



WORCESTER CIVIC SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Spring 2019

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Worcester Civic Society List of officers 2019

President: David Birtwhistle
Vice-President: Stephen Inman
Chairman: Phil Douce
Vice-Chairman: David Hallmark
Hon Treasurer: Stephen Inman
Hon Secretary: John Wickson
Membership Secretary: Michael McCurdy
Publicity Officer: Sandra Taylor
Chair of Planning Panel: Dr. Heather Barrett
Chair of Projects Panel: William Edmondson
Chairs of Programme Panel: David Saunders
Stephen Inman
Newsletter Editor: Cathy Broad

www.worcestercivicsociety.org.uk

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

We began this year with a highly successful Social Evening at the Porcelain Museum. The event was attended by 58 members and guests and the speaker was Philip Serrell who gave a very informative and amusing talk. At the end of March, we had a visit to Slimbridge which again was well attended and enjoyed by everyone.

I was on holiday for the Mayor's Lecture but I gather it was attended by 60 members and guests and was well received. Our events this year have been much better attended than previous years so please keep this up. On a more serious note, we still have major problems with the heritage in the city. At a recent meeting with the planning officer, it was reported that they are struggling to recruit planning officers.

They stated that they have over 200 outstanding enforcement notices not actioned, so the satellite dishes on listed buildings in the Lowesmoor Conservation Area are still there and will be for some time to come. They have recruited a replacement for the conservation officer who was responsible for Conservation Area reviews, but the new officer will only be part time on this work.

The heritage training for the planning council members which was due to take place last year has still not happened and no date has been fixed. This is free training which covers the heritage aspects of planning decisions and is urgently needed by our planning panel members. We have a lot of work still to do, including the work being carried out by two of our members on the Riverside section of the Masterplan. Further work will be carried out on the Shrub Hill section by other members. Our reports will be submitted to the council later this year. If you feel you can help with any of this, please let me know.

Phil Douce
Chairman

Membership:

Individual Membership	£20
Family Membership	£30
Corporate Membership	£50
Student Membership	£5

Cheques should be made payable to Worcester Civic Society

To Mr Michael McCurdy
56 Camp Hill Road, Worcester WR5 2HG

You can contact Michael on:- 01905 353438
or at:- wrcivicsocietymem@yahoo.com

Your new President an Introduction

Following in the footsteps of a much-admired and very distinguished leader is a difficult job for us ordinary mortals. Michael Clarke has been a highly successful president and I am honoured to be his successor.

I thought that I should introduce myself properly and ask your help in filling my new role. Many of you may know me as a watercolour artist, a painter with a contemporary art gallery in Friar Street, but my background was in architecture. It was my wife, Linda, who brought me to Worcester where I joined Henry Gorst in architectural practice. Henry was a passionate member of this Society.

Earlier, during my student days, I had begun exhibiting my paintings and in the late seventies I presented an exhibition of my work at the Worcester City Art Gallery. This encouraged me to consider a second career as an artist. Late in 1979 Michael Westby, another architect with HG, and I opened our gallery.

I may say that WCS gave us a (needlessly) hard time over our application for Listed Building consent for a very gentle restoration of this interesting late-medieval building. This caused both of us to let our membership of the Society lapse.

Anyone familiar with my work will understand that I have not lost interest in architecture, just in architectural practice. The restoration project for Belmont House, Linda's and my home, has almost reached its sixth decade, a quarter of the life of our fine old house. During a third of a century we continued to repair and enhance the gallery, a lovely building approaching a state of dereliction when we started work.

Since closing the gallery many of my exhibitions have been at National Trust properties around Worcester and further afield. The NT faces many of the same problems that WCS confronts, in particular an aging membership and a need to attract younger participants. It is worth considering how they are attempting to adjust their offering at sites such as Croome Court.

Worcester City is expanding very quickly and there is pressure to develop everywhere you look. I am troubled

by the consequent losses of public open spaces and huge numbers of trees. The national move towards electrically-powered vehicles and the provision of fibre-optic communications networks threatens more disruption. Footpaths around the city are cluttered with wheelie-bins and parked cars already. I doubt that this situation will be improved by the provision of charging points for cars.

