

# The Owl



## Issue 1. Summer 2025

Musings on Murals: Leeds Street Art

*A Tribute to Professor Patrick Nuttgens CBE*

1965: A Momentous Year for Leeds United

*Space to Spend: 60 Years of Shopping Centres in Leeds*

Heritage Life Lesson with Phil Ward

*Back to the Future: A Tram System for Leeds*



Celebrating 60 years  
of Shaping Leeds



# **Celebrating 60 years of Shaping Leeds**



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## CONTENTS



- 4 **MUSINGS ON MURALS:  
LEEDS STREET ART**
- 8 **A TRIBUTE TO PROFESSOR  
PATRICK NUTTGENS CBE**
- 10 **1965: A MOMENTOUS YEAR  
FOR LEEDS UNITED**
- 14 **SPACE TO SPEND:  
60 YEARS OF SHOPPING  
CENTRES IN LEEDS**
- 16 **HERITAGE LIFE LESSON +  
PHIL WARD'S TOP HERITAGE  
PROJECTS**
- 20 **BACK TO THE FUTURE:  
A TRAM SYSTEM FOR LEEDS**



# Welcome

I am delighted to welcome you to the first edition of our new magazine *'The Owl'*. We hope you like it!

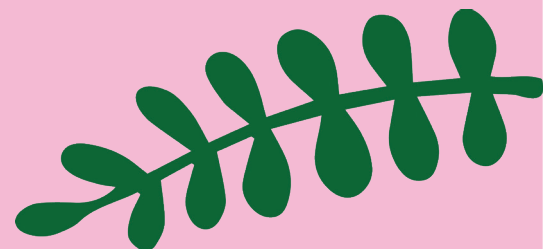
The 1960s may have been a decade of flower power and free love but for Leeds Civic Trust our concerns were much more down to earth! Mr C H Crabtree, who provided £50,000 to get the Trust off the ground in 1965, was concerned about the emerging "concrete blocks" in our city and the lack of exhibition space. Our archives reveal concerns at proposals for new roads. He saw the new body as a 'watchdog' for the people of Leeds.

For Leeds as a whole, this was the decade that saw the birth of one of the most enduring shopping centres in the city centre, the beginning of an era of dominance for Leeds United and an initial flowering of public art.

In our first edition, we feature some of these historical subjects and hope to show how they remain relevant to this day: the tram system had disappeared in Leeds by the 1960s but is it about to make a reappearance? What do Phil Ward's observations on a 35-year career at the heart the city's conservation tell us about the evolution of the city's built environment and how did Patrick Nuttgens influence our city's educational and architectural development?

We hope to provide some answers to these questions. Happy reading!

**Jenna Strover**  
*Chair, Leeds Civic Trust*



# MUSINGS ON MURALS

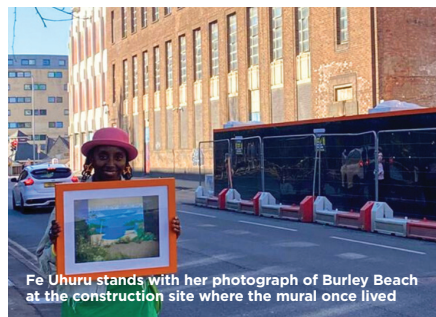
A stone's throw in any direction from the Leeds Civic Trust office, the streets are alive with spectacular murals and street art.

Walking to our office from the bus station, you will pass the INSA X Moniker mural, which casts a rainbow over the Wharf Street / Kirkgate junction. Approaching us from the railway station, you'll pass the iconic Me & You, You & Me mural on the calls, commissioned by former Leeds Civic Trust trustee, Laura Wellington. Our upstairs offices gaze over the playful Mr Penfold's Graphical House mural, providing a cheerful backdrop for our office work.

Perhaps the most notable mural from the time of Leeds Civic Trust's founding was the abstract Thubron mosaic in Holbeck, created in 1964 by the former Head of Fine Art at Leeds College of Art, Harry Thubron. This monochrome piece, characteristic of the time, sits in stark contrast to the explosions of colour we associate with the Leeds street art scene today.

## Love and Loss at Burley Beach

In 2023, we were enchanted by Fe Uhuru's photograph of the Burley Beach mural on Burley Street, submitted to our Civic Pride calendar competition; her photograph became our 'July'.



Fe stumbled across Australian artist Edwin painting the mural while she was on her way to her local chippy. Edwin had been commissioned and given free rein by owners of Henderson's café to paint a mural as a 'gift to the community'. This beach scene was an image that Edwin said had been in his mind since he was a child. The luscious landscape depicted

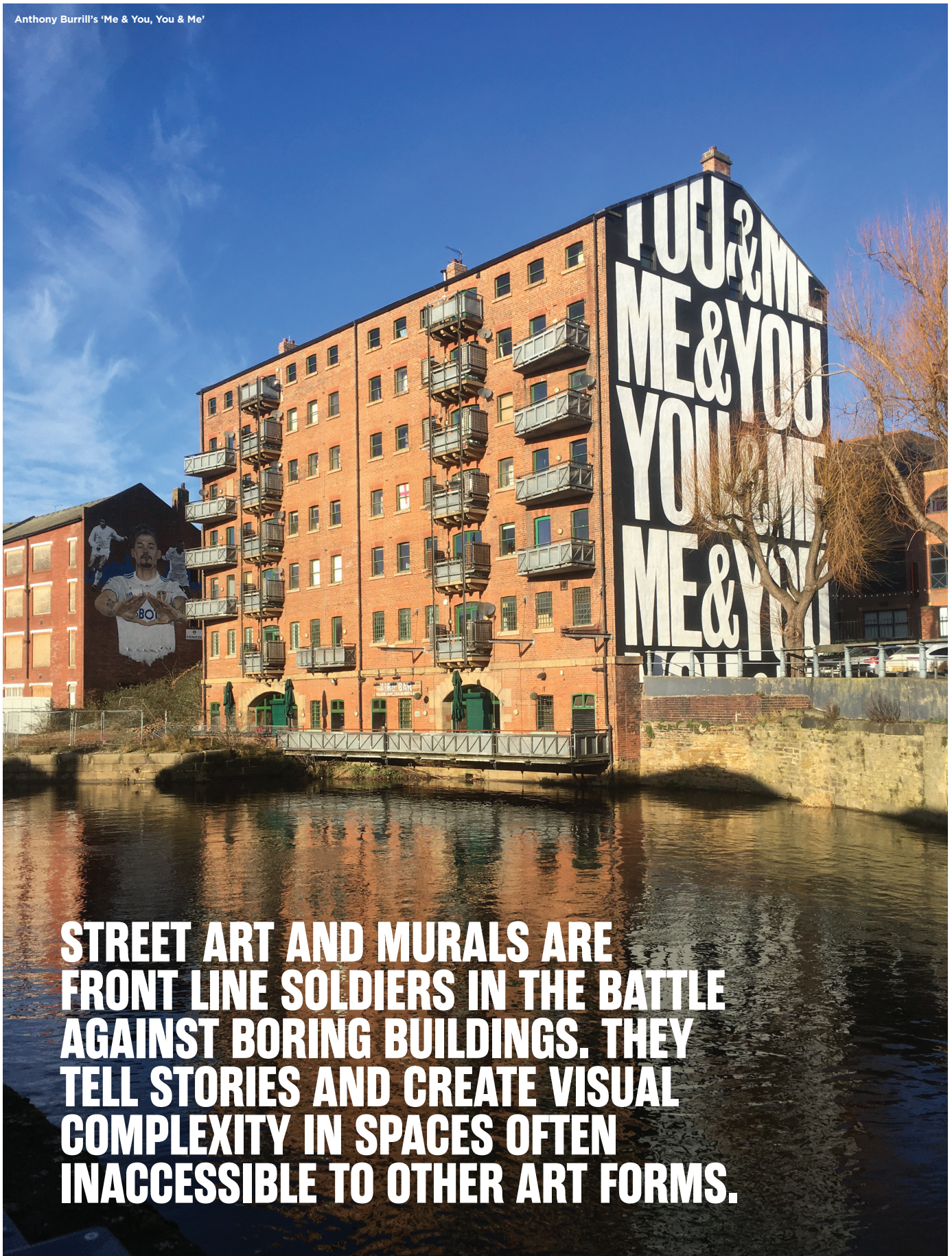
appeared as a portal to an unbothered utopia outside of the hustle and bustle of the multiple intersecting main roads nearby. The flora in the painting meet the plants on the ground, blurring the boundaries between Burley Beach and Burley Street, inviting you to step in.

