

Friends of the Doncaster Mansion House



Newsletter No. 5 Spring 2025



The Mansion House has a long association with music - the picture left shows the delicate plasterwork on the wall of the minstrel's gallery in the Ballroom depicting musical instruments and sheet music – and in this edition we have an article about former concerts and a reminder about the forthcoming one on May 10th. One of our volunteer guides has written a timely article about the Mansion House in the second world war as we look forward to commemorating VE day.

The look of the Mansion House today is very much due to the extensive renovation and decoration work carried out by the Council during the 1980s. Local artist David Venables made a major contribution, and there is an account of his career and his work at the Mansion House. The next edition will carry an article about other work done at the time. Maintenance and renovation are ongoing tasks in a building the age and size of the Mansion House and the Council has recently commissioned an updated Conservation Plan. The

trustees and volunteers of the Friends gave their views and ideas, and we look forward to reading the completed plan.

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Forthcoming Mansion House Open Days – all 10.30 – 2.00

Friday 16 May
Friday 27 June
Friday 25 July
Friday 8 August – Family Day
Friday 22 August
Saturday 20 September-Heritage Open Day
Friday October 24
Friday November 21
Friday December 12

The following article was written by Philip Scowcroft in 2015, so when it refers to 'several recent years', that is prior to that date.

Great Musical Moments at Doncaster Mansion House

Doncaster Mansion House dates from the 1740s but its contributions to the town's music were slow to appear in the sense of concerts, though balls not infrequently took place and even concerts, perhaps as a race week attraction. Dr Miller, Organist at the Parish Church 1756 -1807, was familiar with the Mansion House and his natural son Isaac Brailsford, successor Organist at the same church, organised orchestral subscription concerts in the 1810s and 1820s, many of which took place in the Mansion House.



But two bigger events were to take place there in the 1840s. In 1840 the great pianist and composer Franz Liszt, pictured left, then only 29, but already a superb executant, came as part of a countrywide tour. Unfortunately, local newspaper coverage, while noting all the songs sung by Liszt's supporting artistes, did not see fit to list the titles of Liszt's piano solos in the concert. Few of Liszt's better known compositions had appeared by 1840; though his Grand Galop Chromatique was performed at all his English appearances in that year, so we can reasonably assume he played it at Doncaster. It is quite possible, also, that Liszt played here one or more of the earlier versions of his *Années de Pèlerinage* which had started to appear in 1839. (the *Années* are usually heard now in the revised version of the late 1840s).

In 1844, the Frenchman Louis Jullien brought the institution of the promenade concert, invented in Paris by Musard, to Great Britain and specifically to the Mansion House. Jullien's orchestra played a mixture of classical pieces and dance music compiled by Jullien himself. The Mansion House rooms were hard put to accommodate the sizeable orchestra and even more sizeable audience, who promenaded laterally, some of whom complained of having their pockets picked in the crowded rooms. Jullien and his orchestra came to Doncaster four times altogether, but the other three concerts were in other venues. Many other local concerts were called promenade concerts to be up to the latest trend and ticket prices came down as a result, (more or less permanently). His exuberant style is caricatured in the cartoon by Benjamin Roubaud, right.



For the next century musical events at the Mansion House tended to be balls rather than concerts, but there was one on 4th April 1940 which may be noted for its historical interest in being virtually the last concert of the Doncaster Musical Society. The Society had been founded in 1888 and this concert was given in the Mansion House because its proceeds were devoted to the Mayor's War Comforts Fund. For this the DMS was joined by the LNER Musical Society – a male voice choir and an orchestra - both of which societies were directed by the same conductor Percy Saunders. Soon the DMS was disbanded though its place was taken by the still existing Doncaster Choral Society later in the 1940s.

However, the atmosphere and the acoustics in the Mansion House Ballroom are not to be denied (was it not Goethe who once said "architecture is frozen music") and in the past 30 years these have been put to use in the service of concerts, several of them organised by the Council's Museum Service. Carey Williams, once a local teacher and organist at the Hall Gate United Reformed Church, was particularly interested in exploring the Mansion House's musical possibilities. I recall the Fitzwilliam Quartet giving a concert there and others given by Natalie Clein and the New Zealand mezzo soprano Kamilla Dunster. In several recent years, the September race-week has been marked by a concert given by the members of Sheffield's Ensemble 360, of music contemporary with the first running of the St Leger (1776) and all of which included a specially commissioned (from Carey Williams!) short set of variations on Dr Miller's hymn tune Rockingham ("When I survey the Wondrous Cross").

