

City of Wells Almshouses – Newsletter

September 2020 Update

Dear Friends of the Almshouses,

The last few months at the Almshouses have clearly been very different from what we had planned and, in particular, the lockdown due to the Covid-19 Pandemic has resulted in staff working from home and calling residents on a daily basis to check their wellbeing. However, we are delighted that all of our residents have remained well and very resilient and, despite the restrictions facing us all, we have been able to maintain good progress with our array of improvement projects, not least because of computer technologies which enable us to hold ‘virtual’ face-to-face meetings over the internet. Several noteworthy developments are summarised below.

New steps at Llewellyn’s



As many of you will be aware the main access for our residents who live at Llewellyn’s is via a stepped entrance and gate. The steps have been causing issues for our residents and their guests who use walking aids and therefore last year we had plans drawn up to widen the steps to make them more user friendly.



As the site is Grade 2 listed it was necessary to gain Listed Building consent for the works and then the contract was tendered. Just-Pick-Cribbs Ltd won the tender and the new steps and handrails were completed in Spring 2020. We have been delighted with the quality of the work and the much wider steps have provided much improved access for residents and visitors alike.

The Chapel Restoration



Despite the Pandemic the Chapel Restoration Committee has continued its work, in a more limited way, headed by our Chair, Chris Vigar MBE, who has kindly provided this update for our newsletter.

We’re glad to report that several applications for financial assistance to renovate and adapt the Wells Almshouses (also called the Bubwith Chapel after the founder, Bishop Bubwith, who left £500 in his will in 1424 to found 24 almshouses and a chapel for the poor folk of Wells) have been successful. Several charities have confirmed grants and some individuals have also pledged significant sums in support.

Funds have been confirmed from The Blair Foundation and The Aurelius Trust and we are awaiting responses from other trusts as well as preparing a very comprehensive application to the Heritage Lottery Fund and others.

We still have a long way to go, but we are moving in the right direction. In addition, institutions, individuals, and organisations have expressed strong interest in using the Chapel for small-scale, intimate events such as recitals, concerts, dissertations, readings, presentations, seminars, workouts, rehearsals, etc. The chapel will remain first and foremost a place of worship, as intended by the founder, but will, when the restoration is complete, also become an ideal venue for the people of Wells and the surrounding areas to enjoy, use and visit. The Covid-19 situation, although we are delighted to report that no residents have been smitten with the illness, has meant the cancellation of the very popular and valuable open days. These were simply impossible due to the requirement for social distancing.

Other plans for various entertainments in the chapel had to be postponed indefinitely. We will reschedule more events as soon as it becomes possible. In the meantime, please remember that the chapel is a hidden treasure for Wells and any expressions of support, of whatever nature, will always be very welcome.

Also, finally if you have any historic photographs (internal and external) of the chapel we would be delighted if you could send them to us to copy after which we will of course return them. Please forward to the office at 4 Bubwith House, BA5 2QE or email: manager@wellsalmshouses.org.uk.

The Almshouse Community

Throughout this difficult time the Almshouse Community has not let social distancing prevent the community spirit among residents from thriving. For example:

- Bubwith residents: have held socially distanced barbecues and held Sunday morning hymn services.
- Llewellyn's residents: have also held events to celebrate residents' birthdays and their annual event to commemorate Henry Llewellyn's birthday went ahead with a socially distanced buffet.

Of particular note residents, Trustees and volunteers have assisted in shopping for residents who were self-isolating and also delivering take-away meals from local establishments. We must also thank the proprietors of the Globe Inn in Priest Row who have been delivering Sunday lunches to our residents at a much reduced price. The consensus is 'they're delicious'.

Absent Friends

Due to the lockdown we have been unable to welcome our volunteer gardeners from 'Heads Up', we really miss you and hope you will be with us again in 2021.

However, as you would expect, our residents have 'stepped up to the plate' and the gardens in both Bubwith and Llewellyn's are stunning this year as can be seen from the photographs below.



Harper's (The Old Mortuary)

Work has continued to devise a design for a new Almshouse on the site of the Old Mortuary. Discussions have continued throughout the year with the Conservation Officer at Mendip District Council, Historic England, Trustees and residents and we are now in a position to apply for Planning Permission and Listed Building consent.

And finally...

Normally we would be highlighting our upcoming events. Due to the current situation, we are unable to do this, but we will be in touch with you again as soon as the situation becomes clearer.

Best wishes to all our friends and supporters – stay healthy and safe.

Althea Howarth
CEO
(September 2020)