

ISENBROOKER

AN ARTISTIC INTERVENTION REUNITING



Sculptural concept and
meditations by

JAMES D. WENN

BYRGA  GENIHT



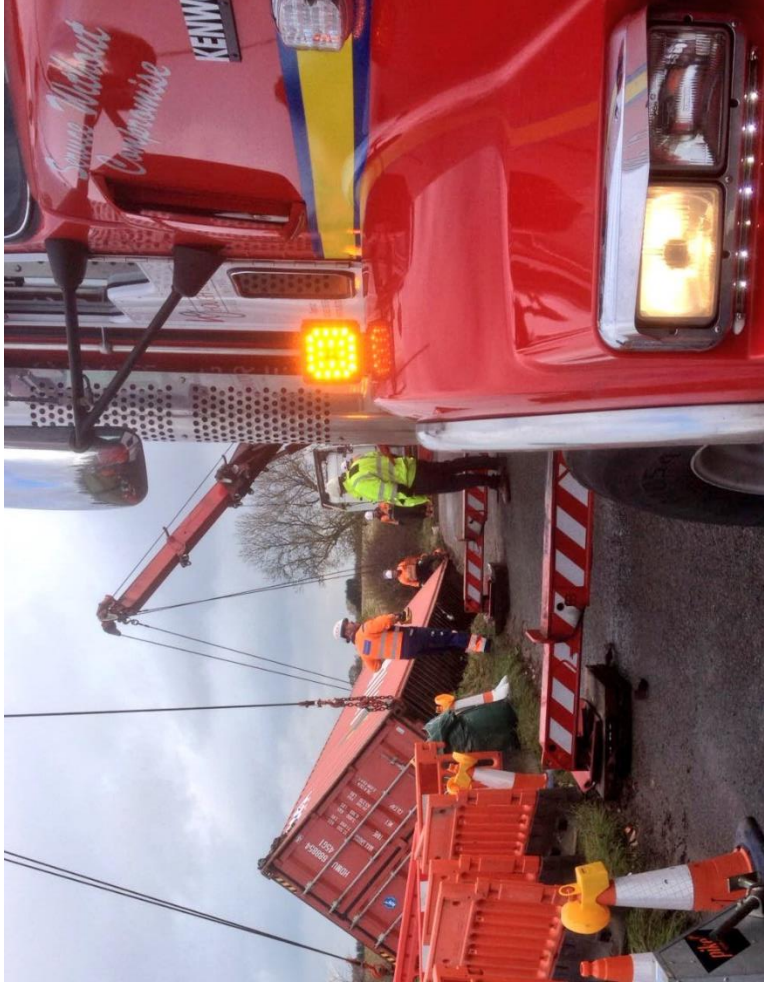
Executive summary

The historic Soulton Estate is split into three parts – between north and south by the busy B5065, and between east and west by the deep Soulton Brook. The three parts focus upon an ancient and narrow Bridge, once renewed under the guidance of Thomas Telford, and partially rebuilt after a devastating traffic accident in 2017.

The importance of Soulton to English history is second to none, and the Hall's builder, Sir Rowland Hill, was a true Founding Father of the Elizabethan Renaissance. The earlier history of the site is represented by a Castle across the B5065, and the woodland across Soulton Brook from the Hall is the forest immortalised in William Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*.

The danger of the road, the heightened danger of the Bridge, and the depth of the Brook have prevented Soulton from fighting for the spiritual, cultural, heritage and economic fortunes of both North Shropshire locally and the United Kingdom as a whole. The Isenbrooker Project is the strategic intent to construct a new sculptural, culturally important iron bridge for pedestrians, mobility vehicles, powered wheelchairs and bicycles. This intervention will transform the cultural life of the United Kingdom, reuniting all of us with our best destiny.





The B5065 in 2017.