In an area dominated by gigantic buildings with little green space, Burley Beach was a sacred slice of paradise in urban Leeds. But murals sit in tension between beloved familiar friends and transient visitors that could disappear irretrievably at any moment. Their lifespan is contingent on that of the building it lives on. Burley Beach's building was demolished and the mural was mournfully lost.

When unlisted, how can we protect the legacy of public art when its lifespan is in the hands of private companies? Developers Torsion have suggested that Fe's photograph could be displayed inside the completed building, but this hardly seems a fitting preservation of a public facing piece, created as a community gift.



Anthony Burrill's 'Me & You, You & Me'



**STREET ART AND MURALS ARE  
FRONT LINE SOLDIERS IN THE BATTLE  
AGAINST BORING BUILDINGS. THEY  
TELL STORIES AND CREATE VISUAL  
COMPLEXITY IN SPACES OFTEN  
INACCESSIBLE TO OTHER ART FORMS.**



MUSINGS ON MURALS



**MURALS ARE A PART  
OF OUR HERITAGE  
AND SHAPE THE  
CHARACTER AND  
PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS  
OF OUR CITY.**



INSA X Moniker Mural



### New Murals for Leeds

Murals are a part of our heritage and shape the character and public perceptions of our city. Thanks to the National Lottery Heritage Fund, five new murals celebrating our sporting heritage will appear around the city. The murals, curated by Leeds Museums and Galleries, seek to honour sports and athletes not currently represented in public art.

The murals are for swimmer Doris Storey at Doris Storey House, Paralympian Kadeena Cox at the Reginald Centre, Dance in Leeds at Northern School of Contemporary Dance, Skateboarding in Leeds at Leeds Dock and the Caribbean Cricket Club at Kirkgate Market.

Leeds' sporting heritage is something we at Leeds Civic Trust have turned our head to in recent years too. We were delighted to unveil our 200th blue plaque for founding Director of Northern School of Contemporary Dance, Nadine Senior in 2024 and are unveiling a blue plaque for Doris Storey in 2025.

### 'Boring Buildings Starve Your Soul'

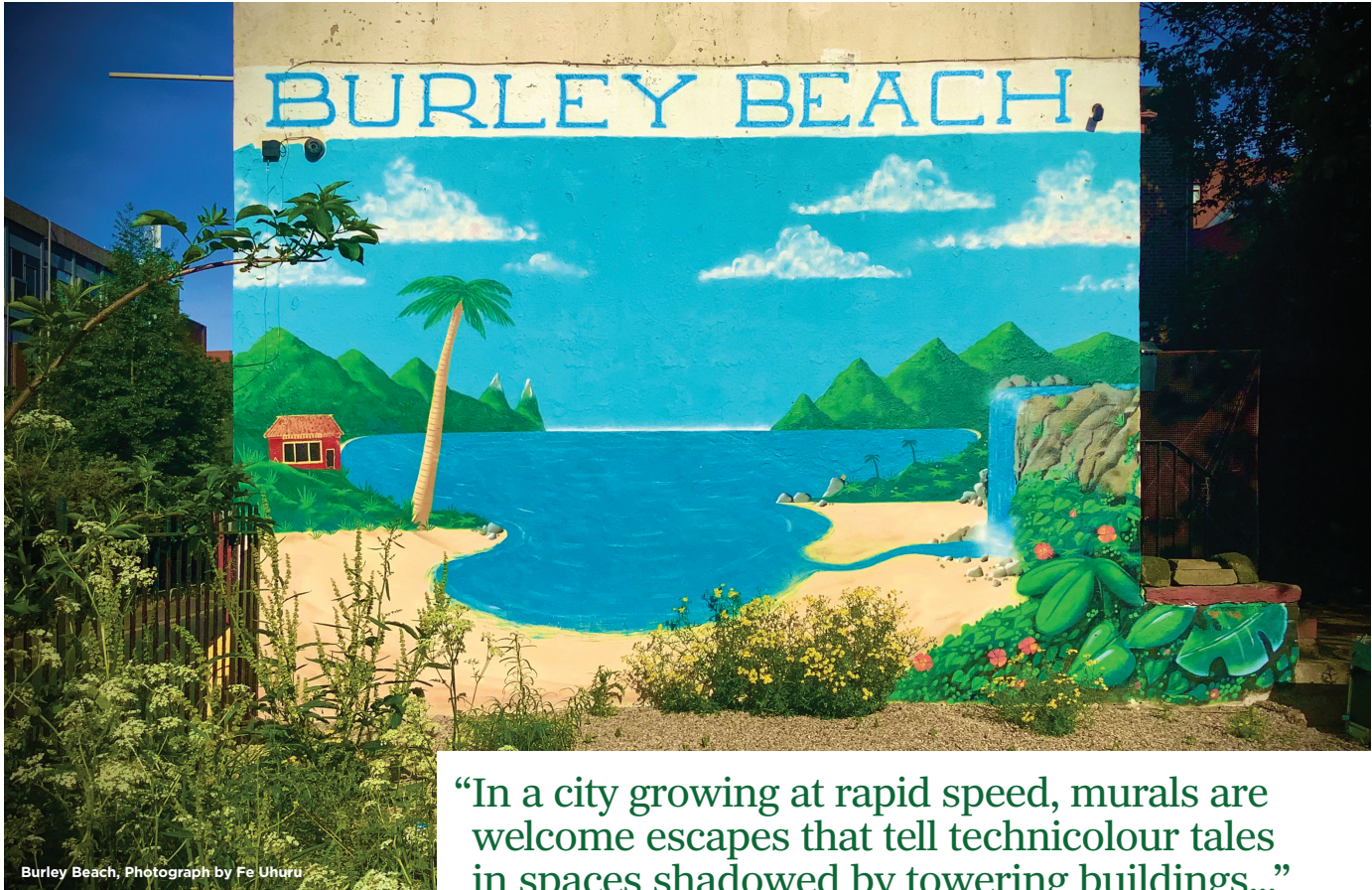
At the Yorkshire and Humber Association of Civic Societies 25th Anniversary Dinner, our keynote speaker, Abigail Scott Paul, presented the aims of the Humanise Campaign. Renowned architect and designer Thomas Heatherwick is behind the initiative which bemoans, 'a hundred year catastrophe... of harmful architecture'.

