



SOMERSET BUILDING
Preservation Trust

NEWSLETTER

September 2022

Dear Members

It was good to meet up again with so many of you during our visit to Inwood House in May.

After two very frustrating years, it was wonderful to get back to something like normality and the visit to Inwood House turned out to be a real treat. I know from the comments I received afterwards how much everyone enjoyed it.

Our annual general meeting this year also promises to be very special. You will see that the location for the meeting is Minterne House, near Dorchester.

I appreciate that this is out of the county and a little farther to travel than our usual venues but I think when you see this splendid house, once home to the Churchill family, you will think the trip worthwhile. I look forward to seeing you there.

After our meeting we will be able to tour the house, which is not normally open to the public, and its extensive gardens.

As most of you will know, during the past few months we learned of the deaths of two of our stalwart supporters – former Trust chairman Mike Foden and founder trustee Derek Gibson.

Both played important roles in the work of the SBPT over many years, helping to save and restore many historic buildings in Somerset. Both will be very much missed.

Russell Lillford
Chairman

The Annual General Meeting...a reminder

Members should have received notification of the annual general meeting which this year is being held on 11 October in Minterne House in Dorset. Fuller details of the venue appear on the next page.

This is likely to be a popular event so we would ask members to book early – and certainly no later than Friday 23 September.

Minterne House



The history of Minterne House, the location of our annual general meeting on 11 October, stretches back to 1620.

The house and 1,300-acre estate originally belonged to the Churchill family - it was the birthplace of the first Sir Winston Churchill in the 17th century - and the house still contains some of the family's original tapestries and furniture.

Admiral Robert Digby, a younger son from Sherborne Castle, purchased the house and land 250 years ago. However, at the turn of the last century, one of his successors found the much-altered house was riddled with dry rot and decided to demolish it and rebuild on the same footprint.

He used iron girders rather than timber in the framework of the house, a technique that was innovative at the time. Although completed in 1905, the house has the appearance of a much older building.

The Minterne Estate is still owned by the Digby family and the present Lord Digby has agreed to give our members a private guided tour of the house, which is not normally open to the public.

Following our meeting, there will be a seated lunch of sandwiches and cakes with tea or coffee.

Afterwards members are free to look around the extensive gardens, laid out in the style of Capability Brown, including the unique Himalayan Gardens.

Inwood House visit



Richard de Pelet welcomes members to his amazing home at Templecombe.

Members who took the opportunity to visit Inwood House in May are unlikely to forget it.

The house, built in 1881 and designed loosely in the Scottish Baronial style, contains surprises around every corner, with its extensive collections of objects gathered from all parts of the world.

Richard de Pelet proved a genial and enthusiastic guide to what he described as his “bits and pieces”.

After seeing the house, including climbing to the top of the observation tower, members were able to stroll in the gardens and view the Chinese tea-house, water tower and stables.

The visit ended with tea in the splendid candle lit dining room.

An extremely enjoyable and truly memorable day.



Update.....Update.....Update.....Update.....Update.....Update.....

The Courthouse, Chard

The town of Chard has been allocated funding from the government's £95 million High Streets Heritage Action Zone programme. The Trust hopes this will provide an opportunity for the renovation of 9 Fore Street and its historic Court Room. We have held a very useful meeting with two organisations who we hope will partner us in the purchase and restoration of this important historic building and bring it back into public ownership and use.



Gate House, Cothelstone



We continue to support the owners of the Gate House at Cothelstone Manor to try to ensure this Grade 1 listed building, which dates from the mid-16th century, will be repaired in the near future and hopefully before the worst of the winter weather.

Bishop's Barn, Wells

In August Mendip District Council returned the ownership of the Bishop's Barn to Wells City Council, signifying a new chapter for the ancient building. The transfer included the £525k dowry which will go towards any future development. The Trust's repairs and the installation of new kitchens and toilets in 2017 mean that the City Council receives a building which has been looked after well.



Mike Foden and Derek Gibson

Sadly, in the past few months we have lost two of our long-standing trustees who shared a passion for the restoration of historic buildings.

Mike Foden, who was a director of old-established building firm Stansell Ltd and Summerfield Developments, joined the SBPT board in 2000 and went on to chair the Trust for many years.

Under his leadership the Trust restored the Tithe Barn at Dunster, St Margaret's Almshouses in Taunton and the historic 15th century Castle House in Taunton, in addition to giving advice to numerous organisations through the county.

It was under Mike's chairmanship that the Trust launched the Stansell Building Awards, to recognise quality design and craftsmanship, in new and restored buildings.



Architect Derek Gibson helped create Bridgwater Civic Society and was instrumental in the preservation and updating of the curved 19th century terrace in the town's Angel Crescent.

Derek was a founder member of Somerset Building Preservation Trust and was also Chairman of the Halswell Park Trust.

A tireless advocate for the restoration of historic buildings, he was awarded the MBE in recognition of his work and his 25 years as a governor of Bridgwater College.

And finally

The biennial William Stansell Awards will be presented in the autumn of next year. These prestigious awards recognise outstanding examples of building, design and conservation, whether new buildings or the alteration, conversion or repair of old buildings. The only stipulation is that the work must have been completed in 2021 or 2022.

So, if you know of any projects you feel might be worthy of an award in any of these categories, please encourage the owner/architect/builder to get in touch with our secretary Jane. The closing date for entries is 12 May 2023.

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