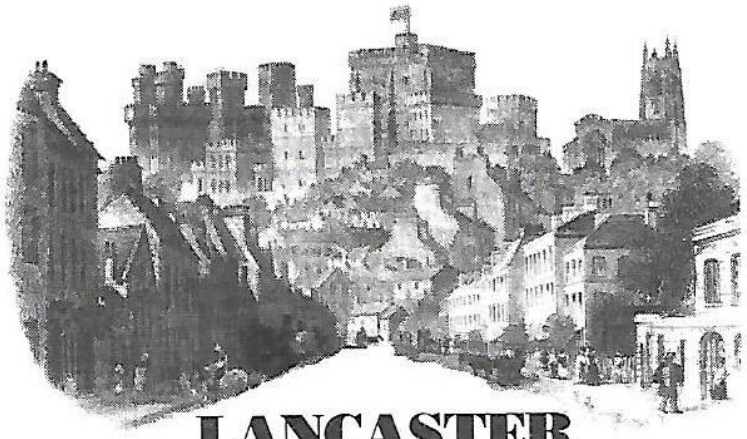


A HISTORY OF LANCASTER CIVIC SOCIETY

THE FIRST 40 YEARS

1967 – 2007

By Malcolm B Taylor
2009

Serialization – part 4

Magistrates' Court House

(1980-1983)

Lancaster owes much of its prestige and entitlement to the courtesy title "County Town" to its position in medieval times as a seat of justice for the whole county. Less appetizingly, it acquired a reputation for a record number of hangings. Hence the Judges' Lodgings, where the circuit judges would stay, and the Shire Hall, where some of the country's most notorious criminals have been tried.

Lancaster lost its right to try serious cases on the opening of the new Crown Courts in Preston. But could it retain a foothold in the justice system? Relief came in 1980, when plans for a new Magistrates' Court House were announced, to be sited on Thurnham Street/Marton Street, opposite the rear of the town hall. The design (by the then County Architect, Roger Booth) was not welcomed by either City or the Society. The Home Office stood back, saying it was entirely a matter for the County. In 1981, the Society's secretary was told bluntly that the building would go ahead as planned. It would appear that the City were quite embarrassed during this exchange – wishing to show continuing disapproval, while having publicly to retain diplomatic relations with the County.

Later, there were also some brisk exchanges on the landscaping of what became Aalborg Square. Perhaps because this was so extensive, the building no longer stands out as one drives past it, but a close inspection still arouses some of the original antipathy. Perhaps more importantly, Lancaster has retained a position in the justice system, and the building appears to work well. A triumph of scenery over shell?

St. John's Church

(1980-Present)

St John's Church has always had a special place in the Society's affections. It would be a fine specimen of a Georgian church in any town, but having a spire designed by Thomas Harrison (also of Skerton Bridge fame) makes it even more precious. Originally built as a chapel of ease to the Priory Church, it became a parish church in 1842 and for over 100 years played an important role in the life of the town.

After the Second World War, its position at the junction of two busy streets, a steady decline in the parish population and the retirement of Harold Kellett, an early chairman of the Society, followed by a prolonged vacancy in the living, resulted in the church being closed in 1980. The building, because of its architectural importance, came under the protection of the Redundant Churches Fund (now the Churches Conservation Trust) but the surrounding churchyard was not so protected and fell into a state of neglect. The then mayor, Abbot Bryning, also a former chairman of the Society, invited the Society to join a Friends of the Church group in an effort to

find a use for the building and although the group no longer exists, the church is increasingly used for concerts, coffee mornings and meetings, including in recent years all the Society's AGMs.

In 1984 a survey of all the memorials at St John's was carried out by the Lancaster Branch of the Lancashire Family History and Heraldry Society, and this formed the basis for further work carried out by the Civic Society.

