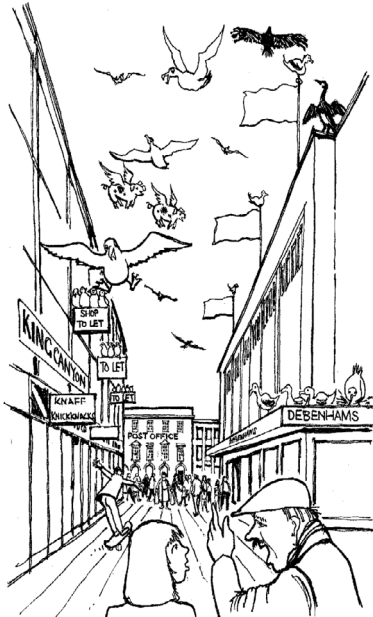


Annual Reports

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT, 2003, by Robin Morris



"I remember when this was a huge open space - in fact at one time you could see all the way to Iceland from here!"

'Ignoranti, quem portum petat, Nullus suus ventus est' (SENECA)

At the end of my report last year I promised that Emperor Nerva was coming. Quite when I did not know but he was definitely coming. It has now happened! The details of the event are dealt with elsewhere but suffice it to say that the unveiling took place on a splendid bright day and everyone enjoyed the occasion enormously. My congratulations to everybody who was involved both in the project itself and organising the unveiling.

In the 28th Annual Report, I discussed the problem of appointing a historic buildings officer. There had been negotiations through Gloucester Historic Buildings (GHB) for one half of the salary to be funded by GHB and the other half to be funded by the City. Eventually Nerissa Krantz was appointed as Historic Buildings Officer. Nerissa worked in this post for something like 18 months before she resigned. In the meantime Elfed Roberts had been appointed as Team Leader Urban Initiative. Elfed sat regularly on the GHB meetings and always had a positive input. Elfed had suggested that a replacement should be found for Nerissa with an appointment of 3 years. The salary would be funded

in part by the City, in part by English Heritage and as to the remainder by the commitment, which we had made for the outstanding 18 months of her salary. This had been agreed by the Board of GHB.

Unfortunately at the last meeting of GHB on the 6th January, Elfed announced that he was resigning and was taking up a new post in South Wales. I was so concerned about the situation that I wrote to a number of representatives of the city expressing concern about the situation. Eventually I had a helpful letter from Lesley Barakchizadeh (who is the Executive Manager of Sustainable Development). As the letter also touches on the question of the proposed Urban Regeneration Company I do not think that I can do better than quote from it at some length:

"I am aware you have expressed similar concerns to a number of other officers, as well as Councillor McLellan, so please accept this response as being from the City Council on behalf of all of us.

Firstly, may I explain what is currently happening. We secured additional funding for the post of Historic Building Officer, enabling us to recruit someone to the post for a further 3 years but we were awaiting formal confirmation from English Heritage, before advertising the post. This was reported at the meeting of Gloucester Historic Buildings on 6th January.

Meanwhile there has been a lot of activity around Gloucester, with regard to regeneration projects and a proposal was put forward to set up an Urban Regeneration Company (URC). Due to the unique nature of Gloucester, with its many historic buildings and monuments, it was decided that if a URC becomes a reality, it could be badged as a Heritage URC.

The cabinet of the City Council recently agreed that the Council should participate in a Shadow Board for a URC, which would look into the proposals further. As part of this research, the RDA has commissioned English Heritage to undertake a Gloucester Characterisation Survey. This is basically a survey which characterises the historical/archaeological land uses in a given area, and the conservational / regeneration / development opportunities they may or may not offer. This is obviously good news for Gloucester but it does increase the potential workload of the Urban Initiatives team - we have only one Conservation Officer and the vacant Historic Buildings Officer post.

However, I have had a meeting with English Heritage, discussed my proposed new structure and the difficulties we are facing and English Heritage have agreed to increase the amount of funding they are offering, enabling us to appoint a qualified conservation officer to undertake both the historic buildings work as well as other conservation activities. This assumes, of course, that you are still happy to provide your contribution, without which we couldn't progress.

English Heritage are sorting out the funding and will be confirming their position in writing shortly. Meanwhile, as this is a change in the post proposed, I need to wait until I have formal committee agreement for my structure (due on 19th February) before advertising the post. However, all of the paperwork is ready and I anticipate being able to make speedy progress in advertising and appointing an officer after that date."

Some time ago I wrote to the City regarding the maintenance of Ancient Monuments and in particular St Oswalds Priory and Our Lady's Well at Hempsted. Subsequent to that letter I noticed that St Oswalds Priory had been fenced but no active work had been done to carry out any restoration. The Civic Trust members of GHB had come to the conclusion that it had become City Council policy to only maintain the monuments on a health and safety basis. I raised the issue in letter form with Malcolm Watkins who is Strategic Cultural Manager. He replied that the current policy is essentially as I had described it. Money is available for remedial works essential on health and safety grounds but not for anything else at present. We must assume therefore that the monuments will continue to deteriorate unless a suitable solution can be found.

Similar problems exist so far as the Museum and Archaeological Services are concerned. Tony Ault, Nigel Spry and myself have sent letters to the City on the subject. We have also asked to be kept fully informed and involved with the consultation process.

Throughout the year we have also raised a number of other concerns such as St Lucy's Garden and we are still awaiting a satisfactory outcome.

I read with interest the article in the Citizen for the 13th February 2003 written by Hugh Worsnip in respect of the Heritage URC. In that article he says that the word Heritage has been included in order to reflect the City's wealth of history dating back to Roman times. Hugh refers to a shadow board meeting to take place on the 21st March and we shall watch progress with interest. Let us hope that the inclusion of the word heritage is not simply another example of lip service. The new edition of Pevsner strikes a somewhat despondent note regretting the fact that no good modern buildings have been erected in the Centre of Gloucester "meanwhile Gloucester housing has continued its relentless march to the east and south, those such areas crying out for some landmarks of merit to relieve the monotony". Much of the conservation of city landmarks in the last two decades of the 20th Century was either carried out or sponsored by the Civic

Trust working through its volunteers. We seem to have no difficulty attracting talented individuals to act as Civic Trust guides and it occurs to me that volunteers might be able to provide some of the leadership and original thinking which is required on the cultural and heritage side of our City life. We have other examples of this in such organisations as the Friends of the Hospital and the Pied Piper Appeal.

I had a feeling of déjà vu in a communication which dropped on my desk from Jon Lockett inviting opinions regarding the Eastgate Street Improvement Scheme. Jon in his letter said that Eastgate Street was the first street in Gloucester to be pedestrianised in 1990. At the time it was considered that a large amount of obstacles were necessary to prevent traffic abuse, but subsequent schemes have proved this to be unnecessary. This is reinforced by current thinking about community safety which discourages the erection of features in the street which can be used as a screen for antisocial activities. He goes on to say that the new scheme should result in a street which has a bright updated appearance and which is easier and more comfortable to use and to clean. In 1990 I said in my Chairman's Report "the execution of the scheme is in my view not good. If there was one lesson to be learnt from the Kings Square development, any public space needs to be uncluttered and easy to clean. The Eastgate scheme is far too busy both as to the variety of paving materials which have been used and as to the sheer amount of street furniture. My main criticism is that the ground surface defies all the efforts of the Corporation Cleansing Department." You have my full support Jon and I hope you have all the luck in the world in promoting the new scheme. To repeat the views of Seneca "If one does not know to which port one is sailing, no wind is favourable."