



THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY CHESTER CIVIC TRUST AWARDS 2022

The Judges received 20 Good nominations and 22 Bad/Ugly nominations. All categories included an interesting mix, and it was good to see nominations from outside the City. There were two uncompleted projects in the Bad/Ugly category. These are the Northgate Development Car Park which was nominated 4 times and the Housing Development on Wrexham Road.

We were concerned about the scale of the car park and felt the housing development looks like being a missed opportunity to improve this important gateway into the City. We expect both projects to be nominated in the future.



Chester basin with
Taylor's Boatyard

Christine Russell
with John Herson,
Ann Farrell and
Jim Forkin
representing the
Inland Waterways
Association



THE GOOD

The Chair's Special Award this year goes to the Designation of Chester as the first **Inland Heritage Port**, recognised by the Maritime Heritage Trust, National Historic Ships and European Maritime Heritage. It is hoped that this designation will raise the profile of a rather unappreciated part of Chester, its 'Old Port' area. The project was initiated by the Chester and Merseyside branch of the Inland Waterways Association and supported by Cheshire West and City Council and Chester Civic Trust. The contribution of John Herson, and others, to the excellent successful submission is recognised.



The **Leadworks Development** is considered worthy of a Good Award. The new building has maintained the clear association with Chester's canal-side industrial heritage and its iconic, historic Shot Tower. The new apartments have been built with sympathetic materials and are a stylish modern addition to the cityscape. Judges were disappointed with the rather barren courtyard and hope this will develop into a more welcoming space in the future. The 'Mr Walker' statue deserves a mention but seems rather lost behind parked cars.

The Restoration of **St John's Ruins** is recognised with a Good Award. St John's Church has a long history that helps to explain why it appears as it does today. Its ruins form a picturesque aspect from Grosvenor Park. In recent years the ruins have become overgrown, the masonry has appeared weathered, and the site looked unkempt and neglected. The ruins also have the curiosity of a coffin mounted vertically with the inscription 'dust to dust', which should intrigue passers-by. Over 2021, the ruins have been restored, the red sandstone masonry has been cleared of vegetation and repaired but retains a picturesque presence and no longer looks neglected. As part of this restoration, the coffin is once again prominent and old etched zinc interpretation panels have been spruced-up so that they are more legible.



The **Natural Burial Ground at Farndon** also receives a Good Award due to its nice mix of cultural and natural heritage. It has a well-designed car park, an attractive oak barn for ceremonies and shelter and new tree and hedge planting. The area also has inspired wildflower planting which is a delight. It provides a fantastic setting that enhances Barnston Monument and helps to address the natural crises facing us, habitat loss and pollinator decline.

Our final Good Award is the refurbishment of the **NatWest Bank** on Eastgate Street. In recent years this building had been looking tired and neglected, with vegetation growing out of the masonry. The refurbishment has done it justice especially given its prominent position at the corner of Eastgate Street and St Werburgh Street. Vegetation has been cleared and the stonework cleaned. The NatWest signage is more discreet and the netting installed to protect it from pigeons is barely noticeable. As a neo-classical Victorian building it adds interest to the townscape. It was by George Williams, who later joined the half-timber revival to build tall and somewhat showy black and white Row buildings on the south side of the street towards the Cross; so an interesting contrast. This should be an example for other properties in the city to follow!



COMMENDATIONS were awarded to 3 projects.

- **The Raven** (formerly The Farndon) was in poor condition but is now an attractive and inviting building improving the street scene in the village.
- **Rake Hall** Little Stanney, a Grade II listed building, former home of the Bunbury family, has been restored to a high standard and opened as a Brunning and Price gastropub in December 2021. Original features, including a beautiful oriel window, have been retained and enhanced. The environment improvements including the restoration of the duck pond are impressive.
- **The Town Hall Parklet** comprising tables and seating together with planters was funded through the government's Containment Outbreak Management Fund (COMF); it encouraged people to use the space when being outdoors was deemed safer. We hope this will return in the Spring.
- Another interesting nomination received was for the **Hoole Food Market Electric Bike Delivery**, unfortunately we are unable to give this an award as Environmental Issues were not included as a category. This should be corrected next year to help raise awareness about sustainable transport and local action to help achieve low carbon.

