

Chairman's Report 2012
by Robin Morris

He builded better than he knew-
The conscious stone to beauty grew

.....Ralph W Emerson

WHEN I was a child living at Corse Lawn Common there was only one bus a day into Gloucester which we caught at 8.30 in the morning and which left Gloucester from the bottom of Westgate Street (opposite the Duke of Norfolk's House at 4 o'clock.

My siblings and cousins were commanded by my aunt and my mother to meet under the clock over the life at the Bon Marche at precisely 3 o'clock.

This was one commanding officer's command you ignored at your peril. Jankers had nothing on it!!!

As I stood at the clock I would read the dedication: "He builded better than he knew." It was only when I read the souvenir of the opening of the Bon, which occurred in March 1931, that I now realise that the clock was dedicated to the founder of the business, Mr J.R. Pope "who in 1889 hoisted his flag in Gloucester in a small double fronted shop known as 19, Northgate Street."

This now makes me think about the foundation of the Gloucester Civic Trust some 40 years ago.

The founder Chairman of the Trust was the Canon David Paton, who was priest in charge of St Mary de Crypt Church. He called the first meeting of the Steering Committee in the Crypt School Room in Southgate Street. This was followed by a number of public meetings. This brought into play the expertise of the existing design group which had been functioning for a number of years.

Eventually the decision was made to form the Gloucester Civic Trust. David was the catalyst with the foresight to understand the importance of protecting the heritage of the city and promoting the interests of the city generally for the benefit of its inhabitants.

He was undoubtedly the founding father of the Trust and I wonder whether he appreciated the way in which the Trust would succeed to the extent that it has.

There has been the restoration of many historic buildings and monuments; planning appraisal; tourist guides, Heritage Open Days, the Beatrix Potter Museum, open public meetings....to name just a few of the activities of our members.

It is fair to say that the Trust has now become one of the most respected organisations now operating within the city.

This anniversary year we really hope to hoist the flag again on St Michael's Tower and to replace the curfew bell. This will bring to final fruition the efforts of Marilyn Champion and the Tower committee and will do much to restore the heart to the city centre.

Quite an achievement to mark David Paton's original initiative 40 years ago.

Slightly tongue in cheek I leave you with a quotation from the 1931 souvenir programme I mentioned above.

“The new Bon Marche is a store worthy of the greatest city in a great empire. It places Gloucester in the front rank – for a city, sooner or later, gets the store and service which she deserves.

“Furthermore this gesture of enterprise has probably hastened the graceful development of the ancient city to a greater degree than is generally imagined. The fine open Square – once a region of sordid poverty – has wonderful possibilities and, despite its somewhat neglected appearance at the moment, its value as a business centre must inevitably be recognised.”

Plus ca change plus c’est la meme chose.

Follow this if you can and best wishes to you all in 2012.

and for 2013