

# The Chester Civic Trust NEWSLETTER

November 2014

## LÖRRACH VISIT



Having made several visits to Chester's German twin town of Lörrach and its borderland with Switzerland and Germany, I thought that this fascinating area of Europe, rich in both natural and architectural treasures, would be an ideal base for a Civic Trust expedition. The Events Committee agreed and 38 intrepid members signed up so, in the early morning of October 9th, the trip finally became a reality.

It has to be said that it didn't start well; the realisation outside Chester station at 6.00 am that we had never actually confirmed the coach booking to Manchester airport rapidly dispelled any early-morning stupor. We reached Zurich without further incident – apart from a half-hour of circling over Switzerland because of fog - to be greeted by warm sunshine, our coach and our driver Rolf.

This initial sunshine may have lulled us into a false sense of climatic security, because by the time we reached the site of our first visit, the ruins of Rötteln Castle perched high above Lörrach, clouds were darkening the sky. They didn't detract from the superb views of the Black Forest, the Vosges and even the distant Alps, nor from the fascinating tour by the "Castellan" in full medieval garb. However, by the time we reached our hotel in the centre of Lörrach it was properly raining and this "English" weather (as our German friends called it) of alternating sun and rain was a feature of the week. Nothing daunted, we paddled our

way across the Bahnhofplatz to the Rathaus (Town Hall) for a Civic Reception.

This was our first taste of the warm welcome from the City of Lörrach, represented by the Oberbürgermeister, Herr Lutz, and from members of Lörrach International.

Lörrach International is a group of volunteers who

support the twinning links of their city – as CILA does for Chester. Not only did its members provide us with a dinner on the second evening of our stay, together with delegations from Chester, Sens and Senigallia who were attending the annual Twinning Commission, they also

provided English-speaking members to accompany us on our excursions to help with local knowledge and any language problems. The city of Lörrach also arranged a talk for us from a senior planning officer about the city's development and from the curator of the Three Countries museum about



the history of this region, often troubled by war because of its strategic importance. We were taken on a guided tour of the city, where the twin town of Chester is represented by a red telephone box and a digital reinterpretation of the Eastgate clock.

## Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

PRESERVATION AND PROGRESS

No 3, 2014

To give a detailed account of all the activities we packed into our six-day stay would be to take over the whole of the newsletter. In summary, we visited three countries, two castles, two wineries, a brewery, a modern art gallery, a major Roman site and a design museum. We had a boat trip on the Rhine and guided tours of Lörrach, Basel and Freiburg, as well as the VITRA furniture factory campus, which contains buildings by several internationally famous architects. We had some excellent food and drink and the only time when the weather really impeded us was at the Roman site of Augusta Raurica near Basel. We also learned that small Swiss towns close down at the weekend, leaving a large section of the party trekking to the nearest McDonalds to find somewhere for lunch. We nearly had another transport failure on our return, when the coach taking us to the airport got stuck in traffic and arrived an hour late. This left us with a mad dash through the cavernous expanses of Zurich airport to ensure that we caught our plane.

Each of us on the visit will have particular memories - here are three of mine. First, the amazing fortress of Haut-Koenigsbourg in Alsace, high on the wooded hills of the Vosges with a view across the Rhine to Germany. At the start of the 20th century, when Alsace was part

of Germany, it was restored as a symbol of German power. The restoration recreated a medieval castle and palace on the basis of the best evidence available at the time.

The second memory is of an exhibition about the First World War in the Lörrach museum. In a tiny cinema there was a show of 3D photos taken in the trenches of the Western Front. They re-created the horror and futility of the carnage of this war more effectively than any of the many other images I've seen.

The final memory is of the welcome and support we received, especially from Elke Hach of Lörrach Tourism and the members of Lörrach International. Our coachload of English people was able to travel without impediment across three international borders in a region of Europe that was fought over for centuries. Each country we visited has retained its individuality, but they now live together in co-operation rather than conflict. It's good, in an uncertain world, to realise that we have made progress towards peace.

**David Evans**

## NEWS IN BRIEF



Details of our **sixth lecture** on 29th April were too late to be included on the Membership Card:

Tony Barton, Chairman of Donald Insall Associates, marks the 2015 European Industrial Heritage Year with a romp through their portfolio of post-industrial sites and buildings that have been converted to new uses. Along the way he will touch on their RIBA Award winning project, the Copper Kingdom at Amlwch. He will also give us something of an illustrated progress report and preview of the Lion Salt Works, due to open during Easter 2015. This will be a preview of a visit for members, which is being planned by the Events Committee.

