

Future Meetings

In July we solicited your views on possible novel ways of arranging future meetings given that the Parish Centre has not been able to operate normally under lockdown conditions. Although the Parish Centre has recently opened and St John's church is potentially available, the committee has decided, at least for September, to opt for safety and not hold a physical meeting.

Your comments on options for future meetings were very helpful and a number of you showed interest in the idea of a *virtual* meeting (as a poor substitute for a real one). So as an experiment we plan to try this in September using the Zoom platform and run the talk 'Sheffield in Tudor & Stuart Times' which we were forced to cancel back in April. The speaker, David Templeman has kindly agreed to present it using Zoom and the committee have been hard at work getting their collective head around the technology! The date for this will be Tuesday 15 September at 19.30 (which is as per the membership card) but will replace the talk on Eyam we had previously planned

You will receive the log in invitation details by email or via the post in cases where we do not hold an email address for you. We encourage everyone who can to join the meeting on the 15th September and to participate in what really is an experiment for you, us and the speaker too. Of course, we hope that we will get back to normal in due course but no one yet knows when that will be. So in the meantime let's give it a go and join the virtual community! And we will be most interested to hear your views and suggestions afterwards.

Firth Homes

The current Firth Homes started life as Firth's Almshouses. Mark Firth, steel manufacturer and often dubbed "the pioneer of Ranmoor" provided the inspiration and money to build 36 self contained apartments for impoverished elderly people in 1869.



The Original Almshouses from Hangingwater Road

The Almshouses were arranged around a central chapel and a minister was paid £50 a year to "watch over the spiritual interests of the Almspeople" to offer brief daily prayers and conduct a full service on Sundays.

Residents were required to be at least 60 years old, born in Sheffield and be a recognised attendant of some Protestant place of worship. This charitable institution was managed by Trustees originally drawn from members of the Firth family.

After almost a century of use these "early Gothic" Victorian buildings had become run-down and were demolished in 1968 and replaced about a year later with Firth Homes. The site includes 28 apartments, 4 bungalows and a warden's house. It remains a charitable institution with the chaplain's role filled by the minister of Nether Green Methodist Church.

In this present time of new rules and regulations which affect our lives spare a thought for the early 'inmates' and the rules they had to abide by. We have highlighted five of the more extreme rules contained in the *Firth's Almshouses Trust Rules and Regulations* handbook of 1937.



Group of Almshouse Residents c.1920

4. In the event of any of the Almspeople not being re-elected - (The Almspeople shall from time to time be elected by the Trustees for a period of one year only) - as aforesaid he or she shall on receiving seven days' notice in writing from the Trustees quit and give up quiet and peaceable possessions of the premises, and leave the same in good and clean condition.

8. The attendance of the Almspeople is expected by the Trustees at the Services held in the Chapel of the Almshouses on Sunday mornings, and whenever possible at prayers held in the Chapel on weekday mornings.

9. Almsmen who are able-bodied are expected by the Trustees to undertake certain work in the Grounds of the Almshouses, such as removing refuse and rubbish, keeping the gardens cultivated and tidy, and the flagstones in the yards scoured and cleansed.

11. The Almspeople are expected by the Trustees to extinguish all electric lights at 10pm, but no objection will be taken by the Trustees to any of the Almspeople who may be ill, or in

any case of emergency, from using the electric lights during the night.

15. If any of the Almspeople or other Inmates of the Almshouses shall fail to observe the Rules from time to time in force concerning the occupation of the Almshouses and the conduct of the Inmates thereof, or to comply with the reasonable requirements of the Trustees, or shall be guilty of drunkenness or other immoral conduct, or if any of the Almspeople shall in the opinion of the Trustees have ceased to be a proper object of the Charity owing to his or her improved circumstances, or any other cause, it shall be lawful for the Trustees, upon twenty-four hours' notice in writing to remove him or her from the Almshouses and discontinue his or her weekly allowance.

Ranmoor's Grade II listed Bridge



At the start of the 19th century the open countryside around Ranmoor was crossed by just a few lanes and 'public footpaths'. In order to convert this farmland into a prime residential suburb it would need to become more accessible. New roads would be required and these were provided by land societies, a growing feature in many English towns from the 1830s. These societies were initiated by local individuals who invested capital to purchase an area of land, drew up an estate plan and then sold small plots upon which individuals would build a house.

We have previously referred to George Wostenholm's role in the development of Ranmoor which began when he purchased 26 acres of fields between Upper Rand Moor Road and Water Lane (now Storth Lane) in 1862. Within a year of creating Gladstone, Graham and Chantry Roads he promptly sold off most of the land to the trustees of what became the *Storth Crescent Land Society*, the first such society in this area. The land around the new roads was divided up into 41 plots and offered for sale. In the event it attracted 26 interested parties about a third of whom purchased two or three plots. Only about 6 individuals built houses in which they subsequently lived. Obviously these worthy and wealthy investors had noted the potential of Ranmoor and were intent on eventually selling their land to others.

One of these investors was local businessman, W E Laycock, who bought two plots on Graham Road. These later proved to be strategically placed when the *Stumperlowe Crescent Land Society* was being mooted. He ran Samuel Laycock & Sons Ltd, Portobello Place,

manufacturers of hair seating for domestic and public furniture, railway carriages, etc and employed about 400 people. He was also Mayor of Sheffield in 1865, and later a magistrate and alderman.

Laycock's own residence was Stumperlowe Grange where he had lived since 1855 so he was hardly thinking of moving into the new suburb of Ranmoor! On the other hand he had also been one of the initial trustees of the proposed *Stumperlowe Crescent Estate* in 1875 and clearly realised that in order to develop the land beyond Storth Lane as an estate of 22 plots along Stumperlowe Crescent Road it would be necessary to make this accessible from Graham Road. He first had to overcome the obstacle presented by the deep cutting of Water Lane and to facilitate this, a bridge, and the land on which to build it, would be required. And, this being Sheffield, it was constructed largely of wrought iron rather than stone!

Consequently, Ranmoor now lays claim to a quite unusual bridge which certainly deserves its Grade II listing with its elaborate traceried cast-iron balustrade, and pedestals with square domed caps and ball finials. This structure, unlike the electric transformer at the top end of Storth Lane, is still maintained by Sheffield Council.

Mystery Edifice



Though not in Ranmoor you may have passed this lone pillar on a local walk and wondered what it was and why it is there. The only clues we will give at this stage are that it was built between 1903 and 1909! The full story behind it will be revealed in the next edition of Ranmoor Notes!

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