

**and Handlooms.** It describes how the Horse Fair moved to this area from the Town Centre in 1690 and remained there for 130 years, until it began to be developed with businesses such as tailors, grocers, shoemakers, brewers and, of course, weavers.



*The “Horses and Handlooms” interpretation panel opposite Weavers’ cottages*

**WEAVERS’ COTTAGES  
OPEN DAY:  
SATURDAY 6th  
AUGUST 2016**

In the Summer 2016 edition of this Newsletter, we recounted “the story so far” on the development of the project currently being undertaken by the Worcestershire Building Preservation Trust at Weavers’ Cottages, 20-22 The Horsefair, Kidderminster. On Saturday 6th August, on probably one of the hottest days of the year so far, Trust members and guests descended on the site to see first hand how the work was progressing.

There was clear evidence of the Trust’s involvement, even before you entered the site, with an interpretation panel on land opposite the cottages. This had been installed by the Trust quite early in the life of the project and is headed **Horses**

In view of the very limited area of the site itself, numbers who could be admitted at any one time were necessarily limited and booking of time-slots for each visitor was essential, but there were nevertheless 68 bookings and, inevitably, other unscheduled visits from passers-by, who saw that something was happening and wanted to find out more.

Each group assembled at the entrance to the site, to be greeted by the event organiser and self-styled “shoe police”, Sue Pope from Parkin Heritage and Tourism who are the Activity Plan Co-ordinators for the project. Sue’s first task was to check that all visitors were wearing suitably robust footwear for a working

building site and, where necessary, providing suitable alternatives!

Next the Trust's Project Organiser, David Trevis-Smith, introduced the project with the rather alarming assertion – one which he was repeating from a number of other disaffected commentators – that it would actually be cheaper to knock the buildings down and build some nice new ones!



*Project Organiser David Trevis-Smith introduces the project to open day visitors*

However, that would not of course be appropriate for these important historic buildings, which were of much more than just local interest, and he went on to describe the rationale behind the Building Preservation Trust's involvement.

He was also able to explain, in part at least, the reason for the high cost of the project, if only in terms of the number of different specialist skills and trades involved, which included roofers, bricklayers, plasterers, carpenters, stonemasons and blacksmiths amongst others.

Then, following a briefing on site safety from Andy Hutchings, the site manager from the principal contractors, Croft Building and Conservation Limited of Cannock, we were let loose.



*Weavers' Cottages Open Day*

As had happened in the case of the West Midlands Historic Buildings Trust open day at The Thomas Robinson Building (the former Lye and Wollescote Cemetery Chapels) Crofts, who had also been the main contractors there, laid on a series of demonstrations of some of the skills involved in the project.

Croft's bricklayer was demonstrating traditional bricklaying techniques, using lime mortar, and showing the different types of brick bonding which could be found in historic buildings and their leadworkers, who had already been involved in providing roof and chimney flashings, were showing how to construct a typical rainwater hopper head in lead.

Representatives from Ashmore Conservation (blacksmiths) were fabricating the S-shaped wall plates

which are attached to the external elevations of the building to hold in place the tie-rods which pass through the building and provide structural support.



*A Leadworker from Croft's demonstrates how to make a lead hopper head (above) and (below) a blacksmith from Ashmore Conservation makes a new wall plate*



The proprietor of A J Mugridge from Madeley in Shropshire was demonstrating traditional brick-

making techniques. In many cases, visitors were allowed and indeed encouraged to join in with the activities although it is unclear as to how many of their products will actually find their way into the finished building!



*Brickmaker A J Mugridge makes new bricks with two of his younger helpers*

Those who wanted to see more detail of the work in the cottages themselves were then treated to a tour of accessible parts of the buildings under the guidance of Andy Hutchings. In view of the strict constraints of the site, groups were limited to around five or six people but this meant, of course, that we could view everything in much closer detail and ask many more questions of our expert guide.