In 1996, the Society joined the then mayor Jean Yates in her Grot Spot clearance campaign and this resulted in the boundary wall being rebuilt and the railings restored along the Chapel Street boundary. The Society continued to tidy up the graveyard with working parties of its own members, a group from Lancaster Girls' Grammar School Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme and a local cub pack. A measured drawing of the site by Michael Quinton pinpointed the eighty-one gravestones and wall memorials and a detailed revision of the 1984 survey added inscriptions on gravestones uncovered by the removal of large quantities of soil and leafmould. Meanwhile the Society appealed to its members for funds to remove four trees which were endangering the building or had become diseased. Clearly there was a need to find a more permanent solution as neither the Priory Church nor the City Council was willing to take formal responsibility for the graveyard. A Heritage Lottery bid was considered, based on designs drawn up by the City Council, but the estimated costs were too high for the Society to make a feasible bid.

Help came at the millennium when the City Council launched its Million for the Millennium Fund and the Society applied successfully for a grant to complete the restoration of the railings. These were in place for the AGM in June 2000 and have been widely admired for the contribution they make to the street scene and to the security and tidiness of the churchyard. The planting of the number "2000" in daffodils has added a splash of colour to this rather gloomy space and two generous donations enabled two stone benches to be installed along the sunny south wall of the church. The Society was pleased to have its efforts recognised by the Lancaster Guardian's "Pride of Place Award" and is grateful for the continuing efforts of St John's custodian, Mrs Kathleen Walker and her husband Lawrence.

In October 2000 the City Council formally resolved not to adopt the churchyard but it continues to supply bedding plants for the North Road frontage. Sadly the remainder of the churchyard has returned to its overgrown state and the Society's aim of providing a usable green space in the middle of the city has not been realised.

Ashton Memorial

(1982-1988)

The Ashton Memorial (or "t' Structure" as it is more commonly known by the locals) needs little introduction to the citizens of Lancaster. In its supreme setting, dominating Williamson Park, it is difficult to avoid its presence from almost anywhere in the city. It is a landmark even to travellers on the M6, to whom Lancaster might mean little, yet the Memorial still arouses their curiosity. It is an edifice (to call it a building would be an understatement), which you either love or loathe, yet it has a timeless power to astonish and impress.

The source of this ambiguity in our affections lies deep in Lancaster's history, and its social history. Those who have made great fortunes have often sought to leave their mark for

posterity, and what more permanent than a “structure”? Wealthy members of medieval society left us some superb churches. But churches as objects of endowment had gone out of fashion by the time the wealthy Victorians arrived, so Lord Ashton had to think of something else. The present town hall and the Ashton Memorial resulted as the two major examples of his determination to leave us brooding reminders of his life and works.

From the 18th to the 20th centuries, the Williamsons, father and son, founded and built one of the richest industrial empires in the world at Lune Mills on St George’s Quay. Their major invention, linoleum, at one time enjoyed the monopoly of being the universal quality sheet floor covering. The vast, now derelict site still remains, awaiting demolition and development, a subject to which we will return when discussing current proposals for **Luneside East and West**. James Williamson II, who became the first Baron Ashton, enjoyed the years of greatest prosperity for this empire. He became rich and reclusive, and was not popular, although by the standards of his peers was not a mean employer. Unlike his Storey contemporaries (Lancaster’s other major employers at the time), his benevolence to the public took the form of monuments to his own ego. He was no George Cadbury or William Lever. One is tempted to speculate whether he really intended the Ashton Memorial as a memorial to himself, although when it was conceived it was declared to be a memorial to his wife, who had just died. Or, had he not chosen to re-marry, would it have been a mausoleum for his late wife’s remains? A catafalque to rival Napoleon’s in Les Invalides would have been quite something. However, by the time it was completed, he had dropped his intention to dedicate it to her memory.

We do not know what precisely was his brief to his architect John Belcher, and architectural historians to this day have debated the purity of the design. Probably best to take it in as a whole, than to criticise the details. But Belcher probably had a free hand, and he certainly had a client with a generous purse. What resulted in 1909 is what we see now, and significantly (back to the mausoleum theory?), until recent times, a structure lacking any practicable use as a building, other than as monument to enter, to marvel at, and to climb to the top galleries to enjoy one of the most incomparable views over the city and the Bay to the Cumbrian fells.

