

Celebrating our **Heritage**, Enhancing our **Environment**, Shaping our **Future**

Salisbury is a vibrant cathedral city, surrounded by the beautiful countryside and villages of South Wiltshire. People visit it or decide to live here because it is a welcoming community, working and trading in a marvellous historic setting. The challenges today are to maintain those attractive qualities and yet accommodate continuing changes in population, lifestyle, and the economy.

The Salisbury Civic Society, founded in 1960, works to promote high standards of contemporary design in all aspects of the built environment within Salisbury and South Wiltshire, while safeguarding the historic buildings and landscape setting underpinning the area's special character.

Over the years, the role of the Society has expanded. Today, it is not only the principal local organisation and guardian for the built environment, but also celebrates and promotes the area's rich heritage and cultural life through a stimulating programme of activities.

Salisbury falls under two authorities, created in 2009, Salisbury City Council and Wiltshire Council. We are able to contribute effectively in many areas and are represented on several groups including the Salisbury Conservation Advisory Panel. We also have a good working relationship with Wiltshire Council, Salisbury City Council and CPRE, The Countryside Charity. As a non-political organisation, the Society maintains an independent stance on all matters.

Through a series of awards, talks, forums, open meetings, visits and our website we promote and provide information on the architecture, history and geography of the area.

Our aims, as set out in our constitution:

■ *To promote high standards of architecture and planning in South Wiltshire*

■ *To educate the public in the architecture, history, geography and natural history of South Wiltshire*

■ *To secure the preservation, development and improvement of features of historic or public interest in South Wiltshire*

Among the many activities of the Society we:

■ *Monitor and constructively comment on planning applications and development proposals*

■ *Run an active and stimulating programme of events for members and the public*

■ *Publish a quarterly magazine for members*

■ *Maintain our support for the projects promoted by the former Salisbury Vision*

■ *Protect and celebrate the traditional chequer names*

■ *Run a prestigious new buildings and conservation awards scheme*

■ *Organise the annual Salisbury Heritage Open Days and the Salisbury Blue Plaques scheme, celebrating our outstanding built environment and heritage*

■ *Promote the economic vitality of the region*

We are always delighted to welcome new members

Cover: High Street Plaque, Salisbury - See page 4. **Photo:** Paul Stevens Architecture
Photos in this issue, in addition to those credited individually: Richard Deane

DIARY of EVENTS 2025

For booking instructions (where applicable) visit: www.salisburycivicsociety.org.uk/events/

WEDNESDAY JUNE 11TH
TOUR OF DOWN FARM AND THE DORSET CURSUS

Farmer and professional archaeologist Martin Green will be leading the tour, which will be followed by a visit to his fascinating prehistoric museum, near Sixpenny Handley
Start time 2.00pm, tickets £12.50
Full details on the website, bookings through Eventbrite

TUESDAY JULY 8TH & WEDNESDAY JULY 9TH
SALISBURY'S HISTORIC ARCHITECTURE

Two evening walks with Richard Deane, looking at aspects of the city's historic buildings
Start times 6.30pm
Price £6-50, for members and non-members. Bookings through Eventbrite

FRIDAY AUGUST 1ST
BOURNE HILL GARDENS AND WYNDHAM ARMS

Neil Beagrie will lead a walk looking at the 18th century gardens of Bourne Hill, which incorporate earlier features. The walk will finish at the Wyndham Arms
Start time 3.00pm, tickets £7.50
Bookings through Eventbrite

WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 10TH
SALISBURY'S FRANCISCAN FRIARY AND THE BUILDINGS THAT BORDER IT

Rosemary Pemberton will lead a walk looking at buildings round the former Friary precinct, finishing with tea and biscuits in the magnificent rotunda in the former Blackmore Museum
Start time 2.00pm, tickets £7.50
Full details on the website, bookings through Eventbrite

OCTOBER 2025
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Likely to be an online event, at a date yet to be decided

WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 19TH
OPEN MEETING
New Places Fit for Living: Meeting the Challenges of Finding More Housing Land

There will be two speakers: Kim Wilkie, landscape architect and John Comparelli, architect member of the Development & Planning Committee
6.30pm Methodist Church, St Edmunds Church Street, Salisbury, SP1 1EF
Booking not required, and free to all

A Warm Welcome to our New Members

We are delighted to welcome the following to the Society:

Sue Allenby, Judy Clare, Andrew Guy and Fiona White, Oliver Chandler Estate Agents, Bridget Pearson, Salisbury Museum

Notes from the Chair

The quality and popularity of events organized and hosted by the Society is proving popular this year. The Awards Party in January was a sellout, well attended by both members and award winners. The standard of awards given to the winning projects was exceptionally good, setting the bar high for future years. Talks were central to the first months of the year, opening with an outstanding presentation from Manuel Irsara of SIRS Architects describing the conversion of a former industrial building in London's East End into Gilbert & George's art foundation. Jonathan Holt introduced the mystery of Follies known and unknown, with the wide extent of the Wiltshire Maltings industry described in fascinating detail by Amber Patrick.

Following requests for earlier warnings about future events we have introduced relevant monthly emails which we hope you have found helpful. Let me know if not. As soon as events are agreed they are entered on to the events programme on our website salisburycivicsociety.org.uk and well worth checking to see what's on.

Feargal Sharkey (well known for 'A Good Heart'!) has generously agreed to speak about his campaign against the pollution of British rivers, particularly chalk streams and the regulations of the water industry which affect British water resources. This is a wonderful opportunity for the Society and the environment, and we will be hosting his talk at The Guildhall on Tuesday 30th September, timings and ticket details will follow.

The search is on for a new editor/editorial team for the magazine. Richard Deane has decided it is time to step down at the end of this year after eight years in the role. He has done a brilliant job during his time as editor. We are lucky to have benefited from his curiosity and extensive knowledge introducing readers to fascinating and often hidden treasures in and around Salisbury. He will continue to contribute to future publications but feels it is now time to let others take the lead in this key publication. This is a good opportunity to review and look at how to take the magazine forward and we would appreciate your involvement and welcome ideas. One solution may be to bring together an editorial team to share ideas and responsibilities so please do contact either Richard or myself with your thoughts and suggestions.

