

Report on talk by Jo Bailey: 2020 – A Year to Remember given 9th November 2021

In many ways 2020 was a very strange year when after 36 years, Jo Bailey re-joined Southampton City Council - just two weeks before lockdown commenced in March. As the city's new Monuments and Memorials Officer one of Jo's first jobs was to replace a plaque on Westgate, where an eagle-eyed resident had pointed out that the Speedwell was not mentioned. It was decided to rectify this and to modernise and re-word the notice. Many plans for the year were cancelled such as talks, workshops, conferences, trips; anniversaries which included 900th for Romsey Abbey, 300 years since Rev. Gilbert White died, 200th of Florence Nightingale's birth, 400th of consecration of the Jesus Chapel (Peartree Church), 100 years since OGS Crawford started working for OS in the city, not to mention the 400th anniversary of the sailing of the Mayflower and Speedwell. But lots of time for research!

The Mayflower Memorial:

Plans had already been formed for the celebration of **Mayflower 400** including restoration of the Mayflower Memorial. Scaffolding was erected to undertake a close survey which was delayed due to Covid lockdown, although it went ahead in June. The pillars supporting the dome at the top were badly cracked due to corrosion of the structural iron rods embedded within them. Some plaques and stone carving were also eroded and the model of the ship Mayflower on top needed repair. This model was crudely made in July 1913 by a local company, Lankester & Sons, and it was repaired and given a wax coating to protect it. Pillars and capitals were replaced by Chichester Stone where necessary. Weathered memorial plaques were recut, (see photo, right) and two new plaques added. One recorded the involvement of the Native American Wampanoag people who lived in the area where the first settlement was built, and their descendants assisted with the wording. The second plaque highlights the role of Southampton as a city of refuge, giving succour to migrants who have settled here or passed through. Two information panels were installed in front of the monument, and the work was finished in time for a restricted 400th anniversary commemoration in August 2020.



Jo's research on the memorial found that the first ambitious design proposed by R M Lucas, Corporation Architect (competition winner) included a ship to be built into the town walls, but this was deemed too expensive. A more modest design costing £600 was agreed, and unveiled in 1913 by the American Ambassador, in front of a crowd of thousands. The ceremony involved a risky operation to burn the cords which held sheets covering the top of the monument! The 300th anniversary in 1920 was marked by an extravagant pageant.

The Bargate:

Jo's first job on this monument was to arrange for the flood lighting to be replaced. There were also general plumbing issues and a ground floor chamber garderobe was thoroughly cleaned as it was infested with rats and pigeons! Window glass was also replaced, some clear glass as well as stained-glass trefoils at the top. Southampton Archives held designs for the stained glass which was replaced in 1864/65, although much of the glass was blown out during WWII and replaced again, but this was of a poor standard and had suffered water

damage. The recent work discovered one Victorian stained-glass trefoil intact, while sherds of glass from the windows were saved after the war and are now in the museum collection.

The Bargate Lions:

Andy Russel had put together a plan and consent for the work to be undertaken and the lions were removed in 2020 and sent to Rupert Harris in London, a renowned expert on lead sculpture. Why did they need conservation? The castings had developed cracks, one of the lion's tongues was bent, the tail had fallen off one and a flag was missing, so the flagstuffs were in bad repair. The left-hand lion had a patch on top of his head which was flattened, causing his eyes to tilt upwards. One of them even had a bramble growing out of his head! A report in the Minutes of the Lease Committee was found, concerning an accident in 1891 involving the lions, with a press cutting headed "Bargate Lion Prostrated". One of the lions fell from its pedestal which was crumbling, and narrowly missed a worker who was fixing a hydrant. On the pedestal holding the left-hand lion there is still a sign for a water hydrant today, and this could perhaps explain the damage it has sustained in the past.



The Lions resplendent in new colours.

