Usk is a small town in Monmouthshire. It sits on the River Usk and developed as a small market town, with some industry including Japanware and a prison. In 2011 the resident population was approx. 2,800.

Over the years Usk Civic Society have been responsible for a wide range of outdoor artefacts, from benches, fingerposts, town maps placed in poster cases, a memorial for Lord Raglan, pavement plaques to denote the edges of the first and second Roman forts and a large number of blue plaques.

Usk currently has 31 plaques placed around the town. The first 2 were mounted in the late 1970s, and 28 others from 2003 onwards. A further plaque was commissioned for AR Wallace with a portrait and dedication. This is sited near his birthplace beside the River Usk. The Society has no ongoing plans for more plaques but would be happy to look at any suggestions.

The society considered the installation of plaques fulfilled their aim of education, sustainability and the promotion of civic pride.

The process Usk followed to designate/mount plaques

1 How was it decided who should have a plaque?
A list of possibilities was drawn up the society’s (then) secretary John Barrow and put to the committee.

2 What topics do the plaques commemorate?
With the exception of 3 plaques for Trelawney, AR Wallace and St David Lewis (see pictures above right, bottom image) the plaques all mark historic buildings and sites in and around Usk.

In contrast to English Heritage’s approach the Society didn’t have a rule that an event should have occurred or that people should have been dead for a certain number of years before a plaque was designated.

3 How was the location of a plaque decided upon?
The decision was made in consultation with the site owner, Monmouthshire Council’s Conservation officer and Highways Officer, as appropriate.

4 How were the building owners contacted?
The Society, particularly two people John Barrow and Stella Collard, spent a lot of time and effort, and tact. Requests were mainly greeted with enthusiasm.

5 How are plaques made and how much does it cost to have a plaque made and placed on a building?
Ned Heywood, a potter from Chepstow, made 28 of the plaques. He made several prototypes until he was satisfied with the results. He can be contacted through his website http://www.blue-plaques.org.uk. Usk Civic Society awarded Ned Heywood the commission, having previously obtained estimates from two established suppliers, on the basis of a keen price, his willingness to install the plaques and his proven craftsmanship in projects at
Chepstow and Monmouth. The fact that he was locally based was also helpful.

The AR Wallace plaque was made by Mossfords of Cardiff and Cwmbran http://www.mossfords.co.uk/. The total cost for the 28 plaques was £10,860.

6 How was the cost of the plaques afforded?
The project was supported by an 80% grant from the Welsh Assembly Government and administered by the Welsh Development Agency under Article 33 of the Rural Development Plan for Wales, which had money specifically for Monmouthshire. The Society's own funds contributed to 20% of the total cost, helped in the first year by support from the former Vale of Usk Tourist Association which was being wound up as the group started with the plaques.

Funding was also applied for successfully from Monmouthshire County Council’s ‘Community Pride Grant’. The funding went towards 5 oak finger posts to show the way to Pwll Melyn, the AR Wallace plaque and the plaque marking the site of St David Lewis’s execution, as well as the plaque leaflet.

For suggestions and examples of alternative sources of funding please see the grey box below.

7 Is planning/conservation/listed building consent required for putting up a plaque?
In some cases yes, contact your local authority’s planning department and/or conservation officer for more information.

In the case of the AR Wallace memorial, planning permission was required for the memorial stone and plaque.

8 How is a plaque actually fixed to the wall?
Ceramic wall plaques have two round slots at the rear which rest on screws inserted in the wall. This is to ensure that the text is horizontal and to take some of the weight. The plaques were then secured with quick drying cement. This was done by the blue plaque maker, Ned Heywood, and some of the Civic Society Committee. He also devised an ingenious method of fixing a plaque to the metal railings of the Owain Glyndŵr field.

Two of the plaques, Pwll Melyn and St David Lewis, are mounted on ‘erratic’ boulders purchased from a farmer at Bettws Newydd for £50 and put in place with help from John Bruce (Craft Renaissance). AR Wallace’s boulder was donated by Hansons. Pavement plaques were installed with the help of a builder friend.

9 How was the design of the plaques decided?
Most of the plaques are blue, round or oval and ceramic. Stone pavement plaques have been made with blue writing on neutral ground. The plaques are in Welsh and English.

