



Cymdeithas Ddinesig Caerfyrddin Carmarthen Civic Society

Cadeirydd/Chairman: Mrs Linda Jones

Is Gadeirydd/Vice Chairman: Mrs Mary Thorley

Trysorydd/Treasurer: Mrs Wendy Evans

Swyddog Hysbysrwydd/Publicity Officer: Mrs Julie Rees

Ysgrifenydd/Secretary: Mr Huw Iorwerth

Annual Report Carmarthen Civic Society 2017-2018

Chairman's Letter

Dear Member

It is a pleasure to present another report on the activities of the Society. The year 2017/18 has been a very busy one and we can proudly say that much has been achieved in delivering our role of encouraging civic pride. As you will see from the attached Newsletter the Executive Committee has been active in a large number of areas, corresponding with and lobbying the authorities, as well as undertaking practical work to improve the town's environment and holding open meetings and talks.

A highlight of the year, and an indication that the Society is recognised as being a force for good was being recognised in the Excellence in Heritage category of the County Council's inaugural Celebration of Culture Awards. It was a proud experience being able to collect the award on the Society's behalf at the glittering Awards Ceremony in Y Ffwrnes, Llanelli in April.

There has, however, been sadness too. During the year we have lost two of our stalwarts, Margaret Evans and John Reynolds. I am very grateful to Mary Thorley for her tributes to these two great friends of Carmarthen which we publish with our newsletter. So much that we achieve is as a direct result of the knowledge, skill and common sense of Margaret and John.

To conclude, an appeal that members continue to support the Society in its efforts. Please look out for events that we organise and come and support our contributors. It would be a tremendous help if our Secretary could have email addresses so that we can contact members directly without the expense of postage. To this end two documents are enclosed: i) a proforma which refers to the new Data Protection Regulations. As you have chosen to be a member, we are advised you do not need to provide further written consent to hear from us about the work of the society. However, **if you do not wish us** to continue to hold your details, please return the proforma; ii) a membership application form for you to complete if you pay annually or wish to set up a standing order.

Sincerely

Linda Jones
Chair

Civic Society Executive Committee Newsletter 2018

Open meetings

On a sunny July evening Jeremy John led members on a fascinating walk past Priordy Chapel, through the medieval gate house of the Priory, across Parc Hinds, past the Old Grammar School and along The Esplanade and the Parade. When we finally reached the former District Council offices we noted the untidy state of the ground around the entrance. A letter was sent to the Chief Executive saying that we would send a working party to tidy the area in a few days. To our great satisfaction this threat of direct action led to Mr James responding that this would not be necessary and the area was immediately cleared by the council's own staff.

Peter Rowland, in September, gave a beautifully illustrated talk on blue plaques the Society has erected in the town over the years. We hope to make these photos available to a wider audience through publication on our website in due course, together with their historical background.

In February Trefor Thorpe stimulated us with a challenging talk entitled "Ancient and Modern: can the twain be reconciled?" which addressed the difficult question of whether contemporary design can sit easily within conservation areas.

This year it was the turn of the Society to host the annual joint talk with the Friends of the Carmarthenshire Museum. The guest speaker was Mr James Pierce who kept a large audience enthralled with his evocative description of the achievement of William Salesbury in translating the New Testament into Welsh 450 years ago.

When the next year's programme is announced, it is hoped that more members will take the opportunity to attend what are always well prepared events directly affecting our concerns as a town.

Nott Square

There has been regular dialogue with the authorities regarding the policing of illegal parking in Nott Square. We are glad to report that as a result the County Council is taking advantage of new legislation to introduce new traffic orders which will limit vehicle access. The impact of this scheme and the success of the new technology to manage it will be monitored closely.

Christmas Dinner

This year's dinner at the Ivy Bush was a special affair. We had as our guests Dr Tori Herridge and Mrs Karolyn Shindler who had earlier unveiled the blue plaque at Napier House commemorating the palaeontologist Dorothea Bate. It was also an opportunity to confer on Mr Byron Rogers, Honorary Life Membership of the Society in honour of his journalism which has so often shown his love for his home town and his despair at some of the changes imposed on it.

Blue Plaques

The Society's programme of installing blue plaques to commemorate distinguished citizens of the town has continued. In December a plaque to mark the birthplace of Dorothea Bate, the first woman to be employed as a scientist at the Natural History Museum in London was unveiled at Napier House in Spilman Street. Two women inspired by Dorothea's achievements agreed to join us and unveil the plaque. Dr. Tori Herridge is a palaeontologist who founded Trowelblazers, an organisation which celebrates women archaeologists, palaeontologists and geologists, while Karolyn Shindler is Dorothea's biographer. We were pleased to be able to sell a number of copies of the biography at the Christmas Dinner as well as commemorative mugs made especially for the occasion. The story attracted the interest of the BBC who broadcast interviews live from the hotel.

In May, a plaque was unveiled at the Spilman Hotel to commemorate Elizabeth Phillips Hughes, founder of Hughes Hall, a constituent college of the University of Cambridge. Dr. Anthony Freeling, President of Hughes Hall and Delyth Williams, Chair of Clwb Cinio Merched Caerfyrddin (who generously paid for the plaque) carried out the unveiling and joined us for dinner at the Ivy Bush Hotel later.

Later this year further plaques are planned to mark the part played by two very different Carmarthen women in the fight for women's emancipation a century ago. Keep an eye out for more details in the press.



