



## RETURN TO NORMALITY

After all the uncertainty of the past 20 months when lockdowns and COVID-19 restrictions resulted in cancelled events and online meetings, the country appears to be slowly edging back to normality. The Events Committee is busy planning walks and talks. Speakers have been booked for the Grosvenor Museum Lectures that will resume on January 12th. A booking slip is enclosed for the 'Twelfth Night Quiz, Mulled Wine and Festive Nibbles' event at Bishop Lloyds Palace on January 6th.

Following the success of the Fens visit, plans are well advanced for a 'Springtime in the Cotswolds' trip from the 10th-13th May. The main attraction will be a visit to Kelmscott Manor, the inspirational retreat of William Morris, described by Morris as 'Heaven on Earth'. The house, owned by the Society of Antiquaries, has recently undergone a major conservation and improvement programme.

We base our group visits at home and abroad on places of historic and architectural interest that are off the usual tourist routes. Members have had the opportunity in the past to visit Iran, Armenia and many countries of Eastern Europe. In September 2022 (Covid-permitting!) we are planning a 10/11 day coach journey 'From Gdańsk to Krakov' that will be based around UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Poland.

Enclosed with this Newsletter is a nomination form for the Trust's annual 'Good Bad and Ugly Awards'. A number of new developments have been completed in the last twelve months and we look forward to receiving your commendations - or condemnations!

Good examples of sustainable developments are particularly welcome. And please don't restrict your nominations to residential developments - the overall winner last year was the Hoole Alexandra Park insect homes and interpretation boards.

Chester Civic Trust continues to work in partnership with Cheshire West and Chester Borough Council on a number of key projects in the city including the Dee House Development Sub-Group. Listed Building Consent has now been granted for the stabilisation work that is necessary to keep the building safe. We are also involved with the Heritage Action Zone Steering Group that has recently commissioned work to commence on the repair and refurbishment of the Rows including the installation of LED lighting and additional hand rails on the steps.

On behalf of the Officers and Members of the Executive Committee I wish you and your family and friends a happy, peaceful and healthy festive season.

Christine Russell



## Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

# KING'S LYNN & THE FENS

## Chester Civic Trust Study Visit 19-23 October

King's Lynn, the base for our visit, has similarities to Chester. Both have histories as important ports, and both have experienced changes to the river they depend on. King's Lynn, however, has continued as a trading port to the present day. This long maritime tradition has left a rich quayside collection of warehouses and merchants' houses from the 15th century onwards. Alleyways run between them to the quay. This intriguing network of pedestrian routes became familiar to us over the next few days.



Civic Trust Group in front of King's Lynn Town Hall

We broke the journey to the Fens in Derby. The group dispersed – some to visit the Cathedral, some to Lombe's Silk Mill, now housing the Museum of Making, which opened in May this year to some acclaim.

On our first evening in King's Lynn we visited Marriott's warehouse, built in the 1580s and now operated by a Trust. Here Dr Paul Richards, historian of Kings Lynn, talked us through the town's history, from a small



Dr Paul Richards and Doreen Leventhall with Christine Russell at Marriott's Warehouse

settlement for fishing and salt extraction, to a trading post linking the North Sea trading routes to King's Lynn and its hinterland. It became one of the main ports of the east coast.

In the 13th to 15th centuries, the dominant trading force in the North Sea and Baltic was the Hanseatic League of continental trading cities such as Lübeck, Hamburg and Bremen. In England the League established trading posts, known as Kontor, in several east coast ports including King's Lynn, where the Hansa House, dating from the 15th century, is important as the only surviving Kontor building in the country. King's Lynn continues to trade with some Hansa ports, exporting grain and importing timber. In 2005 King's Lynn became a member of Die Hanse, an association of 194 towns and cities with Hansa connexions aiming to encourage business links, cultural exchanges and tourism.

The next day we visited some of the historic buildings in the City, starting at St Margaret's Church, founded in 1101 and granted the honorary title King's Lynn Minster in 2011. It has interesting 14th century misericords, and many Norman elements. Then to the quayside, where several buildings have benefitted from the attention of the King's Lynn Preservation Trust, founded in 1958 as a reaction to the threats to historic buildings at that time, and still active today.