Approval of the Salisbury Neighbourhood Development Plan is great news. Our congratulations to Annie Riddle and everyone who worked so hard on this essential plan. The inspector who examined the plan, commended the draft NDP for the great effort that had gone into its creation, showing a commendable commitment to the city and its environment. The SNDP is a community led plan that will guide development in Salisbury giving residents a greater say in planning matters

The sad death of Dieter Scholz was marked by a Celebration of his life, revealing his extensive commitment to Salisbury, serving on a significant number of committees, including the SNDP and our Development & Planning Committee as the Salisbury Cathedral Close Preservation Society representative, where his useful and informed contribution was highly valued. We will miss him greatly and send our sincere condolences to Patricia and his family.

Enjoy the summer and this welcome sunshine!

Stephanie

stephaniedsd@gmail.com

Editorial

The development proposed for the New Look site, in Salisbury's High Street, occupies quite a lot of space in this issue, as befits a major housing scheme for a very central plot of land, about one acre in extent. There was much engagement with the developers last year, after they presented the scheme to the Development & Planning Committee, with quite a range of responses from committee members. As our report starting on page 12 says, there is a curious statement within the application, which on the faces of it casts considerable doubt as to whether the scheme will be built even if it does get approval.

We're very grateful to David Richards for raising a very valid question, on page 4, as to whether artworks planted into pavements really get the attention they deserve, and this has yielded our front cover image. The carved plaques in Salisbury High Street, which David discusses, have been in place for over a quarter of a century, but who among us, if asked, would be able to confidently state what they depict? Equally, who could quote the short poem by Vikram Seth engraved into paving stones in the Market Place? We'll feature that in the next edition.

Other items this time include a return to a feature which started some time ago, on churches in our area looked after by the Churches Conservation Trust. This time it's Idmiston, certainly among the best of all the local ones. But there will be only one more after it to cover, so perhaps some other theme can be developed to replace the CCT one.

Richard Deane

The Open Meeting and the Wiltshire Local Plan

As shown in the Events Diary, this year's Open Meeting will be taking place at the Methodist Church on November 19th, with the title New Places Fit for Living: Meeting the Challenges of Finding More Housing Land.

The two speakers, architect John Comparelli and landscape architect Kim Wilkie, will be covering an old topic, the need to deal with pressures on Wiltshire to find more and more housing land. In the December magazine we showed the impact of Policy 26 in the current draft Wiltshire Local Plan, allowing for 220 houses N of the Downton Road into the city, which would have a devastating effect on one of the best views of the cathedral. A planning application has now been submitted for the houses. The Plan is now heading for its public examination phase, with two planning inspectors appointed to hold it, but the start date is not yet known.

As we also said last time, the number of houses allowed for in the draft Plan is actually in response to a previous target, fixed before the government announced that Wiltshire would be obliged to find a number of houses 81% greater than the earlier figure. Hence approval for the draft Plan, if it comes, will need to be immediately followed by a search for all the additional sites. We hope the Open Meeting will be able to identify civilised ways of accommodating all the increase, which is certainly going to be a challenge.

Salisbury High Street's Problematic Stone Plaques

A Point of View

For generations, public art has played a significant role in society. Usually mounted vertically on plinths or placed on a building's façade, it normally required the viewer to look upwards. Unusually, on the High Street pedestrianised zone, the art was inserted directly into the street surface, below the eye line. The display consists of five stone plaques, carved in low relief by the sculptor Paul Wilson (see initials opposite) and commissioned by Salisbury District Council in 1998 with the intention of illustrating 'events and buildings' in Salisbury's heritage. Subsequently, Salisbury Civic Society gave an award to the Council for their enhancement of High Street and Queen Street that included the use of public art.

This article is not intended to be a definitive account of the plaques but rather a personal examination and interpretation of their content, hidden history, and the public's awareness of them. A critique.



An Annotated Description

The largest plaque, a composite one made up of nine stones, sits at the northern end of the High Street pedestrian zone.

It displays a street plan of the medieval city of New Sarum, albeit overlain with modern street names. Occasionally, images (pictograms) are used to squeeze structures' names into tight places. For example, a penny-farthing for a street name and crossed keys for a chequer and ivy for a street named after a former 17th century mayor who helped during a devastating outbreak of plague. It is worth taking time to look for other pictograms and the artist's initials.

Salisbury did not develop incrementally from an earlier settlement. Rather it was conceived as a whole by its founder, Bishop

Richard Poore, and laid out, in its entirety, on a green field site during the 1200s. 800 years later that urban grid still survives, with the map showing the position of the original streets, the Market Place, the Guildhall, the Chequers and the Cathedral Close.

But there are flashes of modernity too, on the map. Churchill Way evokes memories of World War II with echoes of the thousands of military passing through the city after training on the Plain. The Tourist Information logo reminds us of the role that tourism plays in today's city economy.

A few yards further south, positioned in the centre of the street, and currently overshadowed by a restaurant's outdoor seating area, is the next plaque.



It shows a large star dominating a leafy background. Could this be symbolic of Salisbury Plain's primeval astronomy and its rolling grassy landscape that so attracted Neolithic people? Or is it simply a piece of decorative art? In fact, all this is speculation. The meaning, if any, remains obscure.



The next plaque is labelled Old Sarum, an Iron Age hill fort whose strategic position was exploited by the Romans, the Saxons and the Normans. The plan shows the Norman Cathedral's foundations. Close examination reveals the outline of the original church with three eastern chapels displaying curved exteriors. And then a massive 12th century eastward extension with three chapels displaying square exteriors. Architectural styles changed and the church's new ambitions set them in stone.

In 1086, at Old Sarum, William the Conqueror insisted all his kingdom's nobility and landowners swore fealty to him, with the Oath of Sarum. In so doing he fundamentally changed the nature of feudalism in England. His people were required to give their loyalty and military support directly and solely to him rather than to any intermediate local overlord.



At the same gathering William accepted an early version of the Domesday Book. In 1215 one of the original copies of Magna Carta was placed for safe keeping in the cathedral. Old Sarum, one of England's most notorious and corrupt Rotten Boroughs was done away with, in 1832, by the Reform Act. These events at Old Sarum speak volumes of its significance in the development of our national governance and our unwritten constitution.

The next plaque displays a puzzling design. A twirling corkscrewing tendril overlaid by eight radiating beams and a diminutive, solitary, squiggle.

In fact, this enigma is the artist's imaginative impression of a view from the top of the tower looking up into the hollow interior of the spire of Salisbury Cathedral.

The squiggle represents the extent to which the top of the spire is leaning out of the perpendicular to the southwest. This towering structure crowns one of England's finest Early English Gothic Cathedrals, acting as a magnet to worshippers and visitors alike.

