



# Milton Conservation Society

Representing Milton and Shorefields Conservation Areas



Newsletter December 2020

[www.miltonconservationsociety.com](http://www.miltonconservationsociety.com)

Welcome to this edition of our newsletter finds you keeping well in these difficult times. Our last event was our Quiz Night held back in February which now seems like a different era.

Although the Society continues to function keeping an eye on development proposals all other activities have been on hold and so the Executive Committee decided to extend all existing memberships by a year and for any new members to be enrolled without payment of the usual subscription.

Our next membership year starts 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021 by when we hope our lives will feel more normal. Details of membership and any planned events will be published in a future edition of this newsletter.

One event that will go ahead is our AGM although this year it will take place online on 12 Jan 2021 @ 7.30pm. This will be a basic meeting to receive last year's minutes, accounts and elect the Executive Committee members and officers and answer any questions you may have.

All members are invited to attend but you will need to let us know before hand so we can send you the link and the documents. Just send an email with AGM in the title to [info@miltonconservationsociety.com](mailto:info@miltonconservationsociety.com).

Nominations are invited for officers and members of the Executive Committee which should be in writing to the Hon Secretary, 15 Park Terrace.

Finally may we wish you a Happy Christmas and a much improved 2021! In the meantime stay safe and please read on - we hope you find something of interest for you.

## Conservation Area Appraisals



We were surprised to discover that the Council has updated all the Appraisals of Southend's Conservation Areas. While Milton and Shorefields will no doubt be the main focus of interest to our residents if you are interested in the town's history many of the other areas are worth a look.

The previous version of Milton's Appraisal was many years in the making so it is all the more remarkable that all 14 Appraisals have been updated no doubt due to bringing in Purcell as heritage consultants.

The Council is seeking feedback on these Appraisals, the Conservation Areas as well as anything else relevant to local history.

Details of how to get involved can be found at [yoursay.southend.gov.uk/conservation-area-appraisals-consultation](http://yoursay.southend.gov.uk/conservation-area-appraisals-consultation)

You now have until **Friday 29 January 2021** to take part.

### At Risk Coach House

Earlier this autumn our complaint to the Ombudsman about the Council's handling of the coach house in Park Terrace, now at some risk of permanent loss, reached its conclusion. The building was damaged by the Council when they removed the roof truss ties causing walls to spread and a very messy attempt to demolish the problem followed. This building is a really nice but rare example of a Victorian coach houses that were once all over our neighbourhood. Unfortunately, whilst we made our presentations to the Council and awaited their response things became delayed and eventually timed out for Ombudsman complaint purposes. It's a classic paradox. Where we act too quickly that can reflect badly on us but where we wait and act reasonably our position can time out. This appears to be how councils across the land can get away with their failings and hence why matters so often find themselves kicked into the long grass. Still, our points were made and these do get noticed locally. There is still a chance that the council will work with us to find a new use

for a repaired building but, yet again, we await their response to our enquiries. And so the merry-go-round continues....

### **Ever Present Scaffolding**



We had been pressing the Council to ensure this grade 2 listed building was adequately protected from the weather by repairing the base of the spire. This was done but then it seemed that the scaffolding would never be taken down. We have chased this up with the Council and as the scaffolding went up in the spring of 2019 and are pleased that by the end of November 2020 it has finally been taken down. We trust the repairs will ensure the building continues to survive in a state that enables its owner to find a suitable use and allow it come back to life in the future.

### **Good Works Around the Area**

It's always nice to see good new conservation works around the area and we have seen quite a lot of this over recent years. Windows, railings and whole facades have featured in the past and now is no exception. 30 Park Road has a beautiful new slate roof; 9 Avenue Terrace has had the whole street facing facade restored and an attractive new boundary wall with piers; St Bernard's School has a new extension which shows how modern works can sympathetically fits in with historic context, including the

Listed St Helen's Church. All great to see and helping to keep our neighbourhood in beautiful condition.

## **A New Conservation Area for Southend**

4 years ago Milton Conservation Society initiated the idea of formally protecting Hamlet Court Road (HCR). We kick started a new conservation society in the Hamlet Court area and that has lobbied since that time for conservation designation. It now seems that this is going to happen to the top, shopping part of HCR with a comprehensive appraisal document about to be reported to Council Cabinet. This hasn't happened without the support of our Ward Councillors and Councillor Mulrone from Leigh which has to be appreciated and whilst wider protection is wanted by the overwhelming majority of surveyed respondents, this stands to be an historic achievement in our town - all initiated by conservation in Milton.

## **Former Beecroft Gallery building**



We have learned through the grapevine that plans for a future use of the former Beecroft building as a set of artists studios have been abandoned nearly 4 years after they were proposed.

The building started life as the Warwick Hotel before being purchased by a local solicitor, Walter Beecroft, to house his art collection. He donated the building and collection to the people of Southend in the early 1947. This picture dates from the early 50's by which time the building had lost its elegant railings on the veranda and boundary wall. The building and collection are held in a trust whose objective is the furtherance of art in Southend. There is just one trustee - the Council which represents something of a conflict of interest. On the one hand the building requires remedial work but the trust does not have the funds to do this. No doubt the site would make a very valuable site for developers which may well be what the Council now calculates - we await any formal announcement. I understand the future direction of the site has been referred to the next meeting of the full Council.

