Good architecture and sympathetic restoration of historic buildings are worth recognising. One might argue about what constitutes ‘good architecture’ or even ‘sympathetic restoration’, but the Civic Society tries to acknowledge both through the Civic Awards scheme. We run this on behalf of the Borough Council for the encouragement of standards of excellence in the restoration of historic buildings and other works of improvement in Cheltenham’s built environment.

There are five categories: new build, environmental improvements, restoration, shopfront design and ‘green’ buildings. This year there were thirty two nominations, of which eighteen were shortlisted; these were then visited by the awards panel which decides (often with heated debate) who should receive an award or a commendation. The shortlist is on page 10.

The awards and commendations are presented at a ceremony, followed by a lecture by a national, or even, international figure. Details are on page 3 and the enclosed invitation.

This year’s Civic Award’s Lecture, presented by the architect (and former Mayor of Bristol) George Ferguson, promises to be stimulating and challenging. Entitled Igniting the Urban Regeneration Fuse, he (or rather, William Shakespeare), asks ‘What is the city but the people?’. George goes on to say ‘Urban regeneration’ is a much used, and misused, term. Real regeneration is not about building, as developers and politicians would sometimes have us believe - but is a social and cultural process best exercised by free citizens and responded to by architects, developers and councils. Real regeneration is about releasing the pent-up desire that lies in all of us to improve the place that we live, work and play. It is more about food, health, social wellbeing and mobility than it is about financial prosperity.

I have had the great privilege of being able to bring a life in architecture, history and the environment, together with a passion for people and place to the serious job of briefly running the city which I came to as a student in the sixties. Everywhere is different, and that is to be celebrated, but the principles remain the same, whether in Bristol, Barcelona or Cheltenham!’

Cheltenham Civic Awards 2019

George Ferguson CBE PPRIBA RWA; co-founder of Ferguson Mann Architects and founder of Acanthus Associated Architectural Practices Limited, RIBA President 2003-05; Mayor of Bristol 2012-16.

What’s in OurTown this time

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From the Chairman, Andrew

“...the most important thing in communication is to hear what isn’t being said.” Peter F. Drucker

Let me start with something positive: the Battlefield Crosses project is going very well. The research and conservation stage has finished, we’ll shortly be rededicating them and we’re working with Cheltenham Borough Council to secure a permanent home for them. This is a fantastic project and if you can, book tickets for Freddie Gick’s talk on 7 May.

Meanwhile, I have to candidly say I was puzzled and a bit disappointed that only 7 per cent of you have yet responded to our recent online membership survey. Organisations like ours must satisfy the needs and expectations of their members, otherwise they don’t flourish. Perhaps our survey was too long; perhaps you are quite happy with how we run the society and are content with what we do. Whatever the answer, we really need more feedback, so that we offer the right things in future. Please, if you are on email, find the survey at http://bit.ly/2SepSYR and send it back. Our Town is published quarterly but, between issues, we send out brief email updates, though these will only reach the two-thirds of members who have given us a current email address. Do please let the Membership Secretary know if you have acquired or changed an email address, so that you get all the news as soon as it comes out. His address is on the back page.

If we don’t have an email address for you, we enclose a copy of the survey. Please complete it and send it back by 31 March. Our address is on the back page.

I was surprised, too, that we have had very little feedback on our Boots Corner response. This trial is one of the most contentious schemes the town has faced in recent years (our MP says it accounts for far more of his mailbag than the other B word!), so why are we so quiet about it? Are we content to stay passive on such important matters? We think there are options that address some of the concerns over the proposal, some of which are set out on pages 6-7. I would welcome your thoughts - and my email address is on the back page.

Finally, to our popular talks. You can now buy tickets in advance. If you wish, via our website, using PayPal, it’s secure, simple and quick. It also helps us prepare for events better, rather than guessing how many will turn up on the night. Please give it a go.

Join the debate by following us on facebook.com/cheltenhamcivicsociety and @cheltcivicsoc on Twitter.

