

www.lancmag.com

July 2019 £2.45

Lancashire

& North West magazine



Midsummer fun at Samlesbury Hall
The National Festival of Making
One hundred years of Women in Policing
The Harris: Rebirth of a much-loved Institution
One hundred years and counting for Beaverbrooks
The Dos and Don'ts of Home Improvement

The HARRIS: Rebirth of a much-loved Institution

by Andrew Harris



Re-imagining the HARRIS.



Edmund Robert Harris who made the HARRIS possible.

In 1877 Preston solicitor Edmund Harris left a legacy of more than £15 million – in modern money - to create what became the Harris Museum, Art Gallery and Library. When the next Preston Guild came round in 1882 - they are massive celebrations permitted under an 1179 charter and held every 20 years in peacetime since 1328 - it was decided to proceed with the design and construction of this iconic building which was completed in 1893.

Last year the HARRIS celebrated its 125th birthday during which time it has been the beating heart of the Borough then City of Preston – plus serving Lancashire and much of the North West. It now aims to transform itself for the next 125 years but more of that later.

The HARRIS holds about 80,000 wonderfully diverse and surprising items in its collections. They cover fine and decorative art, costume, textiles and history including collections of archaeology and local history. The museum has a permanent history gallery called Discover Preston which includes wider collections. Highlights include the complete skeleton of a 13,500 year old ice-age moose or elk – *the Poulton Elk* – which is embedded with two man-made barbed points being the earliest relic of human occupation of what is now Lancashire.

The fine art collection includes over 200 oil paintings including inspiring work by Graham Sutherland, Lucian Freud, Richard Ansdell and local artists such as Anthony and

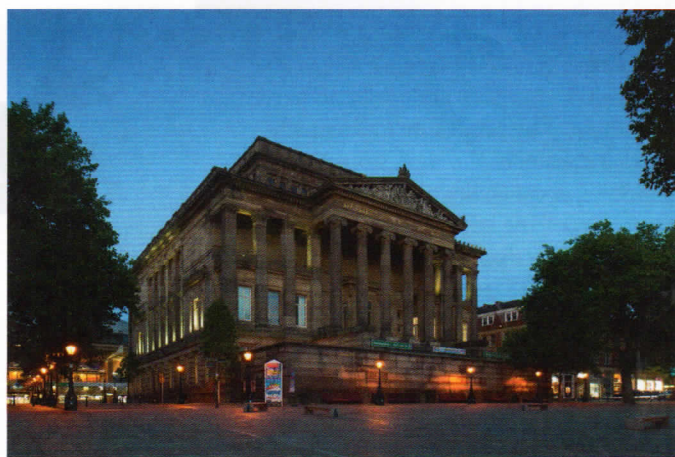


ABOVE: The newly-built Harris Museum, Art Gallery & Library in 1893. RIGHT: The iconic and splendid Harris building today.

Arthur Devis and Reginald Aspinwall. The decorative art collection includes collections of British ceramics and glass – highlights of which include the largest scent bottle collection in the country which is displayed in the *Ceramics and Glass Gallery*. Other attractions include displays by national and international artists, touring shows and in-house exhibitions.

A must-see exhibit is the portrait painting *'Pauline in the Yellow Dress'*. It was painted by James Gunn in 1944 and shows the artist's wife seated with two small white dogs. When it was first unveiled her glamorous appearance and captivating smile created quite a stir. It is said that the small dog on Pauline's lap is looking up at her in awe – as do most of the viewers of the painting – and the attention to detail in the fine pattern of the dress is truly breathtaking. The Daily Mail described the painting as the *'Mona Lisa of 1944'*.

The HARRIS also accommodates the main library in the city. It holds important book collections including the Shepherd Collection which was donated to Preston by Dr Richard Shepherd in 1761 with additional rare and interesting works funded by the Shepherd bequest. The library also holds the wonderful Spencer Collection of illustrated books for children.



But the HARRIS is about much more than collections. It is a café, shop, meeting place, community hub and venue for small conferences. In a previous existence your columnist would use its facilities to impress organisations investing in Preston and to boost support for the campaign for Preston to achieve City status. The HARRIS was central to the bid by adding great prestige to the submission.