Strategic Estate Context

At present, the heritage offer to visitors is restricted to guest accommodation on both sides of Soulton Brook. The main site is in and around the historic Hall, but the As You Like It Wood also contains substantial accommodation in a cottage reached by a private road from the B5065 with no viable pedestrian access from the main site. The business is split into two, and visitors to the Hall cannot easily access the important cultural amenity of the As You Like It Wood.

This situation is compounded by the extreme danger of the B5065, which has claimed lives. The Ashton family is concerned about the welfare of guests who decide to explore the landscape on foot. At the present time, access to the private road to the famous Soulton Long Barrow (to the north of the Hall) requires crossing the B5065 at a relatively safe stretch of the road, but access to the historic Castle Mound demands a walk in the middle of the busy road, and to progress to the As You Like It Wood and to the cottage inside demands crossing the deadly pinch-point of the Thomas Telford Bridge.

In the challenging hospitality sector context after Covid 19, unlocking the nationally strategically important potential of the hospitality business at Soulton requires safe passage from one side of the Brook to the other, as well as a logical layout for pedestrian circulation around the Estate as a whole in

order to fulfil Health and Safety, as well as Accessibility, duties of care to guests.

The development of Soulton as a cultural and heritage showpiece also demands safe passage of high volumes of pedestrians from the historic Hall to the As You Like It Wood. This development has been acknowledged by key local political and civic stakeholders as a major untapped asset for the economic regeneration of North Shropshire as a whole.

The Strategic Estate Context also encompasses duty of care to the local communities. A substantial gathering of domestic dwellings that are at present largely reliant on the private car exists to the east of Soulton. Pedestrian and cycling routes to the Town of Wem at present involve long stretches of travel on the dangerous B5065, and include the deadly pinch-point of the Thomas Telford Bridge. Out of neighbourly concern, the Ashton Family has marked a permissive footpath through fields to reduce the danger to the inhabitants of this hamlet, particularly any whose access to employment and training opportunities involves travel to Soulton as staff or training event attendees. Without a pedestrian bridge, however, the deadly pinch-point of the Thomas Telford Bridge is currently unavoidable for pedestrians.

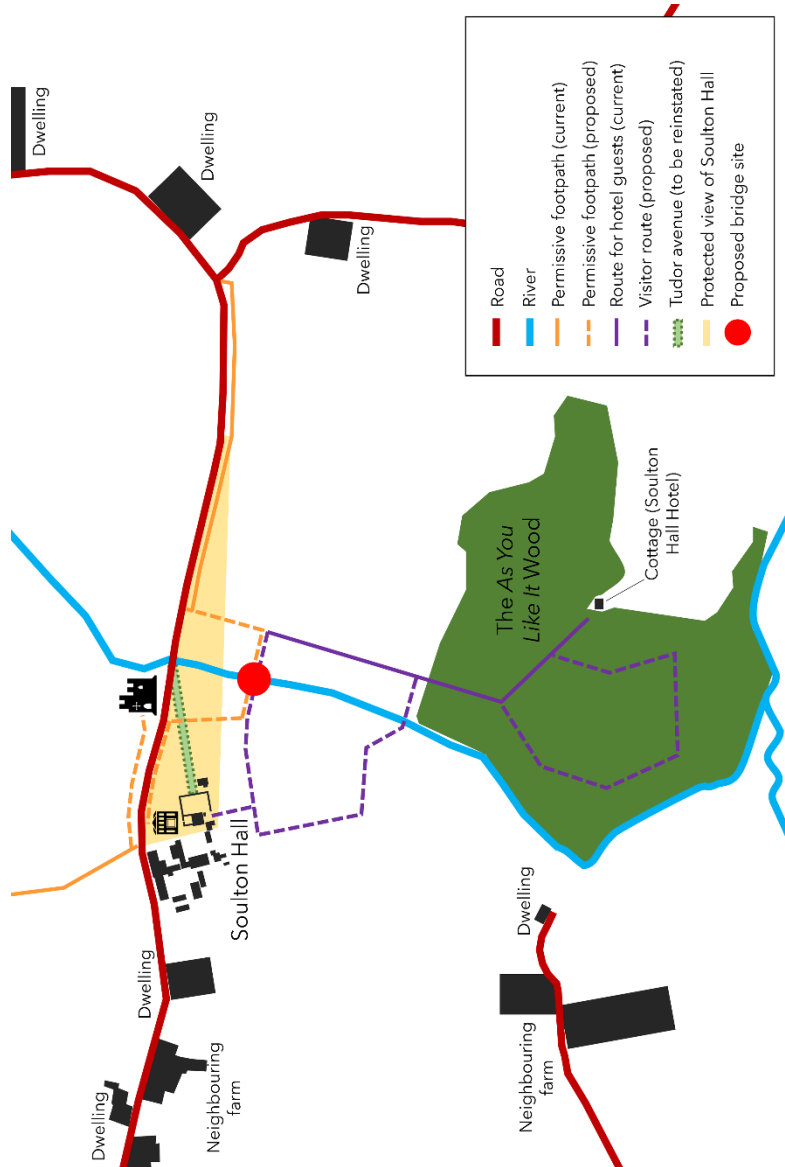
The scale of this existing settlement and its access issues are reflected by the provision of a bus stop at the junction of the B5065, but the Ashton Family has

