

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2009

By Robin Morris

“As creeping ivy clings to wood or stone  
And hides the ruin it feeds upon,  
So sophistry, cleaves close to, and protects,  
Sin's rotten trunk, concealing its defects”

Progress of Error (1782) – William Cowper

I refreshed my memory of where we were all at this time last year, by reading my contribution to our 36<sup>th</sup> Annual Report. It was a somewhat depressing experience, because I am not sure that we have made any progress on many burning issues which were concerning us at that time. For example, Gloscat/Greyfriars seems to be firmly embodied on the rocks and there has been no perceptible movement on the Blackfriars site.

I made an inspection of Llanthony Priory several days ago, only to find that the site is heavily contaminated by litter and some of the walls are affected by graffiti. More importantly, ivy is growing out of the gatehouse and there is a wonderful crop of Buddleia just about to leap into leaf and bloom throughout the site. I am also not sure if the statutory obligation to keep the buildings wind and water proof is being observed – this will be my next priority. If it is not, I will ask the City to commence formal steps to enforce it. Most of the work I have mentioned involves little expenditure but plenty of elbow grease.

Come on Llanthony Priory Trust – get your finger out!

St Michael's Tower is making progress as we see elsewhere in this report. I have just signed the Licence for the works to be carried out with the City Council. I have also signed the Contract with the Contractor. Congratulations to everyone who is involved.

We have had several meetings with representatives of the Church of St Mary de Crypt regarding the future of the School Room, and the Church itself. I have also been in touch with the Solicitors representing the Diocese, who are Messrs Madge, Lloyd and Gibson (Mr Robert Perry Jones). Some progress has been made with the Charity Commission regarding the Crypt School Room itself, and some of this work may be useful to us. We have also commissioned a report on the state of the ground floor which is affected by wet rot. It would appear that the situation is not quite as bad as we had originally thought. I am hoping to have a meeting with the Diocesan Trustees fairly shortly.

My wife Pat and I went to look at the situation at All Saints Church in Hereford. As many of you will know, this was a daring project to undertake, but it has been enormously successful. The additions to the inside of the Church are unashamedly modern. Much of the construction is in stainless steel and similar modern materials.

When the pilot scheme was designed for the Crypt Old School Room and Church some years ago, it involved an external extension to allow for toilets and disabled

access. I am no architect, but having seen All Saints I am rather wondering whether it would be possible to construct these facilities within the body of the existing Church giving inter-communication between the School Room at both levels. The Church itself could be used for concerts and similar activities in addition to Christian worship. If we can get some initial grants for feasibility studies, then this is something we shall have to look at. It could be a challenging, and very exciting project, which would tie in well with the work which has been carried out at St Michael's Tower.

St Mary de Crypt could be a major attraction from a tourist point of view because it has historical associations with such people as George Whitefield, John Biddle, Robert Raikes and Jemmy Wood - to name just a few.

I have to say that I am concerned about the future of the Docks. At the centre of the project lies forlornly Merchant's Quay, unloved and uncared for. As I understand it there is no planning application for any future development of the site. I am guessing when I say that I am assuming that British Waterways and Crest Nicholson still have some form of commercial interest in the building.

This canker at the centre of the Docks appears to be spreading, because there are problems at the British Waterways Museum where three options are being considered:

1. Close the Museum down completely
2. Mothball the Museum in the hope that visitors will increase
3. Keep the Museum open on a restricted basis through the use of volunteers

Gloucester Civic Trust has increasing expertise in this field with our Tour Guides Committee, St Michael's Tower and Beatrix Potter. Similarly, the Cathedral Guides must have a considerable body of experience in organising rotas and carrying out duties within the Cathedral. It did occur to me that it might be possible to organise a small Steering Committee to see whether we can all help one another. It is all very well for the City to talk about marketing Gloucester, but unless we are careful we will find that there is very little to market!

There is one success, however, and that is 66 Westgate Street, where the restoration is now largely complete. I am not altogether sure what the building is going to be used for, but I offer the owners of the building my best wishes for a successful commercial outcome to the project. In a sense, the restoration of the building represents successful co-operation between the City, GHB, and the Civic Trust, because all three bodies gave contributed to the venture.

On a personal note, there has been a certain amount of discussion regarding the English Heritage decision to insist that the building was rendered, as opposed to the exposed timber. I have to say that I quite like the rendered finish.

On a sad note, I have lost my old sparring partner, Tony Ault, who has worked with me for more years than I can care to remember. On the other hand, he will continue to be an inspiration to all of us to keep working for the wellbeing of Gloucester and its citizens.