Welcome to new members

• Peter Clegg
• Paul Davies
• Liz Giles and Richard Seymour
• Alan Jameson
• Mike Lake
• Dr John and Mrs Jean McLroy
• Oliver Pointer and Judith Hardy
• Graham and Barbara Stopher

A fourth Cheltenham VC honoured

James Hodsdon

The highlight of a long and distinguished military career was the award of a VC, for bravery in action on 60 London Road. The Mayor of Cheltenham, Cllr Bernard Fisher, will be unveiling a blue commemorative plaque to James Hodsdon on 8 April, three other Cheltenham VCs have already been honoured in this way, and it is good to be able to complete the set. If you would like to come to the ceremony, please contact me at jj49@btinternet.com. More details are on page 3.

Pupils from Pittville School

Diary dates

Everyone is welcome to attend our talks and lectures.

Wednesday 20 March
Annual General Meeting and Open Forum

The Agenda, Minutes 2018, Chairman’s Report and Accounts 2019 will be on the website two weeks before the AGM. The Open Forum is members’ opportunity to ask questions, make suggestions and get involved. Refreshments will be served.

7.30pm | Parmore House
13 Lypiatt Terrace GL50 2SX

Wednesday 10 April
Cheltenham Civic Awards Presentation and Lecture

Presentation of awards (managed by the Civic Society on behalf of the Borough Council) by the Mayor of Cheltenham, Cllr Bernard Fisher, followed by Lecture, Igniting conditions at home, and on the Western Front, when the crosses were first erected, and will consider the relevance of this kind of project for today’s young people.

Booking details for members enclosed with this newsletter and on our website for all.

6pm | Chapel Arts
Knapp Road, Cheltenham GL50 3QQ

Thursday 11 April
Unveiling of commemorative blue plaque in honour of Lt-Col James Forbes-Robertson. All are welcome to attend the ceremony.

2.30 for 3pm | 60 London Road
Cheltenham GL52 6EQ

Tuesday 7 May
Cheltenham’s battlefield crosses

Unveiling of commemorative blue plaque in honour of Lt-Col James Forbes-Robertson. All are welcome to attend the ceremony.

2.30 for 3pm | 60 London Road
Cheltenham GL52 6EQ

Proposal and Lecture

AGM. The Open Forum is members’ opportunity to ask questions, make suggestions and get involved. Refreshments will be served.

7.30pm | Parmore House
13 Lypiatt Terrace GL50 2SX

Saturday 11 May
Battlefield crosses rededication.

All welcome. Further details on the website nearer the time.

3pm | Cheltenham Minster
44 Clarence Street. GL50 3PL

Civic Awards 2018 for Pittville Gates restoration

Pittville School pupils with a battlefield cross

Chew’s was the home for over forty years to Derek Rowles and his family, and we are saddened to learn of Derek’s recent death. I had the pleasure of meeting him at the unveiling of Dame Sidney’s plaque, when his panache and enthusiasm for his predecessors came across to all.

His articles about both Sir Ralph and Dame Sidney were published in the Cheltenham Local History Society’s Journal in 2004 and 2003 respectively. We extend our sympathy to Rosemary and Susannah.

Fiona Clarke, Editor
such as the Architects’ Panel and the Civic Society, comment formally on significant applications.

Developers sometimes gauge local reaction to a development before making a formal application. A current example is Roberts Limbrick Architects, based in Gloucester and working with Black Box Planning Ltd from Bristol, who are proposing to develop the site of the 1950s BT telephone repeater station in Parabola Road for housing.

The developers’ preferred option is to demolish the existing building and to provide twelve flats, twenty car parking spaces and a bicycle store. A large sycamore on the site is to be felled to allow lime trees adjacent to the street frontage to flourish.

The developers’ preferred option is to demolish the existing building and to erect a four-storey apartment block with twelve flats, twenty car parking spaces and a bicycle store. A large sycamore on the site is to be felled to allow lime trees adjacent to the street frontage to flourish. Some flats are provided with balconies, and there is some “amenity space around the proposed building. The architects held meetings with the Borough Council’s Planning Department and a public consultation meeting for local residents in late 2018. Overall, both groups were positive about the design and landscaping. The architects accepted an invitation from the Civic Society to make a presentation, in December, to its Planning Forum and Trustees; twelve people attended. The reaction from the Civic Society was less positive than that of the Planning Department and local residents. Many of our group consider the repeater station a good example of early post-war modernism, of which there are not many examples in Cheltenham. Historically, it represents a period in early communications technology in a town whose future depends on new technology. We should protect examples of good architecture from other periods. The Civic Society encourages modern architecture; in fact many members believe that the standard of much new building in Cheltenham is abysmal. This begs the question: are developers and planners being too cautious with respect to our Regency heritage, resulting in generally mediocre development? It is acknowledged that it is a difficult brief for an architect to design a contemporary building, in an historic townscape, which respects its historic surroundings, but is not subservient to them.