Photo – Sarah Hanna

Documentary evidence and an inscription on the left-hand lion show that they were installed in 1793 to replace the original wooden lions from the 16th century. Rupert Harris advised that he was fairly certain that the lead lion sculptures were made at the John Cheer workshop which was on Hyde Park Corner, London. This workshop (recorded in a Hogarth etching) was famous and fashionable at the time and supplied many European countries,

including some Royal Palaces. This makes our lions very significant. Whilst repairs were carried out, Andy Russel and Jo undertook research on original colours, flags and flagstuffs. Rupert Harris sent paint samples for analysis which revealed layers of ever-darkening paint used on the sculptures, with the original buff colour matched for use during the restoration. Analysis also showed the tongue and mouth to be red with white teeth. Only the claw colour could not be verified so black was used. For flags and flagstuffs, details came from photographs taken around 1890 by Thomas Hibberd James, although not in colour, with more information from the archives.

While investigating the repairs the restorer found the core material to be mainly brick dust, stones and other scrap material, and the metal armature supporting the sculpture had been patched. A new steel framework was inserted, leaving the original in place for future records. The workshop re-modelled the mane on the top of the left-hand lion using the right hand one for reference, and his eyes were repositioned. The flags and flagstuffs were corroded, with some elements missing and no detail left on them, and they had probably been replaced several times, not being as sturdy as the rest of the sculpture. The front paws were not holding the staffs, which were repositioned correctly. From an early

engraving, it was decided to insert the St George Cross, although union flags appeared in later paintings etc. Some elements of the flagstaffs were gilded as before. On 31 March 2021 the lions returned, although the 'new' colours came as a shock for many!

Update to Memorials

Jo undertook an update of around 250 memorials around the city, 166 of which are in the care of Southampton City Council. Two surprising items were a memorial to a number of Southampton people who died in the Clapham rail crash of December 1988; and one for Joe Zammit, a city taxi driver for 62 years.

Housekeeping:

This has involved lots of cleaning – the memorial to the horse Warrior at the Sports Centre; as well as removal of lots of modern graffiti, which has to be undertaken very carefully as vigorous cleaning can damage the old stonework. The Council has purchased a steam cleaner and trained members of staff to undertake the work. The Palmerston statue has been cleaned and shrubs pruned and tidied. Many bronze plaques across the city have been restored by a company in Birmingham, including those on Northam, Cobden and the Itchen bridges. Pigeon netting has been put in place on the George III statue on the Bargate, and on the ceiling of the Cross House where roosting caused a build-up of droppings.

Repairs:

A hole was found on one of the glass panels around the Cenotaph, which had been done with a hammer (the perpetrator was caught). Apparently, had another knock been taken, the panel would have shattered and it therefore cost £16000 to replace, but I bet he didn't pay for it! The Conduit House has had some attention after an attempted break in, so a new bolt was fitted. A general condition survey was undertaken and the graffiti recorded by SAS, weedkiller was applied to the roof and surrounds and shrubs cut back.

Heritage Assets Repair Programme:

£6.5m has been granted by the City Council, based on a condition survey in 2020/2021 by Pritchard Architecture on all our heritage sites. Immediate urgent works will be undertaken to the Weigh House, the town wall by West Gate, followed by Westgate Tower and steps, the Castle Bailey wall, and Holyrood Church. Major repairs are needed to the Bargate roof which has leaked for some time and the north wall is wet, eroding the masonry and delaying replacement of the shields over the gate. Castle Vault is awaiting a Southern Water survey on a leaking rain water drain which brings silt onto the floor and damaged the stonework.

Questions:

1. Would the recent list of memorials be available to the general public? Jo advised that it was not at present, but it is hoped to be made public via the website.
2. Regarding the £6.5m grant, does this include increased access to heritage sites? Better access will be possible in some instances but not all sites would be viable. Electric lighting has already been fitted to some of the vaults.
3. Alterations to enable income generation for commercial use of some heritage sites was also surveyed, but is not included in the grant.

Based on notes made by Mandy Kesby, with many thanks.