For hundreds of years, pilgrims walked the High Street to approach the cathedral. They were seeking help for their spiritual and physical needs. They were drawn to the tomb of Salisbury's very own, miracle working, Bishop Osmund and to the shrine of the Virgin, Our Lady of Salisbury and to the cathedral's impressive array of relics. Many were rewarded with indulgences that allegedly gave some relief from the horrors of purgatory. Modern day tourists (and pilgrims) continue to come in their thousands to view the finest example of the world's greatest document of freedom, the Magna Carta.

The final plaque shows Stonehenge, looking pristine and newly completed, with its giant stones tightly secured by unseen, hand carved joints. Designed to track the movements of the sun it enabled pre-historic farmers to mark the annual and eternal passage of the seasons, ceremonially and precisely, with events like the winter and summer solstices. Thousands of years later these solar events continue to be celebrated by large assemblies of people.



English Heritage says, *'Stonehenge is the most architecturally sophisticated and only surviving lintelled stone circle in the world.'*

English Heritage also describes Stonehenge as a 'monument' or a 'megalith' but never as a building. It appears that Salisbury District Council may have considered it to be a building, as indicated near the start of this piece. This presents the viewer of the plaque with an artistic dilemma. Can monumental structures be architecture? It remains a vexed question of interpretation.

Do the plaques currently help to fulfil Salisbury District Council's original intentions?

In part they do, by displaying, in a distinctive fashion, some of the district's most famous structures whilst at the same time giving a gentle lift to the observer's spirits. But sadly, the plaques offer no explicit references to important local events or the national significance of those events. The problem is one of hidden historical complexity and the knotty conundrum of interpretation. A stranger or uninformed visitor would find the plaques of little help in their understanding of Salisbury's heritage. Anecdotal evidence, from locals and visitors, suggests that the plaques are failing to be seen, failing to interpret the built environment and failing to communicate historic events. One severe defect is their insertion into the surface of the street and into, what is in effect, a blind spot.

These problems, and that of poor visibility, could be at least in part be solved by placing, in the High Street, a free standing, eye level illustrated information board displaying some basic facts about the plaques, their contents and Salisbury's hidden history. In the past Salisbury Civic Society has co-operated with Salisbury District Council on a similar project, in the interpretation of the Henry Fawcett statue in the Market Place. Might the Society and the now Salisbury City Council repeat this action with the plaques, to improve their accessibility and their public appreciation?

David Richards

Turning Point. John Maine RA. November 21st 2024

Salisbury - the town not the Close - is not overwhelmed with public sculpture or public art. There are a couple of statues to City worthies such as Henry Fawcett, who stands staring sightlessly on a tall plinth in the Market Place, the height giving a false sense of superiority which belies his reformist interests and career. There was nothing which speaks to and engages the public until John Maine RA gave his sculpture, Turning Point, to the city, for the position it now occupies in Guildhall Square.

This dynamic piece emulates the Cathedral spire, but its 'thrust face' gives it movement and in the right light emphasises the facets. It is intended as a marker of a point in a journey. It was also created to mark the 800th anniversary of the Cathedral and 'reflects upon the city's recent recovery from the Novichok poisonings'.

A Bristolian, John studied sculpture at, what was then, the West of England College of Art and then the Royal College of Art. He was awarded the first Fellowship at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, and subsequently worked at Carrara, source of the eponymous marble, a material which has become - but not solely - his trademark material.

He lives locally and is no stranger to Salisbury, and his Sanctuary exhibition in the Cathedral Close in 2014 showed the breadth of his thinking and interests from geometric to natural as well as letterform.

Looking at the images of his work it was hard to pigeonhole him, and he constantly surprises, whether it's the immaculate geometry of Sanctuary or the monumental land art of the Chiswell earthworks on Portland, which reference the stone quarrying of 'The Isle of Slingers', and also the strip lynchets and agricultural land art of the prehistoric and medieval period. This piece was part of Common Ground's New Milestones project.

It is often thought that the sculpting of granite, particularly at large scale, requires simple brute strength to coax out shape and form, however much of John's work possesses a delicacy and finesse which belies the method of production.

It may have come as a surprise to the audience at John's talk that he had also worked in stained glass, a medium at variance with stone carving. The examples he showed were of a stained glass window at the Priscilla Bacon hospice in Norfolk. and the Special Air Service monument at Hereford Cathedral.

The latter comprised a stone monument, with stone from Brazil, Scotland and Belgium set beneath the stained glass window, 'Ascension' (see p. 9).



Portland Roach stone
used as cladding on the
extension at Bourne Hill
by
Stanton Williams Architects
(see next page)

The ten metre high window contained 3000 pieces of coloured glass. The abstract form of the window echoed John's interest in movement and dynamism, but with the addition of colour to maximise on light as the other medium. It is often forgotten that light is a crucial component of sculpture particularly when installed externally and John obviously recognises the importance of this 'medium'.

To accompany the examples of his sculpture and stained glass work he showed drawings which indicated initial and detailed thought processes. Fascinatingly the drawings didn't reveal a stylistic consistency - except in high quality - but a varying approach related to the proposed medium and subject. They certainly helped contextualise what was a fascinating and extremely informative talk from one of Britain's leading sculptors.

The questions session included a comment on one of the works John showed, 'Sea Strata' at Green Park tube station in London, which features the very characterful fossils found in the Roach bed of Portland Stone, using both pieces of the stone itself, and plain bands of Portland with the fossil forms carved into it in enlarged form. The questioner referred to the 2008 extension to Bourne Hill in Salisbury, which he described as the best modern building in Salisbury, and which has an array of vertical fins enclosing pieces of Portland Roach, greatly enhancing their effect.

