



Media Release : May 2016

Clue uncovered to forgotten history

A clue to a forgotten piece of history has been uncovered during the project by the Worcestershire Building Preservation Trust to save three historic cottages in Kidderminster, supported thanks to National Lottery players.

Thanks to support from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), the Weavers' Cottages project is an ambitious scheme to bring back into use three listed cottages in Horsefair and to learn more of the connections between these buildings and Kidderminster's history. Conservation work started on site in February and is expected to be completed towards the end of this year.

Whilst carefully removing render on the front walls facing the street the specialist contractors, Croft Building and Conservation, were surprised to find a sign painted onto the bricks beneath bearing the name "A Wakefield High Class Confectioner". This suggests that 21 Horsefair was once a sweet shop and the sign would appear to date from sometime after 1911, though no other information about this has yet been found.

The Trust would like to make a feature of the hand-painted sign in re-telling the story of the cottages and is interested to hear from anyone has knowledge about the shop owners and the business they ran. Information about who occupied either of the three cottages numbers 20, 21 and 22 Horsefair before, during and after the time of A. Wakefield would be very useful. Anyone with information should contact Ian Parkin, who is coordinating the project activities (call 01803 722250 or email ian@ianparkin.co.uk).

David Trevis-Smith, Project Organiser for the Worcestershire Building Preservation Trust, added: "Getting to understand the history of important buildings that have been unused for such a long time can be a bit like putting together a jigsaw puzzle. It's testament to the skill of the contractors that this sign has been revealed from beneath a layer of cement render and its discovery is an important find for piecing-together the overall picture of the Weavers' Cottages. Maybe mention of this shop name might trigger a few memories and the Trust would love to hear from people who can recall more on this or on other occupiers of any of the three cottages over the years."

The Weavers' Cottages lay abandoned for over a generation but have recently been purchased by The Worcestershire Building Preservation Trust. They are a row of three historically important cottages, the earliest of which dates back almost 300 years. They are modest in scale and sit virtually unnoticed amidst more modern buildings in the Horsefair, attention drawn more by their derelict condition than their significance to the history of the town.

A campaign by Kidderminster Civic Society over fifteen years ago resulted in the cottages being given statutory protection as listed buildings. Research has concluded that the oldest cottage in particular was built as an artisan dwelling, with a workshop on the top-floor for the weaving of bombazine and living accommodation on the ground and middle floors. These cottages represent the only surviving

example of the bombazine industry for which the town was famous, prior to the establishment of carpet weaving for which Kidderminster is better known today.

The scheme is to repair the cottages and convert them for modern-day residential use, bringing the buildings back to life, providing much needed town-centre housing and improving the physical environment and appearance of this part of Kidderminster. The heritage-based activities related to the project include understanding the history of the cottages, working with local schools and colleges to involve young people in project work, performing arts projects, talks about the importance of these buildings and the work being done to save them and open days during the building contract to see repair works in progress.

ENDS

Accompanying images

The images accompanying this release are a photograph of the A. Wakefield sign that contractors working on the project have uncovered and an artist impression of the completed Weavers' Cottages scheme, drawn by Robert Tolley, one of the trustees of The Worcestershire Building Preservation Trust.

About the Worcestershire Building Preservation Trust

The Worcestershire Building Preservation Trust, a registered charity, aims to rescue buildings 'at risk' that are of historic or architectural importance. The Trust has completed successful projects at Church House, Areley Kings; Wyre Hill, Bewdley; Belle House, Pershore; Load St, Bewdley; and The Sergeants House, Ledbury; where sustainable uses have been found for otherwise abandoned historic properties. www.wbpt.org.uk

About the Heritage Lottery Fund

Thanks to National Lottery players, we invest money to help people across the UK explore, enjoy and protect the heritage they care about - from the archaeology under our feet to the historic parks and buildings we love, from precious memories and collections to rare wildlife. www.hlf.org.uk
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For further information, additional images and interviews, please contact:

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