Because it has lacked any practical purpose in these materialistic times, it has always been somewhat of a financial embarrassment to the City, who have had to defend the substantial maintenance costs against what some critics have seen as a useless folly although the Peel family who inherited the Ashton estates, and who effectively passed it on to the City continue to provided funding. In return, the City may not charge for admission.

The Society had always been concerned about its future. Part of this worry lay in knowing that its survival could be made more secure if some practical use could be found for it. This part of the problem it faced was thought to be solved when the Society arranged three very successful summer chamber concerts there in 1976, 1977 and 1978. They would probably have continued, had their impresario Geoffrey Burnstone (to whom tribute is paid in **Section E - People**) not retired to France. However, there was a further concert in the restored building in 1987. These concerts were successful despite difficulties with acoustics, lighting, heating and toilet accommodation, some of which have been improved, following restoration, although ironically access by car is now more difficult, following improvements to Williamson Park.

The Memorial had already survived a fire in 1962, when the dome was re-clad in copper, but the more crucial threat to its survival had been a time bomb ticking away since it was built. It had been known for many years that there was a structural problem arising from poor weather proofing and a complex design mix of early structural steelwork (imperfectly understood at the time) and load bearing masonry. By 1982, the Memorial was so dangerous that it had to be

closed. Funds were urgently needed for a major restoration. It would appear from the Society's records that the Society took the initiative. The executive committee minutes of a meeting on 29 April recorded: "At present it appears the Council have no views on what appropriate action to take with the repairing of the Memorial. The Society's role, to generate as much publicity and noise as possible is most necessary".

It was reported at the May committee meeting that the estimated restoration cost was £368,000. This is the first mention of cost in the records, and it is of some interest to note that several cost estimates followed, ranging from £500,000 to £750,000 (no details of the final cost are in the Society's papers). Such disparities indicate, perhaps, the need for caution in attempting to guess the extent of work necessary in such a situation. Some attempt had to be made of course, to set a target as a basis for a successful appeal.

Early publicity by the Society to arouse public awareness about the serious condition of the Memorial took the form of a press campaign ("Save Our Structure", illustrated by an elegant drawing of a section through the Memorial) and an exhibition at 9 Castle Hill, which was commended by the then principal planning officer, Vic Crumley, at the 1982 AGM. In April 1983, the Society arranged a public meeting comprising a double act by Alastair Service, enthusiast for the Memorial's Baroque style architecture, well known writer and architectural historian, and one of Ken Seed's memorable Son et Lumières as a "Memorial Spectacular". Geoffrey Burnstone had written to the great and the good inviting them to the meeting. None came, which probably did not surprise him, but the publicity was valuable. It was reported at the 1983 AGM that the City had agreed to match amounts raised by donation, £ for £.

The main thrust of the Society's appeal fund seems to have comprised preparation and sales of a card showing an early Belcher sketch of the Memorial, appraisal by Alastair Service, appeal message from the Lord Lieutenant, description of the problems and proposed solution, ideas for future use and listing membership of the steering group. By the time of the 1984 AGM, expenditure on the cards appears to have been greater than income from sales/donations. Sales, and income continued intermittently (the cards were re-published in 1998). It was perhaps as well then, if substantial funding were to be achieved, to quote the minutes of the AGM "stemming from the initiatives we made – outstandingly embodied in the Alastair Service meeting – a working party has been set up (by the City), known as the Lord Lieutenant's Steering Group, in which Martin Widden, in succession to Geoffrey Burnstone, (who was disengaging himself prior to retirement) participated as the representative of the Society". The City had allocated £150,000, so there was great optimism that the memorial would be saved.

By the time of the 1985 AGM, Shepherd Construction (who were carrying out the massive restoration work on York Minster at the time) had been appointed contractors. The City Architect paid tribute to the Society's and Geoffrey Burnstone's contributions.

