The Richmond Review 2023

Richmond and District Civic Society



Courtesy of Dr. J. McLennan

The Richmond Review

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Front Illustration: Richmond Castle in the snow
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Chairman's report

The work of the Civic Society during the momentous 950th celebrations of the founding of Richmond Castle was fully covered in the 950th Review, which was eventually published in August 2022. As there was no *Richmond Review* in 2022, this report covers the two years of 2022 and 2023. At our 2022 AGM, John McDonald handed over the Chairmanship to Colin Grant. John had served as Chairman for seven years and the Society owes a debt of gratitude to him for his commitment, and for overcoming the many challenges we have faced.

Chairman's report for 2022 by John McDonald

In my report to the 2022 AGM, I said that, when the pandemic started in 2020, the greatest threat that Covid held to the Society's programme was the ability to continue with our monthly lectures, but we had successfully prevented that by using Zoom. We had held a full programme throughout lockdown and, in 2022, we ran what we have come to call 'hybrid lectures'. This had been possible because of the dedication of William Gedye, our Zoom expert, and the co-ordinating work of Colin Grant, our Lecture Secretary. Through their work we even have an archive of lectures kept for public use on our website. This year also saw the introduction of two lectures in their own locations, something we would like to continue wherever possible: the first at Kiplin Hall and the second at the Georgian Theatre Royal.

One of the greatest losses in the past few years to our work had been the impossibility of running day trips, and so it had been very gratifying to know that we could re-instate them in 2022: one a local venue, Rokeby Hall, and a second to Halifax to visit Shibden Hall and Piece Hall.

It is not surprising that Covid made our annual holiday impossible, and it is hugely to the credit of Margaret Lowery that the 2022 trip to the Isle of Man even ran, let alone be the success that it was. Only the intrepid booked places, with the vacant places taken up by friends and family. Margaret has decided to make it the last one she wished to organise and, on your behalf, I want to thank her for the quite enormous determination she has shown in recent years in ensuring that these short breaks, visiting heritage sites in the UK, have taken place.

If our programme of lectures is the Society's core activity, and the reason why members enrol each year, there are other activities which are vital to our aim of protecting and promoting the heritage of Richmondshire and I want to summarise these, just in case you are unaware of them. The most obvious one is our role as consultees on all planning applications affecting listed buildings and conservation areas. Our planning group meets every three weeks and responds to all the relevant applications. The planners look to us to represent the heritage viewpoint, and that could force us to be reactionary, but I personally think that we try to assess new trends and products fairly. We want the new to respect and harmonise with the old, but we do not want pastiche reproductions of the old. Ideally, we would want the new to reinterpret the existing, but this is a rare achievement in our street architecture.

Occasionally, but only occasionally, we attract public abuse as we did when the mural in Richmond Market Place suddenly appeared without planning permission, and people used social media to mount a campaign that won in the end against the advice of the Planning Department and the Society. It was, for us, a time to understand just how democratic the planning system is when it is adhered to. It gives everybody the chance to voice their opinion and prevents changes being imposed on a town or village. It is currently under attack within government, and I personally hope that it survives.



The Market Place mural

There are two issues to do with planning that I need to draw further attention to. One is the current re-organisation of local government which will see the closure of the District Council in April. We still do not really know whether the present system will continue and whether we will still be used as consultees. We hope so, if only because we feel that Richmond and its surrounding district is a rare heritage asset which also needs to develop and thrive. Achieving protection and development is a constant challenge and an area of particular expertise, something that the society has been showing now for over 50 years.

The second issue is that the developments that are going to change our area most in the next decade do not lie within our heritage remit and the Society will not therefore be consulted on these. Instead, it will be down to us to spot them and send in our views, as any other group can do. The kind of development I am referring to includes the transformation of both Scotch Corner, Junction 53, and the Catterick A1 exit, Junction 52, into retail and trading estates, thus changing the entrance to Swaledale and Richmond from a rural landscape into a commercial one. A further example is the proposed development in Westfields, which concerns some people and attracts others. None of these major changes fall into the remit of our planning group and the Society's Committee feels that another group of interested people could be formed, as part of the Civic Society, to study and report on these changes.

Before doing that, I want to report on the other area of work which the Society has always prioritised as a way of protecting and promoting Richmond as a heritage centre: our contribution to the town's offer to visitors. You will know of the plaques that we have over many years placed around the town, and you may also know that we hold responsibility for maintaining the town trail information boards around the town. Perhaps fewer of you will know that we produce a free map and guide to the trail and plaques, so that visitors can tour the historic centre, and we make available an audio guide that people can listen to on their phones. All of these things have proved enormously popular, adding a heritage dimension to visitors' experience of the town. The audio guide, for example, hosted on the Original Richmond website, is the second most viewed page on the website (the home page is the first).

Moving on, we have a dormant scheme with Historic England that needs re-starting. It is to update all the descriptions of listed buildings, initially in Richmond. It's a really interesting, good weather topic for a group of people working with the guidance of Historic England. On a similar topic, we want to revive our practice of giving awards for good architecture and the best work done by heritage builders and craftsmen. Again, a small group could work with our planning team on both of these.

The Richmond Review has always been an essential part of our work and a special edition was produced by the committee to cover the 950th anniversary of Richmond Castle. It is in good hands now that Graham Berry has taken on its editorship, but help is needed, particularly at key times of the year. One special element has always been the round-up of the year or 'Collectanea'. It has hitherto been researched and written by my wife, Tina but, as we have both retired as editors, a vacancy arises there.

Finally, the Committee always needs new blood and extra members. Both the Treasurer, Graham Barber, and the Secretary, Carol Hillyard, need co-workers to share their roles. Graham Berry, new to the Committee, has taken over the role of Lecture Secretary and has compiled the 2023 programme.

It is always a pleasure to end by saying 'thank you' to all those who make the Society a success, and this year it is particularly pleasant since I have stepped away from being Chair and become, instead, a member. My seven years have meant a great deal to me, and it is gratifying that the Society is still strong and vibrant, full of potential. It would be invidious to thank individual people, partly because it has always been, and will continue to be, a team effort. But one exception – 'thank you' to Tina for letting me spend so much time doing this job and for always reminding me of looming deadlines. And all that endless proof-reading! A special big 'thank you' to every member of the Committee and the planning group who have worked so effectively for little more than the odd glass of wine or slice of flapjack. And 'thank you', members, for constantly making the Society a friendly, and stimulating place to be. Long may all of that continue.

Chairman's report for 2023 by Colin Grant

At the AGM in December 2022 John handed me the baton and this report covers the nine months to the end of August 2023. Most of our activities have continued, but there have been a few new initiatives.

In January, members of the Committee attended a public meeting in the Town Hall. Organised by Richmondshire District Council, the well-attended meeting discussed which proposals were priorities for the Shared Prosperity Fund. A bid was to be submitted for Richmond under the theme of 'Building Pride in our Places'. The Society subsequently made a detailed response to the proposals, with an emphasis on support for events and festivals. To show our support for these we were pleased to make a donation of £250 to MayFest, the highly imaginative and successful festival which ran at the end of April.

After a series of 'Let's Talk' consultations, the much-heralded Local Government Reorganisation went ahead on 1st April 2023. This move had its supporters and its critics. Were the heralded efficiency and cost savings outweighed by the sheer size of the new authority? Only time will tell. As with all reorganisations, there continue to be some teething problems but, overall, the transfer went relatively smoothly. The former Richmondshire District Council Planning Committee has a different mix of councillors as it now covers both Richmondshire and Hambleton, with the exclusion of the Yorkshire Dales National Park which retains its own planning authority. Over the next five years, the Richmondshire Local Plan, along with all the other former district or borough local plans, will be reviewed to form a new North Yorkshire Local Plan.

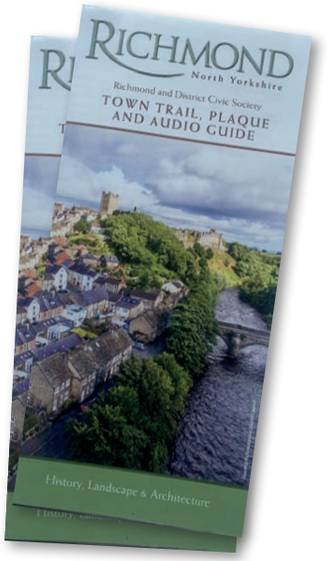
Our planning group continues to give valuable advice on planning applications on listed buildings and in conservation areas, as well as commenting on the larger and more contentious applications in the former Richmondshire District. However, access to local Planning Officers to discuss applications, what alterations to shop fronts need advertising consent and general advice on planning, is still an issue. We would very much welcome the time when Duty Planning Officers can once again discuss matters face-to-face. We feel that this would really help to avoid inappropriate actions in conservation areas that, with proper advice, would not happen.

Marcia Howard sadly tendered her resignation from the Committee, whilst continuing to run our Facebook site. The Committee has

welcomed new members. At the AGM Gregan Davis joined and, in February, Ian Woods was co-opted. An issue that required some soul searching by the Committee was to decide if we should continue our monthly lectures as hybrid Zooms. With dwindling numbers watching on Zoom and with continuing issues with audio quality, the Committee reluctantly agreed to end the use of Zoom in April, after our excellent talk on the Middleham Jewel. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to William Gedye who has organised the use of Zoom faithfully for the last three years and kept the Society alive. Without him, the Society would not be as robust as it is today. We have as many members now as before the pandemic, with 122 memberships, including joint and family, so well over 150 members altogether.

I have become a regular participant of events organised by YHACS, the Yorkshire and Humber Association of Civic Societies, and we will be holding the YHACS October Autumn Conference in Richmond. Encouraging 'Civic Pride' and how to nurture it is a regular topic at these meetings and we have discussed how to help a younger audience to appreciate the magnificent heritage we all recognise. So, at Easter we launched a 'Civic Awareness Photo Competition' aimed at local schools. Understandably, with all the demands on young people's lives at this time, the initial response was disappointing, so the deadline has been extended until the end of September. We are also being encouraged to look at our image and consider an element of rebranding of our Society, in an attempt to attract a wider audience.

Another initiative, mentioned by John, was to restart the checking of listed buildings in Richmond. The advice by Historic England is that we should concentrate on checking that addresses of the 346 Richmond listings are correct. We will, hopefully, continue this activity in August.



We have also continued to support visitors to the town through printing 5,000 free Town Trail, Plaque and Audio Guide leaflets, distributed through Richmond Information Centre. We also continue to maintain the ten trail panels and 34 plaques.

My sincere thanks go to our Committee, who have all played their part. I am very grateful to our officers, Carol Hillyard our Secretary, and Graham Barber our Treasurer and Membership Secretary. The new Lecture Secretary, Graham Berry, has taken over the responsibility for the *Richmond Review* and is currently editing the articles along with eagle-eyed proof reader Peter Cardwell. Ian Hepworth co-ordinates the approach with, and is a member of, our Planning Sub-Committee and, to round off the team, Simon Scott-Priestley, Gregan Davis and Ian Woods give valuable support and advice.

Thanks mainly to Graham Berry's input, we have enjoyed a varied and excellent programme of lectures. He has also organised a challenging, but nonetheless successful and enjoyable, visit to Auckland Castle and Bishop Auckland in April, where we were met by Jane Ruffer, who showed us the gardens and grounds. In July, we had a visit to Pickering to be enlightened and entertained by Dr Kate Giles, who explained the amazing medieval wall paintings in the parish church. Members then visited Pickering Castle or the Beck Isle Museum to round off an enjoyable day.

Collectanea

Tina McDonald

After the 950th festivities finally faded and the emergence from Covid restrictions and constraints began to look more certain, Richmond settled back into the reassuring rhythm of small-town life.

In other parts of the world, life was less secure. The Russian invasion of Ukraine had caused the largest refugee crisis in Europe since the Second World War and had resulted in an estimated 12 million Ukrainians leaving their country to find safer places to live. By October 2022, 134,000 had settled in the UK and, in Richmondshire, over 100 refugees had found homes with local families. A Richmondshire Refugee Support Group (RRSG) was quickly set up, providing language classes, social and community events and a network of support for hosts and refugees. Roman Pronyszym, a volunteer with RRSG, was particularly well-placed to provide help: with a Ukrainian father, impressive language skills and long-standing knowledge of Ukraine, its customs and traditions, his assistance proved invaluable. He explained that 'Our events help hosts to understand the cultural backgrounds of the refugees living with them and help them to bond and build a community.'

Events included a Christmas party on 7th January, the date when Christmas is traditionally celebrated in Ukraine. Eighty refugees and their families and hosts enjoyed fun, food and genuine companionship, while the children enjoyed a surprise visit from Santa, bringing gifts for every child. Later, a professional magician arrived to add a touch of real magic to the occasion.

A later fund-raising attempt by RRSG, working with the Walking and Book Festival, presented a moving and thought-provoking evening: Dr Olesya Khromeychuk, a Ukrainian-born writer, lecturer and Director of the Ukrainian Institute, in conversation with Peter Barron MBE, former editor of the *Northern Echo*, shared with us her personal account of the conflict, juxtaposed with the story of her brother's death. Her book, *Death of a Soldier as Told by his Sister,* tells of the tragic death of her brother, Volodya Pavliv, who died on the frontline in Eastern Ukraine in 2017. Her poignant account of grief for her brother

and her country left many in the audience deeply moved. Proceeds from the evening were donated to the RRSG campaign, *Power to Ukraine*, set up to provide generators for the Ukrainians left behind, enabling them to access power, heat and light.

Members of the Richmond French Twinning Association have been able to resume reciprocal visits with their twinned town, St Aubin du Cormier in Brittany. Richmond has been twinned with St Aubin for 20 years, both having castles built by the same family and many other similarities. Richmond should have hosted a visit for the 950th celebrations, but Covid travel restrictions prevented this. In July, however, 15 residents were delighted to be able to celebrate the 800th anniversary of the founding of St Aubin's castle and the 535th anniversary of the Battle of St Aubin du Cormier. A formal reception was hosted by the Mayor, Jérôme Bégasse, and Richmond visitors enjoyed community meals, entertainment by Breton dancers and various visits to chateaux and the ancient Fougères Castle. One visit, to *Une Spectacle*, a Kynren-type re-enactment of the Battle of St Aubin du Cormier which took place in 1488 and included English archers, was indeed a spectacle and much enjoyed by everybody. The Richmond Association is very much looking forward to returning St Aubin's generous hospitality in 2025.

While families struggle with the worst cost of living crisis for generations, it is gratifying that Richmond's generosity to good causes continues. Fund-raising efforts and generous donations endure. The John Blenkiron and Sons Community Fund was launched in March to offer support to local charities and deserving causes. It has £20,000 available for not-for-profit organisations, which can apply for help for their work. James Blenkiron is a business principal of the company founded by his father, John, in 1968. Readers can discover more about John Blenkiron's interesting life in the 2010 *Review*. This new community fund hopes to make a difference in the areas of health, education and social deprivation.

Retired firefighter, Steve Morris, together with five friends, raised more than £2,000 towards a public defibrillator. Cycling 240km along the Wolds Way, they donated their sponsorship money to the Heart of Richmond, a community group which aims to instal life-saving defibrillators across Richmond.

