

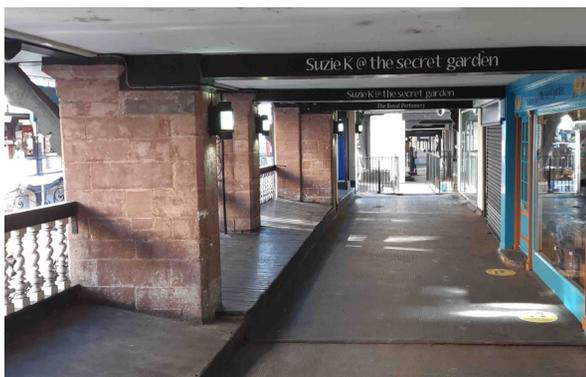


THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

Chester Civic Trust Awards 2023

Members of Chester Civic Trust have excelled this year submitting a total of 92 nominations, 43 'Good' and 49 'Bad and/or Ugly'. It was good, too, to see some from outside the city.

The judges decided not to consider 2 of the nominations this year - the new Northgate market/cinema complex and Chester Zoo's Nature Recovery Corridor, neither of which are complete at present but should be ready for consideration next year.



THE GOOD

The Chair's Special Award this year goes to the **Regeneration of the Rows**.

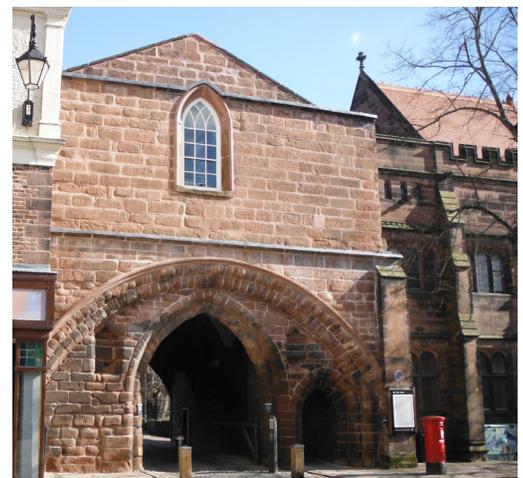
This is a tribute to the partnership of all involved, Cheshire West and Chester Council, the Architects, Chester Business Improvement District (BID), and the owners of the cafes, bars and shops. The work, sympathetically undertaken by the Contractors, includes the careful repair and redecoration of Chester's unique historic asset, with much improved lighting, colour and levels. It is good to see restorative maintenance being done on such an important feature of our City Centre.

Four further GOOD awards were made:

1) The Abbey Gateway.

This medieval structure providing access to Abbey Square from the Town Hall Square is Grade 1 listed.

In recent years it has looked very neglected with weeds growing out of its distinctive, red sandstone masonry. Over 2022 it has been repaired and restored befitting its historic significance and prime location.



2) The Former Post Office Building, St John Street.

Armstrong Partnership has created over 14,000 square feet of studio and office space spanning four floors. They stripped out the building, peeling back decades of alterations and taking back the building to a blank canvas of original brick, steel and timber elements. New spaces were then created to help the team to work as one, whilst being sympathetic to the history of the property. The Judges particularly liked the restoration of the street façade and the new walls, railings and steps.



3) Blacon Parade and adjacent housing.

This project consists of the refurbishment of existing dwellings, new build family homes and one and two bedroom sheltered housing apartments. There is also a new Primary Care Centre and pharmacy, a Community Development Centre with a Library and a Business Enterprise Building to support new businesses, and a new play area. The existing parade has been refurbished. The Judges particularly liked the design of the new housing.



4) It Shouldn't be in the Dee.

The Welsh Dee Trust is an environmental charity seeking to restore waters across the Dee catchment and to highlight the issue of water pollution and littering. Despite its name the Trust works in both Wales and England. Activities in 2022 have included volunteer-based litter picks and educational events. There have been 25 litter picking sessions along the river as well as floating and hard to reach rubbish collected from paddleboards. In total 140 volunteers have collected 265 bags of litter. Pollution monitoring has included measuring phosphate levels and micro-plastic pollution, with volunteer training sessions held in Caldly Nature Park and the Countess Country Park. The micro-plastics monitoring is supported by laboratory testing at the University of Chester and feeds into a postgraduate research programme.



COMMENDATIONS were awarded to two projects.

The Art House Café in Bridge St.

The Judges commended the Art House Café for providing both an extremely pleasant café and various art and craft workshops in Cowper House, which has been very tastefully refurbished. The main café entrance is at Row level and has helped to open up a less used part of the Row's walkway. The 14th century rib-vaulted undercroft houses the workshops.

