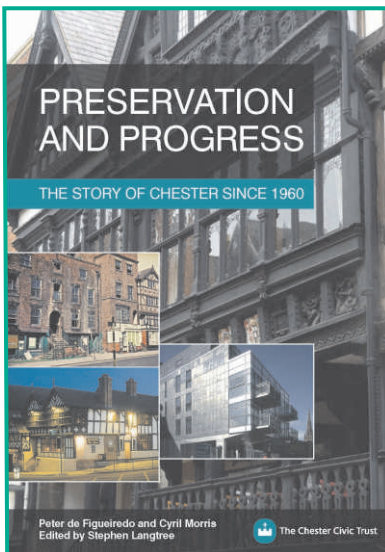


The Chester Civic Trust NEWSLETTER

December 2012

JUBILEE BOOK LAUNCH

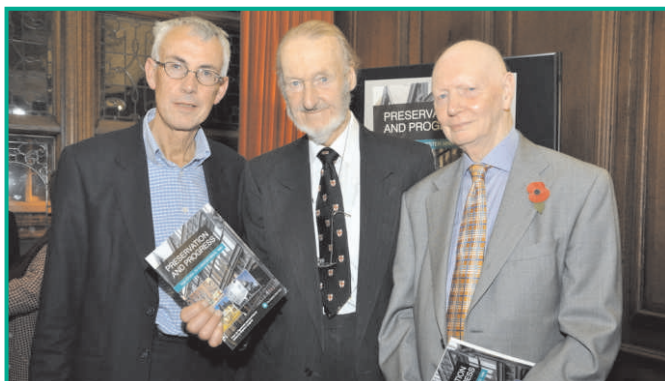


Chester Civic Trust has celebrated its Golden Jubilee with the publication of *Preservation and Progress: The Story of Chester Since 1960*. The book launch was held at Bishop Lloyd's Palace on 2nd November.

Describing it as “an enjoyable

and authoritative book”, Sir Donald Insall, who earlier in the day had received an honorary degree from the University of Chester, said he hoped the book will be read by all who love and care for the city. Dedicated to those who founded the Trust in 1960, the book records a significant period in the development of Chester and the first 50 years of the Trust. It is lavishly illustrated with over 250 photographs in full colour.

Discussions about a book began way back in 2005. Jan Hore was the first to offer help; she made several oral history recordings and started trawling through our archives to identify issues and material for what was then



Sir Donald Insall (centre) with Peter de Figueiredo and Cyril Morris

expected to be a history of Chester Civic Trust. A year later, in collaboration with Cyril Morris, we decided that there was a bigger story to tell – not least, recounting the huge changes to Chester in the 1960s and '70s. Cyril is a founder member of Chester Civic Trust and, as Director of Technical Services for Chester City Council, became a leading advocate of the highly acclaimed Conservation Programme. His knowledge, coupled with that of Peter de Figueiredo, the City's Conservation Officer from 1989-99, has given us the ideal combination of authors. We are hugely indebted to them both.

Thanks also go to Jan, for a great deal of typing among other things, Caroline Holton, John Tweed and everyone else who contributed in any way to the production of the book. Publication marks the final part of our Golden Jubilee celebration, which is now complete : what a relief!

Stephen Langtree

SYNOPSIS

Is Chester an historic city or a modern city? Is it a finely balanced and well managed combination of the two, or an uncomfortable and paranoid victim of a split personality? It's a dilemma highlighted, if not created, by our Victorian forebears, and played out in good measure since the end of the Second World War. When Chester Civic Trust was founded in 1960, its initial enthusiasm for high quality contemporary design was soon tempered by the urgent need to save an endangered historic townscape. Demolition on an unprecedented scale could not be stopped, but was it always necessary, and what would follow in its wake?

Copies of the book are available from Chester Civic Trust at Bishop Lloyd's Palace and from local book sellers. For more information on ways to purchase, visit the Trust's website.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

VISIT TO BOSTON AND GRANTHAM

As well as visiting the two towns of the title, this three night trip provided a welcome introduction for some, and a reminder for others, to the wider Lincolnshire countryside and settlements set in the delightful Wolds and agriculturally productive Fens. Our first stop, on 19th October, was at Belton House, where the 'below stairs' tour was no doubt a response by the National Trust to the public fascination with life at the big house in the 18th and 19th century. It was a terrific insight into the subtle and not so subtle hierarchies that existed in the great houses right in to the 20th century.