The Station Singers with their three choirs, Platform 1, Platform 2 and Branch line, recently celebrated their tenth anniversary. The celebration, postponed because of Covid, marked a successful decade of concert giving and fundraising. Under the excellent leadership of Carol Gedye, Musical Director, and Kay Bromhead, Deputy Musical Director, together with their talented accompanist, Brett Overin, the Station Singers have delighted audiences and raised impressive amounts of money for various good causes: The Friends of Richmond Friary Community Hospital, St Teresa's Hospice, St Mary's Church and Riding for the Disabled, to mention but a few.

Even Rishi Sunak made a generous contribution to Richmond's fund-raising activities this year, donating a painting of Richmond Castle by the award-winning artist Alice Boggis-Rolfe. Originally donated to the Prime Minister by Sky Arts to mark the Sky Arts channel becoming free-to-view, the painting raised an impressive sum at auction which was donated to Richmond Station.



Val and Ian Hepworth's open garden at Skeeby

Two local families again opened their beautiful gardens for charity this year. Val and Ian Hepworth's one-and-a-half acre garden surrounding their historic manor house in Skeeby features a glorious collection of herbaceous and mixed borders, shrubs, trees and perennials, as well as an intriguing quarry garden known as 'The Dell.' Originally designed by the notable local Pease family, the garden has been developed by Val and Ian over 40 years. As well as providing the many visitors with the opportunity to enjoy its delights, the Hepworths also raised a substantial sum for Richmondshire Museum.

Marcia and Dennis McLuckie are the proud owners of Mr Yorke's Walled Garden. This garden was once part of the estate owned by John Yorke III who lived close by in a fine 17th century mansion, sadly

demolished in the 19th century. The Yorke's estate included the house, fine stables (now a car park), the Green Walk, Culloden Tower and Temple Grounds. The Walled Garden, uncared for over many years, was developed as a market garden in the 1980s, before being abandoned again. Rescue came in the form of the McLuckies, who have worked tirelessly to develop and re-design the garden, always aware of original features not beyond rescue. The garden is now a delight of shrubs, parterres, borders, ponds and trees old and new. With two open days, they raised money for Just the Job and Mayfest. Mayfest's talented musicians, Trouvere, added to the atmosphere with their delightful medieval music.



Open garden day at Mr Yorke's Walled Garden

Richmondshire Museum embarked on its own fundraising venture with an exceptional series of talks this year. Bob Wooley revealed the secrets of Victorian photographic studies and Bob Woodings gave a fascinating talk on the Easby choir stalls brought to St Mary's after the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII. The seat of each stall tips up to form a misericord or mercy seat, useful to lean against during long sermons and services. The misericords are richly carved with all manner of mythical beasts, flowers and fruit; there is even a pig playing the bagpipes! Excellent photographs by Guy Carpenter enabled us to see much of the fine detail and Bob Woodings revealed much more about their history.

Gill Page and Paul Leigh provided another fascinating evening, entitled 'Trouvere's Medieval Instrumentarium', which was part talk and part concert, giving us the opportunity to listen to a wide range of medieval instruments. These talented musicians, mainstays of Mayfest, fascinated us all by their musicality and vast knowledge of medieval instruments. To hear Paul play on a pipe made from a sheep's leg bone was extraordinary.

The first lecture of the series was enormously popular and played to a packed Town Hall. Jane Hatcher had been able to get permission from the BBC for a special showing of a documentary made by BBC2 in 1985 about Richmond. The documentary showed life in Richmond in 1945 and was based on a set of photographs taken by the distinguished photographer James Allen Cash, who had been commissioned by the government to provide the world with a view of a quintessential market town. More than 100 photographs were taken, covering all aspects Richmond life: its scenery and architecture, markets, farming, schools, pubs, country kitchens and, of course, its people. Many in the audience were delighted to recognise family and friends long dead and one visitor revealed that he was a nephew of James Allen Cash and had additional information to share. It was a remarkable evening and we all felt privileged to have the opportunity to see Richmond as it was, and how, in many ways, it still is.

Richmond is the perfect place for walkers: town walks, historic walks, even ghost walks, are all on offer, as well, of course, as the almost instant access to the beautiful Dales. Richmond Information Centre offers volunteer-led town walks on Tuesdays and Saturdays and the Green Howards Museum – this year celebrating its 50th anniversary – offers walks with a knowledgeable guide, pointing out clues to Richmond's military past. Local walking groups include the Richmondshire Ramblers, the Swaledale Outdoor Club and Walking for Health. The Walking and Book Festival (15th–24th September), now in its 18th year, is offering 32 walks this year, 20 of which are new. For those searching for a cerebral respite from physical exertions, there are also 20 book events designed to appeal to a variety of tastes, offering talks by Sir Nick Young of the Red Cross, Sally Coulthard and Thomas Halliday, as well as many other interesting writers. *A Richmond Bundle*, a collection of three booklets about Richmond, featuring walks, local stories and legends, is a bargain at only £6 and a useful acquisition for residents as well as visitors; it is available from the Green Howards shop.

One popular destination for Richmond walkers has long been Willance's Leap. In 1606, while out hunting, Robert Willance was returning home when he was enveloped by a thick, impenetrable mist. His young horse panicked and bolted, straight over the edge of Whitcliffe escarpment. Sadly, the horse died but Willance, his leg badly broken, survived by inserting his leg into the belly of the horse for protection during the long, cold night. Now known as Willance's Leap, the walk's deteriorating wooden stiles have been replaced recently by galvanised kissing gates, improving access and appearance. Richmond Rotary Club, with grants from various organisations, has masterminded this much-appreciated improvement.

When plans were revealed for the Designer Village at Scotch Corner, feelings were mixed. Many felt that Richmond's businesses would be adversely affected and residents too would be impacted by increased traffic and an influx of visitors too great for a small market town. Others felt that the 'shop till you drop' brigade might welcome the respite of a gentle market town and visit it as a relief. The closure of several long-lived and popular businesses in the town has re-ignited feelings of alarm. Ravensworth Nurseries has served the people of Richmond for 57 years and has made a major contribution to many of Richmond's excellent floral displays. Cross View Cafe has long been a favourite with visitors and residents. Its perfect position in the Market Place, its friendly service and excellent value have made it the first port of call for many visitors to the town. York House is closing too, after 26 years of providing residents and visitors with an Aladdin's cave of antiques and interesting collectables. A favourite for gift hunters, it will be missed by many. The closure of The Fleece was greeted with much dismay by locals and the many visitors who stay there. Renovated in 2018, its striking Scottish baronial style has made it a landmark in the town. Its restaurant had become a popular eating place for locals and visitors.

The Georgian Theatre has been a popular venue this year, with some very successful productions. RADS has done particularly well, with an interesting production of *Swive*. Clare Allen produced and directed a clever adaptation of *Macbeth* set in the financial crash of 2008, its witches portrayed as office cleaners. Laughter is rare in *Macbeth*, but these characters rather stole the show. The pantomime was a great success, as always, and the knitted fish, one batch coming from a 95-year-old lady in Northallerton and another box from Norway, were re-housed to local nurseries at the end of the run, much to the delight of many young children. This year, the pantomime is to be *Rapunzel* and the theatre is appealing for knitted vegetables, to be thrown at the audience in true Georgian fashion. A band of knitting stalwarts has been seen recently looking for inspiration in Neeps and Tatties.



Knitting stalwarts take over Neeps and Tatties

Royal events were much to the fore this year and last, and flags and bunting abounded. The Platinum Jubilee in June 2022 was a great success and, though the Queen looked very frail, she appeared to greatly enjoy the nation's celebrations. Her performance in the TV sketch with Paddington Bear, shown ahead of the Platinum Jubilee Concert, was a great surprise to many and was enthusiastically received all over the world. Many readers may not know that Simon Farnaby, who played the role of the disappearing footman in the film, was an old boy of Richmond School. Sadly, no one watching this joyous occasion could have imagined that only three months later the nation would be mourning the loss of this much-loved sovereign.



Richmond's Mayor, Councillor Ian Woods, guards Charles and Camilla

In May 2023 the town turned red, white and blue for the coronation of the new king, Charles III. Bunting and Union Jack flags proliferated and family events in the Friary Gardens, with a live band and party games, were well attended. Cardboard replicas of Charles and Camilla presided over the festivities, guarded by Ian Woods in his Victorian policeman's costume. Ian has delighted visitors and locals with his authentic costume. Leading walks and giving talks, he once revealed that one visitor, struck by his

authenticity, asked him the way to the police station. Attired in this way, Ian represents Charles Manley, who had been transferred to Richmond in the 1840s by the London Metropolitan Police to bring order to a band of navvies recently arrived in Richmond to work on the new railway. Their drunkenness and violent behaviour had become a source of great concern in the town. Sadly, Manley died at his post, attacked by the very navvies he had been sent to restrain. Thankfully, Charles and Camilla proved much easier to control.



Trouvere perform at the castle as part of Mayfest

Mayfest this year was a perfect festival of music, dancing and fun. There were waits, orchestras, choirs, Morris Men, folk music, clog dancing, ballet, Scottish reels and tea dances. There was literally something for everyone: maypole dancing, family crafts, Punch and Judy and, of course, a ceilidh with the Blind Panic Ceilidh Band. The town bustled, the locals and visitors smiled and laughed, all delighted to be part of this brilliant event. Like the title of the very popular recent film, 'there was everything, everywhere, all at once'.

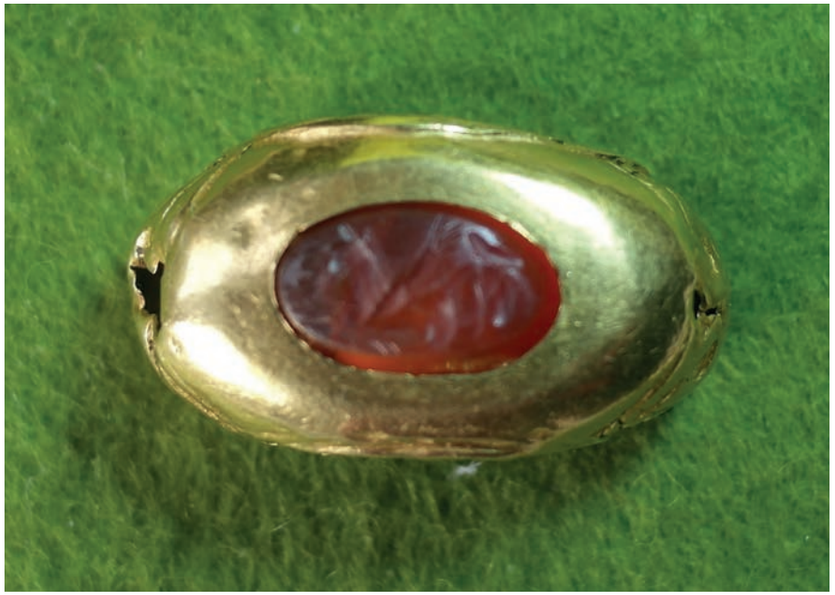
The Swaledale Festival celebrated its 50th anniversary this year with 50 plus events. Festival-goers enjoyed an impressive variety of chamber music, choirs, walks and talks; the range was inspired. The first weekend featured the brass band from Stockport, WFEL Fairey Band. Their accompaniment to the film *Wallace and Gromit: The Wrong Trousers* was very enthusiastically received. The programme included many favourite soloists and ensembles: the Herschel Players, the Doric Quartet, Julian Doyle and Natalie Clein, to name but a few. The final concert at Grinton featured the much-admired Doric Quartet. Their concert was almost abandoned, however, when their first violinist was taken ill. After some quick thinking by Malcolm Crease, the Festival's Artistic Director, Mathilde Milwidsky, a young violinist, was approached. About to perform a duo concerto in Wensleydale, she agreed to play with the Doric that evening, even though she had never played the Beethoven before and had never even heard the Brahms. Mathilde, who had been named one of Classic FM's '30 under 30 rising stars', certainly lived up to that appellation. Moments after finishing her afternoon performance in Wensleydale, she was hurried across the moors to Swaledale. With time only for a quick run-through, she played to a very appreciative audience. As the final concert of the festival, it was an extraordinary finale. As the musicians finished, the audience rose to its feet as one and the applause thundered, virtually, as one audience member described, 'shaking the very fabric of the church.' What an extraordinary finale to 50 years of concerts!

Another musical organisation hoping to move its audience – though not in the same way – is Richmondshire Concerts, who are moving to Richmond School this year. The Chair, Chris Shaw, assures us that this venue has many advantages: good acoustics, comfortable seating, unrestricted sightlines and, of course, free parking just outside the building. Moreover, the change of day from Wednesday to Saturday is very much preferred by many concert goers. This year's concerts include, among others, the Carice Singers, the Trio Meister Raro, the Maxwell Quartet and the Britten Oboe Quartet. At only £60 for six concerts, this is exceptional value.

When we heard of the British Council's choice of Richmond for the series of photographs taken by James Allen Cash to demonstrate a quintessential market town in 1945, their reasons seem just as relevant now: 'Richmond was chosen not only for the scenic beauty of its setting, its castle, its streets and houses, but because life centred on Richmond was typical and with a unique character of its own, deep-rooted in history.' This description feels as true now as it was then. How lucky we all are to live here.

The story of a Roman ring

Jane Hatcher



Courtesy of the Company of Fellmongers

It is a gold ring, with a carved gemstone, or intaglio. It must have belonged to a wealthy Roman person, though it is not clear from its size if that person was a young, slim, man or a rather well-built woman. What is clear, however, is that the Roman owner would not have worn it in Richmond because, although a hoard of Roman coins was found on the Castle Bank in 1720, there was no Roman settlement here.

Might he or she have worn it in *Cataractonium*? Unlikely, but not impossible. So, why am I writing about the ring for the *Richmond Review*? Because, through a series of serendipitous quirks such as make up many historical sagas, the ring ended up in Richmond.

It did that because it had come into the possession of Peter Wenham, the historian who was one of the founders of the Richmondshire Museum. In 1951, he had taken up a post as a History Lecturer at St John's College of Education in York (now York St John University).

Soon after his arrival in York, Roman skeletons were unearthed where some houses were being built and Peter, who had already made a name for himself while at Durham University as a young archaeologist of Hadrian's Wall, was asked to supervise an archaeological excavation.

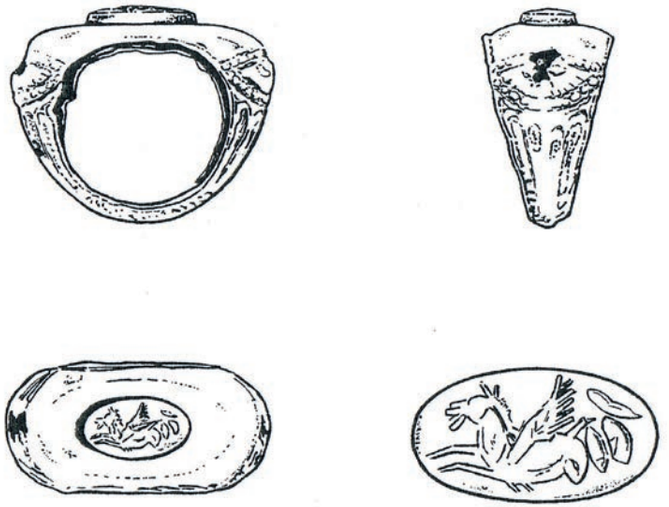
That excavation was to last several years, carried out on top of his lecturing job, and became, for a time, the largest study of a Roman cemetery conducted in Britain. It eventually resulted in a large and scholarly work, *The Romano-British Cemetery at Trentholme Drive, York*, eventually published in 1968 due to the time it took to complete thorough examination of the finds. The tome contains detailed anatomical and dental analyses of the skeletons, and reports on the various finds which had been buried with them, mainly pottery.

