Recommendation 4. This reads: "That ... delegated authority be granted to the Executive Director (Commercialisation) to proceed with subsequent disposals of such land to the Council's *housing company*." In other words, stripped of the jargon: "We want to build houses on these playing fields at some future date."

It's at a very early stage, but the audacity is breath-taking. Presumably the Housing Department is aware:

- that Spalding has 44% less green leisure space than it ought to have for a town of its size;
- that to build houses on playing fields flouts both the Council's own and national planning policies;
- that it would tear up the ruling group's recent election pledge to provide "*more* public open space";

four years ago aroused public outrage;

- that Sport England would be provoked to intervene.

For these reasons the Society has written to object to the transfer of these two playing fields to the General Fund and called for the removal of Recommendation 4.

We are not, it must be emphasised, opposed to building affordable homes – very much in favour, in fact – but not by covering playing fields and public green space in bricks and mortar. The town is awash with derelict brownfield land – such as the Welland Hospital site on Roman Bank and the other large site opposite, the land between the Crescent and the Market Place (derelict for over 40 years now), the old Auction Hall site at Sainsbury's roundabout, the former Bettinson's Garage site on Holbeach Road, the old swimming pool site on Pinchbeck Road, and so on. This is where new housing should go. Some of the land is already owned by the Council. And it does, in the end, of course, have compulsory purchase powers. Our playing fields and green leisure spaces should be sacrosanct.

- that the Planning Committee threw out (14-0, with one abstention) the plan to develop the Chiltern Drive Playing Field as burial plots;
- that plans to sell off the Castle Field for housing

MUCH APPRECIATED

- **The Spalding in Bloom Team** for winning the East Midlands Gold Award for the second year running.
- **M&Co:** three rousing cheers for painting out the naff tulip depictions along Abbey Passage, a major visual embarrassment to the town centre for the past 10-15 years.
- **Tulip Radio** and **The Lincoln Arms** for the attractive floral displays in their courtyards. It would be nice if others followed suit – e.g. at the Granary in Bedford Place or in Spring Gardens behind the osteopath's.
- **The White Hart** (J.Hodgson & Sons, Sleaford) for the complete repainting.
- **The Free Press Offices** for the events board in the window - a real service for local societies and organisations.
- **The Former Tax Office Site:** for the rapid erection of the new buildings so soon after planning permission was granted. Contrast the 'Bull & Monkey' site.

- **Molson's Opticians** (Hall Place) for the consistent inventiveness of its window displays. Not easy when you've only spectacles to work with!
- **The Unique Cottage Studios** window in the Crescent. Always a pleasure.
- **The Moorings** (Commercial Road) for the elegant classical lettering on its fascia boards. Would that some of our town centre shops would take note.
- **The new owners of the Hole-in-the-Wall Pub** for sweeping up the dirt and fag-ends from the nearby passage itself and not just from their own premises.
- **The Town Centre Manager** for bringing the Italian Market to Spalding again.

Not Appreciated

- Yet more blanked-out windows, at the **Station Gates** former pub and at the new **After Glow** in New Road.

THE ARTIST AT WORK



“EACH TIME is a discovery,” said Joseph Hillier, illustrating the variety of his sculptures over the last ten years –

especially when exploring such new techniques as laser-cut steel and digital 3D imaging. Joseph is the artist commissioned by the Society and Transported for the first public art work in our ‘Market Art’ project, and he was talking to an audience of over 70 in the South Holland Centre on 14 July. Among the most striking photographs were those of sculptures he has recently completed for a theatre in Plymouth, developed from a production of *Othello*.

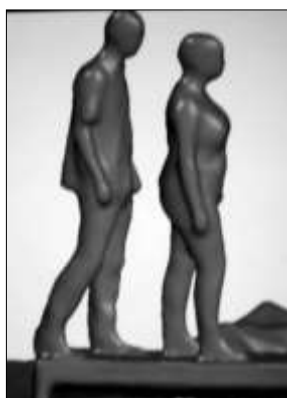
He demonstrated the 3D imaging technique he will be using in Spalding. With a device no larger than a school atlas waved along the people in the front row he produced an image on the screen behind something like a Leonardo da Vinci drawing.