As I see it this Society needs to continue pressing the Council to control these matters, if necessary by being an irritant and exposing failures. I have to say that I have been disappointed by the quality, or rather the lack of quality, in some new buildings around the city and I am alarmed by the spread of unimaginative suburbs in every direction.

Our new university, with which I am pleased to be connected, and the colleges have been creating great new public buildings for us to enjoy. I am excited by such opportunities for the cultural life of Worcester to be thus enhanced.

I invite members, each and all, to take up these topics with me or other officers so that they may be discussed in committee. I'm sure that, as I have, you will have been enjoying the social and informative programme of events which has been arranged for us. I look forward to more and I look forward to meeting you at WCS.

David Birtwhistle



FREEDOM OF THE CITY OF WORCESTER

This is the eighth of a series of articles about the various people and organisations who have received the Freedom of the City.



Brock in his studio, 1889

If you have ever been to London and visited Buckingham Palace, you will have seen the memorial to Queen Victoria that stands in front of that building.

Closer to home, you might be more familiar with the statues of Sir Rowland Hill and Richard Baxter in Kidderminster, or

the memorial to Bishop Henry Philpott in Worcester Cathedral.

These statues were all the work of Sir Thomas Brock, perhaps the pre-eminent sculptor of the Victorian and Edwardian eras. Though now largely forgotten, Brock created public sculpture in most of the great cities of the British Empire.

Brock was born in Worcester in 1847. Aged 10, he attended the Worcester School of Design and two years later became an apprentice modeller at the Royal Worcester Porcelain factory. From the age of 19, he studied under leading sculptor John Henry Foley, and entered the Royal Academy School in 1867, winning a gold medal two years later.

When Foley died in 1874, Brock completed some of his unfinished commissions, including the statue of Prince Albert in the Albert Memorial, which brought him to the notice of the public.

The list of Brock's works reads like a who's who of the great and good of Victorian and Edwardian

Britain – statues of Queen Victoria in Worcester, Birmingham, Cape Town, Lucknow, Agra, Bangalore, Carlisle, and Belfast; Edward VII in Sydney and New Delhi; the Black Prince in Leeds; Millais, Sir Henry Irving, Captain Cook and Joseph Lister in London; and memorials to Lord Leighton, Longfellow and Gladstone in London, as well as the Titanic memorial in Belfast. He also designed the Queen Victoria head used on British coinage from 1893 to 1901.

From 1868 Brock exhibited at the Royal Academy, and became an Associate in 1883 and a full Academician in 1891. He was instrumental in the establishment of the Royal Society of British Sculptors, and became its first President in 1905. He was knighted in 1911, and died in 1922.

Brock was awarded the Freedom of the City in 1913, 'in recognition of the eminent position which he, as a native of the Faithful City, has attained in the World of Art.'

The ceremony took place on 13 May, attended by, according to report in *Berrow's Worcester Journal* of 17 May, members of the Corporation, City magistrates, Corporation officials, Sir Edward Elgar, Lord and Lady Coventry, and the Earl and Countess Beauchamp.

The Town Clerk read the address, which the Mayor then handed to Brock, who signed the roll. The Mayor's tribute, which was frequently interrupted by applause, mentioned that he, the Chief Constable and the High Sheriff had been in London the previous week, and had seen the Victoria Memorial.

'Their hearts were filled with joy that they could claim the designer of that magnificent work as a native of Worcester.' Brock replied that 'he was conscious of the great compliment that had been paid

both to him, and through him, to the art he practised.', and that 'the book of admission ... would always count among the most cherished of his possessions.'

The item referred to was the presentation piece given to recipients of the honour. In this case, it took the form of a leather-bound album, 'inlaid in colours with

the city arms, and the words 'Admission of Sir Thomas Brock, KCB, RA, RSA, DCL, Oxon., as Honorary Freeman of the City of Worcester.' The album contained 'a beautifully engrossed two-page address', as well as 'two beautiful water colour views, one of the Guildhall and the courtyard, and the other



Titanic Memorial in Belfast

of the Worcester Severn Bridge, and the Cathedral in the distance, and the whole is highly decorative, the views and the words of the address being surrounded with a wealth of embellishment.'