Jamie Hobson

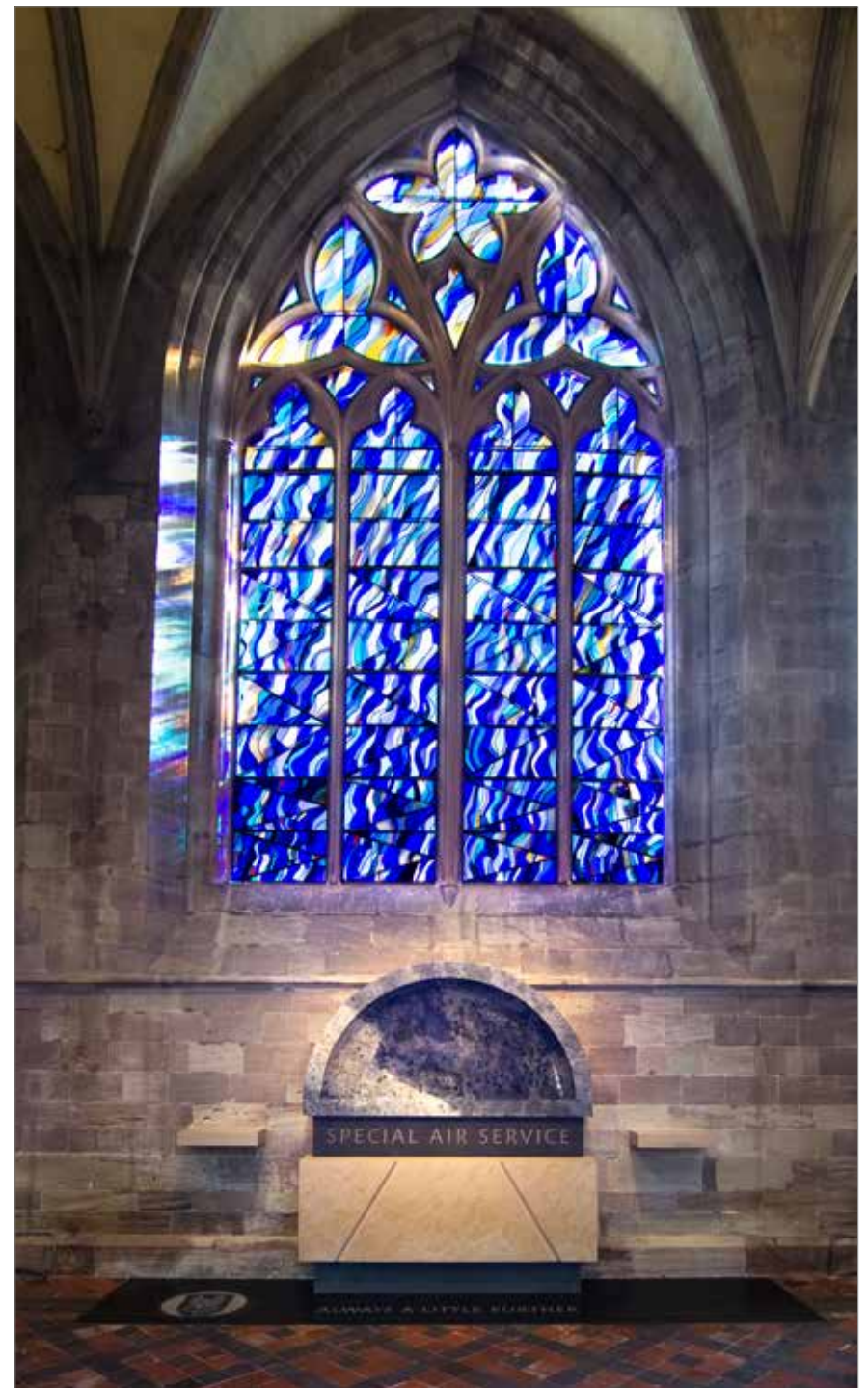


IMAGES:

*Above: Sea Strata Right: Wren Stone at East Knoyle
Next page: Ascension at Hereford Cathedral*

by John Maine

Photos: John Maine



A Thomasson, Further Afield

For those who may not yet have picked up on the idea of Thomassons, which have been featured in the last three magazines, they're parts of a building which appear to have no function, and which may have come about for a variety of reasons.

With no more examples having come to light in our area, we can perhaps bid farewell to the subject, at least for now, by looking slightly outside it, to Wells.

Many readers will know the cathedral there, a wonderful building. But they won't necessarily be aware of a very odd internal feature (or in fact two of them) towards its eastern end, unless they've studied the North Somerset and Bristol Pevsner, where Sir Nikolaus refers to them in the original 1958 volume.

The features are in the conjoined retrochoir and Lady Chapel, one of the great achievements of the first half of the 14th century, a period when English Gothic, in the phase generally known as Decorated, was particularly vibrant and inventive – as is well demonstrated by the tower and spire of Salisbury Cathedral.

In fact Sir Nikolaus says, after describing the subtleties of the Wells retrochoir and Lady Chapel,

'It will now be obvious to anyone who has tried to follow this description that English Decorated space can be as intricate and as thrilling as German Rococo space'.

A bit later, however, he goes on to say

'Nor was the master [i.e. the master mason] wholly successful. In one place indeed he has broken down, or someone took over who was incapable of understanding the original plan.'

From the massive NE and SE piers of the choir rise, among other arches and ribs, three to the E which must have turned out to be so useless that lions are called in to bite them off.

This is a ruthless procedure and one which a less naïve age would not have allowed itself.'

The two biting lion heads, one on the S and one on the N, are in fact quite extraordinary objects, and answers to a problem which in more recent times would no doubt have seen an architect nervously checking their indemnity insurance.

They're extraordinary both because it's actually very hard to see how anyone would have wanted to launch the superfluous ribs on their course towards nowhere, and because having done so, to simply invoke a then exotic beast which could swallow them up was an act of breathtaking effrontery, whatever the naivety of the age.

What did the clerics who had commissioned the new parts of the cathedral think when they saw the lions' heads?

It's a building full of inventive carving, but all placed in positions where it was a natural embellishment of the design, for instance the capitals to the piers in the transepts, with a wealth of themes including a man with toothache, and much in the way of the 13th century style of leaf carving known as stiff-leaf. Salisbury Cathedral has this, in relatively restrained form, but Pevsner says 'Wells is the best place in England to enjoy and study stiff-leaf'.

But the lions' heads fit into no system of added decoration, they just suddenly appear in places where they simply don't belong.

Perhaps the master mason responsible got away with it because no-one among his employers felt confident enough to say 'Er, what's going on here?', followed by 'I think we're going to have to ask you to redo this part of your work'.

Now, of course, the mistakes just add to the character and interest of this superb piece of architecture, and we can be grateful that no-one did ask for them to be rectified.

That they can be classed as Thomassons is not a matter of doubt, and moreover they're deluxe ones, both for the bravado which engendered them, and the accidental contributions that they now make to one of the great pieces of English medieval design. It seems reasonable enough to stray slightly beyond the county boundary in order to feature them.

Richard Deane



Development Proposals for the New Look Site, Salisbury

Many will recall the building in Salisbury High Street currently occupied by New Look as formerly being Woolworths, before the national chain collapsed in 2009. There has been something of a tendency in recent years to treat the New Look occupancy as only temporary. In 2020 Wiltshire Council produced the Salisbury Central Area Framework, (CAF) as a guide to how the city might be improved, with the Society generally supporting its conclusions.