This was a prelude to our arrival at Boston and our hotel base, the White Hart, beautifully situated alongside the River Witham in the centre of Boston, and a two minute walk away from its fine market square. After dinner at the hotel, Christine Russell outlined the economic significance of Boston, both in the past and today.

On the Saturday Christine led us on an exploratory trail around the historic core of this important market town and port. Evidently, from the wonderful variety of historic buildings that we saw, Boston escaped most of the major pressures for comprehensive redevelopment in the 1960s. The charm was in the variety of the narrow lanes, open spaces, and buildings in their settings, rather than the individual properties, excepting of course St Botolph's church; better known as the Boston Stump and the Cathedral of the Fens, it has the highest parish church tower in England. The tower was planned in the 1300s when Boston was second only to London as a wool port.

We were greeted at the church by Judy and John Cammack, from the Boston Preservation Trust. Judy explained how religious dissent in the early 17th century resulted in the departure of a great fleet of ships carrying Puritans, sailing to America in the 1630s, and founding the Massachusetts Bay Colony and the city of Boston. In the afternoon, Judy and John met us again at Fydell House, a fine 17th century town house now in the ownership of the Preservation Trust. At dinner that evening Judy expanded on her indefatigable activity in linking the two Bostons, to the benefit of both.

Sunday morning in Grantham was surprisingly quiet, with most shopkeepers choosing not to trade on that day. This lack of activity was an opportunity for our excellent guides from Grantham Civic Society to show us the town centre and explain the work of their society to "preserve the good in the old...encourage the good in the new". Most memorable was the church of St Wulfram, with its phenomenal spire - the highest of any medieval church in the country. It was a reminder that we were in a county of great churches and cathedrals.



After a short stop en route at the delightful Harlaxton village, Christine explained the work of the community in producing the first village design statement in England. This was instrumental in preventing inappropriate over-development. Thence to Woolsthorpe Manor, the childhood home of Isaac Newton. Today it is well managed and interpreted by the National Trust, and incidentally, thanks to the interactive science area, brought out the inner child in a significant number of our party.

On the final day we visited two fascinating sites that demonstrated the rural economy, past and present. Batemans Brewery, located in Wainfleet, shows how the independent brewer is surviving and even expanding. With nearly 70 pubs in Lincolnshire, Notts and Cambridge, it survived (just) the threat of the national brands of beer in the 1960s and thrives today. We each had a little refresher before leaving Batemans.

Moving on to Heckington Windmill, we lunched on site before visiting this unique eight sail windmill. Managed by the charitable Heckington Windmill Trust and entirely run by volunteers, this is a must-see destination. We were told that a bid has been put in for Heritage Lottery funding to improve facilities for visitors. No need to wait for the improvements. Go and see it now! It feels so authentic in its unimproved state. And so, reluctantly, it was back to the coach for the return journey home, and to recall what a terrific weekend Christine had given us, as tour planner and guide. Also, our thanks are due to Pat Barry and Jan Hore for their efficient administrative support, which is much appreciated.



Peter Bingham

VISIT TO KENDAL AND KIRBY LONSDALE

A lovely warm and sunny September Saturday welcomed a good sized Chester Civic Trust group that had arrived in the ancient market town of Kendal for this two-centre day visit. We started at Grade I listed Abbot Hall. This fine property was completed in 1762, but by the 1950s was nearly derelict and threatened with demolition. It exists today thanks to the efforts of the local community, including Alfred Wainwright the fell walker, in raising funds for its restoration and conversion into an Art Gallery.

Our guides from the Kendal Civic Society welcomed us in the grounds and we set off for a walk through the town. We quickly learned that for many years Kendal was one of the most important wool towns in the country, even more important than those in West Yorkshire. It was also a stopping off point for cattle drives from Scotland as well as holding a very important market, which still continues today. Passing through and by many fascinating lanes, walkways and yards, we made our way to the Town Hall, designed by the local Georgian architect Francis Webster and his son George. It originally comprised the Assembly Rooms (1825) with a town hall extension (1859). We were fascinated to see and touch some of the priceless symbols of this proud town during a visit to the Mayor's Parlour, which had kindly been arranged for us by our hosts.

After a convivial lunch break, and still enjoying brilliant weather, we transferred to Kirby Lonsdale, another fine provincial town that thanks to its location retains intact the sense of being, architecturally, a town of the 17th to 19th century. The good number of independently owned shops is a testament to this continuing tradition and heritage, as were the lovely lanes, alleyways and cobbled courtyards. To round off the day we headed to nearby Twitfield through gorgeous countryside to the Longlands Inn, where a steel band was playing: apparently welcoming our arrival, it turned out to be part of a wedding celebration. We dined well; this added to our feeling of enjoyment and well-being.