nevertheless noted heavy footfall across the deadly pinch-point of the Thomas Telford Bridge.

The Tudor Avenue that once provided the main axis of entrance to the historic Hall ran directly between the Hall and the Brook to the crossing place now occupied by the Thomas Telford Bridge. The course of the B5065 was also set by Sir Rowland Hill to provide a straight-ahead view of the Hall at a special Ancient Greek temple-viewing angle, before deviating to the north to round upon a planar (full-frontal) view from the Bridge itself. It is necessary that the new pedestrian bridge does not fall inside this zone. Outside this zone, development will not affect the setting of the listed building in as meaningful a way.

Soulton Hall was built in Renaissance iconographic codes that must be represented or acknowledged in the design of future landscape interventions. Likewise, the eighteenth-century Model Farm that replaced the Hall's Great Hall and other buildings was an important contribution towards the Agricultural Revolution and Industrial Revolution in the UK, which is a story that also demands sensitive acknowledgement in future landscape interventions in order to unlock the heritage, cultural and international diplomatic potential of the Soulton Estate.







Wider Context

In the Middle Ages people travelled internationally during peacetime for education (at court schools and universities such as Padua, Paris, Oxford and Cambridge), for church administration, for diplomacy, for trade, and for religious pilgrimage.

With the Reformation in England, Catholic pilgrimage was disrupted, but European Protestants (such as scholars of the Palatinate University of Heidelberg) flocked to England to learn about a successful social contract and constitutional settlement under Protestant religion. In Higher Education, a good early example is Emmanuel Cavalerius, Hebrew Reader and Fellow at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, who was trained at Heidelberg. Today, these strong traditional links are commemorated in the formal twinning of Cambridge and Heidelberg.

Over time travel into England for education developed into a set tour, and barmen working at pubs and inns around this circuit before World War One had fluency in German. The Great War instigated a mass forgetfulness of the Grand Tour of England, which was compounded by the reinforcement of sentiment during the Second World War.

In order to rediscover the Grand Tour of England, one merely has to step beyond writings in English. Kristóf Fatsar has researched Hungarian texts that show the depth of cultural importance that the Grand Tour of

England held for Hungarians during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (K. Fatsar, "'Enjoying country life to the full – only the English know how to do that!": appreciation of the British country house by Hungarian aristocratic travellers', in *Travel and the British Country House: cultures, critiques and consumption in the long eighteenth century*, ed. Jon Stobart (Manchester, 2017)).

The route itself can be seen marked by the accommodation and visitor attractions built to cater for the Grand Tourists.

The George Inn, in Norton St Philip near Bath, Somerset, dates from the fourteenth century, and was built by a priory to accommodate mercantile activity in the wool trade that was concentrated locally in annual wool fairs. Claiming to be England's oldest inn, the George shows centuries of development of the architectural mode of guest accommodation, including timber galleries around a courtyard reached through a gated arch.