One passage says 'Single, large retail units on the High Street provide an opportunity to be redeveloped as a cluster of small retail units – artisans' workshops – together with residential units above arranged round a covered arcade. This scheme offers a transformational opportunity to increase connectivity providing improved pedestrian routes from the High Street to the River Avon, as well as providing additional residential space in the city centre.'

This was obviously a reference to the New Look building, as the only 'single large retail unit' on the River Avon side of the High Street. The CAF ideas for it seemed attractive, but there was no action plan attached to the document to move the ideas forward. However the implicit assumption that New Look were not there for the long term has now been confirmed, with the Society being contacted in June 2024 by a team acting for Thomas Homes of Berkshire, who bought the site in December 2022. They are developers who say they have a particular liking for difficult 'heritage' sites. Proposals had been worked up for mainly residential use of this one, together with a range of shops, much shallower than the current store, along the High Street frontage, and these were presented to the Society's Development and Planning Committee at its July 2024 meeting.

After considerable discussion among committee members, a formal response was sent to Thomas Homes, indicating the Society's position on various aspects of the scheme, which is now the subject of a planning application.



All graphic images have been taken from planning documentation by Robert Adam and Woodfield Brady Architects

The CAF ideas almost certainly took as their starting point the retention of the existing building, but what's now envisaged is a complete redevelopment, with everything now there demolished. It would be replaced by a series of buildings which would create 48 flats and five houses on the site, plus the shops. For once, retirement housing is not the focus.



The plan above shows the overall concept, with buildings grouped around a central courtyard. The only vehicle access is via the opening that already exists to the north of the store, in the High Street, though this would be widened, and fire engines would be able to get in and turn round. All the demolition rubble, and all the new materials, would have to come in or go out through this opening. There is a pedestrian access route (shown by the dotted line above) through from the High Street entrance to the riverside beyond, at the point where the footbridge over the river meets the riverside path, thus aligning with part of the CAF aspirations. Parking was originally shown for 24 cars, just under half the number of units, but the application has actually reduced this to nine.

The design approach, shown though not in great detail in our illustrations, is basically neo-Classical, which is very much the style of one of the two architectural contributors, Professor Robert Adam of Winchester, very well known in this field of work, and designer for instance of West Walk House in the Cathedral Close. The other architects involved are a practice called Woodfield Brady, of Newbury. Considerable work has been done on the ecology of the site, and on its trees, which currently feature strongly in views from the other side of the river, near Fisherton Bridge. Many of the less valuable specimens are likely to go, though there will be extensive replanting. The High Street frontage will not be radically different, replacing 1940s/50s utilitarian with what would often be called neo-Georgian, but the three buildings along the riverside will create something completely new for Salisbury. As the view towards the cathedral shows, there will be a very even roofline, unusual for the central city, and almost certainly deriving at least in part from the longstanding Salisbury Skyline Policy, or Forty Foot Rule, with its general limit on building anywhere above 12.2 metres above ground level in this part of the city.

The response which went to the developer after their appearance at the July 2024 committee meeting is the Society's formal position on what we saw then, but this could be varied if any significant changes appear in the application documents. It would be worth setting out the main points made in that response, and seeing whether there are now any relevant variations.

The lead-in to the response said that '**The Civic Society welcomes and supports a residential-led development , with some commercial elements**', and there is no reason why this should now change. The response went on to say:

- **Landscape scheme:** The Civic Society looks forward to seeing a full landscape scheme for the site and for the riverside walk. *The application contains a lengthy landscape strategy and assessment, not yet fully evaluated.*
- **Public accessibility to the river:** This was agreed to be very beneficial, though there are concerns that its 'permissive' nature could leave it vulnerable to later changes. A gallery near the start of the path would attract people to it, and enhance the development generally. *Access will be possible from the High Street entrance through the site and emerging at the river, at the point where the footbridge across it joins the riverside path. The word 'permissive' no longer seems to appear, though as this is a private development and there is no right of way across it, in practice the right to use the path could presumably be withdrawn at any time. Disappointingly, no attempt has been made to include something like a gallery to draw people in from the High Street.*
- **Quality of riverside walk:** There is concern about the adverse visual impact this proposal will have on the character and tranquillity of this attractive stretch of the river, and on views up the river from the Grade I Crane Bridge... the central and southern block along the river should be moved significantly back from it, to enable genuine high quality space, and the retention of two high quality Silver Maple trees which are due to be felled. *This concern has been met in part, by the central block being divided into two halves, the southern one of which is moved away from the river in relation to the northern one. This has enabled the Silver Maples to be kept, and has widened part of the riverside path, though the path as a whole will not be improved to the extent the Society would have liked.*
- **Amount of car parking:** The Society feels that the 50% provision envisaged seems reasonable. *There were committee voices arguing for less than the 24 parking spaces then allowed, but overall it was felt that was a reasonable number. The reduction now to nine spaces is certainly something the Society will welcome.*
- **Sustainability questions need careful thought:** Mature trees like the Silver Maples need to be retained for their value for carbon capture, for alleviating poor air quality in what is a designated Air Quality Management Area, for the biodiversity they support, and for shade and reducing the urban heat island effect. The rare chalk river is highly protected. *The retention of the Silver Maples is certainly welcome. The application is accompanied by a lengthy sustainability and energy statement, and other relevant documents such as a Water Framework Directive assessment. These have yet to be fully evaluated.*

