

IPSWICH BUILDING PRESERVATION TRUST NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2013

(Edited by Bob Allen)



BUILDING VISIT: Saturday 14th September 2013 at 11am

An invitation to all Trust members to visit 3 & 5 Silent Street, Ipswich home to **Claude Cox Old & Rare Books** – see page 4 for further details

AGM – Advance notice that this will be on Tuesday 22nd October at 7.00pm in the Ipswich & Suffolk Club. All members are invited. Further details will follow.

In recent months, two of the Trust's staunchest supporters have died and we take this opportunity to share an appreciation of their contribution.

Peter Underwood – an appreciation by Bob Allen



(photo: Ipswich Star)

I met Peter when I took up my first teaching appointment in the English Department of Northgate Grammar School for Boys, in September 1969. Peter was already a respected senior member of staff, a graduate of University College, Oxford, teaching Geography. He quickly learned of my interest in the built environment, art, and architecture, and I was recruited to join the Ipswich Society executive committee under his chairmanship.

I learned from Peter the importance of involvement in the community. Teaching was his profession but he saw his role as a much wider commitment to all aspects of the town and its people: their history, their present, and their future. He believed passionately in the need to conserve the best of our heritage and to build a future by promoting a close critical scrutiny of modern development. He was a man ambitious not for worldly position, but to be at the heart of things that mattered to him. He was both an intellectual and a man of practical action – bouncing on the rafters to demonstrate that the Sailor's Rest was capable of restoration; planting trees and devising new settings for the sarsen stones dredged from the river Orwell, and always eager for some new expedition to explore the environment at home or abroad. He was an enthusiast for the town's history and archaeology and about its significance in the English story.

He had a lovely warmth and generosity of time and talents. I remember when the concrete portico and oriel window at Northgate Girls' Grammar School was demolished that Peter helped me to rescue and conserve these relics (otherwise destined for hardcore somewhere) and to incorporate them into our newly created rockery in the back garden of 33 Whitby Road – a real act of kindness and inclusiveness that was typical of the man.

Peter's knowledge, tact, and diplomacy ensured the views of the Society were considered seriously, and his non-partisan approach gave him a welcome objectivity. Under his leadership, the Society won the respect of members and officers of the Borough Council which endures to this day. After stepping down as the inaugural Chairman of the Society, Peter took on wider roles – perhaps the most significant being the Chairmanship of the Conservation Advisory Panel, a position which recognized his unique abilities and passion for Ipswich.

As the conservation movement in the town grew and developed in the 1970s and 1980s, two additional bodies came into being to serve specific conservation priorities – the Ipswich Historic Churches Trust, and our own Building Preservation Trust. Both were splendidly supported by the Borough Council, and represent excellent and enduring partnerships of private and public initiative. In both Peter was a significant player.

Peter was a founding trustee of the IBPT. Among his many contributions was to indulge his passion for the theatre by dressing up in Tudor costume to impersonate Archdeacon Pykenham in his Gatehouse and giving visitors to the Gatehouse a taste of the Archdeacon's summary justice. Peter also worked with other members of the Trust to draft its first Guidebook. He was a regular member of the committee giving his knowledge, experience, and judgement to the Trust until very recently. His life and commitment stand as an inspiration to all of us who love the town.

[Peter Underwood died on December 4, 2012, aged 88 years]

Ron Brearley



It is fitting that we should record our appreciation of Ron's work for the Trust, following the sad news of his death last year. Ron became Treasurer of the Trust following Adrian Parry, who first took on the role after the formation of the Trust.

Ron was a man of considerable business skill and experience. He took on his work with a quiet and patient efficiency, and his meticulous approach meant that the Trust was able to steer a course through the choppy waters of nicely balanced finance over many years. He was always good humoured, unfailingly polite, but also firm and direct when the occasion demanded it. He had suffered some ill-health in recent years but continued to serve the Trust with loyalty and honour. His contribution left a firm financial footing and a legacy of a prudent approach to financial matters which has always underpinned our approach to projects. We thank him for the way he gave his expertise and experience generously in the service of the Trust.