Their research shows that 'boring buildings', (defined as being too flat, straight, shiny, monotonous, anonymous or serious), are harmful to our mental and physical health. Extensive research in architectural neurophysiology shows that being surrounded by boring buildings increases cortisol levels and stress. They celebrate and advocate for 'beautiful buildings' that use emotion as a function of design, involve visual complexity and are designed with 'one-thousand year thinking'.

Street art and murals are front line soldiers in the battle against boring buildings. They tell stories and create visual complexity in spaces often inaccessible to other art forms. In a city growing at rapid speed, murals are welcome escapes that tell technicolour tales in spaces shadowed by towering buildings popping up here, there and everywhere. Murals humanise otherwise impersonal and forgettable architecture by evoking our senses and emotions. As Fe Uhuru says in her poem 'Burley Beach', *'As your brain feels the sensations, from your attentive contemplations. It accepts everything you feel. It's YOU that makes it real'*.

### Amy Sutcliffe

*Communications and Membership Officer, Leeds Civic Trust*



**"In a city growing at rapid speed, murals are welcome escapes that tell technicolour tales in spaces shadowed by towering buildings..."**

## A TRIBUTE TO PROFESSOR PATRICK NUTTGENS CBE

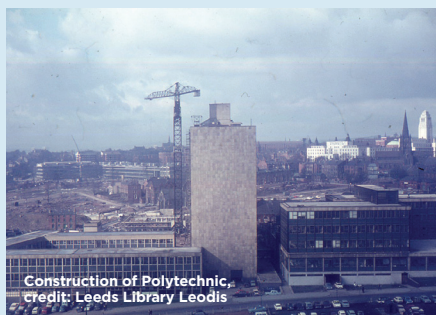
# MAKING SOMETHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY

**Earlier this year, on the 21st anniversary of his death, a new blue plaque was unveiled at the Leeds Beckett University City Centre campus, celebrating the life and achievements of Professor Patrick Nuttgens CBE – a trailblazing figure in education, broadcasting, planning and conservation whose influence can still be felt across the university, the city and the nation.**

**His achievements were legion and varied. Disabled from his early teens he never let his increasing physical challenges stop him. As he himself once said, “I am a man of many parts, it’s just some don’t work as well as they once did.”**

**Peg Alexander, Patrick Nuttgens daughter wrote:** When I was growing up in Leeds in the 80s Dad was on TV a lot; almost everyone knew his name. In some ways he became synonymous with the city. As the writer Jeremy Dyson said at the plaque unveiling of that time, “There weren’t many well-known public figures from Leeds who impinged on the national consciousness. Even Alan Bennett had yet to achieve the countrywide fame he went on to gain. But in our household Patrick Nuttgens was a name that resonated, at least in part because he was a local figure and for (my parents) there was a sense of civic pride in seeing him, hearing from him.”

His proudest achievement was his role as an educator and the institution he founded, Leeds Polytechnic. As its first Director, he had a clear mission. He wanted to make it “the greatest teaching institution in Europe.” That word ‘teaching’ was key. Polytechnics, for him, were about purposeful education – combining theory with practice. He was right at the front of the polytechnic movement nationally.



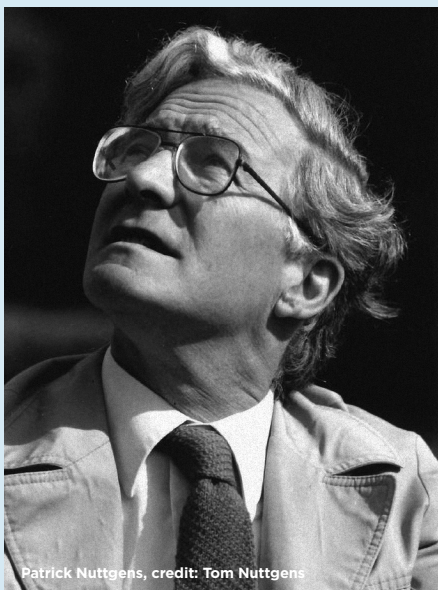
He was a teacher and educator, not just an academic. “We were engaged in the major educational revolution,” he wrote. He believed in education that gave people skills and understanding to solve real problems. He created part-time courses, including the first degree in nursing in the country. No course without a job in mind – but also, education to develop the whole person. There wasn’t a single person at the unveiling who wasn’t unbelievably moved by a tribute paid by John Harris, an engineer and Leeds Civic Trust volunteer who

graduated in the mid-1970s who said that Patrick had changed his life. “From a working-class background and an 11 Plus failure, without the setting up of Leeds Polytechnic, my background and that of many others meant studying at a university was an impossibility. I was offered a place on the degree course, I believe the first time this degree was available. This was a life changing event in my life and the person most responsible for this was Patrick Nuttgens.”

He always believed that vocational education should have the same status as academic degrees. This is an ethos that still lives on at Leeds Beckett University, as its current Vice Chancellor Peter Slee told us, as he too paid a generous and warm tribute to Patrick and his educational vision. Education for a purpose, he told us, is still at the heart of the university, combining theory and practice. Dad’s legacy lives on.