The people buried in the Trentholme Drive cemetery were not wealthy. Some of them had worn items of jewellery, but these were generally of low value, such as jet. Three small gold earrings were found, but nothing remotely like the gold ring which is the subject of this article.

So that precludes it coming from the Trentholme Drive excavation. Was the ring found on any other of the many Roman excavations in and around York conducted by Peter Wenham for over 30 years? Again no, because, if such a ring had been found, it would have been 'Treasure Trove' and the subject of a Coroner's Inquest, and would not have remained in Peter's possession.

So how did Peter Wenham come by it? The short answer is, he bought it. Almost as soon as he arrived in York, he began running evening classes on the Romans at the York Educational Settlement. According to what he wrote down much later, it was in 1955 that a member of a class said that a customer of his, who owed him money, had in her possession a Roman ring which had been given to her by her grandmother in Hull. Further, the customer wished to settle the debt by selling the ring. Peter Wenham bought the ring from the lady, and then discovered that it had with it a note saying it had been found in York about the year 1876.

How the ring got from York to Hull is unknown, as is a more detailed provenance of its discovery in York. However, it is well known that during 19th century building activities, particularly during the construction of the present railway station in the 1870s, Roman artefacts were frequently discovered, and often sold by workmen to collectors.



Line drawings commissioned by Peter Wenham

So, what of the ring itself? The gold forms a ring of hollow section, and is thus very fragile. The oval intaglio, which is of red cornelian, is in good condition. The image carved on it was studied in the 1980s by Dr Martin Henig of Oxford University's Institute of Archaeology, who was the country's leading expert on such intaglios. He interpreted the carving on it as a hippocampus, a fish-tailed sea horse, which, according to classical mythology, was ridden by the gods of the sea.

Peter Wenham, who in retirement returned to Richmond, his birthplace, in 1982 re-founded the Richmond Company of Fellmongers with the Richmond solicitor Ralph Waggett. Peter gave his prized Roman ring to the Company in a presentation box with a brief description of it. It now forms a part of the Company's St George's Day ceremony each year, when the retiring Master places it on the finger of the incoming Master, to symbolise the continuing line of succession through the years.

And so, an artefact which is perhaps 1800 years old, and came from a city founded in AD 71, is still in use in the 21st century in a town which was founded in AD 1071.

Skeeby coin hoard

Mike Wood

In 2019 five metal detectorists discovered a group of hammered silver pennies in an arable field in Skeeby village. They were spread over an area of approximately 20 metres. It is likely that the hoard was deposited during a single episode in an organic container that has since decomposed. No pottery sherds or other related finds were identified. They were made up of 17 coins of Edward I, one of Edward II and two contemporary Scottish coins in the name of Alexander III and of John Balliol. All are of the Long Cross type, date between 1280 and 1310, and are all struck to a standard of over 90% fine metal. They were probably all in circulation together, perhaps a decade or more after 1300.

We might speculate why they were buried around this time in Skeeby, particularly when two of the coins were from Scotland. These were turbulent times, with English armies invading Scotland and Scottish armies invading England. Following raids on Richmond, Edward II had granted a murage tax in 1312 to strengthen the town walls.

So, were the coins hidden by either an English or Scottish soldier heading north or south, in advance or retreat, hoping to recover them later?



This is the rarest English coin and was minted in Durham in around 1290. It depicts, on the rear, a Cross Moline, so called because it resembles a millrind, which is the upper clamp that holds a millstone.

We will never know the answer, but I think that it is quite probable that an army travelling north or south on Dere Street is quite likely to have camped nearby. I have picked three events that could fit the theory.

Firstly, in 1314, Edward II invaded Scotland. Robert the Bruce had demanded that all the supporters loyal to ousted Scottish King Balliol acknowledge him as their King or lose their lands. Balliol becoming King had been much influenced by Edward. Also, the English had garrisoned Stirling Castle and were under siege by Bruce. Defeat at Bannockburn was a disaster for Edward, with over 10,000 English and Welsh killed and over 10,000 fleeing south.

Secondly, in 1318 the Scottish army invaded England. They captured Berwick-upon-Tweed. Edward tried to besiege Berwick, but was forced to retreat as a result of the Scottish army making devastating raids into Yorkshire. The Scottish army wreaked havoc as far south as Richmond, Northallerton, Ripon and Knaresborough. Could this be when the coins were hidden?

The third event was in 1319, after the Battle of Myton-on-Swale. The Scots headed south over the border and robbed and destroyed all that they could. Did they overnight near Skeeby and a soldier buried his money, hoping to retrieve it on the return journey? It was rumoured that Queen Isabella had accompanied Edward north and was in residence at York, and that the Scots were heading there to capture her. She was quickly taken out of the city by the river, gaining refuge in Nottingham. William Melton, Archbishop of York, was tasked to muster an army, which included a great number of men in Holy Orders. They marched north and met the Scots at Myton-on-Swale, but they were no match for hardened and trained soldiers. About 5,000 were killed, mostly drowned trying to retreat across the Swale. The victorious Scottish army retreated back across the border into Scotland, carrying their ill-gotten gains and prisoners. The result was that Edward had to seek a truce with Robert the Bruce.



Above are the two Scottish coins. On the right is that of King Alexander III minted around 1280 and, on the left, is the rarest in the hoard, that of John Balliol, minted around 1292.

The coins can be seen on display in the Richmondshire Museum.

Summary report on Richmond Castle 950th Anniversary Community Archaeology Excavations

Jim Brightman

The Richmond Castle Community Excavation Project was a partnership project undertaken jointly between Solstice Heritage, the Celebrate Richmond 950 Project Steering Group and English Heritage. The project focused on illuminating specific unstudied, or poorly understood, aspects of the historical development of Richmond Castle. The fieldwork element of the project took place in July and August 2021 and included professionally led excavation of four trenches by local community volunteers.



Jim Brightman explains his findings

Trench 1 was in the north-east of the inner bailey, adjacent to the curtain wall to the immediate north of Robin Hood Tower. It focused on a large stone 'buttress' projecting from, though not tied to, the curtain wall and the relationship of this ambiguous feature to an adjacent gap in the curtain wall, long postulated as an additional early gateway. The excavated deposits and examination of the standing remains of the

curtain wall suggested that this section contained an early narrow sally port, decommissioned and infilled during one of the medieval periods of the castle's refurbishment. The current gap in the curtain wall appears to have been the result of a later collapse. The reconfiguration of the former sally port allowed for the creation of a small square building tight up to the curtain wall, though unfortunately the later 'buttress' prevented detailed investigation of all but the foundation levels. Documentary evidence for a small building in this location raises the possibility that it could have even been a stair tower set against the curtain wall.



Trench 1 – the most perplexing of all!

The confusion over interpretation of this section of wall was shown to be the result of a considerable programme of alterations by the Ministry of Works in the mid-20th century which went beyond consolidation to actual creation and artifice. The foundations of the later medieval building were exposed and, with the addition of a concrete raft, were used as the base for the 'buttress' which was left untied to the curtain wall. The surviving section of medieval walling which included the return leading to the former sally port was built over to create a low wall crossing the gap in the curtain wall. The gap itself was consolidated, with some of what were presumably ragged edges 'finished' to appear original.

Trench 2 was targeted on a confluence of linear anomalies identified from a ground-penetrating radar (GPR) survey in the hope that they

could be characterised as potential building ranges extending north from the main domestic part of the castle around Scolland's Hall. The principal feature investigated was a seemingly long-lived floor or use deposit with occasional areas of packed stone, suggesting rough flooring or stabilisation of the earthen floor surface. Finds from this context included a considerable volume of animal bone, some with butchery marks, as well as a silver penny of William I dating to the earliest years after the castle's construction. Given this, the deposit has been interpreted as the remains of a floor of an abattoir or butchery associated with a semi-permanent range of timber buildings or service wing. The medieval deposits were sealed by a clay-heavy layer of imported material interpreted as forming the edge of the late Victorian to early 20th century training/parade ground from the period when the castle was in use by the army.

Trench 3 targeted a large oval feature identified through the GPR survey. This was relatively anomalous, being set away from the curtain walls and appeared to represent the spread stone rubble from an isolated building, potentially a chapel known to have existed in this part of the castle. Instead, excavation revealed a well-made stone floor or area of paving. That part of the feature visible within the trench had a varied form in terms of construction, though the overall plan of the feature appeared to be oval or rectilinear with rounded ends, reflecting the geophysics anomaly. Interpretation of this feature is tentative at best, and the current 'best fit' is considered to be some kind of defined stocking area or yard surface with sub-divisions and potentially an open-sided roof, potentially analogous to later communal storage structures such as tithe barns.

Trench 4 was opened late in the excavation as volunteers came available from their work in other trenches, and therefore fewer features could be subjected to detailed investigation. Nevertheless a few key deposits were investigated and recorded. The first was a shallow hearth pit with an organic-rich fill containing animal bone. Samples from the fill of the pit returned a radiocarbon date of cal AD 1160–1220 (1σ 68.2% probability), broadly contemporary with the late 12th century strengthening of the castle. In addition, a discontinuous mortar floor surface was exposed across the centre part of the trench. Although fractured, the flooring preserved the original outlines of some parts of the stub walls, illustrating again that the above-ground remains

consolidated by the Ministry of Works cannot be assumed to be an accurate reflection of the sub-surface medieval layout.

Overall, the project was a resounding success in meeting its aims, the credit for which must go to all those who devoted so much time, effort, expertise, resources and enthusiasm.

Samuel Butler: have you a future?

Bob Woodings

In 1984, I was teaching Eighteenth Century Drama. What a relief it was when, during that term, I discovered that Sybil Rosenfeld's *The Georgian Theatre of Richmond, Yorkshire* had been published. Until then, I'd been relying for my *Story of the Theatre* on the fifteen-pence, red-covered pamphlet by Richard Southern and Ivor Brown that I'd purchased on my first visit to Richmond, North Yorkshire, to see the theatre in its wooden flesh.

Armed now with the Rosenfeld book, I'd assumed that I had in my hand all that there was to know about Samuel Butler and his theatre – which was clearly what everyone else thought, as that 1984 book consequently became the authority for all consequent guide books and readers.

When I subsequently moved to Richmond and graduated as a theatre guide, I began to learn another story. For, along with my guiding-route sheet, I was offered 'for reading' a typescript of that Rosenfeld book, but dated 1960. As she subsequently explained, her studies had been carried out 'many years ago', and had simply failed to find a publisher. That also meant, of course, that her version of *The Georgian Theatre* was already out of date when we had purchased our copies.

But it was later in the theatre's Paul Iles Library that the spirit of Sybil Rosenfeld (who had died in 1996) exposed the truth: that what became her book was essentially as presented as a lecture to the York Georgian Society in March 1947, and subsequently published by that body, a bare seven years after the rediscovery of the theatre itself.

In so many ways, that presentation she gave was remarkable. For, effectively, that lecture described, virtually in their own voices, how those three key participants had brought the Richmond Theatre into being: they were Lucy Warman through her family's manuscripts; Richard Southern with his practical theatre architecture; and Edwin Bush with all his Richmond history.

But that is to ignore Sybil Rosenfeld. For it was really her most remarkable book, *Strolling Players and Drama in the Provinces 1660–1765*, published by Cambridge University Press in 1939, that brought the above together in their search for the Richmond Theatre. Within a year of publication, they all had access to that book, which, for the first time, explored 18th century provincial theatre through the wandering players, and into their first 'theatres', via the detailed documentation of eight such troupes, including that of York. With this book, Sybil Rosenfeld launched 'theatre research' in the UK, made possible 'eighteenth century studies' – and the exposure of 'the Old Theatre' in Victoria Road.

All of which means that *The Georgian Theatre of Richmond, Yorkshire,* that textbook on which we all depend, was researched and in general written some 75 years ago.

No wonder Samuel Butler is hammering to get out from his Beverley grave! 'That very honest man' wishing that, like his mentor and friend, Tate Wilkinson of York, he'd found time to write his Memoirs, even if not in four volumes. And, even with those consequent labours of local historian Peter Wenham, theatre student Mark Howell, and researcher Doug Waugh.

Of course, presumably Butler, unlike most present-day writers, knows where there are the records of his stage experience, and all that paperwork relating to the administration of his companies. And indeed, the details of his theatres, audiences and actors, and, of course, all about his friends in Richmond and York. And how he was not merely 'a poor player ...heard no more', but the actor-manager who had launched the theatre in Yorkshire.

A newly-discovered Richmond date stone

Jane Hatcher

Recently, while working on some Bargate material, I recalled that the late Richmond historian, Peter Wenham, had been told by a boyhood contemporary, the milkman Tommy Harrison, that stone from a chimney at Henry Cooke's large paper manufactory at Richmond's Whitcliffe Mills, including its 19th century date stone, had been used for Temple Court.

That new housing scheme, commissioned by Richmond Borough Council about 1950, was among several new developments for the town designed by the York architect, Charles Needham. He had supervised important repairs to the Georgian Theatre building in the time of David Brooks' efforts to reopen it permanently, and his practice had also produced the streetscapes of Frenchgate and Newbiggin made at the same time as the photographic record of the town commissioned by the British Council in 1945.

Of course, shortly after World War II, building materials were hard to come by, and so the Borough made good use of stone from buildings they were demolishing at the time. Material from derelict structures on the riverside frontage of The Green were directed to Bridge Terrace – also designed by that York practice – and surplus materials at the former Whitcliffe Paper Mill were used for Temple Court. Thus, this new housing blended in very successfully in what would later be called 'conservation' terms, as well as being high quality architectural design for its time.

That was the background. But was that account of the stone from the paper mill chimney, and in particular its date stone, just hearsay, or true? And so, with Bob Woodings in tow, I began my search.

Temple Court consists of 20 flats in three two-storey blocks set out around a grass square. The obvious approach was to search round the outsides of the three blocks, though I didn't expect us to find anything. But then, suddenly, there it was. The date stone! Perhaps, inevitably, it was incomplete, the block of stone presumably having broken as it fell when the chimney was demolished, but what remained of the inscription is still very clear.

It consists of the numerals '18' and '3', which are easy to read and, after the '3', there is the first part of a number '4', suggesting a date of 1834. This perfectly matches the style of the numerals. There is also, just ahead of the date, a full stop, and I would guess that on the stone were originally also the initials 'H.C.' for Henry Cooke, the owner of the paper mill.

That date intrigued me, as it was earlier than I had expected that Henry Cooke would have introduced steam power to his works, and thus necessitated the erection of a chimney. Steam engines needed coal and, as this date was some years before the railway line to Richmond opened in 1846, it would mean that Cooke was relying on coal from the mines of County Durham, still expensively brought overland by pack ponies. One of the reasons why railway lines were built was to provide cheaper coal for domestic fire grates and, in Richmond's case, also its unusually early gas works, as well as steam engines.