[Ron Brearley died in November 2012, aged 92 years]

LATEST PROJECTS

The Old Bell

Following our feasibility study of the Old Bell public house, we were pleased to learn that the building had been sold at auction, and we believe that the new owners are putting in hand some urgent restoration and refurbishment work. It is planned to begin with the roof of the property, which our survey revealed was in a parlous state. The proposed change of use is apparently to become the premises for an undertaker's business. This was not a use which we had considered in our thinking about the property, but as soon as this news came out we could see the potential advantages. We had considered residential use or specialist business use, and we all felt it would have been ideal if a public house could again have become a viable option on the site. We await developments with interest and hope to see this important building once again being cared for and its fabric put in good order.

County Hall – St Helens Street



Perhaps the most prominent building at risk in the town is County Hall. This building is of considerable historical significance, and architecturally it speaks of its various roles as prison, celebrated law courts, offices and council chambers. Originally sold off by the County Council some years ago, parts of the site have been redeveloped, but the main historic range has not found a new use, and in common with many empty buildings, its fabric has deteriorated

in the meantime. Vandals have destroyed or stolen stained glass windows, pipework, and interior fittings; homeless people have lived in the empty rooms, and water has penetrated where lead and other roofing has been stolen. It is, however, good to learn that the furnishings and fittings of the courtroom in which Mrs Simpson obtained her divorce are actually in storage, and that robust measures have been put in hand to secure the buildings and to make them weathertight. One of the challenges in imagining future uses for the building is the complex system of floor levels and the ways in which the various phases of building have been married together.

We see our role as taking whatever steps we can to assist the owners to find a suitable alternative use for the buildings. It has always been a part of the role of the Trust to facilitate restoration and refurbishment in cases where our expertise and experience might materially assist the owners in achieving the outcomes which we would all welcome.

A small sub-committee of the trust has been set up which has met the owner on site to better understand the current situation and explore possible ways in which the Trust could offer any advice and assistance that might be welcome. It is clear that the scale of the project is beyond the means of the Trust to take on but we had hoped we might be able obtain funding from the Architectural Heritage Fund for a feasibility/viability study; sadly this does not fit their criteria (we would have to be in a position to purchase the building). We continue to monitor the situation and hope that a solution can be found so that this monumental building can once again contribute positively to the life of the town.

[More news on other historic buildings in trouble to follow in an Autumn Newsletter]

MEMBERS' VISIT to 3 & 5 Silent Street, Ipswich - the College Gateway Bookshop premises. A PRIVATE TOUR by owner Tony Cox
Saturday 14th September – meet at the bookshop at 11am

To book a place, please phone Bob Allen (evenings 01206 252474).

This nicely coincides with the annual Heritage Open Days in Ipswich and many other interesting historic buildings are open on that Saturday so why not make a day of it!
For details go to: <http://www.heritageopendays.org.uk/directory/town/ipswich>



3 & 5 Silent Street, Ipswich (photo: © Mr Robert Whitehouse)



CLAUDE COX
Old & Rare Books



<http://www.claudecox.co.uk>

In the same range of buildings that made up our last major project - Curson Lodge – is situated the oldest second hand bookshop in Ipswich. Architecturally, the buildings form one of the best known timber-framed landmarks in the town. We know that they formed part of the accommodation associated with Lord Curson's house which once stood on the other side of Silent Street. In subsequent years the complex was subdivided into tenements and several shop units were incorporated. In the C19 a splendid photograph shows the buildings on the corner serving as the Wolsey Pharmacy, and a careful comparison of that photograph with more recent ones reveals the extent of the restoration undertaken in the 1930s when the smaller second gable was discovered beneath its later framing and restored 'as original'. Sash windows, too, were replaced with leaded casements, and the timber framing revealed from under its coat of plaster. Now the buildings and the bookshop business are up for sale, and Tony Cox, the present proprietor, has kindly agreed to be our host. This gives a particular opportunity for members of the Trust to visit the complex and to see some of the rooms that are not normally accessible in the context of the buildings as a whole.

If you would like to join the party, please reserve your place by phoning Bob Allen as above