Both the original and revised planning applications for 33 dwellings on the site of the former bank building in **Queens Park Road** have been rejected. Redrow has announced that it is no longer interested in the plot. Both the University and a residential conversion specialist have been named as potential buyers.

Grade II listed **Dee House** is still without a future after a proposed scheme to convert it into an international tourist attraction has fallen through. Reportedly, the developers pulled out after an engineers' inspection found the building in too poor state to permit a cost-effective restoration. Its present use appears to be as a store for building materials.

The restored **Grosvenor Park**, now listed Grade II\*, was reopened by the Duke of Westminster this summer. The Park Lodge, by John Douglas, has been remodelled to provide a cafe and meeting rooms, while a new training and events pavilion, including public toilets and changing facilities, has been built in the distinctive Douglas style to replace the park's former toilet block. In 1993 the Civic Trust helped commission a sculpture of the Norse god Ymir. Originally situated in the Garden for the Blind, the tactile statue was mounted on a plinth to make it easily accessible, and there was an accompanying tablet in Braille. It has been moved to a more prominent position near the pavilion but the mounting does not meet the original intention.

# THE BRAVE NEW WORLD OF SOCIAL MEDIA

After debating for some time whether to take the leap into new means of communication, the Trust has finally decided that we must move with the times. To that end the Trust now has both a Facebook and a Twitter account. At the risk of teaching some readers to suck eggs, Facebook and Twitter are the most used types of what is known as Social Media. They provide a way to instantly communicate news and views to those that follow the accounts. Twitter and Facebook, along with our website and more traditional forms of communication, are therefore important ways of enabling us to make people aware of what the Trust stands for and of its activities.

For those of you that already have, or intend to open, a Facebook or Twitter account, please follow us on Twitter or visit our Facebook page to keep up to date with the Trust's activities. Better still, join in the conversation and send your own tweets. The Twitter address is @ChesterCivTrust and the Facebook page can be found by searching Facebook for Chester Civic Trust. An important aspect of Twitter is the ease by which

messages can be retweeted to those who follow your own twitter account but do not necessarily follow the Civic Trust's account; by this means we hope that news of the Trust's activities will rapidly spread among interested people outside the Trust membership. Tweets relevant to the CCT are displayed on the home page of our website.

Social Media is undoubtedly the major way in which young people in particular now communicate, and expect to be communicated with, and as part of our efforts to attract a new generation of Civic Trust members it is important that we embrace social media. Therefore, even if you are not interested in Facebook or Twitter personally please spread the word to those that might be, perhaps children, grandchildren or neighbours, and help us reach our next generation.

**Nick Clarke**

## LOCAL HERITAGE LIST

Our Annual Report gave a brief update on the compilation of a Local Heritage List for Chester and ended with the comment that work will be extended beyond the three pilot areas in 2015. Indeed it will – but only with your help! Our experience to date has shown two things: firstly, that the process is quite involved and rigorous even before anything is presented to the Council for their approval, and secondly, that it is fun. Members in Handbridge and Queen's Park, one of the pilot areas, have enjoyed meeting each other and surveying their own area. We have learned which of our buildings are already on the Statutory List and which others might fit the criteria for a Local List. In Christleton the process, led by Graham Ranger, has been enthusiastically embraced by the local High School, with A level Geography students helping to survey the village. In Upton, led by David Evans, the emphasis so far has been to work in partnership with the local history group and Upton Parish Council.

and compare the efficacy of the different approaches. Then, with help from CWaC Council, we will issue a recommended methodology for the next stage. Likely candidates include Hoole, Tarvin, Dodleston, Westminster Park, Lache and Hough Green. If you want to help with these, or any other areas, please let me know ... and join in the fun!

