

Brief: Commissioning a Conservator for the Gladstone Plaque, Port Sunlight

1. Introduction

Port Sunlight Village Trust (PSVT) seeks to commission an ICON accredited conservator to undertake treatment to the bronze Gladstone Plaque, located on the front of the Gladstone Theatre, Port Sunlight.

The plaque is comprised of five panels of beaten bronze sheets installed on a timber panel above the external door to the Grade II Gladstone Theatre, located in Port Sunlight conservation area. The plaque is highly significant for the theatre, and a very visible part of heritage in the village.

Port Sunlight Village Trust (PSVT) commissioned ICON accredited metal conservators to undertake condition assessments treatment plans for all the external monuments in its care, including the Gladstone Plaque.

The condition assessment rated the plaque as in poor condition, with high priority to address within a year. Remedial conservation work is required to prevent further deterioration of the plaque, improve its legibility, and enable a preventative maintenance routine to be established.



Figure 1: Gladstone Plaque, located above entrance to Gladstone Theatre



2. The Gladstone Plaque and Theatre

The building was designed by the architect William Owen and opened in 1891. It was initially used as an assembly and dining hall, and later converted to a performance space from 1910 by James Lomax-Simpson, before being renamed the Gladstone Theatre. The theatre represents a long and significant history of community-led performance in the village, which still plays a key part in Port Sunlight today.

The bronze plaque commemorates the opening of Gladstone Hall on 28th November 1891 by William Gladstone, who attended the grand opening for the building in the run-up to his fourth term as Prime Minister. Lever was a lifelong admirer of Gladstone (who abolished the soap tax in 1853, benefiting soap manufacturers like Lever Brothers).

The plaque is a later addition to the hall, which, when first constructed, had transom windows with small-paned glazing directly above the doors. The transom windows were replaced by the bronze plaque in the early 1900s. The plaque itself was created by the architect, Henry Bloomfield Bare, and as such, it is a rare surviving example of Bare's skills in producing external metalwork. Bare also had strong links to the village, championing art education for working people through the medium of an arts studio and exhibition in the village.

3. About Port Sunlight

Port Sunlight was founded in 1888 by the industrialist William Lever. He wanted to provide the employees of his new Lever Brothers soap works and their families with decent and affordable housing and a wide range of facilities, services, policies, and incentives to ensure their well-being and 'betterment'.

Port Sunlight is not the first example of an industrial worker village, but it is one of the finest surviving examples in the world. It was an immediate precursor to and a model for the Garden City movement and influenced the design of planned worker settlements, garden villages and garden suburbs around the world from the turn of the twentieth century to the present day.

Most residential properties, public buildings and monuments are listed at Grade II. Two sections of the landscape are included in Historic England's register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest. The village, set in 130 acres of parklands and gardens, is protected by conservation area status and covenants.

Today the village is home to just over 2,000 residents, a mixture of owner-occupiers and private tenants, and under normal circumstances attracts in the region of 300,000 domestic and international visitors each year. There are a variety of community organisations and businesses operating in Port Sunlight, from the village school and Grade II* listed church to two pubs, a hotel, conferencing and events space, a garden centre, and a theatre.



There are other important stakeholders in the village too, namely:

- Wirral Council provide certain statutory services including for planning, waste management and highways and transport.
- National Museums Liverpool is responsible for the Lady Lever Art Gallery, which was founded by William Lever and continues to house one of the UK's finest collections of fine and decorative art, usually attracting in the region of 200,000 visitors each year.
- Port Sunlight is the historic home of Unilever in the UK; Lever Brothers became Unilever in 1929 following a merger with the Margarine Union. The company's rich history is documented in extensive and nationally Designated archives held on site in the Unilever campus.

4. About Port Sunlight Village Trust (PSVT)

PSVT is an independent charity founded in 1999 by Unilever Plc. Our vision is to make "Port Sunlight, an inspiring place to live, work and visit." Our mission "We are guardians of a unique and beautiful village, working with its community to ensure a great quality of life for residents and to celebrate William Lever's amazing legacy through cultural and learning experiences for all."

