

From the Editor

It's only February and already a lot is happening in Devizes. 2019 promises to be a busy year.

This edition of Trust News covers two very important issues – will there or won't there be parking in the Market Place, and will the Assize Court project finally get going? These are both, shall we say, challenging and will take a lot of effort and goodwill to resolve. They both have the potential to change Devizes for the better and will certainly engage many local people as their stories unfold. It is certainly encouraging to see so many people taking an interest in issues affecting our town and, hopefully, this will result in a broader range of people involved in community affairs.

On a more mundane but also important subject, Wiltshire Council is in the process of replacing some of our street lights with LED lights. These lights are more energy efficient and therefore cheaper to run. They also have a longer lifespan of 15 to 20 years. That's all good news. However, the lamp stands which have been installed in Long Street are ugly and out of keeping with other street furniture. They are also very bright and intrusive for residents. The Trust has contacted the Wiltshire Council Cabinet member with responsibility for Highways, Bridget Wayman (bridget.wayman@wiltshire.gov.uk), to ask that these lights should be replaced with something more appropriate. We await her reply.

Our AGM is on 21st March and will be held this year in the Wessex Room at the Corn Exchange. Please come along and show your support for the Trust, ask questions about what we do and listen to our speaker, Terry Bracher talking about the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre.

For those who receive a hard copy of Trust News, you should find an application form with this edition. Please pass this to a friend or neighbour who is not yet a Trust member and encourage them to join. The larger our membership, the more weight we will carry.

Philippa Morgan

A Way Forward For The Market Place

Controversial new plans are in prospect



Devizes Market Place is the single most important and recognisable feature of Devizes. It is Devizes' 'icon'. The Trust's view is that priority must be given to conserving and enhancing the architectural and historic value of the space and its frontage buildings.

Providing a public space for the community, and for the markets and other public events in the town, will support and enhance the vitality and viability of the town centre by acting as a focal point. Providing parking space for shoppers, businesses and other visitors is desirable but the present use and layout are in conflict with that priority.

In 2017/18, Wiltshire Council consulted on proposals to extend the parking period to 2 hours at least, and to charge by the hour. Our view at the time was that this would have perpetuated the shabby treatment of the architectural and historic value of the space. It would have threatened the availability of the space for the community, because the Council would expect to be compensated for the loss of parking fees during public events. And it would cut the availability of short term (less than an hour) parking.

The other option on offer was to remove all parking from the Market Place. The Trust would have preferred

there to be a third option which would have allowed some free parking to continue. However, that wasn't on the table. Wiltshire Council made it very clear that the current free 30 minute parking could not continue.

Devizes Town Council has now committed to take over ownership of the Market Place. We understand that the transfer was conditional on it being used as a community space with some allocation for blue badge holder parking.

As the Market Place will be under local control there will no restriction to holding events in the area as there is no requirement to use the limited free event parking allocation. The Town Council will commit funding and resources to deliver a strategy to increase the number of events in the town centre,

The Trust supports the transfer of ownership to the Town Council who have the focus and the ambition to make the best use of the Market Place for the town. We also understand the legal and financial constraints that both councils are operating under, and recognise that there is no perfect solution.

For more information on Devizes Town Council's plans visit their website:

www.tinyurl.com/market-place-changes

Jacob's Ladder

A mystery solved!



A recent enquiry was received by the Trust by email as follows: "I wonder if you can help me. I have a postcard entitled Jacob's Ladder, Devizes which depicts young children standing on a shallow stepped pathway with banks of grass and bracken on either side. It is not posted but I would date it at the beginning of the 20th century from the clothes the children are wearing.

"The card was published by Woodward, Devizes but I cannot find any reference to this particular subject online. Is it (or was it) a name for a local feature at one time? I should be very grateful for any information you may have or are able to ascertain on the location. I have attached a photo of the card."

John Girvan was able to supply the information that Jacob's Ladder is off Hartmoor through fields towards Potterne and is now very overgrown. The pathway descends steeply down an escarpment towards the Potterne Road. However, the stone steps have now eroded and washed away.

The path can just about be seen on Google Earth and the geo-caching site co-ordinates are N51° 20.067' W2° 00.097' for accessing the path and field across which it is located.

John's book 'Devizes' Hidden Secrets' has more information.

Do you have any memories or information to add? Let us know!

January's Open meeting

A lively and informative event

The Trust for Devizes asked Cllr Laura Mayes in her capacity as a member of the Devizes Assize Court Trust (DACT) to address the meeting on the Assize Court project. Laura was joined by David Dawson, Director, Wiltshire Museum.

Cllr Mayes explained briefly the history of the Assize Court and set out the context within which the Assize Court sits. The plan will be to incorporate the Wiltshire Museum into a wider plan which will include a new towpath on the south of the Kennet & Avon Canal. DACT would employ a professional Project Management team to oversee the development. The first job was fund raising, then a competition for an architect, then recruitment of the Project Team.