Chester Cathedral Pilgrims' Porch.

The new doors installed inside the main doors in the west front of the Cathedral are not only interesting but give visitors a view of the cathedral nave. The view at night with an event in progress in the cathedral is particularly stunning. Sadly the doors are not open to the public and some judges found them over fussy.

THE BAD AND UGLY

The Judges started with a series of what they referred to as 'Hardy Perennials' which are buildings which are unfortunately, often nominated. Included in this category are:-

1. The Flat Shed and Dry/Graving Dock in the Canal Basin.

Both of these are Grade II listed and are important buildings in Chester's recently declared Inland Heritage Port. The Flat Shed was used for building 'flats' (broad canal boats) and retains its original framework of cast iron columns supporting lattice girders. It has been vacant and neglected for years and is now in serious disrepair. The Dry Dock, one of the oldest working dry docks in the country, has been in use until recently. However, it is now fenced off and the roof badly needs repairing.



2. St Olave's and the former Quicks Building, Lower Bridge St.

The forecourt of St Olave's Church has been propped up for years with scaffolding and supports. The former Quicks building, referred to in Pevsner's Guide as 'a nasty 1960's block', has been empty and neglected for years. Its large footprint and elevation has unfortunately dominated this part of Lower Bridge St for too long.



3. Dee House.

A controversial building for many years; its future seems still in doubt. The deteriorating building is an eye sore in a pivotal location, visible from the City Walls, Roman Gardens and Amphitheatre as well as the Ring Road. Goodness knows what tourists think about it!



4. Off the Wall, Pepper St.

The shoddy state of this building has recently been partly addressed. However the higher level of the premises remains an eyesore with some broken panes and boarded up windows and vegetation growing out of areas of the brickwork.



The next group of **BAD and UGLY** awards went to various parts of the City Walls. Included in this category are:-

5. Collapsed Section of the City Wall.

The Judges were disappointed with the lack of progress with the repair of the section of wall behind buildings in St John St. This collapsed some time ago and work has still not started.



6. The Recorder's Steps, wall adjacent to Rufus Court and St Martin's Gate steps.

At all these locations the wall or steps up to it are being supported by unsightly scaffolding which has been in place for some time with no sign of any work being done.

The following group of **BAD and UGLY** awards was made to new nominations for buildings desperately in need of repair and maintenance:-

7. Diocesan House, Raymond St.

One half of this substantial building was built by Thomas Telford as the Canal Tavern for use by passengers to and from Liverpool via the new Ellesmere Canal (not to be confused with today's Telford's Warehouse next door). The other, slightly later half was used as the offices of the Ellesmere Canal company. Both are Grade II listed. They have been vacant and neglected for some years and their condition is now declining to the point where a new use is becoming urgent.



8. Façade of Lecture Theatre of Independent Church, Queens Place.

The relocated façade of the Lecture Theatre is sadly in need of cleaning and repair and the adjacent garden is neglected. The façade and garden can be viewed from the canal and screens the adjacent Tesco service yard.



9. Artillery Store, Chester Castle.

This building is close to the City Walls. Those using the wall walkway are confronted by the unsightly state of this building, its neighbouring structures and the overgrown and unkempt land in front of them. Formerly a store for Cheshire County Council, it could be restored and reused including possibly opening this area to the City Walls.



The final BAD and UGLY award goes to the New Market Car Park.

The car park received seven nominations as either BAD or UGLY or both. Comments referred to it as 'overbearing and dominant', 'totally out of scale for Chester', 'far too high by at least two floors', 'wipes out all vistas from one of the best sites for viewing the Welsh hills in Chester', and 'the materials used are alien to the City'. It was suggested that people should not be encouraged to drive into Chester and increase the already high pollution levels on the ring road, and it would be better to promote 'greener' forms of transport and 'Park and Ride'. (In contrast to these views the judges noted that one nomination had suggested the car park for a 'good' award as an 'easy to use car park' with a large number of charging stations)



Peter Hadfield

Editor's note: I have summarised Peter's Report.

The full report can be found on the Chester Civic Trust website.

CHESTER CITY GATEWAY



Although the removal of clutter is an important consideration, it is imperative that Station Square isn't a barren wilderness: public art, seating and good landscaping are important components of a people-friendly space. The presence of "new bus stops around Station Square" is essential for an integrated transport hub but presents a design challenge when the priorities there are not only improved public realm but also the needs of pedestrians and cyclists.