The Memorial was officially reopened on 28 April 1988. During the restoration works, plans had been discussed for the future development of Williamson Park which would produce some practical use of the Memorial. Consultants were appointed, and recommended development of an Edwardian theme park. There was no public enthusiasm, no developer came forward and the proposed car parking within the curtilage of Williamson Park had met with considerable local opposition. The parking was built, but the rest of the grandiose scheme quietly dropped. So, any substantial use for the Structure still eludes the City. There are frequent art exhibitions in the upper gallery. After removal of the Williamson family exhibition from the main space, it remains empty apart from acting as a venue for civil weddings, and more recently, a space to enclose a travelling puppet theatre and a venue for carol concerts. Externally, the Memorial

annually acts as a backdrop to open-air theatre productions. However, major restoration and extension of the Park itself, restoration of the Butterfly House, conversion of Pavilion into a café have ensured popularity of the whole to residents and tourists. So perhaps neither Society nor City need to fret any longer that the Memorial remains “a folly to end all follies…the grandest monument in England” (Pevsner).

A postscript to the Ashton Memorial story, and an opportunity to comment on expressions of frustration that arise from time to time reminds us that the Society’s efforts are not always given due recognition. It is clear to the author from the documents he has seen, that the Society’s initiative was a major factor in saving the Memorial. He has no idea, nor was there any press mention that the City, or any other organisation were developing a strategy to save the Memorial at the time the Society launched its SOS. While the Society would readily acknowledge that it would never have had the resources and contacts to mount the major campaign necessary to raise the funding required, the Society does seem to have been sidelined from the moment the steering group was set up by the City. On the other hand, the City received considerable publicity for its part in the story. Tributes were paid to the Society, of course, and the Society’s work was acknowledged in a briefing document from the Town Clerk to the steering group in June 1983. But the unpaid, voluntary and often highly professional contributions made by the Society to the everyday life of citizens and tourists deserved better recognition from their City Council.

Central Area Redevelopment (CAR)

(1983-1985)

The market hall has been an integral part of the northern town over many years. One step above the street market, one step down from the retail shop, it provides inexpensive shelter under one roof for traders’ stalls, packed quite tightly together. There is a great atmosphere in a market hall, with goods piled high, the smells of greengrocery, fish and meat adding to the occasion. It still survives (Carlisle has a whopper, under an impressive glazed roof, as does Preston but within a less salubrious building). Experience from the arguably more wealthy south, where customers demand to shop in greater comfort and are prepared to pay for it, suggests that ultimately, the traditional market hall has had its day. Perhaps the writing is on the wall for Lancaster too….

Over the years there have been moves to re-develop the site. In 1974, the Town Hall authorised the City Architect to arrange for planning permission and appoint consultants to re-build the east wall, provide a new servicing area, pedestrian concourse, mall square, toilets, extension to the public house, new stalls, new balcony. The development would free Lower Penny Street of traffic.

However, in 1983, Lancaster still had its flourishing market hall and no empty stalls. In many ways it was the heart of the city’s shopping experience. It occupied a strategic position in the city, within the Market Street - Penny Street - Common Garden Street - King Street block with pedestrian access connecting it to all the main shopping streets. No doubt developers had cast their acquisitive eyes over it from time to time, but the traders stood firm in preserving the status quo. The block enveloping the market hall comprised the Arndale Centre – a 60s development of unlovely shops and offices forming a very visible frontage to King Street and Common

Garden Street (remnants still survive in the form of the shops set back from the pavement in Common Garden Street opposite the new development. If we are not vigilant, some well wisher will persuade EH to list them). In 1983, there was no reason to anticipate that change might be possible.

