



THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

Chester Civic Trust Awards 2024

These awards are presented annually and with the help of our members the Trust aims to:

- recognise progress and change over the past twelve months.
- encourage high standards in the built environment (urban and rural)
- recognise achievements that may not feature in a more formal award scheme.
- recognise the work of local individuals, and
- promote the Chester Civic Trust in the wider community.

Members have been busy again this year with a total of 55 nominations (23 Good and 32 Bad/Ugly) submitted. Once again it was good to see some from outside the city and we would like to receive more in the future. There were several which the Judges have not considered this year as they were incomplete, these will be included with other nominations next year.

CHAIRS SPECIAL AWARD: Picturehouse

This is a much-needed, suitably contemporary addition to the Chester leisure offer. Picturehouse occupies a key location on the Northgate Development's Exchange Square adjacent to the popular new Market. It has six screens and a café-bar. Significantly, it complements nearby Storyhouse in providing an indoor leisure/arts facility - so a venue providing more things to do in Chester and, crucially, in all weathers. The interior is a mix of vibrant and calm with a nod to Art Deco, apparently inspired by the (2014) film *The Grand Budapest Hotel* directed by Wes Anderson. The design is tasteful and helps to provide a sense of occasion welcoming visitors to a cinema experience. The seating in the auditoria is spacious and comfortable. An excellent addition to Chester's Northgate development.



Entrance to Picturehouse



Picturehouse Café and Bar

THE GOOD AWARDS:

1. The Flaggs and Hamilton House, Church Street, Tarvin

This project has put two Grade II* vacant buildings back into separate domestic houses by careful repair and minor alterations. The scheme has been very positive and has largely preserved features of significance in both properties. These two houses form an important part of the wider conservation area's character and appearance. This refurbishment has ensured they continue to add to this in the future.



The Flaggs and Hamilton House



oH Chester Design Foundation oH

2. Chester Design Foundation, Bridge Street

This is a newly formed community enterprise committed to supporting the growth and development of the creative industries in Chester. At the heart of the oH programme are mentors sharing skills, and experience, supporting the development of local artists and crafters. They have clear objectives which are to champion local talent, empower growth and drive positive change so that a sustainable place on Chester's high street is a genuine reality. This project is both imaginative and an excellent fit for the types of independent businesses Chester needs.

3. 6-12 Saint Werburgh Street, Renovation of Facades

This group of buildings is arguably among the best (if not the best) of the half-timber revival in Chester. The architect was John Douglas, who had bought the whole length of this section of the street so that it could be developed in a coordinated manner. The buildings date from the 1890s and have been looking tired in recent years. During 2024 numbers 6-12 in the street were overhauled and repainted – they now look spectacular – the black and white decoration helping to highlight the superb ornately carved timber including figures representing Hugh Lupus, Saint Werburgh and Queen Victoria. Indeed, now, the adjoining buildings look particularly sad.

6-12 St Werburgh Street



4. New Chester Market

Whilst not universally liked there is no doubt that the new market has been a great success. The mix of food court and traditional market stalls works well. The atmosphere is lively and busy, and the area is filled with light from the large windows. The direct access from the car park works particularly well. There is no doubt that this is a significant contributor to the success of the Northgate development.

New Chester Market

5. Chester Zoo Nature Recovery Corridor

Working to create and restore habitats for wildlife with local communities, support from the Green Recovery Challenge Fund (GRCF) has enabled Chester Zoo to lead the initiation of a significant nature recovery corridor in Chester. Currently this scheme has improved over 62 hectares for wildlife including 8 ponds, 24 hectares of wildflower meadows and 15 hectares of grassland. Of particular importance is their community engagement programme including long term support to 6 schools and 6 community groups. Wildlife champions train leaders and give ongoing support, there are also community and wider public engagement programmes.

COMMENDATIONS:

1. The White Horse, Churton

In an important position in the centre of the village this building was looking very run down and dilapidated. After an extensive refurbishment it has been brought back to life as both a high-quality restaurant and a local pub. The character of the building has been maintained and enhanced with sympathetic decoration and interesting artwork on display. An external seating area has been formed with a small garden area which is a very pleasant space for a relaxing drink in the evening. It has once again become an important village community asset.