A famous later example of this building type is the Eagle in Cambridge, dating from 1667, which has a galleried courtyard heavily modified in the nineteenth century. The northern European mediaeval universities grew out of inns like this, where lecturers would continuously hold court with students between infrequent formal debates and ceremonies in churches and schools. The way that Cambridge supervisions often still take place in pubs, and the very discovery of DNA was announced for the first time over beer in the

Eagle in 1953 shows how inns have always been at the centre of English philosophical life.

In order to find the Grand Tour, one must seek out cultural and educational destinations that attracted pre-WWI international visitors beyond simple business. An excellent example of this is the New Inn in Buckinghamshire that was built by Lord Cobham next to his 250 acre estate garden at Stowe in 1717 in order to accommodate strangers visiting the showpiece gardens. From the New Inn, visitors would walk down a lane to reach the Bell Gate to pay entry admission to the gardens – as they still do under the National Trust's stewardship today.

At Kedleston near Derby, a purpose-built hotel on the road to or from the Potteries of Staffordshire was designed by Robert Adam in around 1760 to cater for Grand Tourists, with the hope that they would pay a premium to take spa treatments across the road in the sulphur springs in the park of Kedleston Hall. The spa was a designated commercial enterprise, and the family's own spa (the Fishing Room) was built on the opposite side of a higher lake in the park – at a conspicuous distance from the public both horizontally and vertically.

The example at Kedleston might seem indicative of an aristocratic and gentry frostiness towards international visitors, but this was not the case. At Hawkstone Hall (part of the Sir Rowland Hill estate), the Hill Family's new enlarged seat – replacing Souldon Hall as the principal facility for the family at the dawn of the

eighteenth century, likely under advice from Christopher Wren – hospitality was conspicuous. The interiors and exteriors of the house today are a riot of fashionable extensions and revamps of every decade, as elite guests were entertained in lavish style.

The need to construct Hawkstone Hall was created by the inability of Old Sir Rowland Hill's Tudor prodigy building (which was too sacred to demolish) to accommodate large groups of guests. Both Halls now offer accommodation to visitor bookings, but at Soulton the scale of the Hall necessitates the extra accommodation across Soulton Brook in the cottage within the As You Like It Wood.

Long before the close of the eighteenth century, the volume of visitors to Hawkstone Hall forced Sir Richard Hill to plan extra accommodation, and in 1790 Hawkstone Park Hotel was built, broadly copying the massing of Robert Adam's earlier hotel at Kedleston, but perhaps a greater stylistic borrowing from Wren, given the general style of the Hall to which it must defer.

Soulton Hall was the cultural and religious farthest destination point of the Grand Tour of England, owing to the legend of Old Sir Rowland, but most Grand Tourists saw Soulton from Hawkstone Follies on the cliffs, with the best views appreciated from the 110 feet high monumental column commemorating Sir Rowland Hill, appropriately featuring Protestant Biblical quotations. The Follies landscape was the world's first theme park, and served as a compensation

to international visitors for the unavailability of intimate encounters with Soulton itself.

If Soulton was the cultural and religious destination, because of the Anglican religious settlement, Ironbridge was a totemic waymarker for the industrial aspects of the Grand Tour, as Britain led the world in both the Agricultural Revolution and the Industrial Revolution. The way back across England included Stafford and Stoke on Trent, Derby, and then a filtering south through the Dukeries (the broad range of ducal estates centred around northern Northamptonshire).

The icon on the cover of this report is an artistic imagining of Grand Tour waypoints and destinations as stars in a constellation. The Tour began at any one of the minor East Saxon ports of the Dengie Peninsula, Maldon, the beaches of the Tendring District, or (preferably) one of the Haven Ports (Harwich, Felixstowe, Ipswich or Mistley). At Mistley, Robert Adam built a triumphal entry to England in the form of a church with two pharos towers, as lighthouses to welcome Grand Tourists. Colchester and Chelmsford were the first major towns on the route, and, indeed, the last on the return journey, before Grand Tourists sailed for the Rhine.

