



LATEST NEWS FROM HYTHE CIVIC SOCIETY

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...FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE...

WATER SPOUTS ONCE AGAIN FROM HYTHE'S HISTORIC FOUNTAIN

A 19th century drinking fountain in Hythe has been restored to its former working glory and now provides free, clean water for everyone all year round, having been out of use for more than 50 years.

The idea to refurbish the historic fountain in Red Lion Square was first put to local people in 2018, when local landscaper, Stephen Bailey, asked on Facebook whether they would like to see the hydro work of art restored. The people of Hythe responded with a resounding 'yes'.

Stephen, now a Hythe Town Councillor, takes up the story.

"Having proposed this project to the Hythe Civic Society, they in turn presented the idea to the then Cllr Doug Wade, who proposed it to Hythe Town Council. The motion was passed, so the project was put out to tender, and I was delighted to be asked to undertake the restoration, which was fully funded to the amount of £1,500 and overseen by the Town Council."

The drinking fountain had been donated by Mayor Thomas Judge in 1886 and originally installed in the wall of Dr. Fagge's house, next door to the Town Hall in the High Street. When his house was acquired by NatWest bank in 1911, the fountain was relocated to Market Square (now Red Lion Square).

In 1965, increased public awareness of water quality prompted the removal of the metal cup by the Health Department, and the water supply was cut off.

The fountain was designed and sculpted by William and Thomas Wills – renowned for their drinking fountain designs – and cast in iron by the Coalbrookdale Company of Shropshire.

“There were several stages to the project,” continues Stephen, “but first Affinity Water had to fit a new water meter and fully compliant fixtures and fittings. The priority, of course, was to ensure that the water quality was fit for human consumption.

“We initially sandblasted the structure to remove several layers of paint, and were struck by the level of detail in the three figures – Moses, a cherub and a woman – even to the extent of their nails being clearly defined! And to our surprise, we found that the backdrop above the water bowl itself was made of marble.”

Early 21st century efforts to enhance the fountain ended up with it being painted blue, without being able perform its original purpose - to provide clean water for locals and visitors. Today, the restored structure looks spectacular with the cast-iron work painted in gun-metal grey, which contrasts beautifully with the pure white surround.

“I am hoping that Historic England will recognise the aesthetic and historical significance of the fountain, and that it will list it for its importance as an iconic and functional piece of work,” concludes Stephen.

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Additional information

1. Established in 1945, Hythe Civic Society is a membership organisation for residents who share an interest in the town's community, built environment and open spaces. It comments on local planning issues, works with local organisations and councils on projects such as Red Lion Square and Eaton Lands, and organises 'Hythe in Bloom'.
2. The water fountain restoration project has been fully funded by Hythe Town Council to the tune of £1,500.