



SOMERSET BUILDING
Preservation Trust

NEWSLETTER

April 2022

Dear Members

I am delighted that after the frustrations of the past two years, we have any number of “good news” items to report in this newsletter.

With life gradually beginning to get back to normal, we have been able to organise a visit for members to the splendid Inwood House at Henstridge. This is a rare opportunity to see this privately-owned and excellently conserved house and its wonderfully eclectic contents.

Owner Comte Richard de Pelet has kindly agreed to give us a tour of the house and its grounds. Full details of this visit are given in this newsletter. The cost of the visit at £25 per member (to include afternoon tea) is a little higher than in the past but is a reflection of rising prices, I’m afraid.

There is also good news on the old Court House at Chard. Members may recall several times in the past we have expressed our concern to the local authority about the uncertain future of this historic building which is noted for its outstanding decorative plasterwork. There is still a long way to go but a plan is slowly emerging that would safeguard its future.

We also have news of two other projects – at Frome and Wiveliscombe – aimed at saving and restoring interesting historic buildings.

Although I have said it before, I cannot emphasise enough how much we have appreciated members’ continued support during what has been a very difficult time for everyone. It will be good to see you all again at future events.

Russell Lillford
Chairman

Don’t miss out....

You should have received details of the visit to Inwood House. To avoid disappointment, please book early. This visit is for SBPT members only and numbers are limited.

Contact our secretary Jane to make sure of your place.

Inwood House visit – Wednesday 11 May



This is an opportunity to see a privately-owned house that is not normally open to visitors.

Inwood was built in 1881 for Merthyr Guest whose father Sir John Guest founded the iron works at Merthyr Tydfil.

The house is designed loosely in the Scottish Baronial style with a tower probably built as an observatory. The gardens include a Chinese tea house, water tower and stables.

Merthyr Guest collected architectural salvage which he incorporated into the house.

Today the house is a home for the owners the Comte and Comtesse de Pelet who will welcome members. The tour will be followed by tea in the dining room.

The visit is planned to last from 2pm – 5pm but, weather permitting, members will be able to enjoy their own picnic in the grounds from 1pm.

Unfortunately, numbers are limited to 35 so please book early and certainly by April 20.

For Your Diary

***Our Annual General Meeting this year will be held
on Tuesday 11 October
at
Minterne House, Minterne, Dorchester.
Fuller details nearer the time.***

The Old Courthouse, Chard

The Trust has recently met with the new owners of this Grade 1 listed late medieval town house, in the centre of Chard, to discuss the future use of the building which is currently on Historic England's Buildings At Risk register.

A number of options are currently being considered by the developers and the Trust is hopeful there may be an opportunity to secure the future of this historic building, particularly its remarkable first floor Court Room with its nationally-important plasterwork, in a way that will allow regular public access and use.



The town house dates back to around 1630. The building escaped the "modernisers" of later centuries and retains most of its original features.

The Court Room lit by ten-light transomed windows to front and back, has lavish decorative plasterwork depicting appropriate themes with figures representing Justice and Wisdom and scenes from the Judgement of Solomon.

The building – at the rear of No 9 Fore Street and known locally as the Old Courthouse – is accessed through a narrow alley and courtyard.

A ground floor shop at the front is currently used as a Community Hub.



Somerset Restoration Projects

Members might be interested to learn of two current projects to bring historic Somerset buildings back into use.

The Town Hall in the centre of Wiveliscombe has lain empty and unused since its closure in 1958.

Now the Town Hall Trust is raising money to restore the building for use by local people. This is a £500,000 building project run by volunteers

The hall was completed in 1842 and originally known as The Assembly Rooms. For over 100 years it was used to stage performances, concerts, balls and other public events. The building was listed in 1984.

For further details see their website www.wiveliscombetownhall.org.uk



On the other side of the county, is the Frome Dissenters cemetery with its distinctive Romanesque mortuary chapel.

The cemetery was established in 1850 by local Baptists and Congregationalists in a field on what was then the outskirts of Frome but in more recent times it became overgrown and run down.

Over the past 20 years much of the undergrowth has been cleared and a new pathway laid. Now there are plans to set up a heritage and educational resource centre in the chapel.

It is well worth a visit if you are in the area, and more can be found at www.fromedissenterscemetery.org

The Trust recently met with the volunteers of both these schemes to exchange ideas. Both would be delighted to hear from you if you felt able to help in any way but particularly with fund raising.

Bishops Barn

The historic Bishops Barn at Wells and the land around it are to be handed back to the local community.

Mendip District Council which has been responsible for the Grade 1 listed barn and the neighbouring Wells Recreation Ground for almost 50 years, has voted unanimously to transfer the trusteeship to Wells City Council.

The handover requires the consent of the Charity Commission but it is hoped the transfer will be completed in the next six months, well before the district council is replaced by the new Somerset unitary authority.

The transfer includes a trust fund in excess of £500,000 that can be used to improve the barn which dates back to the 15th century and is designated as a scheduled ancient monument of national significance.

The barn and land were gifted to the citizens of Wells at the end of the 19th century.

And finally

More good news ... work has re-started on the Sandhill Mansion site at Bishops Lydeard.

The conversion of the former outbuildings and stables, is now almost complete. One of the courtyard buildings has already been sold and the new owners have moved in.

Scaffolding has gone up around the fire-damaged mansion as the building is weather proofed prior to renovation and conversion to apartments.