We were less enthusiastic about the concentration of all car parking in the area into one multi-storey car park above the proposed mobility hub, partly because some of the small surface car parks proposed to be removed are crucial to local community use (e.g. off St Anne Street) and partly because it would result in too tall a structure that would block sight lines into the city from Hoole Road.

We also need to be convinced that suitable provision will be made for short-stay parking for the Station and for taxis and that the integration with bus provision is well thought out. If short stay parking (already insufficient) is to be removed from Station Square, the proposed mobility hub must also have sufficient short stay parking to allow this to be a true transport interchange and it must be connected directly to the station concourse by a covered walkway. There is no mention of short stay parking for people dropping off and picking up railway passengers in the description of the proposed mobility hub - it must not be an afterthought.

The removal of through traffic from City Road (except for buses) lends itself to turning it into a green boulevard. It is the shortest route into the city centre from the Station but the critical point is the pedestrian route across The Bars roundabout, which is a disgrace, with no pedestrian signing whatsoever through the dismal underpasses. This must be addressed as part of the Gateway initiative.

Cheshire West & Chester Council has recently undertaken a public consultation on outline proposals for a major strategic regeneration scheme for the area around Chester Railway Station. Although at the core of the scheme is a new pedestrian/cycle bridge over the railway (alongside the existing Hoole Road bridge) and a remodelling of the public realm in the immediate vicinity of the Station, the proposals are much more extensive than this, covering commercial and housing development over a large area north of the railway (south of Lightfoot Street) and south of the Station. Indeed these commercial and housing development proposals are crucial to the success of proposal because, in effect, it is the 'profits' from these developments that are intended to partly fund the transport and public realm improvements.

Details of the draft proposals can be seen at: <https://chestercitygateway.co.uk/#strategic>

A comprehensive formal response was made on behalf of the Chester Civic Trust, a copy of which I can send to anyone interested. In that response, we warmly welcomed the overall concept, particularly the provision of the proposed pedestrian/cycle bridge over the railway, the remodelling of the 'square' in front of the Station itself and the provision of a mobility hub on the site of the current Station west car park.



Some of our other comments included a plea for family friendly new housing rather than yet more 1-bed and 2-bed apartments, an acceptance that a more intensive use of new development sites would be a price worth paying to achieve planning gain to help pay for public realm benefits and a cautious welcome to the concept of the raising of the Gateway skyline to mark this out as a vibrant, growing commercial and residential area.

The remodelling of 'Station Square' is an important component of the scheme and although we support this in principle we are conscious that, as in many such schemes, 'the devil will be in the detail'.

Peter Cocker

A JOURNEY TO THE CULTURAL HIGHLIGHTS OF HANSEATIC LEAGUE PORTS



The theme for the Trust visit that is planned for September will be the cultural and architectural heritage of Hanseatic League cities in Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands. Our two main stopovers will be Lübeck and Antwerp.

In many ways the medieval Hanseatic League, stretching from England to the heart of Russia, was a forerunner of the European Union with members from 200 cities in 16 modern day countries. It was one of the most successful trading alliances in history. The League was founded in 1356 and lasted for 500 years until it was brought down by the rise of nationalism.

The League was a commercial and defensive confederation of merchant guilds. Nobility and the Church played no part. The name 'Hansa' is a German word for 'convoy'. Merchants would travel together between ports and markets for protection. Crime on land and sea was pretty rampant in the Middle Ages! As well as armies, members of the League had their own legal system.

The sign 'Hanseatic Walk' near Cannon Street Station is the only feature left of the self-governing enclave of over 400 German merchants who lived in London and were exempt from customs duties. The Hansa building on the Quayside in Kings Lynn is the last remaining Hansa building in England.

Lübeck in Northern Germany was the 'The Queen of the Hanseatic League'. The city is renowned for its medieval Brick Gothic monuments, like the 15th century Holstentor, the city gate. (shown in the illustration). The Old Town, despite WW2 damage, has retained over 1000 listed buildings, many dating back to the Middle Ages.

Today Antwerp is the 2nd highest-trading port in Europe after Rotterdam. It was an important financial centre for the Hanseatic League. A stock exchange (Kontor) was established in Antwerp in 1531. It was used as a model for the Royal Exchange in London that was opened by Queen Elizabeth 1 in 1571. Many 16th century wealthy merchants' houses have survived in Antwerp but unfortunately most of the Hansa buildings on the quayside were lost in a devastating fire.

Today many of the Hansa cities are now World Heritage Sites. In addition to spending time in Lübeck and Antwerp, the group will also visit Nijmegen and Bremen. Nijmegen is the oldest city in the Netherlands and, in common with Chester, celebrates over 2000 years of history. Bremen has one of the most beautiful historic centres in Germany and its Town Hall is the only town hall in the world to be listed by UNESCO.

