

Dear Councillor,

Lansdown Industrial Estate in Cheltenham is owned by Cheshire West and Chester Council. The Council has applied for outline planning permission to demolish half the site and to erect in its place 215 dwellings.

We are writing to all councillors in Cheshire West and Chester Council and Cheltenham Borough Council because you may not be aware of this scheme and the damage it could do to Cheltenham's heritage. We are certain that this scheme would not be tolerated in a beautiful and historically significant city such as Chester and are disappointed that it is being proposed for Cheltenham.

We request that you put a stop to the proposed application and that you will push for an alternative that enables the retention of historic fabric while enabling selective development that would still produce financial returns.

Why is it important?

Lansdown Industrial Estate is critical to Cheltenham's manufacturing heritage. Both Councils are aware of the significance of heritage to their respective areas yet this application has failed to acknowledge or preserve Cheltenham's industrial heritage. We have gone into more detail on the following pages but this site was where Whitehall's Cenotaph was carved, the Speaker's Chair of the House of Commons created and where the massive clear-span roof of Bristol Temple Meads Station was cast, amongst many other important creations. The Gloster Aircraft Company was founded on the site in 1917. George Dowty was a draughtsman here. He went on to establish Dowty Engineering in 1931 with funding from HH Martyn.

A poor heritage appraisal

The heritage appraisal prepared by one of Chester's consultants contains numerous errors, uses out-of-date sources and omits a considerable amount of the history of Lansdown Industrial Estate that has since been uncovered and published, or soon to be published.

Local historian, Jill Waller, is the only person to have fully researched the site's history but was not contacted by Chester's consultants.

On behalf of Cheltenham Civic Society, she has identified some 65 mistakes, errors and omissions in Chester's 60-page appraisal.

Waller is also in complete disagreement with the appraisal's conclusions that the collection of buildings on the site is not of any great national or local interest. In contrast, they are of local interest because they are so unexpected in Cheltenham, a town which has forgotten its industrial heritage, having promoted itself as a 'Festival Town'.

"A proposal such as this simply would not be permitted to desecrate Chester's rich heritage so why should it be acceptable to destroy Cheltenham's?"

An alternative approach could retain our heritage and be significantly greener while still providing financial value for Chester's pension funds.

There is no need to flatten this important site.

The selective removal of modern and poor-quality buildings would create space for some 10,400 sqm of residential development with a Gross Development Value (GDV) of up to £25m, and a resale value with planning consent of about £9m.

In addition, redevelopment of the Arts & Crafts buildings and industrial mill could create up to 59 residential flats (GDV £10.3m) or live/work units or commercial units. Their distinct style lend themselves to high-end, top value units.

Finally, by creatively reusing the heritage buildings, a high-quality area could be created along the lines of Kings Cross Coal Drops Yard, Bicester Heritage or Bristol Paintworks, yielding premium rents and long-term vitality and economic sustainability.

Reworking the proposal would reduce the capital generation but improve the longer term rental income, and increase the investment value of the estate if it were to be sold. Thus it would still create significant financial value for Cheshire West and Chester Council with appropriate protection of an important heritage site.

Poor pre-app consultation

Chester's pre-app consultation was undertaken by a leading national public relations agency that specialises in the built environment and has offices in Cheltenham. We are aware that it has probably got the longest track record of managing public consultation on major developments of any such firm in the UK.

However, its work on this development proposal was far below par, with its community involvement report reading like a perfunctory tick-box exercise.

With Cheltenham Civic Society being one of the Borough Council's formal consultees on all planning applications, it is almost unbelievable that such an experienced firm failed to identify the Society as one of the most significant stakeholder interest groups in Cheltenham's planning process!

Localism Act duties

Under section 110 of the Localism Act 2011, Councils have a Duty to Cooperate in relation to the planning of sustainable development, the preparation of development plan documents, and the preparation of other local development documents, and in activities that can reasonably be considered to prepare the way for these activities that are, or could be, contemplated. This includes other prescribed bodies, such as pension funds. We are concerned that this duty has not been demonstrated to its fullest extent by either Cheshire West and Chester Council or Cheltenham Borough Council.

We invite you to read the following pages in which we summarise the proposed development and offer alternative options that are financially and operationally viable. These seek to make the most of the site's important history while balancing heritage protection with investment potential.