- **Retail space on the High Street is insufficient:** There need to be facilities behind the shops to make them viable. *The space allowed for the shops (shown as one retail space which could be subdivided) remains as it was in July 2024.*
- **Social housing should be provided, on site or elsewhere.** *No affordable housing is allowed for on the site, and there appears to be no reference to a financial contribution to enable its construction elsewhere. This is in fact pretty much ruled out by a paragraph in the application's planning statement, which says, after quoting figures provided by a registered valuer, 'Therefore, the development proposed does not include the provision of affordable housing as defined by the Council, as to do so would render the scheme unviable. It will be noted that, even without the provision of affordable homes, there would be a deficit in respect of viability. In those circumstances, it is for the developer to choose whether to proceed with the development, taking a more optimistic view of the potential future housing market.' In effect this of course is saying that the indications are that the scheme cannot be profitable, which does leave something of a question mark over it - unless this is just some kind of negotiating ploy.*
- **Neo-classical architectural style:** This approach is felt to cause some problems, including heaviness of detailing. While it is not realistic to expect a complete change of approach at this late stage, there is scope for elements of a more modern, and more adventurous approach. *There have been changes to elements of the design, some in response to suggestions made by the independent design review organisation Design West of Bristol, who considered the scheme in October 2024. However the changes do not answer the Society's concerns about the lack of anything modern or adventurous.*
- **Materials:** Specifically, attempts to match Fisherton Grey bricks in the past have usually been unacceptable. On the other hand there are good quality red bricks available, which reflect their frequent use in the past in the city. Generally the Society will take a close look at proposed materials, once drawings are available at a scale which enables them to be identified. *There remains little detail about materials to be used. Walls will apparently be 'textured brickwork with brick and stone detailing, stucco/render'. There is also a reference to 'the two brick colours used', with no further explanation, nor is the use of 'textured brickwork' explained. The design depictions show much brickwork in a brownish or orange colour, which is no doubt intended to indicate red bricks. A lesser quantity is shown of what can only be brickwork of a Fisherton Grey type, and a purplish colour shown for one of the riverside blocks needs explaining.*

Overall, changes since July 2024 don't give the Society much manoeuvre in how it deals with the planning application, apart from objecting where its suggestions have clearly been ignored. At the time of going to press it is seeking some clarification, particularly over the intentions regarding brick colours. Landscape details also need some explanation. The internal courtyard treatment is seen as potentially successful, the riverside one much less so. Neighbours across the river have expressed unhappiness, which is understandable. A predominantly residential redevelopment of what is very much a brownfield site seems a positive starting point, and the decision to enable public access into and through the site, between river and High Street, is to be applauded, but the details of the design are still open to improvement.



Current view of the site from across the river



Proposed view of the site from across the river by pedestrian bridge



View from Fisherton Bridge as proposed, looking towards cathedral

All graphic images have been taken from planning documentation by Robert Adam and Woodfield Brady Architects



High Street corner study: entrance to development & riverside path



Landscaped courtyard to the centre of the development

All graphic images have been taken from planning documentation by Robert Adam and Woodfield Brady Architects

Wiltshire Follies

Jonathan Holt edits the magazine of the Follies Fellowship, a charity dedicated to the preservation and enjoyment of architectural follies, and when he came to talk to us on March 20th, on Wiltshire Follies, he started with an exploration of what the word 'folly' actually means in this context. There is no one perfect definition, he told us, but rather an array of descriptions which indicate the sort of area follies fall into, without pinning them down in a completely successful way.

'An exquisite little architectural experiment', and 'Built for ornament' are definitions which Celia Fisher, the author of a recent book on follies, quotes without necessarily finding them very satisfactory.

Another writer on follies, Gwyn Headley, says that contrary to what an architectural historian will be looking for, 'follies are riotous and undisciplined, seductive and irrational'. Celia Fisher's book is called 'The Story of Follies: Architectures of Eccentricity', which certainly pins down one aspect of the building type.

Jonathan then launched into a series of Wiltshire examples, starting with one close at hand, the porch which is now a feature in the gardens at Bourne Hill. 15th century in date, it originally stood outside the north front of the north transept at the cathedral, and was moved to its current position by the architect James Wyatt in 1791. This particular folly connected to two features of the topic, one being the fact that follies may be purpose-made for their site, but equally they can be created out of buildings, or bits of buildings, which started out elsewhere.

And the other connection was with James Wyatt, who Jonathan went on to cover in relation to one of the greatest follies of all time, Fonthill Abbey, designed by Wyatt for

William Beckford, with all his dubious slave-generated wealth from sugar plantations.

There have been other curious buildings at Fonthill, including a stone boathouse partly under water at the N end of the lake there, but the abbey fully deserves its description by Nikolaus Pevsner as 'The most prodigious romantic folly in England'.

Jonathan described its hasty construction, to a remarkable height, by armies of workmen working by the light of bonfires, the array of furniture and artworks it contained, the great stone wall surrounding it to help avoid visitors, and the rare exception made in the cases of Lord Nelson and Emma Hamilton.

The abbey's eventual collapse, but not before its judicious sale to a gunpowder manufacturer, led to more follies by Beckford, but at Bath and therefore outside Jonathan's story. He mentioned that the current owners of the surviving bits of the abbey have two open days a year, generally in May, to enable a visit to their very scenic part of the Fonthill estate, which are well worth looking out for.

William Beckford and his father, Alderman Beckford, created other follies on their land, often using the skills of Tisbury-based grotto builders Joseph and Josiah Lane, father and son, who did a lot of work elsewhere as well (grottoes are a frequent folly type). Jonathan showed the Cromlech, a structure created out of gnarled lumps of stone quite close to the road from Fonthill Gifford to Fonthill Bishop, and a grotto which is not publicly accessible, on the far side of the lake from there. He went on to cover the use of mosaics in follies, firstly by Boris Anrep at a pool house of 1933 at Biddesden House near Andover.



Above: The Cromlech, Fonthill



*Above: Shellwork, Belcombe Court
Photos: Jonathan Holt*

Boris was Russian, and had great success as a mosaicist either side of the Second World War – the staircase hall at the National Gallery has a fine display of his work. More recently Blott Kerr-Wilson created a remarkable Shell House about a dozen years ago at Belcombe Court, in NW Wiltshire. Her skill at working up designs from a multitude of individual shells came across as something rather special.

The Palladian Bridge at Wilton House put in a well-merited appearance, before a shift to south Wiltshire and General Pitt-Rivers' Larmer Tree Grounds (now generally known as Gardens). Structures created there for the General have now been followed, in 2010, by a remarkable Indian Mughal Arch, unfortunately just over the border in Dorset and therefore not eligible for the Society's buildings awards scheme.



*Above: The Mughal Arch, Larmer Tree Grounds
Photo: Jonathan Holt*

Equally remarkable, for it being so unexpected, was the Pumpkin Tower in Trowbridge, a private Millennium project sharing the curious address that Wiltshire Council go by – they're both in Bythesea Road, actually derived from the name of a family of Trowbridge clothiers who once owned the land, rather than being an obscure joke in the landlocked town. The tower is a round structure, emerging out of a roof, and adorned with various grotesques, cast in concrete rather than carved in stone.



There are several dragon heads, and the launch event for the tower in 2000 saw smoke being emitted from one of their mouths. After telling us this, Jonathan launched into a musical interlude, playing the 1963 number Puff the Magic Dragon, by Peter, Paul and Mary, on his phone. Rather unexpectedly, this got taken up by the Methodist Church's sound system, to excellent effect.