THE BAD AND THE UGLY

There were 5 Bad/Ugly nominations in Pepper Street; it must surely be a contender for the most unprepossessing street in the City centre!

The **Boujee Restaurant** with its garish pink frontage had 3 nominations. We agreed that it is inappropriate for its surroundings next to the dignified classical facade of a listed building.



The rear of the Grosvenor Precinct now housing the **Leonardo Hotel** was mentioned last year but we considered it worth including again. The appearance of the hotel converted from an office building is so banal that it is not certain that the work is completed. There are many 1960's and 70's developments in the historic core of Chester that would benefit from a new facade treatment, but this is a very poor example and higher standards of design and implementation should be required.

The **walkway from the Walls** to the multi-storey car park was nominated for its poor maintenance, it is desperately in need of a coat of paint. It has been said before that the only good thing about the car park is the lion on top of the stair tower.

The last nomination on Pepper Street is **Off-the-Wall** which is viewed from St John Street, the pocket park with the SE Angle Tower, and the City Walls between Thimbleby's Tower and the Newgate. The building has leaking gutters and drainpipes, has vegetation growing out of the brickwork and roof, and has windows in such a poor and rotten state that it can only be a matter of time before the glass falls out. Indeed, some are already boarded up. It's bad enough that a visitor on the City Walls must look at the derelict state of Dee House across the Amphitheatre, but the proximity of such a dilapidated building must further adversely impact on their impression of Chester and enjoyment of walking on the City Walls. The building is, if otherwise in a good state, an attractive Edwardian addition to the cityscape.



Notwithstanding the demise of Debenhams and the need to find a role for the premises that housed this once iconic store, the **1828 building** (only part of the former shop) has been in a poor state for some time. This classical frontage occupies a prime location on Eastgate Street. The stucco is breaking up, the paintwork flaking off, and the building has vegetation growing out of it. Areas appear damp, not helped by roots of the invasive vegetation. It is a shabby eyesore in the centre of what is Chester's main thoroughfare.

The Judges were pleased to see the excellent maintenance and repair work being carried out on the **City Wall near the Northgate**. Unfortunately, there are still many elements of the Walls that are neglected including the **South East Angle Tower and Newgate**. The Walls are a key attraction and lack of maintenance sends a very bad message to both visitors and residents.

Finally, the inappropriate use of **tarmac repairs** to areas of sandstone paving was considered both Bad and Ugly.



In addition to myself the Judges this year were David and Jean Evans, Graham and Sarah Catlin, Sue Denley, Eileen Willshaw and Paul Hyde. Despite Covid isolations and a hospitalisation we managed to assess the nominations and agree these awards. They all have my thanks for their time and commitment visiting and providing insightful comments on the nominations.

Peter Hadfield

CHESTER PHOTOGRAPHIC SURVEY

There is an urgent requirement for a member of the Civic Trust to take over the Chairmanship of the Photographic Survey.

Being a photographer is not a qualification. In addition to chairing four meetings a year, the group have a need to prevent the deterioration of the current collection of slides already collected by the CCT and dating from the 1960s.

Please contact Sue Denly on 07833 927342

POIGNANT MEMORIES OF UKRAINE

Members of Chester Civic Trust have had opportunities in recent years to visit countries like Albania, Armenia, Hungary and Romania that were formerly on the far side of the Iron Curtain. The focus of our visits has been on UNESCO World Heritage Sites rather than tourist hotspots. In May 2019 it was the turn of Ukraine to host a visit by members of Chester Civic Trust. From the moment we stepped off the plane in Kiev we received a very warm welcome from everyone we met on our travels through Europe's second largest country after Russia.

In Kiev we marvelled at the beauty of the blue golden-domed St Michael's Monastery, originally built in the 12th century, destroyed by the Soviets in the 1930s and rebuilt and reopened after Ukrainian independence in the 1990s. Kiev has many World Heritage ecclesiastical buildings including the magnificent St Sophia's Cathedral.