Still, I knew that the 1830s were an important time for Henry Cooke and his ambitions for his business. He was a remarkable character, totally dogged in his determination to succeed. Having leased the old mill site at Whitcliffe from Richmond Corporation in 1823, he had several times been thwarted in his ability to operate by the tempestuous River Swale destroying the weir which directed water power into the site. Repairing this destruction was not only expensive, but took time, during which the mill could not operate. So having a supplementary form of power would be an attractive idea to him.

Henry Cooke was also a political animal. He had been a strong advocate for the reform of Parliament, the bill for which was eventually passed in 1832. Following the reform of Parliament, reformists in general, and Henry Cooke in particular, hoped that the reform of local government would follow. This was because Cooke felt that Richmond Corporation, as his landlord, were harsh on him in not sympathising sufficiently with his need not only to maintain his weir but to invest in new machinery. For this reason, he looked forward to the powers of the local corporation being modified.

His wish would be granted with the passing in 1835 of the Municipal Corporations Act, and, indeed, Cooke would serve as a member of Richmond's subsequent 'new' authority. I knew he was anticipating this by putting up new mill buildings in the early 1830s, but did he go as far as installing steam power then?

Fortunately, I was able to answer my own question, as there is a wealth of documentation about Henry Cooke and his business enterprise. A minute in the Corporation records for 25th March 1834 notes 'That leave be given to Mr. Henry Cooke to make, carry up and erect a chimney in the ground near his premises according to the plan submitted to the meeting subject to the approbation and under the superintendence of the Mayor.'

So, there is no doubt that this datestone, [H.C.] 1834, did indeed belong to Henry Cooke's Whitcliffe Mill. This was for his first chimney, as the firm was later to add two more. The diary of the younger James Tate, headmaster of Richmond Grammar School, mentions the excitement generated for his schoolboys, and many other residents of the town when, on Saturday 14th April 1861, a huge boiler was laboriously hauled up from the railway station and on through the town.

By a remarkable coincidence, this event took place on the 15th anniversary of the death of Henry Cooke, for he missed by just a few months seeing the Richmond railway line opened in September 1846. So, it was first his widow, Elizabeth, and then his sons who continued the business, and were able to benefit from the more competitive price of coal in the town.

Henry Cooke's large paper manufactory at Richmond's Whitcliffe Mill has featured in the Civic Society's publications before, including in Audrey Carr's article *Whitcliffe Mill* (1979), and Richard Morrell's *Whitcliffe Paper Mills: a history in pictures* (2018).

Thomas Spencer: a part of Richmond's history

John Place

Thomas Spencer was born in Northallerton in 1839. His parents dying when he was young, Thomas and his brother Charles were at first brought up as paupers by the Northallerton church, while lodging with a tailor called Thomas Wheldon. His obituary (*Yorkshire Post* 1832) states that he had begun his business in 1861–1862, and the 1861 census shows that he had set up with his brother Charles in Castle Yard (by Richmond Castle) as a 'printer and compositor' (printing type arranger). He had earlier learnt his trade through an apprenticeship to John Bell and Sons (very well-known printers) in nearby Finkle Street. By 1871, he was running his own shop in the Market Place (opposite the old Toll Booth) as a 'bookseller and printer', where he lived with his wife Margaret and five children.



Those premises being limited in size, he was to move on 1st May 1875 to the newly-built shop at 19 Market Place, a spacious building allowing him to greatly expand his operations. The previous building at that location had housed a steam dye and Thomas Ableson's Hairdresser's establishment, and was one of the last remaining timber-framed and jettied buildings in the town. This overhanging building was unusual even in 1860. Christopher Clarkson, in his *History of Richmond* (1821), writes that:

'...most part of the houses are well built of stone, of modern construction, with the exception of a few in the north side of the market place... The foundations of these are built of brick or stone, while the upper stories composed of wooden frames filled up with lath or plaster, the ancient way of building, overhang the lower parts and project into the streets, presenting the appearance of houses built in the reign of Mary or Elizabeth. At the time of their erection, though

ill-contrived and very inconvenient to modern ideas, they must have been accounted among the best, as the carved work on many parts, particularly on the doors, corners and fireplaces, evidently shew'.

The *Yorkshire Herald* of 15th August 1868 had run the story that the Richmond and North Riding Naturalists Field Club had exhibited in their monthly meeting, among other items, '...a beautifully-sculptured clay model of a dog's head, found at considerable depth in the excavations at the corner of Finkle-street, Richmond, probably 600 years old'. The removal of the old shop and the preparation for the new building would have caused excitement and interest. The present whereabouts of the find are not known, unfortunately. Thomas Ableson also displayed 'a series of stucco' from the wall of the old building, described as being from the time of Charles I.

The move was announced in the *Richmond and Ripon Chronicle* of 1st May 1875 as follows:

> THOMAS SPENCER, Printer and Bookseller, Richmond, wishes to Announce the Removal of his Business to the CORNER OF FINKLE STREET, Market Place, (the new premises lately occupied by Mr Thos. Ableson, Hairdresser), and requests that all future business correspondence may be forwarded to that address. Having devoted the whole of the Premises to business purposes, he is enabled to execute orders with greater precision and despatch than has lately (from the increase of business) been possible. In thanking his numerous customers for past confidence, Thos. Spencer trusts they will find his new premises much more accessible and convenient.

Spencer's own scrapbook and diary records: '19 Market Place (occupied by Thomas Ableson) was rebuilt in 1869 & afterwards, on January 1st 1875, occupied by Thos. Spencer'. Thomas Ableson advertised in June 1868 that: 'in consequence of the premises that he occupies having to be rebuilt this summer, he will dispose of his STOCK at considerably reduced prices'.

He had already been responsible for the annual *Spencer's Richmond Almanack* (begun in 1868), in which he wrote in 1875*:*

'Since its commencement, seven years ago, the publisher has endeavoured to increase its popularity by the addition of Local Features

likely to prove of interest and value both to the Advertiser and to the General Public'.

This almanac, as well as listing all the inhabitants, trades and town information of Richmond and the local area, also carried many articles of both local and general historical interest, and proved an invaluable and popular booklet.

Spencer's led the way in guide books; almanacs; newspapers (including 'all the London Daily and weekly papers supplied'); stationery of every kind; pianos; field glasses; books (it held a 'select library' with 'more than 1000 books to choose from'; violins, bibles and prayer books; printing of wedding, funeral and invitation cards; was the registered Stamp Office (dealing with a range of legal licences); Goss's heraldic porcelain ('The only agent in Richmond for GOSS CHINA, with arms of Richmond, Easby, Zetland and Yorkshire; also with foreign and colonial arms'); dictionaries and atlases; artist water and oil colours and drawing books; Christmas cards; portrait frames; watches; jewel cases; games; carved oak goods; English and German concertinas; purses and bags; and chess, draughts and bezique sets. Every square inch of the three storey building must have been crammed with goods.

Additionally, Spencer's advertised their 'Grey Friar's Printing Works, The College, Richmond', with 'every kind of printing at moderate prices'. They cornered the Market Place and the market. Tony Spencer (great grandson) recalls that printing was carried on in the cellar of 19 Market Place: glass squares were built into the pavement outside to let in light.

An advertisement in 1875 had described how Thomas Spencer:

> '...wishes to inform his numerous customers that he has purchased from Mr. John Bell's trustees his largest and best PRINTING PRESS, and a quantity of TYPE, also the whole of his WOOD-CUTS and ENGRAVINGS, suitable for BILL HEADS, MEMORANDUM FORMS, *ALMANACK ADVERTISEMENTS &c;* and that he has purchased A NEW RAPID PRINTING MACHINE, with all the Latest Improvements; and other Machinery'.

John Bell had been one of the major printers in Richmond. He was the son of Matthew Bell (died 1807), who was the successor in business of the famous Isabella 'Tibby' Tinkler (died 1794), famously painted by George Cuitt. Bell's premises were in 1–3 Finkle Street, facing the side of 19 Market Place (still marked today by the 'Phoenix' fire insurance plaque on the wall). John Bell was the originator of the *Richmond and Ripon Chronicle*. Thomas Spencer's purchase of his machinery and stores set him well on the way to establishing his business as being the leading ones in Richmondshire, and his original apprenticeship there clearly stood him in good stead.



Thomas Spencer outside Lennox House

By 1881 Spencer had bought a house in Millgate and had another three children. Business was clearly prosperous for, by 1891, he had moved to Lennox House, 47 Maison Dieu, a house he had built for himself in around 1886. He was a prominent freemason and named the house after the Freemason's Lennox Lodge in Newbiggin. In 1889 the *Yorkshire Gazette* described how the new 'residence of Mr Thomas Spencer on the Terrace was struck and the lightning did much injury'. By 1901 his second eldest son, Herbert Thomas Spencer, was helping him with the

business. The census describes him now as a 'Bookseller, Stationer and Printer'. The 1911 census shows that Herbert was living in Wellington Place in Richmond, and that another son, Harris Hawkins Spencer, was helping him as 'assistant in the business of Bookseller and Stationer'.

On 30th October 1872 Thomas Spencer put himself forward as a councillor and published his own post bill to promote himself. His main targets would be improvements to the repair of buildings and the 'decreasing of the price of gas in the Town'. As a leading trader in Richmond, he was much involved in the town's activities. Newspaper articles describe his work as secretary of the Richmond Floral and Horticultural society (through the 1870s and 1880s): he arranged a flower show and musical fete in Temple Field in 1878, for example, the article boasting that some five hundred separate prizes were awarded. In 1888 he did much of the fieldwork to allow the Yorkshire Archaeological Society to visit. They travelled by special train from Leeds and had to shelter in the newly restored St Mary's Church to escape torrential rain! Spencer was thanked 'for his valuable help in completing the arrangements'. He was a member of the Richmond Industrial Society (1890) and was a prime mover to establish an extra Bank Holiday for Richmond people. In 1889 he was a supporter of the Richmond Branch of Cambridge University Extension Lectures.

Richmond's first printed picture postcards appeared in the later 1890s, published by Auty of Tynemouth. Spencer was obviously aware of the commercial attractiveness of postcards through the period of the 'Golden Age' of Edwardian collecting, and was to become the leading photographic postcard publisher for Richmond. Enthusiastic to record local events, he was to issue many hundreds of views. For the collector, the best of these cards are the real photographic cards which focus on specific events in the town's history. These include the declaration of war from the town obelisk in 1914; the many Richmond Meet ceremonies; Empire Day celebrations; and many others. He also issued many printed cards which commemorated various aspects of the town's history – The Sweet Lass of Richmond Hill postcards were part of an attempt to claim Richmond Yorkshire's ownership of this lady (Frances I'Anson). Other cards publicised the 169 year-old Henry Jenkins (from just outside Richmond) and Tan Hill (the highest pub in England), together with old drawings and prints of Richmond in the 18th and 19th centuries.



The Pen Shop

Thomas Spencer passed down his business to his sons Herbert Thomas Spencer and Harris Hawkins Spencer. By the 1930s it had become very well known as 'The Pen Shop' until its closure in the 1980s. Thomas Spencer died in August 1932. He and his wife were buried in Richmond churchyard.

A postscript:

The corner of Finkle Street and Market Place has for a long time been a favourite meeting place for people to while away the time, watching the world go by. This is particularly true on market days. William Wise, whose reminiscences of life in Richmond in the 1830s and 1840s appeared in the *Richmond and Ripon Chronicle* of 1888, wrote as follows:

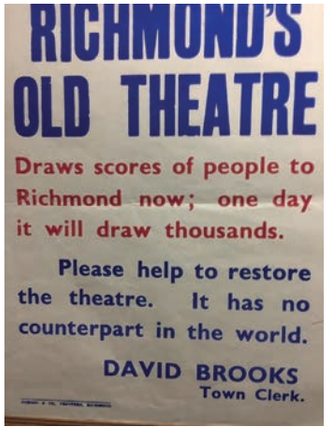
'And now that the Market Place has resumed its normal condition let us glance around it. We see groups of men, three or four together, standing at various points. One near the cross, another at Finkle Street corner... every man jack will have his hands in his pockets summer or winter, rain or shine... There they stand in a kind of statuesque repose. They are there every day of the week, every hour of the day... They are a race apart and, so it seems, will never die out.... men who, if their services were required, would ask in slow, measured words, "How much are ye going to gi' me for t' job?" and if the answer did not come up to expectations would quietly turn and amble away, outraged that their philosophical meditations had been disturbed by matters so trivial and mundane'.

In 1891 a group of boys was summoned to court for repeatedly obstructing the street by standing around!

With due thanks to the Spencer family for all their assistance.

David Brooks: saving the Georgian Theatre Royal

Elaine Frances



In 1943 Richmond was celebrating the 850th anniversary of the enfranchisement of the Borough in 1093 by the 2nd Earl of Richmond and, as part of a two-week programme of events, Richmond's Georgian theatre re-opened and 'broke the silence of 100 years'.

This fantastic change in the theatre's fortunes was due to the inspiration, enthusiasm, hard work and dogged determination of the then Town Clerk of Richmond, David Brooks.

David Brooks came to Richmond as Town Clerk in 1941. He was born in East Ham, Essex, in 1906, studied law at Liverpool and had been a Deputy Town Clerk in Cheshire.

The Georgian Theatre closed in 1848 and, in the interim, had been used for a variety of purposes including a grain warehouse, a billiard room, and a wine store. In their book ***Swaledale*** (1933) Ella Pontefract and Marie Hartley described it as follows:

'At the entrance to Friar's Wynd is an almost perfect specimen of an 18th Century theatre. It is now used as a furniture warehouse and auction room and few people seem to know of its existence.'

When he arrived in Richmond, David Brooks found that the theatre had been converted by the Corporation into a salvage store, which suffered a fire in 1942, destroying a unique proscenium door. This had been the only proscenium door of entrance in the country.

He recognised in the 850th Anniversary Commemoration an opportunity to promote the cause of the theatre. Richmond is rightly proud of its Norman heritage. In 1921, it celebrated the 850th

anniversary of the founding of Richmond Castle and the castle's -950th anniversary in 2021. He was described as:



David Brooks with the Richmond Borough Charter

'The spring that moves the wheels... There is no greater enthusiast for Richmond than this Londoner who came from a Cheshire appointment to become Town Clerk and, incidentally, to help Richmond stir from its lethargy and tell the world something of its glorious story... Already he has achieved something that will be remembered, surely centuries ahead, in the restoration of the old Theatre Royal. Today, it is the proud showpiece of the borough, repainted, cleaned and ready for use. But it is not a glory achieved without struggle. Mr Brooks' plan for its restoration was only achieved by grudging consent that allowed experiment for one month and imposed the condition that the theatre should then return to its old use as a salvage dump.' (*The Struggles of a Town Clerk – what he has achieved in Richmond,* Thomas Olsen, Yorkshire Post, 4th August 1943).

With only a month to get the building into shape, performances began on 2nd August 1943 and ran for over a week. Three short plays were presented by the Richmond Players, the Grammar School and the High School Old Girls' Association. Music was provided by the String Quartet of the Royal Corps of Signals.

David Brooks and local amateur actress and producer, Renee Stant, went up to Newcastle to promote the theatre's opening on BBC radio.

He acknowledged the assistance of other Corporation officers, namely 'the Borough Treasurer, Surveyor and Electrical Engineer and Mr Bush and Mr Vernon from the Grammar School.'

