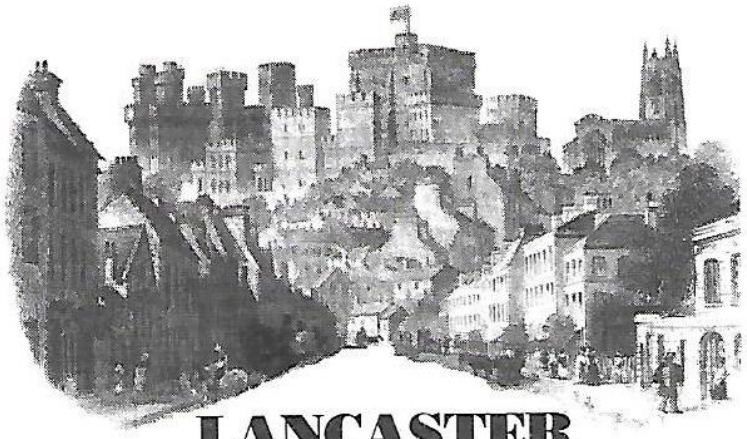


A HISTORY OF LANCASTER CIVIC SOCIETY

THE FIRST 40 YEARS

1967 – 2007

By Malcolm B Taylor
2009

Serialization – part 8

Design Awards

As early as 1970, the committee proposed to set up Annual Awards. Presumably, these would be for buildings of civic merit, a direct ancestor of the present scheme, because the minutes record “commendations of praiseworthy new buildings”. However this intention resulted in awards for stone cleaning. Cash amounts were given for about nine streets.

There were no further awards until 1981 when there was again a suggestion that the Society should organise awards for the best buildings. We had to wait until 1986 for action, when the Society, the Lancaster Guardian, Chamber of Commerce and the Town Hall joined in promoting a scheme for encouraging good civic design. It was described as “an experiment to promote good design in building”. At the time, Lancaster City was one of the “good design authorities”. Awards and commendations would be made for well designed buildings, usually, but not necessarily prominent in the public eye. Entries could be as small as domestic extensions. Awards would be made annually at an Awards ceremony in the town hall, the Awards certificates given by the Mayor to owners, designers and builders and published in the Lancaster Guardian. Any member of the public could nominate entries. The three bodies would be represented on the Awards panel, which would short list entries and make awards, to be known as Lancaster Design Awards. An external assessor, usually a respected local architect would lead in advising on choosing the successful entries.

Initially, the scheme was confined to buildings within the city boundaries, but it was soon extended to the whole of the District administered by the City Council.

Each of the sponsoring bodies took turns in administering the scheme. The Society played a leading part, and each year a band of volunteers have combed the District to identify likely schemes.

The scheme has proved popular and prestigious, the Awards ceremony at the town hall now being a fixed event on the calendar, the contestants awaiting announcement of the winners.

Details of the winners are given in Appendix 5.

Appendix 5

Design Awards

1986

Awards:

King’s Arcade re-building
Middle Street housing
Restoration of 1 High Street
Kellet Court, Highfield Road
Ripley Court, Ashton Road
Porch, 8 Ashford Road, Scotforth

Commendations:

Restoration of 10, Golgotha
Porch, 31 Westbourne Road
Restoration of 40 Balmoral Road

