

From the Editor

The Trust is delighted to have been involved with Devizes School this year. We didn't quite know what to expect as this was the first time that the essay competition had been run but it turned out to be a resounding success. The quality of the six short-listed essays was very good and the authors demonstrated a clear understanding of the essay title 'What would Jane Austen think about Devizes if she came here today?'. They did a brilliant job of translating it into the Devizes as we know it in 2017. I was invited to attend the end of year assembly and was amazed at the commitment of the whole school - staff and pupils - to education and learning. We are publishing the essay by the first prize winner, Sam, in this 'Trust News' and the second and third prize essays will be in subsequent editions.

Elsewhere in this edition, we return to the problem of air quality in our town and the fact that progress has been so slow. Air quality is increasingly moving to the top of the Government's agenda and the UK government has committed to banning all diesel and petrol cars by 2040. There is an argument that this is too little, too late and it will not improve our air quality in the short term but merely put off the problem.

However, banning 'cars' as we know them, will be a fundamental change affecting all our lives in one way or another. It will raise a number of questions, for example, how will it affect those who are dependent on their cars for work and will not be able to afford an electric car (unless the price falls considerably before then).

Of course, we could just bury our heads in the sand as, for many of us, a problem so far in the future is not something we'll have to worry about. But wouldn't it be better if we started planning now for the changes which will be needed? Gradual changes will ensure that we have healthier air now rather than waiting until 2040. At our open meeting in 2015, we talked about the fact that a reduction in traffic of just 5% would result in the air quality dropping to the legislative, acceptable levels. The question is, how can we put that into practice?

Philippa Morgan

Preserving our air



Shane's Castle, an air quality action zone since 2010. But what has changed?
Picture: Gail Foster

In 2011, the Trust took the decision to expand its traditional role in conserving the built environment in order to counter what it saw as a real danger to the quality of life of the people living in the town. The new housing built in and around the town over the past few years had created a good deal of extra traffic without any expansion of our road capacity, which in turn resulted in serious traffic congestion.

While this in itself was a serious problem, the consequent increase in air pollution meant that the less able-bodied in our society were in danger of suffering.

In order to focus attention on this matter, a public meeting was called demanding that the council stop building any more new homes until they had an adequate policy in place to combat this new threat.

The case for the Trust was presented by its traffic advisor Tony Sedgwick. His research had alerted him to new evidence of the harm caused by pollutants generated by traffic; that there was a particular danger to babies and young children, and also to those suffering from coronary and pulmonary diseases.

It is now known that tens of thousands of people die prematurely as a result of air pollution every year, and that those

suffering heart and lung problems have their symptoms severely aggravated.

The meeting overwhelmingly voted to accept the resolution, and the council was forced into taking some sort of action.

The result was a series of meetings and eventually a working group, which included a Trust member. One of the aims of the group was to develop ways in which pollution could be reduced.

There is no doubt that the stand the Trust made in 2011 was more than justified. However, while many hours have been spent by the working group, we are sad to say that very little impact has been made on pollution levels. Certainly, given the threat it poses to all of us, we could have expected more urgent action than we have seen.

The plan for increased cycling made a good start but now seems to have stalled. The need to discourage commuters from bringing their cars into the town at peak times has been ignored, and public transport has been cut rather than expanded.

Perhaps the best illustration of lack of action is demonstrated at Shane's Castle. The junction there suffers from a high pollution rate, and had been declared an Air Quality Management Area in 2010. well before the Trust's public meeting.

Continued overleaf

The Story Of A Map

The saga continues!

In the last edition of Trust News, I wrote about a map of Devizes I had been given by a friend and which I was pretty sure was a 1817 Ordnance Survey map. However, I soon found out that all was not as it seemed.....

I had an e-mail from Trust Member Alan Williams in which he said "You may well have been informed a dozen times already but your old map was misleadingly dated. The existence of the completed Devizes Railway line suggests (that the map is) post Nov 1862."

I immediately consulted Wikipedia and found the following:

"The Wilts, Somerset and Weymouth Railway (WS&WR) obtained Parliamentary powers in 1845 to build a railway from near Chippenham to Salisbury and Weymouth, with a branch line to Devizes. It opened the first part of the network but found it impossible to raise further money and sold its line to the Great Western Railway in 1850. The GWR took over the construction, and had undertaken to build an adjacent line in connection; the network was complete in 1857"

So Alan was correct! My map couldn't have been from 1817.