After Kiev we embarked on an 8 hour train journey to Lviv that has been home to Christians, Muslims and Jews since the Middle Ages. Lviv Station, a masterpiece of Art Nouveau architecture, is now having to cope with a mass of refugees fleeing their homeland for safety 40 miles away in Poland.

From Lviv we travelled round the ancient beech forests of the Carpathians that have been designated as a World Heritage site. We stopped off to visit a number of the traditional village wooden churches like the one at Rohatyn that was constructed in the 17th century.



Civic Trust members in Kiev in happier times

The final leg off our journey was an overnight sleeper train from Lviv to Odessa on the Black Sea coast. Odessa is a cosmopolitan port, founded by Catherine the Great. It is Ukraine's third largest city after Kiev and Kharkiv with stunning 19th century buildings designed by leading French and Italian architects. At the time of writing, Odessa has mercifully so far escaped from Russian bombardment.

It was a memorable visit to Ukraine and it is now heartbreaking to witness everyday, on our TV screens, the scenes of devastation, the mounting loss of life, the growing numbers of refugees and the wholesale destruction of towns and cities.

Plans for a visit by members of the Trust to cultural heritage sights in Poland have been put on hold until peace returns to Ukraine.

Christine Russell

A CHESTER MISCELLANY

The Civic Trust held a well attended Quiz at Bishop Lloyd's Palace on 11th February. It was a very entertaining evening with the usual superb catering. The questions were quite challenging and provoked a lot of discussion within the teams. Your editors thought, that if you missed the quiz, you might like to try some of the questions - so how well do you know Chester?

1. What listed building was acquired by the Faithful Companions of Jesus in 1854?
2. Who was the father of Aethelflaed, Lady of the Mercians?
3. Where is 'Pill Box Parade' or 'Pillbox Row'?
4. Who is the Countess of Chester?
5. What pub was demolished to make way for the new bus exchange?
6. How long is the River Dee?
7. What church was once a cathedral in the diocese of Lichfield?
8. Who was a leading Christian Socialist, chaplain to Queen Victoria, founder of the Chester Society for Natural Science, History & Art, and a canon at Chester Cathedral and Westminster?
9. Which bank building on Eastgate Street was designed by John Douglas?
10. Which pub dates back to the 11th century when it was the official residence of the Recorder of Chester?

Answers on page 7

RED HOUSE BLUES

Many people in and around Chester will know the Red House pub, more recently operating as the Et Alia restaurant. Located in the Dee Banks Conservation Area, the current building is at least 150 years old, and the roadside frontage retains its historic character. The riverside elevations were sympathetically converted in recent years to a multi-level restaurant with spectacular views of the river, the Meadows and beyond. The building is a key element in the skyline when viewed from across the Dee and its current character and massing is in sympathy with the character of the Conservation Area.

In January 2021 Sterling Property Co. Ltd. applied to demolish the building and replace it with seven expensive apartments with underground parking (21/00102/FUL). This provoked an instant campaign to save the Red House and local residents got CWAC to make it an Asset of Community Value (ACV). The application was refused because it was 'unacceptable in principle', particularly because of the loss of an existing community facility and its unacceptable height, scale and massing which would fail to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Dee Banks Conservation Area.

In November 2021 the applicant tried a new tactic. Alongside a new application (21/04648/FUL) for apartments which essentially repeats that refused earlier, a Lawful Development Certificate notification (21/04664/LDC) proposes to change the use of the existing premises to offices, something not needing



planning permission under Government changes to the Use Classes Order. The Red House building is, in fact, not likely to prove suitable or marketable as offices, but the resultant closure of the restaurant and the probable failure of the changed use are designed to free the site for the more profitable residential development.

The current proposals have again provoked a torrent of opposition, including an objection from the Civic Trust and also a petition of 373 signatures. Enterprising management could undoubtedly make a success of this spectacular venue whereas the proposed apartments would constitute a gross over-development of the site and be out of sympathy with the character of the conservation area. The Civic Trust believes approval of the current scheme would create a grave precedent for inappropriate development in this critical area of Chester's townscape.