The HARRIS is now visited by more than 1,000 people a day – so why does it need to be reborn? There are FOUR reasons behind what is described as the 'Re-imagining the Harris' project –



LEFT: A modest entrance to a spectacular building. BELOW: The 13,500 year-old moose or elk known as the 'Poulton Elk'.

even more exciting and exhilarating experience for all users.

In view of these needs the HARRIS is at a transformational point in its history – part way through a journey to change fundamentally how this iconic Grade 1 listed building is used and update the role it plays in the life of Preston, Lancashire and the North West. The vision of the Victorian founders was that the Harris Free Library, Museum and Art Gallery would be the focus of culture, arts and learning - and an embodiment of the aspirations of Preston in the late 1800s. 'Re-imagining the Harris' is inspired by the ambitions of the founders while responding to the needs of the people of Preston, Lancashire and the North West and future generations.

Preston City Council and Lancashire County Council are working together and with partners to bring the museum, art gallery and library together to provide a single 'blended' service which will reinvigorate the HARRIS for users of all ages. This new vision is rooted in the Victorian origins of the HARRIS and Lancashire's modern role and reputation as a centre for creativity

- As the HARRIS is more than 125 years old its facilities are tired and need refreshing. The project includes much-needed repairs to the roof, stonework, windows, accessibility and services to future-proof the structure and ensure that it is attractive and fit for purpose for the next 125 years.

- In the modern world there is a need to introduce community-led displays to encourage learning and interaction for all ages with rarely-seen objects exhibited such as the historic book collection which is currently largely hidden.

- To fulfil its potential the HARRIS must provide more opportunities for people to become creative and for artists to display their work.

- The biggest opportunity is to use the rejuvenated and adapted fabric to become the UK's first blended museum, art gallery and library by combining the appeal of all three to provide an





LEFT: Pauline in the Yellow Dress' – The Mona Lisa of 1944. BELOW: A public consultation. The Horrockses Yard Works Model on display. ABOVE: The lighter side of life. The café at the HARRIS.



for stories and memories and will celebrate Preston's past, present and future. The reborn HARRIS must, however, be sustainable in the more difficult financial climate affecting local government. This is being achieved in FOUR ways –

- Arts Council National Portfolio Status has been granted for the first time. This attracts additional revenue or annual funding of £225,000.
- The HARRIS has seen a 25% increase in users in the last two years - with more than 384,000 visits in 2018/19.
- A network of robust local partnerships has been developed and this includes the University of Central Lancashire which is reported to be keen to play an integral role in the 'Re-imagining the Harris' project.
- The programme of popular events and exhibitions has been greatly expanded and now includes a range of successful music events, talks, debates and quizzes which have been sold-out.

These achievements are real but limited by the current state of the building. For this reason the partners have worked-up a £10.7 million scheme to fund the repairs and changes needed. Much of the funding needed has been committed, pledged or is in prospect. The remaining funding will be much easier to achieve if you, dear reader, can support the project with a contribution however large or small. The need is to evidence local support. The current state of play is as follows –

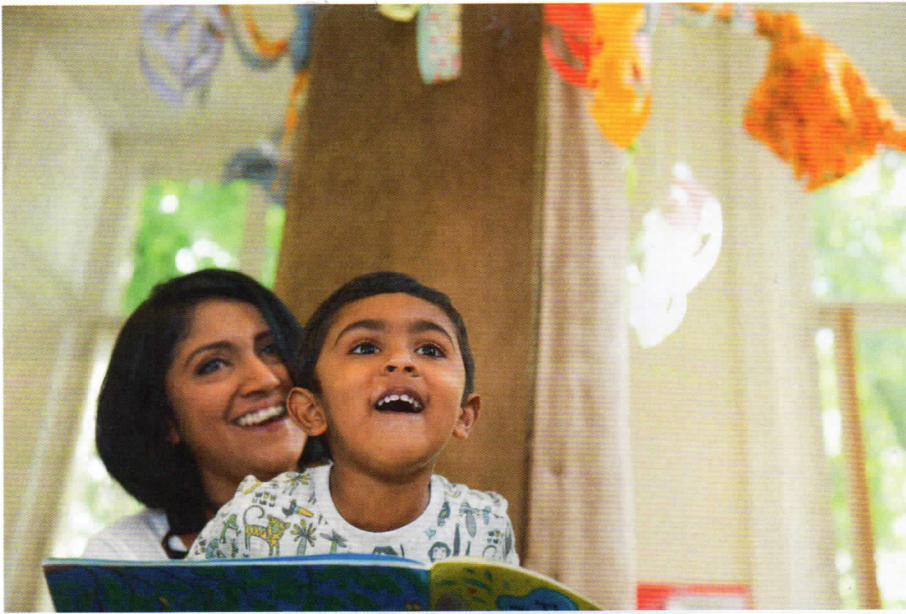
- The National Lottery Heritage Fund has granted £180,900 to help the partners progress their plans in detail.
- The full application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund will be for £4.7

and innovation.