We cannot allow Cheltenham's industrial heritage to be destroyed by one council with the support of its own council.

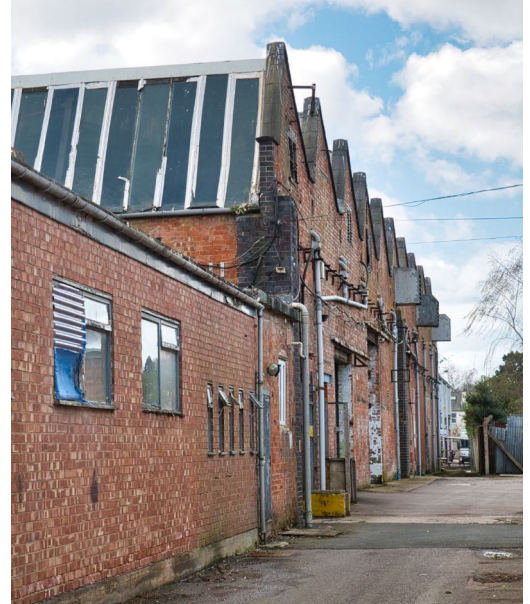
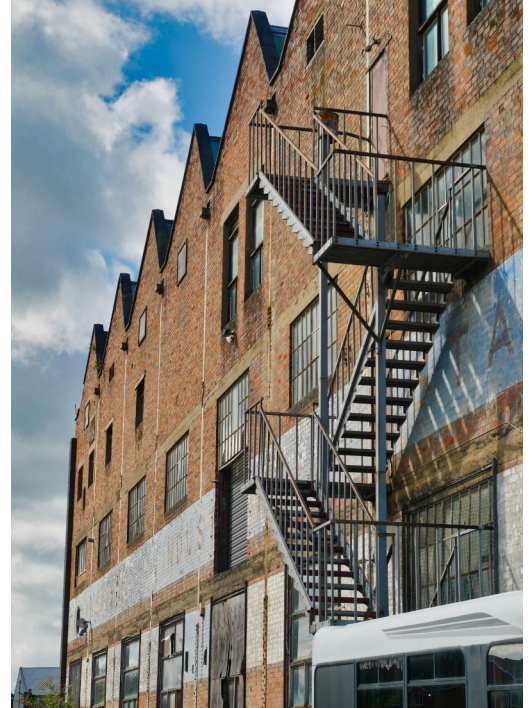
Cheltenham Borough Council must reject the proposal and demand a scheme that is better for our heritage, our environment and our economy.

Cheshire West and Chester Council must submit a proposal that respects Cheltenham's heritage and is of the quality that Chester itself would expect of such an application in its own city.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Booton
Chair, Cheltenham Civic Society



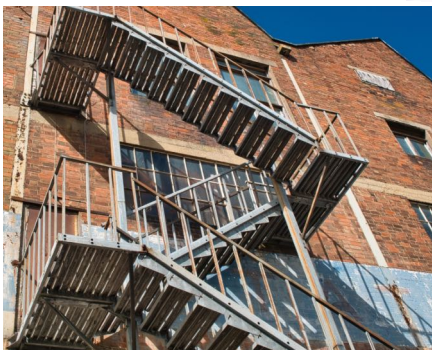
Preserving some of our most important industrial heritage in Lansdown Industrial Estate

Cheshire West and Chester Council owns Lansdown Industrial Estate, near to Lansdown Railway Station. Its outline planning application to demolish buildings in the northern half of the site and replace them with up to 215 dwellings crammed into small plots is unimaginative, being dominated by 6-foot garden fences, vehicle access and parking.

However, this isn't just about housing. It's about Cheltenham's heritage, its environmental policies and the passive and often unthinking and incoherent approach to planning.