But in 1983 there was a fire. A fire which destroyed the market hall. Although within weeks a temporary plastic roof had been erected and the traders back in business, battle lines were being drawn up. The traders formed a vociferous lobby to replace the former roof and continue as before. Others, including the Town Hall and the Society saw the fire as a great opportunity to take a comprehensive look at this key area; here at last was the opportunity to replace Arndale with some decent architecture. The possibilities of redevelopment did not stop there. Town Hall (unusually) was in an expansionist mood. The country was in one of its boom cycles and the retail possibilities seemed endless. Mitchells had just vacated their brewery in Lower Church Street, so a linkage to a redeveloped market hall complex seemed attractive. Once such grandiose dreams appeared, the genie was out of the bottle. Why not continue northwards to Cable Street? You could put new bus and fire stations under the deck which would be formed by extending from the backs of Lower Church Street. Suddenly, Lancaster faced its biggest upheaval since the last Scots raid.

The market hall became a pawn in this fantasy. While intention to re-build it was never in doubt, many sought to diminish its importance in any development proposal. The big scheme extending to Cable Street banished it to above a new bus station, right on the edge of the development. The traders were having none of this. They might have accepted losing the battle to rebuild on their existing site, but they were not going to accept their equivalent of being sent to Siberia.

In 1989 came the inevitable public enquiry, which broadly accepted the proposed development. But by this time, a recession had started, so to a large extent the inspector's findings became academic. However, the central and crucial condition was that the market hall could not be moved far from its pre-fire location.

Then followed a longish hiatus, in which not much seemed to be happening on the ground. In 1992 emerged the plan of what essentially we see now, where the western end of the original scheme can still be recognised. But opposition from the traders was not yet dead. Its two-storey layout within what was effectively an atrium lacked market hall ambience, the first floor would be dead space and the rents would be too high. They also objected to being moved to a temporary site attached to the bus station in Cable Street, while construction took place.

What part did the Society play in this long and complex process?

In 1985 they congratulated the City Architect on his swift and attractive design for the temporary roof over the market hall, on the back of which they asked to be kept informed of the developing design for the Central Area Redevelopment (CAR). Thus, in 1986, the committee was invited to the Town Hall to view the proposals. In 1987, the Society asked to see the proposals for the Mitchell's Brewery site. Demolition of such a large area for the CAR became a major planning issue, which the Society discussed with the Town Hall. Members of the committee discussed four possible options with the City Architect and commented in detail.

In 1990, the Society became seriously concerned about apparent delay in action. It was over a year since the public enquiry, and more than six years since the fire: the current scheme was not the one which had been subject to the enquiry, there was concern that existing major stores

had not been given the chance to expand into the development, the retail trade may not be able to afford the standards which had been set, it was likely that the Brewery scheme and upgrading St Nicholas Arcade would proceed, but the new bus station could be built only after the present market hall site was sold, 250 year leases for the new shops seemed over long. The chairman and secretary had been interviewed by local radio stations.

In 1991, the committee viewed drawings for new bus and fire stations, and were concerned that the CAR scheme still contained too much retail space for the current economy to support. By 1992, the Society did not like the roof parking, but accepted that the time to be pragmatic had arrived. There was a public meeting to allow the traders to voice their concerns. They were still unhappy about the increased rents they would have to pay for going upmarket. The Society saw that continuing objection by the traders could delay the project indefinitely. Ill tempered confrontation with the Town Hall needed a mediator, a pourer of oil on troubled waters. The Society deplored the apparent fact that communications between City and traders was now being conducted entirely through letters in the press. In an attempt to bring the warring sides together, the Society called and chaired a meeting between the traders and the City. There followed another meeting, also chaired by the Society,* at which detailed developer proposals were discussed. So it would seem that here we have an example of the Society's readiness to involve itself in a matter not directly connected with its normal activities.

The Society gave their approval to the final plans, while commenting on the detail. The development was completed in 1995.

A small but unfortunate casualty was the mosaic panel next to one of the market hall entrances, only recently commissioned by the City before the fire. Whether it suffered in the fire, or was just swept away in the demolitions is not known.