The White Horse, Churton



Bren Bikes, Live! New Scene, Newton

2. Bren Bikes, Live! New Scene, Newton

Bren Bikes is a small local non-profit social enterprise with a significant sustainability impact. It was devised to provide in-house training for people with learning disabilities and autism in the Chester area and works with a range of host employers to provide placements so that its beneficiaries gain real world work experience through supported one-to-one placements. It is an initiative that is preventing used bikes from being discarded by refurbishing them and then selling them at affordable prices for reuse. Furthermore, by providing affordable bikes to the local community it is helping to encourage cycling and by providing a local quality-assured bike servicing facility it is helping to keep bikes well-maintained and in use. In 2023 we understand that they sold 1049 refurbished bikes, conducted

1567 services, and supported 45 beneficiaries on placement. Bren also provides volunteering opportunities for people with consequent well-being benefits and personal development for those individuals. Bren Bikes is a local Chester concern implementing an innovative scheme that is actively addressing all three aspects of sustainability – environmental, social, and economic.

3. New Residential Property, Farndon

Situated by the River Dee, close to the bridge, this interesting new house replaces the derelict former Boathouse and Café. The use of brickwork and timber cladding works well and gives an interesting façade. Set at a level to avoid the regular flooding and against the backdrop of Farndon Cliffs it forms an interesting addition to the view from the bridge.



Residential Property, Farndon

The Lock Vaults



4. The Lock Vaults, Hoole Lane

It is good to see the reopening of a local neighbourhood public house that has been boarded and closed for many years. The internal area has been opened up to create light welcoming spaces. Large new windows have been fitted into the external elevations, which can be opened in summer. The public facades have been tidied up and freshened to show off this corner site. It is good to see a pub reopening when so many are suffering in difficult times.

5. Chester Residents Association Group

This group organised a day long conference for Chester residents at the Racecourse in October last year with over 15 speakers from different Chester organisations. The idea was to inform interested residents about what is going on in Chester as well as answer their questions. Chester residents attended for free and there was a very good turnout. This was an excellent event bringing together a diverse group of people.

THE BAD AND THE UGLY AWARDS:

This section is included in the hope that it will prompt action. Sadly, given the current stagnant economy and inadequate funding for local services, we are not anticipating that 2024 will bring many improvements. As usual we had many nominations for our 'Hardy Perennials' (those buildings which get mentioned year after year) including Dee House, the state of the City Walls, the former Quicks Garage and St Olaves. We remain concerned about all these, but this year decided to concentrate on new nominations and those which have not been mentioned for some time.

1. Delamere Street

The north side of Delamere Street from the University of Chester Building to the car parking area is looking very run down. It includes the boarded-up premises previously used by the Funeral Directors George Pettit and Sons, Alpha Barbers, two timber buildings and the derelict former Northgate Arms. This area is seen by those heading to the Bus Exchange or parking in the underground car park, giving a very poor impression of the City. It would be good to see this area redeveloped in the very near future.



2. The Roman Strong Room

This underground strongroom served as the legion's treasury. It held the unit's pay chests as well as the men's savings and perhaps bullion and other valuables: it was kept under permanent guard. It is good that these remains from the heart of the fortress are on show, but the display is weak and uninteresting. We also understand that at times condensation makes it virtually impossible to see through the windows. It would be good to see this cultural asset better used and looked after.



The Roman Strong Room

3. The Riverside Promenade

The Riverside Promenade was created in the 2000s to improve flood defence, and to provide a much improved and accessible route between the Groves and Cop Park. It is particularly popular with walkers and cyclists. There are splendid views towards the western city walls, castle, city and across the racecourse. There are also spectacular views of the Grosvenor Bridge and down the canalised section of the river. Two areas of the Promenade have been particularly neglected. The first is the area by the Little Roodee Car Park where vegetation is growing over the path and the adjacent car parking bays are covered with mud. The other is by the Racecourse Stables where the width of the path is significantly reduced by vegetation growing from the riverside. The graffiti on the stable walls and the tunnel under the railway add to the feeling of neglect in this area. Some railing is in desperate need of repainting and the cobbles around the seating areas are infested with weeds, making an otherwise pleasant area feel unkempt.