But it wasn’t just education. He was a talented artist, known for his distinctive watercolours. As a writer, he was prolific. Two of his books became standard texts: *The Story of Architecture* and *Understanding Modern Architecture*. He wrote columns and opinion pieces for papers and journals. He lectured across the world.





Patrick Nuttgens, credit: Tom Nuttgens



Peg Alexander and her mother Bridget Nuttgens

An architect by trade, he made us think about place – becoming the BBC’s architecture, cities and buildings expert. In *In Search of the City* (early 70s), he asked of Leeds: “Is this to be the model of the modern city... the city of people?” Many of us are still asking that. He was a visionary. My Mum once said he kickstarted the “Living Above the Shop” initiative and it was him who coined the slogan for the Corn Exchange, a “cornucopia” of small delights.

Patrick made many TV programmes on Leeds and architecture. He was possibly the first person on British TV to front presenter-led documentaries. And almost certainly the first disabled person to present a network factual series from a wheelchair that wasn’t about disability. That was the 1989 ground-breaking series, *The Home Front*, the first and maybe only series looking at social housing and overall housing design that’s ever been on TV. He makes the case for investment in social housing, with the people who live in it put in the driving seat, one review saying, “Professor Nuttgens is a compelling broadcaster, his effervescence never masking his clarity.”

On radio he was captain of the North of England *Round Britain Quiz* team, regular on *A Word in Edgeways*, a panel member on shows like *Any Questions* or *Question Time*.

His personality was just huge. Possibly the most intelligent person I’ll ever meet, but also a great communicator. A fantastic people person, he chatted to everyone. One obituary said his “flow of conversation enchanted anyone who came within his orbit.” Almost everyone would talk about his enthusiasm, his approachability. Still to this day people who met him tell me they never forgot the exchange. Much of this came from his early experience of being bed-bound in hospital during the war with polio. “I acquired a profound hatred of pretentiousness and pomposity,” he wrote. That never left him.

So all family pride aside, Dad totally deserves this plaque. One of his most famous quotes was: “The job of the modern architect is the same as the job of us all. It is to make, out of the ordinary, something out of the ordinary.” He spent a lifetime doing just that, leaving a legacy for others to do the same, whatever challenges they might face, encouraging us all to live the life we have been given to its fullest.

The plaque is just a bit up the road from Rob Burrow’s mural. I love that. Both men coping with the challenge of disability whilst still making a massive mark on our city and nation in very different ways, but both of them showing by example the kind of people we should aim to be, whatever our adversity. And no matter how skilled and talented and clever or important you are, decency and human connection and compassion, as well as a smile and lust for life, are also right up there in importance.

**Peg Alexander**  
*Journalist and Broadcaster*

It is fitting that as we celebrate a man who spent his life commenting on the built environment in our city, we will be celebrating the best of our city’s architecture later this year.

The 2025 Leeds Architecture Awards takes place this year, and to celebrate the Trust’s 60th anniversary we will be giving people the opportunity to vote on their favourite building of the last 60 years. An exhibition will be held during Heritage Open Days, where visitors will be able to explore the shortlisted schemes and cast a vote in person.

**Jodie Stott**  
*Engagement Manager,  
Leeds Civic Trust*





Albert Johanneson in full flight, credit: Varley Picture Agency

# 1965

## A MOMENTOUS YEAR FOR LEEDS UNITED



# 1965 was a special year for Leeds Civic Trust, but for another Leeds institution it turned out to be a year of both commiseration and celebration.

## The Celebrated Team of the 1960s

Having won promotion to the First Division at the end of the previous season, the 1964/1965 season saw Leeds United finish level with Manchester United at the top of the football league with 61 points. Manchester won the league thanks to a superior goal difference. Leeds was also unlucky in the FA Cup final against Liverpool that year, the first time they had managed to go all the way to Wembley. After a goal-less 90 minutes, extra time saw Liverpool prevail by two goals to one. However, this cup game has gained legendary status for another reason. One of the Leeds players was Albert Jonanneson. When he took to the field, he became the first black African footballer to play in an FA Cup Final.

## Recognising a Trailblazer

More than fifty years later, on 11th January 2019, we gathered at Elland Road to witness Leeds United beat Derby County 2:0. Once again, Leeds United's division-winning aspirations were thwarted at the eleventh hour. They finished in third place in the league and this time were beaten by Derby County in the play-offs. The club would have to wait another year for promotion to The Premiership.

The reason Leeds Civic Trust was present at the game was to unveil a blue plaque to celebrate the contribution made by Albert Jonanneson to the club in the 1960s and to recognize his position as a trailblazer. The plaque's wording speaks for itself.

We always look for someone with a close connection to the subject to unveil the plaque. Many dignitaries were to be present for the ceremony. Leeds United CEO Angus Kinnear would be present, United legend Brian Deane would speak and we would be joined by Cllr Jane Dowson, the then Council Leader Judith Blake and many others. But who should unveil the plaque? Out of the blue, we were informed that Albert's eldest granddaughter Samantha Jones (based in the US) would be able to make a visit to Leeds to unveil the plaque. Of the 202 plaque unveilings undertaken by Leeds Civic Trust since 1987, this must count as one of the most touching and memorable. It is not often that we reveal a blue plaque to a crowd of nearly 35,000!



# We caught up with Samantha Browne (now married and with a five month old son) for her memories of this wonderful occasion.

**Can you tell us how you came to be in the UK for the unveiling of the blue plaque?** I was honored to be designated as my family's representative at the blue plaque unveiling. Having attended and graduated from Loughborough University, I'd made friends that I was keen on visiting so the timing of the event worked out quite well. I was also very familiar with traveling to Leeds, having visited several years prior and attended the 2015 Leeds Sports Awards (on behalf of the Johanneson family).

**What are your memories of the evening at Elland Road? Did you enjoy the football?** It was an electric evening! Even leading up to the match, I could feel the energy at Elland Road. I absolutely enjoyed the football (Leeds won) and I felt so honored to have been present in the same space my grandfather had been decades before me.

**Growing up, how aware were you of the achievements of your grandfather?** I was always aware that my grandfather played football in Leeds during the 60s, but it was not until about 2015 when we were invited to celebrate the 50th anniversary of his appearance as the first person of African heritage to appear in an FA Cup final that I realized the impact he had on the game and other players of color.

**Albert Johanneson was the first black African to play in an FA Cup Final. As a person of colour, does this make you proud?** This makes me very proud. Knowing that my grandfather was a pioneering black footballer in England, during a time of intense racism, is inspiring and encouraging.