So the next time you pass the law courts in Foregate Street, stop to look at the statue of Queen Victoria, and tip your metaphorical hat to the unfairly forgotten master craftsman who created that memorial.

Cathy Broad

Mayor's Lecture

Andrew Reekes, the author of *The Birmingham Political Machine*, *Two Titans* and *More than Munich – Neville Chamberlain*, delivered The Mayor of Worcester's Annual Lecture to Worcester Civic Society on April 9th in the Guildhall, on the subject of *The Chamberlains and the Birmingham Civic Gospel*.

He described how two Nonconformist ministers in mid-nineteenth century Birmingham, George Dawson and Robert Dale, developed an entirely new mission to improve the conditions of life for Birmingham's citizens – in terms of sanitation, housing, education, public spaces, and culture. The key to success they preached was to win over successful businessmen from their congregations, leaders who were used to handling money and making decisions; they should become councillors and take civic responsibility.

Joseph Chamberlain, rich industrialist, passionate advocate of free, compulsory education, answered the call, became a councillor, then the most famous Mayor in modern English history in 1873; he initiated a great revolution in taking municipal control of gas, water, parks and slum clearance. Other talented manufacturers and professionals followed his lead, transforming Birmingham into a great Victorian city.

Chamberlain went on to become an MP, and a minister, but after suffering a devastating stroke in 1906 he handed over to his son Neville in Birmingham, who became an imaginative innovator in matters of health, housing and town planning, as well as a most distinguished wartime Lord Mayor in 1915.

Andrew Reekes made much of the way that Birmingham's civic gospel drew the most talented men of their generation to spend hours in public service, to give freely in time and money, for the benefit of the municipality, and lamented how rare is this sort of dedication today.

WAY MARKING AROUND WORCESTER



Grazebrook casting

Many tracks crossed the landscape in ancient times, created by droving animals, for trade and by itinerant artisans; finding the way would have been by significant features such as rocky outcrops or specific trees. The Roman military roads of the first century AD often followed these tracks, straightening and widening them for heavier traffic. Cylindrical stones were set up every Roman mile, that is a thousand double-steps, 1618 statute yards, the Latin 'mille' for 1000 giving the word mile. The distances were probably painted on these after installation because the Roman engineers did not trust the illiterate wretched little Brits! The Romans also set up honorific pillars, engraved in praise of the current emperor or other dignity; when the subject changed, such stones were often up-ended and re-

dedicated to a new subject. The 'milestone' in Worcester Museum found at Kempsey is actually an honorific pillar.

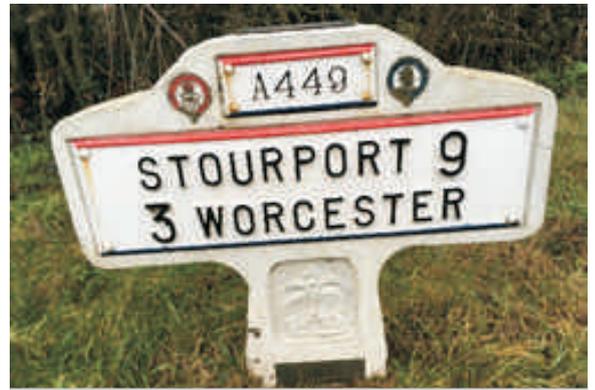
After the Romans left, there was no organised highways system until the seventeenth century. Routes developed to meet community needs, to market, to the manor court, to collect rents, to the daughter churches, between the monasteries, for trade such as the salters' ways. These might be marked by cairns or crosses or wooden posts, in addition to the landscape features. But travellers had difficulty in traversing the countryside so in 1697 an act was passed compelling the Justices of the Peace (the Local Authorities of their day) to have guide posts erected where highways crossed and over open moorland. The materials to be used were not specified so in places where stone was easily obtained, such as the Pennines or the Cotswolds, these markers were made of stone, sometimes elegantly inscribed with directions and destinations. In the Midlands, the markers were likely to have been made of wood, so few survive to the present day, other than in contemporary illustrations.

