

news

hereford civic society

Autumn 2010

FREE

Jamieson Associates' stunning design for the local Martha Trust charity, Worcestershire conservation architect Robert Kilgour's on-going £5-million transformation of Hereford Cathedral Close, the completion of Hook Mason's Bastille-like Bridge Street apartments, the handover of Phase 1 of John Renshaw Architects' Steiner Herefordshire Academy, RNCB's award-winning Facilities Block on Venns Lane and the start of the final phase of Widemarsh Street's refurbishment, all make this a memorable architectural year. Each, in their different way, underscore this issue's theme of 'Design Quality'.

To be built on a two-acre site at Hampton Park, the Martha Trust's second Residential Home (above) will be dedicated to the lifelong respite care of severely disabled young people. The single-storey building's sheltering double curve will provide 14 specially-equipped bedrooms, kitchens, laundry, a therapy centre with hydrotherapy pool and staff accommodation. The lozenge-shaped space enclosed by the curves will be a planted internal conservatory, to be roofed with ETFE, the patented air-supported plastic membrane system used on the Eden Project's biomes. Externally, there will be landscaped gardens with raised flower beds as well as specially-planted areas for sensory stimulation.

In This Issue

Guest Editor's Commentary p2; Letters p2; News p3; Cartoon p3; Steiner Academy p4; Hereford Futures p5; Butter Market competition p6; Book reviews p7; Membership p8

Each edition of this "News" from the Hereford Civic Society is edited by a different person selected by the News group; if you would like to organise an edition or contribute an article contact our secretary, details on last page.

GUEST EDITOR

Nick Jones, an architectural writer, is an ex-London 'immigrant' who has lived in the county for almost 20 years. A regular contributor to the *HCS Newsletter*, he also wrote an architectural column for five years for the regional listings magazine *Broad Sheep*.

Commentary

THIS summer, Herefordshire Council announced the creation of a new development company called Hereford Futures.

Its remit will be to deliver an ambitious package of new-build schemes, ranging from a carbon-neutral urban village and business parks dedicated to 'knowledge-based industries', to a new public transport interchange and a second river crossing. Unsurprisingly, retailing is high on the council's wish list, though it has now added the pledge to "protect and promote the special character of the city's historic core".

It is often remarked by visitors to our county that Herefordshire remains one of the English countryside's best-kept secrets. To this virtue might be added the compactness and intimate charm of our cathedral city: ringed by countryside, it has virtually no suburbs and can be comfortably crossed on foot in under an hour.

Hereford's built environment boasts some fine modern buildings and spaces: Sir William Whitfield's Mappa Mundi Museum; Jamieson Associates' Moat junior school and the Left Bank complex; RRA's Watershed building opposite and its imaginative transformation of All Saint's Church; Glen Howells' competition-winning Courtyard Arts Centre. And there is more to come: the Cathedral Close project and the new Martha Trust home at Hampton Park, which we feature on our cover.

Cities as diverse as Bilbao (with its much-visited Guggenheim Museum) and Gateshead (the Sage concert hall and the Baltic Mills arts complex) can attest to the magnetic qualities of 'landmark architecture'. It is surely no coincidence that the sole surviving record of the 1992 World Fair in Seville is Santiago Calatrava's gravity-defying Alamillo bridge. An ephemeral weekend 'shopping experience' can never match the power of beautiful buildings (Angel of the North or Cribbs Causeway: which left the most lasting impression with you?).

It behoves Hereford Futures to emulate this pan-European tradition of encouraging design quality in its ambitious development programme by commissioning talented regional designers and by sponsoring more (competently run) architectural design competitions.

The engineer Michel Virlogeux's spectacular cable-stayed road bridge spanning the Millau Valley in southern France is now one of the most popular modern structures, viewed by more than 25 million people since it opened less than six years ago. Is there any reason why something so sublime could not span our beloved River Wye?

NJ

Letters & E-mails

THE HEREFORDSHIRE CENTRE For several years the Hereford Library Users Group (HLUG) has pursued a twin strategy: to seek urgent improvements in a totally unfit-for-purpose library in Broad Street; and to use the opportunity being opened up by the development of the Edgar Street Grid to build a new library in the Conningsby Street / Catherine Street area of the city.

On the face of it we have failed on both accounts. The Broad Street premises remain largely unchanged, lacking even a fresh coat of paint. Dedicated library users, especially those who visit for more than just exchanging borrowed books, suffer intolerable conditions. HLUG has drawn up a detailed schedule of improvements, based on extensive research it has carried out in libraries elsewhere in the UK, Europe, North America and Australasia. However, we now face cuts in the already totally inadequate budget for stock purchases, reductions in staff and no monies available for even essential improvements (although a new boiler is promised).

A building that was designed to house both a library and a museum for a city with a population of less

than 10,000 in 1870, when the number of new books published could be counted in 100s, is totally inadequate for a city and its environs of over 80,000, when the number of books published annually has surpassed the 100,000 mark. So a new library is an essential requirement for the city of Hereford.

HLUG has come up with a model, suggested by the need for a number of overlapping and serendipitous cultural and informational activities, for a building (or buildings) called The Herefordshire Centre. Hereford Futures said recently: "We want to enhance the identity... of Hereford and fulfil its potential as an exciting destination for tourists, shoppers, businesses and inward investment." We believe that this is best achieved by our proposal.

Firstly, take the library service out of local government altogether and create a social enterprise – a course recommended by the soon-to-be-axed MLA. Access to funding should take on a different approach, working perhaps with landlords (as happened recently in Cardiff). The Herefordshire Centre 'company' could then provide the council with a library service for a fee, together with general and tourist information services. The Centre could also attract specialist retailers, including a bookshop. And surely it would be possible to incorporate

something which celebrates Herefordshire's culture, countryside and people rather more imaginatively than the static displays in the present building?

