

Annual Reports

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT, 2004, by Robin Morris



"If you see that Civic Trust lot coming - hide behind the bushes quick!"

"In the middle ages people were tourists because of their religion, whereas now they are tourists because tourism is their religion."

(Robert Runcie - Archbishop of Canterbury)

Robert Runcie was not the first churchman to appreciate the importance of tourists to the local economy. As anyone will know who has read the book written by Phil Moss 'Historic Gloucester' that the fortunes of medieval Gloucester were strengthened in 1327 when Abbot Thokey accepted for burial at St Peter's Abbey the body of King Edward II who was murdered in nearby Berkeley Castle. During the next two centuries many people were moved to make the pilgrimage to Edward's tomb resulting in an increased wealth and importance for the city and abbey. So successful were the monks in attracting tourists that they had to build the New Inn under the supervision of John Twyning to house all the visitors.

In these days of religious tolerance Gloucester welcomes people of all religious persuasions including tourists!

The Trust has in recent years become concerned about the falling number of tourists visiting the city. We monitor this through the statistics kept in connection with persons availing themselves of the guided tours. There are a number of problems, which do not help. The more obvious ones are the lack of hotel accommodation, inadequate parking arrangements for coaches including facilities for the drivers, and poor public toilets. We have been in an active dialogue with the City suggesting a number of initiatives, which would make Gloucester a cleaner and more attractive venue for tourists. Colin Nyland, with his committee, and Phil Moss have put a lot of thought into looking for a way forward and we have had a constructive meeting with Steve Ellway, Mick Thorpe and Malcolm Watkins on the subject at Herbert Warehouse on the 13th of February. Two of the main problem areas are the Museum and Archaeological Services (including Culture) and the Ancient Monuments of which there are 43 in Gloucester.

The Museum service has been the subject of much public discussion and consultation. I have been advocating a greater role for the voluntary sector. The Civic Trust has a large reservoir of gifted and well-trained guides and I am sure there are many more Gloucesterians just waiting to be invited to give service to the community. There are also similar bodies of individuals providing a service at the cathedral, the Docks and at the Folk Museum. If these and other voluntary bodies could be drawn together then I am sure a workable organisation could be set up to provide a comprehensive service. It was suggested to me at our last meeting that volunteers were less reliable than salary staff.

This is certainly not our experience because the Trust has provided a trouble free Tourist Information service for many years under the guidance of Peter Thompson.

The other subject of discussion during the meetings has been the ancient monuments. I think we have now satisfied the City that this is a statutory obligation and provision simply has to be made within the budgetary arrangements for adequate funds to be available for the care and maintenance of the monuments. I think we are making progress and the subject will be kept under review both by the Trust and by members of Gloucester Historic Buildings. Again in this context we are going to look at the role of the voluntary sector. We are all aware of the great success of the Brunswick Square Residents' Association. We are going to look at the possibilities of forming residents associations, for the Bishop Hooper monument, St Mary's Square area, and the area around St Oswald's Priory. In a way it is all to do with Pride in our City.

Following on from last year's annual report, a Conservation Projects Officer has now been appointed in the form of David Farrington. The arrangement seems to be working well. We are hopefully edging closer to a solution to the problem of 66 Westgate Street.

The Nerva statue is now part of the Gloucester scene. So far as my experience is concerned everybody feels that it is a worthwhile addition to the Gloucester townscape as well as being educational in that it highlights our Roman past. I mention this again because as most of you will remember a number of people from the Trust attended the memorial service for Brian Tait, which resulted in a handsome donation to the Trust. This was used to fund a further plaque on the other side of the plinth and we were able to record Brian's contribution to the Trust in its early days.

Congratulations to everybody who was involved in last year's **Gloucester in bloom, buddleia awards**. It attracted media attention both locally and nationally. It has made everybody aware of the problem and there have been significant improvements to a number of buildings and monuments. It nearly, but not quite, made me into a television personality overnight.

Thank you all for your support in the last twelve months. It never ceases to amaze me how much time many members of the Trust put into making Gloucester a more attractive place to live in.

Thank you Peter - Peter Thompson has indicated to me that he feels that he is unable to continue with such an active role in the Civic Trust because his health is not as good as it used to be. Peter has been one of the most dedicated members of the Trust for a great many years. He has in the last 13 years been responsible for organising the Tourist Information Office at the National Waterways Museum. This has been one of the flagship services rendered by the Trust to the City. The office is staffed by volunteers who give nearly 2,000 hours of service every year and deal with well over 5,000 enquiries. The success of the office is in no small extent due to the organisational abilities of Peter.

Peter, and his wife, Marjorie, have also been active members of the Council of Management for well over 20 years. Marjorie took over as membership secretary from Kathy Weygang, who had occupied that position for a number of years. Indeed Peter has been something of an elder statesman in recent times whose views were always listened to and respected. Peter has given wonderful service in connection with our public meetings. He has organised the venues and frequently manned the projector should this be required by the speaker. He was almost invariably present at the end of the meetings with his begging bowl to collect donations towards the cost of the meetings. Peter has assured us that he will continue to take an interest in our affairs. He will however be a difficult act to follow and we give him our grateful thanks for his many years of service.