



a bus station more integrated with its surroundings? As it is, it looks for all the world as if it has been dropped into place, like a capsule, from above.

Two further town-centre sites are worth more than a passing mention. Old Wrexham clearly grew up around its sumptuous late fifteenth-century parish church of St Giles, which has the presence and proportions of a small cathedral, and can now, after clearance and road construction, be more clearly seen and appreciated. It even retains the elements which are comparable to a cathedral close.

Nearby, the High Street is certainly the most handsome of Wrexham streets with office buildings, shops and banks dating from the mid eighteenth century to the early twentieth century. No longer a focus for shopping, the buildings are now increasingly devoted to nightlife.

At one end the street is nicely blocked by the Wynnstay Arms, whose façade was saved in the early 1970s; at the other, unfortunately, it tails away into more nondescript buildings. The Eagles Meadow development, just started, which includes a new Debenham's store, a bowling alley, and some town centre housing as well as public areas and concourses, may bring greater coherence to this part of town; but the old Borders

Brewery building, which has been transformed into flats, does this district no favours; its texture is shabby and has an unfinished appearance.

As will have been noted, the new Wrexham is not yet sufficiently integrated into the old. It is not beyond local ingenuity to remedy these defects – and indeed, perhaps where it matters most, there are models which could well be imitated. The first of them is still very definitely “old Wrexham”, containing two of the town's nineteenth-century market halls – the Butchers' Market and General (Butter) Market. These still flourish, but more importantly the winding lanes and arcades which connect them, successfully linked with the major shopping development in Henblas Square, make for a most pleasant enclave. It is such a pity that the modern “People's Market”, incorporating a multi-storey car park is, by contrast, so execrable.

The area centred on the Guildhall is evolving into the town's “cultural quarter”. The Guildhall itself (built 1959-61), it is interesting to note, was modelled on Stockholm City Hall. The Library and Arts Centre, across the town centre park, built a decade later, is described by Edward Hubbard (*The Buildings of Wales: Clwyd*, 1986), as “a pleasure to visit and to use” (so it still is).

The park is much used as a sitting area by the students of the nearby Yale Sixth Form College. The college building itself is a successful transformation of the old War Memorial Hospital (1923), saved from demolition after a campaign by the Civic Society; the society has every right to be satisfied with the open and urbane space that has been created.

The Cultural Quarter might have become merely a collection of assorted buildings, none of them without merit, but lacking connection with each other. Not only has this been

avoided, but through an imaginatively laid out town square the quarter can be experienced as a whole, and is fully unified with the rest of the town centre, to which it is linked by pedestrianised shopping streets. That the square can, quite naturally and informally, accommodate street markets and an annual ice rink, as well as provide a pleasant area to watch Wrexham walk by, is a tribute to joined-up thinking. Here at least, the new has taken on board the best features of the old.

Doubtless Wrexham will continue to evolve, and may perhaps once more aspire to become a city. It was, after all, once the biggest town in Wales. Its potential to achieve city status would certainly be strengthened if the idea of a major public space for the performing arts was dusted off. Some years ago the County Borough shied off a plan to build a theatre, partly on the grounds that there was already a centre of theatrical excellence at Theatr Clwyd, in Mold. But the sub-region – and that includes Chester and Shrewsbury – has no purpose-built hall for music of all kinds and Wrexham, if money and imagination were available, could well remedy its absence. Meanwhile, if, as may reasonably be expected, Thomas Telford's Pont Cysyllte, (part of “Greater” Wrexham), is designated a World Heritage Site, who knows what effect that might have on Wrexham's status?

Info

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