

Ipswich Society

Review of the Year 2017

There have been a number of highlights during the past year worthy of a mention in my report. I'll start with Heritage Open Days and our collective ability to attract visitors from elsewhere to come and see what Ipswich has to offer. Volunteers in the various buildings inevitably talk to their visitors and are frequently surprised by the distance the guests have travelled. Clearly our efforts to publicise the weekend across East Anglia has paid rewards. These visitors all spend a pound or two on a coffee, an ice cream or even on overnight accommodation, may there be many more of them.

The Society's association with the University continues and again we used the foyer for an exhibition last October, this time in conjunction with Ipswich Maritime Trust who were celebrating 35 years since the first Maritime Festival (1982). It was interesting to see how much of their vision has come to fruition and how much is still promised.

In conjunction with the University Exhibition we launched the rewritten Maritime Trail leaflet, this time as a booklet rather than as a single folded sheet. Covering the same buildings (and plaques) it is no longer a trail with instructions on how to proceed, instead each double page spread features a group of buildings in a single location.

The 2018 exhibition will be a joint effort with RIBA Suffolk, south east Suffolk architects each of whom has been invited to display an A3 board of their most interesting projects from the last couple of years. The exhibition will run from 11th – 25th October, we will need volunteers to maintain a presence during the day.

The Ipswich Society cannot claim the glory for either the restoration of Holywells Park or St Mary Quay church, now Quay Place but we did nominate both for Civic Voice Awards. The Society provided sufficient background information to enable both to win an award, Holywells Park in 2016 and Quay Place last year. In a fiercely fought competition the description of the work that has taken place, of the community involvement and of the enthusiasm of staff, written by the Vice Chairman on the nomination form proved sufficient interest for the judging panel to investigate further. The result, excellent national publicity for Ipswich and for the way it looks after its heritage buildings and open spaces.

The Society continues to enlarge the photographic albums on Flickr, the photo storing web site on the net. I am told we now have nearly 8,000 photographs of Ipswich from the last 100 years. Thanks to Nick Wiggins some even older and more recently a collection of 330 excellent aerial photographs taken by Brian Mateer whilst working for Fisons. As an ex RAF photographer Brian was employed to photograph crops from the air to establish how well, or otherwise the fertilizer was working. As well as carrying the special cameras provided by Fisons Brian also carried his own and before they returned to land at Ipswich he would snap away taking quality images of Ipswich and its environs.

Work is at last underway on the Cornhill, some five years after Stuart Rose suggested we spend £250,000 on improving the town centre. It transpires that none of the contractors tendering could meet the £3.5 million target price (notice how time and dreams have increased the size of the project) and some hasty negotiations were carried out with the partner funders, and with the contractor to reach a compromise. I think they call it value engineering but it simply means reducing the specification to get closer to the available budget.

The funding partners include Suffolk County Council and the Local Enterprise Partnership (Government money – your money) and despite the hiccup just before work started (the possibility of omitting some details to meet the budget) I understand both the fountains and the four monoliths (arches) should be in place by the end of October.

It is not surprising that with the promise of a new town square there has been interest in the former Post Office and in The Golden Lion Hotel (but I am sure not as a post office or as a hotel!). Lets hope the contribution the new occupants make to the Cornhill is worthy of our investment.

I mentioned in the April 2016 Newsletter that a developer was considering 'Façade Engineering', demolishing Grimwade's but leaving the front elevations and building a big box of a store behind. Unfortunately this came to nothing and the Cornhill frontage will be a sandwich shop with a greeting card outlet in Westgate Street. My point about occupants worthy of the investment taking place outside applies.

John Norman