The developers for this Parabola Road redevelopment were considered to be too safe and self-effacing. It was thought that a building which was more challenging, more imaginative, and more interesting would be appropriate. Another solution would be to retain the telephone repeater station and adapt it for housing, with a sensitively designed minimalist extension, to provide the twelve flats required by the developer. It was also suggested that the developer should provide more green space and landscaping to encourage biodiversity.

Among the Tantivy hills: Challenges of setting a novel in Cheltenham

Christine Whittemore

In Trollope’s Miss Mackenzie, the eponymous heroine’s doctor recommends a change of air: “Littlebath, among the Tantivy hills.” Littlebath is reminiscent of Cheltenham, with its waters good for the system, and its clergyman who opposes “… card-playing and dancing … hunting and horse-racing” like Francis Close. Yet Trollope avoided a clear identification, and so was free to embellish as he liked. Contemporary writer Kim Fleet, on the other hand, does call the setting of her time-slip crime novels Cheltenham, but invents street and building names slightly different from the true ones.

My own first novel, Inscription, happens mostly on the Italian island Ponza, two thousand years ago. Long before the book was dreamt of, I’d been there; during the years of writing I returned. I absorbed the white cliffs, turquoise sea, unchanged since the first century; but ruins had to be re-imagined. Those Roman pool enclosures once teemed with fish, had moving partitions, shell-work ornament.

Inscription

Among the Tantivy hills: Challenges of setting a novel in Cheltenham

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To continue in the search for collaborative solutions as advanced in my article in December’s issue, the Civic Society is co-hosting a public meeting with St Paul’s Residents’ Association on Monday 8 April at 6.30pm at St Paul’s Church. It will explore constructive solutions for the Boots Corner closure. Free tickets can be booked online (rather than include a very long URL just enter Eventbrite Boots Corner into your browser and details should come top of the list). Details are also on our Facebook page.

Meanwhile, to show there are alternatives to what has been proposed so far, let me take you through some ideas.

Last November, Cheltenham Civic Society responded to the idea of closing Boots Corner to traffic. The policy of leaving traffic to “find its own way” was considered unhelpful to drivers, risking created pollution hotspots and traffic congestion, and was unsuitable for a walking town, attracting a large number of citizens and traders. Here I am going one step further by proposing an alternative north-south route to address these concerns and to enable a number of other developments and improvements. The proposal is not perfect, but it offers environmental, transport and redevelopment benefits, as well as financial viability.

The route

The proposed route would run between the junction of Lower High Street/ St George’s Street in the north, down Ambrose Street, St James Square and through the current public car park to join up with Royal Well Place until it meets St George’s Road in the south. This new route would handle two way traffic along its full length, enabling transit both north and south to St George’s Road. There is also potential to improve the High Street/ Poole Way/Swindon Road junctions near the sorting office to reduce traffic transiting St George’s Street.

Principal advantages

The proposal has a number of advantages that make it not just financially viable but operationally attractive:

• It enables the redevelopment of the Municipal Offices and Royal Well Road, generating significant public funds, estimated to be well in excess of £20M. This is an important space with considerable architectural significance and potential that merits an architectural competition to decide the nature of future redevelopment.

• Boots Corner would be closed to all traffic apart from delivery, emergency and municipal cleaning vehicles (even then, controls should be put in place to keep them out of the pedestrianised area in the daytime). This would enable full pedestrianisation of the High Street between the Brewery Quarter and Cambrai Place. It would also allow the full pedestrianisation of Clarence Street from Imperial Circus, Imperial Circus itself, and the Promenade until its junction with St George’s Road.