At the beginning of World War II, Edwin Bush, a history master at Richmond School, led his Sixth Form pupils in a project to research the

fabric and history of the building. In the 1940s he was also involved in surveying and clearing out the rediscovered theatre and for one of its first productions.

These 1943 performances were such a 'success, financially and in every other way' that prominent people became interested, and it was decided that the 'sheer vandalism of such a reversion (to its former use as a salvage store) will not be permitted' (ibid).

The theatre opened again in 1944 during 'Holidays at Home' week, a government initiative to encourage local authorities to provide local holiday activities and raise morale during a time of restricted travel. This time, a programme of Shakespeare involved the Harrogate Shakespeare Festival Society and a company from 51st Royal Artillery Training Regiment from Catterick Garrison, led by Lieutenant Daniel Thorndike.

Lieutenant Daniel Thorndike was the son of the actor and novelist Russell Thorndike, who wrote the Dr Syn books. Daniel had a long and successful acting career, mainly on the stage and in supporting roles, and he appeared as Lord Whiteadder in *Blackadder 2* on TV. He was also the nephew of the leading actress, Sybil Thorndike, and this fortuitously led to a long connection between Dame Sybil and the Georgian Theatre. She appeared with Dame Edith Evans at the theatre's re-opening night in 1963.

Warehouses in the Wynd and The Fleece Hotel provided dressing rooms for these early performances. The inevitable trials and tribulations occurred, including mislaying Yorrick's skull and the mis-presenting of the balcony scene from *Romiet and Julio (sic).* It also featured a rather Junoesque Juliet having no trouble in gaining the balcony in order to converse with her lover below, but needing every assistance in leaving it.

The doors opened again in 1945 as part of Thanksgiving Week – a government initiative to promote saving Government Bonds to rebuild the country after the War. The Harrogate Shakespeare Festival Society gave two performances of *The Importance of Being Earnest.*

The Corporation decided that the theatre should be preserved and restored if sufficient funds were forthcoming:

'It took the view, and has never deviated from this, that, if the theatre is unique, then it belongs to the English-speaking world and, as such, the nation should take care of it, and the responsibility for its restoration should not rest on the shoulders of the Corporation.' (***Richmond's Georgian Playhouse: The Theatre Royal,*** David Brooks 1953).

Subsequently, the Richmond Theatre Royal Restoration Fund was established in 1943 and fundraising began.

David Brooks was heavily involved in fundraising, giving talks, guided tours, organising whist-drives, dances, collection tins and even flag days.

In the 1950s the campaign went national. It had the support of the British Drama League, the Yorkshire Architectural and Archaeology Society, the Georgian Society, the Society of Yorkshiremen in London, the Arts Council and ***The Times*** and ***The Stage*** newspapers.

On 7th February 1951 Dame Edith Evans expressed her pleasure in hearing that efforts were being made to restore the theatre. She said: 'I saw the little theatre when, during the war, we played to the surrounding camps in Richmond and the enthusiastic town clerk showed us over.'

The following day, on 8th February 1951, the British Drama League hosted a fundraising event at the British Academy, Burlington Gardens, London to support the restoration. The programme comprised of Yorkshire-born actors Eric Portman and Helena Pickard, who performed as the 18th century actors David Garrick and Mrs Cibber. The leading theatre historian, Richard Southern, outlined the history of the theatre, and David Brooks described the progress made towards its restoration.

Initially, it had been thought that the old Theatre Royal had no raised stage but, around the time of the performances in 1943, Richard Southern's researches discovered that there was a pit, which had been floored over at the level of the stage when the lower section of the theatre was converted to a wine cellar in the 19th century. He and Richard Leacroft, an architectural historian and stage designer, prepared a scheme and made a detailed plan for the first stage of the restoration. The major aim of this stage was to uncover the pit again. Their work was extremely important to the theatre's restoration.

The Statement of receipts in 1953, produced by the Borough Treasurer, showed that fundraising was slow going and that £930 had been raised. Interestingly, individual subscribers ranged from Ella Pontefract to John Gielgud and Douglas Bader.

An article from the ***Yorkshire Post*** on 1st October 1954 reported that the Ministry of Works had granted £1,000 towards its restoration costs and that:

'According to town clerk, Mr David Brooks, who has made the theatre's restoration a personal crusade, "It will take us a considerable step forward".

'So far about £1,000 has been spent on the theatre, all raised by voluntary contributions, largely through the personal efforts of Mr Brooks. So far, Richmond Corporation has made no contribution'.

Ten days later, an article in the Darlington & Stockton Times suggested that a further £6,000 was needed to complete the work and that, for the moment, restoration had been suspended.

This must have been a blow for David Brooks, who had had a difficult journey to reach this stage.

'When David Brooks discovered that Richmond had a unique Georgian theatre, in which some of the great ones had spoken and strutted and played their parts, he said "Here in the heart of Richmond is a little gem, dulled by neglect, perhaps, but here to recover and polish and restore and bring into proper use again". Since his interest was quickened, he has made the old theatre a main interest and a hobby. Others have told him that his crusade was **the most unpopular thing in Richmond**, and, sometimes, he has nearly believed it. But he has refused to ignore the challenge.' (***Personal Studies No. 25 David Brooks – defender of our little countryside capitals,*** R A Donaldson, *Yorkshire Post*, 27th January 1954).

In the wider world of local government affairs, David Brooks was well respected and influential:

'Unofficially, he is keeper of the Borough's artistic conscience and sense of history... In local government circles he is respected as a champion and spokesman for the ancient boroughs of England and Wales. He visited Nigeria and Cameroon in 1950 to view the prospects of adapting our local government system to West African requirements'.

'He is no 20th Century Don Quixote, tilting any windmill in sight. Conditions being what they are, often forced on to the defensive, though no one has developed to finer art the good military precept of attack in defence' (*Northern Echo,* 19th November 1954).



"Sir" David Brooks, knight at arms by E L Horsfall Turner, town clerk of Scarborough

That was shown magnificently in his part in the contest for the preservation of the country's ancient little boroughs, when the reconstruction of local government was an ominous threat in the immediate post-war years.

David Brooks would say, modestly, that Richmond's positive line during those disturbing times was decisive in staying the onslaught. Those who know how the day came to be won would narrow it down to the challenge of the Town Clerk of Richmond and those he gathered around him.

"The little capitals of our countryside" that David Brooks would call Richmond and similar country towns, which owe their present-day status to little other than history, were saved.

'History to this Town Clerk is no dry-as-dust thing. It is real and exciting and he has made Richmond's story all his own.

'He wrote a fascinating book about it a few years ago for the town's schoolchildren [this was *The Story of Richmond*, published at the end of the war in 1945 to celebrate the victory, and presented by the Mayor and Lady Mayoress to every schoolchild].

'He communicates his own interest in a lively way, in speech as well as in writing. He must have spread the gospel according to Brooks at hundreds of places in the North of England and beyond. He enchants his audiences, spins web as graceful as gossamer, but strong in fact as nylon.

'In 1948 Richmond entertained a number of important Nigerians who were studying the English way of life in small country towns. Here

was another cause for the official who loves causes. He was instructor, organiser, guide, mentor and friend. Those Nigerians still remember him with gratitude, and they were more than delighted when the British Council sent him out to Nigeria to visit them and propagate the virtues of British domestic administration there'. (Personal Studies No. 25 David Brooks – defender of our little countryside capitals, R A Donaldson, Yorkshire Post, 27th January 1954).



In the wider world of local government affairs

As recently as December 2000, in a letter to the *Northern Echo,* he was described as 'a great town clerk of the 20th century' (Alan M Wilcox, Richmond Town Clerk 1985–1997, 1st December 2000).

On 14th June 1955 Richmond Council in Committee recorded the receipt of a letter of resignation from David Brooks prior to his taking up the post of town clerk of Broken Hill, Northern Rhodesia and on 26th July he attended his last meeting as Richmond's town clerk and was wished success, health and happiness in his new appointment and thanked for 'the interest and enthusiasm he had brought to bear, over the past 14 years, upon all measures concerning the welfare and future well-being of the Borough and all its inhabitants' (Ordinary Meeting of the Richmond Town Council, 26th July 1955).

An article about him in ***The Dalesman*** in 1955 shared the 'sense of bewilderment and loss with the borough of Richmond' with the news of the resignation of:

'...one of its most engaging personalities. Most people who met him fell under his spell and under his enthusiasm for Richmond ...a particular cause which he had made his own was the restoration of the Georgian theatre, whose virtues he discovered and declaimed to the world. He discovered that it was a unique little gem... he campaigned for it, knowing that his campaign was unpopular, but he left for Africa knowing that the preservation and restoration seemed fairly certain'.

He had introduced Lady Nancy Dugdale (later Lady Nancy Crathorne) to the cause of the Georgian Theatre. She became the driving force behind the Georgian Theatre Trust, the successful financial appeal which was to lead to the theatre's re-opening.

Richmond Corporation did not hide its lack of interest in nor lack of support for the resurrection of the Old Theatre, which is illustrated in this report by Cllr F W Woodall for August 1955 to October 1957:

'I think it's fair to say that the restoration of the Theatre has never evoked any great enthusiasm in members of the Council (myself included).

'Mr Brooks, the former Town Clerk, resigned, I volunteered to undertake the work formerly done by him, not with any great personal desire to restore the Theatre, but because a great many local people had subscribed money for this purpose.

'Having noticed the time spent by the former Town Clerk in publicising the theatre, I know that most of my leisure time would be taken up conducting parties and individuals around the building... During the past two years many hundreds of people have visited the theatre – Swedish, French, Canadian, American and Dutch visitors, and English people from almost every county'.

He does go on to say that he has now been convinced of the importance of restoring the theatre 'a startling result' and that any delay would be a disservice to the nation and to the ratepayers of Richmond:
'I am convinced that, provided there is no charge to the rates, that the restoration of this unique playhouse is essential'.

He may have been swayed by estimates of the potential income from the completed scheme, rather than any love for heritage:

'When one suggests that, of the 60,000 odd visitors to Richmond Castle every year, 60,000 would also pay 6d to see the Theatre, added to which there is a probability that, with due publicity, ...some 10,000 or more Americans would visit the town, it is easy to assess the financial potential.' (*Richmond's 18th Century Vernacular Playhouse*, Doug Waugh 2018).

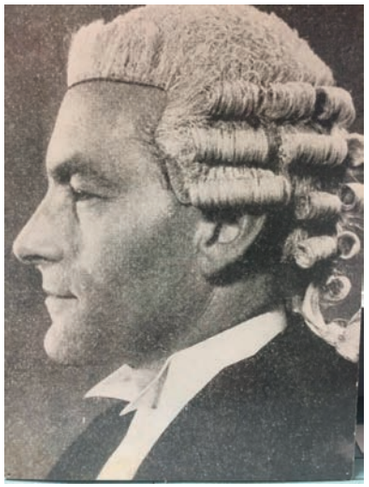
Councillor Woodall's report goes on to recommend the establishment of the Georgian Theatre Restoration Trust, which did not come about until 1960, with Lady Crathorne as the first Chair of Trustees. She had been introduced to the cause by David Brooks and had already proved to be a dedicated and dynamic champion of the theatre. Her efforts led to the theatre's reopening only three years later in 1963.

David Brooks became a popular and well-respected town clerk of Broken Hill in Northern Rhodesia. In 1962 he visited London to attend a twinning ceremony between Broken Hill and the Borough of Harrow, which was enhanced by a ***Broken Hill Comes to Town*** exhibition.

After Independence in 1964 Northern Rhodesia became part of Zambia and Broken Hill became Kabwe, where he continued as town clerk. In 1966 he was presented with the Order of Distinguished Service of the Republic of Zambia. Of the 80 persons honoured, only ten were European and he was the only local government officer.

David and his wife Jean retired to Alicante, Spain, in early 1970. Because of his deteriorating health, they eventually moved to Canada to live near to their daughter and her family. Their daughter Kathleen (Kay) Hopkinson, who was educated in Richmond and at Edinburgh University, had practised medicine in Zambia and moved to Ottawa in 1975. David Brooks died there on Easter Sunday, 15th April 1979, at the age of 72, and is buried at the Pinecrest Cemetery in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

He was the first person to recognise and demonstrate the potential of a restored Georgian Theatre and, without his inspiration, enthusiasm and hard work and that fortuitous meeting with Lady Crathorne, the Old Theatre might still be languishing as a corporation store, or be the site of a now redundant 1960's retail development.



Richmond Town Clerk

His work was crucial to the revival of the Georgian Theatre Royal, which has gone from strength to strength and has become the jewel in Richmond's crown. We should ensure that his efforts are remembered and his work recognised by a permanent memorial within the fabric of the building.

Richmond Racecourse: the 'hub of the Eclipse universe'

Members of the Burgage Pastures Committee

On 29th June 1927 Richmond became the 'hub of the Eclipse universe' (the *Northern Echo* headline), as thousands of people came by road and rail to witness the total eclipse of the sun. The town was considered to be the best place to view this rare event, the first time it had happened in central Britain for 200 years, because it lay on the centre line of totality. The racecourse, set high above the town, was where most of the vast crowd gathered on that memorable morning.

So many trains came from London that passengers had to disembark at Broken Brea level crossing, just outside Richmond. There was simply not enough platform space at the station to cope with the hordes of people who descended on the town. Astronomers from all over the world even came to Richmond Racecourse to set up their telescopes.

A 14-year-old Richmond boy, Leslie Thorpe, recounted in his diary how everyone had a wonderful time. He described how street traders were out in force, selling pieces of smoked glass and goggles and anything else they could make a few coppers on. There were even amusements in the Market Place for the occasion. A Grand Ball was held in the Castle Grounds, with what the social calendar for that week described as 'electricity effects' to enhance the occasion.

Then, around 4 am, the crowds set off up Hurgill Road towards the Low Moor to witness the spectacle of the eclipse.

It hardly mattered that the cloud level frustrated the actual sighting of the eclipse. Leslie wrote that: '...when it came, it was very eerie. From brilliant sunshine everything went grey, then black... pitch black. The dogs started barking and the kiddies crying'.

Grandfather Parkyn, in his account of the eclipse, describes how: '...the grass and objects became strange, with a violet colour hue; even the cattle and farm stock, which, a few minutes earlier, had been carrying on their usual bleat, now became very quiet'.

Virginia Woolf and other members of the Bloomsbury Set, Vita Sackville-West, Harold Nicholson and Quentin Bell, were among those who made the journey to Richmond from London. Woolf wrote a description of the event in her diary. The extract is entitled *A Moment's Liberty.*



Photograph of Virginia Woolf 1902
by George Charles Beresford

'Left by train 10 pm on one of the Eclipse specials from... Kings Cross. It was a five-and-a-half-hour ride to Richmond in North Yorkshire. It was impossible to sleep on the train, so I passed the time smoking cigars. We got to Richmond about 3.30 am... then here was a level crossing, at which were drawn up a long line of motor omnibuses and motors... As we crept up to the top of the moor there were people sleeping in their cars... people had already taken up positions. So, we joined them, walking out to what seemed the highest point looking over Richmond... We could see by a gold spot where the sun was. We began to get anxious and saw rays coming through the bottom of the clouds... We got out our smoked glasses... We saw the sun, we saw it crescent, burning red. The next moment it had sailed fast into the cloud again. The moments were passing. We thought we were cheated... But now the colour was going out. Clouds turning a reddish black. The 24 seconds were passing [the eclipse actually lasted 23 seconds]. Then... very quickly, it became darker and darker... when, suddenly, the light went out. There was no colour. The earth was dead... the next (moment) the cloud took colour on itself again; and, so, the light came back. The colour for some moments was as the most-lovely kind, fresh, various – here blue and there brown ...all new colours, as if washed over and repainted. Then it was over...'