**Since you came to Leeds your life has changed. You are now married and have a baby. As your baby grows what will you tell him about your grandfather?** We've already got Elijah juggling a ball – lol – just joking. I do hope Elijah develops a love for football, but even if his future passion lies elsewhere, I plan to pass down the stories my mum used to tell us about our grandfather, like his nickname being "Hurry, Hurry Johanneson," but I also want my son to be aware of his great grandfather's achievements in football as a black man and the hard work, dedication, and resilience it took to gain those achievements.





# A Renaissance for Leeds United

Since the heady days of the 1960s, Leeds United has had its ups and downs but 2025 will be remembered as the year when they gained promotion to the Premiership as winners of the Championship. It may also be remembered for another reason – the start of a process which will end up with Elland Road becoming one of the larger football stadiums in the country, increasing the current capacity from 37,000 to 53,000.

Subject to planning permission, work will start in earnest next year to build a new west stand, followed by a new north stand. Other parts of the ground and its facilities will be improved along the way. Some 26,000 supporters are on the waiting list for season tickets so the demand is there. There are also proposals to develop the land around the stadium – much of which is surface car parks – a huge regeneration opportunity that could benefit the wider South Leeds population.

The biggest challenge may be how the increased attendance is matched by improvements to transport arrangements at and near the ground. Approval for the mass transit system may help, as Elland Road is likely to be on the route. Proposals to develop the disused Holbeck Viaduct as a green route linking the city centre to Elland Road and the south of the City could provide an imaginative way of conveying large numbers of people to the ground. This new use would create an opportunity to link the prosperous city centre with some of the most deprived parts of Leeds.

So as we hope for a return to an era when the club dominated the sport in the UK, we look forward to Elland Road acting as a catalyst for the broader regeneration of South Leeds.

**Martin Hamilton**  
*Director, Leeds Civic Trust*



An artist's impression of the new stand, credit: LUFC

“We look forward to Elland Road acting as a catalyst for the broader regeneration of South Leeds.”

## 60 YEARS OF SHOPPING CENTRES IN LEEDS

# SPACE TO SPEND

The landscape of Leeds has changed almost beyond recognition over the last six decades, but its status as a purchaser's paradise has never been in doubt. Ross Horsley asked three local retail moguls how they keep the city spending.

From tastes in tailoring to successes in sport, the things for which Leeds is most famous have a reputation for change. But its celebrated shopping centres continue to entice consumers from around the country. Will shoppers still be flocking through their doors sixty years from now?

One man who might know is Edward Ziff, the Chief Exec behind the Merrion Centre, one of the country's most long-established retail hubs. He was just four years old when, along with his parents, Arnold and Marjorie, he welcomed the first customers to the innovative new shopping destination his family built.

May 1964: The Merrion Centre's opening ceremony, featuring a scale model made of cake



Images courtesy of Town Centre Securities (TCS) and Land Securities Group

September 1964: The newly built Merrion Centre



### A Centre of Convenience

The Merrion opened in 1964, the same year as the UK's earliest indoor shopping centre, the Bull Ring in Birmingham. Back then, the Merrion had one major difference – it was open to the elements, including some famously strong winds, all of which was rectified when a roof was added a few years later.

Whichever way the wind blows, the Merrion has weathered competition from multiple rivals. For Edward, it's a matter of local loyalty. "We've always relied on our resident population; we're very convenient for them. Up and down the country, shopping centres have established themselves as the beating hearts of the city. The Merrion isn't as big, but it's crucial to our central district."

Indeed, students have settled into nearby streets in numbers equivalent to the population of Tadcaster in recent years, making Morrison's at the Merrion one of the chain's busiest supermarkets. But students aren't the only new neighbours: the First Direct Arena was built specifically within walking distance. "It popped up there," Edward explains, "because we ended up doing a deal with the Council around car parking. The Merrion Centre gets used later in the day, and in the overall scheme of things we're surrendering income we weren't collecting anyway."

There may even be a new entertainment venue in the works. "We've got a big space that used to be the nightclub," Edward reveals. "There's no other taker so we're investigating leisure uses. It's evolving... I wouldn't say Merrion's ever going to be the finished product but it's quite a coherent place."





### The Spaceship in South Leeds

Thirty years after the launch of the Merriion, something like a spaceship landed three miles to the south, or at least that's how it might have seemed to residents. The White Rose Centre had arrived, boasting 700,000 square feet of shops, all fully let to retailers when the doors opened in March 1997.

The development wasn't welcomed by Leeds City Council, however, and planning consent was only achieved on appeal. Did that make for a crash landing? "The people of Morley thought it would destroy their town centre," remembers Gerald Jennings, one of the crew at the helm of the shiny new centre. "With hindsight, Morley did suffer because of all this new retail just down the road, but one thing we were keen to do was to integrate the shopping centre with the local community."

Current centre director, Steve Foster, keeps Gerald's mission alive. "We've got a big responsibility to give things back, whether we're governors on local school boards or working with charity partners. Every morning we've a group of elderly people who walk up and down before the shops open. My team walks with them for a chat, and that can be the highlight of someone's day."

He speaks with pride of the 350 jobs created when Marks & Spencer relocated to the White Rose's giant former Debenhams store. As he puts it, "The best retailers want to be in the best locations." Some big names seem to agree: JD Sports has upgraded to a larger unit, while Primark is set to double in size, thanks to his company's investment.

### The Big Kid on the Block

Perhaps surprisingly, Steve also oversees another bastion of local shopping, Trinity Leeds. Now in its thirteenth year, surrounded by city-centre parking and high-end brands, can it possibly keep pace with costly renovations out at the White Rose? He argues it can. "One of the big names you want for the younger generation, Zara, moved in from Briggate last August, and we spent over £10 million building a unit to attract them."

His mentor, Gerald, adds: "You need to be that kind of active landlord. The Core is being demolished; it no longer has a purpose. We're not out to kill the competition but we are out to redefine it."

Redefining Leeds was already on the agenda when Trinity was conceived. "It was 2005 when the idea came to us," Gerald explains. "We bought the old Bond Street shopping centre and another out-of-date arcade across Albion Street. We had a million square feet – the big kid on the block!"

Merging with existing streetscapes, rather than putting up doors, Trinity took a fresh approach to design. According to Steve, the centre also targets a different audience. "The average customer is in their mid-thirties and financially independent, and the retail mix is more aspirational. Trinity and White Rose should be trying to put each other out of business but actually work well together."

