

Trust News



Issue 160 - May 2020

From the Editor

This edition of Trust News comes to you during 'lockdown'. We have tried to make it entertaining but we have also included a 'think piece' from Richard Ormerod about changes to Planning law which are starting to have an impact in the Devizes area. If you have any comments on the article, please let us know as we are considering whether we should ask our MP to take up the issues involved.

Unable to meet in person, we have held two committee meetings on Zoom which, for those of you who don't know, allows us to meet up via the internet and carry on regardless. There are unfortunately some technical issues which have meant that not all Trustees have been able to participate. We also make use of e-mails to enable everyone to participate when issues need to be discussed and decisions made.

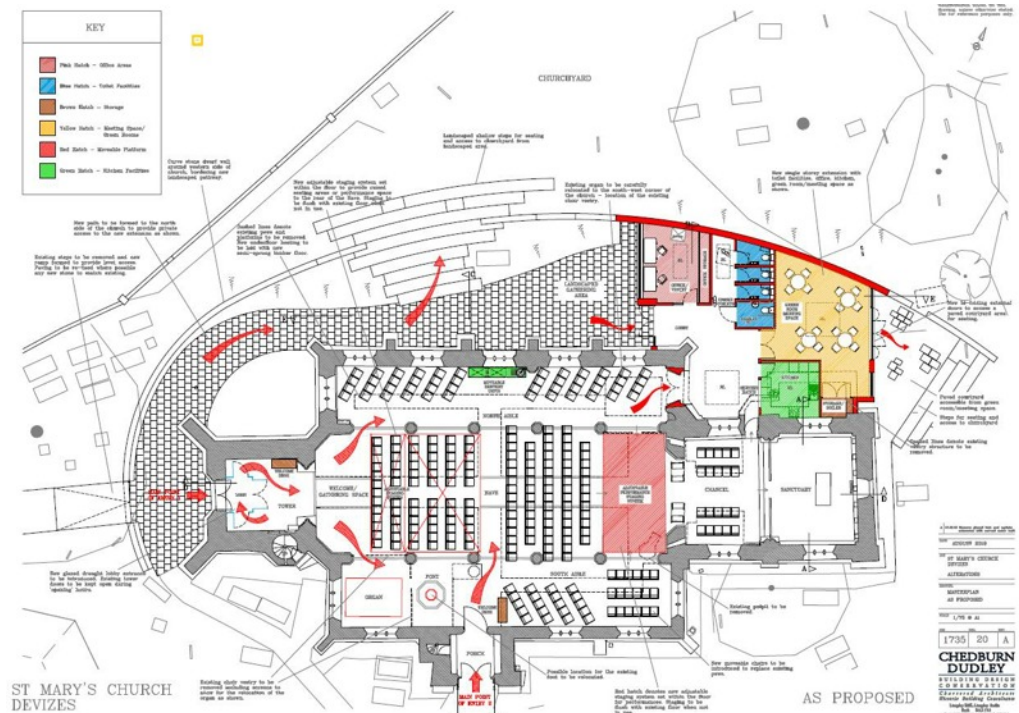
We continue to keep our eyes on what's going on around town and we have been able to take action on a number of fronts. 'Dates for your diary' section in this issue is thin for obvious reasons. We hope that by the next edition, we will have something to report on the revised date of our AGM.

The Committee has asked me to thank you for your continuing support for the Trust and we wish you all well until we meet again.

Philippa Morgan

St Mary's Church

A new plan



The revised plan

The St Mary's Church Future Group has now produced a new plan for the church, a Grade 1 listed building located in the central Devizes Town Conservation Area. Parts of the building date back to the 12th Century.

The plan will be submitted for planning consent subject to further consultation. The new plan (see above) is intended to allow a range of activities including theatrical and dance performances, public meetings, film shows and art, photographic and sculpture exhibitions.

