The Conwy Civic Society was founded in 1966, making it one of the earliest Civic Societies in Wales. Some three or four years ago it fell into a state of inaction, having been run for many years by the same few people, who came to realise that its future could not be assured unless a fresh input of enthusiasm could be found. It is now proposed to relaunch it, and thanks to invaluable help from the Town Council it seems likely to be revived in a new pro-active form - in time, incidentally, for its fiftieth anniversary.

In the meantime it is interesting to review what it has done, in this long period of exciting and unexpected change.

Right from the start we have been aware that our main contribution to Conwy’s well-being would be to foster and promote a climate of opinion. As a day-to-day involvement we have monitored and made representations on planning applications, and in this connection have invited planning officers, councillors and politicians to address, and to listen to, the society’s membership. By doing so we have acted as a two-way channel of communication, a medium between the decision-making process and public opinion. This involved fighting our cases at Public Inquiries, attending Council meetings, lobbying, even demonstrating outside the Council Chamber with placards. In pursuit of the aim of spreading information, we have held exhibitions, commissioned and designed interpretive plaques, carried out surveys, run competitions for schools, laid on outings to other historic places and provided talks by experts in various fields.

Conwy is unusually vulnerable to outside pressure, being a tourist town as well as a historic one, and the forces of commercial interest are difficult to resist in such a place, but resisting them when necessary is of importance to our valued heritage.

We are always aware that the town is a living entity, particularly since Conwy has a strongly identified settled community, and we always felt it essential that any future development should benefit the community itself, since a large part of the value of the town which we sought to preserve is that it is a place where people live and work, and not just a museum or theme-park to be presented as something adapted for the entertainment of tourists. Therefore we have, over the years, favoured wherever possible the retention of service shops, within the shopping zone, and fostered the interests of the town's natural industries, particularly the maritime activities of its quay - the inshore fishing industry, yachting, and the internationally famous...
mussel fishery. We believe that the sight of people engaged in such traditional and ancient occupations is of value to tourists as well as locals, a fact borne out in the findings of outside reports, which show that more people visit and enjoy the Quay than visit the castle.

We think that this overall approach has paid off, since Conwy now has a range of high-class, privately-owned, shops to serve both locals and visitors. More specifically we have successfully campaigned against the introduction of tourist-based facilities such as amusement arcades, which we argue could better be located elsewhere, and with considerable effort we have defeated two attempts to install these, one on the Quay and one in Castle Street. More recently we have successfully opposed the commercial development of the Quay itself, resulting in the defeat of two successive schemes, firstly for the introduction of shops, which would have competed with those within the walls, then by a plan to construct a restaurant, which though billed as 'high class' might, we argued, at any time have degenerated into a fast-food or take-away outlet. Since these schemes were all favoured by the owners of the Quay, the County Borough Council - the Planning Authority itself - it is doubtful if they could have been defeated without the input of a body able to mobilise the power of public opinion. As a result of these efforts the Quay at present continues as a public open space used for occasional markets and food-fairs, a popular and well-attended use to which it is well suited.

Of course the Civic Society was for a long time involved with the question of how to by-pass Conwy, since until the 1990s the town’s narrow and ancient streets formed part of the route of the main road from London to Holyhead. The need to cross the river gave rise to alternative schemes for new, motorway-sized bridges, either at the side of the castle or at the narrows at Deganwy, either of which would have been catastrophic. The Civic Society acted as a mediating body in promoting a third option, an immersed tube tunnel, and our representatives fought for it at what was then the longest Public Inquiry ever held. As a result of our and others’ efforts we now have the amazing result of a motorway on our doorstep which you cannot see at all. If nothing else it would have been worth the effort of the long years of our existence just to have been a party to this success, a case of the victory of local interest against the forces of national vandalism.