Photograph of the Solar Eclipse sign in Victoria Road

One of Richmond's popular landmarks, located in Victoria Road, commemorates the 1927 Solar Eclipse.

It is estimated that some 30,000 people viewed the eclipse at Richmond, most of them from the racecourse. The event raised significant funds for the town, with the money being used to restore Trinity Tower, which was in danger of collapsing after the surrounding shops had been demolished.

Alan Gilpin has recently discovered this evocative picture from a newspaper, showing the event and how Richmond Grandstand was used as a vantage point to view the eclipse.



People watching the eclipse from the vantage point of the Grandstand
Photograph courtesy of Alan Gilpin

One hundred years of the Operatic: a brief history of Richmond Operatic Society

Sheila Russell



The Society was founded in 1922–23 by a group of people who were interested in music and amateur theatre. Mrs Jennie Weedon, née Hook, was one of the founder members. She was born in Yarmouth in 1889 and spent holidays in Richmond, where she met her husband. They lived in Newbiggin, Richmond.

The group of people rehearsed in people's homes, public houses, or anywhere there was a piano, to raise money to put on a show. In 1924 they staged *HMS Pinafore, or The Lass that Loved a Sailor,* in the old cinema, now a hair-dressers and flats in Queens Road. The group now called themselves the Richmond Operatic Society (ROS). The cinema had no dressing rooms or stage so ROS built a stage and used the Grey Friars Cafe, situated across the road, at the bottom of King Street, as dressing rooms.

Shows were staged in the old cinema until 1936. In 1937 ROS staged *The Desert Song* by Sigmund Romberg in the newly built Zetland Cinema in Victoria Road, now a church. The Zetland Cinema had a stage and two small dressing rooms either side of the stage, which were reached by ladders. These dressing rooms were used by the principal actors.

The ladies of the chorus changed in the old fire station, which was next door to the cinema. They had to run round the front of the cinema and up an alley to get to the stage door. When pantomimes were staged in January, wellies were sometime needed to be worn. These often got mixed up, as there was not much room in the wings for changing into stage shoes.

The men changed in the Buck Inn, a public house in Newbiggin. They had to run across the road to reach the same alley, but from the other end, to access the stage door. This alley now has flats and a car park built round it.



Up until 1948–49 ROS rehearsed anywhere they could find. In 1949, the Ebenezer Primitive Methodist Chapel in Bargate, Richmond, built in 1861, came up for sale. ROS bought it for £2,500, but more about that later.

ROS flourished and performed a show in October and a pantomime in January. For a number of years, they also performed an Old Time Music

Hall in the Georgian Theatre in the spring. It also had a concert party called ROSCO (Richmond Operatic Society Company).

Before a show, preparations had to be made in the Zetland. After the film finished on Saturday night, the screen had to be moved to the back of the stage area ready for an all-day Sunday dress rehearsal. Then, late Sunday afternoon, the screen was put back ready for the evening film. When the film finished it then had to be put back again ready for opening night on Monday.

Shows used to run from Monday to Saturday, with sometimes a matinée on Saturday. Tickets for performances were sold by the box office staff at the Zetland Cinema. As the cinema declined, its box office was closed. ROS tried both selling tickets from members' homes and having a telephone installed in the Operatic Hall and running a box office, staffed by members, from there. It was an absolute nightmare. This all changed when we moved into the Georgian Theatre Royal in 1991. A real theatre, where ticket sales were looked after by their box office. It was a blessing.

The Committee responsible for running the Society consists of a Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer, Publicity, plus their assistants and with six other committee members. There is also a Stage Manager, Wardrobe Mistress, Social Secretary, Patrons Secretary, Hall Supervisor and a NODA representative (NODA: National Operatic and Dramatic Association awards medals to members who have worked for their society, with unbroken service, for a number of years. It also awards Life Membership). All look after the well-being of the Society. The Committee chooses a show, Director, Musical Director and Choreographer.

The Society rule book has been updated but the original stands us in good stead. Talking of rules, the Society is now governed by health and safety and safeguarding policies for adults and children.

The Society used to perform pantomimes, which included a junior dancing troupe. On one occasion, a hundred children, aged five to ten, came along to audition. Only 12, plus two reserves, were needed. There were an awful lot of tears that afternoon. The senior dancing troupe consisted of 12 girls, who were usually 16 to 20 years old.



I said that I would return to the subject of the hall. When the Society bought the property, it had one large room with a gallery, a kitchen and another room. At the west end of the building, an outdoor passage led up on the north side to a unisex toilet. This was changed to a flush toilet at a later date. In the 1970s–80s, part of the main hall was converted into two toilets for the ladies. The front of the gallery was walled up so that it could be used as the wardrobe department. The back room, at the west end, became a property room. The kitchen is still in the same place. Over the years the hall has been decorated and repaired.

In 2020–21 extensive repairs and a structural overhaul of the building inside and out were carried out. The kitchen was very damp. The damp was dealt with and a new kitchen put in. A lot of the work was done by members. It all looks wonderful now. The Society was lucky in receiving grants to carry out this work, together with a legacy received from a past member.

Just to end with, when the Society took over the building there was a clause in the deeds that stated no alcohol could be sold or consumed in the chapel. In the 1970s–80s the members wanted this changed. After a two-to-three-year wrangle, this clause was removed. It cost the Society a lot of money to have it removed. This is just one of the aspects of running a Society that the committee came up against.

We are thriving. With thanks to all the past and present members who have put their heart and soul into Richmond Operatic Society.

With thanks to Linda Baldry for her assistance.

The Richmondshire Subscription Concerts at 75

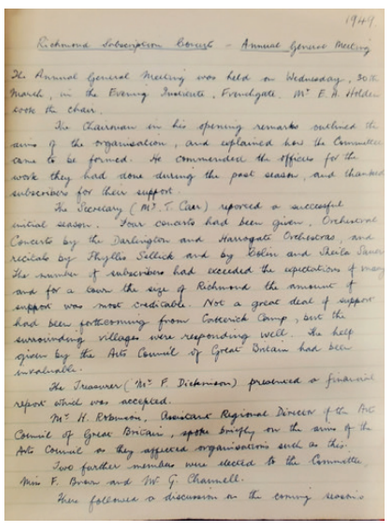
Doug Waugh

Someone else will write the formal study of the Richmondshire Subscription Concerts that should be written, listing the outstanding musicians who have played the concerts, giving details of all the venues and paying adequate tribute to the Officers of the Society. All that I want to do is paint a picture to mark the 75th anniversary.

The RSC began in 1948. Tom Carr was one of nine in a Hudswell farming family, whose ability was spotted early and who had been sponsored to Richmond School and then to Oxford University. He returned to his college, Oriel, after his long war service on mine-sweepers and after enjoying opera in Italy while on shore-leave. At Oxford he met fellow student Arthur Jacobs, a future deputy editor of *Opera Magazine*. Tom told him that 'there's no music in Richmond', only to receive the reply 'well, why don't you organise some concerts?' When Tom returned to Richmond and a post at Richmond Grammar School, he took those words to heart and did start organising concerts.



Tom Carr



1949

Richmond Subscription Concerts – Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting was held on Wednesday, 30th March, in the Evening Institute, Frenchgate. Mr E.A. Holden took the chair.

The Chairman in his opening remarks outlined the aims of the organisation, and explained how the Committee came to be formed. He commended the officers for the work they had done during the past season, and thanked subscribers for their support.

The Secretary (Mr T. Carr) reported a successful initial season. Four concerts had been given, Orchestral Concerts by the Darlington and Harrogate Orchestras, and recitals by Phyllis Sellick and by Colin and Sheila Sauer. The number of subscribers had exceeded the expectations of many and for a town the size of Richmond the amount of support was most creditable. Not a great deal of support had been forthcoming from Catterick Camp, but the surrounding villages were responding well. The help given by the Arts Council of Great Britain had been invaluable.

The Treasurer (Mrs F. Dickinson) presented a financial report which was accepted.

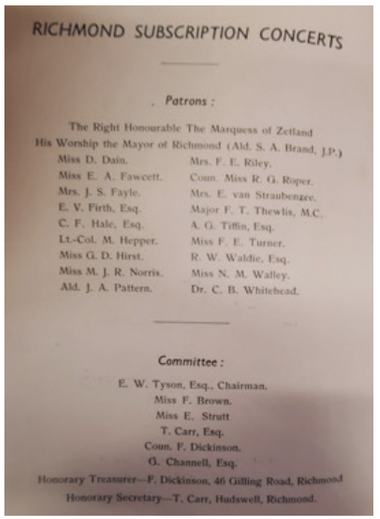
Mr H. Robinson, Assistant Regional Director of the Arts Council of Great Britain, spoke briefly on the aims of the Arts Council as they affected organisations such as this.

Two further members were elected to the Committee, Miss F. Brown and Mr G. Channell.

There followed a discussion on the coming season's

Page from the first AGM of the Richmond Subscription Concert 30th March 1949
North Yorkshire County Records Office

The minute book (now in the North Yorkshire County Record Office) details the first AGM on 30th March 1949. What is so frustrating is to read 'The Chairman... explained how the Committee came to be formed' without providing any detail! Here is the first page, which also fails to record the number of members, but the second AGM does note 185 in the second year, which indicates a very good start.



RICHMOND SUBSCRIPTION CONCERTS

Patrons :

The Right Honourable The Marquess of Zetland
His Worship the Mayor of Richmond (Ald. S. A. Brand, J.P.)

Miss D. Dain.	Mrs. F. E. Riley.
Miss E. A. Fawcett.	Coun. Miss R. G. Roper.
Mrs. J. S. Fayle.	Mrs. E. van Straubenzee.
E. V. Firth, Esq.	Major F. T. Thewlis, M.C.
C. F. Hale, Esq.	A. G. Tiffin, Esq.
Lt.-Col. M. Hepper.	Miss F. E. Turner.
Miss G. D. Hirst.	R. W. Waldie, Esq.
Miss M. J. R. Norris.	Miss N. M. Walley.
Ald. J. A. Pattern.	Dr. C. B. Whitehead.

Committee :

E. W. Tyson, Esq., Chairman.
Miss F. Brown.
Miss E. Strutt
T. Carr, Esq.
Coun. F. Dickinson.
G. Channell, Esq.

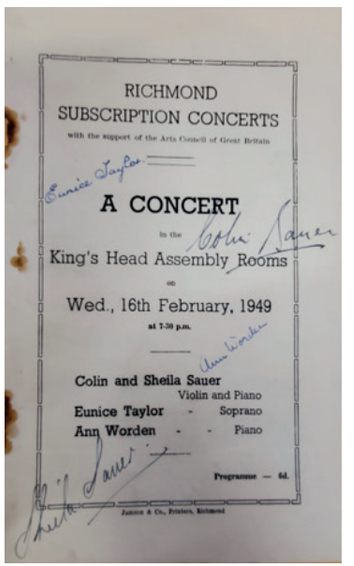
Honorary Treasurer—F. Dickinson, 46 Gilling Road, Richmond
Honorary Secretary—T. Carr, Hudswell, Richmond.

Patron list and members of the Committee from the second season of the RSC
North Yorkshire Records Office

Tom led the RSC for its first 50 years, until the celebratory opera *Seraglio*, doing whatever was required to bring excellent artists to the town and to put on very good concerts. Tom was expert at inveigling people to get involved (as I well know... he persuaded me to become Chair with 'well, if you don't do it, who will?') and this included the legendary Dr AJ Bull. This link became stronger when Tom married Dr Bull's daughter, Katherine, the three becoming integral to the town, starting organisations like the Swaledale Festival, the Civic Society and supporting others like the Choral Society and with Katherine even finding time to be Mayor in four different decades. Many of the great and good supported the RSC.

Programmes do record that, in the early days, there were gramophone nights at Swale House as well as concerts. Normally concerts were in local venues – St Mary's Church, the King's Head ballroom, the Town Hall, the Grammar School, Aysgarth Church, Grinton Church, the Zetland Centre and the Georgian Theatre Royal.

The programme shown here was for the third concert in the first season (if anyone has copies of the programmes for the first and second concerts it would be great to see them). There were four concerts in the first 1948–49 season, two being orchestras from Darlington and Harrogate.



RICHMOND
SUBSCRIPTION CONCERTS
with the support of the Arts Council of Great Britain

Eunice Taylor

A CONCERT
in the
King's Head Assembly Rooms
on
Wed., 16th February, 1949
at 7-30 p.m.

Colin and Sheila Sauer — Violin and Piano
Eunice Taylor - Soprano
Ann Worden - - Piano

Programme — 6d.

Junion & Co., Printers, Richmond



Photo of the audience arriving at Influence Church, Victoria Road, for an RSC performance

For a long time, the Georgian Theatre Royal was the main venue, especially with its Steinway piano, even though the piano had seen better days. As the eminent critic, David Robson, said 'any musician worth his salt would want to play in this Theatre.' But, this century, it gradually became obvious that the best venue in many ways was Influence Church, especially as it had been developed by the Church led by Pat and David, Jane and Roger and Ben and Gail. That came to an end after the 75th season and the Society is now back where it began – Richmond School.

The Carr children have memories of RSC days (Tom and Katherine married in 1959 and the children followed).

David recollects:

'I loved some of the operas performed at the Grammar School. I remember thinking *Don Giovanni* was really powerful and dramatic. I can't imagine the productions were very sophisticated, but the music must have done it for me.

'The Christmas Parties at the Grammar School were great events. Lots of running about chasing each other and great party food. Don't remember any music at them, but I guess there must have been some.

'Lots of us must have memories of musicians staying with us. When I was a bit older, I remember sharing my patent hangover cure with a visiting violinist who'd had a bit too much of Mum's whisky!'

Chris remembers:

'I think Dad had a policy of always trying to book the runner up to the Leeds Piano Competition; the winner was always in great demand but, by booking the runner-up, we were able to get some amazing pianists on their way up (I remember Radu Lupu and Craig Sheppard). I also have very fond memories of eating with the artists, either before or after the concert – for some bizarre reason I have a vivid memory of my Mum feeding a world class pianist scrambled eggs.

'Dad also had a very sensible policy of encouraging the performers to give a few words on their background or an explanation about the works they were about to perform (particularly useful for less accessible pieces). I still find it odd whenever I go to Carnegie Hall that the artists usually walk onto the stage and start playing. I think, "where's the introduction!".'

Martin recalls:

'I also remember the Christmas reception with tangerines and meringues. The music was usually some of the local members. The one performer I do recall was Julian Lloyd Webber, with his long hair and rather zippy Mini 1275 GT.'

