

Thought for week

Reverend Guy
Baptist Minister

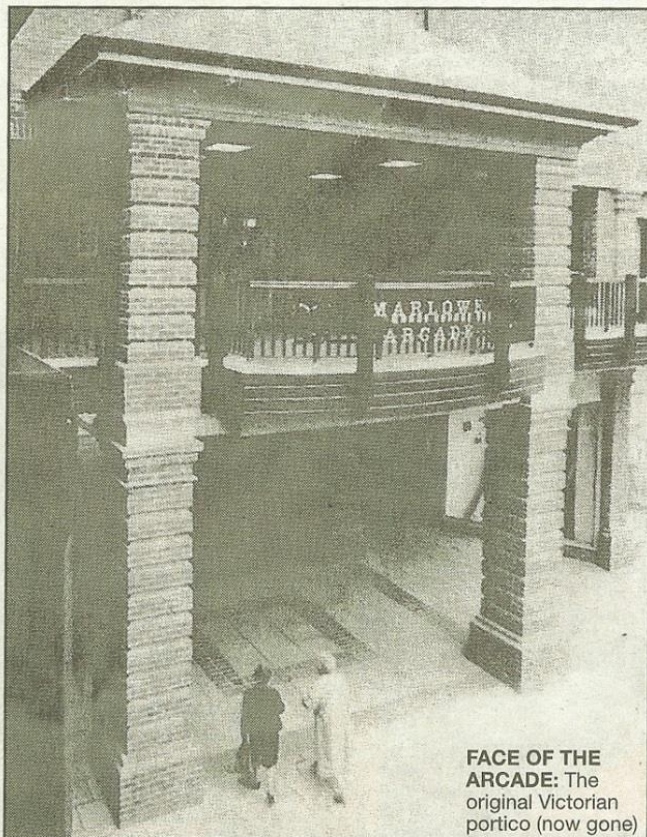
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Marlowe the old master slips into city's shadows



FACE OF THE ARCADE: The original Victorian portico (now gone)

Way we were



David Lewis
Canterbury
Historical and
Archaeological
Society

THIS month marks the 450th anniversary of Marlowe's baptism in St George's church – his actual birth date is uncertain. Time perhaps to take stock of the city's relationship with its most famous son.

Demolition of the old art college buildings beside the Marlowe Theatre has encouraged me to make further enquiries on the whereabouts of the attractive Marlowe Society plaque we used to see in the lane leading from St Peter's Lane to the theatre.

On it the Latin tag "Ut nectar ingenium" or "Genius is like nectar" is taken from the Marlowe Society emblem, itself based on a woodcut that appeared on the title page of Marlowe's poem Hero and Leander, published in 1598.

It seems we (developers, contractors, council, Marlowe Society) have managed to lose it.

A second vanishing link with the great poet has been the Marlowe Arcade. This, according to a plaque high on the arcade wall, was opened by the Duchess of Kent in September 1985.

A year ago we learnt that the Marlowe Arcade was to be renamed Whitefriars Arcade, to integrate the arcade image more effectively with Whitefriars development.



IMAGES IN STONE: The frieze in Rose Lane car park



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The Duke of York's
Royal Military School

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FACE OF THE ARCADE: The original Victorian portico (now gone)

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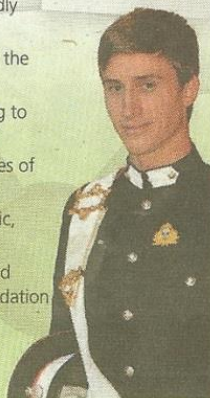
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Let's recap on its short life by taking a guided walk through, starting at the St Margaret's Street end.

Look up first at the weather vane high above the arcade entrance. Spot the two theatrical masks which remind us that this site was once the site of the original Marlowe Theatre, which stood here from 1927 to 1982.

At the entrance we are greeted with two versions of the arcade name – Marlowe Arcade in stone at our feet and Whitefriars Arcade on the sign swinging above our head.

The architecture of the main shopping area ahead of us, with its repeated shallow arches set slightly back, takes its cue from 16 Watling Street, a 17th-century property standing a block away. The latter has a reasonable claim to be the earliest brick built house in the city.

Earlier photos show that an original water feature has been removed from the arcade, as has a Victorian portico erected at the far end, and its accompanying external balcony from which archbishops joined in the civic carol singing. The only vestiges of the portico are irregularities in the external brickwork.

Name signs at this end of the arcade are no less baffling than in St Margaret's Street – look up to see the Whitefriar's Arcade sign or, higher still, read Marlowe Arcade etched in the glass above.

The story of the arcade is also linked to the fate of the mysterious ecclesiastical frieze, which stood for many years in the nearby Rose Lane car park. An offer for incorporation of the frieze into the new arcade was made but turned down.

IMAGES IN STONE: The frieze in Rose Lane car park



FOUNTAIN: The original water feature (now gone)



EARLY BRICKS: 17th-century window arches in Watling Street

The frieze, possibly recording the consecration and enthronement of St Thomas à Becket, was reduced to rubble when a white van backed into it in December 2010, so it is now lost for ever.

So, in all, a short but mixed history of good intentions, chance events, changes of mind and a half-changed name.

If the spirit of Marlowe is slightly confused, so am I.

Finally, one design feature of the arcade has come up trumps over recent weeks – unlike the remainder of Whitefriars, it at least offers total protection from heavy, persistent,

cold, rain!

■ For more on Marlowe and Canterbury, see CHAS website for details of Marlowe450 drama and talks see the Marlowe Theatre web site.



■ The Canterbury Times is working with Saga to mark the centenary of the start of the First World War. Share your family stories online at

canterburytimes.co.uk/nostalgia

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