Philip Scowcroft

Update 2025



Ensemble 360 now uses the Cast Second Space as a venue, but the Friends have tried to continue the musical tradition, and in 2017 they worked with the Council to put on a concert with the late Simon Lindley consisting of music from the Regency Period. In 2018 Mathew Schellhorn performed a piano recital in aid of the Sand House charity, and in 2019 the Friends organised a Christmas concert with the Cusworth singers. We were delighted to welcome them again last year, and they have agreed to come this year on December 4th for another Christmas concert.

On May 10th at 7.00pm there will be something different – a concert of two military brass and trombone quintets from the band of the Royal Yorkshire Regiment. The concert is free, with a retiring collection for the Friends and the Regiment charity. If you would like to come, please reserve your space by contacting secretaryfodmh@gmail.com.

David Venables and his contribution to the Mansion House

When visitors are shown around the Mansion House, the guides point out the expertly marbled columns, and then proudly explain that the work was done by a local artist, David Venables. However, David's long association with the Mansion House - from 1992 until 2017 – includes more than the pillars, and he has also had an extensive career covering fine art, interior decoration, restoration and graphics.

David was born in Haltwhistle in Northumberland and his early life in the matriarchal household of an extended coalmining family made a deep impression on him, as the subject matter of so much of his later work shows. His mother's marriage to a soldier meant a move to Doncaster in 1950, and that brought with it the opportunity to blag his way into the Doncaster College of Art at the tender age of 14. David had been drawing and making pictures since the age of three; he put together a portfolio and walked into the secretary's office and asked to join the college. His first contact was with Mr Anderson who called on the deputy principal and told David to wait outside



DAVID IN THE FORMER COUNCIL CHAMBER/DINING ROOM

whilst they discussed his work. Fortunately for David they were so impressed they decided to admit him for the foundation course without even having taken the entrance exam. By the time the education systems found out his age, it was too late to do anything about it and it was classed as continuing education. David later continued his education at the Central School of Art and Design in London.

Within a few months David also started practical training for the other aspect of his career. Harry Corbett

was performing at the Arts Centre in Doncaster and the set designer, learning that David was doing an art course, asked him to help with the backdrops. Early experience painting Sooty's bedroom led to an enduring association with the theatre and a stint at the Mount View Theatre School in Crouch End.

David's first exhibition at the age of 18 was in Doncaster and he won a prize of 25 guineas – worth approximately £1600 today, for his Sea Harvest painting.

David's renovation work has taken him all around the country, in London regilding at the Mansion House, cabinet painting at the fine jewellery department at Asprey's in Old Bond Street and work at the Canadian Embassy and St James Palace. At the 1904 Royal Hall in Harrogate he used old photographs to design and oversee a complete restoration in the spirit of the original architect Frank Matcham, and painted murals showing both classical type scenes and coats of arms in the main hall and one depicting the rose garden as it was in the 1920s. Elsewhere in Yorkshire he has worked at the Pump Room in Harrogate, the Georgian theatre in Richmond, and the Castle Museum in York, though there his desire for an authentic effect in his '30 years war' dramatic scene made him quite unpopular. He found some of the right type of wood in the museum's store, but wanting a more aged effect, he decided to burn it, having built a safe hearth on the roof.

Unfortunately, the weather proved unpredictable, the wind carried the smoke into the museum itself, resulting in multiple fire engines arriving, the evacuation of the building, and a rather red-faced David!