As a postscript to the CAR story, the reader may ask what happened to the vacant Brewery site, behind Church Street? It remained a wilderness disturbed by occasional archaeological scratching for what the experts hoped would reveal further evidence of Roman occupation. Little was found. Then the current fashion for multi-screen cinemas struck. A whopper was built. Despite its bulk, it never really hit the conservation headlines, nor did the Society object too strongly. Fortunately, being built within a cordon of existing buildings it is still hardly visible at street level. After a long hiatus during which it has remained empty, it finally opened its doors in 2006, leaving the art deco original Odeon in King Street facing an uncertain future. Perhaps this is a building which should be listed?

The Bus Station

(1988-2002)

Like many other towns up and down the country, Lancaster had a pre war, vaguely art deco decrepit bus station with few amenities. Its plight worsened as members of the chattering classes abandoned the bus as a means of transport. At one time, provision was made for a new bus station in one of the more grandiose schemes for an extended central area redevelopment which collapsed (See **Central Area Redevelopment**). But now the wider public began to take an interest, which was sustained when the bus station formed part of the temporary market hall whilst the new market hall was being built. It was now clear that Lancaster deserved better.

The first scheme (if we ignore what was proposed for the over ambitious first CAR scheme) for a new building was declared far too expensive and a completely new design was prepared by the City Architect. This proved surprisingly elegant, and thought to be an improvement on the original design. The Society commented in 1999, and in 2000 approved the design with minor comments. The site includes pick-up space for taxis.

It has worn well, is popular, and fits the ambience of Cable Street well.

The society protested about allowing smoking in the building, and the lack of a clock. Ripples about the latter lasted awhile: at one stage, in desperation, Roger Frankland offered the bus station his old kitchen clock (presumably in working order). There is no record of whether it was accepted or not.

The Society's attention should then have turned to the Fire Station, its tired municipal architecture of the 60s long out of date. But there is no record in the archives of any interest.

Cottams Farm

(1998-Present)

The first thing the traveller leaving M6 junction 34 bound for Lancaster or Morecambe sees on his left as he leaves the motorway junction is Cottams Farm. Not the farm itself, but the unlovely business park from which it takes its name. At first, a substantial hedge thankfully hid the transformation from pleasant grazing land into a desert. But this soon disappeared as the road was widened, to reveal the site in all its raw horror (plus an array of junction and traffic lights and highly visible advertising,). So it has remained, three years later, still a part waterlogged desert (if that is not a contradiction in terms?), still largely empty, still without any serious attempts to landscape it.

For a long time, the only building was the fitness club and its garish illuminated sign at the roadside, a very large shed, mitigated only by its position at the back of the site. A bland, speculative office block nearer the road (and still empty) followed. Two more, in the same style have been built, also empty. Further strident advertising signs have joined the fitness club's at the edge of the road. However, the really dominant, recently completed and already extended buildings are a Travel Inn hotel and its associated Brewers Fayre restaurant. The term "architecture" has no place in describing these buildings. Their impact could have been lessened by placing their parking in front of, rather than behind them; their position, right against the road cannot now be softened by landscaping. The saddened traveller will proceed on his way, perhaps noticing the other hotel opposite, architecturally much happier. His next confrontation with the blandness of commercial development will be the Kingsway site (see **Kingsway**).

The Society protested against these buildings, as it had earlier protested at the lack of landscaping: apparently to no avail. University Housing, Cottams Farm, Kingsway, Marton Street seem to be a part of a growing pattern: of a City so desperate not to lose income from

developer investment that it has to allow developers to avoid the basic decencies of good design.