Chester's plan

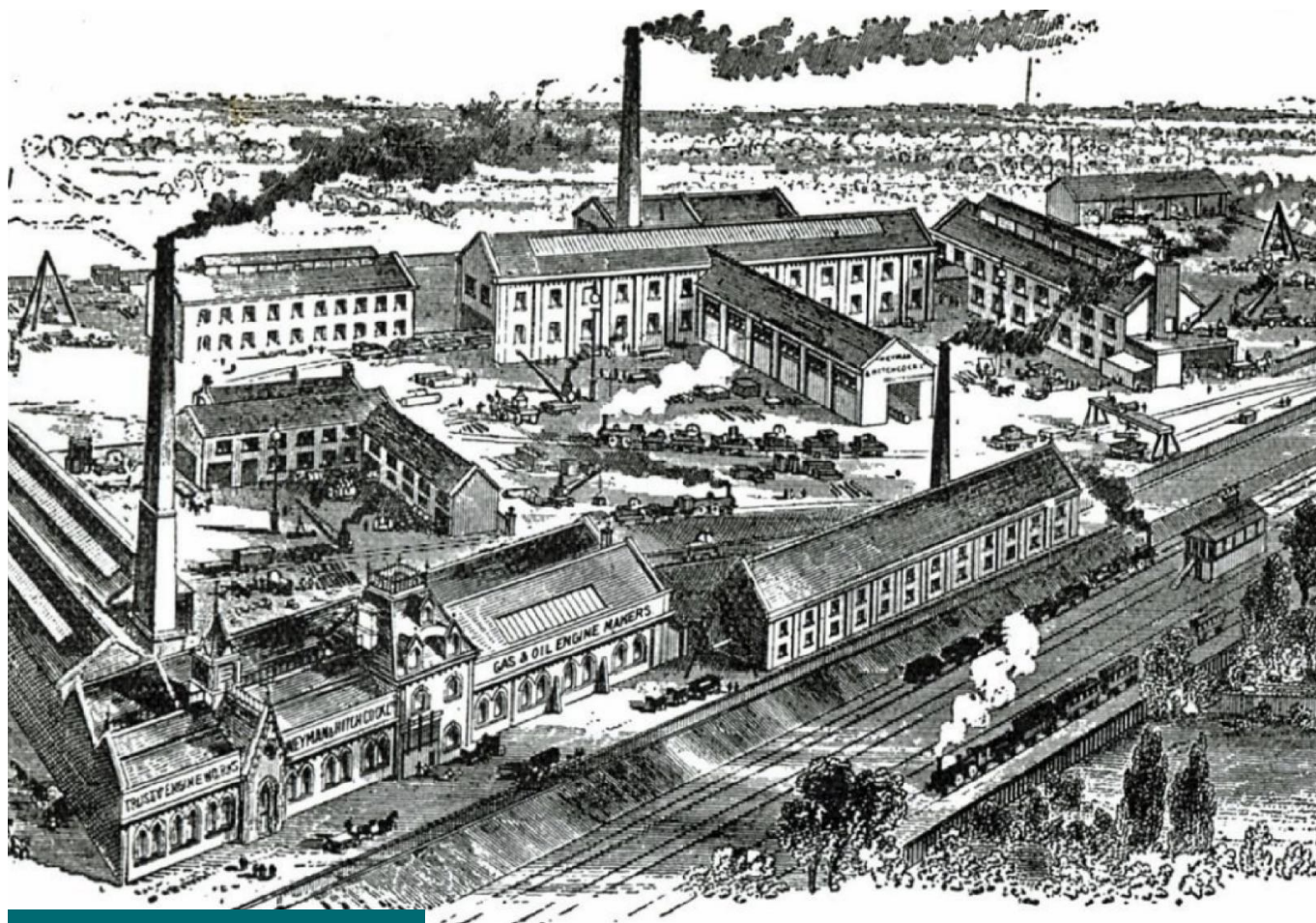
Involves wholesale demolition of the industrial heritage with a banal redevelopment cramming in some 215 flats and houses.



Proposed demolition rather than re-use of some of Cheltenham's most attractive industrial heritage.



Replacement by poor-quality housing subdivided by a forest of 6ft timber fencing!



ISSUE: Heritage

It has suited Cheltenham to portray itself as a genteel town that grew up as a high-class health and holiday spa resort following the discovery of mineral springs in 1716. This snobbery has hidden the town's rich industrial heritage, built on a supply chain of raw materials from the Forest of Dean and high-quality craftsmanship that built and fitted out the town's beautiful buildings. Cheltenham has ignored its incredible heritage as a place of invention, craftsmanship and opportunism.

Lansdown Industrial Estate was where the Gloster Aircraft Company was founded in 1917. By the spring of 1918, the company was producing 45 new Bristol Fighter aircraft per week. George Dowty was a draughtsman there, who went on to establish Dowty Engineering in 1931 with funding from HH Martyn.