The Centre's new library will be much more than a place to borrow (or refer to) books. In this electronic age, access to the exponentially burgeoning range of resources can often be best done in such a building – perhaps as part of some form of formal education.

Since HCS members are rightly interested in the architectural aspects of the city's regeneration, HLUG would be interested to know whether they would prefer to see F R Kempson's very Gothic building in Broad Street preserved and regenerated, or whether they would like to see an entirely new concept in public building – perhaps a set of environmentally-friendly buildings, designed by a local practice and featuring local materials, enhancing the presently-unloved Catherine Street area.

HLUG intends to work up ideas for this concept over the coming months and would welcome the input of HCS members, who can visit our website at www.hlug.wordpress.com

John Hitchin, Chairman,
Hereford Library Users Group ► p7

The site that disappeared

JUST weeks after we published our article about the land behind the Green Dragon ('Neglected backwater'; *HCS News; Late Spring 2010*) archaeologists moved onto a site in Aubrey Street, just a stone's throw from where the old Plough Inn stood. This was swiftly followed by a Malvern building contractor's security fence and news that 21 social housing units (designed by Evan Jones of Cheltenham) were to be built for the Marches Housing Association on this strip of land tucked away behind the tax office. But by early August, archaeologists, builders and the hoarding had all disappeared and the extensive dig had been concreted over, to become yet another of the Berrington Quarter's plethora of off-street car parks. It seems the scheme has been mothballed due to the withdrawal of the promised funding from the Housing Corporation.

Copying the capital

ON A trip to London this summer, an HCS member encountered the RIBA-sponsored 'Open House' weekend, now administered by Victoria Thornton, doyenne of foreign architectural study tours. It works like this: for free, for two consecutive days, you can have access to around 700 of the capital's most prestigious offices, apartments, libraries, government buildings and cultural centres. Unsurprisingly, the directors' dining room atop the Swiss Re tower (aka The Gherkin) is invariably the most popular, though art deco nuts will stand for hours in a queue in Fleet Street, to view the fabled interiors of Lord Beaverbrook's black glass Daily Express offices. So why not a modest carbon copy of the idea down here in sleepy old Herefordshire?

Well the City has taken part in Heritage Open Days, also over a weekend in early September, but not with the enthusiasm of "Open House". Although our Society has helped to steward various houses the involvement of the Council has been lamentable. Instead of buildings that are usually private our list of buildings involved was dominated by museums and old buildings usually available to the public. There are many fine historic buildings, hard-to-get-into rural churches and architect-designed private houses (not to mention the six outstanding projects outlined on our cover) which local people would love to get a peek at. HCS News could publish the catalogue in the Summer issue, all that's needed is an architecturally-sympathetic local sponsor. Any offers?

Limboland

IN A written parliamentary answer before the summer recess, the new coalition government gave notice that all road-building programmes sanctioned by the Labour administration were to be reviewed,

and that future projects would be frozen. A week later, communities minister Eric Pickles signed Advantage West Midlands' death warrant. So where does that leave the council's notorious Link Road? More importantly, what impact will the announcement have on the many businesses along the line of the east-west carriageway, planned to link Edgar Street and Aylestone Hill? For them – and there are over 20, employing more than 200 local people – it is the worst of all possible worlds, with little likelihood now of being re-located at the council's expense and a fat chance of a CPO dropping through the letterbox.

Wasting asset – 1

NETWORK Rail's property specialist Spacia has had a To Let board on the front of Hereford Station, advertising the availability of 4,000 sq ft of first floor office accommodation, for well over a decade. So why no takers? At one time, Hereford Art College was in talks with NR about the idea of converting the entire space into teaching studios. But after the college's Principal moved on, the idea collapsed. A



bibliophile friend of an HCS member, en route to this summer's Hay Literary festival, spotted the board and rang Spacia on his mobile. "Would it be possible to look over the empty space?" he enquired. "I'm afraid that's quite impossible. We've found traces of asbestos in the roof, so under Health & Safety regulations we can't show people round at the moment".

Wasting asset – 2

HOW on earth can the owner of the derelict Champions site on the north bank of the Wye not feel guilty every time he crosses Greyfriars Bridge? In the 15 years since the little banqueting venue put up the shutters, this prime site has changed hands at least three times, with no less than four residential schemes (by as many architects) being aborted. Most surprising is the myopic notion, shared by all the site's owners, that it has to be used for apartments. Such an idyllic riverside setting would perfectly suit a much-needed new hotel for the city.

New shops

TWO trading names to be welcomed to Hereford are Peacocks and the fast-expanding toy chain The Entertainer, their refurbished premises effectively 'book-ending' what most believe should be the physical boundaries of the city's retail quarter. After a two-year absence (following an abrupt departure from the Butter Market), the Cardiff-based clothing giant Peacocks has courageously taken on the fortress-like Woolys building at the bottom of Eign Street. The arrival of The Entertainer, which now occupies part of the former Chadds department store, augurs well for Commercial Street's open market in the run-up to Christmas.

Blueprint or pipe dream

THE surprise announcement, in a paragraph towards the end of the leader's report at the July council meeting, of the transmogrification of ESG(Herefordshire) Ltd into Hereford Futures Ltd was certainly a bolt from the blue. With so little achieved for the £13-million spent, no sign of a start on the much-vaunted Retail Quarter and

recessionary times looming as far ahead as financial analysts can see, what possible motive can there be for creating an even more ambitious 'development vehicle'? Cllr. Phillips' aspirational litany reads like a chapter from a Jane Jacobs planning textbook of the 1960s: strategic business parks, energy-efficient urban villages, multi-modal sustainable transport systems. However, one casualty of the name change is to be welcomed: the dropping of the dreadful 'grid' sobriquet. Where it originated nobody knows; but it certainly won't be missed.