Tom was very happy seeing the pleasure members got from the concerts; indeed, that was his biggest reward. When Concert Manager I always stood at the doors when members left, keen to hear what they thought as well as to wish them 'goodnight'. The Society had a key ethos of being exactly that, a society as if of friends who simply met to enjoy music. Tom and Katherine fostered this through their roles in the town as well as through receptions, especially the aforementioned Christmas reception when members brought the food and young local musicians performed and, if we were lucky, Tom would give us one of his stories.



Members gather in the interval at the Influence Church to discuss the performance and for a social chat

Gradually, over time, the Society has moved from being as much a community, the social side being almost as important as the music (see above), to a very professional organisation. And that has seen the membership rise from around 160 20 years ago to nearly 250 recently – most music societies would give their eye-teeth for even the 160!

Over the years, members have been wonderfully supportive, raising the money to buy and refurbish a piano of our own, preparing food for receptions, rearranging the cinema-style seating in the Influence Church and providing accommodation for musicians, including one generous supporter providing a whole house for young opera singers when we staged the *Marriage of Figaro* to celebrate our 60th anniversary. Another member provided the introduction to the Ladies of Richmond Meet who have provided interval refreshments at concerts at the Influence Church for the last decade or so, to the considerable benefit of both parties. Loyal, generous sponsors have meant the Society has enjoyed a stable income.

Some of those members have been inveigled to be Officers of the Society. Nora Dale took over from Tom as Secretary and Nora then introduced John Furniss and Anna Jackson, who both succeeded Nora, and all three have been instrumental in bringing superb musicians here, often early in their careers before they achieved international fame. Syd Beddow was the Treasurer when I took over (our financial reviews were fuelled by the superb baking of his wife Josie!) and he was only the second Treasurer ever (Frank Dickinson being the first and Philip Wicks the third: he only has a couple more decades to go before equalling his predecessors in longevity). Others have lent their skills, efforts and ideas for shorter or longer periods, all being part of this community effort to bring the very best of music to our district.

In the interests of variety and introducing members to music they may not know, the Society has, over the years, included harmonica players, brass bands and all sorts of early and world music players in concerts. On top of that, programmes have often included less-known composers, and it has been very rewarding to hear members say 'I didn't think I would like it but it was marvellous' as they leave a concert.

Performers have often spoken of their enjoyment at playing in Richmond, their surprise at the size, good behaviour and knowledge of the audience and their pleasure at the erudite programme notes of Ken Birkin (often faxed from his home in Vienna to John Furniss, just in the nick of time). In turn providing musicians with travel, food and water, and accommodation has brought a number of us great experiences. I recall listening to Elizabeth Watts, now an international opera star, sat at our kitchen table discussing the merits of Norwich City footballers with my daughter, the cheerful and incomparable Belcea Quartet and the friendly and superb Carducci Quartet. There were also visits from the outstanding composer John Joubert, organised by his friend and local teacher, Ken Birkin. The concerts with exceptional local musicians such as Miranda and Caroline Dale and Peter Furniss were especially treasured. Each concert brings new experiences, mainly enjoyable, and the memories soon build up.

Over 75 years the Society has created a tradition of friendly music-making to the very highest standards. We should give thanks for that and then look forward to many more years of the same!

Richmond Ale Festival: where did it go?

Keith Thomas



Beer is no stranger to Richmond today and throughout the town's history. The Richmond map of 1724 illustrates 47 ale houses, pubs and inns. By 2002 only 15 remained, mostly serving beers from national and regional breweries who owned most of the outlets. Little opportunity was available for drinkers to sample beers from the emerging small brewing industry. In 2002 the nearest independent small brewery, Hambleton's at Pickhill, was 19 miles away and, beyond that, the North Yorkshire Brewery at Guisborough.

The Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) was well established in its endeavour to promote such beers. By 2002, festival fever reached the Richmond branch, inspiring members to do more than sample these beers, and to actively serve them.

Observers and participants of the festival over the years since 2002 will have seen the festival develop its format, from rough scaffolding and duct tape initially, to purpose-built bar fronts and full hand-pull dispensers by 2010. In effect, a fully professional bar, staffed by eager and informative enthusiasts. And not just a drinking emporium, but an opportunity for local musicians to trial repertoires and a medley of pub games to demonstrate competence with skilled competition.

The festival's purpose of providing an opportunity to sample rarely encountered ales and ciders has remained a major objective throughout its years. Up to 30 different beers and ciders were served, including

standard bitters, and also brown ales, milds, porters, stouts and, occasionally, a cask-conditioned lager. In the early years, few of these styles were available over the counter in Richmond pubs, so the festival became an opportunity for publicans to view and taste additions to the range. In later years, the micro-brewery craft beer explosion overtook the range available at festivals, which focused as much on providing a convivial social setting as on the range of beers available.

The festival did, of course, always act as a large pub venue, providing a meeting place for multiple town associations, sports clubs, musicians, bell ringers, charities, council members, garrison military, traders, teachers, even occasional pupils – of appropriate age. After a few years, these aligned to some extent with the music sessions… a folk focus on Friday night, soul and R&B on Saturday night and, in later years, a brass band on Sunday. Lunch and afternoon sessions often hosted a mix of visitors and passers-by, lured in as a bonus, or diversion, to weekend shopping.



Attendance did take a few years to stabilize. The first festival, in 2002, was initiated by Mayor Stuart Parsons, not, it is perhaps fair to say, to encourage extensive drinking, but seeking to broaden the use of the Market Hall and provide extra activities to the town's calendar. Beer festivals were becoming prominent across the country as a promotional focus of CAMRA and the local branch responded positively to the offer, agreeing to fund and run the event on the 21st and 22nd June.

In hindsight, running a beer festival in one of the warmest months of the year posed obvious challenges, but enthusiasm prevailed, and 20

beers were ordered from 18 breweries, 12 of which were in Yorkshire. For CAMRA, a major aim was to provide novel beers, which drinkers would not normally encounter locally, and to encourage publicans to consider broadening their bar range having sampled their character. To achieve this in a hot summer environment required strenuous efforts to cool the beer. Lacking a cellar, the Market Hall necessitated some welcome technical assistance from chilling systems via the Theakston brewery.

Attendance on the first Friday in 2002 increased rapidly after the 5pm opening, reaching around 150 by 9pm, with extensive sales and a buzz approaching that of the back bar in the Black Lion. Unfortunately, unforeseen circumstances then arose as the band, booked for free as a rehearsal opportunity, began at a volume reflecting youthful exuberance. By 9.05pm, attendance was just 15 and a painful reputation haunted the festival until musical management gained a broader reputation.

One aid to popularity was moving the timing to October and coupling the festival with the Richmond 10K run. As a challenging road race, the Richmond Run drew dedicated competitors from a wide distance, with over 100 participants and families filling the town on the Sunday morning and completing their exertions in Richmond Castle grounds – conveniently near the rear entrance to the Market Hall and real ale bar.

Other associated activities included sword dancing teams who, in some years, arranged for performances around the town and in various pubs. Again, friends and family accompanied the teams, providing welcome input to the town and busy business at the bar. Other performance offerings included the Back Room folk band, the Atlantic Soul Messengers and Reeth Brass Band, all of which attracted local followers.

The festival was always concerned to be distinct from pubs and to promote the town's facilities. Aside from occasional bags of crisps or Fairtrade nibbles, food was not served, with drinkers encouraged to use pubs and take-away outlets. Overnight accommodation was also promoted and visitors from considerable distances did attend. In some cases, these included festival-goers dedicated to attending every festival in the country, but, in other cases, simply incorporating it on a visit to friends and relatives. A survey in 2010 indicated that 59% of drinkers were from DL postcodes, 8% from Teesside, 6% from Sunderland, 5%

from Newcastle and others from Harrogate, Hexham, Bradford, York and Hull. In 2017, two incidental visitors, heading to Scotland from Germany, arrived by accident, curtesy of the A1 upgrade diversion!

Specialist visitors included beer-tickers seeking a rare ale, often from a distant or inaccessible brewery. Beer-tickers could, perhaps, be considered grown up train-spotters, although this may be a moot point to discuss at the bar. Each beer ticked gains some progress towards an unattainable goal of tasting every beer ever brewed. Tasting all 30 at the Richmond Ale festival is not impossible over a weekend, but the more professionally oriented tickers carry sample containers so as to extend the experience to later days or, in some cases, to swap duplicates with equally dedicated tickers.

At its height in the Market Hall the festival regularly sold over 2,000 pints through the weekend, with an attendance approaching 1,000 visits, while raising funds for charities and CAMRA activities. Extensive promotion of cask ale was readily distributed, and publicans encouraged to maintain the momentum of interest. Whether the festival had a significant impact on the beer scene in the town is, though, an interesting retrospective question.

Certainly the 17 festivals operating in Richmond between 2002 and 2019 do span a critical period of the brewing industry, when major changes brought independent breweries to prominence. In 2002 there were 438 independent breweries in the UK and 15 pubs in Richmond. By 2019 the tally of breweries had increased to over 2,300, while Richmond had lost a historic pub, the Oak Tree. Although not a valid substitute, in 2002 the Post Office in Queens Road was converted to a Wetherspoons.

During this time a revolution played out in the brewing industry with two major regulatory changes – the revoking of the 1989 Beer Orders in 2003 and the Progressive Beer Duty enacted by Gordon Brown in 2002. Prior to 1989 the major brewers owned the majority of public houses and, inevitably, dictated what beer they would sell. Availability of beer from independent breweries was limited mostly to Free Houses, of which very few existed across the country and none in the boundary of Richmond town.

The Beer Orders attempted to open-up the market by putting a limit of 2,000 on the number of pubs a large brewery could own. As a result,

those breweries with large pub estates put many on the market, providing some opportunity for independent purchase. While this had the potential of providing small breweries with a better access to the market, it mainly created a number of pub chains who negotiated exclusive supply deals with the very breweries the pubs previously served. Only a few of these chains would entertain taking guest beers from a small brewery when they could obtain mock specialist beers brewed by the large breweries.



In contrast, however, the success of the Small Independent Brewery Association (SIBA) in persuading the Treasury to enact a sliding scale, or progressive system of excise duty, reduced small brewery duty rate by 50%. This was an allowance provided by the European Union and persistently campaigned for by SIBA over 21 years as a means of levelling the playing field for small producers. Under the system, breweries producing less than 5,000 pints per week would pay only 50% excise duty and so have a price-benefit to their sales. In 2002, this advantage was just beginning to appear in the market and awakening interest in both consumers and publicans.

So, what part did the Richmond Ale Festival play in the effect of these changes? Was it just another bar for drinkers' indulgence or did it have any impact on the town's drinking habits?

Proponents of the nudge theory might suggest it was just one of many influences encouraging the growth of the micro-brewery industry. The range of beers available in Richmond pubs has progressively increased, as more local beers are promoted and restrictions on sales reduced. The town now hosts its own producer, the Richmond Brewery, based at the Station and which also owns the Market Tavern pub selling its own and other local beers.

It is, however, noticeable that a dedicated beer bar, or specialist off-licence, popular in many towns has yet to open in Richmond although the Gin Bar in Frenchgate has some similarities and acclaimed ales. This may be due to the town's size, the unsuitability of premises for conversion or rental costs. Conversion of retail premises is a common route in towns, producing a bar of limited space and encouraging more transitory attendance than a standard pub bar.



Although the festival had many years of success and became an established fixture in the town's calendar, it did become victim to changing fashion and circumstance. The Market Hall offered a highly suitable venue of character and size, albeit with variable acoustics. It also has a stone floor with good drainage for an annual washdown on the following Monday.

Operational factors, however, interposed as the council promoted more extended use, with increasing number of traders and opening times. The construction of permanent stalls for regular traders limited the usable space and, in 2015, the festival moved to the Cricket Club. This move had the advantage of more comfortable seating and a permanent on-site bar to broaden the range of drinks. It also hosted a restaurant, but was unable to provide a Sunday session, so omitting the Richmond race support. The club venue further allowed drinkers to use their own glassware if desired, rather than plastic, a major limitation for purist drinkers in the Market Hall, where stone flags required plastic, to prevent the prospect of broken glass underfoot.

Although the Cricket Club had a solid membership, it lacked passing trade and rainy nights were often poorly attended. In 2018 a further

move to the Comrades Club allowed more extensive opening and a larger venue, but beer sales and income further declined, despite cider becoming increasingly popular as an additional serving. One feature provided by the Cricket and Comrades Clubs was to allow a blind tasting and judging of beers and ciders by licensees, brewers, seasoned drinkers and volunteers willing to forgo bar drinking time for a more considered intake.

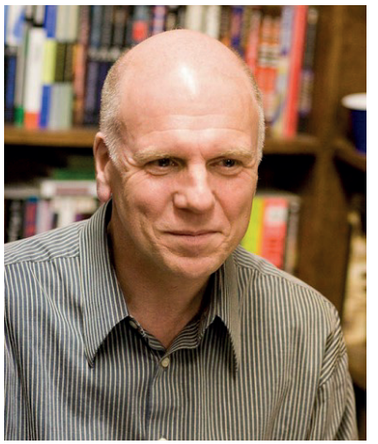
Although beer was predominant, cider was a minor offering for many years, with just one cask served initially in 2005. The supposition that the first cider provided was drunk entirely by the rugby team is probably inaccurate (by perhaps 20%), but popularity increased and was 25% of sales in 2019. In addition, the 2018 and 2019 festivals provided an opportunity for the production of a local cider at the Comrades Club, using apples donated by visitors and from the community orchard on Quarry Lane. Alternative drinks are also increasingly available on a local production scale. Cider has different production methods than brewing but, being based on apples, has extensive opportunity for small scale enterprises. Distilling has also appeared locally in Catterick and Bedale, again extending opportunities and local products. Such initiatives do suggest future prospects for promoting local beverages in other festival events. Nevertheless, the last festival in 2019 showed a further decline in attendance and, even without a pandemic, it is unlikely that future festivals would have been viable, particularly as local pubs host their own.

In the years before 2002, Richmondshire had just one microbrewery, the short lived Swaled Ale Brewery in Gunnerside. By 2023 five are flourishing – Mithril Ales Brewery in Aldbrough St John, Pennine Brewery Company in Well, Richmond Brewery Company in Richmond town, Wensleydale Brewery in Leyburn and Yorkshire Dales Brewery in Askrigg. The range of local beers is now extensive and available in pubs, shops and by direct delivery.

Where did the Richmond Ale Festival go? A major ambition of the festival has transpired even if the festival itself expires. As perhaps it should, the festival came, it drank widely, and it eventually passed out into the pubs and bars of Richmond to be savoured all year rather than for just one special weekend in October.

A Sense of Place: a tribute to the author Peter Robinson

Sheila Robinson and Gillian Howells



Richmond Walking Festival was launched in 2005 and, two years later, we decided to incorporate a new Book Festival to run alongside it, partly so that we could offer additional and alternative activities to locals, walkers and visitors, as well as enriching the cultural life of Richmond. So began *Books and Boots, Walks and Words,* and it stood out from other festivals around the country that were either literary or walking festivals, but not both. As Festival Organiser, I was delighted when our neighbour, Nick Reckert, told me that we had an internationally successful author living locally. His name was Peter Robinson, and so began a rich relationship with this talented and generous man. By 2009, he had agreed to become Patron of the Festival and, from then on, tried to co-ordinate his visits to the UK and busy schedule with our festival dates.