As economic activity increased greatly in the eighteenth century, there was a need for better highways – the use of compulsory statute labour instigated by Mary Tudor's government in 1555 was insufficient to maintain the surfaces, let alone construct new roads. The response? Privatisation! So from 1700 onwards, by Acts of Parliament, groups of local worthies formed Turnpike Trusts, issuing shares to enable the repair and development of the highways and charging tolls to road users. An act in 1767 made milestones compulsory on the turnpike roads, to show directions and distances. These also facilitated the changing of horses at the posting inns, where hirers were charged for the distances travelled. And in the days before the uniform Penny Post was introduced by Rowland Hill in 1840, letters were paid for on delivery, again charged by distance travelled – many originated from London, so the name of the capital often appears on milestones.

The early Worcester milestones were made of the soft local sandstone, which erodes easily. Examples can still be found at Bow Brook Feckenham, at Stanford Bridge and at Broadway on the road from London to Aberystwyth. Because of the erosion of the inscriptions, cast iron mileplates were later added, often fastened on the original stones. The Worcester Turnpike Trust established in 1726 was responsible for 156 miles of road at its peak and therefore as many milestones; they adopted the simple legend "To Worcester Cross X miles".

With the coming of the railways from the 1840s, long distance travellers largely deserted the turnpikes and most of these were wound up in the 1870s. Responsibility for maintenance of the major routes passed to the newly created County Councils and local roads to the new District Councils. Was it civic pride that sparked a new series of milestones around the county, the triangular cast iron mileposts made by the Grazebrook foundry?! And unusually, Worcestershire had a new crop of milestones in the 1930s, at the behest of the deputy surveyor Mr Brooke Bradley who designed them specially for the motoring age. They are of cast concrete with attached cast iron plates and around fifty still survive in the county, having been removed and safely stored during World War II, following the Government decree.

Although milestones may be designated 'listed buildings' they are at risk from verge cutters, vehicle accidents, vandalism, theft and casual neglect. Founded in 2001, the Milestone Society encourages people – Local Authorities, parish councils, heritage associations, individuals – to care for these vulnerable lumps of stone and rusty metal sitting quietly by the wayside. In 2012, the Society's Worcestershire Group produced a replica Bradley stone to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee; this stands on the A449 at Hawford, just north of Claines, near the Civic Society's new Heritage Trail.



Jubilee Milestone

And in 2018, the group commissioned replacement 'To Worcester Cross 1 Mile' plates for six of the main routes out of the city. The plates were cast at Blists Hill, Ironbridge and can be found on London Road at the entrance to number 136; on Bath Road at number 142; by number 94 Bransford Road, appropriately called Mile End House; on Bromyard Road outside the Methodist Church; at number 79 Astwood Road and opposite Gheluvelt Park near the tollhouse at the junction of the Ombersley and Droitwich Roads.

Enjoy spotting them! And if you want to find out where there are other milestones around the county displayed on Google mapping, look on the Milestone Society's website, www.MilestoneSociety.co.uk

Jan Scrine

WORCESTER CIVIC SOCIETY 60TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE 12TH OCTOBER 2019

This special Conference will be held at St Helen's Church in Fish Street, Worcester. The provisional programme is being designed to cover not only a feature on the origins and evolution of WCS but also topics of immediate contemporary importance to the City.

There will be a series of speakers to include Joan Humble, the Chair of Civic Voice, which represents all civic societies nationwide. James Caird represents the Historic Building Conservation and is familiar with the Civic Voice phrase 'The Conservation Conversation.' Michael Hodgetts is a specialist in developing old listed buildings, and will speak as an expert on the planning laws. Peter Sweetland, who practised as an Architect in the city for 40 years, will be willing to share his experiences and we hope to share a panel with former planners to discuss the challenges of promoting planning applications for applicants and for planners.

Iain Rutherford, who recently retired as Head of Museums for the County and City, is going to share his current research into the personalities of Worcester in the 1950s and the issues they handled, which will bring in some of those who were instrumental in forming the Worcester Civic Society. The issue of the High Street and retailing and the concerns for homeless rough sleepers will also be considered.

We expect a contribution from Jim Panter who has revitalised Tudor House in Friar Street and is a Trustee of Lasletts Charity, seeking to provide accommodation for the very needy, and from representatives of St Paul's Night Shelter and of Maggs Day Centre.