As ever, our grateful thanks to Martin, Cynthia and others on the Events Committee, who made this an enjoyable and stimulating day.

Peter Bingham



DAY TRIP TO LIVERPOOL

Fifty one members this year went to Liverpool on a rain soaked Wednesday in June to see four locations outside the central city. The first building visited was the Grade I Listed Princes Road Synagogue. Built in 1874 to replace the smaller original neo-classical building, it was the first major commission of the Audsley brothers. Not Jewish themselves, they researched principally in Spain and produced an 'oriental' concoction for this Liverpool site. The original minarets were declared unsafe in 1960, but the interior of the building remains in essence how it was.

Our second visit was to Sefton Park to see the restored Palm House. A five-minute meander around the Park's walks discovered statues of Peter Pan and Piccadilly's Eros. Truly a new little London had been created in Liverpool. The Williamson Tunnels were the third destination. This underground labyrinth of tunnels, chambers and passageways under Edge Hill turned out to be a remarkable Victorian work creation programme.

Finally, we visited Alfred Waterhouse's Victoria Building, which gave the name to "redbrick university". Originally the main university building, it now houses a small museum and art gallery, not to mention a cafe with spectacular tiled fireplace.

Eventually the rain stopped and the final visits could be enjoyed in the dry, if not the sun.

Karen McKay



LOCAL PLAN CONSULTATION

First, some jargon. The Preferred Policy Directions for the Core Strategy of the Borough's Local Development Framework - now thankfully returned to its original name of the Local Plan - has been out for public consultation during the autumn.

What this means in practice is that Cheshire West & Chester Council has been seeking the public's views on the outline policies in the new draft Local Plan. Numerous meetings of the various Community Forums across the Borough have been receiving presentations from planning officers and have allowed lively question and answer sessions. Chester Civic Trust has benefited from its own private briefing and discussion.

In the Chester area, the Forums have been dominated by one major topic - the Green Belt. The proposal to site 2000 homes in Chester's Green Belt over the next 20 years has generated a great deal of concern and has received an almost universal thumbs down from the general public. The pity is that there is much more to the Local Plan than housing policy, and much to be supported, but in Chester the Green Belt debate has overshadowed all else. The city's Green Belt occupies a relatively small area; it is bounded on the east by the M53, to the south by the A55, by the Welsh border on the west. The northern border runs about 2.5 miles from the city centre. The exact layout is set out on the CWaC website.

Chester Civic Trust's view is that the amount of housing growth allocated to Chester is too high and does not reflect the public's views as expressed in earlier consultations. In particular, we do not agree that the Preferred Policy Directions document presents a compelling argument for the "exceptional

circumstances" required by the National Planning Policy Framework for there to be changes to the Green Belt boundary. The choice of a housing target for Chester that cannot be achieved other than by the release of Green Belt land cannot in itself constitute an exceptional circumstance.

We would much prefer to see a lower housing target for the Borough, with a slightly greater proportion of the lower total allocated to Ellesmere Port, Northwich and Winsford. This would aid economic regeneration in those towns and there would be no need to build in Chester's Green Belt.

We have strongly supported the policies of "Town Centre first" and resistance to further out-of-town retail development. We also welcomed the commitment to ensure that Chester city centre's role as a major retail destination is maintained and enhanced by directing retail, leisure, tourism and cultural development to the city centre, enabling it to offer a vibrant, vital and distinctive city centre experience. It is clear to us that, with the competition from out-of-town shopping and the rapid growth of on-line shopping, the town centres that will thrive as retail centres will only be those that offer the public this "wider than retail" experience.

We have also argued for policies specific to Chester on transport, the natural environment, the historic environment, and high quality design. Of course, having good policies doesn't always mean that good things happen in practice - you have only to look around in Chester city centre to see buildings that make you wonder how they ever managed to get planning permission!

Peter Cocker

CIVIC VOICE AGM

CCT members David & Jean Evans, Stephen Langtree and Martin Meredith attended the Civic Voice Annual Convention and AGM held this year in Coventry on 20th October. Our hosts, the Coventry Civic Society, organised tours during the day before and an evening reception held in the magnificent St Mary's Guildhall, dating back to the 14th Century.

