

Just a few bits of the castle

AS magical mystery curs go, there was perhaps more mystery than magic.

We had gone in urgent search of Sheffield's past, and most of it wasn't there. "If you look over the road," said Ron Clayton on Lady's Bridge, "you're looking at where the curtain wall of Sheffield Castle used to be."

We looked over the road. An Eager Beaver and an Army ambulance from 1990 sped across our 1290 vista. The Don swirled brownly and the concrete back-end of the markets clouded the eye of history.

So we walked up Waingate and gazed over the car park where the ABC Cinema used to be.

"There could be foundations of Tudor buildings under there," said Ron.

We summoned our imaginations, but it still looked like a car park.

What's not there is very much Ron Clayton's point.

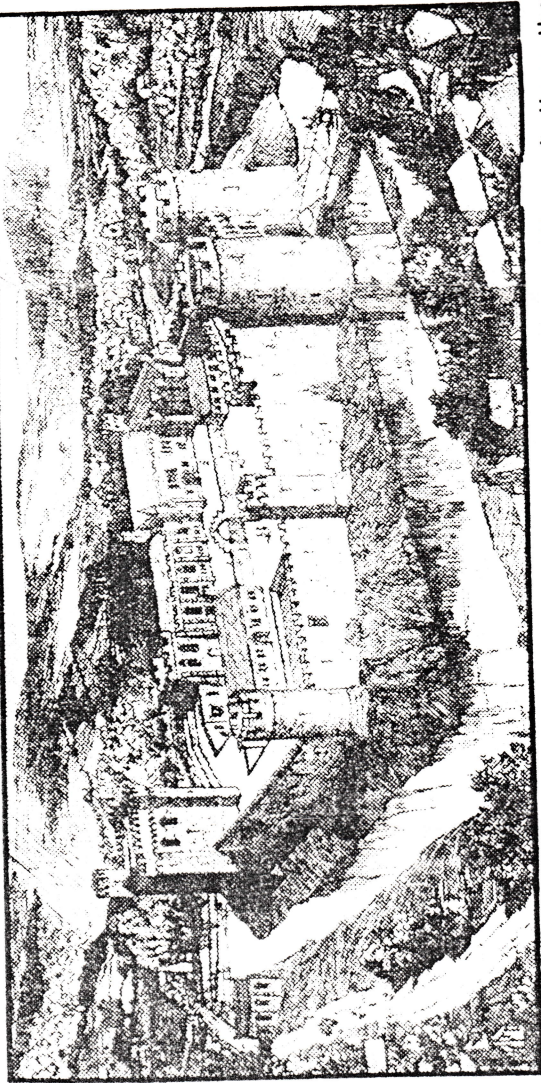
Stephen McClarence

The aim is to unearth clues about the city's medieval core. It extended modestly from Lady's Bridge up Haymarket and Waingate as far as the Cathedral (and would have fitted very neatly in the proposed Castlegate centre).

"We'd hopefully be able to develop an idea of what the medieval town plan looked like," says John Little.

"The big problem about this medieval core is how much was taken out during the redevelopments in the 1960s, and before that by the bombing.

"If there's anything left of the archeology it would be shops and town-houses. And developers to help fund



"If you believe the descriptions, the castle was an impressive place. It must have been impressive for Mary Queen of Scots to be imprisoned there."

The few bits, under Castle Market, have the look of a modest rockery, as a week of public open days demonstrated three years ago. A complete tour of the ruins takes between 35 and 40 seconds.

Other bits and pieces have been unearthed at other times — and Ron Clayton duly produces photographs of them.

"Now I wouldn't swear to the authenticity of this," he says, studying a picture of a trim piece of masonry. "Too modern" says Pete Quincey.

"Too precise," says Ron. "But this..."

"Typical Norman that." "But if you believe the descriptions, the castle was an impressive place. It must have been impressive for Mary Queen of Scots to be imprisoned there."

The conversation has turned inevitably to Mary Queen of Scots and from there even more inevitably to Keith Cheetam, her one-time Sheffield public relations manager.

And the Hillsborough society itself?

Membership varies, says Ron. Different events attract different numbers — "about 20 stalwarts, though we had 50 for a lecture on the Sheffield Flood. You always get a good gate for the Flood."

The appeal of it all? Ron doesn't need to stop to think.

"It's your heritage, your roots, the character of the place you live, the feeling of continuity — and in practical terms a boost to your town's image."

"Plus like the rest of the country, there's an awful lot that should have been recorded but wasn't — and that's sad, because you can't replace it."

Except by shopping centres, of course.

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