



# NEWSLETTER

## SUMMER 2022

Weymouth Civic Society works to conserve the historic towns and harbours of Weymouth & Portland and to enhance their built environment.

## Nothe Fort wins the Prize of Best Small Visitor Attraction In England

The Civic Society runs two museums in Weymouth, Tudor House and The Nothe Fort. Thanks to the work of the management team, chaired by James Farquharson, the staff and, above all the volunteers, Nothe Fort was recognised by Visit England as the best small attraction in the country. The prize was awarded to James and Keith Holdaway by Clare Balding at a ceremony in Birmingham.

Driving up, James and Keith convinced themselves that coming third would be a great honour, so as the bronze and then the silver were awarded to other attractions, the magnitude of being *the best in England* sank in. The award was given not only for the quality of what could be experienced, but also for our inclusivity and community involvement.

Further recognition came more recently from Weymouth's own Business Awards as "Business of the Year" and for "Best Community support". There is a clear trend emerging...



# CIVIC SOCIETY ANNUAL AWARDS



After two, frustrating Covid years, the Society was, finally able to recognise the enterprise, imagination and skills of local individuals and business people with the presentation of the 2020 and 2021 Awards to recognise their care and concern for our local area. After postponements and delays, we were eventually able to present the blue Plaques of the **2020 and 2021 Annual Awards** at an open air ceremony on Custom House Quay on a bright, cold but mercifully dry day in December 2021



Dr Keith Holdaway, chairman of the Society, presented the 2020 blue Plaque to Claire Hoff representing Mickey Jones of DJ Property for the restoration and re-purposing of the historic John Deheers warehouse. Instead of the run-down Sharkey's, the building now houses five up-market apartments and the E-Bike café. Moving a few metres along the Quay, Sean Cooper was presented with the 2021 Plaque for the transformation of the Old Fish Market selling high quality, locally caught fresh fish with a much-praised restaurant in the extended upper storey.

These two high quality restoration projects represented almost everything we hope to find in such schemes. The character and features of the two listed buildings, representing Weymouth's former importance as a working port, have been retained and restored but they have also been brought up to 21<sup>st</sup> century environmental standards and imaginatively repurposed for modern uses. New and existing businesses have been invented, extended or modernised to take advantage of their prime position, securing and developing much needed job opportunities. In May we held a more conventional Award ceremony, with guests from Weymouth and Portland Town Councils, local organisations and Society members gathered, socially distanced, at Hope Church in Trinity Street to celebrate our two Annual Award winners and a splendid range of other projects.



We do not specify particular categories for our awards. Our aim is to recognise the widest possible range of modern or traditional new buildings, of restorations and refurbishments, imaginative new ideas and attractive designs which blend with the old. We notice whole estates by locally important

developers or small detailed improvements by individuals. Our only unbreakable criteria are that they protect or enhance the public domain through quality of design and execution, with flair and imagination anywhere in our area of interest south of the Ridgeway.

Temporary or smaller scale improvements often receive a **Letter of appreciation**. This year we recognised, among others, Weymouth Museum for camouflaging the neglect of a much loved landmark with a bit of paint and a lot of imagination (window displays at Brewers' Quay), and two friends who used their craft skills and spare time to provide a resting place for passing strangers by building a dry-stone bench near Portland Bill.



Examples from the list of **Commendations** awarded for significant works to individual buildings or more permanent works, include the renovation of the long neglected Round House, 2-4 Coburg Place (now Goadsby's), significant



improvements to Portland Museum's building, a group of neighbours working together, (including finding a path through bureaucratic

complications) to brighten up a small street with extensive planting (Wesley Street flowers): while one resident's "labour of love" rebuilding a fine Victorian boundary wall, mainly with the original bricks, helped to preserve the character of the Lodmoor Hill Conservation Area.



**Certificates of Merit** are awarded for larger scale works of high quality, often requiring significant commitment of time and money. Such works usually require the involvement of companies or official bodies like local authorities. The new Lorton Park Estate at Broadway, modern, but sympathetic to vernacular styles in natural materials and, importantly, designed to encourage the development of a neighbourly community and the development by Dorset Council of the Ferry Steps area of the harbour are current examples.