His work for Spalding will be inspired by the annual Statute or Hiring Fair which was held in Hall Place every May (*See p.7*). Rather than a large single figure, the work will take the form of over a dozen wall-mounted small bronze reliefs clustered round Hall Place and fanning out into the Pied Calf Yard, Red Lion Street, the Hole-in-the-Wall Passage, and so on. A visitor might come upon one unexpectedly or could more methodically follow a trail.

An open invitation via the local press and on-line for models to be immortalised in bronze produced an interesting succession of people on 25 and 26 September: an evacuee from WW2 who stayed, a

drainage engineer, an elderly village postmaster and his wife, a schoolgirl, a gardener whose father and uncles were farmers, a local councillor, a market trader

Each of them was first coaxed to talk about their lives and memories of South Holland (prompted by archive photographs, for example). “My father, I remember, owned a reaper-and-binder, which threw out sheaves at the back, and these ...,” lacing his fingers into an A-shape, “were stoked across the field to dry.” Joseph was listening for the words that



would spark off ideas for a variety of poses for the bronzes.

Then he would circle crabwise round the model with the imaging device. [Top left.] The father and son hanging from a ledge by their finger-tips, the young couple crossing a bridge (*left: the resulting 3D image*), a blacksmith

with raised sledge-hammer, and so on. “Where in Spalding do you and your friends normally hang out?” to the schoolgirl. “Well, we go to the Candy Bar, then Bookmark, and then sometimes sit on a wall with chips.” “So what about sitting on the edge of the table there?” Pause. “I don’t want to be immortalised eating chips.”

The designs should be ready by the end of October.

For the diary

□□ Unveiling of the plaque to □□
WILLIAM BOOTH

by
Colonel Bramwell Booth
(his great grandson)

Saturday, 17 October 12.30
Boot’s Optician’s, Bridge Street, Spalding

Founder of
The Salvation Army

WILLIAM BOOTH
(1829-1912)

lodged here
whilst Minister of Spalding
Free Methodist Church
1852-4

STOP PRESS – 12 noon: The Boston Salvation Army Band will play in Hall Place before moving to Bridge Street for the unveiling.



A16 traffic in the town centre before the bypass – Bridge Street left, Hall Place right

THE BATTLE FOR THE BYPASS

IT'S NOT MUCH OF AN EXAGGERATION to say that the Society saved Spalding. What the bombs failed to do in wartime the County Council and Urban District Council were set to do in 1966 – i.e. lay waste the town centre. At that time the A16 ran through Bridge Street, the Market Place and the bent bottleneck of Kingston's Corner to Pinchbeck Road. It was murderous. Juggernauts mounted the Bridge Street pavements to pass each other, and to hell with pedestrian or cyclist. The only sane solution was a bypass.

Instead, the County Surveyor came up with a so-called Inner Relief Road – a John Adams Way that would smash its Spalding way straight from High Bridge to Pinchbeck Road. [*Below right.*] Mediaeval street pattern, historic buildings, shops, pubs, houses, the 'Consti' bowling green, all to be bulldozed to keep the lorries moving. Worst of all, it would entrench the worsening A16 traffic permanently in the town centre, for there'd be no county or Whitehall cash for a bypass once an Inner Relief Road had been built. Imagine it: all the present bypass traffic jammed in the middle of the town, juddering, fuming, and all the extra demolition that would then have been found necessary, the double-bridge roundabout at High Bridge, the White Horse just a thatched memory. This is the devastation that Spalding was saved from by the Society.