The buildings on the Lansdown site range from mid-Victorian factories and mill through Arts & Crafts canteen and

lavatory buildings (c.1917) to 1980s big box warehouses. The buildings themselves are notable and in good condition – if one overlooks the dilapidation that the landlord has permitted. The 3-storey mill appears to have one of the earliest pot and beam floors in the country, which is the predecessor of block and beam flooring.

On this site between 1864 and 1972, a string of foundries and manufacturers turned out the best bronze and ironwork for the most notable commissions.

These included the Bristol Exchange courtyard roof, the College of Arms railings and gates, London (originally at Goodrich Court, 1870s), the 125-foot clear span Bristol Temple Meads roof (1876), Guildhall gates and railings, Worcester (1880), The Cenotaph, Whitehall (1919-20) and even the Speaker's Chair for the House of Commons (1950). They are all now Grade I listed structures.

It is estimated that HH Martyn's factory cast 75% of the UK's art metalwork between 1920-38. It was the town's largest employer with 1,000 men on site by 1920.

While the site is best remembered for HH Martyn, its most recent owner / occupier, it is the consistent and high-quality history of the site that should be acknowledged and conserved.

It is not just a pity but a travesty that there is so little acknowledgement or understanding of the town's industrial history and specifically on this crucial site.



Temple Meads' roof in Bristol

POLICY MD1: LANSDOWN INDUSTRIAL ESTATE

Site description	The site is capable of redevelopment for mixed-use, including a continued element of employment in better-quality units together with some new residential development. There would be a net loss of employment land but this should be offset by an upgrade in the quality and density of premises.
Site area	5.5ha
Constraints	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Contaminated land• Highways access
Site specific requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Employment led regeneration which may include an element of residential development provided that existing provision is offset by a net gain in the quality (see Policy EM2) and / or the number of jobs provided on the site• Measures to mitigate the impact of noise and vibration caused by railway line• Safe, easy and convenient pedestrian and cycle links within the site and to key centres• A layout and form that respects the existing urban characteristics of the vicinity

Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC) set the planning policy for this site in the Cheltenham Plan (adopted 2020 – see panel above).

CBC sees the site being used for 'employment-led regeneration which may include an element of residential development.' That means employment opportunities should dominate the whole site with some residential infill. That has already started to happen by infilling Roman Road with residential units as industrial units are demolished, benefitting the residential area and the landlord's wallet.

However, planning officers have been complicit in permitting an application for the wholesale demolition of the proposed site. Pre-application advice has obviously not focused on the employment requirement of Policy MD1 and officers have obviously failed to impart CBC's environmental

concerns. Put simply, officers have followed a tick-box approach rather than seeking to add value to the proposal or to enforce compliance with a policy that is barely two years old.

Let's also consider the bigger picture for Cheltenham's employment land. CBC is permitting the encirclement of Kingsditch Industrial Estate to the west with over 4,000 dwellings.

Not only will this cut off any expansion space for Kingsditch, it will create traffic problems that will limit the availability and range of commercial units, drive expansion into unsustainable land elsewhere and take up potential employment land. No wonder Cheltenham has a problem attracting and retaining businesses, and with retaining young people in the town!

The Localism Act 2011 places a duty to cooperate on local and national authorities. Customarily, this has been understood to relate to neighbouring authorities to ensure sustainable delivery of plans.

However, the Act is silent on geography, so we should read it to include all local planning authorities.

Cheshire West and Chester Council could claim that the site is owned by its pension fund but HM Land Registry shows the site is owned in the name of the Council.

Details aside, there is no way a city so rich in heritage would accept such a poor-quality scheme at the expense of its history, and we should not accept such in our borough either.

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ISSUE: Environment

Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC) has been trumpeting its environmental beliefs for years, but despite this, it still has yet to present hard planning policies that help to address its self-declared climate emergency.

To achieve net zero, we must find new uses for our old buildings, not simply demolish them to completely redevelop sites – thereby releasing thousands of tonnes of carbon and embodying much more.

The size, build quality, architectural features and layout of these older buildings lends them to reuse. Their 'industrial style' is trendy and enduring and with some imagination and modest investment, these buildings could not just be brought back to life but could become desirable premises and flagship investments.



There is an enormous amount of carbon embodied in the existing buildings.

Wholesale demolition and re-development is the least sustainable solution.

