



NEWSLETTER October-November 2020

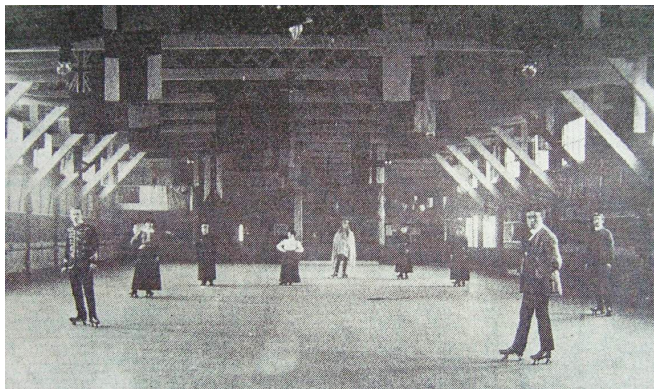
CHESTERFIELD'S SKATING RINKS

It may come as something of a surprise to learn that Chesterfield has had three skating rinks, two of which came to a catastrophic end. It will be less of a surprise to learn that they were for roller skating not ice skating.

The first one was opened by J. B. White and Sons in Elder Yard in March 1876. It was opposite where the Golden Fleece now stands – at the time Elder Way was the narrow Elder Yard and that section of Knifsmithgate did not exist. The rink was 112ft x 51ft, a total of 5700 sq ft. It was floored with Limmer Asphalt which the *Derbyshire Times* reporter thought was harder than ice if one fell. Roller skating was advertised as a form of exercise for ladies. There were three sessions each day except Sunday. The rink was well lit at night and there was a comfortable gallery for ladies and others who did not wish to join the throng below. By January 1888 roller skating was no longer as popular and the building was used as a warehouse and a drill ground for the Chesterfield Volunteers thanks to Lt Charles James White, son of J. B. White.

In December 1894 a severe gale struck Chesterfield, the market stalls were wrecked, tiles and chimney pots endangered any pedestrians, a large piece of lead was torn from the church steeple, but the greatest damage was to the skating rink which was completely wrecked. The wall on the north side remained, the others were reduced to a couple of feet in height.

On 15th September 1909 the new Premier Rink was opened on West Bars next to Park Hotel formerly West House the former home of Olave Soames (later Olave Baden-Powell). Roller hockey and speed skating were very popular with Chesterfield competing against some of the best teams in the Midlands. One of the members of the team was Fred Renshaw who became the manager of the rink at the end of 1910. He had a grocer's shop at the junction of Chester Street and Chatsworth Road. He had been a fine ice skater, but was also well known for roller skating, swimming and bowling.



He offered the rink 'to let for balls, whist drives, concerts and other entertainments. Floor space was advertised as about 18,000 square feet and the seating capacity as over 2,000'. Over the years well as skating the building was used for dancing, fairs, carnivals, trade exhibitions, boxing matches, public meetings and concerts.

Speakers included Lloyd George and Lord Birkenhead. Exhibitions included the ten day civic and industrial exhibition by the traders to raise money for the hospital in 1917.

On the 20 February 1932 disaster struck when the rink caught fire. Such was the speed that the fire spread that within 10 minutes of it being spotted the whole place which was chiefly of wood was ablaze. The building was completely destroyed together with chairs, skates, a fairy fountain, and two orchestrans together with 30 150 year old engravings procured from Madam Tussauds, some fossils and antiques.



Thankfully the fire occurred at night – if it had happened when the rink was open to the public the death toll could have been high.

On the other side of Chesterfield the Rendezvous opened as a dance hall in 1925, following conversion from the maltings which had been owned by the Burkitt family. The building stood on Sheffield Road opposite the Girls' High School (now the University of Derby.) The dance hall was extremely popular offering dancing on six nights a week. Following the destruction of the Premier Rink the Rendezvous Dance Hall began to stage boxing matches and wrestling. At the same time the popularity of dancing there declined. In 1937 a new manager George Jackson took over. Like Renshaw he was a former roller hockey player and proficient skater and dancer. In February 1938 the Rendezvous re-opened as a skating rink. The Spire Rink Hockey Club was founded by Jackson in 1939 and the club inflicted some heavy defeats on other local teams. Interest in skating was increasing and the future looked bright but on 19 November, when introducing a match between Derby Condors and Chesterfield, Jackson announced that there would be no more skating until further notice. Chesterfield won 6-2 but that was the end of roller skating in Chesterfield.

SOME EVENTS OF WHICH YOU MAY BE UNAWARE

1. TRAVELLED ON HIS OWN ENGINE

Mr Wm Burkitt of Kings Lynn rode from Kings Lynn to Chesterfield on a little locomotive he had specially designed for use in his extensive works at the former place. He left Lynn on the Great Eastern at six o'clock in the morning and travelled via Lincoln where he joined the LDECR arriving in Chesterfield about 11 o'clock. He was met by his brother Mr S Burkitt, Charles Markham (mayor of Chesterfield), officials from the LDECR and friends. After lunching with his brother he returned to Lynn leaving Chesterfield about three o'clock. (*Sheffield Daily Telegraph* 25 July 1897)

2. FLYING BOAT STRANDED

Novelty for Chesterfield People.