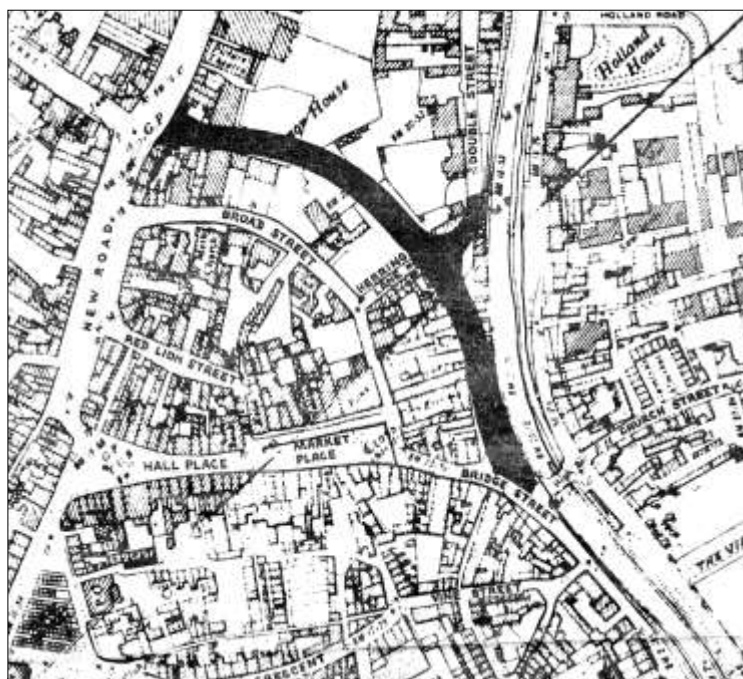
Unbelievably, the Urban District Council voted in favour of the scheme – on the casting vote of the Chairman.

Appalled, the Society pledged itself to fight the relief road and to battle for a bypass. Its first, and

crucial, action was a door-to-door petition of every house in Spalding. Public opinion declared itself overwhelmingly against the road. (Victory 1.)

Faced with this degree of hostility, the County Council put the Inner Relief Road on ice. (Victory 2.) Gradually the Urban District Council and then the County Council were won round to acknowledge that the only acceptable long-term solution was a bypass. (Victory 3.)

Indeed, in 1973 the Ministry of Transport unveiled five possible bypass routes. Only one of them, however, was a true bypass (east of the Coronation Channel). The rest ran along the closed railway track-bed and involved a huge fly-over over Winsover Road. (Imagine Park Road with the A16 alongside it and all the noise of an elevated road.) The County Council opted for one of the railway