10 How has the mounting of a new plaque been launched?
At the unveiling of the first of the 28 plaques those attending included the Assembly Member, Mayor of Usk, County Councillor, Project Co-ordinator, Welsh Development Agency representative, Ned Heywood the plaque designer and craftsman, the Civic Society Executive Member and several interested members of the public. The rest of the 28 plaques were launched in two phases by our President, the late Lord Raglan. The local press gave publicity for both launches.

When the AR Wallace plaque was launched, there was local and national coverage and the unveiling was done by AR Wallace’s grandson. The event was also marked by a lecture and buffet lunch with guests and speakers from the Natural History Museum and various universities and societies.

Above: Article from Society newsletter. Below: extract from the Plaque trail
11 Plaque maintenance
Society member, Stella Collard regularly checks the health of the plaques around Usk. After the hard winter of 2012, the Pwll Melyn plaque fell off its stone - luckily it was undamaged. After consulting plaque maker, Ned Heyworth, it was reattached with quick drying cement. In future the Society hopes to recruit members to be responsible for particular plaques, thus sharing the workload.

12 The Usk Plaque Trail
Once all of the plaques were in place a leaflet was produced on the plaques to be enclosed in the previous Usk Town Trail booklet (produced by the Society) that existed at that time. The plaque leaflet is now free, and there is now a new colour edition of the Town Trail which can be purchased (£5 for non-members and £3.50 for society members).

12 The fingerposts
Five fingerposts were placed in and around Usk at the end of the project. The Society realised that for people to locate some of the plaques directions were needed. The Society successfully applied for a Community Pride Grant, through Monmouthshire County Council, which paid for four posts and the Society’s funds paid for one post. The installation was done voluntarily by members. The posts were made locally from Wentwood oak, with routed lettering coloured dark green. They were designed like the plaques, to be long lasting and low maintenance.

13 The Town Council
Usk Town Council supported the project, but not financially.

14 Further reading
English Heritage have published a very useful book, which can be downloaded from their website ‘Celebrating people and place. Guidance on Commemorative Plaques & Plaque Scheme’ http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/celebrating-people-and-place/

The Civic Initiatives (Heritage) Grants Scheme
Cadw runs a grant scheme to help voluntary organisations to promote a better understanding of their local heritage. The maximum grant - which has to be matched by the voluntary organisation from a non-governmental source - is £5,000. The scheme is aimed at small-scale projects which help to preserve, enhance or improve the historic environment of Wales and increase social awareness of Welsh heritage. It is of particular relevance to civic societies or other local, voluntary groups.

Applications are only received between January and April every year. There is a 6 week decision time. It is recommended that you contact Cadw (Ann Thomas on 01443 336061) prior to making an application to double check these deadlines. NB Cadw may have requirements for the inclusion of their name on plaques if using this funding source (you will need to check this). For more information, and the application form, see the Cadw website: http://cadw.wales.gov.uk/historicenvironment/help-advice-and-grants/grants/civicinitiativesgrant/?lang=en

Llanelli Community Heritage
Launched on St David’s Day 2004, the society’s main aim is to consolidate the work of local historians in preserving historic buildings and structures and to promote the community’s rich heritage.

Since its inception the Society has succeeded in creating many Interpretive Panels and Blue Plaques to commemorate famous buildings and celebrities. This work is by no means complete and Llanelli will have more panels and blue plaques in the future. A list and map of the current blue plaques can be found on their website (http://llanellich.org.uk/Maps/blue-plaques-map.html).

On the above image of the plaque for Emmeline Pankhurst the bottom line of text reveals who sponsored the funding of the plaque. All of Llanelli Community Heritage’s plaques have been sponsored whether by an individual or a local business. Emmeline Pankhurst’s was sponsored by Catherine Thomas, former AM for Llanelli for whom Emmeline Pankhurst had always been a hero. Other sponsors include: Llanelli Rural Council, Huw Edwards (BBC newsreader), Communities First, Charles Church Wales, as well as a range of local individuals.

Other civic societies designating blue plaques include Monmouth, Ruthin, Chepstow, Tenby, Aberystwyth, Wrexham, Rhwbina, Kidwelly, Haverfordwest, Machynlleth.

With thanks to Stella Collard of Usk Civic Society for sharing the experiences and work of Usk Civic Society.