WORKING ON THE HALL PILLARS

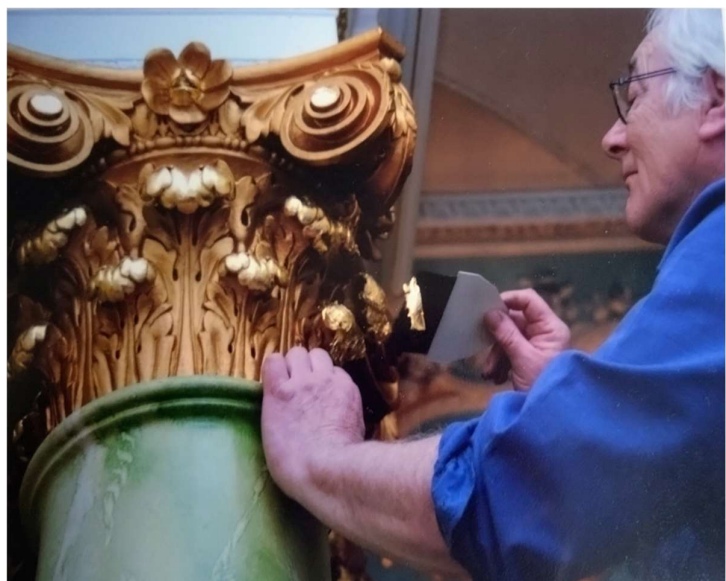
Considerable renovation work at the Mansion House was carried out from the mid 80s to mid 90s, and a chance meeting with former art school friend John Holmes, who was overseeing the work at the Council, led to the offer to work there. David met with the management of Ibbotsons who were doing the construction work, and they were pleased to have him on board.

All the columns in the Mansion House had been painted white, and the first to be marbled were in the Dining Room, then used as the main Council Chamber. It was agreed that there should be a mural on the back wall between the pillars and

David produced a draft design of a Georgian pastoral landscape, which Councillor Grainger, who was championing the restoration work at the Mansion House, showed to his colleagues. They suggested that the bottom part of the wall should be painted red, but thinking quickly, David put forward the counter suggestion of garlands of red roses twined around the pillars in the mural meeting in a graceful swag, which can be seen today.

Further work followed in marbling and regilding the pillars in the hall and balcony.

David's restoration skills are all self-taught. The early restorers used to work with the doors closed to keep their techniques secret, but through trial and error, and a deep understanding of his materials, he was able to develop his skills. For the columns he first applied the base coat loosely using a filbert brush, and then mixed it with scumble, before achieving the right effect with a soft haired brush, then flecking it while still wet with white spirit to break up the colour and finally applying two coats of varnish. He prepared two colour schemes, one green and one grey, and the councillors chose green, which he was happy with since it was a Georgian green and complemented the red walls. Some of the column capitals also needed restoring since the original stone had deteriorated. David built up the pattern again using plaster, and regilded them, together with the ironwork on the staircase.



PILLARS IN THE HALL

There is a fine set of six mirrors, possibly designed by Paine, and 250 years of wear had caused some damage. The sconces are modern, appropriate replacements, and David had the task of

regilding the frames. A close examination will show the subtle differences in the shine of the gilding with the highlights polished and the lower areas dulled to bring out the intricacies and beauty of the wood carving.

David's work was not limited to the paintwork and gilding. The back corridor is papered in a fine yellow Zoffany paper, and when it needed to be repaired, a better result was obtained by David mixing the right shade of paint, and painting over the damaged area to make an invisible match with the original. The doors in the principal rooms look to be made of fine-grained hardwood, but a closer inspection shows yet another example of David's many talents in painting and varnishing the original doors to look like mahogany.



Some years later the Council decided to restore and paint the outside of the Mansion House and asked David to prepare a colour scheme. The Brunswick green of the front door was retained but the exterior walls were lightened in shade to a colour which David mixed himself. English Heritage were initially not happy about the use of gilding on the exterior since this had not been the original finish, but were eventually persuaded when told that it was necessary to preserve the carving. The work involved going up on to the roof where parts of Paine's original pediment can be seen behind the Lindley replacement and repainting the shield and gilding the Doncaster lion.

David has had many one-man exhibitions, in Doncaster, Bradford, Leeds, Durham Bishop Auckland and London, his murals are in place at Durham University, the Royal Hall and the Pump Room in Harrogate and Studley Royal House, and his work is in public collections at Doncaster, Bishop Auckland, Durham and Wakefield.

David's paintings show a deep human connection, whether that is with the toiling and resting miners, the children at play, or the women working in their homes and Doncaster's factories. Commissioned to do a painting of the demolished railway workers' social housing in Hyde Park, David was having difficulty 'the scene didn't speak to me' until he started to pick up pieces of the abandoned remnants of homes – a newel post, a cupboard handle, parts of a defunct piano, which made a connection for him with the people who had lived there. Children playing nearby were curious about the stranger behaving so oddly, and when David told them what he was doing, they were eager to help, and soon started to bring him their own discovered 'treasures'. The completed collage was exhibited at Cusworth and seen by the Director of High Melton College. He was so impressed that he offered David a job teaching there.

