The Street Abbreviated

A shortened history of Newland Street

Guithavon Road Bridge, Witham

elaine tribley, 2010

In January 2010 visual artist, Elaine Tribley, was awarded a commission by Essex County Council to create a design for the new bridge being constructed in Guithavon Road, Witham. The bridge crosses the stream which runs from the River Brain and according to records will be the third bridge to be built in this position. In the book 'Witham River Bridges' published in 1972, M.L. Smith writes:

'Further downstream is a bridge in Guithavon Road. It has always been a parish bridge as it does not lie on a main road. In fact, it was not until 1855 that this road was dedicated to the public. In July 1860, opinion was expressed that the bridge should be removed and a new one erected in iron or brick. It was not until May 1862 that tender was accepted for its repair. The bridge was reported once more as being unsafe in 1912 due to the decay of timbers resting upon the brickwork. In January 1914 the Surveyor was instructed to obtain plans and tenders for a new reinforced concrete bridge. The date 1914 with the letters "W.U.D.C." are plainly to be seen on the present bridge.'

Images of the 1914 bridge in January 2010

Demolished in January 2010 the 1914 bridge has been replaced by a new concrete bridge re-opened to the public in April 2010. The design created by Elaine Tribley was grit blasted onto the concrete parapets away from site and delivered and lowered into place individually by crane.

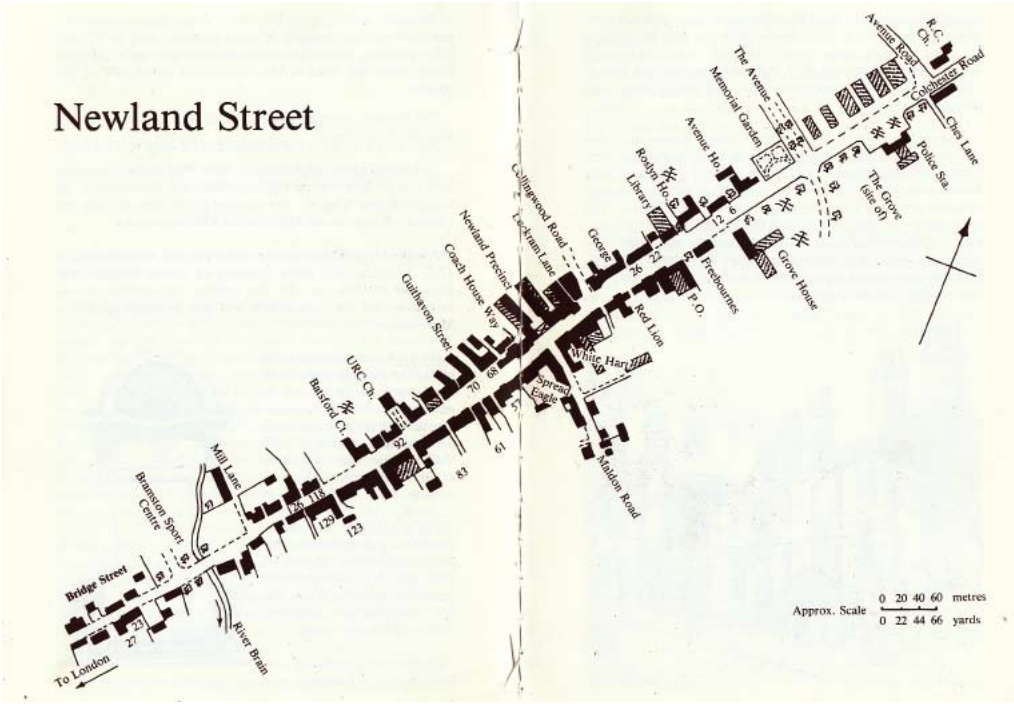
This document records the thought process behind the final artwork, both the imagery on the outside of the bridge parapets and the quote which runs along the traffic side of the new concrete bridge.

Newland Street Histories

Forming part of the conservation area in Witham, Newland Street is the main route through Witham, and up until the 1960's when the A12 bypass was constructed, was the main route from London to Colchester. The medieval marketplace is a recognisable feature of the streetscape where Newland Street broadens and as well as preserving the medieval street plan, the conservation area also takes in the Victorian expansion of the town. The variety of periods represented makes this a remarkably rich historic townscape, many buildings have survived from the medieval and early modern period, but it is the Georgian period that has the greatest visual impact. Many older timber-framed buildings were refaced in brick and graced with elegant sash windows and classical details, whilst retaining variety in rooflines that add interest to the street scene. The Georgian façades in Newland Street, create a sense of grandeur which is exceptional in the county.