PSVT is responsible for:

- A diverse group of monuments (listed and unlisted), the museum collection, and the village archive.
- The landscape within the Conservation Area (except individual back gardens of houses).
- 292 of the Grade II-listed houses, 323 garages and 22 commercial and community buildings.
- Port Sunlight Museum & Gift Shop, including the Edwardian Worker's Cottage and learning experience, SoapWorks.
- Tackling social issues and promoting community cohesion.
- Managing the visitor destination and raising its profile through partnership working, marketing activities, visitor services, product development, and events.

PSVT employs 50 members of staff to discharge its charitable objectives and works with 18 volunteers across all areas of our operations from landscape gardening to building conservation. We are governed by a Board of Trustees with expertise in housing, surveying, finance, conservation, landscape, planning, museums, and heritage.



In 2019, PSVT launched its first 5-year strategic plan articulating five strategic objectives for the organisation and village:

- i. Conserve and promote Port Sunlight's unique heritage in a sustainable way
- ii. Be a financially strong and well-managed, independent charity
- iii. Deliver high quality services across the estate
- iv. Realise the potential of Port Sunlight as a leading visitor attraction
- v. Be a brilliant place to work

The Conservation Management Plan (CMP) was adopted for the village at the same time. Since then, the organisation has been working hard to lay solid foundations to realise its new vision and ambitions for the site.

5. The Project

Before the plaque and any surrounding woodwork is removed, they should be documented (measured and photographed) to ensure that the plaque will be returned to its exact location, and any replacement woodwork replicated accurately.

The proposed conservation works include documenting the existing conditions of the frame and plaque, removing the plaque for treatment in a conservation studio, cleaning the plaque, removing corrosion and repatination of the plaque to match the existing bronze brown colour as well as installing non-ferrous metal (such as brass or bronze) dome-headed fixings to secure the plaque in place.

From the visual record, it appears that the plaque has undergone some form of repatination between 2008 and 2009, and thus the current brown patina with varied green deposits spread across the surface of the plaque does not appear to be original.

The plaque is installed in a wooden frame with a backing board. The condition of these features cannot be fully assessed until the plaque is removed. If less than 3/5th beyond repair, the frame and backing board should be repaired. However, if these features are severely damaged or no longer fit for purpose (which is likely) they will be replaced in kind (materials, dimensions, finish and ornamental details).

Once the frame and backing have been addressed, the plaque will be reinstalled in its original position.

Please note, a Listed Building Consent (LBC) application has been submitted for these works, and therefore there may be additional requirements requested as part of the conditions of the LBC.

5.1 Condition

Please see 'Condition Report Gladstone Theatre Bronze Plaque July 2021' by Antique Bronze for more details.

Structurally, the plaque comprises five sections of thin beaten bronze, attached by screws and nails onto an unseen (probably wood) backing board of unknown condition. There are gaps between each section of the bronze panel. The open spaces have filled with detritus, and it is likely that water will be penetrating in and rotting the wooden support behind.

The plaque has a wooden surround which has been painted black. The top edge of the plaque is tucked under the upper frame edge, which latter holds it in place at the top. The other three sides sit within the inner edges of the frame.

There appear to be several previous attempts to prevent water ingress behind the plaque, including caulk (which has failed). On the bottom edge, the wood surround has rotted away entirely, leaving nails clinging to splinters and fillers stretched over a wide gap and adhering at random points. A visual chronology for the plaque indicates that it was repatinated in the twenty-first century to have a dark brown finish. The bronze surface is now characterised by disfiguring and uneven green corrosion.

To the rear of the plaque (inside the theatre), tongue and groove boarding is visible (see image below). Inspection of the roof around the panel shows the plaque is screwed to the tongue and groove timber which in turn is secured to the oak timber uprights of the frame for the porch. Although heavily water stained from a roof leak, these timbers appeared in good repair (January 2024) but should be assessed as part of this scope of works once the plaque is removed.





5.2 Proposed Treatment Plan

Below is a summary of the scope of works for the Gladstone Plaque. Please also note the recommendations in “**Gladstone Theatre Plaque Bronze Condition Report 2021**”*and* and also the **Gladstone Plaque LBC Heritage and Access Statement 2024** and **Gladstone Plaque Research and Timeline 2024** for more general information.