A trip to the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre in Chippenham was arranged and I was able to find out more about 19th Century Ordnance Survey maps. There were two major updates to the 1817 Mudge map as a result of the building of railways. The first was in 1853 when the London-Bath, Swindon - Gloucester, Chippenham - Westbury and Salisbury - Southampton lines were added. The second was in 1862 when Hungerford - Pewsey & Devizes, Westbury - Frome and London - Salisbury - Exeter were added. In neither case was the original date of 1817 changed.

So, my conclusion is that my map was issued in 1862 but bears the original date of 1817 in line with practice at the time. It was nice to sort it out and I am grateful to Alan for his sharp observation.

Philippa Morgan

Preserving Our Air

continued

It remains in that state some seven years later, despite the fact that a solution has been on the table and it is one which was easily within the Council's ability to implement, since it means taking a small amount of land off the boundary of Browfort in order to widen the road to allow for a right turn lane so that the through traffic on the A361 would no longer be delayed by vehicles turning right.

The dangers to health caused by traffic are similar to those of cigarette smoking. There is abundant scientific evidence that it is harmful; we know it is killing people; we know it is harming our children.

What we appear to lack is the determination to rectify this matter in the short term. The fact that the pollution results mainly from emissions from cars is too close to home for many people to deal with as it requires a change in the way they run their daily lives.

When the Trust first raised this issue,

the Council's response (and the government's) was that a new generation of clean vehicles would bring about a solution without us needing to do anything. Six years on we are still being given the same story. The fact is that it will take many years before clean vehicles replace the current stock, and in the meantime thousands of our fellow citizens will die prematurely and many thousands of our children will suffer needlessly from asthma.

Wiltshire Council are responsible, but we must recognize that they are under severe financial restraint and it is going to be necessary for central government to make funds available if the problem is to be tackled.

What can we do? We can make our councillors and our MP aware of the seriousness with which we regard this matter and press them to come forward with a far more ambitious programme than hitherto. And we should take steps to reduce our own car use.

Philippa Morgan and Tony Sedgwick

What's In A Name? Sidmouth Street *Tony Sedgwick reveals all*

It has been good to see the progress made by the Sidmouth Street traders in bringing life back to this oft neglected shopping street. The renovation of Albion Place has certainly helped.

But why Sidmouth Street? Before being renamed, it was known as "Leg o' Mutton Street. Quite why no one knows. There were certainly plenty of butchers there and also a pub of that name. Whatever the origin, in 1826 it was renamed after Lord Sidmouth, without question our greatest MP.

Born Henry Addington in Reading, his only connection with Devizes was through a sister who married into the Sutton family of South Park. Addington had a sharp intellect, having gained a first at Oxford and significantly, was a childhood friend of Pitt the Younger. (Addington's father had been Lord Chatham's physician.)

Pitt was keen for his friend to join him and Devizes offered a strong possibility of a seat, as it so proved. Addington's political career was impressive. First elected in 1784, he became Speaker of the House in 1789 and was judged to have performed this task with exceptional skill and honesty.

In 1801 Pitt resigned and Addington was appointed in his place. These were

difficult times, the Napoleonic Wars were raging, the cost of war was crippling the nation and there seemed no short-term solution. His decision to sign a treaty thought to be favourable to the French was severely criticised, but, given the parlous state of the nation's finances, it was probably the best he could do. Nevertheless he was replaced as PM by a re-energised Pitt in 1804. He was then ennobled as Viscount Sidmouth and appointed Lord Privy Seal, the fifth of the great offices of State.

His final office was that of Home Secretary which lasted ten years from 1812 to 1822 (which I believe to be the longest period for any Home Secretary). These were momentous times. The spectre of the French Revolution was never far away and Lord Sidmouth needed to be strong and resolute. So he proved with the Treason Act and the Seditious Meetings Act, both passed in 1817. That same year he took the major step of suspending Habeas Corpus. He was also ultimately responsible for the aftermath of the Peterloo Massacre in 1819.