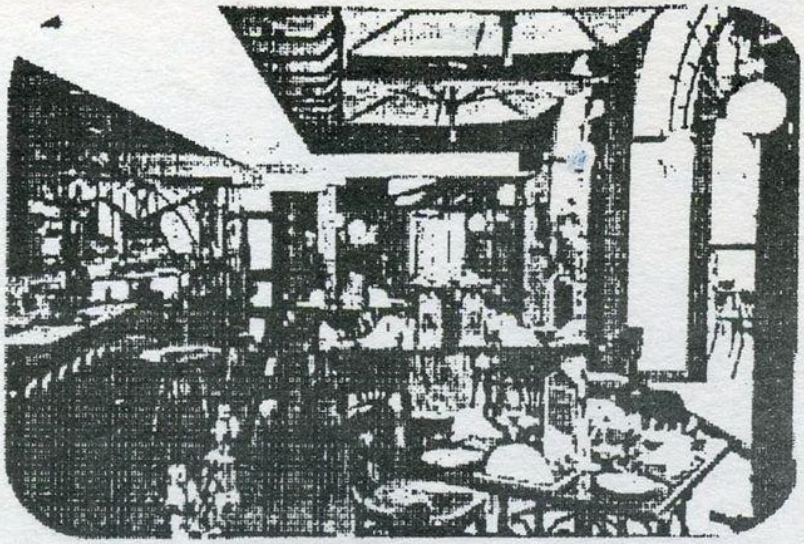
1987

Awards:

Maritime Museum
Park House Cottages, Bolton, near Wray
Footbridge across Lancaster Canal to Waterwitch pub
Owner designed and built: 2 Hanging Green Lane Hest Bank and Horreum House, Wray
St John's Hospice, Slyne Road

Commendations:

Usher's Meadow housing, Dallas Road
Extension at Old Rectory, Claughton
Public conveniences, Crook o' Lune
Lune cycleway
Barton Court, Barton Road
White Cross public house and restaurant
Infill housing at Derwent Road/Rydal Road



THE WHITE CROSS

Quarry Road, White Cross, Lancaster
Telephone: 0524 841048

This imaginatively designed hostelry is in an attractive canalside location close to the centre of Lancaster.
The original building dates back around 120 years when it was known as 'The Klondyke' and when a tnp by passenger barge from Preston to Lacaster cost only one penny!
It opened as The White Cross in May 1987 and was awarded a Lancaster Civic Society Commendation for building design.
Food is served in the attractive conservatory restaurant where the menu is both interesting and excellent value for money. Popular dishes include Stuffed Mushrooms; Peppered Steak and Chicken plus a daily blackboard special. Vegetarian dishes are always available and the White Cross is known for 'healthy eating'. Children are welcome at all times and. on Sundays, traditional family lunch is served. A variety of bar meals is also available.
The White Cross is a Bass Taverns operation serving Draught Bass, Stones Bitter, Bass Mild plus Carling Black label Tennents Extra and Pilsner lagers.

OPEN: Usual licensing hours
Food: 12 noon - 2.30pm; 7pm - 10pm Monday to Saturday

1988

Awards:

Buoymasters, St George's Quay
Building 7A, Sharpe's Mill, White Cross
174 Scotforth Road
Wenning Stores, Hornby
Shop Font, Mears Ghyll, Brookhouse
Mosaic, Ashton Memorial

Commendations:

Burr Tree Cottage, Cowan Bridge

Fish and Chip Shop, 255 Lancaster Road, Morecambe
1-4 Clarence House Cottages, Silverdale
Barn conversions, new housing and sheltered flats, Piccadilly, Scotforth
Millrace Court, Skerton
Flats refurbishment, Ridge Estate

1989

Awards:

Abbeyfield house, Bowerham
Moor Lane Mills (North)
Meeting House Row, Wray
22 Castle Park
Housing Action Area, Primrose
Yew Trees, Wennington

Commendations:

“Aroona”, Collingham Park
The Stables, Overtown, via Carnforth
Victoria Court, Penny Street
Refurbishment of Caton Road Frontage, Standfast Dyers and Printers
Waterstone’s Bookshop, King Street

1990

Awards:

Sheltered Housing, East Road
The Croft, Piccadilly
White Cross: facing Quarry Road and Canalside Building
Swan Yard, St Peter’s Road
Moor Lane Mills
St George’s Quay: house adjoining Victoria Corn Mill, Victoria Wharf
New building, West End School, Morecambe
Chapel, Cross Ghyll, Littledale

Commendations:

Canal Restoration Works
Ramp, Middle Street
Shops, corner Penny Street, Common Garden Street
Landscaping, Claughton Manor Brick Works
15, The Row, Silverdale
Re-cobbling, Main Street, Wray
Wall, Methodist Chapel, Wray

1992

Awards:

Mill 14, White Cross
Marton House
Butterfield House, Chapel Street
Westgate Church, Morecambe
Doctors' Surgery, The Battery, Morecambe
Warton Methodist Church
Ringstones, Bentham
Barn Conversion, Burrow