Later, Dr Richards arranged for True's Yard Fisherfolk Museum to be opened for us. It is based around the last surviving fisherfolk yard which included six tiny cottages, two of which remain and form the museum. We gained an insight into the hard way of life which was normal in that quarter of King's Lynn well into the 20th century. In the evening we dined in the Bank House Brasserie. Built in the early 18th century, it has extensive underground cellars where imported wine was stored for onward shipment.

On the third day we visited Wisbech. We were welcomed by Ray Johnson and David Crouch from the Wisbech Society & Preservation Trust in the former chapel of the Wisbech General Cemetery, recently restored and now used by the Society. Peter Clayton, Chairman of the Octavia Hill Birthplace Museum Trust, told us about Octavia's life and work. Octavia Hill, social reformer and one of the founders of the National Trust, was born in Wisbech in 1838. Her birthplace on the banks of the Nene is currently closed for restoration.



North Brink, Wisbech



Over lunch in the Town Council Chamber the Deputy Town Clerk talked to us about the history of Wisbech as an inland port, importing timber from the Baltic and exporting grain and scrap metal, and the history of the building containing the Council Chamber, once a pub where deals were done in back rooms, and later a club for business people. With the Wisbech Society members as guides, we walked round the town, particularly admiring the collection of handsome Georgian houses along the bank of the Nene known as the North Brink. One of these is Peckover House, a National Trust property where, unfortunately, only the gardens were accessible to us.

The following day we visited Ely. The Cathedral dominates the town. Queen (and Saint) Etheldreda founded a monastery here and the present building was started in the 11th century. In 1322, the Norman central tower collapsed. It was replaced by a lantern tower which rises from the octagon. It is constructed of timber and is a masterpiece of medieval joinery. The Stained Glass Museum is housed in an upper level of the cathedral. The well laid-out and illuminated displays show both religious and secular work, and explanations of the evolution of stained glass techniques through the ages. Back in King's Lynn we had dinner in the Riverside Restaurant, formerly a wine warehouse.

Ely Cathedral



The journey back to Chester included a break at Newstead Abbey. This was originally a 12th century monastery, then during the Dissolution of the Monasteries, it was sold to Sir John Byron. The poet Byron lived there from 1808 to 1814. It is now owned by Nottingham City Council.

Newstead Abbey



Many of our group were looking forward to seeing a part of England they did not know well. They were not disappointed. We were delighted by the quayside area of King's Lynn and the way in which it is being nurtured. Georgian Wisbech and medieval Ely were revelations. It seemed to us that civic groups in King's Lynn and Wisbech, have been adept at raising funds for heritage purposes, and creating sustainable modern uses for historic properties. We all hope this will continue as funds become harder to find.

Organisation for this tour started in 2019 but had to be replanned for 2021. In the interval, some places on the itinerary had closed, or changes made to allow for Covid restrictions. This made more work for Christine Russell and Karen McKay, our organisers, and we are grateful to them and their helpers for their perseverance and getting the show on the road. Christine and Karen had a lot of help from people on the ground: Dr Paul Richards, Alison Gifford, Chair of the King's Lynn Civic Society, Doreen Leventhall, Chair of the King's Lynn Town Guides, Ray Johnson and David Crouch of the Wisbech Society, and Peter Clayton of the Octavia Hill Society. Finally, we all appreciated our driver, Vilma, for her good humour and smooth handling of the coach.

**Cynthia & Edward Phillips**

*The text above has been abridged. It can be seen in full on the Trust's website.*





# 2021 CIVIC AWARDS

## for design and conservation in Cheshire West and Chester

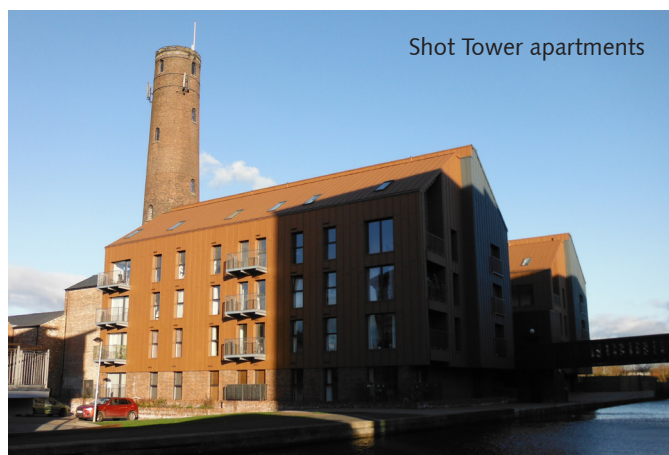
These awards, not to be confused with the Civic Trust's Good, Bad and Ugly honours, are normally presented on a 5 year cycle, but because of the