Not far away, in Westbury, is the fairly recent Beggar's Knoll Chinese Garden, with Jonathan showing several of the structures it contains. A Harvesting the Moon Pavilion, a Moon Gate, a Wildly Cheering Pavilion, and An Imperial Gate to the Three Friends of Winter Pavilion, all surrounded by appropriate planting.



IMAGES:
Above left & middle: Pumpkin Tower, Trowbridge
Above right: The Pepperbox, Alderbury
Bottom: Moon Gate, Beggar's Knoll, Westbury

Photos: Richard Deane and Jonathan Holt

The garden is open in June and July, by arrangement with the owners, who have clearly created something rather nice.

A local folly-builder topped off the evening, Francis Dineley of Berwick St John, who over the years has created, sometimes by his own hand, various buildings on the land he owns. Look out for his Banqueting Temple, visible under the chalk ridge north of the village from some viewpoints in the surrounding landscape. His work provides an answer to the inevitable question, of whether follies are all old structures which just need to be maintained, or whether they're still being produced. The answer, as Jonathan's excellent and very well-illustrated talk showed, is that there are definitely still folly creators out there, and long may they prosper.

Jonathan has written books on the follies of several counties. His Wiltshire Follies was published in 2019, and sells at around £14.

Richard Deane

Planning Updates - Two Long-Running Cases

Site Formerly proposed for a new Salisbury Library

The land at 30-36 Fisherton Street was proposed in 2018 as the site for a new Salisbury Library, together with a Travelodge Hotel. The library element disappeared in 2022, leaving mainly the hotel. That application is still technically undecided, but in practice it's been superseded by one submitted last year by Churchill Retirement Living, for retirement housing.

The earlier applications had some design aspirations, but the Society could see nothing of interest in the Churchill one. The age range being targeted is not considered by the planning system to be a valid reason for objection, so there was no point in us mentioning that. Its concerns about the design were mirrored by similar ones from formal consultees, but all these were deemed not to be sufficient cause for refusal.

Refusal in fact came, at the end of 2024, but for other reasons - unacceptable noise levels for occupants, and a challenge by Wiltshire Council to the applicants' claim that their expected profit wouldn't enable a contribution to affordable housing, off the site. Churchill have appealed against the refusal, and are clearly confident enough to advertise the flats on their website, as 'awaiting planning'. Meanwhile the hoarding round the site seeks to sell the prospective units as though they were a given. As an afterthought, a retrospective advertising application is now in to cover this.

The original library + Travelodge proposal had some real architectural ambition. The Churchill scheme has no ambition at all, just aiming at yet more bland neo-historic housing, and it will probably be built, another case of a missed opportunity in the centre of a city which could really do with some decent, adventurous contemporary architecture.

Former Post Office site, Castle Street

The current owners, Osman Homes, submitted the latest application for the site in August 2023. Conversion of the former post office buildings into mainly residential use, with a small commercial element, is the aim. The Society put in some objections, particularly on the design of a new building to replace a current uninteresting one, out of four there, and on an obvious lack of conviction to the enabling of a new commercial use for the former post office hall, keeping it having always been seen by the Society as vital.

In the end, the council decided that the building proposed for demolition should stay, and to maintain the number of flats achieved, the loss of the former hall was accepted, to our regret. The amended application was finally approved in April 2025, some time after the whole site had actually been put back on the market as a development opportunity. The Society has been told by a planning consultant working for the owners that their intention, if no buyer was found, was to go ahead and carry out the conversion, now almost all to residential use, themselves. We shall see.

This is how matters currently stand, meaning that 18 years after the first application for the site, for the creation of a boutique hotel, we appear to be still no closer to redeeming a range of interesting (and partly listed) buildings which has been a prominent eyesore for far too long.



IMAGES:
Gargoyles at All Saints', Idmiston



Churches in South Wiltshire in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust:

All Saints', Idmiston



Idmiston is in the Bourne Valley, just north of Porton, with its church on the edge of the village, but certainly not hiding away (post code SP4 0AU). Its immediate impact owes much to the pyramidal shingled spire on top of the tower, unusual for this part of the world, but while the tower is mostly Norman, its top part, and the spire, date from a Victorian restoration. This also affected the chancel, the least exciting part of the interior. The nave and aisles, however, are well worth a look, made legible by mostly clear glass in the church's windows, only the west and east ones having pleasant but unremarkable Victorian stained glass.

The arcade arches are of the 13th century, made distinctive by the use of alternating blocks of Chilmark stone and Wiltshire greensand. Much of the rest of the stonework is of the 15th century, with a profusion of carved corbels, featuring human heads and upper bodies, and angels. Attention also deserves to be given to the less obvious timber roof bosses, mostly carved with faces and no doubt originally painted, on the excellent 15th century nave and aisle roofs.

Externally, there is a fine set of gargoyles in Chilmark stone (see opposite page), given additional character by five or six hundred years of weathering. Overall, All Saints' at Idmiston is one of the very best CCT churches in our area, and well worth a visit - open every day at no charge, though locking-up times may vary.

Salisbury Conservation Advisory Panel

The Salisbury Conservation Advisory Panel is a long-standing body with which the Society has been involved probably since the 1980s, and it seems sensible to say a bit about it here. It was begun in the days of Salisbury District Council, the local authority which gave way to Wiltshire Council in 2009, and draws together representatives from various relevant local and national bodies to perform its function, as 'an independent advisory committee to Wiltshire Council'. The extent to which the latter body actually acknowledges this function, and acts on the advice received, has always been a bit of an issue.

The local organisations currently represented are the Salisbury Business Improvement District, the Salisbury Museum, the Salisbury Civic Society (we have two representatives), and the Downton Society, while the national ones are the Campaign to Protect Rural England, the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, the Royal Town Planning Institute, the Landscape Institute (also with two representatives), and the Royal Institute of British Architects. One elected member from Wiltshire Council, and two from Salisbury City Council, are also included in the Panel membership.

The Panel's adopted remit is updated when necessary. It's too long to quote here in full, but an abbreviated version will give a good indication of what the Panel is interested in.

The aim of the Salisbury Conservation Advisory Panel is to promote the maintenance and enhancement of the character of the historic built environment within south Wiltshire, including the townscape and landscape settings.

The chief focus of the Panel's work is to provide advice to local authority officers and elected members, and to encourage and assist them towards initiatives and decisions which will best promote the Panel's overall aim.