John Herson

CHESTER MERCHANT ADVENTURERS' HALL

Look at the top right-hand corner of the panel with the arms of Bishop Lloyd, and you will see the arms of the Chester Merchant Adventurer's Company. The tentacles of this overseas trading company reached into the civic life of Chester throughout the reign of Elizabeth I to the eve of the English Civil War.

Its members were a coterie of the richest and most powerful men in the city. The majority of these merchants had been apprenticed to a trade in the city and then passed through the municipal offices from councilman to alderman and sheriff. Many were mayors and at least two were local Members of Parliament. It really was a case of what's good for overseas trade is good for the city of Chester.

The group needed a prestigious Hall. In York their company had inherited the ancient Mercers' Hall. In Exeter the company had the former Woollen Merchants' Hall. The Chester Company was a totally newly founded



company and had no earlier hall. What we now call Bishop Lloyd's Palace, provided them with a magnificent building in which to meet and where they could be contacted. It had grand chambers where guests could be accommodated.

A monograph on the Chester Merchant Adventurers has now been added to the previous seven articles on the history of the building. They can be found on the Chester Civic Trust website. There is a lot of other interesting material on the website. It's well worth a visit.

Karen McKay

WORLD CLASS GARDEN FOR NORTH WEST



In the 20th century it fell into disrepair and in 1943 was badly damaged by subsidence and a fire. It was then sold to a scrap merchant for £2,500, the house was demolished, and gradually nature reclaimed the gardens.

The RHS took over the 150 acre site in 2017 and in the biggest garden development scheme in its history set about creating a new garden to complement Wisley (Surrey), Harlow Carr (Yorkshire), Hyde Hall (Essex), and Rosemoor (Devon).

We look forward to hearing about the history of the site and the construction of this wonderful new amenity for the north west of England. At all stages

Postponements and cancellations of Civic Trust events over the past two years have been only a minor inconvenience compared to the catastrophe that the Covid19 pandemic has been to many people. We are grateful for your understanding and loyalty as we were unable to go ahead with planned trips, lectures and social events, and so have arranged two extra events that we think you will enjoy.

On June 22nd a curator from the Royal Horticultural Society will give a presentation on the society's fifth garden, RHS Bridgewater, which opened in July 2021, on the site of Worsley New Hall. This very grand gothic mansion was designed by architect Edward Blore and built in the 1840s for Francis Egerton, a year before he became the first Earl of Ellesmere. Over the following 50 years the extensive grounds were landscaped with formal gardens and terraces, heated greenhouses, parklands, and a boating lake. Worsley New Hall was visited twice in the 1850s by Queen Victoria and also by Edward VII.

of construction the RHS has been keen to involve the local community in the Manchester/Salford area including Manchester's large Chinese community, and to ensure the new garden is as sustainable and environmentally friendly as possible.

The presentation will be at the Grosvenor Museum on Wednesday June 22nd at 7.30pm. It will be free to Civic Trust members; as usual there will be a small charge of £5 for non members.

The following week, on Wednesday June 29th, Civic Trust members will have an opportunity to visit RHS Bridgewater to see what has been achieved in this formerly derelict area. Please see the booking form enclosed with this Newsletter. We will be travelling by coach so obviously the number of places is limited. Early booking is advised!

Cynthia Phillips

CHESTER HERITAGE FESTIVAL 2022

CHF is back; bigger, stronger and more varied than ever before.

Last year, for obvious reasons, most of our Heritage Festival was on-line. We learned a lot from this experience and attracted a large new audience from far and wide. With that in mind, our 'new normal' will be a hybrid event comprising further on-line material as well as the more traditional talks and walking tours.

There will not be a printed brochure this time, so please visit our dedicated Festival website for all the information you need, www.chesterheritagefestival.org.

Some events with limited capacity will need to be pre-booked, but most will be free of charge. The staff in the Visitor Information Centre at the Town Hall will be able to help you find out what is happening and take your bookings where necessary.

There will be something new for everyone, so please join in and enjoy the wide range of events.

Stephen Langtree

REVITALISING OUR HISTREET

ROWS IMPROVEMENTS ARE UNDERWAY!