He remained a strong supporter of both the Crown and law and order until he died in 1844 at the age of 86 years.

The Trust's Essay Competition

In June the Trust organised an essay competition in conjunction with Devizes School. The topic was, how would Jane Austen react if she could see modern-day Devizes?

A hundred entries were received from students in years 7 & 8 (age 13-14) and the three prizewinners will be published in Trust News. Here is the overall winner, by Sam



Trust News Editor Philippa Morgan with the prizewinners and their teacher

Dear Cassandra

I was on my way home after seeing you when the hard journey broke the wheel on my cab. Fortunately, we were just about to enter Devizes – the quaint town we used to visit in our youth – and I decided to see how much it had changed. I was astounded by the differences, not only cultural but also physical, the town seems to have grown impossibly large. I am sure you too will be shocked by the startling changes.

I will start when I first got out; I looked down a road and saw a huge building with 'Wadworth' written on it in huge letters. It seemed to be a brewery and (as I am not usually one for beer) that was the end of that. I turned around meaning to forget about it but realised that every inn had 'Wadworth' written on it. It seems I won't be able to escape its influence that easily.

Then, I saw the castle. "At last, something I know and remember" you must be saying. If only that was the truth. Walking up to the gate, I was quite annoyed to see that the grounds were no longer open to the middle and lower class. It is also privately owned. I can't believe that this amazing labyrinth of twisting corridors and dark, dingy dungeons has been reduced to a playhouse for the gentry. It brings back so many memories. However, to do it credit, it looks even better than it did in my childhood.

After that moment of nostalgia, I took a trip down the canal. Once again, I could never have been prepared for the shock of it. It looked almost completely new! The banks had been raised, the water had fallen, the banks had got further apart

and there were no barges; the boats on the water were only pleasure craft. It seemed so pretty, there were ducks and swans swimming in the water, trees and flowering bushes covering the banks and people walking along the pathway. It seems I had found a great part of Devizes. Finally, to cap the experience, one of the locks opened and all the water sped through, tugging the narrowboat in with it. It all looked so peaceful.

I went back to the main part of town and looked around the shops. Apparently, I had mis-judged the town from my first look. There was a huge variety of shops, coffee shops, sweet shops with little children tugging reluctant parents up to them, charity shops filled with everything you could imagine, all the high street shops you are used to and even more.

The culture is rich and complex. It seems there aren't any classes like we are used to and everyone is a lot better off than back at home. It has changed in unbelievable ways but many parts are the same. As if to prove my point, when I got back to the cab, the Market Place was filled with stalls and the general public were milling around buying things and chatting. I felt almost sad to be leaving it. I felt so old fashioned, with my views on society so different to here: I attracted some strange glances as my horse trotted past people.

I should conclude now as I am running out of paper. I think I can learn a lot from this visit, and I hope you can too. I look forward to meeting you again soon but before then you can look forward to many more letters like this one.

Jane Austen

Museum News

A selection of forthcoming events

EXHIBITION: Devizes Camera Club

Monday, 11 September, 2017
Devizes Camera Club Biennial Print Exhibition until Sunday 8 October 2017.

TOUR: Salisbury Plain at War

10:30 am, Friday, 15 September, 2017
Tour of the Museum, followed by a light lunch and guided walk on Salisbury Plain led by Richard Broadhead. £40 (£35 WANHS members)

LECTURE: A Medieval Guide to Sex - Dr Gillian Kenny

2:30 pm, Saturday, 23 September, 2017
How attitudes towards falling in love, sexual activities, contraception and the ending of relationships both differed and were sometimes surprisingly similar to those in today's world. Dr Gillian is a Visiting Research Fellow at Trinity College, Dublin. £6.50 (£4 WANHS members).