Meanwhile at the request of Milton Ward Residents Association we have submitted a request to the Council to add the building to the Locally Listed building register. While this would not afford the building any additional protection it does seek to recognise the role it has played in the cultural and social history of the town rather than any major architectural merit given that there are many buildings of a similar style existing in Southend.

## **The Invidious Fate of a Conservationist**

I have often thought that the role we take in trying to protect our local environment could be seen as one long, constant moan. As we work to protect our heritage we seem to be forever complaining about this or that development or this or that Council inaction. But we all we want to see is the protection of our environment which is surely not at all unreasonable. We are even happy to see appropriate modern development where it contributes to the heritage of the area. I then recently saw a great film called 'The Social Dilemma' (which everyone should see in this digital age). In the film the concerns and criticism of the personal invasion that is social media are laid bare. Then one of the participants, Jaron Lanier says 'It's the critics who drive improvement, the critics who are the true optimists' and I felt much better about our work. I think it can be said that it is through us, the community, that our heritage is protected and things improve.

Andy Atkinson, Vice Chairman

## A New Town Hall.

On 24<sup>th</sup> September 1929 the Council voted to purchase the Palace Hotel and convert it to provide offices and public rooms to become the new Town Hall. This is a story that I had not heard of before I came across it quite by chance looking for something else in the Council Minutes but it is one which could have changed the face of the town. Instead it turned out to be just a small unremarked footnote in its history.

As the town developed the responsibilities of the Council expanded both in size and in scope and it became apparent that more office accommodation was needed over and above what the Borough Council had inherited from the Local Boards. This shortfall was initially met by leasing or buying buildings as necessary which was costly and inefficient as staff were spread around. After the First World War a Special Town Hall Committee was formed to secure a new site.

The Palace Hotel was completed in 1901 but did not open until 1904 due to wrangling over its finances following a bankruptcy. Alfred Tolhurst had been a creditor and was seen as its saviour when he bought the hotel out of bankruptcy.



However, in 1925 Alfred Tolhurst died and the hotel was put up for sale at auction. Knowing the Council were seeking new premises, the executors invited the Council to bid which they declined to do. Despite having cost

over. £250,000 to build only 25 years previously, the hotel failed to reach its reserve price of £140,000. The executors again approached the Council offering it to them for £125,000 but once again their approaches were rebuffed.

Meanwhile the Council did what many organisations do today and hired an external consultant, Professor S D Adshead, (originally Professor of Civic Design at Liverpool University though by then working at London University) to advise the Borough Surveyor and subsequently produce a report for the Town Hall Committee which proposed 3 options.

1. Demolish the Technical College at Victoria Circus and adjacent buildings and build anew.
2. Adapt these buildings.
3. Build on a green field site off Victoria Avenue in Carnarvon Road.

Option 1 was chosen by the committee and then approved by the full Council at a net cost of some £280,000 so Professor Adshead was commissioned to produce detailed plan and costs. To cut a long story short, progress stumbled on during 1927 and 1928 but by 1929 the committee accepted that none of these options were feasible because of escalating costs and lengthening timescales

The possibility of using the Palace Hotel had been raised and dismissed during the years these plans were being worked on so once it was agreed they could not proceed with any of their favoured options the Borough Surveyor was asked to produce a costing for the Palace Hotel option. Assuming a deal could be done on the purchase price at £125,000 (by then the owners had increased the asking price to £140,000) the conversion cost would bring the total to £211,000. This estimate was accepted by the Council and they voted to proceed on that basis. They also voted to consult with all the ratepayers' associations and business groups who naturally were delighted that the Council had opted for the cheapest and quickest option.

No, of course they weren't! All groups were opposed to the idea. Such was the negative feeling generated in the town as a result that the Hotel's owners felt it was detrimental to the business and so asked to terminate the discussions on the proposed sale and that marked the end of the Palace Hotel as a candidate though the Council's search rumbled on though it was obvious that it was left with only one option and that wouldn't open for another 38 years.

## Conservation Area Responsibilities - A Regular Reminder.

Despite this regular reminder every year sees several residents having to replace recently fitted windows needlessly because they have not heeded this advice.



Do not fit UPVC windows or doors to your property where they can be seen from the road or side road. As this is a Conservation Area any new windows or doors fitted should be in the style and material as originally fitted when the property was built. In nearly all cases that means timber.

There are many other types of work where additional planning controls apply and permission is normally only given if proposed development preserves or enhances the property's character. Demolition of buildings and work to trees are also controlled.

If in doubt, ask before you commit yourself so you don't have to pay twice. The council offers a simple guide available on its website [www.southend.gov.uk](http://www.southend.gov.uk) - a link is also available from our website.

## Help and Advice

We are often asked to help residents with their queries over fences, parking or their properties. We are happy to do this but we have one qualification - you must be a member of the Society.

## Contact Us

Chairman	Tony Brown	15 Park Crescent	394094
Vice-Chairman	Andrew Atkinson	28 Park Road	335808
Secretary	Julia Cannon	15 Park Terrace	331941
Membership Sec	Michael Mann	9 Park Terrace	333551

**Other Executive Members:** Paul Cavanagh, Jill Freeth (Park Crescent), Neil Lands (Avenue Terrace), Susan Wright, Gill Salter

**Email us - [info@miltonconservationsociety.com](mailto:info@miltonconservationsociety.com) or find us on Facebook.**