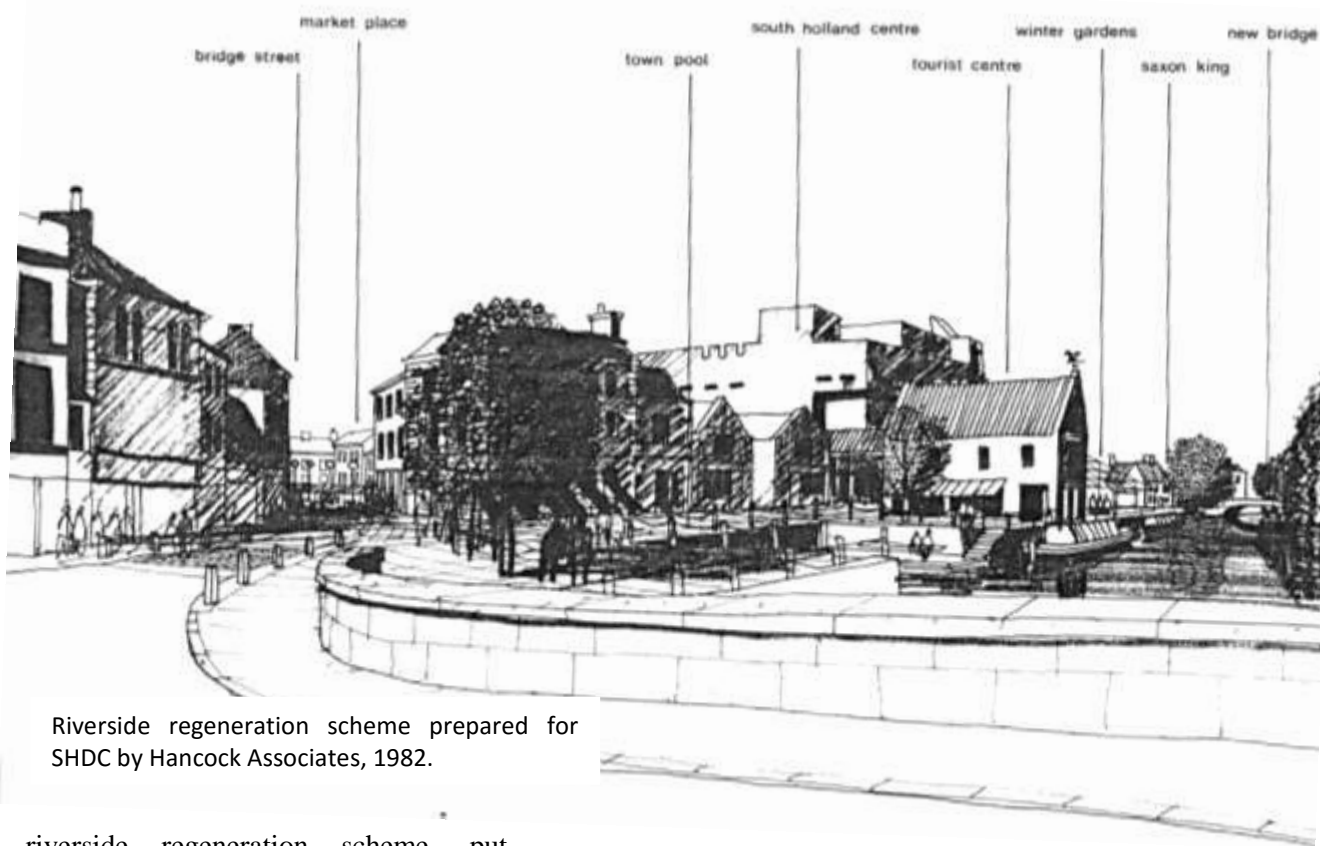
versions; Spalding people for the real bypass. But either way there was no Spalding bypass on any government action list.

Meanwhile, with worsening congestion in the centre, the County highways engineers turned to traffic management schemes. As these all involved treating the river as a sort of dual carriageway with a central water reservation, they were acceptable to neither the Society nor South Holland District Council (as it had become), who were by now keen to develop the riverside as a town-centre amenity.

Indeed, in 1975 to mark European Architectural Heritage Year, the Council commissioned a

did allow the Market Place to be free of through-traffic and later pedestrianised.

The lack of progress on a proper bypass led the Society to join forces with the Chamber of Trade and to approach our MP. To his great credit, Richard Body immediately agreed to arrange a meeting with the Junior Minister of Transport, Kenneth Clark. Within three weeks we were round a table with the Minister at Westminster, with the Society leading the presentation. Ken Clark was very straightforward, he had been to Spalding (“a nice little town”), but “no, our bypass was not on the list”. He listened to our case and promised that if, as seemed probable,



Riverside regeneration scheme prepared for SHDC by Hancock Associates, 1982.

riverside regeneration scheme, put money aside and secured a £75,000 grant from the government. Shamefully, it was two Spalding county councillors who led opposition to it at County Hall (it would hamper possible road schemes, they said), and scheme and money were lost. A few years later the Council tried again, commissioning its own traffic management scheme and another riverside regeneration plan, only to have them vetoed by the County as before.

Meanwhile, a one-way system for traffic management using High Street and Double Street was put in place as a temporary measure. Although adversely affecting the riverside (as it still does), it

existing contracts made savings, then he would ensure that Spalding would be next. True to his word, five months later we were “on the list”.