pandemic it was decided to defer this round until 2021. By rewarding the best architectural projects, this award scheme aims to stimulate interest in our built environment and develop a deeper and broader appreciation of traditional craft skills and high quality contemporary construction. All the sponsoring bodies (Cheshire West and Chester council, the Cheshire Society of Architects and Chester Civic Trust) hope that the awards will raise the profile of good architectural design in our community.

A judging panel was appointed by the award sponsors, information submitted with the nominations was closely inspected and a shortlist was agreed. This was followed by two long days of visits after which the judging panel arrived at its final decisions. Thanks go to Steve Wright, Councillor Louise Gittins, Kirsty Henderson, Eileen Willshaw, Stephen Savory, Geoff Clifton, Michael Scammel, Rory Chisholm and Philip Harrison for their hard work and for making the whole process great fun.

### AWARDS IN CHESTER

Among the awards in Chester are the **Shot Tower apartments** completed in 2021. The lead shot tower is the oldest of only three remaining in England. The site was very challenging to develop. This new development maintains and enhances the views of the shot tower and provides an impressive addition to the series of old and new buildings along the canal.



Shot Tower apartments

**Storyhouse** is housed within the Odeon former cinema together with the site of the demolished Commerce House. The new complex opened in 2017 combines a

theatre, cinema, library and restaurant creating a unique cultural and community centre. Over 130 different community groups use Storyhouse as a base for regular creative activity. The award recognises its fantastic contribution to the community and cultural life of the city.



### HIGHLY COMMENDED

The conversion of **Greenbank Hall** into apartments and houses, and the construction of four new houses in the grounds was highly commended. The Hall and Gatehouse have been refurbished to a high standard and the new houses are of a simple but stylish modern design.



Tramways

The site of **Tramways** student accommodation was successively part of the railway station, a wagon repair workshop, a tram depot and a bus station. The new development comprises five blocks of a distinctly contemporary design. The materials respect the local vernacular whilst reflecting its industrial heritage.

The **Abbey School** occupies a pair of 18th century town houses in Abbey Square, featuring well preserved interiors and fine historic features. In transforming

these spaces into highly specialised educational use, the widest range of solutions has been devised to create an entirely practical environment.

The judges were disappointed that the 12th century **Agricola Tower** is not open to the public, but they were pleased to see the fabric of the building has been repaired to a high standard, safeguarding the Tower and Guardhouse for the future.



The very modern design of **Chester Bus Interchange** is exciting and bold. The thoughtful and thoroughness of design is evident in the detailing of the structure, the fittings and paving. However, the function of the building is severely compromised by being in the wrong place, too far from the railway station. Traffic flows are confusing and there is only one controlled pedestrian

road crossing. An excellent building marred by illogical town planning!

The enlargement of a small **nature reserve by Chester Zoo** to 6 hectares was highly commended for sustainable development. There is provision for wheelchairs, colourful interpretation boards, seating and picnic areas. The judges were impressed by the maturity of the planting and ponds. The nature reserve addresses the challenges of avoiding the loss of wildlife and habitats, and the role that meadows and wetlands can play in absorbing carbon dioxide.

**Trafford Hall** and its 14 acres of grounds provide a home for the National Communities Resource Centre. It was reopened in 2021 by the Regenda housing group after comprehensive environmental improvements to the hall and incorporating a YHA hostel and a venue for energy and sustainability events. The many innovations exhibit a long term commitment to sustainability. The grounds are managed to improve biodiversity. The historic features and setting of the Hall have been protected.

