

From the Editor

Happy New Year to everyone. I would like to thank those who came to the Christmas social and also thanks to John Girvan and David Dawson who gave presentations. Our next get together will be on Thursday 20th June for our AGM. Our new MP Brian Mathew hopes to be at the meeting, subject to Parliamentary demands.

On a more serious note, it can be argued that 2025 will be a key year in the history of Devizes and decisions made this year will have a major impact on the future of our town. The Wharf project which started in 2016 has now reached a critical point. There are planning applications in process for the former Wadworth brewery site and the Assize Court. The former cottage hospital site is for sale although it is obviously not as attractive a prospect as the Southgate House site which also has a planning application in process.

All of these town centre developments together will have a major impact on Devizes when it comes to traffic and air quality, health services, education and heritage. We also have agreed housing developments at Marshall Road, Coate Road and the London Road which will produce 450 properties. The integration of all of these new developments is vital. The new needs to fit in with the old. Otherwise, we will lose much of the character and charm of Devizes which makes our town so special.

The Trust comments on your behalf on all planning applications, but it is just as important that individuals make their feelings known to town and county councillors as well as commenting on individual applications. Please take the time to e-mail or write to let our representatives know your concerns. If you need help in how to do this, please get in touch.

Philippa Morgan

The Wadworth Brewery

Details of the planning application



An illustrative view of the proposed development on the brewery site.

The application for development of the former Grade II listed Wadworth Brewery and White Lion Public House is currently out for consultation. The intention is to turn the site into a mixed use residential and commercial development including a new two storey mixed use commercial and residential building, with associated car parking, landscaping and public areas.

The application has been developed by the Trevor Osborne Property Group and the Nash Partnership. Both organisations have experience of working on historic buildings.

The development includes the conversion of a range of listed buildings stretching from the Grade II brewery building on New Park Street to the former White Lion pub.

In total, the scheme will see the creation of 22 homes, including a single four-bed house and multiple apartments, and 9,000sq feet of commercial space.

The Trust's view is that most of the key elements listed by the architects are public benefits. However, the key issue is whether the axis through the gateway should remain as clear as possible.

After discussion at our January meeting, it was decided that we should agree with the general proposal but request that the axis should remain, as it is effectively a gateway to the new development.

More details of the planning application are here:

<https://tinyurl.com/8exk7zyp>

A Devizes Girl Remembers

This was found amongst memories shared by website visitors to the Share Your Memories facility of the website of The Francis Frith Collection – www.francisfrith.com – and used with permission.

I started at Southbroom Junior School, Estcourt Street in 1943 where the headmistress was Miss M M Marchant, who had taught my Dad. She had a whiskery chin and wore bloomers to her knees which peeped below her skirt when she sat down. My most abiding memory of that school is the sickly smell of milk as the small daily bottles were warmed on radiator pipes. The secretary was a young lady from Potterne called Thelma Underwood who sat in a little office overlooking St James Church. She taught me to tell the time on that big Church clock.

One of the pupils in my class was Eileen Underwood whose Mother, a lovely lady, came in daily to heat the school dinners. A precious box of matches to light the stoves was kept in my teacher's cupboard and Mrs Underwood would have to collect this box daily and hand it back on leaving. Lionel Billinge, who was to be a teacher in Devizes for many years, joined the school when he left the Forces and took a photograph of my class. On an afternoon in early May 1945, I came out of school into Estcourt Crescent where all the mothers, including mine, awaited their children. Usually they chatted quietly but on this day there was a buzz in the air with lots of excited conversation and cheerfulness. Mother told me the War was over and Hitler was gone. I was just happy he wouldn't be coming through the hole in the wall of the Bank cellar although we hadn't needed to go in that cellar for some time.

The centre of Devizes, in those days, housed a large residential community with everyone living over the shop or nearby in the myriad of courts and alleys which existed mainly off New Park Street and Sheep Street. Everyone knew everyone. Many with large families, such as my Grandparents, had moved after the First World War from the crowded centre of the town to just beyond St James Church where the various Avenues had been built by the local council. But the courts and alleys remained occupied in the centre for many years after the Second World War until more development took place beyond the Avenues with new roads such as Forty Acres, Pines, Waylands, Cromwell and Eastleigh.

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Southgate House

A disappointing result



The planning application for the development of homes on the site of Southgate House has been submitted and is currently subject to consultation. The plan is for the erection of 34 dwellings (comprising 33 open-market homes and one affordable First Home) and involves demolition of the existing office building (constructed in the 1990s for the Wiltshire Regional Health Authority), new vehicular access, parking, drainage, landscaping and associated works.

The Trust has objected to the application on the grounds that it offers inadequate affordable housing and that the Pans Lane frontage will result in the destruction of the tree belt. We note that Wiltshire Highways have commented that the applicant does still need to provide a drawing showing a "Buffer" along the boundary of any property which

fronts a carriageway without a footway. This should be set at a width of at least 500mm. This area will be adopted by the council as highway so will need to be cleared of obstruction. This is mostly important for car parking areas to ensure that cars are not encouraged to over hang the highway.

Because of our concerns, we asked Cllr Simon Jacobs to "call in" this application so that it can be considered by the Eastern Planning Committee. Unfortunately, his response was that he had discussed the application with the planning officer and was satisfied that due process is being carried out properly. For that reason, he will not be calling the application in. We are hoping to persuade him to rethink his decision as we consider this to be an application which should be discussed before a decision is taken.