Signs of the times

THE government's communities supremo Eric

Pickles has launched an anti-street clutter campaign, aimed at the proliferation of signage in our towns and cities. Perhaps he's been to Hereford and spotted the hideous grey-boxed automated signs which sprang up in the city centre this summer, apparently without public consultation. HCS chairman Garry Thomas has written to Cllr Brian Wilcox, expressing concern over the inappropriate siting of some signs, such as the one on the corner of Offa Street and St Peter's Square. An illustrated summary of the correspondence can be downloaded from the society's website.

Gaffer tape gaff

THE bullnosed granite kerbing along the refurbished Widemarsh Street continues to give problems. Ignoring its contractor's advice, councillors opted for a low stepped kerb line, instead of a constant level between pavement and road. The 'trips, slips and falls' claims came flooding in and emergency black taping was hastily added to the kerbside. Now the tape is peeling off and the cabinet member who's bright idea it was is tearing his hair out... or what's left of it.

How refreshing to discover in the heart of our county an outstanding schools project. And how disappointing to learn of the levels of opposition – both at community and local authority level – to its creation. **Nick Jones** recounts the remarkable story of the genesis of the Steiner Academy which is now taking form at Much Dewchurch

Spirit of Steiner

I WAS fortunate to visit the site of the new Steiner Academy Herefordshire on one of the most beautiful days we had this summer. Driving eastwards towards Much Dewchurch in the early morning, catching snapshot glimpses of the undeveloped rolling Herefordshire countryside, soon makes one realise how lucky we are to be blessed with this divine landscape.

So too are the governors, teachers, pupils and parents connected with the exciting school complex which is now taking shape – discreetly, almost invisibly – off a narrow farm lane in the centre of the village. A Steiner school has been in Much Dewchurch for more than 20 years, originally created through the adventurous purchase (for the princely sum of £22,000) of the redundant village school, by a group of parents in 1983.

Plans to enlarge the site were first mooted in 2005, when the governors appointed the Bath-based architectural practice and staunch environmental designers Feilden Clegg Bradley (FCB). It was an ambitious, largely new-build scheme, but the heady mix of Steinerism and ‘green’ buildings seems to have been the problem. And when the entrenched views of a small but vocal minority are matched against the ‘threat’ of something like modern architecture, expect sparks to fly.

On the micro scale, we have the example of Jamieson Associates’ award-winning Junior School (The Moat) for Hereford Cathedral School. This self-effacing addition to the buildings which enclose the city’s Castle Green is an object lesson in townscape. But if you’d tried telling that to the Castle Green residents association back in 2003 when the school’s planning application was being heatedly discussed, they’d probably have lynched you from a lamp post in Castle Street.

Then on the heroically macro scale, we have the intervention of the nation’s most famous unqualified architectural critic, Prince Charles, who this year successfully scuppered Lord Rogers’ £3bn residential scheme on the former Chelsea Barracks site for the rulers of Qatar. Not, in this case, so that the site wouldn’t be

developed, but because the heir to the throne thinks that neo-classical architect Quinlan Terry would make a better job of it.

Nor did the FCB scheme find favour with Herefordshire’s planning committee. Though the case officer recommended approval, it was refused when it went to the planning committee, leaving officers in the awkward position of defending an appeal that they had previously supported. Two years after its scheme was turned down on appeal, FCB won the prestigious national Schools Architects of the Year award!

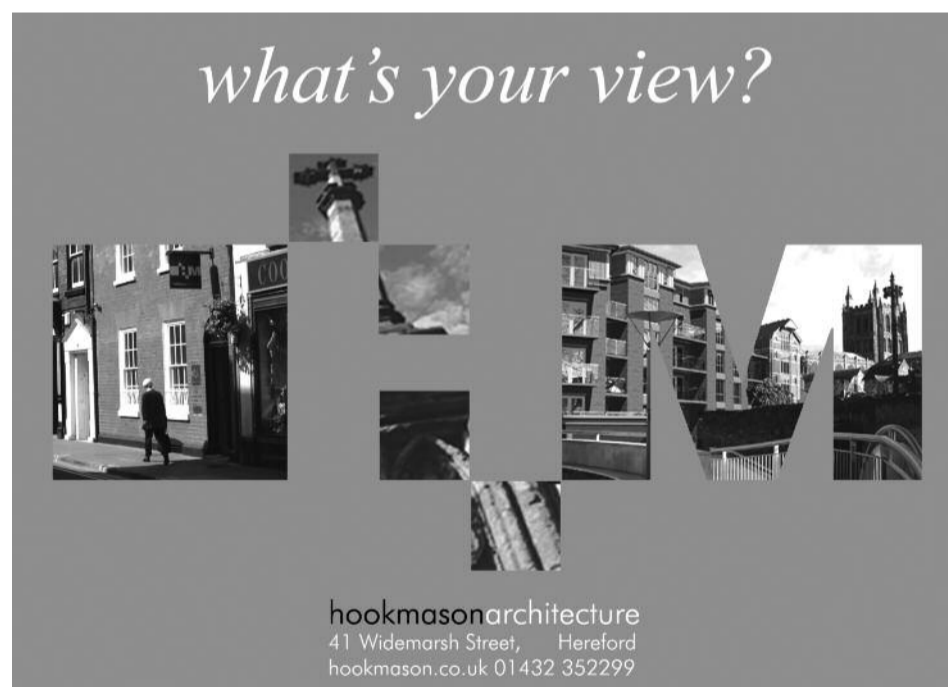
John Renshaw’s Edinburgh-based practice was then appointed by the school governors, to ‘pick up the pieces’ so to speak, and the £5.5-million scheme which is now emerging at Much Dewchurch is the result. It will be the UK’s first state-funded Steiner Academy, offering co-educational schooling for up to 330 children aged from 3-16.