**Stephen Langtree**

All three pilot areas are doing things slightly differently, but the output will be the same – a comprehensive list of nominations objectively assessed against the selection criteria recommended by English Heritage. In January I will prepare a report on the three pilot studies



# WIRRAL MISCELLANY

Thirty four members set out on a fine day in July for a tour of the eastern sector of the Wirral. Led by Graham Fisher, we started the day by visiting Bromborough Pool, which was developed in 1854 to provide housing for workers in the nearby Price's Patent Candle Factory. The factory was owned by the Wilson brothers and the village was laid out by the London architect Julian Hill. It is an early example of the way wealthy industrialists recognised the need to provide good standards of accommodation and welfare for their workforce and followed the example set by Robert Owen at New Lanark. It was a static village for many years, but is now expanding with both new and proposed housing.



ago following an allocation of almost £12 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund. When we arrived at the Park we drove around the Upper Park before reaching Ainsley Gomon's Visitor Centre. Here we had coffee before setting off on a walking tour led by Graham.

And finally on to New Brighton, where the layout has not changed since the 1830's when James Atherton, a Liverpool merchant bought 170 acres of sandhills and heath. His intention was to build an elegant watering hole for the gentlemen of Liverpool but

this was only partially realised. The town has had a varied history but latterly has undergone a revival.

We made our way along New Chester Road to Port Sunlight, where we had a tour of the outskirts. Here we saw buildings by several great late-Victorian architects, including Grayson, Edward Ould and of course John Douglas. We also passed the Oval in Bebington, which featured in the film Chariots of Fire and the very modern and interesting house belonging to Peter de Figueredo.

And so to Birkenhead Park. Designed by Joseph Paxton in 1847 and remarkable in many ways, not least that it was the first park to be publicly funded and planned for the benefit of the whole town. The Grand Entrance to the park was designed by Lewis Hornblower; Edward Kemp, designer of Grosvenor Park in Chester, was the Park Superintendent. Olmsted based his Central Park in New York on Paxton's Birkenhead design.

The park has had its share of ups and downs but in 1977 it became a Conservation Area. Restoration began ten years

We were joined by two members of Wallasey Civic Society, Terry and Joy, at what is a symbol of this regeneration - the award winning Floral Pavilion. Originally built in 1913, it now houses an 800 seat theatre and conference centre on a site with stunning views over the Mersey. The Floral Pavilion has avoided the fate of the Tivoli Theatre, the Promenade Pier and the New Brighton Tower, all now demolished.

Other features of the town include the Fort Perch Rock, which has guarded the seaward approach to Liverpool since 1830, and the Lighthouse, known originally as the Perch Rock lighthouse. Another significant building that dominates the skyline of New Brighton is the 1930s Roman Catholic Church of St Peter, Paul and Philomena. This prominent Grade II listed church is known locally as the Dome of Home; homeward bound sailors would see the dome and know they were close to Merseyside.

**Doreen King**

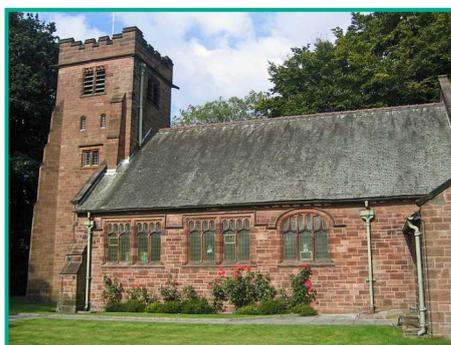
## DOUGLAS IN SANDIWAY

John Douglas was born in Sandiway in 1830 and lived there until he went to work with EG Paley in Lancaster. When he returned to Cheshire it was from here that he received his first commissions from the family of the second Lord Delamere. Douglas inherited land in Sandiway from his father, and towards the end of his life purchased more land himself. In 1902 he gave land and money for the building of St John's Church, as well as designing the building and furnishings himself.

On a pleasant September morning 28 members did a walk in the area led by local Douglas enthusiasts Marian Harris and Margaret Sherry, who had created a trail that included entry to a number of private properties. We visited his home, the 1879 model cottage, plus Magpie Cottages, Sandiway Manor House, and Forest Hey house and cottages. Possibly the biggest privilege was to see the area where Douglas had tried to create a village green. On one side was the church with the curate's house opposite it.

On another side were two cottages and finally the grander Redwalls on the fourth side. This piece of planning was lost when the Thompsons of Lion Salt Works bought properties here and fragmented the concept with hedges and private gardens.

We were also able to see the interior of St John's Church, a stark diminutive arts and crafts structure, full of surprising details internally and externally.