We will also want to consider the current Masterplan for the City and the issues of promoting access and attractions for local visitors and for tourists who are significant contributors for the local economy. We will be able to show the benefits of joining WCS and of the initiatives for the Trails and for the Blue Plaques and plans for the statues of Adams and Jefferson, who came to Worcester in 1786.

Catering will be provided by Aspen Vintage. There will be seating for about 120 people. We look forward to presenting a programme to encourage the local community, including the general public and special interest groups, all of whom wish to see the future beneficial development of the city. We would wish to encourage existing and potential members to attend and share the review of the first 60 years and also the vision for the future and to expand the membership and impact of this respected Society.

David Hallmark

Civic Society Visit To Slimbridge

Wednesday 27th March 2019

The morning of Wednesday 27th March dawned bright and clear without a cloud in the sky – absolutely perfect weather for Worcester Civic Society's group visit to the Slimbridge Wetlands Centre in Gloucestershire. With the weather clearly set for a lovely day without a hint of rain, 26 members and friends of the society boarded the luxury coach in Worcester, and set off in comfort, arriving at the Centre at 10.25, where we were met by two volunteers who gave the group a welcome introduction and distributed information leaflets with maps of the Wetlands.

In 1946 artist and conservationist Peter Scott set up the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust at Slimbridge as a centre for science and conservation. Uniquely at the time, he opened it to the public so that anyone could enjoy getting close to nature. Today the Trust welcomes a million visitors each year to nine Wetland Centres in the UK.



Kingfisher



In the Visitor centre

Once inside the visitor centre, some of us enjoyed a cuppa and a piece of cake in the restaurant before setting off to explore the vast and impressive grounds where hundreds of water birds and waders were clearly visible. With well laid out pathways, numerous hides from which to spot the different species, further refreshment facilities along the way and the opportunity to attend the otter feeding with associated commentary, a great day out was had by all.

The variety of birds is quite staggering – swans, moorhens, eiders, bar-headed geese, Hawaiian geese, cranes, avocets, redshanks and many more besides. Walking down to the Kingfisher hide, we arrived to find the often elusive kingfisher sitting most obligingly on branches within sight of the hide. Not particularly easy to spot among the branches, keen birdwatchers with equipment focused on the female bird (as recognised by the experts!) and allowed those who had no binoculars or suitable cameras to look through their spotter scopes.

On a number of occasions we were treated to a flash of blue as the male kingfisher flew along the river to feed the female before darting off again. With numerous benches along the paths, and sometimes slightly tucked away, those of us who took a packed lunch enjoyed eating 'al fresco' while others chose to sample the delights of the restaurant's lunch menu. At 2pm a small number of our group met up again with Mike, a volunteer at the centre, who gave us a 40 minute guided tour with a most interesting and informative commentary. Then it was time to head back to our coach for a 3pm departure back to Worcester where everyone agreed that it had been a superb day out which all had enjoyed immensely.

Sandra Taylor
Publicity Officer
Worcester Civic Society



Avocet

Huddington History

Whilst researching a history of Huddington I came across a story with some link to Worcester that I can share. Huddington is a very small village about six miles from Worcester, and I live at Huddington Court which was the home of the Wintour family, whose name is synonymous with the Gunpowder Plot. The story concerns a man called Sir John Bourne. The connection with Huddington is through his daughter, Elizabeth, who became the second wife of George Wintour in 1576. She bore him two children, John, who was hung, drawn and quartered on Red Hill, Worcester, for his involvement in the Plot, and Elizabeth. Through this marriage George would acquire the manor of Oddingley and, on her mother's death in 1581, the village of Upton Snodsbury. Elizabeth died some time before 1591.

John Bourne was born circa 1518. He married Dorothy, daughter of Richard Lygon of Madresfield, and was a young man during the Reformation and Henry VIII's split with Rome. This event overshadowed John's whole life, as it did so many people alive at this time. After a spell at Lincoln's Inn, by 1539 he had become clerk in the household of William Fitzwilliam, Earl of Southampton.

A swift rise then followed because by 1542 he was a Member of Parliament for the borough of Midhurst. About this time, probably 1545, he bought a property in Battenhall from Worcester priory, from whom he had leased it since before the Dissolution. On the death of Edward VI he supported Mary's claim to the throne, and when she succeeded in 1553 he was knighted on 2 October that year, and became her principal Secretary of State.