David Dawson spoke about the building itself and was able to share recent photos showing the state of the building. (Unfortunately, there were no photos of the interior of the building in the museum archives).



The ceiling of the main courtroom.

Photo: David Dawson

He explained the status of Wiltshire Museum's collection which is classified as of national importance. He also explained how the Museum currently works with many elements of the local community, including outreach to local schools, a programme of lectures and walks and many visits by groups.

It was intended that the new museum would include community space, a cafe and a gallery. There would be

community involvement in capturing stories and memories of the Assize Court, orally or in writing. Many older people in the town could remember when the courts were operational.

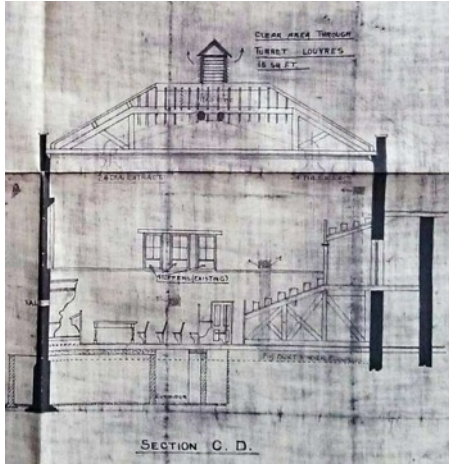
David then illustrated some early sketches of how the building might look after the refurbishment. He showed photographs of other iconic buildings which had become museums, with particular reference to the Brecon Assize Court, also designed by Thomas Henry Wyatt.

Finally, David spoke about funding for the refurbishment. An early application had been made to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for money to secure the building and start the process of fund raising. The estimate for the whole project was £10 million. To achieve this, DACT would need to appoint a Fundraiser with experience of working on large scale projects.

Cllr Mayes then invited questions and ideas from the audience. The following points were made:

- The HLF were very keen that projects such as this engaged fully with the community. It would be vital for there to be considerable community involvement and this would need to be demonstrated as one of the key objectives during applications for fundraising
- It was important to involve Historic England in order to overcome any resistance to planned changes to the building – David Dawson advised that the project team had met with Historic England
- What will happen to the current Museum premises in Long Street? David Dawson said that it was not yet clear what the relationship would be between the Museum and DACT once the development had been completed. The Museum would not be able to leave the current building until the Assize Court project had been completed. These were issues which would be discussed and agreed with over time. The proceeds of the sale of the existing building would probably be invested in an endowment to maintain the museum and its collections into the future.
- Are DACT freeholders of the Assize Court? Yes

Continued on the next page



A plan of the court

- For the project to be successful, it will need to have a professional team to support the Trustees
- How about setting up a 'Friends of DACT' so that people could become members and get involved? This could be done at different funding levels.
- Once the building was safe to enter, paying tours should be set up so that visitors could look at plans and see progress.
- Various other Museums had set up mock court rooms which were used to play out trials and inquiries eg Southampton Museum has an audiovisual show for visitors to find out about the Titanic Inquiry, which was held in London soon after the disaster. Perhaps something similar could be done for the Assize Court.
- One of the empty local shops could be used to display plans for the project.
- Also a progress report could be delivered to the Devizes Area Board on a regular basis. Social media should also be used for updates.
- How about having a bus stop or coach drop off point directly outside the Assize Court?
- In the short term, the front aspect of the building could be generally tidied up and improved by the use of planters.
- DACT Trustees should talk to Rowdeford School about their very successful fundraising and how that had been achieved.
- Eventually, canal boat trips could bring visitors to the Museum. Also, the public space could be made available for weddings and birthday parties

The meeting closed at 8:30 pm. About 80 people attended.

For the latest news on the Assize Courts, or to get involved, go to the website <https://devizesassizecourt.org.uk>

A little piece of history



An interesting piece of stone was displayed at the Trust's Meeting on the future of the Assizes Courts in the Town Hall.

The piece of stone had broken away from the stone carving off the portico

entrance of the Assize Court building after a very rough storm a while ago.

John Girvan rescued the stone, which was destined to be dumped into a skip after a clear up by workmen at the time. It will be donated to the museum for safe keeping.

Museum News

A selection of forthcoming events

Lecture: Eric Ravillious: White Horses and the 'lost' Puffin picture book by Joe Pearson, Design for Today

16th March, 2:30pm, Lecture Hall, £4.50 WAHNS, £7 non-members

Archaeology in Wiltshire Conference 2019

23rd March 2019, 10am – 5pm, Devizes Corn Exchange, £25 WAHNS, £35 non-members

Lecture: Identity and Ideology during the Beaker period by Chris Carey, University of Brighton

30th March, Lecture Hall, £4.50 WAHNS, £7 non-members

Art Course: Drawing on the Ancient Past, with Helen Garrett

An eight-week course with artist Helen Garrett starts Thursday 25 April.