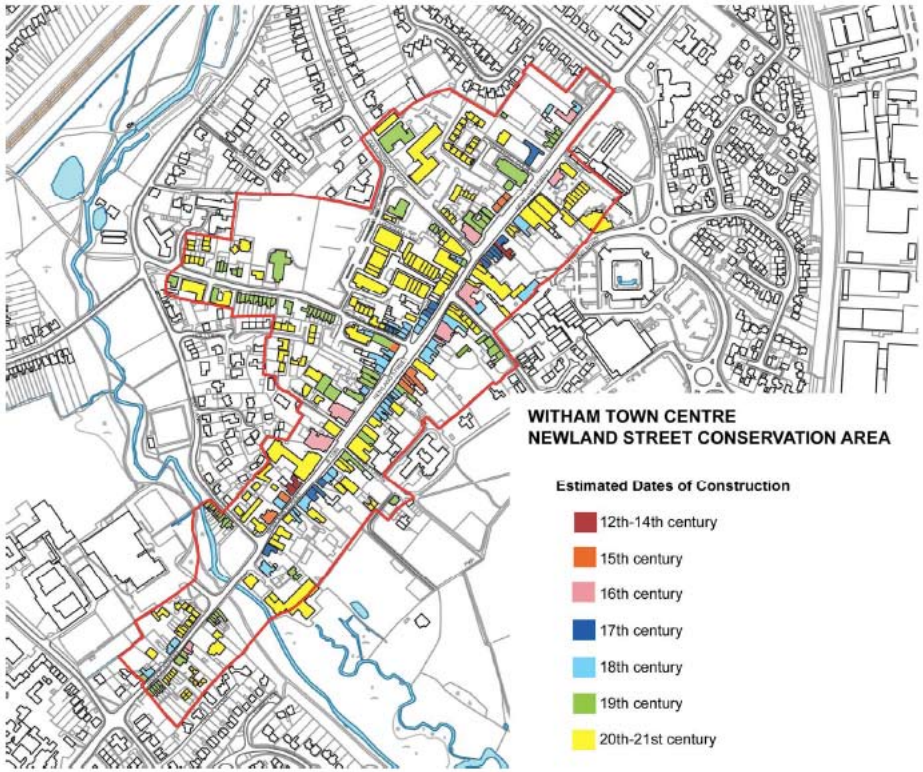
Although Newland Street is essentially a long, straight street it has a varied character which changes along its length, this is emphasised by the changing relationship between the building line and height. There are 57 buildings within the conservation area that are included in the List of Buildings of Special Architectural and Historical Interest compiled in 1973. As many older buildings were re-fronted in the Georgian period, the current appearance of Newland Street masks the number of older timber-framed buildings that have survived, some of medieval date. There are several substantial and prominent buildings from the 16th-century, reflecting Witham's prosperity as a market town these include the coaching inns of the White Hart and the Spread Eagle and Battesford Court which is an imposing building of 16th-century origin now with a three-storey brick façade.

Newland Street, 1832



Artwork featured on the exterior walls of bridge overlooking the River Brain

Newland Street has a rich variety of historically interesting buildings scattered along its length interspersed with modern shop units and concrete office structures. The artwork takes a small selection of these historic buildings and re-creates an abbreviated street, condensing centuries of histories and evoking a refreshed curiosity in these now displaced buildings.



outline sketch

bridge sections

Featured Buildings

White Hall at the top of Newland Street has an early Palladian facade and low pitch slate roof. It was the home of the Blood family in the latter part of the 19th century and later became a boys' school. It was converted into a cinema in 1926 with the addition of the auditorium behind. It was then restored by Essex County Council who received a Civic Trust Award in 1982 and now functions as the town's library.

The White Hart on the corner of Maldon Road is a timber framed former coaching inn. The building dates from the 15th century, was extended in the 16th century and in the 19th century received a new roof and decorative woodwork on the front elevation. In the 1840's Rebecca Cook, a descendant of Captian Cook, was hostess.

