

Civic Award 2002 - 2-3 Market Place, Hitchin

The Hitchin Society Civic Award was presented in recognition of the remarkable and imaginative renovation of one of the oldest buildings in Hitchin's historic Market Place. The building has the appearance of a brick-fronted Georgian house, but behind the façade parts of the building are much older, dating back to the mid 1500's. The ground floor shop has always been successful, and is now a fashionable hairdressing salon. But the three floors above the shop have for years been sadly neglected, and had become almost derelict.



In a major conservation and renovation project, Lantern Construction Ltd have converted the upper floors into three flats, combining an exceptional standard of modern design with the preservation of a wealth of original features. These include the brickwork of a massive central chimney stack - a walk-around feature in one of the flats - and 400 year-old timbers exposed in many of the rooms.



Perhaps the most stunning feature is the moulded plasterwork above a magnificent fireplace. Dating from 1670, the plaster decorations include the rose of England, the thistle of Scotland and the fleur-de-lys of France, all perfectly preserved and under the protection of English Heritage. It has been commented that this great fireplace has the appearance of having been in a guild room rather than in the dining room of a private house.

Before the redevelopment work could take place it was first necessary for the building to be made structurally sound. The original builders of the central chimney stack - itself a conversion in the mid 1700's - had cut away some of the beams leaving part of the building unsupported. This has been put right using a modern version of a traditional blacksmithing design which has now given this remarkable timber-framed building a secure long-term future.

The Hitchin Society Civic Award is therefore made this year in respect of the exceptional standard of design, conservation and renovation work carried out within this scheme.

Design: Brent Smith Associates

Construction: Lantern Construction Ltd