Phase 1, which was handed over in September, includes an Assembly Hall (1) Music and Eurythmy Rooms (2) and the East Range classroom block (3). Phase 2, due for completion by the end of this year, involves the refurbishment of an old barn (4) into seven classrooms and reading support rooms. Phase 3 is the first floor extension of Church Farm (5) into staff and administration accommodation, plus a new kindergarten building (6). The scheme’s final phase, the transformation of agricultural land to the south of the site into tree-planted class gardens, a multi-use games area and staff / parent parking, is due to be finished next year.

Entering the site, one is immediately struck by the closely-integrated nature of the buildings. This is due in part to the extremely compact site and partly because of the ‘sheltering’ nature of the old school, Church Farm and its farmyard. The designers have used the close proximity of the individual units to create an intimate, but utilitarian, collegiate atmosphere.

Appropriately, the Academy’s Assembly Hall has the most dominant profile, though with its untreated Douglas Fir boarding and Welsh slate roof, it’s unlikely to frighten passing horses. Shropshire bricks and sandstone from the Forest of Dean are also featured as facing materials. A proposal to have a series of ‘pop-up’ ventilator chimneys (no more than 21st century versions of the county’s traditional hop kilns) to aid natural air circulation within the hall, didn’t find favour with the Much Dewchurch Community Forum. The hall is naturally lit and ventilated, with accommodation for around 300, with four massive glue-laminated (Glulam) arches spanning the space. Beneath the hall floor is a plant room housing a wood chip-burning boiler with sufficient capacity to heat all the school’s buildings. The hall’s lobby-foyer is dominated by a 4m-high central Glulam column, with its tree-like ‘branches’ fanning out to support a partly-glazed roof. Alongside is the Music and Eurythmy Room.

One unconventional detail which wasn’t vetoed is the concept of featuring a palette of special pastel colours in all classrooms. Using a neutral-coloured organic paint as background, the German artist Roy Seifert will be hand-applying special



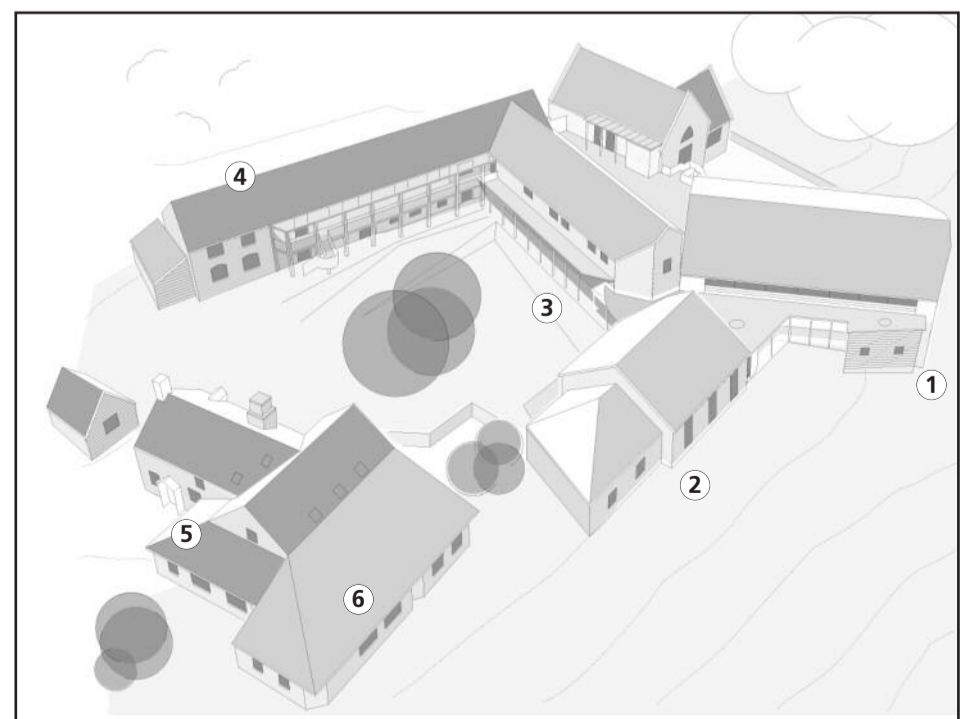
OPINION

Most of Nick Jones’s reports are valid and accurate reporting but his love of all things Steiner goes a bit far doesn’t it? Would the great philosopher really want to plant a large school in a small village? With the inevitable long travel distances of most children, as this is not the school of choice for most local ones, surely it should have been sited near a transport link?

It negates many of Steiner’s earth loving principles.

And our local, Royal landowner didn’t scupper the inept Roger’s scheme in Chelsea, he merely wrote a letter to a foreign landowner who chose to take note.

JB



colour-co-ordinated interior finishes to walls and ceilings, using the Lazure technique favoured by Rudolf Steiner.

John Renshaw – who somehow manages to spend two weeks on site in Herefordshire before travelling back to his Edinburgh office for two weeks every month – goes out of his way to pay tribute to the skills and consideration of the scheme's main contractor Speller Metcalfe. Restricted site access, strict speed restrictions for delivery vehicles entering the village, minimal noise levels because of the proximity of the classrooms and the hawk-like scrutiny of the community

forum, has in no way dampened their ardour. They've even built a temporary shelter in the grounds, under which tuition in traditional building crafts is being passed on to the pupils. This summer, the children have learned how to hand-carve oak pegs for the construction of the new green oak gallery required to provide access to the classrooms in the old barn.

With the Steiner philosophy's emphasis on earth / environment-based teaching and appreciation, this idyllic Herefordshire setting would be hard to better.

STEINER THE DESIGNER The Austrian writer and philosopher Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) is best known as the founder of the anthroposophy movement, universally used in Waldorf Steiner schools. The first Waldorf school was established in 1919 in Stuttgart, serving the children of the employees of a local cigarette factory. Today there are nearly 1000 Steiner schools or academies in 60 countries around the world.