*This article has been much abbreviated from the full report by Peter Hadfield, Chair of the Judge's panel. The full report can be seen on the Civic Trust's website, and includes awards made to projects outside Chester; and credits to the clients, architects, designers and contractors. The report is also available as a leaflet which the Civic Trust will make available at future events.*

## WHITHER CHESTER?

The guest speaker at this year's AGM was Andrew Lewis. In Spring 2018 Andrew was appointed as Cheshire West and Chester's new Chief Executive. The theme of his talk was 'Whither Chester?' He spoke with warmth and optimism about a city that he is familiar with from his childhood, describing the Council's responsibilities beyond service delivery as a custodian of the city. This drives the need for long term thinking, balancing the needs of commerce and public value. His talk placed a welcome emphasis on stakeholder involvement in the Council's approach to creating a vision and strategy for the future of the City. He described Chester emerging from the pandemic in a position of strength, noting the advantages that we have in terms of quality of life, strong cultural attractions and services as well as the region's industrial base.

With the continuing decline of city centre retail, development of Chester's tourism potential is key. In the past marketing initiatives for attractions in and around the city have been disjointed. However, recently 'Destination Chester' was launched with the aim of driving through a shared vision and closer collaboration between organisations. Members of the network include Chester Zoo, Cheshire Oaks Designer Outlet, CH1ChesterBID, Chester Hospitality Association, Blue Planet Aquarium and the National Waterways Museum. The network is supported and co-ordinated by Marketing Cheshire and Cheshire West & Chester Council.

The network plans to increase the number of visitors and the time they spend in Chester by working closely together to produce an annual programme of events. Since the relaxation of Covid restrictions, visitor numbers have been increasing. In June, Chester was named city of the year in the iTravel staycation awards. The Northgate scheme reached a critical decision point in Spring 2020. It was a time to pause and reflect over the development. The change in the nature of retail had been exacerbated by the pandemic. It would have been easy at this point to put the development on hold. However, the Council's decision was to move forward into delivery, but with the schemes focus no longer being retail. Andrew described his vision of Chester emerging from the pandemic as a confident city with employment opportunities and improved infrastructure that will benefit generations to come.

We heard updates on a wide range of topics including the impact of Covid on city centre businesses, the Council's response to the challenges of climate change, a refresh of the local plan, Dee House, City wall restoration and initiatives to improve the accessibility and usability of the rows.

Andrew's previous role was managing director of five combined authorities in the Tees Valley. In his early career, he worked as a senior economic policy advisor at the Treasury.

**Sarah Catlin**



# THE CHESHIRE SANDSTONE RIDGE: Towards a New National Landscape

In June 2021 it was announced that the Cheshire Sandstone Ridge is to be considered for status as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Securing this designation will allow the area to benefit from greater protection and management. This diverse, distinctive, and celebrated landscape is located in the heart of Cheshire and covers an area of over 230 sq km and is rich in heritage, archaeology, wildlife and culture. This will be Cheshire's first AONB and represents the first nationally protected landscape lying wholly in the county.

The process towards designation of the Sandstone Ridge will start in the New Year and will involve the consideration of natural beauty, the determination of the AONB boundaries and public consultation. This process will take between two and three years during which time the public profile of the Ridge will be greatly enhanced.

The Sandstone Ridge Trust is one of many organisations that have an interest in the natural beauty, landscape and cultural heritage of the Ridge together with the needs of the people that visit, live and work on it. To this effect the Trust has been instrumental in protecting and managing this magical landscape and has, over a number of years, attracted significant Lottery funding to support this initiative.

**Andrew Hull**





# URBAN DESIGN GROUP VISIT



Around thirty members of the Urban Design Group visited Chester on 13th November. The event was organised by John Tweed and hosted by the Civic Trust. The group gathered at Bisop Lloyds Palace for a coffee and an introduction to Chester given by David Evans.

The Group spent most of the day on two walks in Chester – one led by David Evans and Steve Langtree touring old and new developments in the city, and the other by John Herson and Ann Farrell following the history of Chester's Port from the River to the Canal. These tours were repeated after a lunch break at BLP.

**Ann Farrell**

John Herson and Group on the  
Dee Branch of the Chester Canal

# A DRIVE FOR NEW CORPORATE MEMBERS

We have long been conscious that we have under indexed in terms of our potential to act as a voice for the business community in Chester in relation to the development of the City. Our basic ideology of seeking to ensure high quality design in relation to development in the City is just as relevant to those who work in and around the Chester as it is to individual members living here and of course there is often overlap between the places we live and work in any event.