ISSUE: Consultation

The pre-app consultation undertaken for Chester by a locally-based public relations agency was one of the poorest such exercises we have ever seen.

There was a complete failure to identify key stakeholders other than the ward councillors, site occupiers and immediate neighbours – so there was no consultation with a number of relevant interest groups such as Cheltenham Civic Society.

The selected consultation zone was absolutely minimal, being restricted to an area that at best extended to no more than about 150 metres from the site boundaries.

Wordy invitation letters to participate in the consultation appear to have been the only communication attempt to

engage with those within the consultation zone. And these letters contained little in the way of scheme descriptions and facts, with no scheme plans or illustrations provided at all.

A minimal 4-page project website also provided very limited information and relied on visitors downloading a large document to find more details.

There was also no face-to-face consultation at all. While that is understandable given the Covid restrictions in force at the time, the online event was somewhat technically challenged and succeeded in attracting only 39 people.

That's quite a contrast when compared with the week-long public exhibition the same agency organised in the late

1980s for the similarly sized Black & White site plans – which, after an extensive publicity campaign, attracted more than 4,000 townspeople.

But Chester's attempt to engage with the town's wider population in this consultation was limited to a single press release that was sent to only some of the local media. As a result, the level of awareness about the scheme across Cheltenham was almost non-existent.

An alternative

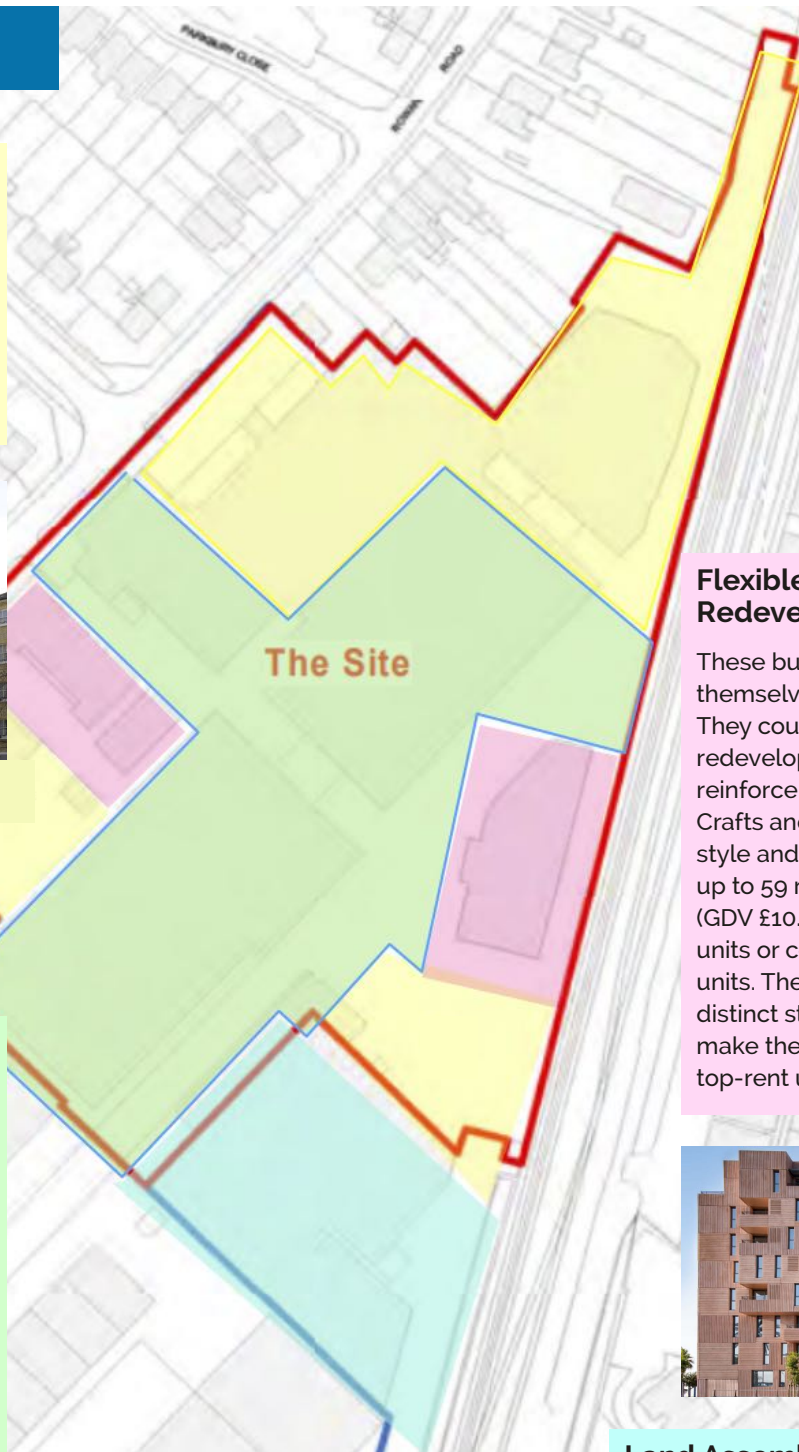
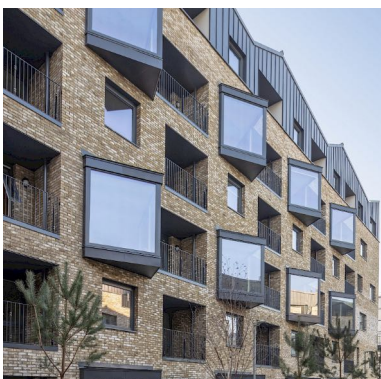
Enabling Development