Kingsway

(2000-Present)

(this chapter has been written as at the end of 2005, and will need to be revised at the end of completion of construction of the current buildings. It may also be necessary to update news on the proposed residences: a new scheme submitted early 2006, and a ghastly Pizza Hut)

Like the phantom Eastern Relief Road, to which it would have been physically linked, Kingsway has been an apparently intractable problem for the City over many years. It derives its name from the public baths, built in the 30s at the same time as the City's contiguous bus garage, and in the same architectural style. The baths served Lancaster well, themselves replacing the baths on Damside Street (Samuel Gregson's foundation stone can still be seen on the wall now disguising Sainsbury's store). They closed on the opening of the new sports complex on Salt Ayre. The bus garage had been abandoned earlier. That left Bridge End House, the three pavilions with linking façades Thomas Harrison designed in the late 1800s as a toll house, and to set off the Lancaster end of his Skerton Bridge. Forlorn, they deteriorated over the years until rescued in 2005 at the point of total collapse. This is the site which has become so controversial, and is the subject of this chapter. Physically, as defined by the area isolated by the road system, it is not the whole site. The remainder still comprises the motley and unlovely selection of buildings which remain (including the site of Lancaster's remaining rope walk, one of the few reminders of the medieval ship building industry which flourished over this area).

The whole site is a large roundabout, completely enclosed by constant traffic, from M6 junction 34 to Lancaster and Morecambe. It would have been a major player in the **Bay Parkway** road, described elsewhere. It occupies a dominant position, marking the beginning of the city centre for motorists arriving from the M6, highly visible from Skerton and Greyhound bridges, and close to the now well landscaped edge of the river. Thus a sensitive site, for Lancaster, deserving of the best design treatment.

There have been several proposals to develop this site, probably speculative and not helped by its current isolation from the city's commercial centre. But the unfortunate and untimely listing of the architecturally unremarkable garage and the baths made it even less attractive to the developer. The Society has always disagreed with the listing, both on the grounds that it was not worth listing anyway, and that retention of its walls could only have served to wrap a meaningless pastiche around any new buildings. A crucial part of this background to what has now materialised was perception (rightly or wrongly) of a City so strapped for cash that it would accept buildings of a lesser design standard than the site merited.

The latest, and successful (successful only in that it is actually being built) scheme comprises industrial scale sheds housing national multiple shops, ironically screened from the roundabout by the listed walls (all that remain from the garage and baths). It might be interesting to pause here and compare these walls with the walls of the old baths along Cable Street which now disguise Sainsbury's store. At the time, there was some similar comment that they were pure

pastiche, falsely presenting a building with a totally different function. But they have long been accepted as a convenient and benign fiction. Will history accord the same recognition to the curtain wall around Kingsway ?

One would guess that a part of the deal between the City and the developers was that housing would be permitted on the remainder of the site (that is, on most of the area formerly occupied by the bus garage). However, although it is known that what is planned comprises three storeys of parking, topped with eight stories of flats, there are as yet no publicly available drawings.

What has the Society been doing throughout this saga? During the years that the site has been derelict, it has urged the City to accept only schemes which respect this key site. In particular, it pressed the City (largely unsuccessfully) to save Bridge End House before it was too late. When the application for the scheme now under construction was published, the Society examined it closely and made a number of detailed recommendations. It objected to a proposal that the units behind Bridge End House be roofed with pitched slated roofs, which would be visible over the tops of the screen walls. Happily a restored Bridge End House has emerged from its plastic cocoons looking very well. The Society also recommended lowering the road surface at the northern end of Skerton Bridge, so that Bridge End House would be seen again from the level intended by Harrison. The Society has recommended de-listing the remaining walls, so that any inhibition to good design imposed by these elements may be removed.

But perhaps the most important pressure to be applied by the Society concerns the proposed housing. It has urged the City to pressure the developers to appoint architects, ideally via a competition, known for their high quality approach (perhaps hoping for a Stephenson Bell repeat of the Nelson Street housing?). It has protested that 11 storeys of construction would result in heights similar to the Skerton flats across the river, and, as such quite unsuitable for the site. The Society has doubted how the retained listed walls can possibly harmonise with such bulky and tall buildings. It has suggested appointing an eminent architectural advisor (echoes of William Whitfield's intervention in the designs of Mitre House and Sainsbury's?). It has suggested that offices would be more appropriate than housing.