A booking form for the 8 day visit to Hanseatic League Ports should be included with this Newsletter. If you would like further information, please contact me on 07976 313336 or email christinerussell4@icloud.com

Christine Russell

ACCESS TO CHESTER CASTLE

It's good to report that the Agricola Tower and Walls of Chester Castle are now open to the public at certain weekends. This follows restoration work carried out by English Heritage to allow safe access. Details are available on the English Heritage website: www.english-heritage.org.uk

The opening dates for the rest of 2023 are:

- **Georgian Red Coats** 13th & 14th May
- **Medieval Chester** 24th & 25th June
- **Civil War Heritage Open Doors Event** 16th & 17th September
- **Torch Light Tours** Dates TBC
- **Christmas in the Castle** Saturday 25th November



THE YORK MERCHANT ADVENTURERS: WHAT CHESTER HAS LOST



The Merchant Adventurers' Hall in York is a magnificent long, one storey half-timbered building near Foss Bridge. It was built in 1357, became the York Merchant Adventurers' Hall in 1581 and has been in continuous occupation since. By looking at the evidence of how it was used, we could get some insight into Bishop Lloyd's Palace during its occupation by the Chester Merchant Adventurers.

The Great Hall on the first floor was meant to be impressive. It was accessed from a private courtyard by external stairs and was huge. A plaster 'sealing' covered the timber framing. The walls were also 'sealed' with wainscotting. The ceiling was removed in the 1920s to reveal the timber framing of the roof.

The dais in the hall has long since been removed, but there are references to it in documents. There were boards and trestles 'for the dece (dais)' It seems to have had pictures around it, 'pykhure belonging to the hy deyeuse'.

Presumably this area was for the Governor of the company and the deputy, as well as other important officials. There were regular business meetings of the company as well as the need to witness oaths and admit new members. There was sitting space for others with five boards and trestles on the south side of the hall and seven forms and four boards on the north side. There was also a minstrels' gallery in the room.

The hall was not just used by the Adventurers as a business area. Regular company feasts were held. In 1590 the menu was

FIRST COURSE: potage of beef stock, boiled salt beef, roast beef, mutton and veal.

SECOND COURSE: 15 hens, 4 capons, 3 cockerels, 4 partridges, 30 fieldfares, 60 larks and a baked turkey.

228 pints of beer, 70 pints of claret and 12 pints of sack were served with this course.

VOID: baked warden pears with sweetmeats and 8 pints of muscatel and piment.

Music was played to accompany the eating.

We know so much about the building and activities, because of its extensive archive. It has documents dating back to 1301, including the 1581 charter licensing the company. There are deeds of the company's properties: payments to tradesmen: merchants' letters: loans and repayments: the

Governors of the company and membership of the companies using the building from 1357 to 1835. Many of these charters vanished in 1730 but were rediscovered near to Sheffield in 1890 and returned to York. Perhaps one day such a treasure trove belonging to Bishop Lloyd's might be discovered.

Money and bonds also needed to be stored. This demanded sturdy and well-locked chests There is still on display a wooden chest with a complicated locking system from the fourteenth century and two iron chests.

A picture collection of Governors of the Company was hung in the hall. The earliest was of William Wooller, who left £100 to be lent to two young merchant adventurers for a term of three years. This level of start up support was fairly common in the company. The early paintings are artisan products painted on wood. They are reminiscent of the portrait of Bishop Lloyd in the Grosvenor Museum.

The smaller chambers had a more practical use. Cloth was stored and sold here. There is a record of 'making Rowmes in the hall for lyeing of cloth'. A 1603 document reads 'no brother of this fellowship shall go to se or buye anye cloth.... in no place but our hall' Accurate weights and measures were also kept here to check goods by the company's searchers.

The under croft housed a feature unique to the York company. The building had begun in 1357 as a chantry and there is still a chapel here that was associated with the company. Religion was intertwined in their business. A hospital for the poor and inform had also been housed here from 1373 and was continued by the company in various forms until 1900.

Karen McKay

LOST AND FOUND?

We have had the following request:

"I wondered if you might have any photographs of the concrete and stained-glass screen that used to stand alongside the pedestrian ramp entrance to the Grosvenor Precinct (now Centre) on Pepper Street? I am researching Dalle-de-Verre stained glass for my dissertation for my MA in Conservation of the Historic Environment with Birmingham City University. I discovered in the newspaper archive that there was once an interesting example in a rare secular public setting installed at the Precinct in 1966. The screen consisted of 150 separate concrete and stained-glass panels depicting the six gates of the city, Coats of Arms and the Chester City Crest..."

