



## THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY 2020

This year saw fewer nominations than in previous years, though the quality of the nominated projects was generally good generating debate among the judges. Details of the panel's conclusions are below.

### CHAIR'S AWARD

This year's Chair's award goes to the revitalisation of Chester's indoor market. The judges were unanimous in their praise for the combined efforts of the traders and the Council in turning the market back in to a vibrant facility that is a credit to all those involved and a real asset for the City. There was particular praise for the Friday night openings. The judges felt this was an excellent example of what can be achieved in an unpromising space. This was one of two projects which received multiple nominations. The judges hope that the Council will ensure that this reinvigoration is transferred to the new market hall when it is constructed.



Christine Russell, Karen Bates - Market Manager,  
Cllr Samantha Dixon and Adele Thomas



Chester Indoor Market



Deewater Grange



Hotel Indigo

### GOOD AWARDS

The first of this year's two good awards goes to Deewater Grange, Chester Road, Huntington. The judges were impressed with the extent to which care had been taken with the design which has resulted in a building that fits superbly in its environment. It would have been easy to build something functional without reference to the street scene and the developers deserve credit for avoiding that all too common approach.

The second Good award goes to Hotel Indigo on Grosvenor Park Road. The judges praised both the exterior and interior design noting that the exterior design provides a nod to the John Douglas houses opposite but with a thoroughly modern interpretation. The interior is tremendously individual and it's well worth a visit for a drink or something to eat.

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## COMMENDATIONS

The judges agreed that both the George Street Pocket Park and the St Mary's Handbridge Centre deserved commending. In the case of the George Street Pocket Park an unattractive piece of land has been transformed



George Street Pocket Park

into an attractive and usable space. Likewise, the St Mary's Centre in Handbridge, which received multiple nominations, was regarded by the judging panel as a very significant asset for the local community.



St Mary's Centre in Handbridge

## BAD AND UGLY

The Judges resolved to conflate these two categories this year given the difficulties in classifying something as bad or ugly when in reality it could be considered as both! The following awards were given in this category.

A perennial nominee in these categories is the maintenance and cleanliness of the Rows. We have highlighted this before but such is the significance of the Rows to the City it was felt appropriate to raise it again in the hope that the attention will ultimately lead to improvement. The judges acknowledge that improvement schemes are in place and it is hoped these will deliver tangible results in the near future.

The underpass below the Bars roundabout was also felt to be worthy of note in this category. It is an unpleasant and intimidating space with the section between Grosvenor Court and Foregate Street often flooded. Furthermore it is a very unpleasant way to arrive in the City centre by foot if travelling from the train station.

The decay of the former hydro electric building by the Old Dee Bridge is regrettable and it is hoped that a solution can be found that will allow it to be restored and potentially opened to the public on occasion.



Hydro Electric Building by the Old Dee Bridge

The shop fronts in Boughton between City Road and Steam Mill Street were nominated and the judges agreed that some of these are unattractive though the judges noted that many of the gateways to the City are unappealing.

Finally in this category, the student accommodation at the bottom of Hunter Street received more than one nomination. This divided the judges; none particularly liked it though how bad or ugly it is was a matter of debate. The judges were however unanimous in their concerns in relation to the car park which is due to be built next to it. That will no doubt be a matter for future judging panels to consider.

I would like to thank this year's judges, Peter Hadfield, Ann Farrell, Philip Harrison, Alex Hall and Ian Lawrence for their contributions. It is a not insignificant commitment to visit 20 or more projects and spend time meaningfully evaluating them and the judges this year, as ever, have done so with enthusiasm, intelligence and a sharp eye.

**Nick Clarke**



Boughton Shop Fronts



# ROUND THE WALLS IN 60 YEARS

It was a splendid start to Chester Civic Trust's Diamond Jubilee Year. Steve Langtree and Tony Barton took a packed audience at the museum on a virtual 'walk' around the walls. As they walked their 'conversation' reflected on the past 60 years and looked forward to the next 60. Moving clockwise from 'the clock' they discussed many of Chester's buildings, both historic and modern along the route, and speculated whether they would last another 60 years.



Their first slide showed the view along Newgate from Pepper St 60 years ago. Would the Grosvenor Precinct which was built soon after and dramatically altered the view, be there in 60 years time? They thought it unlikely.

Their discussion continued to the Amphitheatre and Dee House, the Castle, HQ Building, Centurion House, the 'Fountains' building at the top of Delamere St and many others.

On the way they also talked about some of the Civic Trust's campaigns and projects in the last 60 years. There was the successful campaign to conserve the



'Nine Houses' in Park St (6 survive); storing the original lion from the Red Lion Brewery and re-erecting it on the multi-storey car park on the same site; and installing a waterwheel in the race of the former snuff mill alongside the weir.