The next day, Martin, as National Treasurer of Civic Voice, presented the accounts, which were adopted without query. A major concern of the meeting were Government consultations aimed at "simplifying the planning process". Civic Voice's Chair, Paula Ridley, said "Civic Voice members reject the notion that good planning is a brake on the economy. On the contrary the

best designed places are also the most economically successful. The barrier to house building arises from borrowing restrictions and economic uncertainty, not planning." Delegates then voted unanimously to back a motion calling on the Government to withdraw its proposed planning reforms

Members also voted on a campaign to encourage their 75,000+ members to write to local MPs and newspapers to maintain pressure on the Government to cancel the reforms. Civic Voice's "call to action" will be made available shortly and will be timed to coincide with the release of the consultation seeking views on the proposals.

Martin Meredith

NEW WORKS NEWS

Most of the issues facing the New Works Committee have been running for some time and this newsletter describes recent developments.

The Student Village at Mollington

The first application, to which we objected, was withdrawn following widespread public controversy, but it became clear that the proposal would be re-submitted using the proposed Redgrave Institute for Sports Science as another prop to strengthen the argument for exceptional circumstances to breach the green belt.



NWC therefore wrote directly to Sir Steve Redgrave to alert him to our earlier objection and the unfortunate nature of his apparent public support for the developers. The letter was given to him directly but no reply was received either to that letter or to a follow-up communication through his web-site. The second, outline (though very detailed) application has been received and Civic Trust has objected on broadly the same grounds as previously. It is understood that the application will be considered by the CWaC Strategic Planning Committee in December. In the meantime, work has started to build 200 study bedrooms at the University's Parkgate Road campus in time for autumn 2013 and permission has been granted on appeal for 85 student apartments at the former George Street School at Gorse Stacks. Chester Race Company and a London-based developer are working on project to build a 500-bed student complex on the Linenhall car park, opposite the Crowne Plaza Hotel. There is also speculation that University is negotiating to buy the 160-bed Travelodge by the Fountains roundabout.

The Leadworks (Shot Tower) Development

The Civic Trust was involved with Chester Archaeological Society, Chester Canal Heritage Trust, the ward member and local residents in opposing this proposal, which was described in the last Newsletter. When it was considered by the CWaC Planning Committee on 3rd July 2012, the councillors were appalled by what they saw and were about to vote to refuse it. At that point the applicants announced that they wished to withdraw the application and no decision was made. Subsequently a Places Matter! design panel considered the scheme and ended up supporting the basic design of the scheme but making a number of telling criticisms. These were rejected by the developers. The application was then taken to the CWaC Strategic Planning Committee on 11th October 2012. The only change was to the cladding material, now to be "quartz zinc". The brutal appearance and gloomy colour of the development was unchanged. However, it was finally approved by the Committee by a 4:3 vote with two abstentions, scarcely a ringing endorsement. There

has been considerable local publicity about the issue. Civic Trust is concerned at how the proposal was handled by the planning authority; other parties are continuing to challenge the procedures connected with it. The Shot Tower will be the visual focus of the whole Boughton and Business Quarter regeneration scheme and when that progresses the Leadworks site will immediately become more commercially attractive. Civic Trust believes there was no need to accept this ugly stop-gap scheme. It will desecrate an historic treasure and breaches a whole host of planning policies. Chester deserves, and could have achieved, a better solution.

Bank HQ, Queen's Park

New Works Committee members attended a presentation of pre-application proposals by the architect and developers of this scheme for a housing development opposite Queens Park High School. In general a welcome was given to the employment of a top-quality architect and to the outline of his proposals but felt it was important to ensure the developers follow through with high quality detailed designs and good implementation. The full planning application has now been received. Although there have been some changes, the general nature and the quality of the scheme seems satisfactory.

The Business Quarter

On 13th September 2012 New Works and other Civic Trust members attended a presentation by members of the Chester Renaissance Business Quarter planning team. The initial proposals mainly concerned the public realm area leading from the General Station through the current east car park. On balance our response is favourable. We particularly welcome the emphasis on the use of traditional materials in the future office buildings, although it remains to be seen whether the scheme will be financially viable and attract developers of adequate quality and commitment. New Works Committee is currently considering its response to the detailed public realm application that has now been received.

The work of the New Works Committee

The New Works Committee monitors developments and planning applications in the Chester area. Our members are all volunteers. We consider development applications purely on their planning and civic design merits, and when it is felt appropriate we lodge comments or objections with the local planning authority. The Committee always considers the expressed views of Civic Trust members when discussing development proposals, but it cannot act as advocates for individual members in relation to specific applications. Applications are considered on their planning merits alone. The committee is always looking for suitably-qualified people to contribute to its work and we would welcome any members with experience of the development field – widely defined – to contact us.