A huge thank you to Marian and Margaret for a relaxed and highly informative walk.

**Karen McKay**

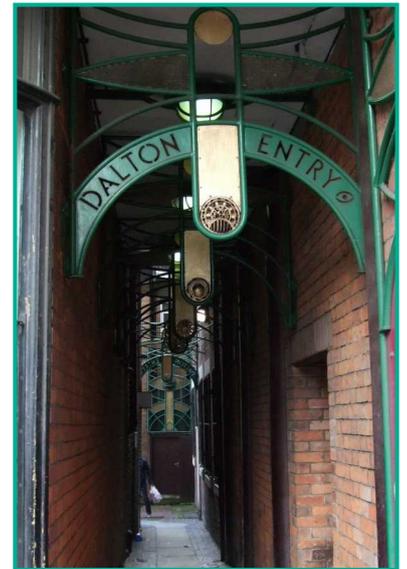
# MANCHESTER: TWO CENTURIES OF CHANGE



This popular visit to Manchester attracted 46 CCT members and friends. First stop was the Imperial War Museum North, where we visited the current exhibition "From Street to Trench: A World War that Shaped a Region". This reveals the important contribution the people of the North West made during the First World War. We enjoyed a buffet lunch at The Britons Protection, twice voted best pub in Manchester, which stands on the site of the Peterloo massacre. We were joined by Steve Roman, our guide for the afternoon. He is a trustee of the Victorian Society and helped create the Manchester Peace and Justice Trial, which we partly followed. Steve told us the story of the Peterloo Massacre while we were standing outside the Free Trade Hall, which carries a plaque

commemorating the event. The hall is also famous as the place where Bob Dylan took up the electric guitar in 1966.

Even those of us who thought we knew Manchester discovered something unfamiliar, whether the story of the Abraham Lincoln statue, unwanted in London, the charming Dalton Entry or the life-size statue of Alan Turing sitting on a park bench. Another little known landmark was St Mary's Catholic Church, described as Manchester's Hidden Gem. On the way we learned that the listed CIS Tower held the record for the tallest building in the UK, and later for the largest solar façade. Current record holder for the tallest UK building outside London is the Beetham Tower on Dean Street, which received the 2007 award for best tall building in the world. Our group was divided on its merits.



## CIVIC VOICE ANNUAL CONVENTION

Civic Voice is the national umbrella organisation for civic societies and civic trusts throughout England. Sadly, many such societies have rather limited horizons and do not engage with either the regional associations or the national body. Not so, Chester Civic Trust! We have always played an active role both in the North West region and at national level. The Trust is therefore proud to be a founder member of Civic Voice. That's partly why we took the trouble to attend the AGM and Annual Convention in Canterbury on 24th and 25th October. The other reason is, of course, that we like visiting unfamiliar places, meeting the locals and comparing notes on issues of mutual concern.

So it was in Canterbury, a small historic city well-used to pilgrims but now host to 30,000 students and some four million visitors per annum. It is a city that is enduring Council cut-backs, reductions in conservation staff, enforcement officers and other services that help to keep Canterbury special. Not surprisingly, a call came from the

chairman of the Canterbury Society to say "enough is enough": how can places like Canterbury and Chester sustain their heritage in the face of such financial strictures? Not to be downhearted, the Canterbury Society has produced its own Vision for the Future for the city and has even persuaded the district council to abandon its cabinet-style decision making.

Civic Voice is also in good heart, not least thanks to the support of Griff Rhys Jones as its President. Many new initiatives were announced at the Convention, including a Civic Manifesto to be presented to all parliamentary candidates before the General Election. Martin Meredith, our own Hon Treasurer, continues to do a great job as Treasurer and Trustee of Civic Voice. David Evans, Jean Evans and I were also among the delegates and we were all pleased to represent Chester Civic Trust at this national event.