Early in 2004 the Society was invited by the Planning Department to join a design panel to comment on the developing proposals for the housing. After attending one meeting, it felt it should withdraw on the grounds that it was too late (outline planning permission by then having been granted for the car park and 100 flats) to influence the design of an inevitably inappropriate design for the site. The Society would not have wanted to be associated with a building it had objected to from the start; it would not have wanted to be associated with such a scheme. We await events anxiously.

Marton Street Housing

(2000-Present)

The temptation to include the many planning applications to have been pored over by the society over the years has been resisted, largely on the grounds that the job would have added a great deal of unnecessary – and probably boring – detail to the book. But it may be appropriate here to record that not many applications have escaped the attentions of the Society. It has always been a priority for the committee to attempt a comprehensive trawl, however large or small the application.

However, the book has attempted to cover most of the key schemes in and around the city. No doubt some readers will be disappointed with what has been omitted - and occasionally included. Marton Street comes within this marginal territory – to include, or not? It is no larger than many schemes which have been omitted. Marton Street has been included for a particular reason.

Marton Street housing will occupy the now empty corridor along the canal from Penny Street to Quarry Road bridges, opposite White Cross, and was the cause of the controversial demolition of the Navigation Pub. Its construction and the Castle View scheme further along the canal will mark the final *final* end to hopes of an Eastern Relief Road. The scheme which gained planning approval pleased the Society. However (and this is the reason it has a place in this book), the Society learned too late for protest that amended plans incorporating 40% more houses which had changed the essential character of the scheme had been allowed. It was satisfied that the City had breached planning regulations in not having insisted on a new application, which of course would have allowed full public consultation.

After much deliberation and a formal vote, the committee decided not to refer the matter to the Ombudsman, but to write, hoping that next time the City might be more transparent.

The City's reasons for this unexpected act of planning leniency are not in the Society's archives, so conclusions cannot be reached. But the incident does show how near the wire the Society is sometimes prepared to go to secure what it believes to be right for the city.

The Museums Crisis

(2000-2002)

In 2000 the City Council was experiencing one of its too frequent financial crises. Its knee jerk reaction this time took the form of a proposal to reorganise its museums and tourism services – townhallspeak for making redundant four of the senior officers. One of the casualties would be Andrew White, Director of Museums. Public protest was strong enough to see this off – for the time being.

The Council's next try occurred in 2001. This time, the proposal was to close the museum in Market Square, the Cottage museum and the Tourist Information Centre in Castle Hill, transferring the contents to the town hall in Dalton Square. The outrage which ensued centred on dismay that a proposal to close such an historically important monument could even be considered. The old town hall museum had existed since the new town hall opened in 1910. The Society was well in the forefront in leading the protest lobby, and was a founder body in the formation of Friends of the Museum. This body, while formed initially as a focus for protest, survives to serve the more benign purposes of its existence today.

The next and final chapter of the struggle to retain the city's museums was in 2002, when the City announced plans to "merge" the museums (including the Judges' Lodgings) with the corresponding County services. This was a euphemism for a take-over, although the City Council assured the public that Lancaster would not lose control. However, it resulted in the

early retirement of its director, and transfer of key staff to Preston. The Society accepted the inevitability of this move, and offered no further objections.

So, for the moment the future of the City's four museums is safe, (albeit controlled by the County) helped by recognition that tourism is now an important part of the city's economy.

Conservation Areas

The Society has always maintained a close interest in the City's programme for creating Conservation Areas. There is reference in the Society's first committee meeting, when the City Architect sought Society support. All of the important parts of the historic city are now covered. Planning applications for them are monitored by the Society with particular care.

Many of the older Conservation Areas now need appraisals. In 2004, the City asked the Society to assist by carrying out surveys. The Society was very pleased to accept. A group toured Westfield Village, was concerned about several points of detail but was reassured that it had been maintained largely in accordance with the criteria laid down. The same group has now walked the Aldcliffe Road canal corridor and will shortly present recommendations to the City's Conservation Officer.

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