It took another ten years to plan, consult and construct the road, which opened in 1995. On its tenth anniversary a County Highways senior officer said that without the bypass the town today would be “unable to cope, because of congestion, delays, environmental issues and of course safety”. Yet it is precisely this intolerable state of affairs that his department, and our own town council, would have inflicted on Spalding in 1966 for ever – if it hadn’t been for the stand taken by the Civic Society.

John Charlesworth and John Honnor

[Reprinted from October 2010 Newsletter.]

WILLIAM BOOTH IN SPALDING

WILLIAM BOOTH was just 23 when Spalding's Free (or Reformed) Methodists invited him to become their minister. He had no theological or ministerial training. What he did have was a passionate, burning zeal to bring the poor, the destitute, the outcasts of this world to God.

He'd 'seen the light' at the age of 15, as an apprentice pawnbroker, and had started to preach in the poorest and most squalid streets of his native Nottingham. Despairing of the comfortable, middle-class respectability into which the Methodist Church had by then settled, the fiery 17-year-old led his ragged slum listeners off the street one Sunday into the Wesley Chapel and seated them in the best pews. He was roundly reprimanded and told in future to use the back door and the obscure benches set apart for the poor and shabby. Later, after moving to London, he was expelled from the Walworth Chapel for refusing to give up his street preaching, and turned to the break-away Free Methodists.

With his pawnshop job lost as well, he was virtually penniless when the call came from the Spalding Free Methodists. Their leading light was Mr. Major Shadford, a chemist in the Market Place and an increasingly influential local figure. (It would be interesting to know if Shadford had learned of the young man from a London acquaintance or had come across him by chance preaching in the street.)

Arrived in Spalding, Booth lodged first in Red Lion Street and immediately threw himself into the work. Services were held in the old Assembly Rooms in Broad Street (where the Spalding Club now is, opposite the Herring Lane carpark). But the Spalding circuit was enormous, stretching from Boston to Holbeach Drove, with over 30 Free Methodist groups to serve and organise, mostly on foot, sometimes "sitting down under hedges to rest," he recalled. "I have tramped many a mile in these Fens, up to the ankles in mud, not knowing sometimes how to get my feet out again without leaving my boots behind me."

He preached in scattered little chapels, in the open air and in farm kitchens with ceilings so low he could scarce stand upright. The on-going dispute between the Reformers and the Wesleyans meant that it was not always clear who owned a particular chapel. At Sutterton the Reformers were locked out, and "the people had to get in through the window."

His energy was prodigious. In his first week, for example, he preached in Holbeach (Wednesday), Moulton (Thursday), Weston Hills (Friday), Holbeach again (Sunday morning), Fleet Fen (Sunday afternoon), Holbeach (in the evening), Spalding (Monday) and Donnington (Tuesday).



Much to the concern of his betrothed back in London. Charlotte wrote: "No man can sustain incessant toil ... and you must tell them." And Joseph Ashwell, his next door neighbour when Booth moved to Bridge Street, said, "You couldn't really hold him. I used to tell him he would kill himself." To no avail.

As a Spalding chapel member recalled years later: "When he called at [our] house after his meetings, it was easy to tell by his manner whether those meetings had been successful or not. If they had, he would leap up the steps like a school-boy, humming snatches of some favourite hymn tune." A successful meeting meant conversions: 4 after one service in Holbeach, 14 at Donnington, 6 at Swineshead Bridge, 36 at Caistor. "People wept," he wrote. "Strong men were completely melted down." Clearly he was a very charismatic young man indeed. During a 'tea meeting' in Spalding, he found himself "almost crushed by the mêlée of young people trying to get close" to him.

When Booth moved back to London in 1854, he left behind him a much strengthened Free Methodist movement in Spalding with the determination to build their own chapel. (Its eventual site was in the Crescent, where the abandoned Royal Mail Sorting Office now stands. This original chapel was replaced in 1879 by the enormous be-pillared United Methodist Free Church with seating for 1100. But with a congregation reduced eventually to 88 members, it was demolished in the 1950s.)