• It facilitates redevelopment of Cheltenham Walk car park to commercial or municipal offices. The slope of the site would enable two decks of car parking on-site to create increased parking capacity. The development would also help to satisfy the strong demand for office space in Cheltenham and present the opportunity to ‘green’ the surroundings with planting and trees.

• This redevelopment could generate a surplus well in excess of £2M.

• Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC) owns and thus controls the main sites involved in this proposal – Royal Well Road, the Municipal Offices, the coach station and green, and Cheltenham Walk car park - through which the new road section would go. Notwithstanding consultations and finalisation, this could enable speedy implementation and the benefits of the scheme could be coordinated by CBC itself.

• As a consequence, the generation of over £20M could fund the necessary changes to roads and paving without impinging on Gloucestershire County Council’s (GCC) highways budget and thus could be implemented without undue delay. Section 106 agreements would also be used for infrastructural improvements.

Additional opportunities

Public spaces – the proposal creates some significant public spaces.

• Boots Corner, a sizeable public square that links Promenade and upper Clarence Street with the High Street, all of which would be pedestrianised.

• Promenade, which would be pedestrianised along its full length.

• Lower High Street junction that, with planting and good design, could be a constructive link between the Brewery Quarter and the Lower High Street.

These will require separate consideration and redesign to realise their full potential. Nevertheless, they could be exemplary spaces for entertainment, leisure, exhibitions and festival use.

Street improvements – the proposal offers opportunities to improve:

• St James Square, where the square would become one way (west to east). The southern side of St James Square adjoining St George’s Place is a wide but poorly laid out and surfaced street. Its width lends it to herringbone on-street parking, which could be significantly enhanced with street trees, planting, sympathetic surfaces, signage and markings.

• St George’s Place would also become one way (north to south). It is wide enough for on-street parking on one side of the road. Improved surfacing would limit traffic speeds, safety and noise levels.

• Crescent Place is a wide street that, like St James Square, lends itself to herringbone on-street parking, street tree planting and sympathetic surfaces, signage and markings.

Bus routes – in the absence of a proper bus and coach station, buses could be relocated from High Street area to Albion Street. The creation of this “bus spine” would allow multiple sub-loops and bus stops providing numerous points for visitors to enter the central shopping area without disrupting traffic or compromising pedestrian areas. This would also help to regenerate the Albion Street area north of High Street whilst supporting High Street retailers.

Traffic flow – this would be optimised by establishing an urban clearway, marking parking bays better and enforcing them more rigorously, installing roundabouts instead of traffic lights, and improving parking bays on Swindon Road/St Margaret’s Road. Surfaces and markings would help traffic flowing steadily at 20-30mph.

To conclude, this proposal is important and innovative. The civic society are asking for your views, which we will send to the relevant authorities. We also hope to attract others to support this initiative, as it offers a number of potential benefits to the town and its future development.

Andrew Booton

Breakthrough on Boots Corner?
A proposal for an alternative route

Andrew Booton

Proposed Alternative Route
Potential Development Sites
Pedestrianised Areas
Parking
Improved Surfaces
Building Facelift Potential

Building enhancements – in cooperation with their owners, the proposal offers the opportunity to enhance a number of prominent but disappointing buildings in the area or redevelopment to a more suitable use.

These are just a few ideas to mull over. If you care about what happens when the Boots Corner trial period is over and are in town on the night, do join us at the meeting on 8 April!

Image
Battlefield Crosses project nearing completion

Freddie Gick, Battlefield Crosses project manager

The Civic Society’s project to conserve, restore and research the twenty-two WW1 battlefield crosses in Bouncers Lane cemetery is in its final stages. The crosses have been worked on by Stephen Umpleby of Artefacts Conservation Services and are now in much better condition. Stephen has provided a report which will be included in the final report to the Heritage Lottery Fund. Meanwhile, pupils in Pittville School have been working enthusiastically with their teacher, Hannah Taylor, aided and abetted by the Headteacher, Richard Gilpin, in researching the stories behind the crosses. This work has been supported by a very helpful presentation from Stephen Umpleby and a talk from local historian, Neela Mann. Neela is the author of Cheltenham in the Great War, a definitive account of how Cheltenham and its people supported the war effort. One of the crosses, commemorating Private Regan, was seen by one of his relatives at an exhibition in the Town Hall over the weekend marking the 100th anniversary of the Armistice. They made contact and have since provided some valuable information about him and his family, greatly assisting the pupils’ research. The results of their visits and research will be displayed in an exhibition in the school, on 28 March 2019. As noted elsewhere in this newsletter, a service of rededication of the crosses will be held in the Minster at 3pm on 11 May. For further information on these events please see the Civic Society website nearer the time.

