

An Artistic Environment - Derek Latham

So, the Golden Eagle returns!

I recall the Golden Eagle as one of the first, if not *the* first real ale pub in Derby, before Trevor Harris went to take on The Brunswick Inn from the Derbyshire Historic Buildings Trust back in the early 70s

Now it appears it is innovating again (DET 8.7.2013) with a new mural related to Derby's historic past. This is significant, not just to reinvigorate trade at the Golden Eagle, but also as a potential indicator of our future urban environment.

The most effective way to upgrade the energy efficiency of existing building stock is to insulate the outside of the building with a natural, 'breathable' insulation material, I such as hemp or sheep's wool. This retains the embodied energy of the existing building (the thermal mass of brickwork which retains the heat in winter and stays cooler in summer – stabilising temperature variations) within the insulated envelope, whilst reducing overall heat loss. The only downside is that the character of the brickwork externally is lost and is usually replaced with a render (ideally a lime render which is also 'breathable' allowing the whole of the structure to 'breathe' and maintain a healthy internal atmosphere). The alternative may be tile cladding or timber clapboarding.

Render can look bland, and when applied 'en masse', lose some of the texture we have come to associate with English towns and cities. (Render is more common historically in Scotland and Wales). This can be ameliorated by the use of colour (popular on the continent), but what the Golden eagle ably illustrates is that it can be used as a 'canvas' for displaying artwork, history and messages. This is far from unique. Readers will be aware of the gable of the Silk Mill Inn, on Full Street displaying the story of the fight for rights for millworkers in Derby in the 18th century.

But just imagine how vibrant our streets could be if both homes and commercial premises, once upgraded with external insulation and render, were utilised for artwork and/or historic or social interpretation. If not a listed building, or within a conservation area, this would not require planning permission yet could create from erstwhile non distinct streets, real points of interest and visual delight.

Historic examples of such artwork can be seen in the pargetting of buildings in East Anglia, or in the painted timber frame, rendered buildings of Bavaria and Austria. But rather than harking back to the past, this could be used by the young as an expression of their generation. Just as those older members of the community, such as me, have realised that the young use a myriad different ways of interacting through the digital social media, so could they invigorate our environment by using the canvas of the properties they live, work and play in, to communicate their ideas and art to their neighbours and the local community within which they live.

The best of such enactments may well be preserved for posterity, but the less appreciated would be changed by later generations each placing their message, and imprint upon their society. An exciting prospect, if only people will rise to the challenge. There is currently no shortage of artists, only shortage of opportunities!