

# FAKENHAM

It is believed the Saxons first settled here towards the end of the sixth century, naming Fakenham 'Fair place on the river'. Much later, the great estates of Raynham, Houghton and Holkham, where the great agricultural revolution was born, determined Fakenham's position as a market town. The origins of the town's printing industry began in the mid 19th century, the creation of the Miller family.



By 1900, more than ten per cent of the population were employed in book production. With its cattle and sheep fairs, and many shops, it was indeed a thriving town.

This view from the church tower depicts, with some licence, Fakenham in the early part of the 20th century. *Reproduced from the book 'Memories of Fakenham Lancaster' by permission of the publishers.*

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Fakenham is a historic market town with a population of about 8000, set in the heart of rural North Norfolk. It lies roughly 10 miles inland from the North Sea, and is in easy reach of coastal towns like Cromer, Sheringham, Wells and Hunstanton, as well as the fashionable retreat of Burnham Market.



The Market Place area in the centre of the town includes a number of attractive spaces and buildings (many of them Grade II Listed), and is towered over by the mediaeval Church of St Peter and St Paul. The Market Place and Market Square form the focus for shopping and community activities in the town. South of the town is the famous Fakenham Racecourse, a popular venue for National Hunt meetings.

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Fakenham has earned a Tourist Board **Welcome Town** award for the quality of its service and hospitality



**BCSC**

Fakenham is the winner of the British Council of Shopping Centres Design Award 2001

The Fakenham Market Place Enhancement Programme was delivered with funding support from the following organisations:



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GOVERNMENT IN PARTNERSHIP



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## Regeneration and enhancement

In 1995, a regeneration strategy was commissioned for Fakenham to see how the town could make better use of its attributes and develop its undoubted charm, and help give Fakenham's businesses a more prosperous future while respecting its past and its heritage.

To that end, the strategy outlined a set of proposals for improvements to the town centre, which would retain its historic character while planting it firmly in the 21st Century. The Fakenham Regeneration Partnership (made up of local councils, traders and community groups) was formed to see the vision become a reality.

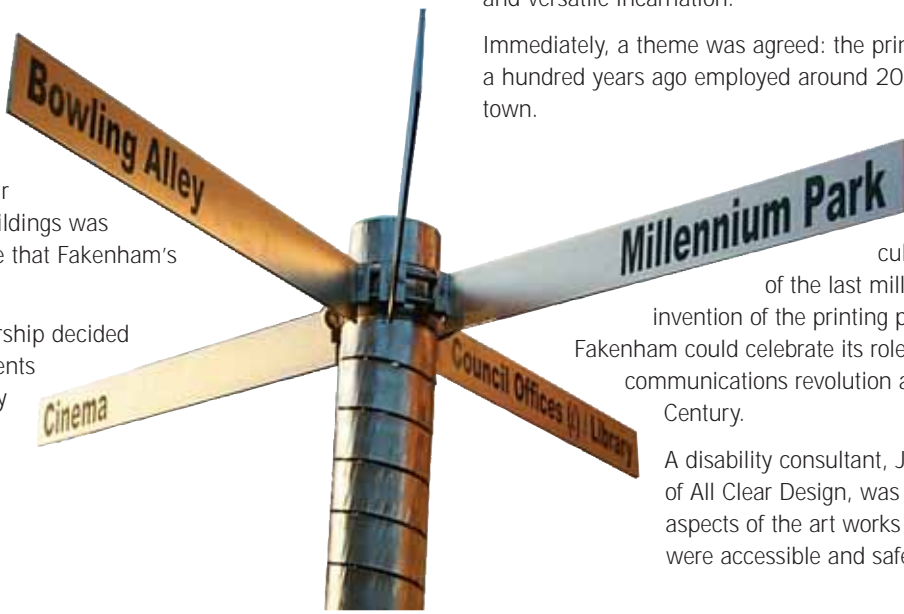
The aim was to take a 'holistic' approach to town centre enhancement. The Partnership took into account all aspects of Fakenham's townscape – the style of buildings, their scale, the spaces and views between buildings – and how environmental improvements might be made for visitors, shoppers and, more importantly, the people who live and work there.