The Path by the Stables



One of the Seating Areas

4. Interpretive Devices

There are two particularly innovative interpretive devices found in the public realm in Chester – the digital binoculars on the City Walls overlooking the Roodee and the 'look-through' device in the Roman Gardens which demonstrates how the breach in the City Walls during the Civil War would have appeared some moments after it happened.

The digital binoculars were installed as part of the Portico project and have not worked for years. They were intended to show viewers how the Roodee would have appeared over the centuries, including in Roman times and the Middle Ages, and the various changes that this landscape went through (supported by audio). They no longer work, have a metal plate across the coin slot and yet the adjacent panel still invites people to use them. A lost opportunity to explain a key part of Chester's heritage including its maritime history in an engaging and novel way.



Panel in the Roman Gardens

In the Roman Gardens a substantial glass panel with images enables people to stand at a designated spot and look through it to see the Civil War Breach at this point of the City Walls. It is a relatively simple and clever device that should provide a visual account of how the Parliamentarians tried to storm the breach but were repelled. However, the images and colour are becoming increasingly hard to distinguish. What a pity as this is otherwise a great device to enhance the experience of people visiting the Roman Gardens.

Both these examples raise a wider issue of maintenance of all outdoor interpretation which has become less legible due to the build-up of dust, dirt and algae etc. What is needed is a regular maintenance regime to ensure interpretation media and key visitor signage remains legible, useable and appealing.



Collapsed Wall

5. Collapsed Wall, Liverpool Road

It is 7 years since the section of wall collapsed, surely it should have been repaired by now!

6. Closure of a Section of The Rows

The Rows at the corner of Upper Bridge Street and Watergate Street have been closed for some time. This is an important section, and its closure gives a very bad impression to visitors and residents alike. Given the slow progress with other desperately needed repairs around the City there is concern that this area will not reopen quickly. Whilst it is important that appropriate safety measures are taken, it is unacceptable that repair work is not undertaken as soon as possible.



The Rows

7. Poor Street Lighting

We have regular nominations for poor street lighting but have not, as far as I can recall, included this before. This year a nomination notes that walking into the car park from Castle Street after dark is unpleasant due to the lack of lighting. It can be very intimidating being here on your own, some decent effective lighting would make a significant difference.

In addition to myself the Judges this year were Steve Wright, Ann Farrell, Graham and Sarah Catlin, and David and Jean Evans. They all have my thanks for their time and commitment visiting and providing insightful comments on the nominations.

Peter Hadfield

MAGNIFICENT MANCHESTER VISIT, 29th February 2024



Manchester Museum on Oxford Road, another of Manchester's 'best kept secrets', opened to the public in 1888 and has recently reopened after reconstruction and a new wing. We were treated to a guided tour of the new 'belonging' and South Asia galleries, and the 'Golden Mummies' exhibition, with plenty of time to explore the museum's vast collection. We learnt about how the museum is rising to the challenges of keeping history relevant, the debate about artifact repatriation, exhibiting in new and novel ways, and about their education and outreach programmes.



*Egyptian
Golden
Mummy*



Ordsall Hall Salford

Ordsall Hall is Salford's oldest building, rescued by Salford Council in 1959 and completely restored in 2009/11. Somewhat incongruent amongst social housing and an industrial park, the Hall is a reminder of city co-existence. Enter and you are treated to a Grade 1 moated Tudor mansion and the stories of the Radclyffe family, fantastic restoration work, the Great Hall, haunted chamber, and kitchen hanging room and well. There are lots of learning workshops held throughout the year with a relevance to Tudor times to attend (including on sleep remedies and tea bags).



*Ordsall Hall
Great Hall*



*The Great Chamber
Medieval paintwork
on roof braces*



*Ordsall Hall
restoration work*

Both are well worth time out to travel and see. More info at museum.manchester.ac.uk and ordsallhall.com. Thanks to Abigail Stevens at Manchester Museum and Olivia Holcombe at Ordsall for supporting our tours and of course, the extra insights.