Specific tasks undertaken by the Panel towards these ends will include:

1. Where possible, examining and making comments on planning proposals
2. Using the expertise of members to make specific suggestions to council officers about issues relating to historic buildings, townscape and landscape
3. Monitoring the ways existing conservation policies are implemented, and if necessary encouraging council officers to make better use of them
4. Suggesting changes to council policies which concern conservation areas or listed buildings, as well as protected trees and listed landscapes, or the adoption of new policies
5. Encouraging the production of conservation area appraisals and management plans
6. Bringing to the attention of officers any unauthorised and damaging works which have been observed by its members
7. Supporting the council in any enforcement action it may decide to take when unauthorised work takes place

Some of these aims need to be seen in an 'ideal world' context. Wiltshire Council, for instance, currently simply do not have the resources to add to the conservation area appraisals it now has in place, and the Panel itself only meets four times a year, and is not in a position to do full justice to everything it would like to. This is reflected in the 'where possible' against its aim of making comments on planning proposals. One area of action which began seven or eight years ago, and has successfully developed since, is a 'listed buildings at risk' register. Completely separate from the Historic England register of that name, the Panel's list covers listed buildings of all grades, not just the upper grades which HE looks at, which means that some 92% of listed buildings are not covered by its register.

The Panel's register is reviewed at every meeting, and is acknowledged by the local Wiltshire Council conservation officers as having a useful impact in focusing attention on difficult cases. It certainly doesn't guarantee instant remediation where the condition of buildings has slipped below an acceptable level, but it does mean that such buildings won't get forgotten.

The register does feed into what has been a constant topic in SCAP discussions, over many years, namely how much effect it's actually having on Wiltshire Council. This is very difficult to quantify, though we know that the local conservation officers appreciate having the Panel to back them up on occasions, and also sometimes to keep them informed about problems that have cropped up. In April 2023 we had a visit from Nic Thomas, Wiltshire Council's Director of Planning, and then at the next meeting in July we had one from Cllr Nabil Najjar, then the council's Portfolio Holder for Arts, Heritage and Tourism, both of them expressing a willingness for further involvement in the future. So Wiltshire Council are at least aware of the Panel, even if pinning down precise outcomes from the Panel's work can be difficult.

Richard Deane
(current chairman of SCAP)



The Eel Trap at the Avon at Britford, formerly on the SCAP buildings at risk register, but now repaired thanks to the efforts of the local Wiltshire Council conservation officers

The Gilbert and George Centre, Spitalfields.

A talk on February 20th.

As a student at Hornsey College of Art in 1969, I was first made aware of Gilbert and George when a fellow Hornsey student came back from a visit to St Martins School of Art saying that 'there are a couple of strange guys doing a duet to Underneath the Arches there. The 'strange guys' were Gilbert and George who eventually became stalwarts of the British art establishment.

Personally I've been rather lukewarm about their work in the same way that I have for that 'enfant terrible' Damian Hirst. There have been flashes of brilliance which have interested me such as Hirst's Pharmacy series and Gilbert and George's Jack Freak Pictures. What I really liked about them however was their commitment to the location, the streets of Spitalfields in East London and particular Fournier Street where they've lived since 1968. Indeed they were instrumental in saving this beautiful area of Georgian buildings with a Huguenot heritage. In fact they were so well established that admirers would follow

them every day for breakfast and lunch at the Market Café on Fournier Street. After 30 years they changed the venue to Nilly's, a Turkish cafe nearby.

The area of East London has always been associated with minorities and immigrants and was the home of industries such as brewing, tanning and metalwork. It was also renowned for its entertainment venues such as playhouses, pleasure gardens and music halls, which were often prohibited within the city boundaries. Writers such as Defoe and Dickens and artists such as Doré and Hogarth captured the volatility and outsider character of the area.

It seems therefore appropriate as the home and centre of Gilbert and George's artistic world.

In 2015 they commissioned SIRS Architects co-founder Manuel Irsara, to convert an existing building in Heneage Street, Spitalfields to be the Gilbert and George art foundation.



Manuel Irsara had established SIRS with co-founder Sebastian Soukup in 2010 in Fournier Street. Whether the location of their office contributed to their being selected isn't recorded but their portfolio of previous projects certainly did. SIRS is a London and Vienna based studio specialising in unique and sustainable design. Manuel studied at TU Vienna, TU Delft and the Bartlett in London before qualifying as an architect in 2006. He is a visiting design critic in the UK and abroad. The Civic Society was extremely lucky to host this talented architect.

A former 19th century brewery building was selected to be the Gilbert and George Centre. In order to create sufficient space to accommodate the collection a basement level was built under the existing building, using a complex top down methodology which involved striking the perimeter of 37 neighbouring parties, making it the largest party wall award (a legally binding document) at the time. SIRS had to prioritise sustainability in terms of energy and water, and UV light had to be controlled, within what had to be an airtight building to minimise heating and cooling.

IMAGES:

Previous page

Left: Entry gates to the Gilbert and George Centre, Spitalfields

Right: Gilbert and George

This page right:

Architect Manuel Irsara with Gilbert and George

Photos:

Prudence Cuming
© The Gilbert & George Centre

All aspects of the building and its carbon footprint were considered, as was a courtyard entrance which required sustainable urban drainage. Materials were recycled and craftspeople locally sourced to reduce the impact of shipping.

Opened in 2023 the centre is accessed via a pair of wrought iron gates designed by the artists into a courtyard leading into the centre itself. The finished conversion is beautifully crafted with exquisite attention to detail which unselfconsciously allows access to Gilbert and George's work without demanding attention...although it does this in a very subtle manner.

In the questions session, there was a comment about how well the new gallery clearly fits into and enhances its local area, making it a great benefit for local residents, even ones who may not go in to look at the art works very often.

This was a fascinating talk which gave us a valuable insight into a centre which has already become a significant attraction and addition to the UK's cultural venues.

Jamie Hobson



'Footpath 66'



The present paving in the Market Place and Guildhall Square dates from 2013, when the project to improve the spaces was a less ambitious one than that originally developed by the former Salisbury Vision. One feature surviving from then was lighting to Footpath 66, the diagonal way across the Market Place. Lights were installed, but unfortunately never worked properly, and the idea was effectively abandoned. Now, encouraged by the Society, Environmental Services at Salisbury City Council have finally got the lights working.



Tidal Enclosure at Weston-super-Mare, by John Maine (see page 7) Photo: John Maine

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Turning Point - by John Maine (see page 7) Photo: John Maine



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