The ground floor interiors of numbers 20 and 22 and all levels of the external scaffolding were accessible and it was particularly interesting to have a close view of the upper parts of the building, and especially the roofs and chimneys, of



which you would normally only have a distant view from ground level.



*Visitors on top of the scaffolding at Weavers' Cottages*

Chimneys had been repaired or rebuilt and some had been lined so that they were capable of use. The slate roofs of numbers 20 and 21 and the plain clay tiled roof of number 22 had been stripped and these were in the process of being re-laid.



*The clay tiled roof and chimney at number 22 in the course of repair*

Around 75% of the original slates and 85% of the original clay tiles had been salvaged for re-use; new slates had been obtained from the Penrhyn quarry in Wales and new clay tiles were hand-made to order by Tudor Tiles and, as the roofs were being re-laid, the new slates and tiles were being distributed evenly across the roofs to avoid a patchy appearance.

One original cast iron gutter bracket had been recovered and this was duly despatched to the blacksmith for 30 copies to be made.

The external brickwork had been rendered some time in the middle of the 20th century and there was much debate about whether to try to remove the render and restore the original brick finish.

Trials were undertaken and it proved unusually easy to remove the render, partly because some areas of "render" proved to be no more than interior plaster and partly – and crucially – because the surface of the brickwork had not been roughened (often carried out by hitting the face of the brickwork with a hammer) to provide a key for the render.

The individual bricks were therefore generally found to be in good condition although some areas of brickwork were unsound and had to be carefully taken down and rebuilt. It is only the end gable of number 22 which may need to be re-rendered to provide adequate weathering although further tests will be carried

out to see whether this can be achieved by careful re-pointing only.



*Visitors inspect the external brickwork from which the render has been removed*

One of the surprise finds, when the render was removed, was a large painted sign on the front elevation stating **A. Wakefield Confectioner** and thought to date from the 1920s.

It was not uncommon at that time for buildings to carry general advertising material, not necessarily related to the activities being undertaken within the actual building, and it was not therefore clear whether this sign had anything to do with Weavers' Cottages – not clear, that is, until Mrs Wakefield's granddaughter appeared at the open day and confirmed that her grandmother did indeed operate a sweet shop from the building!

Some work had been undertaken on the interiors, including repairs to an unusual elm staircase and original fireplaces. An original quarry tiled floor had been found in number 20 and was being retained and restored.



*The original fireplace and quarry tiled floor at number 20*

After the tour of Weavers' Cottages, visitors had the opportunity to join a short heritage walk around Kidderminster, finishing at The Carpet Museum, where free refreshments were available, along with the opportunity to meet family historian, Gay Hill, and Paul Hudson from Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service.

Gay had organised a number of Family History sessions as part of the Activity Plan and she had obtained copies of extracts from past censuses from The Horsefair. They showed amongst other things that, in 1871, the head of the household at number 22 was Robert Harden and that other residents were his widowed sister-in-law, Harriet, who was described as "housekeeper" and his nephew, who was described as a "creeler". In the textile industry, a creel is a rack that holds spools of thread or yarn and a creeler tends to this piece of equipment to ensure there is a continuous supply of yarn – it was good to see that that the link with the weaving industry continued!

Grateful thanks are due to Sue Pope for organising the event; David Trevis-Smith for his introduction to the project; Andy Hutchings and the craftsmen who were demonstrating their skills; and Trustees Sue Whitehouse, Philip Adams and Nigel Brown who were on hand to welcome visitors and answer any questions.

**There will be one final open day on 3rd December 2016 for members and guests to view the work before the cottages are sold. If you would like to attend, then please contact Sue Pope on 07875 377243 or by email on merrienoyse@btinternet.com.**

Nick Hogben

**WEAVERS' COTTAGES:  
A TASTE OF POINTING  
BRICKWORK IN LIME  
MORTAR**

On the 17th June 2016, in collaboration with the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), building contractors Croft Building and Conservation Ltd opened up the building site at the Weavers' Cottages in Horsefair, Kidderminster for a day to instruct and advise on the use of lime in historic building construction. This site, of course, constitutes the latest and current project for Worcestershire Building Preservation Trust (WBPT).