David very much appreciates the opportunity he had to develop his artistic talents, and the support he received from his mother and extended family. One of David's paintings shows a miner letting out a homing pigeon entitled 'Let it Go'. Whilst people may put many different interpretations on the scene, for David, he himself is the bird, flying high with his talent, set free by the labour of his mining forefathers.

Jackie Gladden

The Mansion House and the Second World War

In May 2025, as we mark the occasion of the eightieth anniversary of VE Day 1945, it may be appropriate to look back at the part played by Doncaster Mansion House in the Second World War. It is impossible in this short article to do justice to the various efforts of everyone in Doncaster in supporting the war aims of the day and to describe the multitude of matters pursued in the town as a whole. Only those involving the Mansion House have been described here and then generally only in summary form.

The Mansion House during the war.

At the time of the Second World War, as the Mansion House in Doncaster was regarded as the centre for local administration, it is not surprising that it took on an increasing role. Indeed, this was nothing new, as it had carried out a similar function during the Great War. Primarily, it was the



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base for the usual meetings of the town council, but the number of meetings increased apace as local government took on the task of administering the plethora of new requirements thrust upon it by central government such as the organisation of local rationing.

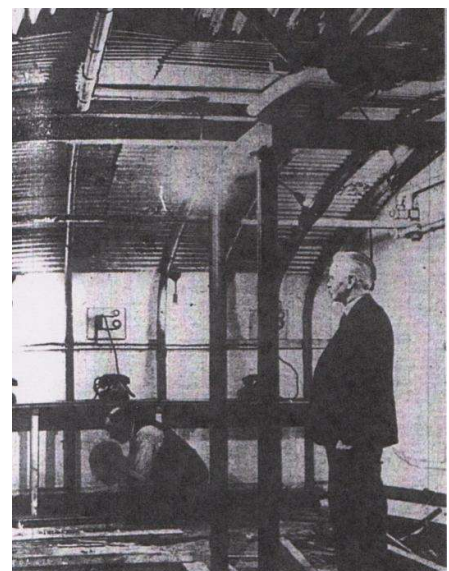
The ration books were made out in the Council Chamber, with Doncaster Grammar School boys being brought in to assist in this very time-consuming task. There were so many different groups at work in the Mansion House on one task or another that a blackboard was situated in the vestibule to direct visitors to the appropriate room. Committee meetings were held on so many matters and there were,

amongst others, committees set up as follows: War Comforts Committee, Local Defence Committee, Food Control Committee, Local Volunteers Information Committee, Air Raid Protection Co-ordination Committee, Victory Celebrations Committee etc.

The annual mayor-making ceremony was moved during the war years: to the Corn Exchange in 1939, and then for the remainder of the war the premises of Doncaster Grammar School on Thorne Road were used, but the "at homes" and inaugural dinner which followed still took place at the Mansion House and the usual civic parade started from there as well.

In addition, it was decided that the cellar in the Mansion House would become a reporting centre and be used as a message and control room for the town. Accordingly, ten telephones were installed in the cellar which was reinforced to protect it against aerial attack, and remnants of the work carried out remain to this day.

As might be expected, a multitude of fund-raising efforts took place during the war. Wherever possible these efforts and other

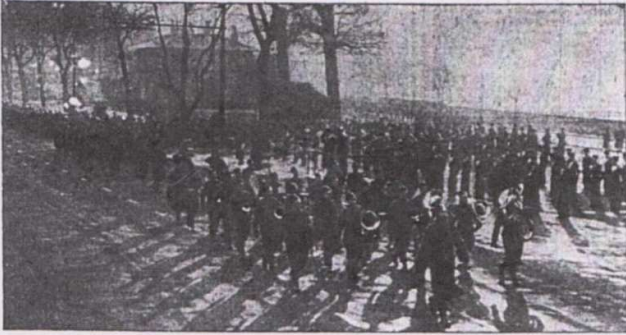


DONCASTER GAZETTE 31 AUGUST 1939

social gatherings were still celebrated in the Mansion House. Some were local initiatives, but others were pursued nationally, and the Mansion House was the centre for each and every one of these ventures.

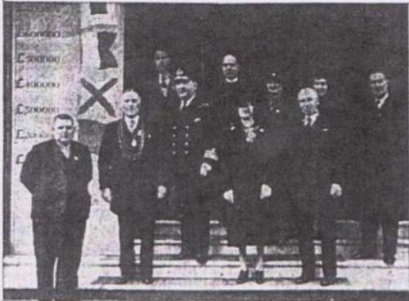
They included the following: Spitfire Fund Week (August 1940); War Weapons Week (February 1941); Warship Week (February 1942); Russian Aid Fund Week (May 1942); and Wings for Victory Week (1943).