The methodology you develop as part of your tender submission must address the necessary conservation work as outlined below:

- a. Documentation
 - Submit H&S documentation including proposed methodology to PSVT for approval before removing the plaque and backing panel.
 - Prior to removal, document the existing conditions of the plaque and surrounding joinery (including frame and backing board). Documentation should include installation details, photographs, measurements and accurately recording profiles of the joinery.

- b. Remove Plaque with its Back Panel and Install Temporary Protective Panel
 - Remove plaque with its back panel and take to conservation workshop. It may be necessary to cut out rotten wood and leave zone ready for reinstall.
 - Provide and install a temporary wooden panel in the void left by the plaque. Any fasteners used should not damage the surrounding woodwork.
 - Panel should provide sufficient protection from the weather for the interior of the theatre roof while the plaque is at the conservation studio and should be painted black to harmonise with surrounding woodwork.

- c. Transport Bronze and Back Panel to Studio
 - Suitably support the bronze and its back panel during transport to prevent undue strain on the thin sheets of bronze.

- d. Treat Plaque
 - Assess and document the existing conditions of the plaque and back panel and surrounding joinery (including frame and backing panel). Documentation should include installation details, photographs, measurements and accurately recording profiles of the joinery.
 - Review suitability of proposed methodology for bronze and communicate findings with PSVT.
 - Hand clean with appropriate dilute soap solution followed by solvent clean of surface to remove any dirt, debris, detritus.
 - Ensure seams are as secure and watertight as possible
 - Remove corrosion either by gel cleaning or fine abrasion
 - Repatinate to match existing brown-bronze shade as closely as possible. PSVT to sign off on patina colour after discussion of options.

- Dome-headed fixings of non-ferrous metal (such as brass or bronze) to match current screws be made or sourced.
- e. Wooden Frame and Back Panel
 - Assess the condition of the wooden frame, communicate level of deterioration and if frame will need replacing to PSVT. If the frame is severely deteriorated or no longer
 - Apply incralac to the bronze as a protective finish.
 - Replace any missing fixings onto new back panel.
fit for purpose (more than 3/5th beyond repair), then propose a methodology for replacing the frame so that it matches the original materials, dimensions, finish and ornamental details.
 - Frame to be painted in external black paint to match the surrounding woodwork.
 - Submit proposed methodology to PSVT and relevant stakeholders for approval before removing the frame.
 - Once approved by PSVT and relevant stakeholders, supply and fit a replacement wooden frame.
- Note if a new frame is required, the bottom lip of the frame may need to be re-profiled to encourage water to run away rather than pool. If this is required, provide costs for the installation of a drip edge for the bottom of the frame. Note that the design and dimensions must be approved in advance by PSVT and relevant stakeholders.
- Assess condition of back panel, and, if rotten, a hardwood panel sought for replacement. Panel to be sealed with an external grade wood sealant (which should be inert when cured).
- f. Roof works.
 - Once bronze panel has been removed, inspect the condition of the surrounding timbers
 - Coordinate access and work schedule with PSVT's roofing contractor who will address any deficiencies or damaged areas of the roof identified after plaque is removed.
- g. Reinstall plaque, backing board and frame
- h. Once any potential issues with the roof have been resolved, reinstall plaque, backing board and frame.
- i. Ensure that the new frame fits tightly to reduce chance of water ingress.
- j. Non-ferrous (brass or bronze) metal dome headed screws to match the original should be used.
- k. Any remaining gaps around the plaque can be sealed with a pigmented external grade silicone sealant (this sealant should not have additives that react with copper).

l. Security, Access and Health & Safety

- A robust risk assessment and methodology must be undertaken.
- Note that the plaque is located above a primary fire exit for the theatre. Therefore, consideration around access requirements should be outlined in your application. Co-ordination with the theatre staff is essential to reduce impact on the day-to-day management of the theatre, and to ensure that the venue can be safely accessed.

m. Record keeping and reports

- Conservation report documenting works carried out, materials and methodology with sufficiently detailed photographs (before and after).
- In addition, informal photographs to be sent to PSVT to document progress during course of project.

Tender

- You are invited to tender for these works as detailed in the enclosed documentation- We strongly recommend that you visit the site to ascertain the full scope of the works.
- Your Tender should include for all labour, plant and material including scaffolding (please see below under 'Budget' for more details).