Change of committee chair

John Herson stood down as chair of the New Works Committee in October 2012, though he will continue to contribute to the committee's work. Andrew Pannell has taken over as chairman. The committee will benefit hugely from his wide experience in the planning field.

John Herson

HERITAGE OPEN DAYS 2012

After a summer full of wet weekends, we were blessed with fine weather for the Heritage Open Days, which ran from 6th to 9th September. Chester played its part in this nationwide event by opening 46 venues to the public; venue managers were delighted to report a further increase in visitor numbers. Eighteen walking tours and talks were arranged this year; two new walks reflected our theme of the Diamond Jubilee. The Royal Chester tour gave details of the various Royal connections in the city over many years and the "Sights and Sounds of Chester 1953" tour dealt with Chester's changing townscape since the Coronation Year.

There were three properties new to Heritage Open Days: Mad Hatters Tearoom, The Three Kings Tea Rooms and Sally's Secret Garden, which can be found in The Dutch House. The Three Kings Tea Rooms is housed in a building dating back to the mid 15th Century, and contains a massive inner oak frame that can be seen by visitors. One of the stairwell timbers has recently been dated as early 12th Century, and is claimed to be the oldest structural timber in Chester. The building was thought originally to have been the tithe store of the Earl of Shrewsbury, who at one time owned the entire block in which this property stands. The Georgian façade was added at the beginning of the 19th Century. Since then the building has been put to various uses, from a private dwelling to wine merchants, refreshment rooms, bespoke tailors and now, rather appropriately, as "The Three Kings Tea Rooms".

Thanks are owed to so many people who made the Heritage Weekend so enjoyable and worthwhile. Firstly, of course, the venue owners and managers for opening their doors to the public. In addition, the event would not be possible without the many volunteers who gave the public a warm welcome: the members of CCT who hosted visitors to Bishop Lloyd's Palace and other venues:

the Guides who willingly gave their time to arrange and lead our walks and to those members of NADFAS who stewarded at St Mary's Centre. Our thanks to the Dean and Chapter for hosting the launch event at the Cathedral, and for making the Cathedral free to visitors during the HODS weekend. Finally, to our partners from CWaC who worked with us on our project team. Their ongoing cooperation, support and enthusiasm is invaluable, as they provide many of the creative ideas, specialist skills and administrative support.

Planning for next year's event will start early in the New Year. Many buildings will be old favourites but we are always looking for new possibilities. If you have any suggestions for further additions for 2013, we would love to receive them.

Doreen King



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 52nd AGM of the Chester Civic Trust was held on 11th October 2012 at St Mary's Centre, with Stephen Langtree in the chair. The chairman of the trust, David Evans, introduced the Annual Report, paying tribute to the dedicated work carried out by many members. The Civic Trust's Golden Jubilee has left a permanent legacy in the form of a handsome mosaic at the entrance to the Roman Gardens. The important work of the Trust continues in campaigning for the improvement of Chester, opposing the poor schemes and encouraging the good; the year has seen both

successes and failures. Consultations have started on the Local Plan, with its important implications for Chester's Green Belt. The meeting voted for the appointment of Cyril Morris as Vice-President, in appreciation for his valuable contributions over many years. The meeting broke for refreshments, after which the CEO of Civic Voice, Steve Graham, gave a short talk on the civic movement, when he stressed the importance of engagement with local communities.

Subsequent to the AGM, Michael Plane was co-opted as a Council member.

NEWS IN BRIEF

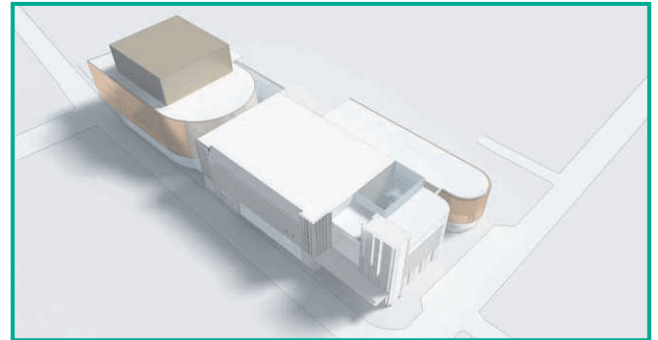
In 1899 Chester's floating baths broke from their moorings in the Dee and ended up stranded on the weir. They were replaced by the John Douglas designed City Baths, which opened in 1901 and are now Grade II listed. Generations of Cestrians have learned to swim in the Atlantic and Pacific pools. CWaC have now given approval for a £4 million plan to refurbish the pools, install a gymnasium and restore the exterior.