Whether city-based or suburban, shopping centres face the same key challenge: how to attract customers. "We've got to activate spaces with things that bring people alive," Steve says, "like student nights, farmers' markets, dinosaurs, and nature trails. We're planning to spend up to £15 million extending Trinity Kitchen, which was quite pioneering at the time, but how do we get people to come in the evening? Now there's a rooftop terrace being designed and built."

Whatever we want from the grand streets and shopping palaces of Leeds, developers like Edward, Gerald and Steve are keen to utilise its traditional retail character in surprising new ways. Storefronts may have changed since the early days of the Merriion Centre but our desire for destination shopping seems undiminished.

### Ross Horsley

*Office Administrator,  
Leeds Civic Trust*





Phil Ward has just retired from Leeds City Council. He looks back at his 35 year career, where he and his team have given conservation advice to the planning department, designated conservation areas and administered grant schemes. He names his top heritage projects.

# Heritage Life Lesson



**Leeds in 1990, when I took up my post at the Council, was a very different city – undergoing change (as always), caught somewhere between de-industrialisation and reinvention as a legal and financial centre. The Leeds I knew as a student in the early 1980s was still recognisable and the northern gothic miasma evoked in David Pearce’s Red Riding quartet was still hanging around, but there was something new in the air.**

Many heritage buildings were still soot blackened and my hunch would be that the majority of Leeds residents were ambivalent at best or at worst downright hostile to its heritage. This was counterbalanced by a strong heritage lobby badly bruised from battles with the Council with whom there was mutual antagonism. The Conservation Team was caught somewhere between the two warring parties and wasn’t entirely trusted by either side.

The questions that were being asked then are still relevant today: what is the point of the city’s heritage, how much of it should we keep and how should the new respond to the old? Taking the long view over 35 years, the questions have remained the same but the answers have evolved.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the economy of Leeds was restructuring quickly and our approach to conservation, akin to above ground archaeology, was not fit for purpose. It was noticeable that non heritage buildings were finding new uses much faster than heritage buildings, many of which were rotting away.

A new approach emerged in Leeds coinciding with the arrival of a new Team Leader who had a regeneration background and was not ashamed to be called “pragmatic”. Two life lessons had to be learnt very quickly.

The first was that the object (the historic asset) also had a subject (the owner, the developer, the other council officers, councillors and the wider public). We had been ball watching – the ball being the historic building – when we should have been watching

the players. After all, it is people who make decisions about heritage, not the heritage, and we had to get engaged.

The other life lesson – blindingly obvious in retrospect – was the revelation that heritage buildings need a beneficial use. Without a use, buildings fall into disrepair and will be demolished. Ensuring re-use usually entails alterations and a new skill set to be learnt on minimising the impact and judgement calls on impact versus public benefit.

This new approach bore results as heritage buildings were “adapted” to new uses. Textile mills became apartments, schools became offices, churches changed denominations, banks became pubs and many a barn became a “des res” in the Green Belt. This mania for adaptive re-use was aided by specialist developers like Rushbond who emerged in the 1990s to exploit the potential of historic buildings.

This new pragmatism in Leeds also attracted investment from central government, Historic England and National Heritage Lottery Fund in area-based regeneration schemes too numerous to accurately recall but including Morley, Chapeltown, Armley and Holbeck, culminating recently in Lower Kirkgate and New Briggate in the city centre. The point of heritage in this context was to stimulate economic development and build confidence and pride in local communities.

This pragmatism also extended to the way historic assets were adapted. During my tenure, our approach to extensions and new buildings in the setting of historic assets could be

called pluralistic – keeping in keeping, contextualism and juxtaposition depending on the circumstances. Unprecedented building forms in historic settings have garnered hot-tempered debate and denunciation, but I am confident that Broadcasting House (aka Rusty Nail) and Simpson Haugh’s glassy Scape on Merrion Street opposite St John’s Church have added to and not subtracted from their historic settings.

New challenges have arisen in the 2020s which were not anticipated in the 1990s, most pressingly climate change. This is another point of reinvention or repurposing of heritage as the means to reduce the carbon footprint of the country’s building stock. A consensus has not yet been reached on how best to do it and the balance between retrofit and significance.

Taking stock, I’m pleased that adaptive re-use (considered almost risqué when I started my job in the 1990s) is considered as just another mode of development and not a specialist activity, and that historic buildings are almost taken for granted. The historic environment is the backdrop to the city’s work, play and rest. I would hazard that Leeds residents are comfortable with its old buildings because they are, for the most part, beautiful and useful.

More than anything, I take satisfaction that there is a strong view that the city’s heritage is something to be valued. This view is shared equally between the public, private and voluntary sectors. This gives me confidence that Leeds’ heritage is in safe hands. I look forward to watching my city change from the sidelines.



# Phil Ward's Top Heritage Projects

## Victoria Quarter (now Victoria Gate), Briggate

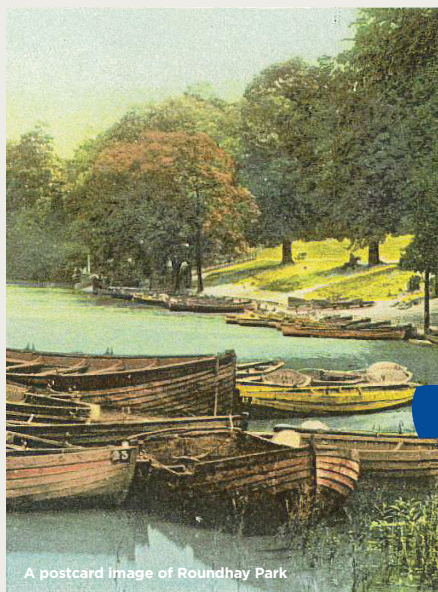
Nicely bookending the start of my career at Leeds in 1990, this is still the most significant and audacious conservation project in Leeds, continuing to take my breath away after 35 years. It combines the best conservation practice (at that time) plus the covering over of a street with the largest expanse of stained glass in Europe to form a new arcade. It shows the synergy that can exist between new and old which has been the holy grail of my practice.



Victoria Quarter: after 35 years this is still the best conservation project in Leeds

## Roundhay Park

This is conservation at the largest scale – 700 acres to be precise – funded by the Urban Parks Programme. The park was much loved and much used recreation space but by the 1990s it had become seriously run down. The government funding, matched by council money, secured the refurbishment of the mansion and several other park buildings, including the shelters. Controversially, it required the felling of trees to open up vistas and restore the parkland.



A postcard image of Roundhay Park



Phil Ward speaks at the opening of Leeds Civic Trust's restored Bear Pit

## Majestic Cinema, City Square

It is difficult to imagine the former Majestic Cinema without the roof extension to correct the squat proportions of the original building. This project literally rose from the ashes following a devastating fire which destroyed the original dome and much of the interior. It begs a question about the statutory planning system that this outcome would not have been possible without a catastrophic fire.