Chester Rows improvements are well and truly underway. In January this year, the 'Chester Rows High Street Heritage Action Zone' (HSHAZ) programme took an important step forward as conservation specialists Recclesia began work on improvements to The Rows. In this phase of work, 100 plus properties will see repairs and redecoration of walls, ceilings, balustrades and some stallboard areas. In addition, there will be installation of new 'warm' lighting along the walkway and on steps. The aim is to enhance and highlight this key historic feature, to help to secure the future of the Rows and Chester as a whole. Thanks are due to Historic England as the main funder of the works, with Chester being one of many places funded under programme.

Cheshire West and Chester Council is mindful of the need to consult with owners, occupiers and a wider audience. This has been a considerable undertaking, with for example 600 plus owners of Rows and nearby properties having been written to. The Chester Growth Partnership website is also another avenue for

communication: <http://chester.westcheshiregrowth.co.uk/projects/heritage-action-zone/>

The HSHAZ is led by a partnership comprising of Cheshire West and Chester Council, Marketing Cheshire, Chester BID, University of Chester, Grosvenor Estates, and the Civic Trust. The programme of works was developed following the commissioning by Cheshire West and Chester Council of a specialist team of heritage professionals. The team comprises of Donald Insalls Associates (Conservation Architects), Ramboll UK Limited (Structural, Mechanical and Electrical Engineers), Thornton Firkin (Surveyors), and Keelagher Okey Klein (CDM Advisor).

The colour palette used for repainting reflects that historically the Rows would have seen a great colour variety in its properties and surrounds. Samples of colour were put on display on Bridge Street Row West to give people a chance to see their impact 'in situ.'

Andy Seddon, Chester HAZ Officer



Chester Miscellany - the answers

1. Dee House
2. Alfred the Great
3. Nicholas St - because it housed so many doctor's surgeries
4. Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall
5. Ship Victory
6. 70 miles through Wales and Chester
7. St John the Baptist
8. Charles Kingsley
9. HSBC
10. The Pied Bull



Chester Civic Trust

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

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DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

MAY 4th

BOB COSTELLO and TONY BARTON
talk on 'A ZERO-CARBON FUTURE FOR
TRADITIONAL HOMES?'
(Lecture re-arranged from January)
Grosvenor Museum Lecture Theatre 7.30pm

MAY 9th - 13th

VISIT to the COTSWOLDS. Fully booked.

MAY 18th

MIDDLEWICH WALK
Flier enclosed in this mailout.

MAY 28th

LAUNCH OF CHESTER HERITAGE
FESTIVAL at Chester Races' Roman Day.

JUNE 17th - 27th

CHESTER HERITAGE FESTIVAL including
Chester History and Heritage Fair at
St Mary's Creative Space on Sunday 26th
June. See www.chesterheritagefestival.org
for full details.

JUNE 18th

COMMUNITY FORUM at Bishop Lloyd's
Palace to celebrate NATIONAL CIVIC DAY

JUNE 22nd

LECTURE by the CURATOR of RHS
BRIDGEWATER on the 'DEVELOPMENT
and ETHOS of RHS BRIDGEWATER'
Grosvenor Museum Lecture Theatre
7.30pm.
Free special extra event for members.
Guests welcome £5 on the door.

JUNE 29th

VISIT to RHS BRIDGEWATER
Flier enclosed with details and
booking form.

JULY 26th

DAY VISIT to LICHFIELD
Flier enclosed with details and
booking form.

PLEASE NOTE

There are some changes to how events are organised. Some are being advertised by email. Please do check your emails for these. All events are now on the society's web site with an application form. You can pay and fill in the form online. We will continue to put flyers into the mailouts whenever possible.

Payment now can be done by BACS.
The Bank Transfer Account for trips is not the same as for subscriptions. We will always remind you on the

flyers, about which to use. You can continue to send cheques to Bishop Lloyd's Palace.

Remember that no news is good news. You can assume you have a place on an event, if you do not hear from us.

We are sorry, but events are becoming more expensive. They continue to be advertised at what they cost to organise. A very small donation is given to Chester Civic Trust. The organisers receive no payment. Costs of the visits have risen as prices rise.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF CHESTER
KENNEY MOORE
THE CHESHIRE GARDEN
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