Warship Week Events Pictured



The Doncaster Home Guard marching past the saluting base at the War Memorial in the Sunday parade.

At the Opening Ceremonies



Friday (Nelson Day)—A group on the Mansion House steps, including Rear Admiral Sir T. Spencer Lyne (opener), the Mayor and Mayoress (Councillor and Mrs. C. H. Mason), Canon and Mrs. Davies, Mr. J. A. McCallum (Savings Committee chairman), Mr. R. Howarth (Borough Treasurer), and Mr. E. Charlesworth (Savings Committee secretary).



Colonel Jones (left) presenting to Volunteer T. H. Barlow, of "B" Company, the first Meritorious Service Certificate awarded to a Doncaster Home Guard.



Saturday (Beatty Day)—The group includes Mr. R. Howarth, Mr. Evelyn Walkden, M.P. (opener), Mr. A. Ellis, Captain Wilson, Mr. C. A. Barrass, and Captain E. A. Jackson.



DONCASTER GAZETTE 12 FEBRUARY 1942

Each of the above national initiatives lasted for about a week or ten days and on each occasion there were parades, concerts, exhibitions, speeches by people of note (often in the Mansion House), a civic service at St George's Church and a number of fund-raisers e.g. whist drives, dances etc (once again, often in the Mansion House). A large cardboard thermometer was placed outside the Mansion House, recording the progress of the fund-raising during the event.

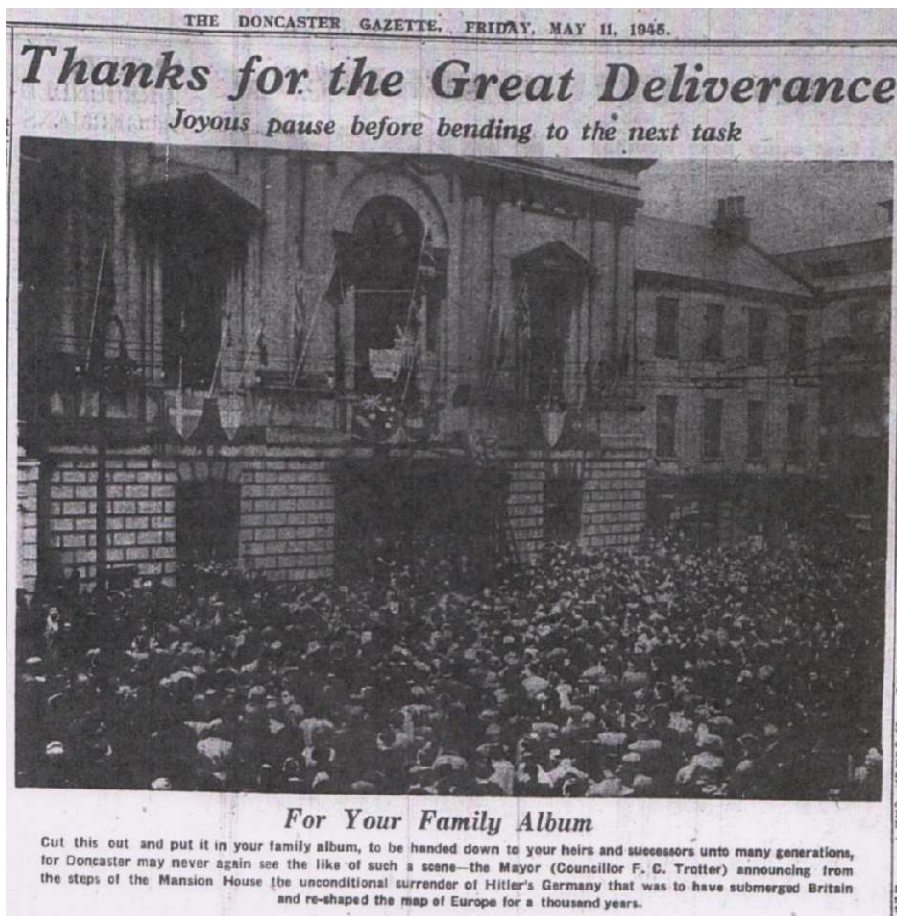
The steps of the Mansion House provided a suitable saluting base for the parades and Home Guard troops were frequently involved in these, whilst the building itself was used to entertain the visiting VIPs hoping to encourage the people of Doncaster to dig deep into their pockets in support of the fund.