It will allow for church functions such as hosting receptions after baptisms, weddings and funerals. Café and refreshment services will be provided in conjunction with events. There will also be space for office functions for charities.

Full details can be found online here:

<https://www.stmarydevizestrust.org.uk>

This is the latest in a series of proposals for the church. In 2012, a planning application for a contemporary circular 'cloister' design extending north from the church across the churchyard, was

submitted. Planning permission was refused in October 2013 and an appeal was dismissed in August 2014 largely due to the significant scale and impact on the site.

Following extensive consultation, in January 2019, a pre-application submission with several options for schemes with smaller footprints was made to Wiltshire Council, with mixed responses from the Council and from Heritage England.

Further consultation was held, and the current proposal is designed to sit harmoniously within the context of the church itself. This will provide much needed modern facilities which will enable regular worship, community meetings, and large performances and enable the building to become a sustainable public activity venue with benefits to the wider community.

The Trust welcomes the new proposals which we hope will ensure that the church can be used as a community space while retaining its status as a Grade 1 listed building.

Our Annual Report

In lieu of an AGM

As we were unable to hold our AGM in March this year, below is a summary of our Annual Report for 2019.

Most of the Trust's activities in 2019 have been reported to members in our regular newsletter Trust News.

Committee members regularly attended meetings of other community organisations, such as the Devizes Air Quality and Transport Strategy Group and the Neighbourhood Plan review group to present the views of the Trust when appropriate.

The Committee regularly reviews the planning applications submitted to Wiltshire Council that concern the Town and its environs. It does this to support the right sort of development as well as to put forward fact-based logically argued objections to inappropriate development. 2019 was a busy, with over 140 planning applications being reviewed. We submitted objections to Wiltshire Council on 14 of those, and supported 10. We are grateful to Richard Ormerod for all the work he does on planning applications.

Other issues

We took part in two events - the Devizes Wellbeing Day, held on the Small Green in June 2019 and the Lions' May Fair. Both events enable the Trust to reach out to potential members and raise our profile.

We held another successful Heritage Open Day in September 2019. Over 100 people attended.

We continued to work with Devizes School on the essay competition. The subject for 2019 was 'The Moonrakers and the Crammer pond'. The quality of entries was again high. The winning pupils were presented with money prizes at the school end of term assembly.

FINANCIAL REPORT FOR 2019

The draft financial accounts for the year 2019 are summarised below. Full details on the Trust's website.

	2019	2018
OPENING BALANCE	8,181.24	8,283.61
INCOME	2,796.12	2,641.49
EXPENDITURE	2,398.05	2,743.86
CLOSING BALANCE	8,579.31	8,181.24
EXCESS EXP	-398.07	102.37

James Flood, Treasurer

The Moving Post Office

Ann King charts the changes



The Post Office was sited at 24 Market Place from 1888-1921

Devizes is first recorded as an official post town in 1706, but a postal service had been operating from at least 1674 when a Mr Lawrence was the deputy postmaster. In 1783 Charles Whitfield is the postmaster and you could send a letter from the post office to London every day except Saturday - that is a year before the first Royal Mail coach service was introduced.

But where was the post office? It is likely it was associated with the Bear Hotel - the stopping place for the London to Bristol Royal Mail coaches, first in the inn, then, possibly in the shop areas beneath the new assembly rooms when they were erected in the 1790's. Certainly one of these was used as a coaching office where people bought their tickets for the coaches.

Initially the innkeeper would also serve as the postmaster, but as the amount of post increased, so did the need to provide a designated area to receive and collect letters and also the need for a person to take charge of the post. Before 1840 and the arrival of the adhesive postage stamp and uniform rates over the country, every letter and package would have had to be weighed and the destination recorded. The receiver would have to pay the postal charge.