Peter Robinson was born on 17th March 1950 and, although he was raised in Leeds, the Yorkshire Dales were never far from his heart. His father was a keen amateur photographer and, as a young boy, Peter accompanied him to the Dales, climbing up the hills, searching for the ideal view and then waiting hours for the light to be just right to take the perfect picture. Peter, meanwhile, was usually to be found sitting by a drystone wall reading a book. A pass in the 11-Plus exam took him

to West Leeds Boys School. He successfully completed his O Levels but, being part of the Sixth Form Committee in the 1960s and protesting against certain rules, it was 'mutually agreed', after one particular visit to the Headmaster's Office, that he would not return to sit his A Levels although, on their website, the school does list him as one of their notable graduates!

Peter gained a Higher National Diploma in Business Studies at Leeds Polytechnic, and completed his A Levels at night school. An apprenticeship at Yorkshire Imperial Metals as a marketing executive did not lead to a job as, once again, it was 'mutually agreed' that his personality did not fit their requirements. He tried, unsuccessfully, for journalist positions, but was then successful in getting accepted to study at Leeds University, where he was awarded his English Degree. Whilst there, he also got to see some of the great bands – the Kinks, the Rolling Stones, Paul McCartney and Wings, to name just a few – and was even in the audience for 'The Who Live' at Leeds, recorded in the Refectory in 1970! So, two of his passions were well met at the University and it opened up a world of possibilities. Later, in 2009, in recognition of this, and to pass on that gift of education and opportunity, Peter and Sheila would endow the Peter Robinson Scholarship to support students from less-advantaged backgrounds who wished to study English. Peter also gifted his literary archive to the University.

In 1974 Peter emigrated to Canada to further his studies in English Literature, gaining an MA in Creative Writing at the University of Windsor. He then moved on to Toronto, where he was awarded his PhD in 1983. He would reminisce about Yorkshire in general and the Dales in particular, and often said that living in Canada gave him an objective perspective of what he was missing. Location was always important to Peter, and he even wrote his PhD dissertation on *A Sense of Place in Modern British and Irish Poetry*. When he started writing crime fiction, as a break from his literary studies, it was natural that he would think of the Dales and set the location for his fictional town of Eastvale here. He submitted two unsolicited manuscripts to Penguin Canada, which resulted in the first Inspector Banks novel, *Gallows View,* being published in 1987, followed by *A Dedicated Man* in 1988. So, we meet Inspector Alan Banks, who has decided to leave the Metropolitan Police and relocate to the Dales for what he hopes will be a quieter life! And Peter's life changed too, as he was able to be a full-time writer. Nearly

30 more Inspector Banks novels followed, many reaching Number One in the Bestseller List. He won many awards around the world and was translated and published in over 20 countries, introducing yet more people to the Yorkshire Dales. He also published three non-series books.

In the 1990s, now married and a Toronto resident, Peter and his wife, Sheila Halladay, regularly visited his parents in Leeds. These trips always included a visit to the Dales, and the renting of a cottage in Wensleydale or Swaledale. Sheila said that Peter took great delight in introducing her to the Dales locations that inspired his books: 'This is where they found the body in *A Dedicated Man,* or 'This formation is a *Hanging Valley*'.



Peter interviewing his crime writer friend, Ian Rankin, at the Festival

In 2005, Peter and Sheila bought their first home in Richmond, so they were able to spend more time in the area, and he became a regular contributor to, as well as Patron of, the *Books and Boots Festival*. Not only was he a speaker himself, but he also interviewed other famous authors, such as Ruth Rendell, and persuaded some of his crime writer friends, such as Ian Rankin and Mark Billingham, to come to Richmond and participate in the Festival. As a keen walker, he also led a couple of walks, combining that sense of place with his novels.

Peter said that Eastvale started out based on a combination of Ripon and Richmond, but it expanded through the Inspector Banks series as he needed a larger community for all of the crime he was writing about. Over the years, the types of crimes covered also grew and he always seemed to be completely topical. Issues we were reading about in the newspapers were there in his latest book – PTSD, grooming and sexual exploitation of young girls, the



A programme for the *Books and Boots Festival*

abuse and conditions of migrant workers, international drug dealing, or the distribution of drugs through 'County Lines'. He was a meticulous researcher but, as a consummate storyteller, the research served, rather than dominated, the novels.

Those of you who have read his books will know that music was an integral part of Peter's works, and the Inspector Banks website even contains playlists compiled from some of the novels, which range from classical, jazz, pop and rock to folk. One of his recurring characters was Penny Cartwright, a local folk singer. When he found out that Norma Waterson was a fan of his books, he invited her daughter, Eliza Carthy, to perform with him. He would read a portion of one of his short stories, allowing breaks in the reading for her to play the fiddle or sing a folk song relevant to the plot. Peter later wrote a short story, specifically to be performed with Eliza's father, Martin Carthy, at the Festival, on the stage of the Georgian Theatre in 2018.



The setting for *Before the Poison* in Coalsgarthdale

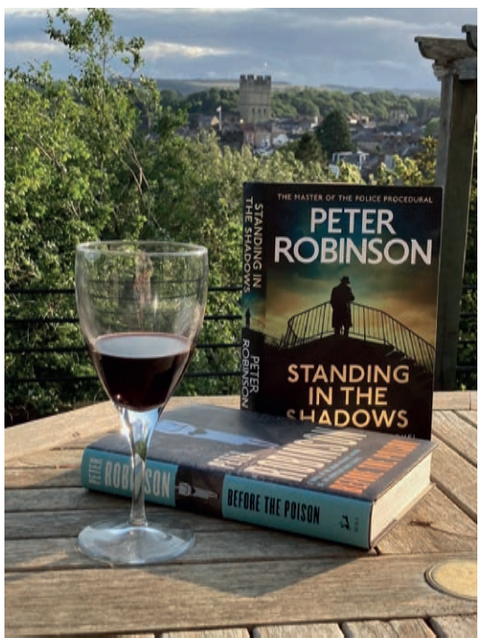
Whenever he went walking in the Dales, Peter was always the crime writer, looking for interesting, isolated locations for finding a body. As he says in the acknowledgments of *Sleeping in the Ground:* 'Thanks again to Nick Reckert for the interesting walks that, despite their beauty, somehow always seem to suggest to me a possible crime scene'.

A walk around Richmond Racecourse, for example, lead to the discovery of Coalsgarthdale and the location of the farmhouse which

became Kilnsgarth in his non-series book, *Before the Poison*. A trip to Thruscross, with its dried-up reservoir, formed the basis for *In a Dry Season*.

I leave the last words to his wife Sheila, with thanks for her significant contributions to this appreciation:

'Peter was never happier than when he was going for walks through the Dales, or writing at his desk, overlooking St Mary's Church and Richmond Castle keep, or sitting in our back garden in the early evening, with a glass of red wine, watching the everchanging sky, blue tits flitting about in the bay tree and swifts soaring overhead as the sun set'.



Peter's view of Richmond and some of his novels

In his last book *Standing in the Shadows*, which was published posthumously in June 2023, where was the victim's body found? In the Dales, of course! What better place to find a body than in the excavation for the new shopping centre at Scotch Corner.

Peter truly was a man dedicated to Richmond and the Dales.

John Ward



John was a member of the Civic Society's committee from 2002 until 2016, a long-serving and greatly valued supporter and advisor. He was unusual in that he linked the Society to the whole development of Richmond, through his leadership of bodies that promoted the development of the town. With the Richmond Partnership, he was instrumental in producing a major study, sponsored by the Countryside Agency, to improve the town and surrounding countryside in the aftermath of the Foot and Mouth epidemic of 2001. For ten years he was initially vice-chair, then chairman of the Richmond Swale Valley Community Initiative, the charity that took over from the Richmond Partnership.

He helped oversee many of the innovative heritage-led regeneration projects delivered, in partnership with others, to help Richmond's recovery. John was particularly interested in the Property Improvement Scheme for shops and offices that gradually transformed the town centre, the improvements to Castle Walk, the new seating in Trinity Church Square and the various lighting projects. He was also very keen on our walking initiatives, including the *Walking Festival*, that became the *Walking and Book Festival* and an established part of Richmond's calendar, the town trail and the nature trail. He also was very supportive of the Richmondshire Building Preservation Trust, who, in the early 2000s, were doing such a brilliant job of planning the transformation of the Station.

John and Caroline were also great supporters of all things connected with community education, arts and culture and were great lovers of folk music. The Richmond based touring company North Country Theatre was one of many organisations that benefited from their generosity. John had a great affection for Swaledale and for Hudswell, where he was born, and was a shareholder and a keen supporter of the George and Dragon community pub. More recently, when the major initiative to repurpose the empty Richmond Old Grammar School building was taking shape, despite only having been a school-boy for one term, that term had left such a good impression that he was only too keen to support the fundraising efforts.

John's career had been away from Yorkshire, at a national level, and many people who knew him did not realise just how significant this career had been. His commitment had always been to a fairer and more open society, championing the rights of the whole population rather than the few. His career took him to key roles in, among other bodies, The National Council for Social Services and the National Consumer Council. He was, for instance, instrumental to the Plain English Campaign, simplifying official documents so that everybody could have access to them. His natural modesty meant that his influence was most often 'behind the scenes', but always progressive and deeply influential.

It is true to say of John that the people of the country and of Richmondshire benefited greatly from his living and working among them.

Colin Grant

Tony Dykes



Tony was a valued member of the Civic Society from 2008 and a Committee Member from 2012. For many years he was also on the Planning and Lecture Programme sub-committees.

Tony was born in 1941 and grew up in Ingleton, now North Yorkshire, and he attended Queen Elizabeth Grammar School, Kirkby Lonsdale, where he met Freda. They married in 1964.

He joined the Ministry of Pensions in Newcastle, then transferred to Darlington in 1965, which was when he and Freda moved to Richmond to live. He became deputy manager at the Bishop Auckland office, then manager at Northallerton until his early retirement in 1994.

Tony's love of the Dales led him to become a Voluntary Ranger with the Yorkshire Dales National Park, based at Hawes and Malham, where he led school groups on walks and projects within the Park, presenting the official YDNP slide show and participating in fundraising concerts. Tony retired from the National Park after 15 years and then volunteered with the Weardale Railway as a track inspector for a few years.

Tony loved folk music from both sides of the Atlantic and he and Freda started singing together whilst at school. In Newcastle he formed two folk groups and continued the folk tradition when he moved to Richmond and met John Deighton at the newly formed folk club here.

A group was formed, 'The Oak Tree Four', later named 'The Dalesfolk'. Various people joined and left the group over the years, but always at the core were Tony, Freda and John. In the early 1990s, when John went to South Africa, a new 'Dalesfolk' emerged, which continued until 2022 with Tony at the helm. He wrote several songs for the group, who performed all over the North of England, in village halls, chapels and institutes, raising considerable funds for charity. Their concerts were lots of fun and Tony, always a great storyteller, filled the gaps between songs with his gentle Yorkshire humour. In more recent years, Tony sang with the Richmond School Singers, several choral workshops and special events at St Mary's Church, as well as the church Upbeat Group.

Tony had been involved with St Mary's Church since 1965 and was frequently a member of the Parochial Church Council. During the 1980s he was Appeal Director, raising around £250,000 for re-roofing and re-ordering the building. He was an enthusiastic and popular walk leader, introducing many people to the joys of walking in the Dales and the Lake District through his 'Hikes with Dykes' programme.

Tony, along with Freda, was a keen and adventurous cyclist, even tackling the 'Ring of Kerry' in Ireland. Then, in 1999, they took their bicycles (and Pip the dog) and cycled the coastline of Scotland, each alternating days on the bike, and covering almost 2,000 miles over six weeks in all weathers. The story and slide show of the trip subsequently became a charitable fundraiser.

Tony also played his melodeon as a member of the 'Old Hoss' group, dressed in colourful hunting attire and singing the song while one member, dressed as the Old Hoss, was snapping at bystanders in the Market Place during the pre-Christmas week. The scene is recorded in a painting hanging in the Town Hall in Richmond.

Among Tony's other interests were Richmond Model Railway Club, of which he was a founder member, his allotment and, of course, his family, who have each inherited Tony's love of the outdoors and music.

Tony lived life to the full and was a well known and respected member of our Richmond Community. He will be greatly missed.

Graham Barber

Graham Merlane

Graham Merlane was a quiet and relatively undemonstrative colleague, yet a strong and influential individual who, as Treasurer, made a significant contribution to the Civic Society. It was Graham who took on the daunting but very valuable task of creating an index for the first 20 years of the Society's *Review*.

Graham also had an exemplary record in education. He joined Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools in 1984 and he and his wife Margaret moved to Richmond, where they settled comfortably into the quiet life of a market town; she in the local Oxfam shop and as a volunteer with the Georgian Theatre, where her background as a teacher of English and History proved invaluable, and he becoming Treasurer of the Civic Society. Both were regular attenders of St Mary's Church. He was also a member of Richmond Probus.

Shortly before his death, Graham and Margaret celebrated their 65th Wedding Anniversary. They had met at Mundella Grammar School in Nottingham at the end of year social and married shortly after, on 10th August 1957. Graham advised that the secret to a happy marriage was to 'have a good sense of humour and enjoy each other's company'; advice he took with him into his professional life as a teacher of mathematics, and as one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI).

Graham joined the Inspectorate having been head teacher of King Charles I School, Kidderminster, for ten years, seeing it through the difficult transition from Grammar to Comprehensive school. Prior to this, his distinguished career included being Maths teacher at Latymer School, Hammersmith, then Head of Mathematics at Reading Grammar School and, later, a Deputy Headship in the Wirral before taking up his headship in Kidderminster. Whilst teaching in Reading, he became an instrumental supporter of the effective and successful Schools Maths Project (SMP) and, both before and subsequent to his time as an HMI, he also supported hundreds of children overseas to learn mathematics, including pupils in the Ukraine, Malaysia and Kenya while, in his spare time, he was also a Scout Master in Nottingham, Reading and Hammersmith.

Together, he and Margaret had four children, who they frequently took camping in France, as well as five grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. The pair shared a passion for travelling, visiting an array of countries, which included Russia, Jordan and Turkey, and even the Antarctic.

For the past two years, Graham was a resident in the Terrace Care Home, where the family were able to celebrate their 65th Wedding Anniversary. The Manager said that they 'were honoured to be a part of such a special moment for Graham and Margaret – they (were) truly an inspirational couple, and... it was lovely to hear their stories too.'

To those of us who knew him well, he was a much-respected friend and colleague.

Bev Joicey

Lecture Programme 2023

January 11th *Caroline Stanford*
The History and Development of Calverley Old Hall, Leeds

February 1st *Professor Giles Gasper*
Food for Thought: Medieval Recipes and What They Tell Us

March 1st *Helen Guy*
The Legacy of the Kearton Brothers

April 5th *Dr Kate Giles*
The Middleham Jewel – Discovery, Analysis and Interpretation

May 3rd *Carol Watson*
Fort for the Day

June 7th *David Butterworth*
Tackling Climate Change in the Dales

September 6th *Dr Keith Emerick*
Funding What Matters to People

October 4th *Doug Waugh with Lord Crathorne*
The Georgian Theatre Royal

November 1st *Mike Wood*
Hurst

VISITS
19th April *Auckland Castle*
18th July *Pickering Church wall paintings*

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Courtesy of Dr. J. McLennan

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