Looking back in old age on his time in Spalding, Booth said: "I was a weak and puny fellow when I went to the Fens [but] those long journeys on foot and the splendid hospitality of the Lincolnshire people simply made me."

It was in 1865 that William Booth created the Salvation Army, and by a happy coincidence the installation of our blue plaque will also mark the 150th Anniversary of that event.

[Sources: *Lincolnshire Free Press*, Norman Leveritt and Michael Elsdon: *Aspects of Spalding* and David Bennett: *William Booth in Lincolnshire 1852-4*.]

THE HIRING FAIR



Carter with whip

the day in May appointed for the annual Statutes or Hiring Fair. It was the same everywhere. Shepherds and ploughboys, cooks and dairymaids looking for a place, were mostly hired for a year at a time, with a week's holiday in May. They would stand around or parade back and forth amongst the farmers and potential employers with a token of their particular skill. "Carters and waggons were distinguished by having a piece of whip-cord twisted round their hats; thatchers wore a fragment of woven straw; shepherds held their sheep-crooks in their hands" (Thomas Hardy: *Far from the Madding Crowd*).

A deal was sealed by a handshake and the new employer handing over a shilling or a crown (the "fasten penny"). "When a lad was engaged, he used to deck himself out in all kinds of various coloured ribbons, to show that he had a place" (E.H.Gooch: *A History of Spalding*). Then the fun could begin.

With a full year's wages burning a hole in so many pockets and purses, it is not surprising that the hiring fairs were a magnet for travelling showmen of all kinds, with their coconut shies, tickling feathers and penny-squirts, shooting galleries, freak shows, roundabouts and swing-boats, along with the cheap-jacks, confidence tricksters, nut-hawkers, card-sharpers, pickpockets and other prowling vagabonds with an eye on easy pickings. Pubs laid on "two-penny hops". And by the middle of the 19th century hiring fairs had become notorious for their rowdy horseplay, drunkenness, brawling and general licence. Although the worst excesses began to subside as the century wore on, the *Spalding Free Press* for May 1877 records: "We saw much more real or sham intoxication – for undoubtedly in many cases,



Hodge had a idea that to appear intoxicated is just the proper thing at a statute - than we cared to see."

Victorian broadside ballads about hiring fairs follow a pretty standard pattern: the toggged-up lads and lasses head for the nearest market town in the spring sunshine, then comes the merry-making, flirting, dancing, drinking and drunkenness, with a final warning to all fair maidens to beware of young men! In Spalding in the 1880s and '90s, Gooch recalls, couples who had "clicked" would "make their way to the nearest quiet country lane ... to play the oldest game in the world". Peck's Drove and Cunningham's Drove were apparently the favoured spots and, "though ordinarily they were the loneliest places one could imagine, on 'Status Day' they were packed with courting country couples and it was impossible for them all to find a secluded spot".

There were voices raised of course against the general licence of the hiring fairs, some as early as the 18th century, rising to a determined campaign to abolish them in the 1850s. For the Archdeacon of Lincoln Cathedral there was an even more fundamental objection than the general licence:

"There is something very un-English in hiring servants off the stones; and though we do not object to the servants' annual holiday, we scarcely know of a more disgusting proceeding than that of men crowding amongst females and selecting their servants just after the same manner as they choose pig, cattle or sheep." (*Spalding Free Press*, 12 May 1857)

But to little avail, it seems. As late as 1907 a paragraph in the *Spalding Free Press* headed "IN THE MARKET" (lambs 30s. to 40s.each, pork 6s.6d. per stone, suckers 24s.each) is immediately followed by one headed "MAY HIRING" (ploughboys £5 to £8, horsemen £8 to £10, housemaids £10 to £15, plain cooks £16 to £18). It's a sobering juxtaposition. It is also part of our history.

The hiring fairs, however, like so much else, did not long survive the 1914-18 War.

