

# The Mawer group carvings

**Tracey Hebron** looks at the work of Catherine Mawer whose apprentices produced carvings on two of Barnsley's iconic buildings.

**C**atherine Mawer (1803-1877) was a master sculptor and stone mason based in Leeds in the 19th century. As a woman working in a male-dominated profession, she was highly unusual for her time.

She established a successful stone-yard and studio with her husband Robert. After Robert's untimely death in 1854, she continued to run the business on her own, eventually founding the Mawer group of architectural sculptors with her nephew William Ingle and three apprentices – Benjamin Payler, Matthew Taylor and her son, Charles Mawer.

Her incredible legacy in shaping some of Leeds landmark buildings, including Leeds Town Hall, has been celebrated in recent years, but her mark on Barnsley is less-well known. Under her guidance, the Mawer group created beautiful carvings for two iconic Barnsley buildings; the Barnsley Mechanics Institute and Public Hall (now the Civic, Barnsley) and the Queens Hotel on the corner of Eldon and Regent Street.

## Barnsley Mechanics Institute and Public Hall

The Barnsley Mechanics Institute and Public Hall opened in January 1878. This grand new building provided a place for ordinary Barnsley people to access culture, science and the arts. It was partly funded by Henry Harvey, a local industrialist, Quaker and philanthropist who believed in education and social reform, along with other local benefactors and public shares.

With his brothers, William and Charles, Henry was an active member of the Barnsley Mechanics Institute. In 1875 he set up a company to fund a new building for the institute through public shares. When the cost of the build spiralled, Henry took out a mortgage to cover the costs. The stonework on the front of the building was carved by Matthew Taylor, one of Catherine's apprentices. It includes a bust of Henry Harvey above the front door on Eldon Street alongside twin muses, Arts and Science.

Henry died in 1879. The building, renamed the Harvey Institute, passed to his brother Charles. Charles gifted it to Barnsley Town Council in 1890 on the agreement that it became Barnsley's first Free Public Library. The building is now The Civic, Barnsley and continues to enable access to arts and culture for all.

## The Queen's Hotel

The Queen's Hotel was designed by architects Turner and Wade for the Fox family. It was built in stages throughout the 1860s and early 1870s, opposite the new Barnsley railway stations. The ornate carvings were by Benjamin Payler, another of Catherine Mawer's apprentices. They include lions, eagles, floral designs and numerous carved heads. The most recognisable portrait is that of a young Queen Victoria above the main door on Regent Street. Others include the first and second mayors of Barnsley, a self-portrait of the artist and a rare carving of Catherine Mawer herself and maybe James Fox. The Fox family were local brewers and benefactors to the town. They were closely involved with the Cooper Gallery. Because of the challenges of transporting ornate carvings, the stones would be roughed out by stone masons away from site, and then incorporated into the building unfinished. The sculptors would then finish the carvings in-situ using ladders and scaffolding, in full public view. It would have been quite a spectacle!

The identity of the other heads on the Queens Hotel is not known, but they are likely to include local dignitaries and possibly characters from well-known plays or theatre productions.



**DO YOU HAVE MORE INFORMATION** on the people who were depicted? I would love to hear from you [TraceyHebron@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:TraceyHebron@hotmail.co.uk) I want to celebrate Catherine's legacy and encouraging you to 'look up' and enjoy the work of the Mawer school as part of the Eldon Street High Street Heritage Action Zone. The Eldon Street HSHAZ will help to restore historic buildings on the west side of Eldon Street, between Regent Street and the junction of Market Hill.

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