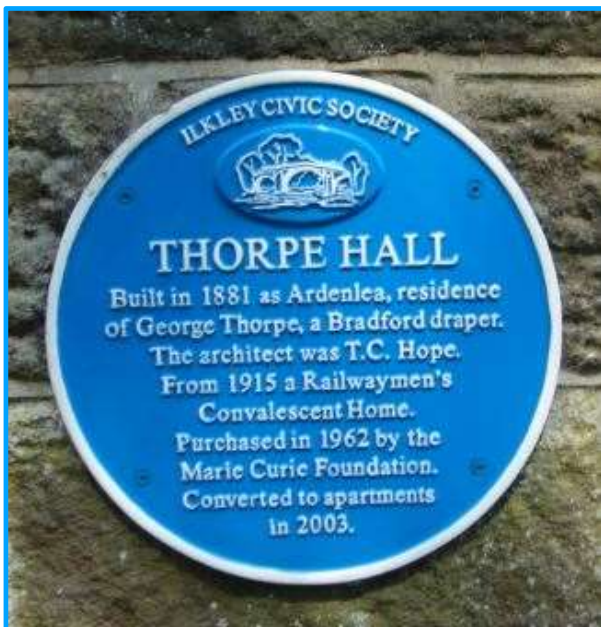


TAKE A STROLL WITH THE U3A AND CIVIC SOCIETY ALONG ILKLEY'S BLUE PLAQUE TRAIL

If you are looking for a purpose in your lockdown walk through Ilkley, you can do no better than to follow the trail of Ilkley's blue plaque historic buildings. These are featured in two new talks offered by Ilkley & District U3A and Ilkley Civic Society given by leading local historian, Alex Cockshott. The online Zoom talks, in February and March, will be available to watch on the U3A's website once they have occurred and are open to the general public. Through this collaboration with the U3A, Ilkley Civic Society hopes to broadcast the talks to a wider audience than those of the two organisations involved, so that everyone living in the town and surrounding area has access to this fascinating local history.

Blue plaques were first erected in London in 1867 and are now in most historic towns. The Civic Society is responsible for developing the idea in Ilkley, and the Town Hall plaque was the first to be unveiled in June 2004. Since then, twenty plaques have been erected, the most recent in November 2020 at the Rombalds Apartments, formerly Rombalds Hotel, on Wells Road. The blue plaques celebrate the history of Ilkley and the buildings that have shaped the town.

In her talks, Alex takes a walk back in time, to highlight some of the more interesting facts about the history of the buildings and the people who built or lived in them. The first presentation, in February, will look at ten blue plaque sites on a trail from the Town Hall up towards Ilkley Moor. These include Hillside Court on Crossbeck Road where Charles Darwin and his family stayed on a visit to Ilkley in 1859, Thorpe Hall (formerly Ardenlea) which was the home of Bradford draper, George Thorpe, and Wells House, a luxurious, hydropathic hotel and later, after the 2nd World war, a teacher training college.



Thorpe Hall



Wells House

The second talk, in March, begins at the railway station and covers the old village of Ilkley and artisan area. The ten blue plaque buildings below The Grove reflect the working part of the village. As expected, buildings such as the Manor House and Ilkley Playhouse are on the list, but others

like the old national school (now Tower Court) might be less well known. Alex will elaborate on the history and more interesting facts about the buildings. For instance, the Crescent Hotel on the corner of Brook Street and the A65 has been a landmark since it opened in 1861 but did you know that it originally offered not only accommodation, fine dining and extensive stabling but also a bowling green and archery butts?

The Civic Society always welcomes suggestions of other buildings which might merit a blue plaque. Anyone can make a suggestion, but the designation of a blue plaque building has to have the permission of the building's owner and, if the building is listed, also from the Council. Often designation is easier when a large building is undergoing a change of purpose. For instance, when Rombalds Hotel was being converted to apartments, the Civic Society was able to talk to the developer and get his agreement. Sponsorship is needed to help to offset the costs of researching, making and erecting the plaques.



Sometimes the announcement of a new blue plaque is an excuse for welcoming a celebrity along to unveil it. As a 'son of Ilkley' and a former trainee gardener for the Council, Alan Titchmarsh was invited to unveil the plaque at the Town Hall and the actor Timothy West came along to do the same at the Ilkley Playhouse.

Commenting on the collaboration with the U3A, Alex Cockshott says, "Ilkley & District U3A is the latest group that the Civic Society has worked with and we welcome this opportunity to continue our aims of educating and celebrating the history of Ilkley."

Ilkley U3A's John Hancock says, "Our U3A is delighted to be collaborating with the Civic Society on these presentations and we look forward to working with them again in the future. It is a splendid idea to open the talks up to the public so they can learn more about the town they live in."

The blue plaque talks are taking place online on **Thursday 25 February and Thursday 25th March**, both **at 10.30am**. To book your free place in the zoom audience go to talksgroup@ilkleyu3a.org or, if you are a U3A member you can register on the Ilkley & District U3A website at ilkleyu3a.org. As a member of Ilkley & District U3A you have access to these and other talks in addition to group and social activities. There are over 140 groups to choose from, many of which are operating on zoom during the pandemic. If you would like to find out about all the U3A's activities, then go to the website and follow the links. Visit us also on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/IlkleyU3A/> and Twitter: <https://twitter.com/IlkleyU3A>. Further information about Ilkley Civic Society can be found at civicsociety.ilkley.org

Ilkley Civic Society is a group interested in Ilkley past and present. They help to preserve, develop, improve and research features of historic and public interest in Ilkley. They also seek to promote high standards of planning and architecture and educate the public in geography, history, natural history and architecture. The Society works with local schools and welcomes people sharing information and memories about Ilkley.

Ilkley & District U3A is a friendly organisation with over 1,500 local members. It offers opportunities to get to know new people, learn new things and make friendships through shared interests and hobbies. Membership is open to all in their 'third age' – typically those who are retired, semi-retired or working part-time. Activities are based around Ilkley but also cover Otley, Addingham, Silsden and Menston.

There are groups to appeal to all tastes – from art, languages and science to current affairs, philosophy and music, as well as more active pursuits such as walking, table tennis, croquet and visits to places of interest. Members are encouraged to start their own groups if they have a particular interest they would like to explore. There's also a programme of regular events, both social and educational. Ilkley & District U3A is run by members, for members.

Find out more from the website: <https://ilkleyu3a.org> You'll also find us on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/IlkleyU3A/> and Twitter: <https://twitter.com/IlkleyU3A>