

We go to press on the eve of the Neptune Celebration at the Town Hall on 31st October, when the old man of the sea comes home. The lead statue, given to the city by George Bowes in 1729, is fully restored - and the fund raising completed.

The present chapter of the story began in September 1978 when the Trust commissioned a report on the statue. The report, undertaken by Miss Jenny Cronyn of the University Department of Archaeology, revealed serious sagging of the lead, extensive cracking, and bad corrosion in areas where iron supports and pins had been used. Parts too of the statue were missing, and 36 layers of paint probably hid more damage.

The conservation of the Neptune statue has been carried out by Andrew Naylor's workshop in Telford, Shropshire. Mr. Naylor's first report was made in 1982, three years after the statue had been struck by lightning. However he reported that total restoration was possible and that it was worth doing as the figure was nicely modelled, the head was especially good and that beneath the many layers of paint there were indications of fine detailing and chasing in the lead.

The outlook for Neptune was not good, however, as £10,000 was required and such a sum could not be found for such a project by a local authority at that time because of financial cuts. The Neptune story, however, is one of resilience, for this was not the first, but the fifth time, that the statue had been faced with oblivion. In 1816 a proposal to demolish the whole pant (and Neptune) was made but nothing came of it. In 1862 one local councillor considered 't'owd barbarian' was too shoddy to stay in the Market Place alongside the newly-arrived statue of Londonderry. A new pant was designed by E.R. Robson without Neptune, but public opinion forced his retention on top of the new edifice. Not only did Neptune survive but he was so brightly painted that a local citizen complained that his eyes were dazzled by the sight every time he walked across the Market Place. The gift of a new pant to the city by Miss Gibson threatened Neptune again in 1900 as he was not at first included in Kitchin's design. However he was repaired and placed on top of the pant and stayed there until 1923 when the Gibson pant was demolished to make way for the policeman's box. Neptune was banished to Wharton Park. There time, weather and vandalism accelerated natural decay. The lightning strike of 1979 nearly finished him off for good. However 'all's well that ends well'. Neptune is fully restored to 'full health' ready for another two and a half centuries in Durham.

For this the fifth survival of Neptune our sincere thanks must be recorded to those who made the restoration possible: the North of England Museums Service, the Hadrian Trust, and the Pilgrim Trust. And, last but not least, to our members and friends who supported the three years of fund raising so faithfully. Our thanks must go also to the Planning Office for its support and to the Andrew Naylor workshop for its craftsmanship and enthusiasm. And that leaves just one further thing to be said. Where is Neptune going to be placed? Have YOU any ideas.

J.H.C.