1994

Awards:

Phase 1, Low Mill, Caton
Conversion of Cowdber Farm, Burrow
New House, Wennington Road, Melling
Barn Conversion, Low Lane, Leck
Chennel House, Castle Hill

Commendations:

Red Oak House, Scotforth
The Hastings (conversion of former Greaves School)
New Surgery, Pointer Court
Aughton Court and Pointer Court, Beaumont Park
Child Psychiatry Unit, Piccadilly

1996

Awards:

Charter House, Dalton Square
Hipping Hall Barn, Cowan Bridge
Paramedical Centre, S Martin's College
Stone Jetty, Morecambe

Commendations:

Avocado Research Chemicals, Heysham
Castle Chambers Refurbishment, 60 Market Street
Girls' Grammar School, Reception extension
Visitor Centre, Heysham Power Station
Terrace to Pavilion Café, Williamson Park
St James Court, Wheatfield Street

1998

Awards:

Canal Users' Service Station, Aldcliffe Road
Salt Ayre Sports Centre Phase 2, new swimming pool
Rural housing, Crofters Fold, Galgate
West End Renewal: public park Alexandra Road, landscaped amenity areas, Morecambe
Ruskin Library, Lancaster University

Commendations:

Restoration of Reform Club, Great John Street
Main Mill Conversion, Low Mill, Caton
Greaves Park Public House
Abbott Court, Bridget Street
Pye's new Feed Mill, Lansil Estate
St Johns Court, Cable Street
Victoria Pavilion, Winter Gardens, first phase of restoration, Morecambe

1999

Awards:

Commendations:

2000 (2000 to be checked against a published list)

Awards:

Disabled Access, Ashton Memorial
Eric Morecambe Statue and Landscaping
Crow Trees, Melling
New houses, Tunstall

Commendations:

Spaghetti House, Mary Street
Burt's Butchers, Market Street
Temple, Williamson Park
Standen Park Housing, Moor
Offices, Ashton Road
Sports Centre, Lancaster & Morecambe College
Lifeboat Station, Morecambe

2002

Awards:

Extension to 4 Hanging Green Lane, Slyne-with-Hest

Millennium Bridge and Landings
Arkholme Village Hall and Community Centre
Conversion of Former Craig Home, Bare
Sea Wall, Marine Road, Morecambe

Commendations:

Gray's Seat, Crook O'Lune, Caton
New Gates Skerton Primary School
The Summer House, Hay Carr, Ellel
The Villas, Dallas Road

2004

Awards:

Carnforth Station Refurbishment
3 New Houses, Church Street, Whittington
Refurbishment of 21 Castle Hill
The Round House, Quarry Road

Commendations:

Rogerson's Depot, Yealand Conyers
Northgate House, White Lund, Morecambe

Summer Visits

Members of the Society have for many years enjoyed the summer visits to places of historical interest. They started in truth with no higher aim than a pleasant coach trip – a suspension of the more serious let's protect our city motivation. Typically a Lancaster City Transport coach awaited the members in Dalton Square at noon on a Saturday and transported them to a stately home within an hour's travel. There they had a tour and a pleasant afternoon tea, and were back in Lancaster for 6pm. The organiser, surreptitiously (he hoped), clutching Pevsner would attempt to be one step ahead of the passengers when introducing the delights ahead over the coach's pa system.

Between 1975 and 1985 we went to Sizergh Castle, Levens Hall, Leighton Hall, Borwick Hall, Browsholme Hall, Hoghton Tower, Hutton-in-the-Forest, Dacre Castle (including St Andrew's Church), and Lawkland Hall. There was then a gap year. The theme was resumed in 1987 but became more ambitious with whole day excursions to more distant places, where the local civic society would act as our hosts. These were opportunities for ideas to be exchanged between opposite numbers and often resulted in exchange visits to Lancaster. Thus between 1987 and the present were visits to Belle Isle Windermere, Chester, Halifax, Bolton, Burnley (including Gawthorpe Hall), Hebden Bridge (including East Riddleston Hall), Port Sunlight (including the Lady Lever Art Gallery), Skipton, Carlisle, Penrith, Barrow (including Roe Island, Piel Island and Furness Abbey), Darlington (including Rokeby Park), Saltaire, the Anderton Boat Lift and the Salt Museum, Richmond, Overton and Sunderland Point.