The job of postmaster was important; a status job in the town - the first business noted in trade directories is the post office with its location, the name of the postmaster and the times of the postal collections and deliveries. The job seems to have been a sinecure passed down through the family. In 1809 Thomas Smith became the postmaster. He retained the post

until the 1820's when his son Thomas Burrough Smith took over, combining postmaster with being a bookseller, stationer and having a patent medicinal warehouse. Then his daughter Mary took over the business from 1859 to 1866.

From 1847 the post office was located at 44 Market Place, which now forms part of HSBC. Between 1881 and 1887 it was at 39 Market Place (before Lloyds Bank was constructed), then in 1888 it moved briefly to 24 Market Place (now Hallmark Flooring) before returning to No. 44 until 1921. The daily horse-drawn Royal Mail coaches from London had ceased in the early 1840's with the coming of the railways, but instead Devizes had a mail coach going to Chippenham to collect the post from the station.

With the increasing volumes of post, by 1907 Devizes had also acquired three sub-post offices, at 27 Bath Road (Townsend's, where Frederick Townsend was also the sub-post master), 4 Estcourt Street and 25 Long Street.

Whereas in the early 20th century many towns gained large imposing purpose-built post offices, this was not the case in Devizes. In 1921 the post office moved to Barford House at 35 St John Street, remaining there until the early 1960's when it did acquire purpose-built premises in Maryport Street on the site of the old school. That site now houses only the sorting office and parcel collection point. The counter service has been housed in Sainsbury's since 2003.

Do you have any photographs of the Post Office's various locations? Please contact the editor.

Planning Regulations

Richard Ormerod reports on the Government's blanket permission to convert farm buildings to dwellings.

A recent planning application on the outskirts of Devizes has drawn the Trust's attention to some quite extensive, but little-publicised, changes to planning law. The Government issued a blanket permission in 2014 to convert farm buildings all over the country into houses, and for a slew of other changes of use.

The general principle is that if you carry out development, you need planning permission from your local authority.

Small projects (domestic extensions, single garages) can be done without applying for permission. They are called 'permitted development', with blanket permissions given by documents called 'General Permitted Development Orders'.

The Order issued in 2014, however, created entirely new rights to change the use of agricultural buildings to residential use.

Limitations

There are some limitations on this new right. It does not apply in National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Conservation Areas and the like. It is limited to three dwellings, and floorspace of 450m² per agricultural unit.

Landowners need to apply to the local authority to ask whether prior approval will be needed in relation to:

- traffic and highways impacts;
- noise;
- contamination or flood risks;
- whether the building is otherwise unsuitable for use as a dwelling(s);
- design or external appearance of the building.

Over the last ten years, governments have introduced similar new rights, such as change of use from a shop to a bank or building society.

Effects

Your correspondent's view of the effects of these blanket permissions for larger developments is:

1. They are much more likely to have significant effects on the landscape, and on traffic.
2. In spite of the 'prior approval' process, the onus is now on local authorities to show why conversions need approval.
3. The trend also seems out of step with the government's long-standing policy for the planning system, that it should be 'genuinely plan-led'.
4. The intention was to simplify the process for farmers, but it seems very unlikely to achieve that.

Applying for planning permission is a fairly familiar process, involving locally elected councillors making decisions on our behalf. Whether it is an improvement for ministers to issue blanket permissions, and then hedge them with limitations to prevent a few cases going wrong, is a matter of opinion.

More information can be found here:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/596/contents/made>

What do you think? Comments to the Editor please.

Museum News

Coronavirus

The Museum is currently closed and from 1 April most staff have been on furlough. But just because you cannot go to the Museum, doesn't mean that the Museum can't come to you. These pages will keep you entertained at home with stories, images and videos.

This is a good starting point for exploring the Museum's resources:

<https://www.wiltshiremuseum.org.uk/home-updates>

This page offers short videos based around some of the museum's objects from the 40s, 50s and 60s:

<https://www.wiltshiremuseum.org.uk/remembrance-resources>

Plans to reopen

There is now some news on a possible re-opening date.