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## First White Cloth Hall

It is a miracle that the oldest extant cloth hall in Yorkshire (possibly the country) survives given the prolonged wrangles over ownership and its parlous condition. It would not have been possible without significant public subsidy and a developer who was prepared to take the risk. Stitching the building back together was like watching heart surgery and it is credit to the contractor who carried this out. Conservation is an experiment that can only be run once and restoring the lost wings to their original appearance and better revealing this building's original purpose was the correct approach.



The reconstruction of the First White Cloth Hall

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## Old Broadcasting House (aka Rusty Nail), Woodhouse Lane

Rising up like a spooked cobra, the Rusty Nail, as it affectionately or disdainfully known, can be seen as a vertical extrusion of the terrace to the north on the east side of Woodhouse Lane. There is an obvious colour match between the Corten steel cladding and the orange-red brick of the historic context while at the same its dynamic form is also the perfect counterpoint to the white purity of the Parkinson Building further up the hill. Looking at the oxidised Corten steel cladding, people still ask when it will be finished?

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## Newton Grove Parade, Chapeltown Road

This parade of shops opposite the Reginald Centre was the centrepiece of the Chapeltown Townscape Heritage Initiative. The parade was in multiple ownerships and to achieve consistency of quality and ensure that all the properties were refurbished at the same time, the building contract was administered by the Council – an innovative and pioneering approach. The restoration was transformational, so much so that passengers on the number 38 bus were heard to comment: “It could be in Harrogate”.

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## Scape Leeds, Merriion Street

Many people would not count this as a heritage project, but its proximity to the grade I listed St John's Church and a conservation area made it something of a cause celebre, drawing objection from far and wide. It would have been easy to kill this proposal at birth, but could the axial relationship with the church tower be made positive? Although much bigger, the glassy reflective tower is in equilibrium with the heavy masonry tower. The relationship is best experienced as a kinetic experience walking through the church yard from New Briggate where the two towers have a closely choreographed dance.

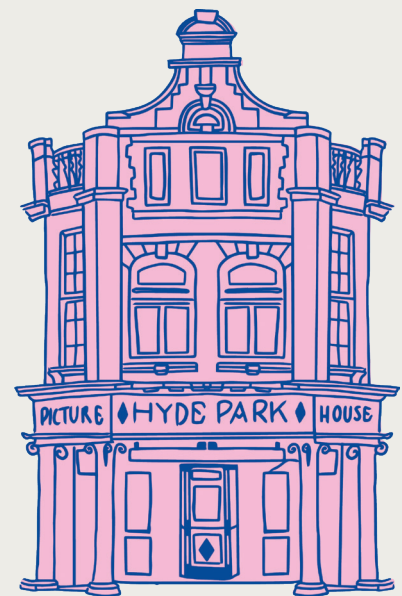


Scape versus St John's Church: new and old in a dialogue of equals?

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## Hyde Park Cinema, Brudenell Road

This much-loved cinema has been in continuous use since 1914, but by the 21st century lacked many basic facilities that are required by a modern audience such as equal access, adequate toilet provision and 21st century audio and visual technology. The refurbishment project by Page/Park Architects in 2021–2023 has been extensive and intrusive in parts, including the addition of a large extension, and yet the “essence” of the cinema has been maintained through the retention of typical features such as the external ticket booth, mosaic floor and balcony front – and of course the original use.



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## Bear Pit, Cardigan Road

Like many students coming to Leeds, this building was a source of curiosity and mystery – what is it? A bear pit – what is it doing here? Finding out more about it was a formative experience and set me on a course that became my career. The “reopening” of the bear pit on the weekend of my retirement was an apt finale to my career at Leeds.





### The Motor Car Dominates

In 1959, Trams stopped running in Leeds for good, as the city looked forward to a future where the motor car would become an increasingly important mode of transport. This was underlined in the seminal report "Traffic in Towns", authored by a team led by Professor Colin Buchanan of Imperial College London, that looked at the impact the growth in motor traffic would have on our towns and cities.

The report sought to consider how increased traffic could be accommodated in four locations: Newbury, Norwich, London and Leeds. The proposals for Leeds (central distributor roads and a rather curious hexagonal road pattern), were considered even by them to be impractical.

Co-incidentally, Professor Buchanan was one of the attendees at the inaugural meeting of Leeds Civic Trust in 1965. Unfortunately, our records do not reveal what he said, but it seems doubtful that he would have supported the city's move to become "The Motorway City of the 70s."

Road construction may have been de rigueur in the 60s and 70s, but nonetheless Leeds retained a comprehensive bus network in public ownership until deregulation in 1986, an event which may have acted as a catalyst for a number of (failed) attempts to reintroduce trams to Leeds.





### Trams, Trolley Buses and Our Own Schwebebahn

Leeds historian, artist and long standing Trust member Clifford Stead (who coincidentally is also 60 this year) spoke to the Trust about a subject that has been a lifelong fascination. Through letters to the Yorkshire Evening Post and a meticulously curated archive of leaflets and reports, he has chronicled the ups (and mainly downs) of the city's quest for a viable mass transit system for much of his adult life. Some of the proposals have been largely forgotten.

For example, in 1985, the West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive (WYPTE) proposed the 'Electrobus' scheme, a network of overhead-powered trolley buses. The initial line was to go from Roundhay to Cottingley, with a network ultimately expanded to comprise a 76 km network. The 'Electrobus' was to be followed by 'Electroline', a tram-based system. The schemes never got off the ground due to a lack of government support.

Not to be deterred, the WYPTE, proposed the 'Metroline' in 1988. Described as "light rail" this was an attempt to re-introduce a rail based transport system to the city. This project never made it past the drawing board.