For the moment, the crosses are in safe storage at the cemetery. The Society is also exploring possible locations for a permanent home for the crosses. Ideally this will be in a secure building that will protect the crosses from any further deterioration and still enable them to be viewed easily by the public. The Society is very grateful to the Heritage Lottery Fund for making funds available to enable this project and to Cheltenham Borough Council for their support.

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Cheltenham lit up again

Fiona Clarke

February is a rather dull month so I was happy to see many of the town’s buildings floodlit, bringing a little cheer to everyone and showing what a lovely town we do have, despite all our complaints about pavements and roads. There was also a large 35-metre high observation wheel in Imperial Gardens from Saturday 2 until Sunday 14 February. It was surrounded by floodlit buildings including the Quadrangle, Queens Hotel, the Town Hall, No 113, and the terrace lower down Promenade. The colour schemes changed over the three weeks and on 14 February, to celebrate Valentine’s Day, the whole town was red lit.

The event was also spread across the town from The Brewery Quarter, central part of High Street, Clarence Street, Regent Street and North Place. This initiative came from Cheltenham Business Improvement District (BID) team under the leadership of Kevan Blackadder who wrote for us in the December 2018 issue. Light Up Cheltenham was held for the first time in 2018 for one week and this year saw an increase in the number of buildings illuminated from six to more than 20 over the three week period.

BID’s raison d’être is to encourage local businesses to help improve our town and certainly many contributed to this event.

September 2019 – a sunnier month?

The Civic Society has taken advice from Kevan on another event which will also expand in 2019 – Heritage Open Days. This will run in England for thirteen days, from 13 to 22 September. Up from eight in 2018 and four prior to that. Managing Cheltenham’s participation is a challenge at any time and we hope that some of the buildings within the BID area will be willing to open some of their ‘hidden places’ to visitors. This is in the very early stages of planning and we have no promises. In the meantime, the HODs team is pressing on with participants from previous years in planning new walks, talks and other events that bring our town’s history to life.

Hidden Cheltenham – follow the trail

You don’t have to wait until September to find some of hidden Cheltenham. Cheltenham BID, with The Wilson and Stand + Stare Collective, has published a trail around the town centre, highlighting some of the less well-known buildings and people, from the Hepworth Bronzes to The Observatory. If you don’t know what these are, get hold of the trail. It is also online and has its own Facebook and Twitter accounts.
Civic Awards shortlist revealed!

To whet your appetite for the awards ceremony and lecture on 10 April, we are publishing the shortlist for the first time. You’ll be able to see most of the buildings from the road – please drive or walk by and see what you think!

**New building or structure**
- One Bayshill Road, GL50 3FH
  - Conversion and new build
- Regent House, Montpellier Drive, GL50 1TX
  - Residential refurbishment
- 61 St. Stephen's Road, GL51 2AF
  - Extension and refurbishment
- Coach House, Prestbury, GL52 3DN
  - Restoration
- Formal House, St George's Place, GL50 3PN
  - Warehouse to offices
- The Ivy, Promenade
  - Bank to restaurant
- 1-7 College Lawn, GL53 7AF
  - NHS offices to girls' boarding house

**Environmental improvement**
- Pocket parks, Lower High Street
- Made in Brazil

**Shopfront**
- 331 Lower High Street

We have provided just a selection of images from the shortlist. If you wish to see an image of any other property please contact the Editor. We will publish the name of the architect, contractor and owner (if agreed), and a brief description of the buildings receiving an award or a commendation in the next issue of Our Town.