Between 1552 and 1554 John Hooper was the Bishop of Worcester. He was a keen Protestant reformer and Sir John was, like many, adherent to the new religion in as broad a way as possible. Bourne disliked Hooper greatly and so when his father died, around this time, Sir John refused to prove the will as it would mean handing over to Hooper and his officers an amount of money for their services. In 1554, after the accession of Queen Mary, Hooper was removed from his position and, subsequently, became a martyr for the new faith when he was burnt at the stake outside Gloucester Cathedral. It was a very sorry fate made worse by the fact that the wood was wet, the fire went out three times, and it took 45 minutes for him to die. To what extent Sir John had anything to do with Hooper's sentence remains unknown, but I would imagine he did not try to prevent it. It was thirteen years later, in about 1565/7, that Sir John's brother took him to court to have the will of their father proved. Thomas Bourne had been prompted to do so after he discovered that whilst he had been seriously ill, Sir John had been heard to say that if Thomas died, he would turn his wife and children out of the 'doors of the mansion house wherein they dwelt'. So, following the hearing in the Ecclesiastical Court, the will was finally proved.

After the Marian years of Protestant persecution, men like Sir John were destined to be punished, and so it was with Sir John. He was accused of a number of crimes including practising the Catholic religion, not attending church and keeping a priest. On one occasion, after yet another court hearing, the judge rose and Sir John went after him with eight men with 'swords and bucklers'. At a place where the court officer 'was wont to be at meals' he charged in, past the officer's men who had been posted at the door, and demanded, in a great rage, to see the master of the house. This was an Alderman of Worcester, and Sir John bellowed at him whether he had 'a knave in his house'. To which the man replied, 'No Sir John, I have none except you have brought him with you.' With this rebuke Sir John departed, in a 'great colour', and the judge, who was in the house next door, probably felt more determined to see the great man brought down. Indeed, Sir John's refusal to conform to the church as law required, and his part during the persecutions of the reign of Queen Mary, meant that finally he ended up briefly consigned to the Marshalsea prison and, in 1570, he was expelled from Lincoln's Inn. He died in 1575.

Chris Edmondson

Worcester Civic Society Planning Panel Report: Spring 2019

Since my last Autumn Newsletter Report, there have been two consultations relating to key planning documents which will have an impact on the city's future development.

In October last year we fed back comments on the draft **City Centre Masterplan**. As I reported at the AGM, it was depressing that the issues we raised were similar to our comments on the previous masterplan document in 2011 and which were therefore still to be addressed. Key issues we highlighted included transport, improving public realm/public spaces, better care of historic buildings/heritage, improved business mix, improved cultural offer and the need for co-ordination of delivery bodies.

A response to consultation came out in December and is now published on the City Council website – traffic was highlighted as an issue and Cripplegate Park extending to the river divided opinion. Our comments have been acknowledged and we understand that aspects of the plan have been revised by the consultants. The revised plan was due for adoption by the council in March but this seems to have been delayed for some reason, which is not encouraging.

In the meantime we have continued to meet with city officers to discuss our ideas and check on progress with the plan to ensure that it does not just 'sit on the shelf'. Currently the panel are viewing plans for each of the city's 'quarters' identified in the Masterplan.

We have developed ideas for the riverside, including not having a cathedral footbridge, so retaining views of the cathedral, retaining and enhancing public open space along the riverside at Copenhagen Street and Croft Road, and retaining important views of the

railway viaduct. We soon hope to go public with these ideas and also look to feed these into discussions with the city and current consultations on the development of the riverside park.

South Worcester Development Plan (SWDP)

In December there was consultation of the issues and options as part of the review of the current review of the plan. We did not make a Society response at this stage but did review the emerging issues for the city.

The consultation asked about the currency of key policies/objectives in the plan and key questions asked about where growth (housing/employment) would be accommodated. A key matter affecting the city was the proposed sites that have been put forward for consideration for possible inclusion in the preferred issues and options for the revised plan.

For Worcester, Middle Battenhall Farm is the largest in-town site identified again, with major sites also at the new Parkway Station, and Claines/Church Farm on the periphery. Smaller sites include Diglis, Grove Farm, Lower Wick, Blackpole, and Leopard Hill as well as Battenhall Road.