It is certain that those who served as mayors at this time certainly had their work cut out supporting the many and varied ventures at the time.

The end of the war in Europe.

The Gazette of 3rd May 1945 was the last edition before the actual announcement of the end of the war in Europe. It anticipated the long-awaited news by dwelling on the plans of the Corporation's Victory Celebration Committee: there was to be flood-lighting of the Mansion House, which was to be decorated with the flags of the Allied nations,

and St George's Church was also to be floodlit; the Mansion House window boxes were to contain spring flowers; band concerts were to be given on the Town Fields, Elmfield Park and Hexthorpe Flatts by the bands of the Salvation Army, British Ropes and the East Yorkshire Regiment; a decorated bus (the decorations designed by the students of the Art College) was to tour the town with amplifiers available for broadcasts and for playing music; and a thanksgiving service was to take place at St George's following a civic procession.



DONCASTER GAZETTE 11 MAY 1945

Public houses would keep their normal hours, but following the actual announcement of peace many shops would be shut for the remainder of that day and for the whole of the following day.

The following week, in the Gazette of Friday 11th May (a change of day for publication for this issue), the paper was able to report on these plans being implemented.

According to the reports, there were cheering crowds, dancing in the streets and the holding of several impromptu parades, including one led down Hall Gate and back by an Australian balancing a pint of beer on his head. The bells rang out; soldiers were

carried along on people's shoulders; ten babies were born in Doncaster on either VE Day or the following day, including one to be named Victor and one Victoria.

The radio broadcast announcing the news was listened to by the mayor and fellow councillors on the Mansion House steps and the crowds outside as Winston Churchill spoke to the nation at 3:00 p.m. Some of the crowd picked springs of foliage from the decorated tubs outside the Mansion House in order to furnish themselves with buttonholes. There were three cheers raised for the serving men, for the mayor and a rendition of the National Anthem.

At 9:00 p.m., there were similar crowds, this time stretching from Clock Corner to the Silver Street/High Street junction, who broke into the National Anthem on conclusion of the address of HM King George 6th which had boomed out from amplifiers on the Mansion House.

Many attended an early thanksgiving service in St George's and seven hundred attended the official service held on Sunday following the civic procession, with the Home Guard once again on parade.

The schools were closed on the Tuesday and Wednesday as the 2,076 days of war in Europe came to an end. Street parties were held in the following weeks as the country prepared for a general election.

Although the war in Europe had ended, the war in the Far East continued and the hardship was not over and to all ends and purposes everything continued as in previous months, although in a more stress-free atmosphere.

The Mansion House and the end of the war in the Far East.

The day before the above event, crowds had gathered outside the Mansion House in anticipation of news of the surrender of Japan. The peace announcement was broadcast at midnight on Tuesday 14th August and Mayor Trotter had to get out of bed to make a short speech on the steps of the Mansion House.

The National Anthem was sung and there were three cheers for the serving men. About one thousand people had gathered outside the Mansion House and many stayed dancing in the street and banging dustbin lids until four o'clock in the morning.



DONCASTER GAZETTE 16TH AUGUST 1945

The victory celebrations, more or less the same as in May, began again: the decorated bus was used; the bells of St George's rang out; there was dancing, singing, fireworks, (four people went to DRI with burns), bonfires, flags and bunting galore, businesses shut for two days, pubs opened for two days until 11:00 p.m.; there was a civic procession to St George's for a 10:00 a.m. Thanksgiving Service (the Home Guard was yet again on parade) and the usual flood-lighting until midnight Sunday 19th August.

The bands played in the parks as in May and on Wednesday the 15th of August, the first day of the national rejoicing, the gates of the Mansion House were firmly shut and three policemen mounted guard on the building.

For the next few weeks photographs appeared in the local press of the street parties which had taken place. The town then began to return to peacetime life.

As 1945 neared its ending, as the ration for bacon, butter and sweets and chocolate received a "Christmas only" increase of an extra 4oz for each person, Doncaster prepared itself for a new year and a gradual return to peacetime activity. There was to be some hardship ahead - rationing was to continue for some years - but at least it was hardship to be endured in a background of peace.