Traditional stone and clay paving surfaces were used to turn roads and pavements into attractive public spaces, and a repair programme for historic buildings was also undertaken, to ensure that Fakenham's charm was not lost.

In this context, the Partnership decided to include public art elements which had a contemporary style, but which drew on Fakenham's past for inspiration.



Cinema has returned to Fakenham in the newly refurbished Corn Exchange



## The art

Artist Simon Watkinson was appointed by the Regeneration Partnership, and commissioned by North Norfolk District Council and public art organisation Commissions East to work on ideas for public art elements.

He became a member of the Joint Design Team of planners, engineers, landscape architects and conservation officers, and his involvement was paid for by the Arts Lottery Fund.

Simon's job was to draw up proposals for bringing out Fakenham's character through unique and novel art works, while taking account of practical concerns like the improvement of access and orientation for Fakenham people and for visitors.

The focus for the art works, and the centrepiece to the regeneration scheme as a whole, was to be the Market Square, where the War Memorial already stood. A scheme was developed which would reinforce and re-define the town centre's role as a meeting and trading place, and which would return this space to the people of Fakenham in a more friendly and versatile incarnation.

Immediately, a theme was agreed: the printing industry, which a hundred years ago employed around 200 people in the town.



The new Square makes a dignified setting for occasions such as Remembrance Day

It was recognised that one of the most important cultural developments of the last millennium was the invention of the printing press, and that Fakenham could celebrate its role in the communications revolution as it entered the 21st Century.

A disability consultant, James Holmes-Siedle of All Clear Design, was involved in all aspects of the art works to ensure that they were accessible and safe for all.

## The die-case matrix

The central feature in the Market Square is an arrangement of cast-iron panels echoing the form of die-case matrices used for casting typefaces. As well as being a reference Fakenham's printing heritage, the letters set into the ground give a sense of story-telling and communication – something deeply inherent to a public space like Market Square, where people might meet, and sit, and talk.

The two bays of lettered panels also incorporate eight 'icons', each reproduced several times and representing an aspect of Fakenham's life and history.

It was crucial that the central artwork – the die-case matrix motif – should be created in the context of regeneration and enhancement, but also that it should not compete with the architectural forms of the surrounding buildings. As a member of the design team, Simon was able to discuss and develop his work with a sensitivity to the site and with other concerns in mind, such as vehicular access through Market Place and the layout of the weekly market.

A vocabulary of street furniture is also used – a common style which echoes from one element of public art to the next (through the materials used and the themes explored), giving the scheme a unifying but not rigidly-singular character.

To illuminate the



## The icons

A set of eight icons, or motifs, was chosen to enshrine Fakenham's history in the Market Square for generations to come. Two of the motifs were suggested by Fakenham residents, and were selected through the Motifs for Market Square competition.

1. Two galloping horses represent *Fakenham Racecourse*. A host to one of the oldest meetings in the National Hunt calendar, this thriving racecourse has recently opened the new £1.2 million 'Prince of Wales' grandstand.

2. A gaslight signifies the *manufacture of town gas* in Fakenham from 1846 to 1965. Fakenham has the only surviving example of a small horizontal-retort, hand-fired works (in which gas was produced from burning coal) in England and Wales. This is preserved as the Fakenham Museum of Gas and Local History.

3 *Fakenham Town Council* and 4 *Fakenham High School and College* both have their coats-of-arms in the Market Square panels.

5. The ship represents the life and work of *Sir Robert Seppings*, a contemporary of Lord Nelson. Born in Fakenham in 1767, he was a master shipwright who became Surveyor of the Royal Navy and the revolutionary developer of Chatham Dockyard.



6. One of the plates depicts a penny-farthing bicycle, denoting the importance of cycle manufacture in Fakenham's history. In the 1870s, *John C Garrod* set up his business in the town and incorporated many new cycle construction ideas (such as the use of ball-bearings). He was the first to build cycles using a tubular frame.

7. The figure of Britannia was suggested by Mr R Richardson of Fakenham. Britannia is the cap badge of the *Royal Norfolk Regiment (9th Foot)*, in which many young Fakenham men have served over the last two centuries.