They concluded by discussing some of the challenges for the next 60 years including the future of historic buildings

(which become increasingly difficult and expensive to adapt); the future of city centre car parking and the 'retail problem'.

It was a thought provoking, as well as a very entertaining, evening.

**Ann Farrell**

## CONSERVATION @ FIFTY

We and others, including Civic Voice, have been celebrating a series of 'half centuries'. Firstly, in 2017 we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Civic Amenities Act 1967 which introduced the legislation for conservation areas; then, in 2018, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of "the Insall Report", CHESTER - A STUDY IN CONSERVATION, which transformed the development policies in our city. Finally, in 2019, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of Chester City conservation area, one of the very first in the country.

So, what have we achieved? This was a question posed at a conference held in Chichester last October. It was organised to examine the progress made in each of the four towns chosen for those pioneering conservation studies.

Clearly, each of the four towns (Chester, York, Chichester and Bath) has benefited in various ways as a

result of the measures put in place 50 years ago. Some have benefited more than others, and some have adopted quite different strategies. However, it seems fair to say that Chester has achieved more than most, especially in the first 20 years.

Sadly, one thing that all four towns, and others, have in common is a lack of resources within their local authorities. The revival of interest in conservation is therefore not matched by any advance in awareness nor in the appearance of the designated areas. The 'celebrations', at last year's conference therefore rang a little hollow. We can only hope that the financial situation will improve but, in the meantime, it is up to organisations like ours to continue to be the torchbearers.

**Steve Langtree**



# THE FUTURE OF DEE HOUSE?



Exterior of Dee House

The vexed issue of the future of Dee House is now live again. A Dee House Working Group was set up last year after the demise of the Thwaites scheme for the site and it has recently reported its draft conclusions for public consultation and also in a meeting with the Civic Trust. The Group's membership included representatives of all relevant stakeholders, including those historically in favour of demolishing Dee House and exposing the underlying Amphitheatre remains. The aim was to get the facts and seek inputs from interested and informed parties. Historic England were represented in an advisory capacity.

In parallel with the Working Group the Chester Historic Buildings Preservation Trust (CHBPT) sponsored a project viability appraisal by Donald Insall Associates which was published in January 2020. This shows that the Georgian core of Dee House is effectively derelict and that all that can be done in the short term is prop up the north frontage wall and temporarily re-roof the building. The 19th century east and early 20th century west elements of the building are recoverable. Wall support and related works in the complex are estimated to cost £500,000. Dee House currently has no commercial value and the money necessary to rescue it from dereliction represents the 'Conservation Deficit' of the site. CWAC would have to finance this if any progress is to be made.

The Working Group has concluded that both de-listing and/or demolition of Dee House are not feasible options due to the rigid requirements governing the de-listing of listed buildings and the National Planning Policy Framework. It has also accepted the view that little new knowledge of the Amphitheatre would be gained by its excavation. The cost would be high and medieval and prehistoric remains on the site might be destroyed.

Historic England do not support excavation. What should be done with Dee House? If the Council, in these times of budget cuts, would have to spend £500,000 to remove the Conservation Deficit, one option is in fact to continue to do nothing and leave it as it is. That is not an option put forward by the Working Group, but it may well be politically realistic. The Working Group actually concluded that everything possible should be done to maximise the heritage and community value of the complex, but it recognised that to move forward CWAC would have to seek an external commercial partner of some type. The range of implementation routes would need further exploration by CWAC. The

preferred option in the Insall Report is for the CHBPT to take possession of the building and remove the Conservation Deficit before selling it on to a commercial developer with covenants ensuring an Amphitheatre Interpretation Centre is operated in the regenerated complex.

Neither the Working Group nor the Insall Report have been able to identify, however, a clearly preferred and viable commercial option for Dee House. A consultant to the latter suggests 'the most likely and possibly the only viable use will be a hotel and restaurant/bar'. Given the failure of the previous Thwaites scheme and the possibly unsustainable number of current hotel schemes in Chester, there must be doubts even about this option.

The Civic Trust has not yet come to a corporate view on the Dee House proposals but will need to in the near future. We seek members' views on the issue.

**John Herson**

Interior (c2001) of Dee House





# AND THE WALL CAME TUMBLING DOWN...

*The following is the text of a letter sent to the Leader of Cheshire West and Chester Council by Steve Langtree, Chair of the Heritage committee.*

"The Civic Trust's Heritage Committee met yesterday evening and asked me to write to you about the plight of our City Wall.

We are definitely not entering the fray about who is responsible for the recent collapse behind Newgate Street. Instead, we are making, what I hope, will be constructive suggestions for immediate action.

You will be acutely aware that there are now three closures in different places around the City Wall. The section to the west of Northgate has been closed for years and there is still no sign of it being reopened. The section at the Bridgegate has been closed since May last year and in this case there is no sign of any repair work starting. We now have what I believe to be an unprecedented situation wherein a third section is now closed.