TOUR: STONEHENGE LANDSCAPE Walking the Dead

10:30 am, Saturday, 30 September, 2017
A guided tour of the amazing collections of the Wiltshire Museum, followed by a guided walk from Durrington Walls to Stonehenge. This full day tour will be led by Museum Director, David Dawson. £40 (£35 WANHS members)

LECTURE: Wor Barrow - Dr Mike Allen

2:30 pm, Saturday, 07 October, 2017
Wor Barrow is an iconic Neolithic barrow excavated by General Pitt Rivers (the father of modern archaeology) in 1893-4. 100 years later, recent research led by Mike Allen on the archive, the human bones, and radiocarbon dating provide some fascinating insights and new insights of the barrow, and of Neolithic life, Neolithic communities, and the selection and treatment of the dead. £6.50 (£4 WANHS members)

AGM of the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society

2:30 pm, Saturday, 14 October, 2017
The Annual General Meeting of the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society (WANHS).

INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY SYMPOSIUM

9:30 am, Saturday, 28 October, 2017
£14 (£12 WANHS members) Booking essential.

Continued overleaf

Museum News

Continued

LECTURE: Bronze Age amber spacer artefacts in Britain & Europe

2:30 pm, Saturday, 11 November, 2017
Lecture with Kate Verkooijen - tracking the connections between Wessex, Mycenae and Central Europe. £6.50 (£4 WANHS members)

FUNDRAISING QUIZ

7pm for 7:30, Friday, 17 November, 2017
All are welcome to our annual fundraising quiz. Price £20 for a team of up to four people, includes a glass of wine and nibbles.

Bookings and enquiries:

www.wiltshiremuseum.org.uk

Or call 01380 727369

You can now search the
Museum's Collections
database online

www.wiltshireheritagecollections.org.uk

The Trust For Devizes

Formed in 1967, the Trust For Devizes is a non-political charity whose aim is to "protect and maintain the character and amenities of the Devizes area".

With a history of successful campaigns, the Trust is an influential body in the local sphere, helping to prevent inappropriate development and to promote or initiate sympathetic projects.

The Trust's members receive a quarterly newsletter and there are regular social events throughout the year as well as open meetings. Membership is just £15 per year. Contact the Membership Secretary by writing to the address below, or sign up at our website: www.trustfordevizes.info

Dates for your diary

This year's Heritage Open Day will be on Saturday 9th September. A leaflet showing details is included in this Trust News.

Wiltshire Council is hosting a series of interactive meetings to discuss the challenges that the council is facing and the impact that these could have. 26th September, 5:30pm, Corn Exchange, Devizes

The Open Meeting on 'The Housing Debate' will now take place at the Town Hall on Thursday 28th September, 7pm for 7:30pm. Claire Perry, MP will chair the meeting and there will be speakers from a number of organisations including Devizes Town Council, Wiltshire Council and Aster Homes. All are welcome.

The Museum will be holding a fundraising Quiz on Friday 17th November. More details from the Museum.

A World First In Devizes



It is not at all clear how a Devizes wine merchant, Alfred Cunnington, came to build his own telephones but he did, within 12 months of Alexander Graham Bell's patent being filed in 1876. The official explanation is that Cunnington made his phones from an article Thomas Edison wrote in Scientific American. But that article was not published until 1879. The more straightforward explanation is that Cunnington obtained a copy of Bell's Patent, and extracted sufficient information to make a working telephone.

Quite what made Cunnington get involved in telephony is not known. He may well have intended to build phones commercially and there is evidence that he clashed with the UK Patent Office who warned him that he was infringing Bell's patent. Sadly this very capable man had to settle for using them in his business and he installed one in his shop in Wine Street and the other in his home, Southgate House.

We know very little else other than people living in Long Street complained that the electricity in the overhead telephone cable was making them ill.

Whatever the fate of Cunnington's venture, Devizes had the first commercial application of the telephone in Britain. At this point it may be worth reflecting that it may also have been a forerunner of "working from home" with Mr Cunnington being in touch with his business from the comfort of Southgate House!

This story would have remained hidden had local historian John Girvan not had such an enquiring mind. John noticed that during some work on the old wine merchants an antique electrical insulator that was used in the original installation had been removed. Aware that the Science Museum had an interest in the Cunnington telephone he reported this to them.

Subsequent discussion with Wiltshire Museum resulted in the phones being put on permanent display just a stone's throw from where they were originally used. In 2003 the Trust organised and designed the stainless steel plaque to fix onto the building (in St John's St) to celebrate this first commercial telephone to be used in the UK.

Tony Sedgwick & John Girvan

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