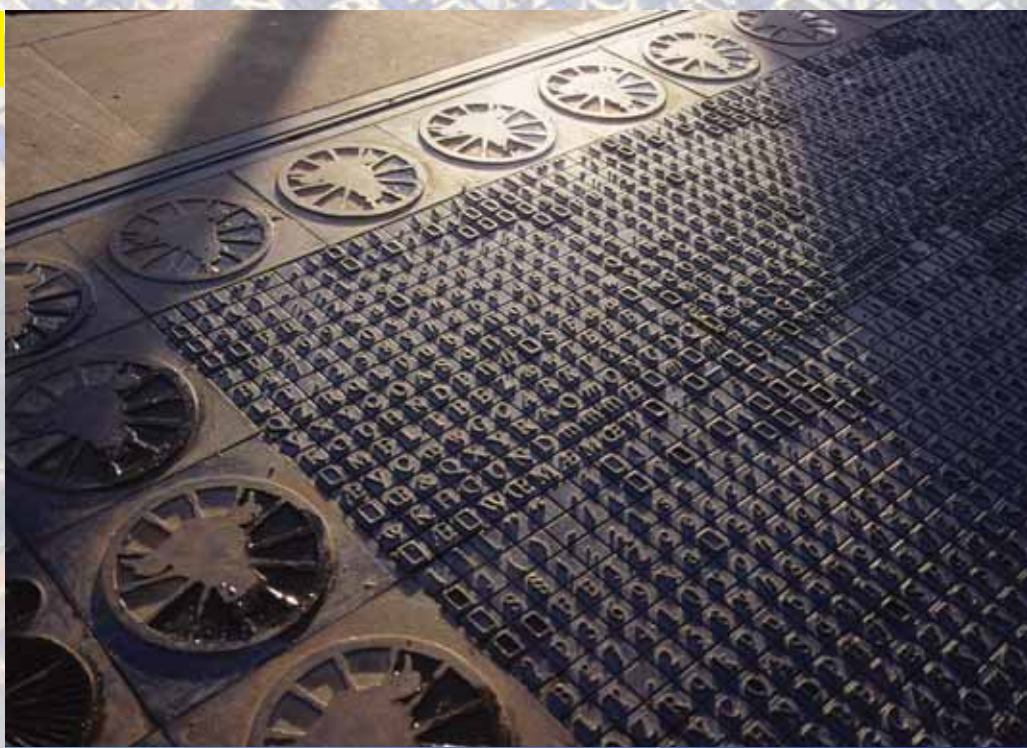
8. The ox and wagon-wheel motif was suggested by D E Kingsley of Fakenham, standing for the *Cattle Market and agricultural engineering*. In addition, an ox-cart was used by Fakenham Methodist missionary the Rev Henry Buckenham on his 2000-mile trip from Kimberley to the Zambesi River in southern Africa in 1889.

## The lighting

Market Square and the bays of letterpress panels, Simon designed a lighting column which continues the theme of communication. Three such columns were erected to one side of Market Square, where they also serve to draw a line between the Church, Market Place, and the walk south off Market Square to the riverside – a pedestrian route which needed to be pointed out after the re-paving of the Square.

Inspired by the shape of a pen, the lights shine upward onto a polished disc (signifying the nib of a pen), where their beams are reflected back down onto the cast-iron plates. A coloured strip of light also runs down the front of each sandblasted gunmetal column, anchoring the reflected light in the new surface of Market Square.

The scale and situation, in relation to the surrounding buildings, is of paramount importance.



## The furniture

Continuing the theme of communication, artists Robert Kilvington and Matthew Fedden were commissioned to design the street furniture to be placed around Market Place.

The seats and litter-bins were made by Robert Kilvington, drawing on the imagery of the printing process. Made of oak on cast iron frames, they refer to the paper feeds of printing presses.

Matthew Fedden made gunmetal and stainless-steel fingerpost signs, echoing the design of the lighting columns.

Semi-mature trees were planted near the entry-points to Market Place, to give a focus and visual softness to the spaces between buildings.