In all three cases the repair works are not optional, they will have to be done sooner or later, and the longer they



are left the more expensive they might prove to be? Our suggestion is that the Council should dip into its reserves or contingency fund to expedite the necessary repairs.

In the meantime, it must be obvious that the core of the walls are softened by rainwater entering through the gaps between the paving slabs on the walkway. As a matter of good housekeeping, and to reduce the risk of further problems, a major repointing exercise is needed using an approved mortar mix.

As I say, none of this is optional, nor will it get any cheaper. So please will the Council consider employing additional resources to restore one of our most famous heritage assets."

## CHESTER HERITAGE FESTIVAL

Please save the dates and join in the 2020 Heritage Festival. On Saturday 23rd May the festival launch will be part of Roman Day at Chester Races. On Friday 19th June the main festival programme begins and runs until Sunday 28th June.

There will be events and exhibitions around the city on topics as diverse as archaeological finds and the history of the zoo. Stories of Thomas Brassey, John Douglas, ghosts and witches will be told. You will be asked for your stories and memories of Chester.

Some events will be new, such as football at Chester Market, yoga in the Town Hall, a calligraphy workshop and tea tasting. Two old favourites, with new twists, take place in Bishop Lloyd's Palace: Taste of Cheese on Friday 19th June at 7:30pm and Chester and the River Dee on Saturday 27th June at 7:30pm.

The Festival booklet will be available in May with details of over 80 activities. Meanwhile more information can be found at [www.visitcheshire.com/chesterheritagefestival](http://www.visitcheshire.com/chesterheritagefestival).



Bookings can be made online or at Chester Visitor Information Centre.

**Liz Preedy**



# IT WAS ALL GREEK TO HARRISON

Thanks to David Burton for his excellent talk about Thomas Harrison and Joseph Turner's work at Chirk.

A lesser known fact about Harrison is that he inspired the acquisition of the Parthenon reliefs by Lord Elgin. Harrison was the first of a continuous stream of architects employed by the Earl of Elgin to refigure his home at Broomhall in Fife. Harrison submitted his plans for Broomhall in March 1796.

Some building was done using Harrison's plans, but in 1799 the Earl became Ambassador Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of his Britannic Majesty to the Sublime Porte of Selim III, Sultan of Turkey in Constantinople.

The Earl used Harrison's plan of the south side of Broomhall for the building of the new British Embassy in Pera, Istanbul. This little known and far-flung outpost of Harrison's work was destroyed by fire in 1831.

Harrison clearly impressed the Earl. He persuaded him to focus on collecting Greek art through drawings and plaster casts. The Turks were occupying Greece. Elgin would be well placed to obtain permission to study ruins.

It would appear that in Athens Elgin intended to only initiate the work suggested by Harrison. In Sicily he employed two painters, two plaster cast makers and two architectural draughtsmen. This group were in Elgin's personal pay and their work was obviously to be his property.

By August 1800 this small party of artists were in Athens, supervised by Elgin's Chaplain, Philip Hunt. Without a firman from the Sultan they were unable to put up scaffolding to take the plaster casts and were only begrudgingly allowed on the site of 'the heathen temple'. Philip Hunt became anxious about the deterioration and lack of care of the ancient stones.



British Embassy, Pera

When Elgin eventually was able to send the firman to Athens it gave them permission to enter the citadel, erect scaffolding to make plaster casts and do necessary excavations. However a final clause allowed them to take away pieces of stones with inscriptions or figures to study. By July 1801 Hunt had the first metope removed from the temple, and in his possession.

Through his diplomatic status, his young wife's fortune and opportunistic audacity Elgin acquired much stuff for his home in Broomhall. He intended to have a personal museum in one of the wings of the house to display his best items.

In 1802 after the stones had been removed from the citadel he wrote to Harrison,

**'I repeat it, you and you alone gave me the idea and the notion of its importance.'**

The extension of his ideas and notions does not seem to have estranged Harrison from Elgin. The stones were sold to the British Government in 1816. By 1818 Harrison was writing to the Chancellor of the Exchequer with a design for a purpose built home for the growing collection of national treasures.

In 1823 to 24 he returned to Broomhall to do further work for Elgin.

**Karen Mckay**

## THE THOMAS BRASSEY SOCIETY

In October 2018 our Newsletter contained an article about the Thomas Brassey Memorial Project and the 'seedcorn fund' set up by Chester Civic Trust.

By way of an update, we are delighted to report that the fund has almost reached the £5,000 target. Many thanks to all the members who made generous donations. This will enable us to install an information panel outside Chester railway station describing Brassey's remarkable achievements and his roots in Chester.

