

Shire Hall Times

Welcome to the winter 2009 edition of Shire Hall Times, the newsletter by the team restoring Shire Hall.



As we all get involved in the details of the work on the hall, we sometimes forget how exciting the project is for Monmouth so this issue will look at what the hall will eventually be like and how it will be used by people in Monmouth. We will also update you on what's going on now at the hall and show you some photos that will illustrate how the hall is transforming.

A new Shire Hall

The shell of the building will be restored and conserved to sustain the life of the building. A lift will be

installed and a small glass loggia will be installed on the front of the building. The building will be smartened up and the facilities available will be extended and improved.

Visitors will come to the building for the history of Shire Hall: how the story of John Frost's trial influenced our right to vote; information about Charles Rolls, Henry V and the history of Monmouth.

There will be guided tours and the building will not only be telling the history of the Shire Hall, but telling the story of Monmouth. For example, the Chartist trial was not just about the Chartists, or the Court room, but the story of local people who sat on the jury.

The town council and the Tourist Office will be able to hold meetings and have an office space in the building. All of the other rooms will be hired for a variety of uses: council committee meetings, business seminars and weddings.

What's been going on?

The project team are working hard to restore the Shire Hall despite recent unavoidable delays to the erection of scaffolding outside the hall.

Shire Hall Times



Behind the hoarding of Shire Hall, the team are making great strides in upgrading the building to make it a modern facility but keeping its character and history.

Work hasn't stopped because of the delay to scaffolding or because of the recent snowy weather as there is plenty of progress to be made indoors.

The new lift is being installed. It is a laborious job that involves extensive structural underpinning, which means contractors are digging underneath the hall and reinforcing the foundations to ensure the lift can function safely. Once the underpinning is done, the rest of the work on the interior will gather pace. Internal scaffolding is up, the whole building has been stripped out and archaeologists are constantly on hand.

The work is painstaking - for every part of work the contractors complete, the archaeologist on site will dig a trench to look for interesting artefacts such as pottery of the recent discoveries of a lemonade bottle from over 100 years ago.

The restoration work throws many surprises at us and bits of history are constantly being unfolded as we work. For more on this, see 'What the archaeologists found' below.



Old construction methods used timber and other perishable materials and so we work closely with CADW who oversee how we replace those materials with appropriate substitutes

Shire Hall Times

in keeping with the history of the hall. For instance, we will replace the roof with the same kind of slate and the ground floor flagstones are being replaced with quarried stone as similar to the original as possible.

Despite the delay to the exterior work, masons are getting on with creating the stonework for the outside of the building and the parapets.



When the scaffolding is complete outside the hall, we will aim to make up for lost time and get working on replacing the roof, masonry repairs and windows.



We are working hard to get the hall restored and ready for people in Monmouth to enjoy.

Shire Hall progress attracts tourists

Monmouth's Tourist Information Centre (TIC), housed temporarily in the old Job Centre building in Priory Street, has an interesting and comprehensive display of photographs and plans of the building that show the progress being made inside the building.

The exhibition has been produced by the Shire Hall Stewards and the contractor Linfords. Even though the display has to take a back seat so other attractions of the town and the Wye Valley can be seen, the tourist

Shire Hall Times

officers have told us that that there is a lot of interest from tourists and residents.

So if you haven't been in to see what's going on, please pop along.

You can see the display between 10am and 4pm although please be aware the TIC closes for lunch.

What the archaeologists found

Monmouth archaeologists are recording discoveries during the renovations and there have been some interesting finds as well as at least one substantial structural mystery.

Discoveries include parts of a 'sack' wine bottle dated from the late 1600's as well as Victorian glass, ceramics and paperwork.

In parts of the site at ground level, the works have included digging by the archaeologists after they found animal bones - sheep, pig and bovine with some bones of birds. Recent excavations were taken over by the archaeologists following the unearthing of bloomery iron slag which may be of medieval or even Roman date.

The early parts of the underground structure are of great interest to

archaeologists and include an unexplained very heavy wall bonded to major parts of the foundations. This wall is visible as a metre-wide scar on one side of the basement and matched by a corresponding scar on the opposite wall. A trial excavation into the floor between the two scars has revealed that the wall had survived below the ground and was running north-west to south-east, in the same alignment as the existing foundations.

Other interesting features have included an early brick and stone built chute from near the modern ground level towards the basement and what appears to be the sealed-up doorway for the judges.

The hoarding

The hoarding surrounding the building shows drawings of life size people (and dogs) reading about the whole project. Despite attempts to take home the dogs as some sort of souvenir, the hoarding remains relatively unscathed and has already received some favourable compliments.

When the scaffolding is complete it will be covered by a shroud which we hope will excite even more interest.

Shire Hall Times



Debbie McCarty of Monmouth's One Stop Shop is part of the Shire Hall project team. She explained:

"We recognised that the scaffolding on the building will not show the building in the best light and we want to help the retailers in Monmouth by keeping visitor numbers high.

"There are 64 characters on the shroud representing trades, historical figures and people important to the story of Monmouth. They are in two rows and are depicted in alphabetical order so the character on the far left is called something beginning with 'A'. An example might be someone with a paintbrush and palette, your answer would be 'artist'.

"In 2010, we will gather all the correct entries and draw out three winners who will each receive an extremely valuable prize.

David Evans, of Monmouth based firm, Platform One, contributed a significant amount of the time needed for research and the preparation of drawings for free.

"I'm very excited about the prospect of watching people guess what each character is and also to get their reactions to the design. I've thrown in a few red herrings, so it is a bit of a challenge."



The hoarding has been covered in anti-graffiti paint by MCC's youth service and each drawn character was printed onto vinyl and applied by another local company, Chillipepper Signs.