John Charlesworth

PLANNING MATTERS

IT IS DIFFICULT not to be puzzled by the **inconsistency of some planning decisions.** For example, the fencing-in of a front garden on an open-plan estate is sometimes approved and sometimes not. Again, the clutter of advertising signs at the Sunshine Café in Bridge Street was rightly refused, whereas HSBC's new long illuminated panel, which is contrary to SHDC Conservation Area policy, has been allowed.

It was disappointing to find the Council's rejection of a plan to turn the **Halmer Grange Care Home** into flats overturned on appeal (given their pokiness, the inadequate amenity space, oppressive parking and poor access).

It's been a quiet summer otherwise, apart from the ongoing **Station Gates** saga. First a wall and window were knocked out of this handsome Edwardian pub, and then a cheap incongruous entrance inserted – all without permission. A retrospective application was rightly refused.

Some updating of the listed **Gamlyn Almshouses** in Church Street will not affect their external appearance.

Car Parks and Markets Review

This long overdue report appeared without fanfare in August. Despite a number of useful ideas, it is, however, disappointing overall – largely because it falls flatly between two stools.

Given its title, one would have expected a close, in-depth examination of the district's stall markets and car park provision. There is, however, neither. No scrutiny of the unsatisfactory stalls layout in Hall Place, the isolation of the 'flea market' in Red Lion Street, the exclusion of the Red Lion's café, or analysis of why the

South Holland Centre stalls are so often vacant and why the market is more flourishing on a Tuesday than a Saturday. Similarly, the under-use of several of the pay-and-display car parks is unexplored, as is the potential impact of all the cars that will come in from the huge new Holland Park housing development on Spalding Common.

However, instead of in-depth studies of two closely-defined topics, the *Review* spreads itself thinly over the whole town centre, without either the time or the resources, it seems, to do this properly, with superficial results. (How different from the Environment Agency's marvellously thorough and perceptive *Spalding Waterspace Study* of 2010 – now available on-line.)

The consultants appear to have spent little time in the town – two days? – but to have relied largely on questionnaires and the internet. Hence, embarrassing mistakes like showing the High Street traffic one-way in the wrong direction, being unaware that the Crescent is a major cross-town traffic route from High Bridge, and calling for the removal of non-existent kerbs in Red Lion Street.

There are several pages of elaborate coloured graphs, but how much faith can be placed in these when the sample was so small? Out of 547 retailers across South Holland personally invited to fill in an on-line questionnaire, only 29 responded (9 from Spalding). Thus, a graph showing that 70% of retailers support free on-street parking represents just 7 Spalding retailers. (Views of the rest unknown.)

The *Review's* best feature is its repeated insistence that **“The improved attractiveness of the town centre streets and spaces is seen as the immediate priority.”** But it hardly needed an outside consultant to tell us this: the Society and many others have been saying it for years.

(We hope to include a more detailed look at the *Review's* recommendations in the next Newsletter.)

Planning Sub-Committee

Spalding and District Civic Society

I enclose a cheque for

£8 for individual membership / **£12** for 2 persons

In the same household / Free in full-time education /

Details of a standing order mandate.

Name.....

Address.....

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Post Code..... Telephone.....

E-mail.....

Please send to: **Melvyn Price, 34 Avebury Gardens,
Spalding, Lincolnshire, PE11 2EN.**

SOCIETY NOTES

A WARM WELCOME to new members Gavin Allmand, James Ingrey, Steven Savage and Nigel Wickenden.

And a gentle reminder to the one or two present members who have still to renew their subscriptions for the year. (*Across left.*)

Apologies to Robert West for missing him off the list of committee members in the last Newsletter and to Paul Walls for misspelling his name.

The Society's website carries information about events, copies of consultation documents, colour versions of the last eight Newsletters, and full contact details for the Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer. www.spaldingcivicsociety.org.uk

Unveiling of the Society's first public art commission towards the end of January. Look out for details in the local press and on line.

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