The importance of the specific roads involved is underlined by the lavish expense of the Stone Bridge in Chelmsford, which the County Surveyor, John Johnson, built with innovative Coade Stone balusters to carry the carriages of Grand Tourists over the first river crossing after the confluence of every entrepôt

(where a traveller could be sure to finally have been reunited with any family, friends and luggage separated on the high seas). Robert Adam's hotel on the high road between Stoke on Trent and Derby also highlights the ground these Grand Tourists trod.

At the estate of Gosfield Hall in Essex the sponginess of Essex is writ large as the road from Cambridge forks – in one direction heading to Chelmsford (and Maldon/Dengie) via Braintree, and in the other straight to Colchester (and the Haven Ports). This crossroads defines the end of the clear thread of the Tour just as the Stone Bridge monumentalises its beginning, and we should expect history to have given such a spot a great destiny. In fact, it did – from 1807-9 the exiled Dauphin of France, future King Louis XVIII, occupied Gosfield Hall as his royal court, along with a retinue of over 350 courtiers. The choice of location for the French resistance against Napoleon was strongly connected to the geography of the estate as a nerve centre of the Grand Tour, and a rallying place for Germanic allies resolute against Napoleon during the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire (1806). The county's importance for merchants of the Muscovy Trading Company (such as the DuCanes at Braxted Park, off the road between Colchester and Chelmsford) also added to its strategic importance through this important period.

At all times and in all places, the Grand Tour of England was an exercise in British soft power – promoting heritage, culture, industry, innovation and the kind of encounters and good relations that bound

the networks of individuals, and the treaties of allied nations. The ability to utilise a set itinerary as part of a diplomatic shop window allowed shrewd investment into attractions, monuments, and catering infrastructure to project British greatness. The Grand Tour is an inherited asset which requires effort and investment to reignite, but which promises a brighter future. Projects such as the Isenbrooker, connecting up the conceptual and economic wiring of the Grand Tour circuitry has the potential for exceptional economic and diplomatic return on investment for both the UK and her Allies today and tomorrow.





Ceramic art commemorating the twinning of Cambridge and Heidelberg



Design

The name 'Isenbrooker' is an Anglicisation of the German for Ironbridge, 'Eiserne Brücke'. The reason for this is to conjure a sense of the Soultion project being a European go-between that resurrects the Grand Tour of England, whilst not intruding upon the unique identification of the 1778 Ironbridge in Shropshire, the first cast iron bridge in the world, and its admiring child, the 1791 Eiserne Brücke in the Dessau-Wörlitz Garden Realm – both UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

The Isenbrooker design concept is illustrated through a limited production of promotional tea towels, based on a hand-drawn sketch illustrating the key shapes. These key shapes are essential, but the design as a whole can be morphed to a certain extent as the shapes are like letters writing a poem. Readability can be maintained with some changes. In particular, the handrail is designed independently of the bridge substructure.

The Isenbrooker design concept exists at a stage prior to the involvement of an Architect or Structural Engineer. It is a cultural and artistic prescription.

Each balustrade is composed of a central square panel containing the Soultion Dance Seal. Flanking this panel there are six further square panels separated by structural uprights. Three to the left, three to the right. Each of these square panels has the Auseklis. The

Auseklis is a 3 by 3 grid, formed by a # shape, with X bars in the centre side squares forming a tilted # shape defining a large, tilted square.

Beyond the steel balustrades will be masonry parapets. It is suggested that the coping stones of these might be carved or inlaid with poetry. Suggestions as to the poet are available, but out of respect for the commissioning process will not be printed until contracts are established.

The substructure of the bridge will rest upon masonry caissons, up against masonry abutments forming the causeway across the Soulton Brook Valley. Additional flood relief openings will be at the discretion of the Architect or Structural Engineer. The material choice (brick, stone) of the masonry elements will be at the discretion of the Architect or Structural Engineer. The anticipated span of the Isenbrooker may be bridged with a steel beam platform, so the substructure is of greater sculptural than structural importance. The Isenbrooker is a cultural sculpture with a practical purpose rather than a decorated piece of engineering.