1. Skills and Experience

We believe that to deliver this piece of work successfully you will require the following skills and experience:

- ICON Accreditation
- Training in the conservation and treatment of historic metal works
- Experience in conservation work to historic metal works
- Training and experience in conservation of historic wood.
- Awareness of recognised standards, guidelines and regulations for heritage assets
- Project management skills, including organisation of project schedule, deliverables and team
- Strong communication skills
- Demonstrable methods for creating and maintaining records
- Evidence of appropriate insurance, including Public Liability Insurance



2. Equality Diversity and Inclusion

PSVT is actively working to be a diverse and inclusive organisation. As part of PSVT's commissioning practice, we strongly encourage applicant submissions from people who are from the Global Ethnic Majority, Disabled, Neurodiverse, D/deaf, LGBTQ+, and/or from working-class backgrounds.

3. Budget

The total cost of the works presented to PSVT as part of the tender process should include all costs of delivery such as transport, labour, plant, materials, access such as scaffolding, health and safety, security measures, any additional welfare facilities, documentation, meetings and travel/accommodation. The Tender Response Form should be used to document your costings.

PSVT can provide welfare facilities in PSVT offices which are located a short walk from the theatre. A small area will also be available for tools and equipment to be left at your own risk.

4. Reporting relationships

You will report to Catherine Downey, Collections and Heritage Manager at Port Sunlight Village Trust and you will also need to liaise with the wider PSVT project team as needed. In addition, as needed, the PSVT client advisor, Lucy Branch ACR, will be involved to help and assist all parties.

5. Application method

You are invited to submit a proposal that must demonstrate the following:

- Your proposed approach and programme schedule to deliver the scope of work described above, including a method statement for the works (60%)
- Examples of previous relevant projects, the names of two referees who have experience of working with you on similar projects and CVs for your team and ICON accreditation (20%). Please note PSVT will not contact references unless your application is likely to be shortlisted.
- Breakdown of costs by scope of work (20%)

Proposals will be evaluated on a quality-and cost basis.



6. Timescales

The brief will be issued on Friday 20th December 2024 and responses must be submitted to Port Sunlight Village Trust in accordance with the guidance below 10am on Monday 20th January 2025. Interviews for short-listed parties will be conducted during the week of 27th January 2025. The works must be completed ideally by 31st March 2025. However, please note that a Listed Building Consent (LBC) application has been submitted for these works, and no works can commence before this has been granted.

Guidance for submitting tender response:

Your tender response must be received in accordance with the following format and conditions:

1. Prices must be provided for each stage of works using the **Tender Response Form**. Tenders returned not fully completed may be treated as void.
2. The completed Tender Response Form and any additional supporting information should be emailed to Catherine Downey, Collections and Heritage Manager on tenders@portsunlightvillage.com. The email should have the subject heading '**Tender: Gladstone Plaque**'.
3. Your return tender must be received at the email address above not later than 10am on Monday 20th January 2025
4. Failure to meet the Closing Date will mean that the tender is considered void.

You are recommended to visit the site prior to submitting your tender to fully understand the works to be completed.

Timescales

Event	Date
Tender process opens	Friday 20 th December 2024
Tenders due	10am Monday 20 th January 2025
Interviews	Week commencing 27 th January 2025
Date for works to be completed by	Ideally 31 st March 2025. Please note, a Listed Building Consent (LBC) application has been submitted for these works, and no works can commence before this has been granted.

7. Further Information



Please contact Catherine Downey, Collections and Heritage Manager, by calling 0151 644 4800 or emailing c.downey@portsunlightvillage.com. Any email enquiries should have the subject heading '**Tender: Gladstone Plaque**'.

PSVT's 5-year strategic plan and 10-year Conservation Management Plan are available to download from PSVT's websites www.portsunlightvillage.com and www.portsunlightresidents.com .

A link to the Historic England entry for the Gladstone Theatre, is below:

[GLADSTONE HALL, Non Civil Parish - 1300139 | Historic England](#)

PSVT has commissioned reports, including those listed below which will be made available on request:

- ***Gladstone Theatre Plaque Bronze Condition Report 2021***
- ***Gladstone Plaque LBC Heritage and Access Statement 2024***
- ***Gladstone Plaque Research and Timeline 2024***