This space could be developed with residential or mixed-use spaces. Covering some 10,400 sqm, it could have a GDV of up to £12m and a resale value with planning consent of up to £5m.



Commercial

Much of the site would be retained as commercial space, making the most of its industrial style to create a stylish, high-quality working environment with cafés, events and soft landscaping. Cheltenham has strong demand for high-quality commercial space, complementing its strong retail market and high-status lifestyle offer.



Flexible Redevelopment

These buildings lend themselves to reuse. They could be redeveloped to reinforce their Arts & Crafts and industrial style and could provide up to 59 residential flats (GDV £10.3m), live/work units or commercial units. The benefit of their distinct style could make them high-end, top-rent units.



Land Assembly

This land is outside the ownership of the applicant but lends itself to simultaneous development, especially as the neighbouring enabling development is presently leased to the owner. The owner operates buses from the site, which is awkward to enter and exit from safely at the Gloucester Road junction.

It's time for them to relocate?





Commando Memorial, Spean Bridge



Temple Gardens gates, London

Conclusion

Cheltenham yet again is on the verge of destroying some of its important heritage and ignoring its own environmental standards for the short-term gain of a poor-quality housing scheme.

We cannot allow this to happen. We must do better.

Cheltenham Borough Council needs to reject the proposal and adopt a scheme that is better for our heritage, our environment and our economy.

Chester's proposal fails on every level. Cheshire West and Chester Council should withdraw its application, consult again (properly) and return with a proposal that respects Cheltenham's heritage and is of the quality that Chester itself would expect of such an application in its own city. ●

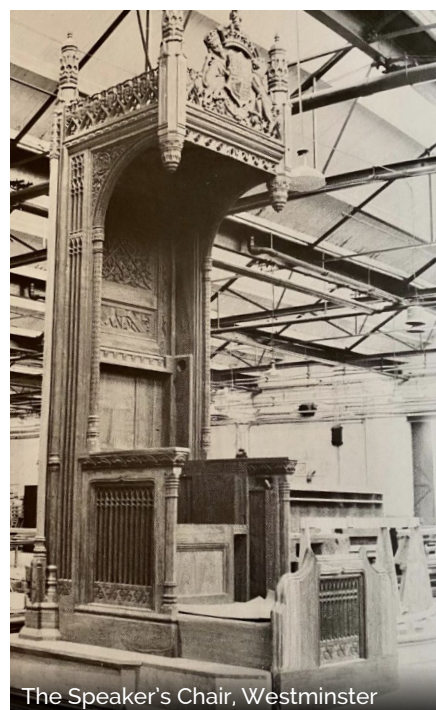


The Cenotaph, London



The College of Arms gates, London

Exemplary wood, stone, plaster, metal and glass work was created by firms based on Lansdown Industrial Estate. HH Martyn employed 1,000 people there in 1920 and the firm cast 75% of the UK's art metalwork. Gloster Aircraft Company was formed on the site. George Dowty worked there before founding Dowty Engineering with a loan from HH Martyn.



The Speaker's Chair, Westminster