We understand that these sites are now undergoing assessment for suitability and viability by the authorities. The preferred option consultation is due to take place in November/ December 2019 and we will look to review these issues and discuss in preparation to feedback at this point.

Heather Barrett
Chair, Planning Panel



Worcester Civic Society's 60th Anniversary

A Brief History

In attempting to review some of the landmark achievements from the mists of time I pursued two approaches: firstly by visiting the Archives Department at The Hive and secondly in using my own personal recall of involvement through my past fourteen years of membership of our Society. The Hive has material both catalogued and plenty more 'yet to be catalogued'. Unfortunately, there is a slight problem with cataloguing terminology. My earliest request for catalogued material listed under 'Worcester Civic Society' somewhat erroneously yielded the bye-laws surrounding citizen behaviour on Pitchcroft. This was listed under the 'Municipal Corporations Act 1882'. Hopefully, the staff at the Hive will be able to correct this anomaly to make searching for Worcester Civic Society material much easier.

Perhaps the most significant success in the Society's history is recorded in the Summer Newsletter of 1977 when Chairman Nicholas Worsley activated a nationwide planning conservation reprieve for the condemned Countess of Huntingdon Hall. Demolition would have led to a car park extension for the proposed Crowngate development.

During the summer of '77 articles appeared in the main national newspapers. Sir John Betjeman, writing in The Times, commented: 'I am sad to hear of the impending destruction of Huntingdon Chapel...such interiors as these are unique and irreplaceable'. The Countess of Huntingdon Hall received 'star billing' in the July-October 1977 Exhibition 'Change and decay, the future of our churches' at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. With Worcester Civic Society's co-ordination, the ensuing restoration project for the building was achieved.

By the time of my arrival here in Worcester in the early 1980s, I was able to listen to Gurney's 'Severn and Somme' song cycle as part of the Three Choirs' Festival while watching cranes constructing Crowngate through the windows around me. The Hall is currently protected by Grade Two starred status, being 'one of the finest examples of non-conformist architecture in the country' (Georgian Society).

Another challenge in 1977, one that remains today, was how to control access to our Central Business District. The Society was pressing planners for 'pedestrianisation' of the High Street and even closure of Deansway to traffic, while proposing new bus routes around the city centre. The same Summer 1977 Newsletter also challenged smaller planning proposals. One developer wanted to interfere with the façade of the King Charles the Second pub (off The Cornmarket), while one of the large banks was attempting to place a cash machine centrally on the exterior of its listed building.

My own experience of the Society has centred on involvement in particular projects. Firstly I've walked a visiting Civic Society (Monmouth in this case) around the city centre to showcase most of our fourteen Grade One listed buildings. Back in 1977 our Society showed Reading Civic Society around, later receiving a letter of thanks favourably comparing our city with what they had to offer. In 2018 I visited both Ludlow and Wells as guest of their Societies.

In 2013 I spent the summer helping the City Council, as a volunteer recruited by our Civic Society, inspecting and recording details of the exterior of some seventy of our City's 1200 Grade Two listed buildings. Each house was photographed by me and any defects recorded online. Only one of the houses that I visited required the Council to offer to share the cost of restoration. By 2015 I was trained up to visit some of the city's War Memorials as part of the Government's attempt to grant a once-in-a-century maintenance and photographic record of the condition of post WW1 monuments. The Society has used the expert knowledge of City Planners and Archaeologists down the years, providing guided walks around our city. These have deepened my knowledge of the street-scape, particularly above eye level.

Other members have pushed, in recent years, for Blue Plaques recording places connected with famous Worcester residents. The city gates around our residual city walls have been similarly recorded. The Tourist Information Centre now offers a handy Civic Society map of our city centre, while the outskirts are being linked with a circular city walk route map.

In 2019 our Society has an important part to play in future development decisions as projects, recently published in the Government's Development Plan for the next twenty years, receive our scrutiny. Watch the press for our updates, join our Society to share in our project work and keep up with conservation issues as they emerge. The newsletter continues for our members and I hope that you will join us in both lectures and projects by becoming a member.

John Wickson
Honorary Secretary



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