Waitrose have received planning permission for their flagship superstore to be built on the Boughton Retail Centre. During the planning submission, a spokesman for Waitrose reported "many people spending days wondering round the City trying to find a Waitrose". Perhaps they ended up in Poundland.



The suspension bridge, linking Queen's Park to the City, has been refurbished. A non-slip surface has been installed and the concrete approaches will be improved. There are also plans to construct a new footbridge across the Dingle, linking Curzon Park to Grosvenor Road.

Bennett's Associates, whose work for the RSC was short-listed for the Stirling Prize, have revealed their



preliminary proposals for the development of the Odeon Cinema. An 800 seater main auditorium will occupy the site of Commerce House, which is to be demolished; the Odeon itself will house a studio theatre, library, foyer, cafe and bars. Two adjacent studio cinemas will be constructed on the site of 49 Northgate Street.

A £2.3 million grant from the 'Parks for People' Heritage Lottery Fund has secured the restoration of Grosvenor Park. Work will start next year and will involve restoring the historic landscape and an extension to the Grade II listed Park Lodge to include a cafe and meeting rooms. In 1993 Chester Civic Trust commissioned a statue of Ymir to mark the Cheshire Celebration Year of Culture;

the sculpture was placed in the Garden for the Blind but has been neglected since. The Norse goddess will be cleaned and relocated to a more prominent position near the new events pavilion.



CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

Conservation Areas were first designated in 1967 and there are now 96 in the Cheshire West and Chester borough. They have been chosen for their special architectural and historic interest. Chester Civic Trust is in discussions with CWaC to work together on a number of heritage-related projects. We are likely to need volunteers in 2013 to undertake a variety of jobs, including the delivery of leaflets within Conservation Areas, the identification of local heritage assets and, possibly, preliminary 'buildings at risk' surveys. Different levels of skill are

required in each case, but the most important qualification is your willingness to help.

Please get in touch with me directly or via the CCT office to discuss what is involved and how you might help. Tony Barton and I will begin compiling our teams of volunteers in January so that we are ready to start as soon as the projects are approved.

Thank you in anticipation!

Stephen Langtree

Tel: 01244 676814, e-mail steve.langtree@yahoo.co.uk

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

11 January 2013

EVENT AT BISHOP LLOYD'S PALACE
Chester Performs: The Plan for 2013
Andrew Bentley
Details and Booking Form enclosed

17 January 2013

EVENT AT BISHOP LLOYD'S PALACE
New members' social evening
starting at 7.00 pm

23 January 2013

CIVIC TRUST LECTURE
Protecting National Parks
John Alexander
Grosvenor Museum, 7.30 pm

20 February 2013

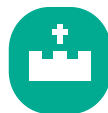
CIVIC TRUST LECTURE
Inns, Taverns and Alehouses:
The History of Chester's Pubs Revisited
Eileen Wilshaw
Grosvenor Museum, 7.30 pm

7 March 2013

EVENT AT BISHOP LLOYD'S PALACE
Looking at Bridges in Chester
Peter Bingham
Details and Booking Form enclosed

20 March 2013

CIVIC TRUST LECTURE
Chester: Its Canal and the Dee
John Herson
Grosvenor Museum, 7.30 pm



Published by

The Chester Civic Trust

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If you would like to join The Chester Civic Trust, please call in at our office at Bishop Lloyd's Palace between 1300 and 1500, Monday to Thursday, write to the Membership Secretary or email us at admin@chestercivictrust.org.uk

BISHOP LLOYD'S PALACE

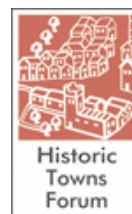
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THE QUEEN'S SCHOOL (Headmistress Mrs E S Clark). www.queens.cheshire.sch.uk

THOMPSON COX PARTNERSHIP, Property Developers. 1 City Walls Road, Chester

THORNTON-FIRKIN, Project Managers. www.thorntonfirkin.com

TWEED NUTTALL WARBURTON, Architects. www.tnw-architecture.co.uk

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Visit our website or contact our Membership Secretary for further details.