Steiner was equally passionate about architecture, creating buildings with organically-expressed free-flowing interiors, often employing contemporary materials and construction techniques. In all, he designed 17 buildings. His Goetheanum was the movement's first headquarters and public meeting hall. He originally planned to erect it in Munich, but with anti-semitic feelings then running high, it was refused planning permission by the authorities. Instead, the domed structure was built at Dornach, in the hills above Basel in Switzerland in 1913. It was destroyed by fire – thought to be arson – nine years later, though a second Goetheanum survives on the site today.

Frank Lloyd-Wright was known to be an admirer, as is the American architect Frank Gehry. Italian eco-designer Paolo Soleri's monumental structures in his Arizona Desert enclave Arcosanti, bear more than a passing resemblance to Rudolf Steiner's famous 'organic' buildings



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Future imperfect

A forensic analysis of the Council's new 'development vehicle'

IN A veritable blitzkrieg of publicity, spearheaded by editorial in the July edition of the ever-faithful council house journal *Herefordshire Matters*, Hereford Futures was launched on baffled and bemused Herefordians in July. Was this a new company, or merely some hastily-applied stick-on spots to the leopard's threadbare coat?

The 'new' company is, in fact, an old company (first registered with The Registrar of Companies for England in June 2005 as Company No 5479236), but with greatly enhanced powers.

Although 5479236's registered Objects are almost the same, it now has, for the first time, clear Articles of Association, including no fewer than 41 powers, many being pretty favourable to its directors, especially since they will be spending public money, have not been asked to invest a penny of their own money and will be entitled to pay themselves expenses that can't be individually identified.

The name Hereford Futures is also used to refer to a new council-designed organisational structure for leading major projects in and around the city. This structure comprises: Herefordshire Council; 5479236's main board, plus three committees devoted to audit, nominations and remuneration;

an executive board, comprising 5479236's directors (together with others), plus four committees devoted to economy, education and training; infrastructure; city centre; and communities and housing. At the hub of this wheel is something called a Gateway Committee, charged with initiating projects and allocating funding. Confused? We've hardly started.

Same old faces

Though the nomenclature and organisational structure may have been given a makeover, the same old faces remain, with key posts going to Cllr Roger Phillips, Chris Bull, Ted Willmott and Jonathan Bretherton.

So it seems important to ask, since all the usual suspects have been implicated in delivering 'a bright new future for a buzzier city' etc etc (at an estimated cost of £13-million), whether any of the following boxes have been ticked: an increase in new business developments; a reduction in the number of empty shop units in the existing city centre (still well above the national average); an increase in affordable housing; reductions in traffic congestion. After all, if any of the above had had to attend job interviews to get these positions, such questions would surely have been put to them.

And if the answers to the above are 'no', it seems not unreasonable to question whether these same 'business leaders', now backed by a greatly-enlarged organisation and operating across a broader environmental canvas, are likely to have any more success than previous incarnations of 54798236 did.

The full Articles of Association of Company No 54799236 can be viewed on the HCS website.

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1810

HEREFORD CIVIC SOCIETY

congratulates the **Butter Market Traders Association** on
200 years of continuous trading at the present location

2010

Long may you survive and flourish

October 1860: official opening of the city's competition-winning Butter Market Hall; **2010:** effective abandonment of the design competition for refurbishment solutions for the historic landmark

No work in progress

IN THE distinguished history of the competition system, the RIBA statement reproduced below is virtually unprecedented. What it says, in effect, is that having committed to holding an international two-stage architectural design competition to tackle the long-overdue refurbishment of its 1860 Butter Market, Herefordshire Council decided to 'move the goalposts' when it realised that it wouldn't be able to fund the winning design. Unabashed, it now plans to 'cherry pick' the ideas it fancies, handing them over to Hereford Futures to implement at a time in the future of its choosing, when it can raise the money to tackle the refurbishment. Since launching the competition, the published timetable has been altered several times and firm commitments - over such things as public exhibitions of the entries - have been ignored. That is *not* the way to run competitions.

After decades of shameful neglect, and with mounting pressure from market traders, the Council reluctantly conceded that 'something must be done', with Cllr Adrian Blackshaw taking on the role of Edward, Prince of Wales and trotting out the tired old 'jewel in the crown' cliché. With due flourish, in October 2009, the Butter Market ideas competition was officially launched, organised for the Council by the Competitions Office of the RIBA.

Thirty-five UK architectural practices registered – an extremely disappointing turn-out for an international competition. Could it have been that wary competitors were deterred by this council 'health warning' in the introduction to the conditions: "... it is the aim of the competition promoters to develop a funding strategy and the intention is that the winning design will be used to help in this respect. Should funding become available then it is the intention of the promoters

to work with the winning designers to develop their concept and take it forward through to completion".

Since these conditions would have been prepared months before the General Election, neither the Chancellor's cuts nor the demise of Advantage West Midlands can be used by the sponsors in mitigation for launching an unfunded prestigious international competition.

The RIBA-drafted conditions required Stage 1 entries to be submitted by May 2010. Four schemes were then to be selected to go forward to Stage 2 (the entries were also due to go on public exhibition this summer – but they didn't), with the jury re-convening to judge the four finalists on 19 July this year (but it didn't). Traditionally, competition juries are invariably chaired by an architect (but this one wasn't). Nor were the prizes on offer (four honorariums of £3,750) overly generous. One local practice (which wisely opted not to participate) normally costs itself out at around £125 an hour. So a cheque for £3,750 would have covered just 30 hours of design time – barely sufficient to come up with a ground-breaking concept for the 150-year-old market hall's £8-million refurbishment.