Having successfully sown these seeds, responsibility for the panel and for the proposed bronze statue has now passed to the new Thomas Brassey Society. This was inaugurated at a meeting in the Queen Hotel on 18th November 2019 and, happily, is supported by several Trust members.

If you would like to know more about the world's greatest railway contractor in the 19th century and/or the proposed activities of the society, please get in touch! Our website is [www.thomasbrasseysociety.org](http://www.thomasbrasseysociety.org), or give me a ring on (01244) 676814.

**Stephen Langtree**



Brassey in 1862.  
From "Science and Society  
Picture Library"



# MALAGA: CITY OF MUSEUMS

Malaga is one of the oldest continually inhabited cities in the world. It was named 'Malaca', meaning 'to salt' by the Phoenicians who established a trading post around 770BC. Later the Greeks, the Carthaginians and the Romans all established colonies on the site of the present day city. Malaga fell under the control of the Moors around 715AD and remained under Muslim rule until the Christians finally conquered the city in 1487. Many of the architectural treasures of Malaga like the 11th century Alcazaba and the 14th century Gibralfaro Fortress date back to Moorish rule.



Fast forwarding to the 20th century, the loss of life in Malaga from influenza in 1918, and later in the Spanish Civil War, had a devastating impact on the city. Malaga's fortunes started to improve in the 1950's with the arrival of sun and sea tourism. However, the cultural renaissance of Malaga is more recent and attributable in large part to Francisco de la Torre, who was elected the City Mayor in 2000. Malaga is not just a gateway to the Costa del Sol, the city is now on the international map for its cultural assets, the pedestrianisation and improvements to the historic core and the quality of its cafes and restaurants.

Perhaps the main catalyst for the transformation of Malaga is Pablo Picasso, arguably the greatest artist of the 20th century. Picasso was born in Malaga in 1881. His birthplace is now a museum and his family have donated nearly 300 works of art to the Picasso Museum that is housed in a 16th century building, the Buenavista Palace. These are just two of the forty museums and galleries that have opened in Malaga in the last twenty years! The population of Malaga is around 590,000, just slightly larger than Liverpool.

Francisco de la Torre has gained international recognition for the opening of a Pompidou Centre and a branch of St Petersburg's State Russian museum in the city.

Malaga has been a pioneer of sustainable development. In 2020 the city, along with Gothenburg, are the 'European Capitals of Smart Tourism' in recognition of their 'sustainability, accessibility, cultural heritage, creativity initiatives and digitalisation'. These all contribute, along with year round sunshine, to the success of the local economy. There are now 646 companies, based on the Technology Park on the outskirts of the city.

During the planned Chester Civic Trust visit to Malaga from the 23rd to the 30th September, you will have the opportunity to see the magnificent historic sites and visit some of the amazing museums and galleries. There will be optional excursions to other highlights of Andalusia like Granada and Ronda - or, for the more adventurous, a walk along the Caminito Del Rey. Copies of the full itinerary were included in the last Newsletter. If you would like further information please contact Christine Russell or Karen McKay.

**Christine Russell**  
Christinerussell4@icloud.com



**Chester Civic Trust Lecture on APRIL 15th 2020  
at 7.30pm in the Museum Lecture Theatre**

**FRANCIS PRYOR, The Fens - discovering  
England's ancient depths.**

One of Britain's most distinguished living archaeologists and a former President of the Council for British Archaeology, Francis has spent 40 years studying the prehistory of the Fens. He was the lead excavator of the Bronze Age village at Flag Fen.

A prolific author, Francis has written many highly acclaimed books including the 'Birth of Modern Britain' and the recent, 'The Fens', that was serialised as a BBC Radio 4 'Book of the Week'.



# Chester Civic Trust

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The office is open between 12 noon and 2pm Monday to Thursday.

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

### WEDNESDAY 15 APRIL

Francis Pryor lecture on 'The Fens'  
Grosvenor Museum Lecture Theatre  
7.30pm

### TUESDAY 9 JUNE

'Tea at Tatton' - booking form  
with last Newsletter

### THURSDAY 25TH JUNE

Day out to Three Gothic Beauties  
of North Wales.  
Details on enclosed flyer

### WEDNESDAY 1ST JULY

2pm at Bishop Lloyd's Palace.  
'Galapagos Islands' with Christine  
Stockton. Hot drink and cake.  
Details on enclosed flyer.

### WEDNESDAY 23RD – WEDNESDAY 30TH SEPTEMBER

'Magnificent Malaga'  
See article in this newsletter.  
Details were sent out in February.  
Please contact the office or Karen  
Mckay ([mckaykaren68@gmail.com](mailto:mckaykaren68@gmail.com))  
if you need replacement details.  
Deposits should be in by 29th March.

### FRIDAY 6 NOVEMBER

Diamond Jubilee Anniversary  
Dinner - save the date!

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