Lancaster has enjoyed visits by the civic societies of Skipton, Bolton, Whitehaven and Carlisle.

Walks – Ugly and Otherwise

From the early years of the Society committees have encouraged members to walk around the City, observe, praise the best and condemn the worst. Indeed the committee itself has pressed both City and property owners to clean up their buildings – perhaps the most notable example occurring during pedestrianisation, when a great deal of success was achieved in the improvement of shop frontages. But in more recent years encouragement to observe and report has focused on organised walks with a route and a purpose. One can hardly claim that some of these walks have been universally popular: after all, only the most dedicated would want to turn out on a wet day to note buddleias growing in decaying gutters. Nevertheless most walks have achieved some success by putting a reluctant property owner on the spot.

The Society has also arranged walks with a more general purpose – largely to encourage interest in the city's heritage. The Music Room, Judges' Lodgings, Priory Church and Castle Park were visited in 1968. There was an evening tour of old Lancaster in 1970. Andrew White, (Museums' Director) led a marathon in 1972, visiting Bashful Alley, Assembly Rooms, Castle Hill, excavations in Vicarage Field, St John's Church. The restored Green Ayre was the subject of a joint visit by the local Ramblers' Group and the Society. More recently, the Society's current president, Charles Wilson, has led walks from St George's Quay to the city centre, and along the canal corridor from Bath Mill housing to Aldcliffe Basin.

Walks

General:

1968: Priory Church, Castle Park

1969: Judges' Lodgings, Music Room, St John's Church, Green Ayre, St George's Quay

1970: Evening tour of old Lancaster

1972: Guided visits for public, Lancaster Ladies' Circle, RIBA conference

1973: Lancaster walk

1975: The Committee's annual walk

1977: Joint, with Ramblers' Association: Green Ayre, Skerton Weir

1999: Sharpe, Paley and Austin buildings, city centre (Jim Price)

2000: Going to the Shops: city centre in the 1900s (Michael Winstanley)

2002: Follow up to winter lecture on Carnforth Station

2002: From the Quay to the city centre (Charles Wilson)

2003: Lancaster Canal from Bath Mill to the Packet Boat Dock (Charles Wilson)

2003: Separate summer walks: Old Poulton Conservation area: Halton Village

2004: Walk around Morecambe front, in the footsteps of Winter lecture on flood prevention

2005: Hest Bank, led by Tom Mawson, and Victorian Wharf, led by Alan Rushton, chairman Slyne –with-Hest Historical Society

Ugly:

1980: City centre (?)

1992: Maritime Museum to Dalton Square (based on John Champness' "New Walk Round Lancaster")

1993: Burrow Beck to the Post House Hotel (M6 J34)

1994: Route of John Champness' "Guide to Historic Lancaster"

1995: Keyline builders' merchants (the Quay) to Greyhound Bridge

1996: ?

1997: Lancaster Canal from Beaumont Bridge to Aldcliffe Road

1998: St George's Quay

1999: ? " "

2000: Part of the route of John Champness "Guide to Historic Lancaster"

2001: Burrow Beck to the Post House Hotel (re-visited)

2002: Between the Rail and Bus stations

2003: Empty shops and premises

2004: Morecambe promenade

2005: Lancaster city centre

2006: Freehold

2007: Moorlands

Concerts

The years 1976-1979 and 1987 were musically memorable ones for the Society. The original intention was to show the public and the Town Hall that there was a practical use for the Ashton Memorial, as has been recorded elsewhere. It was clear from enthusiasm for the first recital that there was a considerable demand for such occasions and perhaps also in other underused city buildings. No doubt the tradition this started would have continued to this day had it not been for its founder's retirement to France.

The first recital indeed achieved its objective. Its success was debated by the City Council's leisure committee, who acknowledged the interest the event had raised, and that enquiries had been made by other groups about using the building.

