

The Worcestershire Building Preservation Trust Ltd

MEDIA RELEASE: 16 February 2016

Historic cottages rescue works begin

Abandoned for over a generation, building repair works have started on site to rescue three historic houses in Horsefair, Kidderminster, known as the Weavers' Cottages, thanks to National Lottery players. This follows purchase of the cottages by The Worcestershire Building Preservation Trust, detailed design work by a team of professionals with expertise in building conservation led by architects Rodney Melville & Partners of Leamington Spa and a competitive tendering process resulting in the appointment of specialist contractors Croft Building and Conservation of Cannock to carry out the building work.

The Weavers' Cottages is a row of three historically important cottages, the earliest of which dates back almost 300 years; all three have been empty and unused for a generation. They are modest in scale and sit almost unnoticed amidst more modern buildings in the Horsefair, attention drawn more by their derelict condition than their significance to the history of the town.

The Worcestershire Building Preservation Trust has secured a mix of grant and loan funding to bring these cottages back into use; grants of £730,000 by the Heritage Lottery Fund, £20,000 by the Pilgrim Trust, £5,000 by the Garfield Weston Foundation, £3,000 by the D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust and a loan of £300,000 by the Architectural Heritage Fund. The level of financial support by these organisations, that choose which projects to support amongst applications from all parts of the UK, demonstrates the significance attached to these cottages as the last remaining examples of an important period in Kidderminster's history.

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.

As the only remaining physical reminder of the bombazine weaving part of Kidderminster's history, the cottages are an important means of telling this important story to present and future generations. However, given the state of neglect, the cost of repair is greater than their market value. To lose these cottages would be a tragedy for Kidderminster's heritage so, in 2009, the Trust stepped in, initially with support by the West Midlands Historic Buildings Trust, and agreed to investigate a way of saving the cottages.

The charitable objects of The Worcestershire Building Preservation Trust are to save buildings of architectural or historical importance that are at risk of being lost. Over six years of endeavour by the Trust has resulted in a fully detailed design scheme that will return the cottages to a viable use as dwellings, that has been granted planning permission and listed building consent, a planned programme of heritage-based activities to invite the local community to get involved in re-telling this part of the town's history, a fully costed programme of building works, and securing the grant and loan funding required to make it all happen.

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Registered charity 214258; Company registration number 837970;
Registered Office: Adam House, Birmingham Road, Kidderminster DY10 2SH

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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 history of the cottages include, amongst others, 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 done to save them, and open days during the building contract to see repair works in progress.

Bob Tolley, former Chairman and a current Trustee of The Worcestershire Building Preservation Trust explains:

“As a son of Kidderminster, I am particularly delighted that the Trust has been able to devise a scheme of repair and refurbishment that will give these important historic buildings a new lease of life and enable future generations to understand something of their history.

I would like to express thanks to members of the Trust and of the Civic Society, the Museum of Carpet, and other helpers at site work parties who have devoted their time to enable the project to reach this major milestone.

We are also fortunate to have on board a dedicated team of professionals with expertise in historic building conservation and none of this would be possible without the fantastic support of our funders.

I must give particular thanks my fellow Trustees, who have given many hours of volunteer time and taken some brave decisions, all in the cause of saving this important part of Kidderminster’s heritage.”

After having breathed life back into these important properties, The Worcestershire Building Preservation Trust will offer the cottages for sale on the open market. They will be handled by local Chartered Surveyors, Estate Agents and Auctioneers Phipps & Pritchard with McCartneys who themselves share a rich heritage and association with Kidderminster, having served the local community since 1848. Phipps & Pritchard with McCartneys Partner Nick Millinchip comments:

“We are extremely proud to be involved with this very special scheme which will see the return to use of these historic Weavers’ Cottages, preserving the past yet embracing the future, and the end result will be the creation of very high quality iconic landmark homes standing prominently and proudly at the heart of the noteworthy Horsefair community, just as they did when the first was built almost 300 years ago!”

The properties will not be actively marketed until later this year but all enquires in the meantime are very welcome and should be directed to either Nick Millinchip or Chris Smith, both of whom are based at Phipps & Pritchard with McCartneys Stourport-on-Severn Office on 01299 822060 or Stourport@phippsandpritchard.co.uk

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Notes to editors

Accompanying images

The images accompanying this release are a recent photograph of the cottages 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 Sargeants 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 @heritagelottery @HLFWestMids

About bombazine

The following is taken from R. A. Smith: "History of the Cloth Industry of Kidderminster" (1959) and Nigel Gilbert: "A History of Kidderminster" (2004) (both available in Kidderminster library).

Bombazine was a very fine silk and worsted fabric used for clothing. With its silk warp and worsted weft, it was a light and fine fabric.

R. A. Smith states that, to weave bombazine, simple and inexpensive shaft looms were used. They were light and small. It is believed that the main base for this industry in Kidderminster was in the Churchfield and Queen Street areas (Gilbert, 2004). The heyday for this trade was from the 1740s onwards (R. A. Smith, 1959).

For the most part bombazine weavers were engaged in home production. In Milk Street, off Churchfield, were a group of loom shops, most with space for four looms, owned by manufacturers, the Penn family. R. A. Smith states this was unusual and that the general rule was for weavers to own their own looms, which they used in their homes.

R. A. Smith has these figures (from T. R. Nash: "Collections for the History of Worcestershire" (1782)):

- In 1772 there were 30 manufacturers finding work for 1,700 looms in the town.
- In 1784 there were 7 manufacturers and 1,000 looms.
- By 1812 there were still 5 manufacturers and 700 looms.

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With Kidderminster having become the leading centre for carpet manufacture by 1800 (Len Smith: "Carpet Weavers and Carpet Masters" (1986)), demand for bombazine declined after 1828 and no attempt was made to save the industry.

For further information, additional images and interviews, please contact:

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