We have traced the whereabouts of this to Bumpers Yard Depot about twenty years ago. Does anyone out there know where it is now? We would appreciate any photographs as we cannot find any record of this object.



Another old chestnut

One of our queens is missing.... the life-sized statue of Queen Anne was removed from the Water Tower about sixty years ago. We still miss her. Contact the Civic Trust, if you know where she is.

Found and to be displayed

The three stained glass windows from the children's ward in the Chester Infirmary were not actually lost, but hidden from general view.

They will be unveiled with one from the chapel on July 5th at the Riverside Museum, Wheeler Building, Chester College. They will be there on display. This is to mark the seventy fifth anniversary of the NHS.

Karen McKay

CHESTER'S WATERWAYS



Chester is a city embraced by its waterways. For the past 13 years Chester Civic Trust (with the local branch of the Inland Waterways Association, IWA) has been promoting the importance of Chester's waterways for their potential role in the city's economic and social regeneration.

This was also

emphasised in the Urban Land Institute report (2010), the Chester Characterisation Study (2011), the One City Plan (2012), the Chester Waterways Strategy (2014) and the designation of the Chester Canal Conservation Area (2018), all Cheshire West and Chester Council initiatives to which we contributed. In 2021 the Civic Trust, in partnership with CWAC and IWA, achieved the designation of Chester as a Heritage Port. We have now been invited into the CWAC team working on the revised One City Plan and have agreed with council officers number of actions to move things forward.

This Heritage Port initiative is not just a passive label. It is a means of improving the waterways as an integral and vital part of the city's economy and tourist offer. We have emphasised that Chester's waterways must be conserved and developed as a joined-up system. At present they are not fulfilling their potential and two parts of the system - the tidal Dee and the Dee Branch canal - are underused, neglected or even becoming derelict.

Fundamental to a more positive future for the city's waterways is the proposal to put a lock in the old mill race on the Handbridge side of the Dee. This was one of the objectives foreshadowed in the 2014 Waterways Strategy and the Civic Trust believes it remains a vital objective today. The first stage of moving this forward is a feasibility study of the engineering issues together with a cost-benefit analysis of the likely returns for the city.

A lock would link the upper non-tidal and lower tidal Dee and open up a substantial new waterway to the national system. That would be the key to regenerating the whole circuit of waterways around the city and also make it potentially attractive to maritime craft which currently have no facilities in Chester. Similar waterway investments in recent years have produced demonstrably positive impacts on localities elsewhere. Chester should seize the opportunity.



Chester Civic Trust

Chair: Christine Russell (christinerussell4@icloud.com)

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DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

May 17th
'USEFUL SCIENCE'
a talk by John Walker at BLP

May 24th
VISIT TO WARRINGTON MUSEUM

May 27th
LAUNCH OF CHESTER HERITAGE FESTIVAL
AT CHESTER RACES' 'Roman Day'

June 1st
VISIT TO DENBIGH

June 17th - 28th
CHESTER HERITAGE FESTIVAL for details see
www.chesterheritagefestival.co.uk

September 1st
VISIT TO WENTWORTH WOODHOUSE

September 17th - 24th
GROUP TOUR to Hanseatic Ports of Lubeck,
Antwerp, Nijmegen and Bremen
(Booking form included with this newsletter)

October 5th
AGM at Garret Room, Storyhouse

YOUR CIVIC TRUST NEEDS YOU!

As members will already know, all Chester Civic Trust activities are dependent upon the efforts of volunteers. The Trust is always looking for more volunteers to help organise our day to day activities. These are organised by a group of committees. If you feel able to help please call or email the BLP office (details above) and you can be put in touch with any of the Committee chairs listed below.

Karen McKay: Events Committee
'Events' organises a range of activities eg the annual lecture programme, the Twelfth Night Quiz, and study trips to places of interest to Trust members.

Steve Langtree: Heritage Committee
'Heritage' coordinates the Trusts input to various initiatives to promote and cherish our local heritage.

Andrew Pannell: 'New Works' compiles the Civic Trust response to planning applications and development within the city.

In addition the Trust welcomes volunteers to help with tasks including staffing Bishop Lloyds Palace during opening hours, contributing interesting and informative content for our Newsletter (or even editing it!) and website, or helping with our annual Good, Bad Ugly Awards. If you have any time or skills to spare have no doubt Chester Civic Trust can use them. Please get in touch.

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