Dr. Anthony Freeling, President of Hughes Hall, Cambridge and Miss Delyth Williams, Chair, Clwb Cinio Merched Caerfyrddin unveiling the Blue Plaque to Elizabeth Phillips Hughes.



Planning applications

Comments have been made on a number of contentious planning applications during the year. One disappointment was the decision to grant planning consent to the Jackson's Square scheme. The Society felt that an opportunity was lost to deliver a scheme of high quality and imaginative design. Of particular concern was the decision to create a level platform with steps at either end. On the positive side, the representations to allow planting to soften the effect and help retain a sense of a quiet garden area have borne fruit. We shall keep a close eye on how the scheme develops.

The other high profile plan which has received a great deal of attention is the proposal to convert parts of the interior of the Guildhall as a restaurant. While not opposing the proposed change of use, very strong and detailed representations have been made to the application for listed building consent, objecting in the strongest possible terms in response to many of the structural changes proposed. The lack of detail in the plans published with the application showed a lack of sensitivity to the history of this important Grade 1 listed building. A meeting has been arranged with the Head of Planning to discuss the implications.

Gardening Group

Molly and her group of volunteers have continued to maintain three abandoned plots of land in the town centre. In addition, thousands of daffodils have been planted in Morfa Lane alongside the Toyota garage together with a range of shrubs. We are grateful for financial support from Toyota and for the practical assistance of Farmyard Nurseries who gave advice and help with the planting.



The Workhouse

The Society was disappointed but not surprised when news broke that the Workhouse had been damaged by fire. Throughout the year representations had been made about the neglected state of the site. Eventually the Council issued an Enforcement Order on the owners under the terms of the Town and Country Planning (1990) Act. The fire occurred before the appeal hearing sought by the owners. In the meantime a request has been made to Cadw that the main block, believed to be designed by George Morgan, be listed. The Council has also been asked not to take precipitate action to clear the site before a specialist structural engineer's assessment has been made.

Civic Society Awards

A review has been undertaken of the Award categories and the following have been defined:

Best Building Conservation Project; winner The Warren, Mansel Street

Best Historic Environment Project: Mural in Shaw Lane

Best Sensitive Reuse of a Redundant Building: Development at Plas Ystrad, Johnstown

Best Commercial Redevelopment: Yr Atom, King st.

Best Domestic Redevelopment: No award

For promoting Local Heritage: Mural at the Model School.

David White Award for a Significant Architectural Design Impact: Maes Y Ffair, Pentrefelin Street.

In a break with tradition, rather than holding one award ceremony, individual awards will be announced at intervals during the year, with attendant publicity. We hope that this approach will continue to encourage good standards of planning, design and construction.



Maes Y Ffair, Pentrefelin St.

St David's Park

We have been reassured that the former livestock market pillars are safely stored at St David's Park. The society has suggested an imaginative reuse would be for them to be incorporated in the next stage of the Jackson's Square development.

In reply to our questions about the future of empty buildings on the former hospital site, we were informed that the Nurses' Home and Job's Well House are surplus to County Council requirements and will be disposed of on the open market. The other buildings on the site are to be retained and there is a programme of work to improve the fabric and convert further areas to office accommodation. The listed chapel has been allocated to the School Music Service.

Norah Isaac Award

<p>The winner of the award sponsored by the Society for the student making the greatest contribution in the Welsh language to the University of Wales Trinity St David's life in 2017 was Caryl Jones.</p>
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Website

It has been a matter of concern that the Society does not have an active and current website promoting our work. Following discussions with the University authorities it was arranged that a former student design a suitable site based on information provided by the society. Progress has been slow but we hope that it will be completed soon and on line before the end of the year. In the meantime, we have a lively Facebook page which advertises our activities and encourages dialogue.

Obituaries

The Civic Society has suffered the loss of two its most faithful and prominent members over the past year. **John Reynolds** had been a member of the Society since its inception and had, for many years, been an integral part of the executive committee. John had a deep and abiding love of the town and was committed to preserving the best of its past while seeking to look to the future with optimism and integrity. We will miss John's wise counsel on legal and planning matters but most of all we will miss his genial company and good humour at our meetings. We extend to John's family our deepest sympathy in their loss.

Margaret Evans had been the mainstay of the Civic Society for well over thirty years. She held, for many of those years, the post of secretary and was still Joint Secretary at the time of her death. For Margaret it was not a case of attending a few meetings, for her supporting the work of the Society meant she gave it her total enthusiastic energies. No weekend would go by without Margaret clearing out a flowerbed in the town centre, planting bulbs and flowers or going after sponsorship for a project. Any cleaning up activities would find Margaret in the middle of the action.... gardening gloves on, refuse sack in one hand, secateurs in the other. Her care for this town did not encompass complaining about the things that were wrong or not done well...her care meant the rolling up of sleeves, the tackling of a problem, the satisfaction of seeing the old place improving and getting better.

One of her major contributions to the society and the town was the compilation of an extensive photographic collection charting the history of the town as it developed through the 20th century. She also recorded important Georgian and Victorian features on town properties and undertook a detailed survey and recording of the wrought iron work in town.

If anyone ever said to Margaret that they were going to take a photograph of the town, she would say 'take it when the sky is blue' but, for Margaret, the sky over Carmarthen was blue every day. Margaret had an eternal optimism about Carmarthen and its people. She saw its potential and she loved the town for what it has been, for what it is and for all that it might be. There are not many people who serve their own generation, past generations and generations yet to come but that is exactly what our Margaret did.

We extend our deepest sympathy to her family. The Civic Society will never be quite the same.