Fiona Clarke, Editor

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Good news for urban trees

Bob Beale, Chairman, Cheltenham Tree Group

With all the turmoil over Brexit running up to Christmas you might have missed the excitement in Sheffield where a major row has raged for a number of years over the plan to fell a large number of trees over a fifteen year period and replace them with little saplings. 5,500 already have been felled, of which it is claimed that 2,000 were healthy. The policy, according to campaigners, was produced to save money, as saplings are cheaper to maintain than large trees, combined with neglect of the existing tree stock over a lengthy period, despite Sheffield’s claim to be the greenest city in the country.

The Minister for the Environment expressed disquiet over the policy in September and the Council (Sheffield) announced just before Christmas that the policy would change and in future no healthy trees would be felled, to general jubilation.

Whether the Sheffield situation had any influence on the decision, or it was just a coincidence, is a matter for conjecture but the Minister, Michael Gove, announced at the end of December that he was launching a consultation prior to legislation to provide greater protection for urban trees. He proposes that councils should be required to consult residents on plans to chop down trees. Councils should be obliged to report on felling and replanting, with more powers for the Forestry Commission to tackle illegal felling and there should be strengthened protection for wooded landscapes.

Thanks to Bob Beale for permission to reprint his article from CTG’s January 2019 newsletter.
Recycling for Gloucestershire

Peter Sayers

Since our enlightening visit to the borough council’s waste and recycling centre in Swindon Road in October 2018, our county-wide civic societies group has met again, specifically to look at waste and recycling across the county. There is no doubt the information, about plastics recycling in particular, is complex and confusing. In other counties, to assist residents Stratford-upon-Avon has an extensive list of what can and cannot be recycled into the various boxes. Plastics Free Ltd is using the mantra Refuse–Refill–Reuse–Recycle and some towns are taking this on. Malmesbury is going one step further, trying to make the whole town plastic free. A bold initiative!

Here we hope to work with Ubico to produce a useful list that we and other civic societies can make available to residents. Things like children’s plastic toys, the lids of milk cartons, and crisp packets need to be identified/classified so that recycling is effective. At the moment, contaminated recycling containing the ‘wrong’ sort of plastics goes entirely to landfill. We can all do a bit but, like plastic itself, the bits can add up to a great deal.

Note from Editor: we await answers from Ubico to the questions raised in the last issue. Perhaps these have been overtaken by the recent survey of Cheltenham’s waste and recycling collections, the results of which are on the council’s website (News). In the meantime, many of us are concerned about the visual impact of all those bins and bags and boxes on our streets, especially in the conservation area. This is another issue altogether!

Key Cheltenham Civic Society contacts
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Art Works, Cheltenham
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Letter to the Editor

Could do better

In the last issue of Our Town there was an interesting article about the ‘green corridor’ in the High Street near John Lewis. The trees, in the huge planters imported from China, promise to be lovely. On my first visit, though, I was disappointed to see litter in the flower beds, spilt food and drink on and under the seats, and more around the litter bins. The edge of one of the seats was damaged.

Last week I was pleased to see the area cleaner, but the seat has been removed and not replaced. With the big investment in this part of the High Street, surely it should be looked after better.

Name withheld

Pittville Pump Room revisited

“John Forbes, Architect”

Well, I’ve been back to the Pump Room several times since my rant in September 2018. Things are a little better in that there was a big board outside saying that the building was open to visitors and there was a guide to welcome me once or twice. There was even a free booklet to take away and I was mentioned in it!

I decided to find out more about what’s been happening lately and learned two things:
• a local group has conducted a ‘mystery shopping’ exercise and produced a report on the ‘visitor experience’ (all these modern words!) which it has sent to The Cheltenham Trust. This is available on the group’s website (Friends of Pittville) and they hope to work with the Trust to further improve matters.
• The Trust itself has commissioned an inquiry into the future use of Pittville Pump Room and it has written to ‘key stakeholders’ (what on earth are they?) with a short survey. The deadline was 12 February so too late for this issue but I will report again if I can.

In the meantime, when it’s available, try the mineral water (one time it wasn’t and there was an awful handwritten sign on the fountain). The water doesn’t taste like it did in my day. Can anyone tell me why? Just write to the Editor of this august publication if you know.

Who carries these bins up or down the steps?