The first recital in the Memorial was followed by two more in 1977 and 1978. The third, in 1979 took place in the Shire Hall. These were all under the direction of Geoff Burnstone whose contribution to the Society's work is recorded elsewhere. However, it should also be noted that the enthusiasm for these recitals may not have been entirely due to a love of chamber music or even a sense of civic responsibility. Geoff's wife Pat, in putting on some memorable food probably knew that the alimentary canal was as important to some members as the Lancaster Canal.

The venue for a further and final concert was again the Shire Hall, this time organised by the Society's tireless chairman, Martin Widden. This returned to the Ashton Memorial to mark the occasion of its re-opening after its restoration.

The music was provided by young instrumentalists. Three of the recitals were by the Stamford Ensemble - variously flute, oboe, harpsichord, guitar. Two were by students of the Royal Northern College of Music, playing clarinet, bassoon, oboe, piano, flute, violin, viola, cello. The music was eclectic - whether instruments and music were chosen to accommodate the difficult acoustic of both buildings is not known, but it seemed to work very well.

While it is a cause for regret that this series of concerts did not continue, increase in musical activity generally in Lancaster has to some extent taken their place. One might mention concerts and recitals at St Martin's College, the University, St John's Church, the town hall and Ashton Hall.

Newsletters

Trawling through 30 years of the Society's Newsletters has been at times a slow but always rewarding exercise. It had to be done slowly in order not to miss something crucial. Size, layout, colour, print size, frequency of issues have all changed over the years, making the job even more challenging. But the sheer variety of subjects covered has provided a source of information equal to any of the other files. No matter how short the newsletter – and some of them have been very short – there was always content of interest.

One is struck time and time again by the Society's constant dedication to good design. Another theme is generous praise to property owners who have cleaned up their premises, as well as hard words for those who haven't. Newsletters illustrate graphically the ebb and flow of committee life – near abandonment one day, three pages packed with information – even pictures – the next. After a time trudging through the detail, one comes to recognise editorial style, even though for the most part, editors remain anonymous. Geoffrey Burnstone, David Morgan, Roger Frankland, John Cousins, Judith Clarke, Michael Quinton, Martin Widden, and no doubt many others can be identified without too much difficulty.

Newsletters are by their nature ephemeral and will be discarded after they have been read. Some of the content deserves better, being well researched in some detail. Some articles have been illustrated with diagrams and maps which must have cost their authors a deal of time. Perhaps the Society might set up a more permanent archive for such material?

Nowadays members have come to expect the expertly laid out computer driven and professional publication which appears regularly through their letterboxes. Quality of content remains as high as ever, but one remembers with affection the sometimes idiosyncratic approach of the early issues.

It would be impossible to attempt to encapsulate any of the considerable and extraordinarily varied content of any of the valuable glimpses of the life of the Society which the Newsletters reveal: the best that can be done is their enrichment of appropriate sections of the book.

Recently the Society has ventured further into the electronic revolution by establishing its own website, and within it a chat room in which members can exchange opinion. Members with email addresses are being encouraged to download their copies of the Newsletter. Is this the end of paper?

Tree Surveys

A group surveyed the city's trees in 1969. A report was submitted to the City in 1970 and further areas earmarked for attention. Tree Preservation Orders were proposed at the 1970 AGM. In 1975, the City invited the Society to help in a survey of Lancaster's trees. The city was divided into sectors, each headed by a committee member who formed a team for his sector. Many trees were earmarked as being suitable for Tree Preservation Orders.

Working With Youth

Attempting to engage with the youth of the city has not been one of the Society's successes. An attempt was made to form a Junior Civic Society in 1972. All the schools were circularised, but

responses were late and few. LRGS and LGGS responded positively. The committee persevered and a meeting was held in 1973, which few attended. Since the only activity suggested was clearance of Lancaster's eyesores (the bank behind Bulk Road was one), one might understand the lack of enthusiasm. The project was dropped.

The only real contact with youth in recent years has been the President's Award, launched in 2001 in which pupils at the city's primary schools would select a building and say why they liked it. The Society's president presented certificates to the quite respectable numbers who took part. There have been no projects since then.