The SPAB Maintenance Co-operative project exists to empower volunteers at places of worship across Herefordshire and Worcestershire, to understand their traditionally built buildings and take on basic maintenance tasks to ensure these buildings remain in good condition for years to come. With several Co-operative churches built of brick and it being essential to carry out repairs using traditional materials, the chance to learn how to repoint brickwork in lime has been a regular request from Co-operative volunteers.

Whilst not a church, the same skills are being applied at the Weavers' Cottages to match the type of lime mortar used when the cottages were originally constructed and this provided an ideal learning opportunity. Volunteers from churches in the Kidderminster area were also keen to get behind the scenes, take a tour of the site, and have a chance to see a live building conservation project at work.



*A group photograph of those involved on the day*

Seven people were able to take part in the training day at the cottages, ably led by staff from Croft and organised by Kate Andrew (SPAB project officer for Herefordshire and Worcestershire), and Andrew Mottram from Worcester Diocese.

Kate said: "Working on a live conservation building site and carrying out work that could well be in place for at least a century was a very special opportunity for both the volunteers and myself. Making sure everything was in place to allow the training to happen safely and effectively required a lot of careful planning but paid off with a superb day that everyone learnt from and enjoyed".



*Kate Andrew points up the front elevation*

If you would like to find out more about the SPAB Co-operative and get involved in its work, then please contact Kate Andrew at [kate.andrew@spab.org.uk](mailto:kate.andrew@spab.org.uk)

Andy Hutchings from Croft said: "We at Croft Building and Conservation

Ltd are very happy to show our skills and hopefully pass on a small amount of this to help others understand the nature of our work, enabling them to carry out the skills they learnt on their own and various other buildings. Lee, Grant and I enjoyed having the SPAB Volunteer group with us on Friday and we all thought how much the volunteers being novices learnt very quickly and hopefully got something out of the day, which makes it all worthwhile".

Robert J Tolley, past Trust Chairman and accredited Conservation Architect, said: "The use of traditional building materials has long been recognised as an important element in good historic building repair practice and the WBPT always endeavours to ensure that these practices are followed in all projects. Encouraging the use of such materials as lime is an essential aspect in repairs we undertake, using wherever possible Building Contractors experienced in the use of traditional techniques, which is why we have supported the recent SPAB initiative".

**WEAVERS' COTTAGES  
PROVIDE WORK  
EXPERIENCE  
OPPORTUNITIES**

Two 16 and 17 year old students from Kidderminster have joined the team at Croft Building and

Conservation Ltd on a work experience placement at Weavers' Cottages. Courtney Chapple and Frankie Green, who study bricklaying at Stourbridge College, have been spending two days a week on the site and have been given their own jobs to do, repairing brickwork in one of the chimneys.

Site manager for Crofts, Andy Hutchings, has been mentoring the students and says that they tackled the task "brilliantly", adding that "as individuals just beginning their training, they have already gained valuable industry knowledge and developed skills that place them ahead of the game in terms of their professional progress".

Courtney and Frankie will continue their studies at Stourbridge College in September where new construction and built environment facilities will be available to full-time students and apprentices.

"This is my first time working on a building project and it's just as good as I expected it to be" said Courtney. "Frankie and I have grown up in the area so we've seen how Horsefair has changed over the years. It's a huge deal for us to be involved in these developments and be part of the cottages' history".

"We're learning a lot," added Frankie. "Everyone at the site has told us we're part of the team now, so we're also spending the summer working here. It's a brilliant start to our CVs".

It is of course an absolutely vital part of any of the Trusts' projects to involve young people and bring forward a new generation of craftspeople and Trustee Nigel Brown added: "Providing young people with hands on experience of building restoration ensures these specialist skills are not lost and that other buildings can be preserved in future".



*Courtney Chapple and Frankie Green with Trustee Nigel Brown (far right) and site foreman Andy Hutchings*