Based on feedback from colleagues in the business community it was clear that a major obstacle we have to overcome is the perception of the Trust as an organisation that is only interested in turning Chester into a time capsule. Those of us who are already members and work with the Civic Trust know this isn't the case but getting that message across convincingly requires new approaches.

To that end we invited representatives of the local business community to an event at Bishop Lloyd's Palace to explain our aims, the work we do and the opportunity that we have in terms of our connections with the Council to be a voice for business. The invitations were enthusiastically received and existing corporate members attended to lend their weight to the drive to persuade attendees to join us.

The event was well received and the evidence is in the growth of our corporate membership since the event. I'm delighted to be able to report that already six new corporate members have joined us as a result of the event and we continue to be in discussions with others.

I'd therefore like to welcome My Tax Point, The University of Chester, The Cheshire Garden, Kenney Moore, Bolton Birch and Haines Watts as corporate members. The support of all our corporate members is appreciated and together our voice is stronger as we continue to insist on the highest standards of design and development for our City.

Finally I'd like to thank everyone who worked so hard to make the corporate event happen, not an easy task as we emerge from the pandemic. Particular thanks to Jane Harrad-Roberts of Marketing Projects for organising the invites and attendance on the night, Chris Russell for the catering, Tony Barton for explaining the benefits for Donald Insall of membership and all the volunteers who helped on the evening.

**Nick Clarke**



# Chester Civic Trust

**Chair: Christine Russell** ([christinerussell4@icloud.com](mailto:christinerussell4@icloud.com))

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## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

### **JANUARY 12th**

**A ZERO-CARBON FUTURE for TRADITIONAL HOMES?**

BOB COSTELLO, Principal of BCA, services consultants, and TONY BARTON, Chairman of Donald Insall Associates, have been working together for 20 years to reservice historic buildings from Manhattan to the Cotswolds. They have real concerns that traditionally built homes will be left 'stranded' if they cannot be improved to react to the climate crisis. They will explain the issues, describe the current research project (based near Chester) and answer your questions.

### **FEBRUARY 9th**

**THE GROWTH OF IMPERIAL TOBACCO, CHESTER LINKS and KEY DEVELOPMENTS in BRISTOL**

SIMON BIRCH, the Chair of the Bristol Society, will give a talk on his researches into the role of tobacco in the industrial heritage of Bristol and the link with tobacco manufacturing in 19th Century Chester. In addition Simon will highlight the

involvement of the Society in current developments in Bristol.

### **MARCH 9th**

**THE CHESHIRE SANDSTONE RIDGE : TOWARDS a NEW NATIONAL LANDSCAPE**

ANDREW HULL, Chair of the Sandstone Ridge Trust, will explain how the designation of the Sandstone Ridge as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) will allow the area to benefit from greater protection and management. This diverse, distinctive and celebrated landscape in the heart of Cheshire is rich in heritage, archaeology and wildlife.

### **APRIL 2ND am and pm**

Norman Walk in Chester

### **MAY 18th am**

Middlewich Walk

**All the Lectures are held at the Grosvenor Museum Lecture Theatre starting at 7.30pm. Admission is free to members of Chester Civic Trust. Guests are welcome - payment is £5 on the door.**

## CORPORATE MEMBERS

EXCELLO LAW  
DTM LEGAL  
CHESTER BID  
HAINES WATTS ACCOUNTANTS  
BOLTON BIRCH  
KENNEY MOORE  
THE CHESHIRE GARDEN  
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHESTER  
MY TAX POINT  
VINCI CONSTRUCTION

CHAMPION ACCOUNTANTS  
AARON & PARTNERS SOLICITORS  
ALLINGTON HUGHES SOLICITORS  
DESIGN GROUP  
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSOCIATES  
DONALD INSALL ASSOCIATES  
LOVELOCK MITCHELL ARCHITECTS  
RAISE ARCHITECTS  
TWEED NUTTALL WARBURTON SADDLER BROWN  
RAINFOREST

**The Civic Trust is grateful for the support of its Corporate Members.**

Corporate Membership is available to professional practices, institutions, colleges, schools and businesses of all types in the Chester area.

**Visit our website or contact Nick Clarke, [nickclarke77@btinternet.com](mailto:nickclarke77@btinternet.com)**

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