Subject to government advice and guidelines, the Museum may be able to open in early July. This is likely to involve the use of timed tickets, contactless payments and screening of staff at reception. It is unlikely that volunteers will be able to return until the Autumn.

The Ravilious exhibition which was due to have opened in October has now been postponed until October 2021. However, it is hoped that the Egyptian exhibition can be staged during the summer, again subject to lockdown conditions.

The latest information can be found on the museum's website.

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

Quakers Walk

The Trust acts



At some time in late March a large hole appeared in Quakers Walk. Since the Coronavirus lockdown, Quakers Walk and has become a very popular route for people taking their daily exercise. It wasn't helpful to have an obstruction which forced everyone onto the verge on the western side of the Walk.

A large spoil heap had been left around the bole of a beech tree which is the subject of a Tree Preservation Order. We were concerned that the beech tree would be damaged by the spoil around its bole.

The hole had been dug in order to lay a new stormwater sewer and was required to ensure that the new pipework crossed the existing services safely. However, shortly after the hole was dug, work on the nearby building site came to a halt and the hole remained untouched. Evidently the Council's Tree and Landscape Officer had not been informed of this work, as protective barriers should have been erected around the tree boles before works commenced.

Our planning expert, Richard Ormerod, contacted the relevant Enforcement Officers at Wiltshire Council to advise them of this and the hole was eventually filled in on 20th April. We understand that the hole will have to be reopened once work starts again. We hope that there won't be any long term damage to the nearby trees. We will be certainly keeping an eye on what happens when the building site re-opens to ensure that the correct procedures are followed in future.

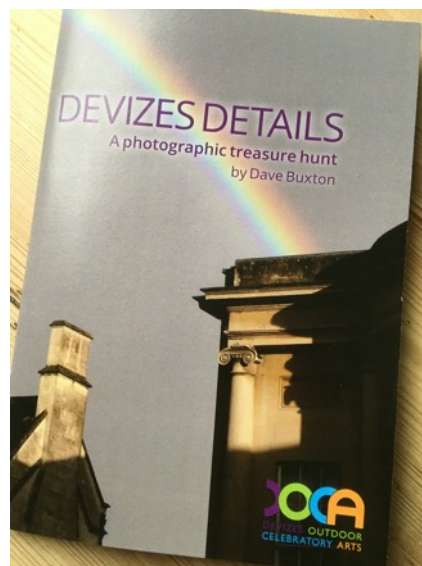
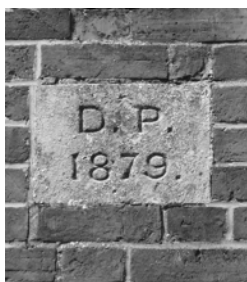
Dates for your diary

Heritage Open Day

At the time of writing, there is no decision yet as to whether Heritage Open Day will be going ahead this year. If it does go ahead in some form, Devizes Heritage Open Day will be on Saturday 19th September 2020.

Devizes Details

A new book to raise funds for DOCA



The new book, and a couple of mystery "details"

Looking for something to do in the lockdown? Why not combine your daily walk with a photographic treasure hunt around Devizes.

Dave Buxton's book 'Devizes Detail' (£6) is in aid of Devizes Outdoor Celebratory Arts (DOCA) and is available now from Devizes Books – in case you didn't know, proprietor Jo Batchelor is doing a free delivery service for all books. It's also available online from the DOCA website:

www.docadevizes.org.uk

Dave reports that the book was selling well until the Lockdown but

sales have now tailed off. The closing date for entries was to have been October 2020 but it's been moved to 29th May 2021 to allow more time to buy the book and complete the hunt. Following the treasure hunt should be a good way of passing the time on your daily constitutional - social isolating not a problem!

Please support DOCA by buying the book. The first prize is £500 (donated by Hunter French estate agents) and the second prize £250 (donated by Wansbroughs solicitors) so it could be a very lucrative use of your time!

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www.trustfordevizes.info