A word from the Treasurer

It's renewal time!

We are always very grateful to our members for their support. We couldn't do all the things we have achieved without it.

It's time to collect the annual subscriptions. In spite of the challenging economic conditions we

have no plans to raise our membership fee.

If you pay by banker's order there is no need to do anything. If you pay by cheque, please send £15 to the Trust at the address on the back page.

James Flood, Hon. Treasurer

The Kennet And Avon Canal

From a liability to an asset



Caen Hill in 1965, from "The Kennet & Avon Canal" by Kenneth R Clew

The Kennet & Avon canal wasn't always as it is today, as can be seen from the photo taken in 1965. The newly formed British Waterways Board declared in December 1963 that the canal was "being maintained in a state of delayed decay at an annual cost of some £50,000" But Saturday 16th May 1970 was the day when the future of the canal really started to change.

It was the day that the bottom lock at Bath was reopened, and the announcement that Berkshire County Council, Wiltshire County Council, Devizes Borough Council and Devizes Rural District Council had all made donations of £100 as the first tentative step towards greater involvement in the future of the canal. They were soon joined by Newbury and Hungerford councils who gave £20,000 over a five year term for the extension of the Newbury to Hungerford stretch.

Work on the restoration accelerated in 1971 and 1972 with a number of stretches of the canal being opened at Bath, Hungerford and Wiltshire. Job creation schemes were set up with the Manpower Services Commission paying for the labour costs, the British Waterways Board providing the plant, fuel, tools

electricity etc and the Kennet & Avon Trust paying for the materials.

In December 1977, a £175,000 project for the restoration of the 19 Caen Hill locks was started. The funding did not include the making of the lock gates which was estimated at a further £300,000. In the same year, Kennet District Council sponsored another job creation scheme to convert Devizes Wharf into an amenity for the town and the canal.

Fast forward to 1983 and the Kennet & Avon Canal Trust celebrated its twenty-first birthday with a proud record of achievement, including 44 locks repaired and 28 lock chambers restored at Devizes with top gates purchased and being fitted as well as the side ponds being dug out. Passenger boats were in operation at Reading, Hungerford, Crofton, Devizes, Bradford-on-Avon and Bath. The canal was a showpiece, attracting visitors from the Netherlands and France.

After many more years of effort and hard work, including the enormous contribution of volunteers, the canal was officially re-opened by Queen Elizabeth II on 8 August 1990.

Museum News

A selection of forthcoming events

LECTURE: a Potted History, by Julian Richards - The story of Britain's ceramic history spans 6000 years.

5th April 2025 2:30 pm

For more information, go to <https://www.wiltshiremuseum.org.uk/events/>

The Museum has announced that it has raised the first million pounds towards the project to revitalise the Devizes Assize Court as a new home for the Wiltshire Museum and a community destination at the heart of the county.

It received two pledges from major foundations in late 2024. The Rothschild Foundation and The Julia Rausing Trust have both awarded £500,000 towards the restoration of the Assize Court building as the new, sustainable, home for the Museum.

A public fundraising appeal will be launched once the major commitment from The National Lottery Heritage Fund has been secured.

In the meantime, you can support the project by joining the Wiltshire Museum, and becoming a member of the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society - the charity that runs the Museum. Members are already supporting this phase of the project, investing over £30,000 each year.

<https://www.wiltshiremuseum.org.uk/membership/>

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

Caffe Vialottie

A new arrival in the Market Place



Still called Strong's Restaurant, 35 Market Place in its Historic England listing, the cafe formerly known as Times Square has now changed its name again to Caffè Vialottie.

Whether they will be baking the Devizes Cheesecake which was made by Strong's for 150 years before they finally closed in the 1990s, is another question. Why not pop in and ask them!

A Devizes Girl Remembers

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In about 1946, I crossed the Green to go to the senior school, Southbroom Secondary Modern. There was a middle aged teacher, Miss M A Pearce, whose sister had taught me at the junior school. They lodged at Heathcote House, the Headmaster's home, during the week and on Fridays their father would come from Bradford on Avon to take them home for the weekend in a long black car that resembled a hearse.

Mr Reynolds, the Headmaster, had a stiff leg and was a kind but authoritative figure. Miss Street came from Street in Somerset which I always thought amusing. Miss M M Garrett, who taught my Dad, was another teacher.

Dates for your diary

The Trust's AGM will be held on Thursday 20th March in the Cheese Hall, Devizes Town Hall at 7pm for 7:30pm. Brian Mathew MP will be joining us, subject of course to Parliamentary business, and will give us an insight into what it's like to be a new MP! Please come along if you can.

Devizes Town Hall

Repairs and renovation



Top: the Town Hall covered in scaffolding. Below: the roof repairs

The renovation of Devizes Town Hall is now well under way.

The building is covered in scaffolding while urgent repair work to the deteriorating roof takes place. The work began in late October 2024 and the renovation, which is expected to cost around £450,000, is due to be completed in early March.

There had been water ingress during bad weather which had become a problem and this is now being dealt with.

St John's Street will remain closed between the road's two junctions with the A360 until March 2025.

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