**Stephen Langtree**

# ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

On Thursday 2nd October 2014 there was a good attendance of members in the pleasant surroundings of St Mary's Centre for the 54th AGM of the Chester Civic Trust. Graham Fisher took the chair. The Chairman, David Evans, presented his report. He emphasised the essential contributions of members to the success of the trust, and paid tribute to the work of Ann Jones, who is retiring after being a member of Council since 1992. Martin Meredith summarised the financial accounts, after which

the Annual Report and Annual Accounts were adopted without dissension. The meeting then moved to approve the election of the following Officers and Council Members:

## OFFICERS

<b>Chair</b>	David Evans
<b>Vice-Chairs</b>	Peter Cocker, Christine Russell and John Herson
<b>Hon Secretary</b>	Martin Meredith (acting)
<b>Hon Treasurer</b>	Martin Meredith

## COUNCIL MEMBERS

Tony Barton, Ruth Davidson, Philip Harrison, Jan Hore, Doreen King, Karen McKay, Cynthia Philips and Michael Plane were elected.

The meeting re-appointed Hargreaves and Woods as Independent Examiners.

Following the usual refreshment break, there was a presentation by David Burton-Pye on his recent commission by English Heritage to produce a study on the Management of Growth in Historic Cities.

## NEW WORKS COMMITTEE

The New Works Committee continues to be vigilant in its role of tracking planning applications for development in Chester and making our views known on behalf of the Civic Trust. Applications that do not comprise a major development can still have a significant impact on the character and quality of a residential neighbourhood, conservation area or on the street scene of the historic town centre. For example, we have recently objected to the proposed felling of trees that are protected by preservation orders or by being within conservation areas. We have also objected to proposed new shop fronts or signs that we consider would be out of character and too obtrusive in the street scene or spoil the design of the original building. Applications that we have recently commented on are as follows.

**CARE HOME, CITY ROAD.** This is a major redevelopment of existing buildings on the corner of City Road and the north bank of the Shropshire Union Canal. It will make a significant change to the appearance of City Road and the canal side. So although we support the redevelopment and proposed use as a care home in principle, the proposed building is considered far too massive in comparison to the scale and height of the surrounding buildings in the conservation area.

This is following a trend in Chester for ever taller and massive buildings, such as the former Travelodge Hotel at Fountains Roundabout, the newly completed block at Delamere Street, the proposed student accommodation at Tower Wharf and at the former Linenhall Stables on St Martin's Way. These developments are all widely considered out of character with the predominant scale and height of the city's buildings and are gradually eroding the historic quality of the city's street scene and skyline. This trend is likely to continue as new precedents for height and scale are set by consented and completed developments unless existing planning policies are implemented with more rigour and determination.



**NEW SCHOOLS AT BLACON.** A similar problem of quality of development has arisen with the proposed replacement of two primary schools and the secondary school at Blacon. Here the concern is not so much about the townscape as the quality of the pupils' learning environment. It is recognised that the two existing schools are dated and need new buildings. However the proposal is to replace them with standardised designs produced by the Government's Department for Education. These designs have been criticised by the Royal Institute of British Architects as 'not fit for purpose and will not stand the test of time'. There is evidence from teachers that the reduced space standards lead to behavioural problems. Published research in the UK and USA has shown that well designed schools can improve pupils' performance. We have objected to the poor design specifications of these schools based on this evidence.

**BUS INTERCHANGE AT GORSE STACKS.** This new bus interchange is to replace the current one at the rear of the Town Hall; this will make way for the Northgate redevelopment. A detailed report on this proposed bus interchange by the Chairman of the Urban Development Committee is given elsewhere in this newsletter. New Works Committee is concerned that the opportunity to make the best of this important gateway site into the city has been compromised by design details that result in visual barriers such as walls that block views into the site and beyond. We also consider that the proposed public open space should be of the highest quality to present an impressive welcome to visitors arriving by bus.

**Andrew Pannell**

# NEW BUS INTERCHANGE

No one would describe Chester's present bus exchange - behind the Library - as having any great architectural merit or being a credit to the city's public realm. And the recent replacement of the brick-based shelters by the pathetic yellow structures has turned a poor environment into an eyesore. But following the sale of the Delamere Street bus station site for development, it is all the city has by way of a functioning bus interchange and lay-over facility.



impressed with the developing proposals. Not everyone is convinced by the need to demolish the Grade II listed Ship Victory public house, but on balance we are persuaded that this is the only way to get the necessary capacity and a safe drive-in drive-out layout. The proposed design is a

U-shaped green-roofed and largely glass-walled structure with 13 bus stands. Compared to the original design that was illustrated here, the latest design extends the roof to cover the waiting areas of all the bus stands. It also incorporates a public cafe with both inside and outside seating areas.