The partners – including Preston and Lancashire Councils, Preston, the Preston, South Ribble and Lancashire City Deal, Friends of the Harris and the Harris Trust – are committed to achieving a very high-quality, constantly

refreshed and community-led museum, art gallery and library services delivered in a truly seamless way. This is thought to be a unique opportunity to make the most of the potential of the HARRIS to keep pace with how society is evolving.

The HARRIS will become a factory



LEFT: Displays can amaze the young and less young: expressions say it all. MIDDLE LEFT: The local Welsh Club meet at the HARRIS. BOTTOM: Another vision of the future.

million in 2020.

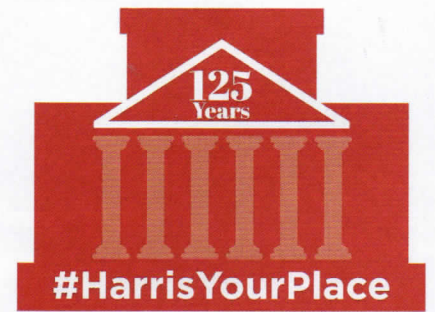
- Preston and Lancashire Councils, the local City Deal, Arts Council England, the Harris Trust and the Friends of the Harris are supporting the project with a further £3.6 million.

- The partners have prospects for raising the remaining £2.4 million or thereabouts but there is a need to evidence local support through the HarrisYourPlace public fundraising campaign.

- Local support in the form of even modest contributions will greatly assist this process although larger donations from companies in Preston and Lancashire will directly help to achieve the target.

‘Re-imagining the Harris’ offers fascinating prospects. The unique blended offer will permeate all spaces including those normally used for commercial activity. Collections, art, historic and lending books will be displayed within the café and retail spaces connecting narratives and activities. Pop-up mobile café units will be able to move around the building. Multi-use spaces on the ground and first floors will offer a new form of flexibility. They may feature permanent displays in a modular form to allow the space to be reconfigured to accommodate events and activities – whether mums and toddler groups, chill-out spaces for teenagers, community group meetings, weddings or one-off events. A further ambition is to remove unhelpful partition walls added in the last 125 years. Many of the original and spacious galleries will revert to their former glory. The partitions can be replaced by space dividers providing opportunities for blending museum,





TOP: Blending uses: PLAYING at the Harris. LEFT: The proposed Lancaster Road entrance. ABOVE: The past was 125 years. The future is #Harris Your Place.

art gallery and library uses to meet the needs of different groups. It is exciting!

Councillor Peter Kelly - Preston City Council Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure - commented "We are thrilled to have this (£180,900) generous support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund for such an important project for Preston. The Harris is, in many ways, the heart of Preston and deserves to be used to its full potential. I cannot wait to watch its transformation in the coming years and see it further embedded into the community it serves."

County Councillor Peter Buckley – LCC Cabinet Member for Community and Cultural Services – added "This (the award of the development grant) is great news for our plans to create a new chapter in the life

of the much-loved Harris. It will transform the building and create new cultural space for people to be creative and learn new things."

The HARRIS has had a glorious past and could have a spectacular future. If you would like to help to achieve this with whatever you or your company can afford please donate online to www.bit.ly/harryourplace, send a cheque payable to 'Friends of the Harris' to the Harris Museum, Art Gallery & Library, Market Square, Preston PR1 2PP or drop it off at the shop in the HARRIS where cash or card donations are also welcome. Whatever you do please provide your name and address so that your support can add weight to the remaining funding bids.

The blending of the Harris Museum, Art Gallery and Library is an innovative and fascinating prospect. We hope it succeeds.

Andrew E. Harris – www.andrewharris.co.uk – gratefully acknowledges the help provided by Hilary Machell – Capital Fundraising Manager for the HARRIS – in the preparation of this article. All the images used are courtesy of the HARRIS. Andrew Harris is not related to Edmund Harris.