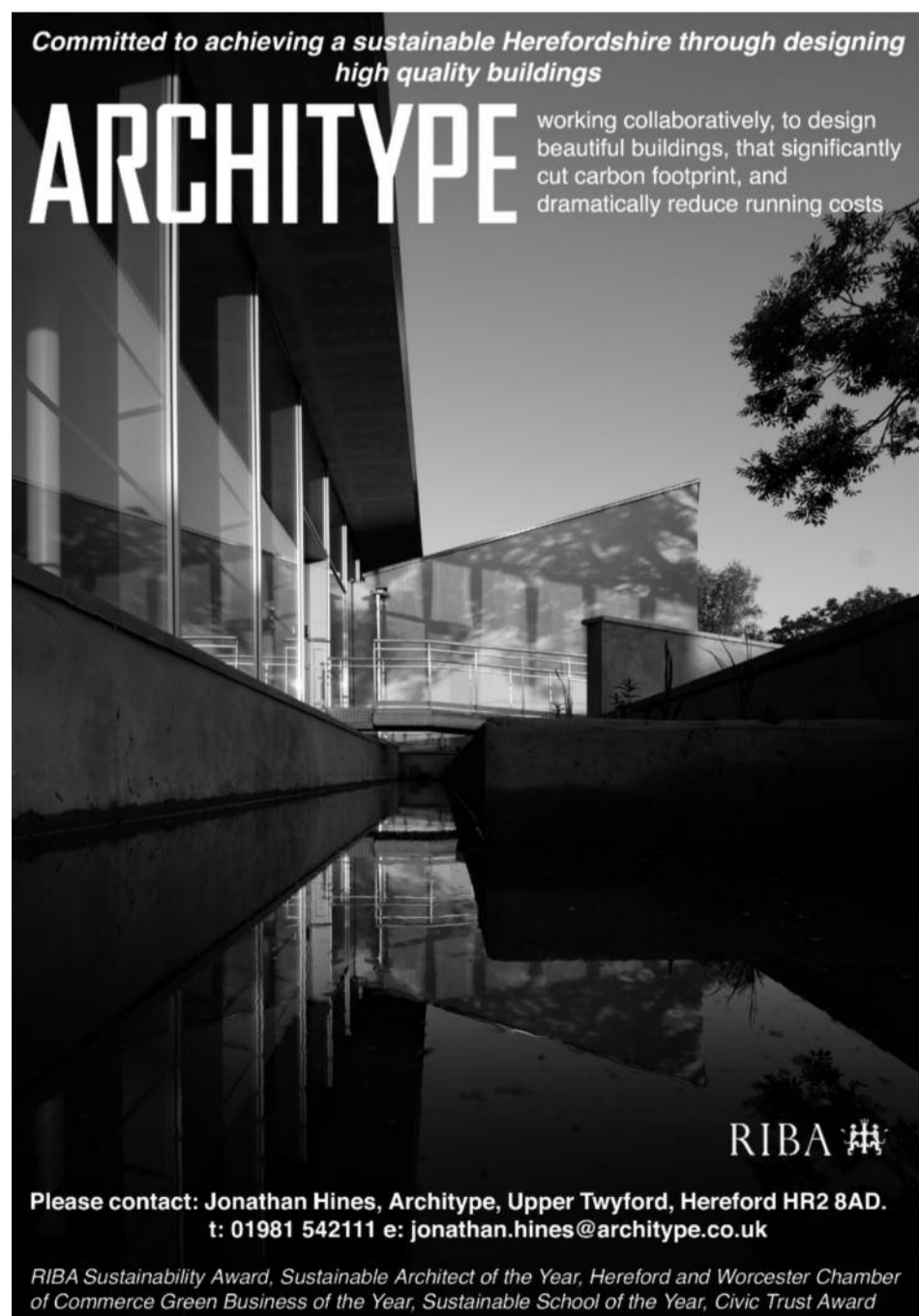
Surprisingly, given the crucial importance of maintaining trading conditions throughout the refurbishment - something which has always troubled the Butter Market's established traders - there is only a single phrase tucked away in the conditions inviting entrants to address this major logistical problem ("to... consider... how trading may be permitted to continue during redevelopment...").

Half rations

As far as can be ascertained (much of the detail is now hidden by obfuscation from the Brockington smoke machine), the 6-person jury, under the chairmanship of ESG's Jonathan Bretherton, met for one all-day session in May, when four schemes were chosen to proceed to Stage 2. But their authors were given no deadline for further design work to take place, and only 50% of their prize money was paid to them at the end of August - itself a clear breach of the competition conditions. Bemused jury members have been told that the competition is now 'on hold'.

After a year of confusion, broken promises and missed deadlines, this municipal muddle got worse last month, when Hereford Futures announced that it is to seek design ideas for the building's repairs and transformation into 'a centre of excellence' from European designers.

Of course there have been competition *imbroglios* in the past, Cardiff Opera House being the most recent and closest to hand. After a vituperative campaign orchestrated by the local Press, the Iraqi winner Zaha Hadid was 'robbed' of the commission, the job eventually going to a local firm of architects. Going further back, there is the case of the first competition to design a suspension bridge to span the Avon gorge, when the jury chairman, Thomas Telford, ordained that all the 22 entries were either rubbish or unbuildable, reserving special disdain for the designs submitted by someone called Brunel. A few weeks later Telford called on the chairman of the Bridge Committee and offered to do the job himself.



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RIBA Sustainability Award, Sustainable Architect of the Year, Hereford and Worcester Chamber of Commerce Green Business of the Year, Sustainable School of the Year, Civic Trust Award

Herefordshire Council commissioned the competition to develop ideas only for the refurbishment of the Butter Market, Hereford and is reviewing it as an asset in order to identify opportunities to take forward proposals and develop a funding strategy. This building is a vital part of the future of the city. Once we have the results of our review our intention is to work with the short-listed teams with a clear brief so that ideas can be developed in that new context

Reviews

Venice; Jan Morris (Faber & Faber); £9.99

Many HCS members will be familiar with Venetian architect Francisco da Mosto's lush and enthusiastic explorations of his native city, which have twice been screened on BBC Television. By contrast, the travel writing doyenne Jan Morris's classic is more a paean, or as *The Times* puts it: "a classic, witty love letter to Italy's most iconic city".

