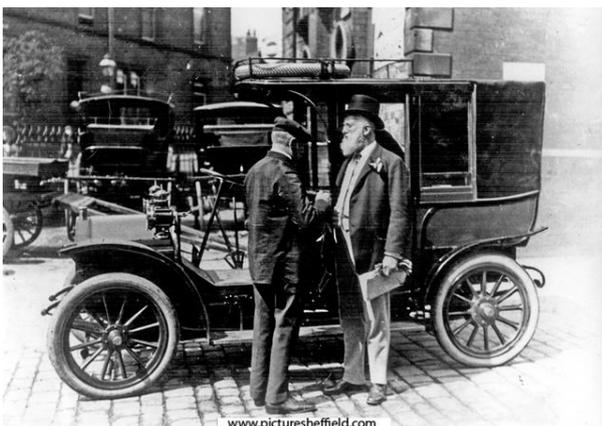


West Lea – The Ranmoor Parish Centre

Originally the building we know as our Parish Centre was named “West Lea”. It was the first house to be built, c.1870, on the Ranmoor Park Estate, created by property developer Frederick Bardwell and modeled on other local land societies at a time. It was then common to follow the fashion of naming such developments “Parks”. (e.g. Tapton Park to the east and Ivy Park to the west). Clearly Ranmoor Park, with a lodge at its entrance, was envisaged as a high-class environment but in the end never fulfilled this vision. Although houses were constructed on the west side of Ranmoor Park Road, the opposite side remained empty until part of this space was offered by William Harrison for building St John’s Church in 1879.

West Lea appears to have been built and named by its first occupant George Cutler in about 1870, followed then, after a few years, by Frederick Leggoe who seems to have taken over temporary residence while he focused on building his opulent Ranmoor Grange next door. When it came up for sale again in 1875 the sale particulars describe a house *“replete with stoves, chimney pieces and fixtures of the best class, with hot and cold-water pipes laid throughout, offering a bathroom and water closet on the first floor”*

The person who took advantage of this opulence was John Edward Bingham, the senior director of Walker and Hall, the silversmiths and electroplating firm that employed over 400 workers at its “Electro Works” in Howard Street at the time. Having started work at the firm aged 16 when it employed a mere 19 people Bingham is credited with turning the company into a world class business with showrooms across the country and offices in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. By 1894 he employed around 1500 people.



Sir John Bingham (right) paying his fare in Barker’s Pool

John Bingham proved to be the West Lea’s longest term resident. During nearly 40 years he served in many prominent positions including, unusually, two terms as Master Cutler in 1881 and in 1885 when he was also a magistrate. His aptitude as a publicist and showman prompted several personal crusades. He led a campaign to ban the use of granite setts arguing that these were dangerous for horses especially on hills or in wet weather and that they should be replaced with wood blocks or tarmac. He also formed a Smoke Abatement League to fight against excessive smoke in the centre of Sheffield. He was knighted in 1903.

During his time at West Lea Bingham built a stable and coach house at its rear in 1878. The engraving below shows the house with a conservatory standing where the billiard room was added in 1891.



Apparently when he died in 1915 John Bingham was still working at his company. Dowager Lady Bingham continued to live in West Lea until her death in 1923. It was then that his son (Sir Albert Bingham) presented the building to the Anglican Church Commissioners to serve as a “parsonage”. The reverends John Nicholls, Henry Foster, John Pain and Geoffrey Needham occupied West Lea until 1979 when it was found to be too large and impractical to work as a vicarage and required extensive renovation.

West Lea was eventually purchased from the Church Commissioners and the ground floor converted into meeting and function rooms, including the Garden Room that we see today. The upper floor was converted into two flats for letting.

When next in the Centre look for some of the original conservatively classical features; including the tessellated pavement in the vestibule and the decorative ceiling. And when walking through Bingham Park perhaps remember that this is land which Sir John donated to the public in 1913.

Joseph Jonas - The Spy Who Never Was

Joseph Jonas began steelmaking in Attercliffe, soon after he arrived in Sheffield in 1870. He was then still in his mid 20s. By 1890 he had teamed up with Robert Colver to form Jonas and Colver & Co Ltd. Under his chairmanship the company expanded rapidly to become one of Sheffield's most successful producers of high-speed nickel steel used in naval and marine applications. "Novo" steel, its key invention was marketed across the world in Europe, the USA and Canada where Jonas travelled extensively. By the end of the century the Novo Steel Works was employing approximately 2000 workers.



Sir Joseph Jonas in Mayoral regalia in 1904

Jonas was remarkably active across a broad area of Sheffield's public life. He served as a City Councillor for six years, from 1890. He was president of the Sheffield Reform Club, chairman of the Board of the Technical School (a forerunner of Sheffield University) and a governor of the Royal Grammar School. He donated £5000 to the Applied Science department to fund a materials testing laboratory at Sheffield University, and also helped establish chairs in German and French. He was elected Sheffield's Lord Mayor in 1904/5. And when King Edward VII conferred a knighthood on him in 1905 Joseph Jonas must have justifiably believed that he had reached the pinnacle of civic life in Sheffield. His fine home, Endcliffe House in Endcliffe Vale Road, reflected his status as one of Sheffield's leading figures at this time.

However the Great War began to generate storm clouds around him. Although he had lived in Sheffield for almost 50 years and had been a naturalised British citizen for most of this time, he had been born in Germany. And as British casualties mounted on Europe's battlefields Germans living here became increasingly subject to verbal and physical abuse. The

question "Are you for King or Kaiser?" was raised in many parts of Britain. Jonas had made no secret of his antecedents and indeed held the position of German consul in Sheffield which he openly used to facilitate trade between the two countries. Sir Joseph had legitimate dealings with Germany before the outbreak of hostilities, but quite properly had severed contact with his contacts and customers immediately after war was declared. Thereafter, all his company's steel production was devoted to the British war effort.

It is now assumed that because the war was going badly at the time someone brought his earlier dealings to the notice of the "British establishment" who used this to make him a convenient scapegoat. The fact that he had married a British woman and that one of his four sons was currently serving in the British Army did not apparently help his case. Because in July 1918 after an illustrious career 73 year old Sir Joseph found himself, with two others, in the dock at the Old Bailey charged with "obtaining and communicating information prejudicial to the interests of the State", in other words being a spy. The prosecution referred to letters and meetings that had taken place before the outbreak of war and related to the legitimate sale of Sheffield steel in Germany. Other local firms conducted similar commercial activities, and German manufacturers had been invited to visit steel and munitions factories here.

Joseph Jonas and his associate were quickly found not guilty of conspiracy or felony (for which they could have been jailed for up to seven years) but to have merely committed "a misdemeanour" and ordered to pay substantial fines along with the prosecution costs. A month later, Joseph Jonas was stripped of his knighthood and he resigned his directorship of Jonas & Colver.

When he retired with his wife to Endcliffe House he must have felt a broken man. He suffered a stroke in December 1920 and died nine months later. His final resting place is All Saints Parish Church Ecclesall. Endcliffe House was sold in 1929 to the University for £6000 and became a women's' hall of residence soon after. It was renamed Halifax Hall in 1959, after Lord Halifax, then the Chancellor of Sheffield University.

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