The war was over; it was peace at last, although there would be several years before the country could be said to have returned to something like normality.



DONCASTER GAZETTE 23RD AUGUST 1945

It was at this point, once victory and peace was assured, that the Gazette of 7th June 1945 took the opportunity to reflect on some of the statistics of the war in so far as they referred to Doncaster: During the war, 142 bombs had fallen on Doncaster (mostly on spare land); 20 people had been killed, 83 injured, 42 buildings destroyed and 861 damaged (not counting those premises just suffering broken glass). The main two attacks had been the Balby and Bessacarr bombings - 8th-9th May 1941 and the Station Road bombing 1st September 1942.

The Mansion House could now, once again, return to its pre-war life.

Richard Cuell

Obituary Peter Brindley



We are very sad to report the death after a long illness of Peter Brindley, a former trustee and volunteer guide. Peter had a very successful career in the steel industry and then chaired the Doncaster Strategic Partnership and the board of the Doncaster New Deal for Communities, and was active in many local organisations. He was awarded an MBE in 2004. In the Friends, we knew him as a very modest, charming and courteous gentleman who had a kind and complimentary word for everyone, was always patient and helpful with the public, and positive and supportive as a volunteer. We continue to miss his cheerful smile, and his words of encouragement.

Addendum to the article in the last newsletter on the Agricultural Show in Doncaster 1843

I am indebted to member Peter Coote for finding, amongst the papers of the late Eric Braim, a reference to an article in the Doncaster Gazette of 4 Aug 1843 which says 'Great meeting of Yorkshire Agriculture Show. The home of the Copleys' This was Nether Hall, and looking at the pictures this makes sense of the positions of local landmarks. The site is between Nether Hall and Christchurch

In the July 1979 issue of the Civic Trust newsletter Eric Braim wrote an article about the Nether Hall estate and its development for housing, and many of the streets such as Park Road, named after its origins, and Christchurch Road still standing.

Citizenship Ceremonies at the Mansion House



Citizenship ceremonies regularly take place at the Mansion House. People hoping to obtain British Citizenship must meet a range of criteria, including residence for 5 years in the UK, the payment of a processing fee of £1,735, completion of an application form, passing the Life in the UK test, proving knowledge of English, Welsh or Scottish Gaelic, intention to continue living in the UK, good character, and attending a citizenship ceremony. Staff at the Doncaster Registrar's department organise the ceremonies. Applicants sit in designated seats at the front of the Ballroom, and their prebooked guests sit separately. The Civic Mayor and one of the Doncaster Deputy Lieutenants – the monarch's personal representatives in the area - preside and both give a speech of welcome. The Mayor often refers to the importance of the Mansion House, and there is usually a reminder about British

values. This photograph was taken at a recent ceremony at which Charles Warde-Aldam, one of the Deputy Lieutenants, and the current Doncaster Civic Mayor, Councillor Julie Grace, presided.

After the Registrar's statement each applicant in turn then either swears an oath of allegiance, or affirms if they prefer not to swear by God, and a pledge. The oath reads

"I (name) swear by Almighty God that on becoming a British citizen, I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to His Majesty King Charles Third, his Heirs and Successors, according to the law. I will give my loyalty to the United Kingdom and respect its rights and freedoms. I will uphold its democratic values. I will observe its laws faithfully and fulfil my duties and obligations as a British citizen". The applicants are presented with their certificate of British citizenship and a welcome pack, the national anthem is played, and the new citizens are invited to have their photograph taken with the Mayor and Deputy Lieutenant. Tea, coffee and biscuits are served in the Salon, and the new citizens and their families are offered a short tour of the Mansion House by the one of the Friends' guides - although quite a few do have to return to work.

Would you like to Join Us?

Would you like to help us in our aims of conserving the Mansion House and its contents, increasing opportunities for the public, and particularly schoolchildren, to visit, and providing educational resources about the Mansion House and its architect James Paine? Membership of the Friends costs Adults £10, Joint £15, Volunteers £5 Over 60s £7.50, Corporate £20 For this you receive our twice-yearly newsletter, updates about events at the Mansion House, and an invitation to our AGM and social afternoon. For information on membership, or volunteering, please contact the Secretary at secretaryfodmh@gmail.com Facebook https://www.facebook.com/people/Friends-of-Doncaster-Mansion-House/100070344483577/?locale=en_GB

Website <https://www.mansionhousedoncaster>

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