Jane Harrad-Roberts

CHESTER CASTLE

From now the castle is opening between 11am and 3pm on Saturdays and Sundays. This does however depend on there being sufficient English Heritage volunteers available. Also, on Facebook, they advertise the 'Big Events' being held there - around five a year.



GARDEN PARTY AT CREWE HILL

Chester Civic Trust's largest fundraising event to date will be held on Saturday, 22nd June 2024, 2-5pm. Our Garden Party at Crewe Hill, Farndon will give you a rare, exclusive opportunity to visit one of the most historic and inspiring private estates in our locality. It is by kind invitation of Inger and Michael Trevor Barnston, Life Members of the Trust who were inspired to create a garden reflecting their travels and passion for unusual trees and shrubs.



We will enjoy private tours during the afternoon to see the wide variety of planting and creative garden features including the walled, Japanese and sub-tropical gardens, water features and statues. There will be refreshments, a brass band, entertainment and raffle. You are welcome to bring friends and family.

All proceeds will go towards the upkeep of our HQ, Bishop Lloyd's Palace. Please add the date to your diary. There are more details on the enclosed flier and booking form.



CHESTER HERITAGE FESTIVAL 2024

Preparations are underway for this year's Heritage Festival which takes place from 21st to 30th June. Members of the Trust are busy organising events: planning walks in and around Chester, preparing tales of 1824 and Trena Cox (local stained glass artist), organising minstrels at St John's Church and producing a film about the trials of witches of Chester with glimpses of Bishop Lloyd's Palace! (see pictures below)

There will be events for everybody. It begins with a day of talks in Storyhouse, followed by nine days with three walks a day and opportunities to write poetry, learn to Morris Dance, test your knowledge of Chester and add to it. During both weekends there will be a full programme of activities for young persons and families. Full details will be found on the festival website before bookings open for some events in May.

www.chesterheritagefestival.co.uk

Liz Preedy



STOP PRESS!

We are delighted to announce that Lady Alexis Redmond MBE, HM Lord-Lieutenant of Cheshire, has accepted our invitation to be the President of Chester Civic Trust. Lady Redmond takes over the presidency from the late Duke of Westminster who had been the Trust's President for over 40 years.





Chester Civic Trust

Chair: Christine Russell (christinerussell4@icloud.com)

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DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

MAY 5th

ROMAN DAY ACTIVITIES
with Chester Heritage Festival on the
open course at Chester Races.

MAY 24th 7.30pm

'THE FOUNDLING HOSPITAL IN CHESTER'
talk at the Bluecoat, Upper Northgate St,
Chester. Details and booking form included.

JUNE 21st - 30th

CHESTER HERITAGE FESTIVAL.
See www.chesterheritagefestival.co.uk
for full details.

JUNE 22nd 2pm

GARDEN PARTY, Crewe Hill, near Farndon.
Details and booking form included.

JULY 19th

Visit to STOCKPORT HAT MUSEUM AND
TUNNELS. Details and booking form
included.

SEPTEMBER 4th

Visit to WALSALL LEATHER MUSEUM AND
NEW ART GALLERY. Guided tour of
heritage port of Stourport with some free
time. Details and booking form included.

OCTOBER 18th 2pm

MULTIPLE CHESTERS, talk by John Walker,
BLP. Details in next mail out.

NOVEMBER 7th 2pm

1824, CHESTER TWO HUNDRED YEARS
AGO, talk by Chris Fozzard, BLP.
Details in next mail out.

NOVEMBER 22nd 6pm

Talk by David Ebsworth about his mystery
thriller set in Wrexham in 1876 including
pie, mash and pea supper. Details in next
mail out.

VISIT TO POLAND

'Unfortunately the proposed visit to Poland
in September has been cancelled as
insufficient numbers responded to the
invitation in the last Newsletter to 'express
an interest' in the visit. Many members
who usually come on residential tours had
already booked a group visit to the Isle
of Wight whilst others had already visited
Warsaw and Krakow.

We are now exploring the options for a
shorter visit to Gdansk with day trips to
Torun and Malbork in October. Please email
Christine at christinerussell4@icloud.com or
Karen at mckaykaren68@gmail.com if you
are interested in joining a group tour.'

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