First published half a century ago, this Faber & Faber paperback revival is still as fresh as ever and speaks volumes for the timelessness of the *Serenissima* and its inhabitants. This is a sensible working guidebook, not only with a comprehensive index, but with cross-referenced indices to a city map. It was written at the time that Morris was living in Venice, working as a foreign correspondent, and lovingly conveys the feeling of 'habitation' as opposed to the usual travel writer's 'visitation'. In the Foreword she says she has resisted the temptation to make radical revisions: "It is Venice seen through a particular pair of eyes at a particular moment...". If you've been there, you will probably agree with every word Morris writes; if you haven't, then it's high time to adapt that much-quoted advice about Italian travel: "see Venice and die".



The Dovecotes and Pigeon Houses of Herefordshire;

Robert Walker (Logaston Press); £12.95

It is no surprise to learn from the introduction to Robert Walker's absorbing study, that the redoubtable Alfred Watkins had already researched the subject over a century ago (this new Logaston title includes 22 of Watkins' original record photos, many previously unpublished). Today, Herefordshire still has 46 listed pigeon houses dotted across the county, at least four of which are open to the public.

The Woolhope Club's *Transactions* carried an article in 1890, thought to have been inspired by Watkins' discovery that the cylindrical pigeon house at Garway (built or restored in 1326 and containing a staggering 666 nesting boxes) was the oldest surviving structure of its kind in Britain.

Three years ago, the Woolhope Club again broke new ground with its publication of a paper by historian John McCann, in which he contradicted the long-held view that dovecotes and pigeon houses were built and maintained to provide the gentry with fresh meat through the long winter months. McCann's theory is that bespoke buildings were erected to provide year-round top-of-the-range luxury food for the tables of the well-to-do. Walker has even unearthed a household record which shows that over a 10-month period in the late 13th century, nearly 300 squabs (baby pigeons) were supplied from Bosbury for the Bishop of Hereford's table.

Round, free-standing buildings were first erected in this county by the monasteries to provide food for their own tables and about half of the religious houses listed on the County Sites and Monuments Record are known to have had them.

By the 17th century, the inclusion of a dovecote or pigeon house (sometimes with extravagant architectural detailing) was considered a status symbol, with the buildings often placed by the

roadside, as at Wellington and Shobdon. The book covers the preferred building materials, their forms and the detailing of their interiors and nesting boxes. A well-considered pigeon house tower, for example, might incorporate a continuous stone 'perching platform' to mimic the cliff-edge home of the domestic pigeon's ancestor, the rock dove. And as the author observes, with impressive external dimensions often as much as 20x20m, enclosing 800+ nesting boxes, some of these structures put pigeon keeping on a factory-farming scale. There was innovation too. Robert Walker records four estate locations in Herefordshire where pigeon houses, built near lakes, incorporated an ice house in the basement.

As well as financing the building of these elaborate structures, estate owners might well have had to retain pigeon keepers on their staff (certainly for part of the year), charged with the tasks of rearing and feeding the birds (it was not uncommon to see the keeper hand-feeding young birds, like hens, in the farmyard), the discouragement of predators, and the cleaning out of the nest boxes; rich in nitrogen, potash and phosphorous, pigeon dung was a much sort-after form of manure, especially by local hop growers.

Handmade Houses and Other Buildings;

John May (Thames & Hudson); £14.95

Given its paperback format and under 200 pages, this is a surprisingly comprehensive guide to indigenous vernacular dwellings across the globe. Over 300 annotated monochrome drawings illustrate the traditional native houses of Europe, north and Latin America, Asia, Africa and Oceania. The book's frontispiece is a 30-page full-colour glossary of building materials, from stone to snow. 'Earthships' (using old car tyres) and even bottle buildings are touched upon, though the next edition would benefit from a more in-depth chapter on eco-homes.

Letters cont

p2 ► **BERRINGTON QUARTER** With reference to the article 'Neglected backwater' in the Spring issue of HCS News, readers may be interested in a summary of the archaeological potential which has been identified for this city centre area during a number of years.

Over the years, the main area between Aubrey Street and Berrington Street has suffered more from demolition than reconstruction and as a result, little is known about its archaeological potential. However, quite large scale excavations have taken place on the western side of Berrington Street and, recently, on the east side of Aubrey Street. An important natural feature, known as The King's Ditch, lies approximately along the line of Aubrey Street. It was first examined in 1958, and in 1980 a timber corduroy road crossing the ditch was found in a trench in King Street - the timbers were dated 990-1150AD. Recent excavations on the east side of Aubrey Street produced virtually no pre-Conquest material. However, on the west side of Berrington Street the picture was totally different. Grain-drying ovens from about the time of King Offa (c730-796) were followed by timber buildings and a north-south road, all before the first defences around Hereford had been built, probably in the mid-9th century. The Berrington Street sites produced the earliest archaeological evidence in Hereford, apart from burials on Castle Green (St Guthlac's monastic settlement). Somewhat later, pre-Conquest features were found during works at Castle House and, very recently, during the on-going excavations in the Cathedral Close.

The area between Aubrey Street and Berrington Street has never been archaeologically examined and has suffered little disturbance from cellars, so its archaeology is likely to be intact and of high national - or even international - significance.

Ron Shoemsmith and P.J.Pikes

UNSTUCK As I was staring in amazement early one morning at a large information banner affixed to a street lamppost at the top of Commercial Street, a middle-aged cyclist riding a mountain bike at top speed on the pavement narrowly missed knocking me flying. What he shouted at me over his shoulder cannot be repeated in a respectable magazine. The banner read: "Bin Gum Or It Could Cost You £80".