The Isenbrooker substructure will be fully visible from the Thomas Telford Bridge, and more safely appreciated and photographed from a very low (and flood-vulnerable) concrete slab bridge that currently allows access across Soulton Brook for hikers who can brave the steep inclines of the wetland Soulton Brook Valley downstream of the Isenbrooker location. Cyclists, wheelchair users and infirm walkers will be

able to view the substructure at an angle from the walks along the top edges of the Soulton Brook Valley.

These views mean that the substructure is conceived as two sheets of steel construction (whether cut out of very thick steel sheet, cast as one piece, or constructed of pieces), one on each bridge opening facade. To what extent and how these sheets are linked to each other is left to the specification of the Architect or Structural Engineer.

The depth between the edge of each masonry caisson and the vertical of the masonry abutment supporting the pathway will be defined by two verticals ascending to the roadway, with an ogee arch between them at the top. At their bases, two semicircular elements will bridge the river, and the apex of the outermost will touch and support the roadway. The spandrels between the outer arched element, the outer vertical and the roadway will be occupied by a circular, or hooped, element. This circle will contain a hexagram element resting with two points up, and two points down. The two semicircular arched elements will be linked by twelve evenly spaced radiating elements, each formed by two kinked bars so as to form a rhombus of proportion one to the square root of two. This will form thirteen open compartments between the rhombuses. The central compartment, directly below the Soulton Dance Seal panel of the balustrade, will contain a Chi-Rho symbol. The rhombuses will continue as straight radiating bars radiating across the space between the two verticals rising from the caisson, as appropriate.

The metal construction will be painted or finished in a dark teal colour.





Tea towel art commemorating the Isenbrooker design concept.



Historisches Bauwerk im Wörlitzer Park (Dessau-Wörlitzer Gartenreich),

Gußeiserne Brücke. Credit: Empiriokritizismus, CC BY-SA 4.0



Design Rationale

The height of the bridge, set by the choice of a deep semi-circular archway supported above the water on masonry caissons, exists to carry a dry roadway high enough to flatten the route between the two edges of the Soulton Brook Valley. This flattening of the path into gentle inclines is intended to make the As You Like It Wood and guest accommodation accessible to wheelchair and mobility vehicle users, as well as to cyclists.

The masonry abutments present the opportunity to construct bat roosts, and the requirement for earthen banks to cloak the walls of the causeway present a use for the soil that will be removed during works to reinstate wetland habitats as part of a parallel rewilding project downstream from the Isenbrooker.

The choices of semicircular arched elements, ogee arched side panels and spandrel roundels references both Ironbridge and the Eiserne Brücke in the Dessau-Wörlitz Garden Realm.

The central panel of the balustrade at Ironbridge referenced Soulton itself by utilising an eightfold motif. The use of the Soulton Dance Seal in the Isenbrooker brings greater clarity, readability, and local distinctiveness to this long-established tradition.

The dance for eight dancers, referenced in the final Act of William Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*,

written about the very wood to which the Isenbrooker gives access, conjures harmony.

In the hands of the later writer W.B. Yeats, in *Rosa Alchemica*, the Dance was said to conjure the divine; so eight dancers mystically become nine as the dance is danced.

The Christian interpretation of this mystic effect is that divine harmony becomes evident in the space between people acting with fellowship between each other. This reading of the Dance is explored in the arching panel of each facade of the Isenbrooker substructure. The twelve rhombuses can represent the twelve disciples of Jesus, but the spaces between them number thirteen. The central space is occupied by a Chi-Rho for Christ, leaving twelve open gaps again. Out of a dance of twelve, thirteen become present.

