

BIRMINGHAM EVENING MAIL 24TH JULY 2001 (?)

The magnificent seven....who all deserve a place of pride in Birmingham

BRUM'S HALL OF FAME...

It was ironic that Birmingham's Lord Mayor should have been suffering from a temporary loss of voice on this particular day of decision.

The issue at stake was one about which Birmingham itself has been strangely voiceless over the years.

But, virus infection or not, Councillor Edward Hanson let it be known that he is determined to put matters right.

Birmingham at long last, is to have its Hall of Fame.

Clearing his throat and talking only with difficulty, Councillor Hanson told me: "It is an absolute mystery to me why it has never happened before. Whatever the reasons I am determined to put the matter right. We should have a Hall of Fame and I am determined that it shall get under way in my term of office."

The Lord Mayor's decision follows the response by Evening Mail readers to suggestions that something should be done to commemorate Tony Hancock, a man who became one of Britain's leading comedians of his time and who was born in Hall Green, Birmingham.

Readers have also donated sufficient money to have a special plaque made and it now seems certain this will be placed on the house in Southam road, Hall Green, where Tony Hancock was born.

This aspect of the commemoration of Tony Hancock is now well in hand. The Birmingham Civic Society has been consulted and it will cooperate with any plans.

Tony Hancock's widow, Mrs Freddie Ross Hancock, has been very keen on the idea and it is the hope of the Lord Mayor that she will be able to come to Birmingham for the unveiling of the plaque.

It is the tremendous interest shown in marking the memory of Tony Hancock that has made Councillor Hanson the more determined to go one stage further and create Birmingham's long awaited Hall of Fame.

"Obviously," he said, "Tony Hancock will be the first subject."

At the same time, such a decision will give Birmingham a chance to pay tribute to another of its famous comedians, Sid Field.

It is felt these two would set the tone and character of the proposed Hall. The basic idea is that it should feature entertainers, writers, musicians and artists.

"These are the kind of people the public can identify with", said the Lord Mayor. "We have our inventors and our industrialists, but their place is in the Science Museum.

I want the Hall of Fame to be our sort of star place."

The great question is where it is to be situated. There have been a number of suggestions, linking Birmingham's theatres and TV studios.

But the idea under most serious consideration is a place in the city's new central library.

The next great debate, of course, will centre on the people who are chosen to take their place in the Hall of Fame.

The idea will defeat itself unless there is careful and strict selectivity. But a number of names immediately spring to mind.

J R R Tolkien, the distinguished author who created the Hobbits certainly deserves a place. He spent his childhood in Birmingham.

Albert Ketelbey, the Handsworth born composer of such popular classics as "In a Monastery Garden" should be included too.

Conan Doyle, creator of Sherlock Holmes, deserves consideration. His early years as a general practitioner were spent in Aston.

Paul Schofield, the man many consider to be one of Britain's greatest living actors, was born in Birmingham.