Please take the time to visit the Society web site where you will find the details of these and all the other deserving projects which received awards in May. (Link below.)

<http://weymouthcivicsociety.org/awards.html>

To celebrate more than 40 years of our awards, we are also holding an exhibition at the Nothe Fort in the middle of September during Architectural Heritage Fortnight 2022. This will display some of the most significant buildings which have been past winners of our coveted Blue Plaques. Pictures with commentary to draw attention to many of the most interesting buildings that make up our historical legacy and some fine modern buildings which continue to enhance our wonderful built environment.

**Pauline Crump**

Chair, Planning and Environment Committee

## Nothe Fort 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

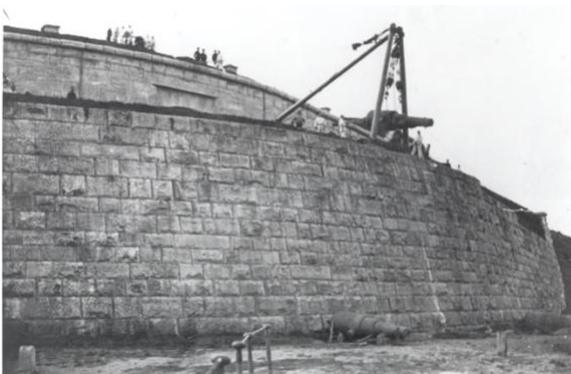
This year marks the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Nothe Fort becoming operational in November 1872. However, the construction work was largely completed three years earlier, with the Royal Engineers who had done most of the construction leaving for Malta in January 1870 after finishing their work late in 1869.

The fort was then left for over a year until February 1871 when a company of Royal Artillery commanded by Captain Tatton-Brown, accompanied by 10 women and 24 children, arrived to install the gunport iron shields and guns.

So why the lack of urgency to arm the fort? Work was underway to design better shields to protect casemate gun positions from enemy fire at the time so they would have wanted to wait until the new shields were available. But probably the main reason was that there was no military threat from France at the time as she was struggling to maintain control over her Algerian colony and had been heavily defeated in a war with the German states.

Back in Weymouth the first step for the Royal Artillery in March 1871 was to start installation of nine of the ten 9-ton iron shields. These were hoisted up the external walls onto the terrace, then moved into position using a temporary railway built on the terrace.

### Hoisting the guns onto the terrace



The ten main guns which were transported from the Woolwich foundry by boat were too heavy to bring into the fort over the drawbridge, so were unloaded underneath the walls, then

hoisted up onto the terrace using sheerlegs. They were then swung into the fort via the gunport which had not had its shield fitted.

The first clear evidence of a gun being installed comes from March 1872 when the local newspaper reported on a theatrical performance in the gun room in the presence of a gun. There was a further delivery of guns in September.

Work was completed by November 1872 when the specialist Royal Artillery battery who installed the guns left for Halifax (Canada) and were replaced by a standard Royal Artillery garrison battery (21<sup>st</sup> Battery No 5 Brigade) under Lieutenant Ford.

There does not seem to have been any official opening ceremony for the Nothe Fort and in fact the opening ceremony for the Breakwater by Edward Prince of Wales in August 1872 only took place at the instigation of Weymouth Council.

At the Nothe only the ten main coastal defence guns that protected Portland Harbour were installed initially. None of the land defence weapons had been authorised by the Army Defence Committee, so the fort was missing the planned 64-Pounders in the first two casemates which covered Weymouth beach, 32-Pounder Caponier guns, parade ground mortars and mobile 40-Pounders intended to fire across the Glacis. The official reason for delaying the land defence weapons does not seem to have survived in the records, but it's probably that although an enemy ship may conceivably attack shipping in Portland Harbour there was no serious risk of a major land attack on the fort at the time.

The land defence weapons were finally installed sometime after March 1878, although it's doubtful whether the caponier guns were ever operational even though they were delivered to the fort.

*Geoff Culver*

*Volunteer in the Nothe Fort curatorial team*