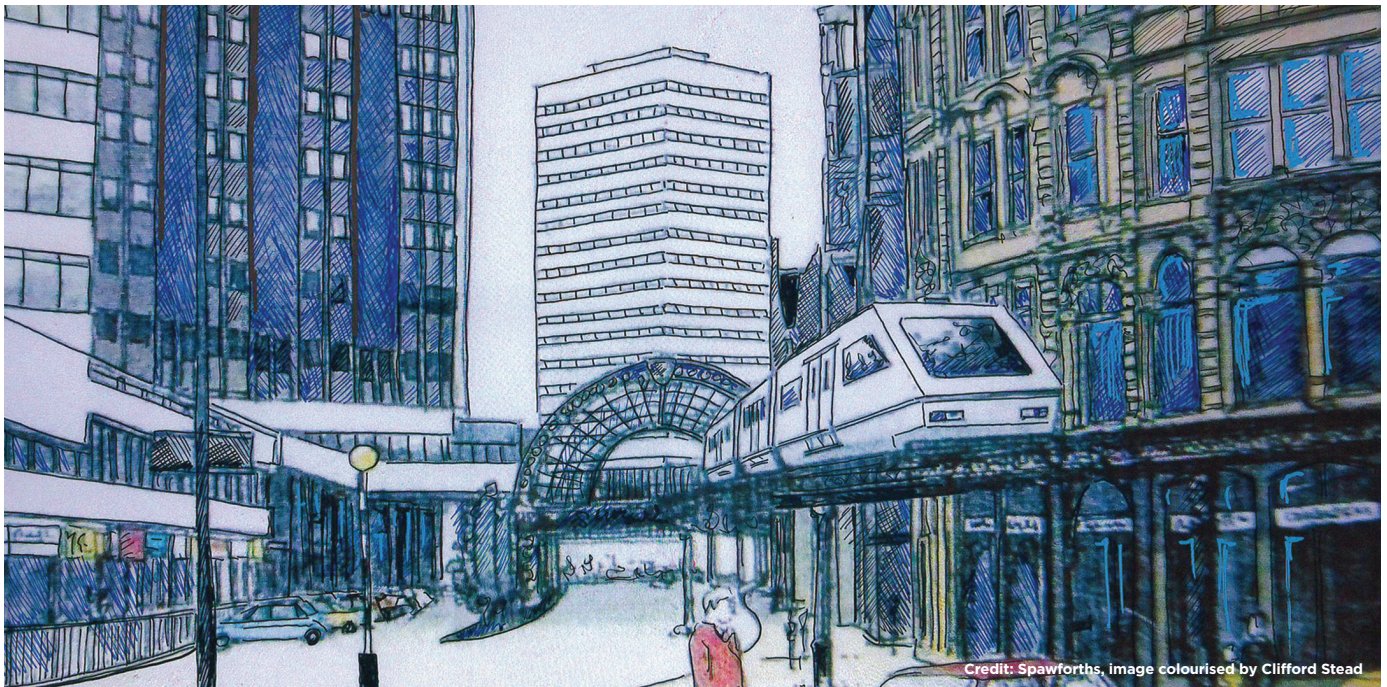


In 1989, Leeds City Council decided to develop its own scheme. Inspired by other schemes overseas (and bearing similarities to the Schwebebahn in Wuppertal, Germany), the proposals included the creation of a network of driverless trains that would convey people above street level. The scheme is largely forgotten and unrecorded, but one image created by consultants Spawforths has survived and has been colourised by Clifford Stead.



Over the course of the next two decades, the Supertram (and then Leeds Supertram) project was developed. It too was cancelled in 2005 due to lack of funds (the government having funded schemes elsewhere in the country), even though it had been given formal government approval four years earlier. This would have seen a tram from Holt Park to Belle Isle. The Headingley leg was the most controversial and led to significant objections organised by local pressure groups.

The final attempt was the Leeds New Generation Transport scheme, another attempt at a trolleybus, which was finally cancelled in 2016.



Credit: Spawforths, image colourised by Clifford Stead



## A TRAM SYSTEM FOR LEEDS

### Prioritising Public Transport – A Rallying Call from The Mayor

Since 2014, Leeds has been part of the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, and since 2021, we have had an elected Mayor in Tracy Brabin. These two changes in local democracy have provided a new impetus to improve the region's public transport. Bus franchising will be introduced in early 2027, and the Mayor has pledged to deliver for West Yorkshire a tram system with spades in the ground by 2028, when her second term of office is completed.

Leeds Civic Trust has engaged with the process of identifying and developing the initial routes. We produced our own proposals, and even commissioned London-based social enterprise Create Streets to produce some visuals which we hope will set the tone for what we believe should be a public-realm led scheme. The government has now committed to an allocation of £2.1 billion of local transport funding, some of which will be used to implement the tram project. With preferred routes due to be published this year, we are hopeful that we may finally see trams returning to the city.

We asked Tracy Brabin to tell us what a new mass transit system will mean for the area:

“It is simple”, she said. The West Yorkshire Tram will be the biggest transport infrastructure project in West Yorkshire since the building of the motorways in the 1960s, and I am thrilled that Leeds Civic Trust has given its backing to the scheme”

“The first phase will see the tram network starting with two routes – one running between Leeds and Bradford, and the other connecting St James’s Hospital with south Leeds. We asked for views on potential route options last year, during which thousands of people from across the region had their say on what they would like to see. We are hoping to go back to the public with more in-depth plans around the turn of next year.

“This is so important to me because I believe people in West Yorkshire should be able to get around as easily as those in places like Manchester, Birmingham, Newcastle and Nottingham, which all have their own tram systems.

“But we also have to believe we deserve it – this is the best opportunity we have ever had to create a region-wide tram network – and now is the time for us to get to work and make it happen.

The logo for the Weaver Network, featuring a stylized green 'W' followed by the text 'Weaver Network' in a green sans-serif font.

“The government is supportive of this scheme, but we still need the enthusiastic voices of our residents, businesses, politicians and charities in order to keep the momentum going and make our vision for spades in the ground by 2028 a reality.”

To mark this new dawn, the “Metro” brand, which has been in existence for 50 years, will disappear from bus stops, buses and stations to be replaced by a new name “The Weaver Network.” Poet laureate Simon Armitage has helped to develop this new name, which echoes the textile heritage of West Yorkshire.

So as we look back at the ups and downs of public transport in our city since the Trust was established, there are reasons to be hopeful that Leeds will once again have the public transport system that it deserves.

**Martin Hamilton**  
*Director, Leeds Civic Trust*

“There are reasons to be hopeful that Leeds will once again have the public transport system that it deserves.”



An AI image of a tram and its setting commissioned by Leeds Civic Trust, credit: Create Streets





**We are a voluntary, non-political  
body, open to everyone who wants  
to participate in and influence the  
development of our City.**



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## SUPPORT LEEDS' HISTORY: JOIN THE BLUE PLAQUES FUND SCHEME!

Leeds Civic Trust's Blue Plaques celebrate the city's history, but we need your help to ensure their future! Our Blue Plaques Fund will raise money to install new plaques, restore existing ones, and promote Leeds' incredible heritage.

### Your support will help...

Fund plaques for worthy nominees who lack financial backing

Preserve and restore historic plaques across the city

Develop educational resources, including walking maps and digital guides

Create a lasting endowment to protect our plaques for generations



SCAN THE QR CODE TO FIND OUT MORE AND JOIN TODAY!