

FRIENDS OF INSOLE COURT

NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2011

Dear Members

There is much afoot at Insole Court – most of it unresolved. Therefore this "Interim Newsletter" is being rushed out just to keep you in the picture. As soon as the issues touched on in this edition become clearer, we shall let you know.

CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT STUDY

A TRUST SOLUTION ?

Members may recall that we announced at last June's AGM, that the Council had commissioned a "Conservation and Management Study" for the whole site. This was a direct outcome of our arguments at the public consultation over the future of the Stable Block. Amongst other things, we asked them to investigate the viability of transferring some or all of the Court into the hands of some form of community-based trust, dedicated solely to its care.

The conservation architect leading the study is Mr Niall Phillips of the Bristol-based architectural practice, "Purcell, Miller Tritton". (Niall is also advising the trust seeking a conservation solution for Cardigan Castle). On his recommendation, we have been invited to join with the Council in an urgent attempt to secure a Phase 1 "Community Asset Transfer" grant from the Welsh Assembly Government. Things have had to move very rapidly, as window of opportunity for applying to this fund closes on March 3rd.

If Phase 1 funding were secured, it would allow for the professional exploration of the viability of transferring the Court to a (yet to be established) trust with the aid of Phase 2 funding, which could in turn attract larger capital grants from HLF sources.

Before long we should have news of either the success, or the total failure of this attempt, and have some idea of the next steps that need to be taken.

As Chairman, I should say that, if this should prove the way forward, I would not see FIC itself becoming the managing trust. Rather, I would expect to see us acting as 'midwives' (with our partners, the Residents' Association and the Llandaff Society) in the birth of a new body. Whether it remains in the hands of the local authority or a new trust, the Court will still need FIC to be there to play its vital roles of encouraging community use, studying and recounting its history, and generally keeping the custodians up to the mark.

It is important not to jump to premature conclusions at this stage, because no radical change will happen overnight (if at all); but despite the lack of hard detail, we think it right to let all members know which way the wind is blowing before inaccurate rumours begin to spread.

We have all but completed the funded phase of the work covered by the HLF "Your Heritage" Grant. The formal independent evaluation has been submitted by Beryl Norris, and we have just two pieces of expenditure outstanding before signing off with HLF. These are: the acted bilingualisation of the "Victorian Tea" DVD (awaiting studio time becoming free) and the professional distribution of our tourist leaflets to attract more visitors to the Court.

Casual visitors can now enjoy a rolling DVD in the hallway, and the fine exhibition in the long corridor, depicting the story of the house in the hands of the Insole family. This has been designed for us by Peter Gill Associates, of Canton, who have also provided us with six portable pull-up panels that we can use as a free-standing exhibition or take out to accompany our growing range of Powerpoint talks.

The panels, along with our laptop and projector give us the outreach tools we have lacked and we are now able to respond to invitations to deliver talks on the Insoles and related topics. The modest charges we make for such talks will go to help fund our continuing work.

My thanks go to every one of the Management Team, and to the research, volunteering and schools liaison sub-groups, for their dynamic work on this project which is bringing about the transformation in the civic perception of the Court we have been seeking for so many years. There is one final meeting of this team to be held before their work becomes absorbed into the work of the main committee. This will be the occasion for proper thanks to be given.

THE SWISS WING

The Heritage Project is by no means over. We expect work on the important Swiss Wing to be completed early in March and we hope that it will be marked by a civic opening some time in April.

At this point it will become possible for us to embark on the next phase of interpretation, which will involve creating the long-awaited 'Heritage Room' in Room G17 - the space once occupied by the FIC Library. We expect The Butler's Pantry (Room G13) to become an interesting viewable space for visitors as well.

This will help ease the occasional tension between the house's conflicting roles of Community Centre and Visitor Attraction.

Equipping this heritage room will not be without cost – and your committee has earmarked £900 from existing balances as the core of a "Development Fund". When we have a clearer idea of the funds needed, we intend to launch a modest appeal to our nearly 700 members in the hope of raising what is needed independently of external grant aid. There will be a further announcement in the next newsletter.

SOME DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

THIRD THURSDAY CONCERTS – Tickets: Members £7 (otherwise £10) from Peter Morgan ☎ 02920 575180

17th March	An evening of Musical Entertainment by the pupils of HOWELLS SCHOOL
21st April	Return of jazz and swing, from the wonderful "KEITH LITTLE BAND" <i>N/B Prices not raised, thanks to the Arts Council's "Night Out" scheme</i>
19th May	Yet to be arranged – watch this space.
16th June	"OPERA MINT" perform "DON GIOVANNI" Voices and piano with arias linked by narration
Saturday June 11th	AGM – Venue to be announced (due to Possible wedding at the Court)
50+ GROUP: 10.00 am Wednesdays - talks and good company.	
see www.insolecourt.org.uk for talks schedule.	

The committee asks me to thank you very much for the support you give to their work on your behalf. We hope to be able to give you a more detailed account of the above matters very shortly.

John Prior-Morris