But the bus exchange site is needed for the long-promised and elusive Northgate Development, so the search has been on to find a new home for the bus station. The best solution, and realistically the only solution, is the construction of a new bus interchange on the site of the current Gorse Stacks car park. The Council has charged the Northgate Development team with bringing the scheme to fruition and has appointed a specialist transport architect who has been involved with the design of several other new bus stations, including Macclesfield and Wolverhampton.

We were disappointed to learn that, although electrical trunking will be installed to allow real time bus information to be provided for passengers at some stage in the future, there is no current proposal to provide such a system. Old-fashioned paper timetables will continue to be the order of the day. A full planning application has now been submitted and can be viewed on the Council's web-site. By the time you read this newsletter, the application should have been determined.

The chosen site is clearly convenient for the bus operators; it will allow those services which serve the railway station, rather than the present bus exchange, to have interchange facilities with other services and it is well placed for access to the city's most popular departure stops on Frodsham and Foregate Streets. It will also have a driver rest room and toilet facilities, which are absent at the current sites. Whether it will prove to be as attractive to bus passengers is another matter; it is no longer close to the market and is some distance from the main city centre attractions. We have the experience of withering passenger use of the old Delamere Street bus station when the present bus exchange provided a more accessible alternative.

**Peter Cocker**

Chester Civic Trust has had two consultation meetings with the project managers and the architect, and we were



## LAST CHANCE

There are still a few places available on the Chester Civic Trust visit to Southern **Hungary** and Maramures in **Romania**. Running from 14th to 21st May 2015, the itinerary will include World Heritage Sites and towns and cities of historical and architectural importance. The visit is open to friends and families of members of the Trust. The package will include return flights from Manchester to Budapest with coach connection from Chester, accommodation in 4\* hotels with all evening meals plus 2

lunches, all transportation, entrance fees and tour guides. The cost will be £890pp for a twin or double room. A single supplement will be an additional £155.

If you would like further information or to make a booking, call Christine Russell on 01244 390686 or 07976 313336, or email russellcm@hotmail.co.uk. To reserve a place send a deposit cheque for £100, payable to Chester Civic Trust, to Martin Meredith at Chester Civic Trust, Bishop Lloyd's Palace, 51-53 Watergate Row, Chester CH1 2LE.

# DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

**Thursday 4th December 2014**  
EVENT AT BISHOP LLOYD'S PALACE  
Italian Townscapes - Graham Fisher  
Details have been circulated

**9th January 2015**  
EVENT AT BISHOP LLOYD'S PALACE  
Art In Parliament - Christine Russell  
Details enclosed

**Wednesday 21st January 2015**  
CIVIC TRUST LECTURE  
Transylvania Lost and Found - Jessica Douglas-Home  
Grosvenor Museum, 7.30 pm

**Wednesday 18th February 2015**  
CIVIC TRUST LECTURE  
The Whiplash Line - Adrian Sumner  
Grosvenor Museum, 7.30 pm

**Friday 27th February 2015**  
EVENT AT BISHOP LLOYD'S PALACE  
Salt and Subsidence - Colin Edmondson  
Details enclosed

**Wednesday 18th March 2015**  
CIVIC TRUST LECTURE  
Manchester: The Regeneration of the Birthplace of the Industrial Revolution - Angela Harrington  
Grosvenor Museum, 7.30 pm

**Wednesday 29th April 2015**  
CIVIC TRUST LECTURE  
Conservation and Reuse of Historic Industrial Sites - Tony Barton  
Grosvenor Museum, 7.30 pm

**14th to 21st May 2015**  
CIVIC TRUST TRIP TO ROMANIA  
Details have been circulated

**Saturday 20th June 2015**  
Civic Day  
Details to be announced

**Saturday 27th June 2015**  
Guided walk in Weaverham  
Details to be announced



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Our office in Bishop Lloyd's Palace is open between 1200 and 1400, Monday to Thursday, and on the first Saturday each month from 1200 to 1500.

If you would like to join The Chester Civic Trust, please call in at our office, write to the Membership Secretary or email us at [admin@chestercivictrust.org.uk](mailto:admin@chestercivictrust.org.uk)

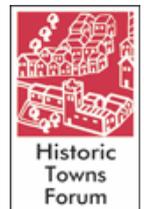
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Visit our website or contact our Membership Secretary for further details.