On Thursday afternoon the hull of the world's largest flying boat was stranded in Chesterfield whilst being taken on a lorry from Gosport to Bradford. Upon arriving at the bridge in Lordsmill Street, over which the Midland Railway passes on its way to Brampton, it was found that the hull could not pass beneath it. It was necessary to reverse towards the Horn's Bridge under which it had come, but in doing so the strain on the steering gear of the lorry was apparently too much, and it broke. A new gear has been sent for from London, but it is not expected to arrive before Saturday or Sunday. The hull is 65 feet long and when completed the machine will be the largest of its kind in the world. When mounted on the

lorry, the top is 15 feet 10 inches above the ground. It is stated that engine will develop 2,400 horse power. (*Derbyshire Courier* 5 April 1919)

3. NATIONAL MOUSE SHOW AT CHESTERFIELD

There were about 300 entries for mice and rats in the show from as far away as Brighton, Swansea, Morpeth, Plymouth. Exhibitors included women. (*Derbyshire Courier* 8 June 1908)

4. CHESTERFIELD GAS-FILLED BUS SUCCESSFUL TRIAL RUN TO ROTHERHAM (T.P.Wood's Almanac)

For further information about the bus see *Derbyshire Times* 29 October 1932 p16.

5. MISS MERCEDES GLEITZ'S ENDURANCE SWIM AT CHESTERFIELD

Miss Mercedes Gleitze, Britain's long distance swimmer, concluded her endurance swim in the bath at the Central Schools, Ashgate Road, Chesterfield, at 9.30 on Saturday night, after having been in the water 45½ hours, thus breaking her previous record of 45 hours set at Rotherham Baths recently. Miss Gleitze entered the water at midnight on Thursday, and remained throughout Friday and Saturday. She was given chicken broth and honey at intervals, and was entertained with gramophone records. ... There were many visitors throughout Saturday, and on innumerable occasions did Miss Gleitze swim to the side of the bath, take a pencil and programme, and smilingly oblige the enthusiastic autograph hunters. ... At the bewitching hour of 9:30 Ald. H. Cropper (chairman of Chesterfield Education Committee), announced: "I declare the swim closed." (*Derbyshire Times* 29 January 1932)

CHESTERFIELD'S MAN OF MUSIC

Frederick Staton was born at Mosbro, Eckington, where he deputised for his uncle at the village chapel before being introduced to the organist at Chesterfield Parish when he was 12-years-old, starting an association with the church which lasted for 40 years; for much of the time he was organist and choir master. He became the conductor of the Chesterfield Orchestral Society founded in 1893 and the Chesterfield (Amateur) Operatic Society founded in 1905. This latter society was the latest in a line of choral societies in Chesterfield dating back to the Chesterfield Choral Society which was formed in 1860 although it didn't perform regularly until the 1870s. This was wound up in about 1890. The Chesterfield Sunday School Choir became the Harmonic Society in 1884. It performed the Messiah every Christmas, but was wound up because of the lack of support in 1907. This was partly because of the formation of the Chesterfield (Amateur) Operatic Society. However this society performed music of a lighter style – particularly the works of Gilbert and Sullivan.

Frederick Staton was the driving force behind the foundation of the Chesterfield and District Musical Union in 1907, which performed a broader range of music. The qualifications for membership were a 'fairly passable voice, brains to use it and enthusiasm'. The organisation was non-sectarian and rehearsals were to be held away from any church or chapel, which rather limited the places for rehearsal. All these choral societies took part in competitions throughout the country but the Musical Union went further travelling to Paris in 1912 for the *Concours International de Musique* in Paris in 1912. Competing against choirs from England, Scotland and France, they were awarded joint first prize and first prize for sight reading.

Two years later the choir performed in the Dieppe International Musical Competition where the choir won first prize for sight reading, first prize for studied music and second prize for the *Concours D'Honneur*. Despite having only short notice of the competitions, Jessie Fearnough took first prize in the mezzo soprano class and Winnie Elliot took second prize in the contralto class.



The choir in 1914

Undoubtedly the successes of the choir owed much to their conductor Frederick Staton, who was awarded a special medallion for his conducting at the Paris competition. As well as Chesterfield, Staton was involved with music in Derby, Sheffield, Rotherham and Barnsley.

During the Great War he was 2nd Lieutenant in the Royal Engineers, winning a Belgian Croix de Guerre. After the war increasingly he was in demand as adjudicator at musical festivals up and down the country and by the late twenties he was making trips across the Atlantic. In 1934 he was adjudicator in the national competitions in England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales, where he was created a Bard at the National Eisteddfod.

In August 1926 Staton arranged for the Chesterfield Musical Union and the Hasland Prize Band to visit Belgium.

Unfortunately choral societies began to suffer as the result of the popularity of music newly available on the wireless and the gramophone. The Musical Union was no exception operating at a financial loss for several years before it performed its last concert in 1932.

The first Chesterfield Musical Festival was held in February 1924 and it continued until November 1938.

In February 1939 Dr Staton was married quietly to Miss Vera Greaves – his second marriage. The next day the couple set sail for Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Ceylon and the West Indies for adjudication work and examination activities. Originally the trip was intended to last a year but it was six years before the couple returned to Chesterfield. He had been a guest conductor for many leading choirs and orchestras during his travels. In recognition of services in promoting fine music during the war years he was made an Honorary Member of both the Royal Academy and the Royal College of Music.

Unfortunately, by the time he returned to Chesterfield, Frederick was suffering from rheumatism. Having spent much of the war in warmer climates the couple soon moved to the milder climate of Minehead in Somerset. He maintained his interest in musical activities in Chesterfield until his death in May 1961. If he had still been alive he would have been devastated to hear about the fire which destroyed the Schneltzer organ, which he had spent many hours playing, at the Parish Church the following December.

Choirs and orchestras have come and gone. Chesterfield Operatic Society (founded 1905) is still in existence. Mention must be made of the Chesterfield Male Voice Choir formed in October 1922. The Choir's inaugural concert was performed at Chesterfield Market Hall on March 14th 1923. The Chesterfield Cooperative Choral Society is also still in existence having been founded in 1937 as the Chesterfield Labour Party Choir. Chesterfield Symphony Orchestra is very much the junior organisation having been founded in 1982. Hopefully all will survive the present difficult times.