The Spread Eagle is 16th century with decorative 19th century bargeboards. There may well have been an inn here since 1300, the date proclaimed on the front bay. A document dated 1399 with the seal of Pope Boniface IX and relating to St Alban's Abbey was left here long ago, according to local tradition, it is now at the Essex Records Office. A sketch of the Spread Eagle by Adam Home was published in the Second World War as part of the 'Dear Homeland' series, designed to inspire patriotic fervour.

The Town Hall at 61 Newland Street dates back to the late 14th century when it was known as The George Inn set in a perfect position for travellers and horses on route from London to Colchester, Ipswich and Norwich. In the 1800's the lathe and plaster building was re-fronted in brick, the roof line raised and false windows inserted to be in keeping with its Georgian neighbours, and it was taken over as the town's bank. Early in the 20th century it became a tobacconist with bars added to side and ground floor windows to protect its precious stocks! In 1993 the building was purchased by the Town Council and refurbished, it now houses the Town Council offices, function rooms and the town's Visitor Information Centre.

Nos 155-157 Newland Street form an Edwardian building with an important place in the history of Witham. Built around 1911 and designed by the local architect, Harry W Mann - killed in the First World War, the building was originally the home of Glovers' Motor Works but later became the workshops where ginetti made their iconic sports cars.

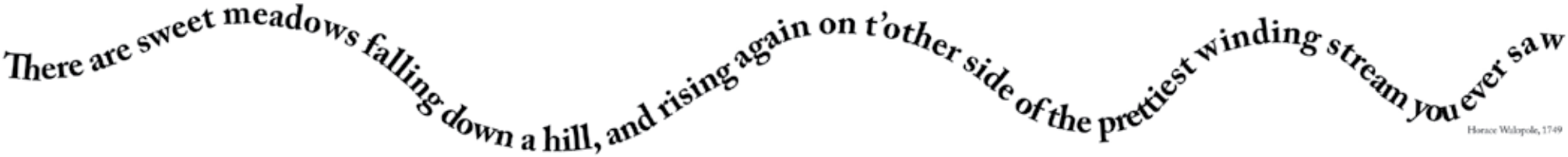
Social life flourished in the 18th century, and in 1757 a cock fight was advertised in 'a very handsome pit at 'The Black Boy' now known as **The Red Lion**. This historic Inn was also the choice of drinking establishment for the husband of Dorothy Sayers, the novelist, playwright and theologian. Major Atherton Fleming arrived with Dorothy in the early 1930's and became a regular at the Red Lion. This building was the third in Witham to be given the name The Red Lion.


TOWN HALL


RED LION

Text on the interior walls of bridge (traffic side)

The bridge takes traffic and pedestrians over the River Brain, a river which disects Witham and forms the route of a river walk established 40 years ago and stemming from Whetmead Nature Reserve where the Brain meets the River Blackwater. The river was the delight of Horace Walpole on his travels through the area in the 18th century.



Horace Walpole the 4th Earl of Orford (24 September 1717 – 2 March 1797), was an English art historian, man of letters, antiquarian and politician. He is now largely remembered for Strawberry Hill, the home he built in Twickenham, and for coining the word 'Serendipity'. In 1749 he wrote 'what pleases me most in my travels was Dr. Sayer's parsonage at Witham ... one of the most charming villas in England. 'There are sweet meadows falling down a hill, and rising again on t'other side of the prettiest winding stream you ever saw.'

To further echo the words of Walpole the text flows with them and the suggested river, and is set in a typeface of the same era, Caslon.

The typeface Caslon was designed by English gunsmith and typeface designer, William Caslon I (1692–1766) in 1722. It is cited as the first original typeface of English origin.

The Caslon types were distributed throughout the British Empire, including British North America. Caslon's types were immediately successful and used in many historic documents, including the US Declaration of Independence. After William Caslon I's death, the use of his types diminished, but saw a revival between 1840–80 as a part of the British Arts & Crafts Movement. The Caslon design is still widely used today. For many years a common rule of thumb of printers and typesetters was "when in doubt, use Caslon," particularly if no typeface was specified.

Several revivals of Caslon do not include a bold weight. This is because it was unusual practice to use bold weights in typesetting during the 18th century, and Caslon never designed one.