**Hero who shortened World War Two attended threatened school  - 18th August 2016**

As a second Public Meeting is called about the fate of the former Wilnecote School buildings in New Road, The Tamworth and District Civic Society (TDCS) has made a further startling discovery in its battle to save the Victorian buildings from demolition by Staffordshire County Council.

In addition to boasting Basil Champneys - one of the most famous architects in British history - as its designer, and Harry Hibbs - officially classed as one of the 100 greatest footballers of the Twentieth Century - as its most celebrated pupil, it has now been uncovered by the Civic Society that Tamworth’s George Cross hero of World War Two, Colin Grazier was also a pupil of the New Road buildings.

Staffordshire County Council drew up plans last year to sell the former school site to *Housing 21*to build some 50 social housing flats in place of the beloved landmark buildings - a move which when it became public knowledge caused widespread outrage amongst residents, and the community groups who used the site until evicted by the County Council at the end of 2015.  A public meeting was called by users of the buildings in October last year at which 100 attendees made loud and clear their opposition to the county’s proposals.  A bid to acquire the buildings as an on-going community asset was, controversially, rejected by the county council earlier this year.

However,  the town’s civic society has been doggedly on the case of protecting the heritage buildings since it was re-launched last September.  In May TDCS Chairman Dr. David Biggs uncovered the fact that the schools were designed in 1877 by Basil Champneys (1842-1935) one of the most famous, innovative, and celebrated architects in British history.  David said at the time: “Tamworth and Wilnecote have an architectural gem in their midst that we should all be incredibly proud of, and TDCS will not sit idly by and let Staffordshire County Council rob Tamworth of yet more of its precious heritage for its own financial gain.”

The most famous pupil of the Wilnecote Schools has always been considered to be footballing legend Harry Hibbs (1906-1984).  Tamworth’s greatest sporting hero was goalkeeper for Birmingham and England in the 1920s and 1930s, and he  features on the Football League’s centenary list of the top 100 players of the Twentieth Century.  Contemporaries called him “the best goalkeeper in the world.”

Now, David has uncovered the fact that Tamworth’s Second World War hero Colin Grazier, George Cross, also attended the school.  Grazier’s story was little known until  the 1990s because of the Official Secrets Act, but he is now world-famous for having helped to alter the course of the war and to shorten the path to victory.  The 22 year old sailor from Two Gates sacrificed his life salvaging German codes from the sinking U-boat 559 which were then used by boffins at Bletchley Park to crack the Enigma Code to discover German plans and movements.  In 2002 a memorial by celebrated sculptor Walenty Pytel was erected, through public subscription, to Grazier and his colleagues Fasson and Brown, in St. Editha’s Square in Tamworth.  The roads on a housing estate at Two Gates were also named after Grazier and other aspects of the 1942 event.

David explained: “I thought that Colin spent all his school days at Two Gates.  I was talking to the well-known Tamworth naturalist Maurice Arnold, an old boy of Wilnecote Schools, about his personal memories of Harry Hibbs, when he suddenly said: “You do know that Colin Grazier went to Wilnecote School as well, don’t you?”  I hadn’t realised that in the 1930s Two Gates pupils did not spend all their school days at the school in The Hollow.  They transferred for their senior years to the buildings in New Road.  Maurice was at Wilnecote when Colin was there!  I’ve since had confirmation from others that Colin attended Wilnecote senior school.”

David asked: “What more information does Tamworth Borough Council want in order to act urgently to protect these remarkable and historically significant buildings?!  We have attractive, landmark structures that enhance our environment and townscape, that served as a useful community asset, which were designed by one of the most famous architects in British history, which have two former pupils who are of local, national and international significance.  They can easily be incorporated into the Wilnecote Conservation Area as any site visit shows, and are outstanding candidates for inclusion in the Local List.  These two actions are immediately open to Tamworth Borough Council to implement straight away in order to protect the buildings from the county council.  If the councillors and officers at Tamworth Council let down their residents and electors on this issue and these buildings are lost, it will be unforgivable and to their everlasting shame and disgrace.  They need to stand up for Tamworth against Staffordshire County Council - who are only custodians of these Tamworth heritage buildings - and they need to do it now.”

Both TDCS and the national charity for Victorian and Edwardian buildings, The Victorian Society, are pressing Tamworth Borough Council to protect the buildings by   adding them to the Local List of significant buildings, and to the Wilnecote Conservation Area, without any further delay.  The Victorian Society states: “our belief is that the historic school buildings are attractive, characterful and worthy of retention. Furthermore, they are – like many former school buildings – eminently capable of being repurposed."   Two former Council Leaders and Mayors, Irene Davies and John Garner, have also publicly called upon the present council leadership to act immediately to protect the borough’s heritage.

The Public Meeting will be held in Holy Trinity Parish Church, Watling Street, Wilnecote, on Thursday 18th August, starting at 7.30 p.m..