During the course you will be drawing on the Ancient Past for inspiration; from rocks and fossils in the earth to Cave Art, Celtic Art and even some Anglo Saxon treasure. With access to some of the artefacts in the Wiltshire Museum collection, this is a unique opportunity to connect with history in a closely profound and imaginative way.

Exhibitions

Snakes ... a Slither into a Secret World

2nd March 2019 - 28th April 2019
Wiltshire Museum, Oexmann Gallery

Come along to the new exhibition opening from March next year to learn more about the fascinating life of snakes from all around the world. This exciting exhibition from uses displays of taxidermy, skeletons and award-winning photography.

Interested in archaeological field-work? Go to

<https://wiltshireafg.weebly.com>

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

Banks And Building Societies

An endangered species?



Devizes currently has at least nine banks and building societies but there is a real danger that they will soon start to disappear. Indeed, Santander recently announced the closure of their branch in St John's St (pictured above).

At a time when most other towns are losing most if not all of their banks – Marlborough will soon have only two banks when its NatWest closes – it is a real concern that more banks in Devizes will shut their doors forever. It is particularly worrying because they occupy such dominant positions in the Market Place and are mainly in listed buildings which were built specifically as bank premises. There would also be a considerable loss of local jobs.

The rise in the use of internet banking means that most people now bank online and the human touch isn't needed. But for many people, particularly small businesses dealing mainly in cash, the presence of a local bank can be a real lifeline and save a lot of time and effort.

After all, there are times when it's nice to sit down with somebody face to face. Communication over the phone or internet isn't always clear, and sometimes it feels better (and might even be faster) to talk and look at things together.

The message is 'Shop local, bank local. Support our community'



www.trustfordevizes.info

Dates for your diary

The Trust's AGM will be held on Thursday 21st March in the Wessex Room at the Corn Exchange, 7pm for a prompt start at 7:30pm.

**** PLEASE NOTE THE CHANGE OF VENUE ****

We are looking for volunteers to join the Committee. We would like to fill the roles of Chair and Secretary. If you are interested in either of these positions, please get in touch, contact details are at the bottom of the page.

Our speaker at the AGM this year will be Terry Bracher, Archives & Local Studies Manager at the Wiltshire And Swindon History Centre, Chippenham.

Practising law in the old Assize Court

Peter Bell remembers

I have been asked to write one or two recollections, as I must be one of the relatively few survivors from the early 1960s to have practised in the Devizes Magistrates Court when it was housed in the historic Assize Court building in Northgate Street, with its Ionic portico, now fortunately to be converted for the Museum.

The Quarter Sessions were also formerly held there, followed by the Assizes in the summer.

The Assizes used to deal with the more serious criminal trials such as homicide, highway robbery, assault, coining, forgery, even witchcraft in early days. The Devizes Court opened in 1835 and ran until the system was abolished in 1971. It was later used both for the Crown Court and the local Magistrates Court.

I was working with a firm called Delmé Radcliffe & Brunskill, located in Parnella House in the Market Place. This had previously been the home of a local surgeon, and over the door was a statue of Aesculapius, the Greek God of Medicine, which is still there. Mr Delmé Radcliffe, who was before my time, used to live at Patney, whence he caught a train to Devizes Station every weekday morning.

The firm later passed to Joe Brunskill, an old Harrovian. There were then some five or six firms of solicitors in Devizes, the leading advocates at Wansbrough being Walter Ireland and

Macgregor Johnson. The former was a formidable advocate, and one could hear a pin drop when he was cross-examining a witness.

In the 1960s the Chairman of the Bench was Donald May and the Clerk to the Justices was Mr Gregson. It was said that "Their Worships always dispense with justice very quickly here!" And I soon learnt that it was Court etiquette to say "With respect" if one disagreed with one's opponent, "With great respect" if one strongly disagreed, and "With the greatest possible respect" if he was talking nonsense.

Our firm was instructed by the A.A. to defend any of its members charged with motoring offences in the Devizes area. The Magistrates used to say that "they always believed the Police", so it made me wonder what was the point in having a trial. But I sometimes managed to get a dangerous driving charge reduced to careless.

The work was not too rewarding, attracting a fee of only 3 guineas for a guilty plea in mitigation, and 5 guineas for a not-guilty plea. And one had to be properly dressed in those days. If one had a button undone, the Judge would say "I can't see you!" But all in all it was a valuable experience.

The Assize Court will be a fine new home for the Museum, but maybe a few ghosts from the past will still haunt the building.

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