Library House

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Heritage: New plaque for Library House

Historic site is honoured by civic society

By Graham Chalmers
graham.chalmers@jpimedia.co.uk
@HgateAdvertiser

A new plaque has been unveiled at a building steeped in important Harrogate history, including this newspaper's.

The current owner of Library House, Graeme Lee, who is the founder of Springfield Healthcare, was on hand as Harrogate Mayor Coun Bernard Bateman cut the red ribbon on one of Harrogate Civic Society's renowned brown plaques.

Owned by 18th century bookseller Ely Hargrove, who was born in 1741, the building on Regent Parade was originally a shop at first before the man who also published Harrogate's first guide book turned it into the town's first subscription library.

Henry Pankhurst, chairman of Harrogate Civic Society which has been responsible for 80 plaques so far, some of which mark notable residents and visitors to Harrogate such as Florence Nightingale and Niccolo Paganini, said the new plaque showed how important the town's heritage was.

He also said the society planned to create a new series of plaque trails in Harrogate.

He said: "Plaques are important as an educational tool but they also add interest to the town, especially when they highlight unexpected and unusual facts."

"There not just about buildings that still exist but, occasionally, lost buildings, too.

"If all the scripts of these plaques put together, it would amount to a fair idea of the history of the town.

"The Civic Society intends using plaques to create trails, such as short ones that can be done individually or could be linked up to form longer ones."

Among the other civic dignitaries in attendance at the ceremony were the chairman of Harrogate Civic Society, Henry Pankhurst and leading historian Malcolm Neesam, who both talked about the building's impressive past.

So famous was Library House in the early years of the 19th century when Harrogate first became a magnet for visitors from around the UK and abroad, it was even mentioned in Sir Walter Scott's 1823 novel St Ronan's Well.

'Library House' changed hands and was the site of the town's first 'Weekly List of Visitors'.

This, in turn, inspired a rival Stage Coach Calendar which, in 1836, became the Harrogate Advertiser.

The rest, as they say, is history.

Making history in Harrogate - Graeme Lee and his partner Janie Boston with the plaque. (1812111AM3)