



## A new, a different, Rising Universe

**T**wenty years ago Horsham unveiled the Rising Universe by Angela Conner to celebrate Percy Bysshe Shelley. The veiling and unveiling, the rising and falling have been going on ever since.

This year, the decision has finally been taken to abandon Conner's work. The original idea came as a consequence of Sainsbury's resited supermarket.

Under the 'Arts for All' policy, Sainsbury's gave £100,000 to Horsham to build an art work to embellish the town.

It was agreed to commemorate Shelley, easily Horsham's most well-known poet.

Angela Conner was inspired by the poem 'Mont Blanc' with its lines about the '... everlasting universe of things...'

The old universe appeared as an encrustation on a bursting new shiny one which would rise up, shed seven tons of water and set four smaller globes twirling around in their channels.

Ten years on the work was still being commended, though it was by now as surrounded in controversy as it was with extra planters and flowers, placed around the base to disguise the fitful performance



Horsham's landmark Shelley Fountain

of the Universe. By the time 20 years were up, Horsham had had enough of this expensive creation. Few liked it and

apparently even fewer bothered to read Shelley's poem to find out what Conner was depicting.

What will happen to the site is not as yet known, though it is unlikely that something as large will be put there.

If plans for a new multiplex go ahead there will be little room for a huge art work where many people will gather regularly.

So here's an idea of what to do about Shelley. Horsham must commemorate him somehow and it certainly must learn from the mistakes with the Conner work.

No mechanical parts, not within easy reach of mischievous fingers, ease of maintenance, and not an untried format.

I suggest we base our figure on the lead of Jeff Koons. Koons is famed for some memorable sculptures, ones of shiny dogs in bright colours, which have astounded the public by their banality and exorbitant price.

But let's think of a different one - a West Highland puppy made of flowers which is 12 metres tall. It certainly attracts attention, with no other claims to originality than its size and construction materials (the flowers are planted in pots on a steel frame).

Let's follow this lead but not in puppies.

First size. The Angel of the North is now a national icon, mainly through its size near a motorway.

We've got just the spot, the roundabout where the A24 meets the Warnham Road. Shelley came from Warnham rather than Horsham proper so this is a bonus.

Secondly, Shelley's features are easily recognisable so a huge bust of him would be understood.

The material would be galvanised wire, just as those entwined hands by Sophie Ryder were at a recent exhibition at Salisbury cathedral. No maintenance required. And the whole could be engulfed in climbing roses which will remind our literate friends of the lines 'I fall upon the thorns of life, I bleed'.

And it will cost less than Sainsbury's £100,000.

*The Horsham Society is concerned about the past, present and future of the town. It seeks to promote good planning and design for the built environment and open spaces. Membership of the Horsham Society is open to anyone who shares these concerns. For more information, visit the website [www.horshamsociety.org](http://www.horshamsociety.org) or phone 01403 261905.*