A. ENDPIECE

Thus, two forces important to the future standing and image of the Society are clear: the **Town Hall**, and the **Lancaster Guardian.** Firstly, the Town Hall. The playing (sometimes battle) field has, of course always been dominated by Society and Town Hall. Should we look for blame or scapegoats in the cooling relationship between City and Society? It takes two to tango: as has been discussed in **Society and Town Hall,** so it is difficult for any civic society to flourish in the face of an unsympathetic Town Hall. Over recent years the climate for sensitive design has changed, with movement towards increasing privatisation (less initiation of development by the authority itself, more reliance on the commercial sector, fewer officers with professional design skills). So we should not judge our Town Hall too harshly regarding forces over which it may have lessened control. But these changes do underline the need for a vocal civic society. It would do no harm constantly to remind the City that in its civic society it has a valuable asset which it could use constructively and that it has ready access to some professional design skills which it no longer employs. The phrase "Critical Friend" coined by a previous chief planning officer keeps coming to mind.

Comment has been made elsewhere that contact with councillors has been almost non-existent, ever since the Society was formed. This serves as a reminder that the Society should identify within the Town Hall those who will be sympathetic in promoting a cause, and those who may be less helpful, both officers and councillors. The art of lobbying will be familiar to the Town Hall: it is less obvious to the Society. It is many years since there was a councillor on the committee. The only attempt in recent years by the executive committee to engage with the City's councillors was in 2005, when Anne Chapman, also a member of the planning committee was invited to address the executive committee. She admitted that design is not always a priority when reviewing applications and there is no-one with an architectural background to assist in making decisions. She gave valuable advice on routes for lobbying the Town Hall on planning matters. The Society should build on this rare contact with an influential councillor.

Relations with the Lancaster Guardian naturally complement those with the Town Hall. It seems a great pity that there is apparently so little wish by the Guardian to use the Society more as a source of news so perhaps the Society should look for reasons. As suggested above, if the Society were to be seen as more combative, more column inches would appear. The press likes controversy. Would the appointment of a publicity officer be part of the solution?

Comment has been made on the notable absence of interest by the Society (until very recently on the specific issue of a housing development) in the University's building programme, which is a general opportunity to suggest that the time might have come for the Society to spell out more

precisely its boundaries of interest. We have already seen that in addition to the University, there are other major building developments where the Society has looked the other way - the Royal Lancaster Infirmary, White Cross, have been mentioned.

These are examples of major influences by developments which influence the appearance and economics of the ancient city. But we should not ignore Morecambe altogether when considering the immediate future civic influences of the Society. Schemes like the future of the Winter Gardens, the Midland Hotel, the sea front will always attract the Society's interest, and the problems of Morecambe as a whole are too big to be tackled by a society with few resources. But there is one part of the town which might just benefit from the Society's attentions: the quite unbeautiful White Lund industrial site. It really is a civic disgrace and an affront to a civilised and prosperous society. White Lund as it is will not disappear overnight, but might the Society not become a focus for a long term revival plan?

The final levers for the Society in all this postulating over what might or might not happen, are tourism and competition from Kendal and Preston. Lancaster is not the only town to realise the importance of tourism to its future, and if the Society ever needs a lever over a suspect development it can – and should - show the tourism card. Lancaster has always had to compete with the towns to its north and south for its future prosperity. The Society should be aware of and bring to public debate the forces which will influence all three towns.

Development of the blighted Eastern Relief Road corridor – Castle View - will shift the commercial/shopping centre of gravity of the city for the first time since Mackereth produced his wonderful map of 1780 which showed a centre roughly bounded by King Street, China Street, Cable Street, Stonewell: an urban boundary stretching back long before Mackereth. Not even the Luneside developments will have such a fundamental effect. It seems a fitting end to the first 40 years and the start of the next that the Society may have some influence on this site and how it will connect to the "old" city. Handled properly it will enrich the city, encourage the tourist and provide an edge over Kendal and Preston. Handled badly, another Arndale? The Lancaster Civic Society must do its best to ensure that such a fate is avoided.