My question to the authorities is this: It's all very well trying to stamp out gum as pavement litter, but it hardly constitutes a safety hazard. Cycling on the pavement, on the other hand, is a dangerous growing menace in this city, about which it seems, nothing whatsoever is being done. Several roundabouts on the edge of Hereford now have posters advising 'Think Bike'. Why not similarly courteous notices on the pavements recommending 'Think pedestrians'? I.K.Northchurch

WIDEMARSH STREET KERB FIASCO The improvements to this historic street in Hereford are welcome and overdue. However, an obvious mistake appears to have been made in the street surface design. The provision of low kerbs in some places and not in others along this street, is not only illogical but has proved dangerous to the public. In answer to this criticism, the council says the kerbs are 'a necessary navigational aid' for the blind, but has still compiled a Review Report on the design and on trip incidents and injuries.

Hereford Civic Society has asked some probing questions about the affair (see HCS website) and is still waiting for definite answers. A request has also been made for a sight of the report. So far the council has ignored the idea of removing the kerbs from that part of the work which is complete, or building the rest without kerbs. Apparently, it adheres to the idea that we will eventually become accustomed to the design, and that any danger to the public will then disappear, particularly when pedestrians not only have to 'mind their step' as they recommend, but also have to look out for

passing traffic, planned to be allowed to share the space with shoppers when the scheme is completed next month. As for the blind, the council has yet to explain how they will manage without their essential 'navigational aids' on those sections of Widemarsh Street without kerbing. Hubert Porte

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Recent Meetings

22nd September 2010 – **Youth Involvement in Local Societies** – Alex Hempton-Smith

A rare insight into the world of the young, with its blogging, texting, tweeting and twittering and its self exposure on Facebook and other visual media. Alex gave us some reassurance when he explained that though technology and the means of communicating change continuously, the need of the young to communicate remains essentially the same. We were given a clear analysis of the ways in which we should all react to the changes and that we must all make an effort to share our experience while understanding the significance of the digital world.

We see many young people becoming involved in community projects; most often where they feel these are 'relevant' to them. However, many find politics uninteresting and the ways in which older people discuss them intimidating. Many therefore retreat into an electronic social *melieu*, where they may have hundreds of electronic 'friends'. It is up to us all to tap into the great fund of energy, innovation and enthusiasm that young people have.

H.E.P

28th July 2010 – **Walking the City Walls** – led by Peter Gwatkin

Nearly 30 members of HCS walked the length of the City Norman Defences under the guidance of one of our City Guides, who is also our treasurer!

The walk began at Greyfriars to admire the tower recently cleared of nettles and undergrowth. We crossed "Greyfriars gate", followed the wall built along the Saxon defences; passed through Gunner's Lane and on to pay our respect to King Offa (a discovery for most members); then along to Widemarsh Gate to hear about the school, now the Farmers' Club, and Thomas Church doorway. This led us on to the old Sally Walk, named after the Willows (salix) which lined the old moat in the 18th century. We stopped at the Bishop's Gate (Commercial street) and listened to the tales of the infamous Bastion Gaol. The walk ended at the Saxon Wall with its new display board, tucked behind a block of flats at the junction of St.Owen's St. and Mill St. All this medieval history that we often just hurry past.

Along the way we noted the work needed for the care of the defences. A letter was sent to the relevant officer of the Council. I was delighted to receive a very positive phone call from Natalia Silver (Tourism and Economic development). AP

Next three meetings

Wednesday 27th October

Kindle Centre, ASDA, Belmont Road, 7.30pm
"The Regeneration Game"
A lecture by Dr.David Thame, commercial property and planning journalist and short AGM
NB: not at the usual venue

Wednesday 24th November

Shire Hall 7.30 pm
'Developing Civil Society in Eastern Europe'
A talk by Christine Fowler, Social Development Consultant

Wednesday 8th December

Shire Hall 7.30 pm
'Half-timbered Houses in Herefordshire'
An illustrated presentation by Penny Platts, a member of Cathedral Friends. To be followed by a glass of wine and mince pies

Admission to all meetings is free to HCS members

Membership

Member profile: Stuart Edinborough



How long have you been a member of HCS?

Since the 1980s, not long after the society was originally formed when David Whitehead was the secretary.

What originally made you join?

I was persuaded by Edward Pritchard, an old school friend, when Hereford City Council was planning the redevelopment of what was known as 'Sector C' (the area of the city bounded by Newmarket Street, Widemarsh Street and Bewell Street and now largely occupied by Tesco) and there were grave concerns about the scheme... *plus ca change!*

Bypass: for or against?

Strongly in favour, like the majority of people. Hereford has desperately needed a bypass for decades. Not because that will cure it's traffic problems – on its own it won't – but because it is clearly wrong for *any* traffic (especially heavy, long-distance transport) to have to travel through our fragile, historic market town if it doesn't need to.

Name your favourite modern building in the city.

Difficult. I can't think of any recent

building which has particularly impressed me, but there are plenty of horrible ones. The new magistrates' court does at least refrain from insulting its surroundings. Not sure about The Courtyard, though it seems to work functionally. And the Mappa Mundi museum is well built from good quality materials and blends in well.

How can we encourage more young people to join the society and become actively involved in its work?

I suspect that the problem may be a general one of trying to interest young people in planning and their built environment at all, as much as it is of persuading them that HCS is an effective vehicle for reviewing and safeguarding it. To the extent that youngsters today are interested in environmental matters at all, it usually seems to be in relation to whales, rain forests and other currently-fashionable obsessions of the academic world. No one appears to have explained to them that The Environment starts with the streets and the buildings where they live, shop, study and entertain themselves.



I am interested in joining **Herefordshire Civic Society**.

Please send membership information, subscription rates and an application form to:-

Mr / Mrs / Ms

.....

.....Postcode.....

*e-mail address

* optional information which HCS will not share with other organisations.

Return to: Andree Poppleston, 33 Breinton Avenue, Hereford HR4 OJZ

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