The research of Byrga Geniht has shown that the addition of the Chi-Rho and Iota-Chi monograms to the Cross of Christ as Christian symbols followed ideas of the Trinity coming together in the Person of God as if beams of light – a form of iconography later shown as the Scutum Fidei. At different times in history this has been thought to have been tilted square or hexagonal beams of light forming a Rhombic Dodecahedron where they intersect.

The two ways of making a Rhombic Dodecahedron by projection are shown in the additional square panels

of the balustrade, and in the roundels in the substructure.

The Auseklis in each square panel produces a tilted square. Applied to the six faces of a cube, these tilted square projections form a Rhombic Dodecahedron. This is why each balustrade has six square Auseklis panels (the net of a cube in two parts).

An octahedron will require a hexagram with two points touching each edge on its triangular faces to form hexagons. These eight hexagonal projections will form an identical Rhombic Dodecahedron to that produced by the Auseklis on a cube twinned with it via a cube-octahedron. There are four hexagrams on the Isenbrooker, referring to the Holy Almandal, a mediaeval instrument for projecting a Rhombic Dodecahedron into incense smoke using filtered candlelight.

There are twelve Auseklis squares on the monument because the squares could form two cubes, and two cubes form the volume of a Rhombic Dodecahedron. If a cube is pulled apart by its faces from the centre, six square-based pyramids are made. Placing these pyramids on the faces of the second cube causes the triangular pyramid faces to line up, forming rhombuses. The Rhombic Dodecahedron is formed.

Of course, a Rhombic Dodecahedron can also be formed by its net of twelve rhombuses of dimension one to the square root of two, and these can be seen represented on both facades.

An extra level of meaning is given by the roundels, which nod to the two round windows on the Moot Hall at Soulton – an historic courtroom that influenced the design of Stafford’s Shire Hall, and thus the US Capitol at Washington DC, whose design drew on competition entries for the Midlands civic project a little earlier in the eighteenth century.

The juxtaposition of each roundel next to an arched side panel, and above a semicircular arch, also references the internal structure of St Paul’s Cathedral dome, in London. This Grand Tour attraction is historically linked with Soulton in many ways which scholarship is beginning to uncover through research led by Byrga Geniht.

The teal colour specified for the metal elements of the Isenbrooker is a reference to historic woodwork paint colouring at the Model Farm – the part of the Estate most closely involved with the Agricultural and Industrial Revolutions.





View across Saulton Brook towards the Hall, showing the site of the Tudor Avenue to be reinstated, and the roadway currently shared by fast, heavy traffic and pedestrians.



Site of the Isenbrooker. Saulton Brook crosses a large area of degraded farmland that was formerly wetland.



Degraded farmland that frequently floods. A causeway will be required to traverse this landscape. It is intended that the former wetland on each side of this causeway will be restored as habitat.



Strategic Partnerships

The resurrection of the Grand Tour of England is a high-level diplomatic strategy for the UK to showcase culture and industry to an international audience. It explicitly exists to maintain and grow UK and NATO soft power global influence, and has stakeholders in central and local government across the UK and her Allies, as well as diverse UK industries.

The key industry to be showcased in the Isenbrooker Project itself is the British steel industry, and it is hoped that a UK-based steel company will engage with the Isenbrooker Project as a key partner. An intended output of the Isenbrooker Project is the creation of an international platform for the prestige of British steel manufacturing through art. It is required and expected that the successful partner company will be energetic in its use of this project as a marketing opportunity for itself, the UK steel industry, and UK manufacturing as a whole on the global stage. This engagement is important for starting the economic uplift that will meet the strategic objectives of the resurrection of the Grand Tour of England as a whole movement.

Artistic and heritage strategic partnerships exist to be enhanced between Essex (the Gateway to England) and Shropshire (the Destination of the Grand Tour), and among these, the Stone Bridge in Chelmsford and the Ironbridge in Shropshire are key contacts for the Isenbrooker Project.





Isenbrooker: An Artistic Intervention

James David Wenn

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Byrga Geniht
The Willows
Fell Mill Lane
Honington
CV36 5AD

byrga.co.uk

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