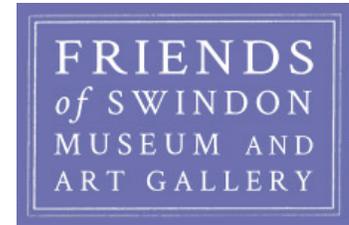




Newsletter

October 2021



Hello Friends

A despondent Committee meeting on the 27th of September as the future of Swindon Museum and Art Gallery at Apsley House hangs in the balance. More of that later.

Monthly Zoom Talk

27th October 7.30pm David Dawson, Director of the Wiltshire Museum, will be discussing the Eric Ravilious exhibition 'Downland Man' opening on 25th September.

Many thanks to Jo Baring, director and curator of the Ingram Collection of Modern British & Contemporary Art at the Lightbox Gallery in Woking, for her very informative September talk.

Monthly Zoom talks to come

24th November Grant Aston, ceramicist. His piece 'Radioactivitat' is in the Swindon Collection. There won't be a talk in December but the committee is preparing the list of speakers for 2022. Please let Linda Kasmaty know if you have any suggestions.

Friends of Swindon Museum and Art Gallery Annual General Meeting,

Will take place on Monday 29th November on Zoom, more information to follow

15th December Friends' Christmas Social 6.30-8pm Civic Offices, Euclid Street

We were having difficulty finding a venue for a Christmas gathering until Swindon Borough Council offered free use of the foyer and two adjoining committee rooms in the Civic Offices. It will be an opportunity to spend time together and appreciate this 1930's, Grade II listed building and the eighteen paintings from the Swindon Collection, displayed in the foyer.

Trips to look forward to

'A Century of British Art - Bournemouth Arts Club 1920-2020' at the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum, Bournemouth. 1st October 2021 – 1st March 2022

The exhibition includes nine paintings from the Swindon Collection.

On Thursday 14th October, Dr Gill Clarke, the curator of the exhibition, will give a talk to Friends, making their own way to the exhibition. Please check emails, numbers are limited.

Or you might like to take advantage of a Barnes Coach 'Senior Special', trip to Bournemouth on Thursday 21st October, £18 fare. <https://www.barnescoaches.co.uk/> or ring 01793 821303

Eric Ravilious exhibition 'Downland Man' Wiltshire Museum, Devizes. 18th November, 11.30am

Visit for Friends, numbers are limited, so please check emails. The 49 bus to Devizes leaves at 5 minutes past the hour from Swindon bus station, passes through Old Town and arrives close to the museum 55 minutes later.

Members who don't use email will be contacted separately about both these visits.

2020 Photography Competition Winner, Mark Somerville

In his garden studio one hot day this September, we met Mark for an interview and to see the photograph that won the 2020 competition at the Swindon Museum & Art Gallery.

The pandemic struck at the very time of the exhibition in the Gallery whereupon the building closed and no further access has been allowed. However, The Friends of SM&AG had awarded Mark's photograph 'C2036' with the first prize of £100 which was delivered to him without the desired ceremony by a member of the Swindon Borough Council museum staff.

We wished to meet Mark to affirm our delight at his win and to see more of his work. His photography had been landscapes, and Wiltshire has no shortage of interest here. However, with the advent of smartphones and digital cameras available for anyone to capture the images, he turned to 'applied photographic art', definitely a unique field. This starts with a photograph, manipulated, enhanced, created with computerised additions to produce remarkable images. The results are startling shapes, unexpected angles, infilled with colours and shading.

Recently he took part in the Marlborough Open Studios weekend for public viewing. We hope many people will continue to enjoy his splendid works.

Linda Kasmaty and Rosemary Savage. 6th September 2021.



Welcome to new Friends

We have gained eight new Friends in the last few weeks, thank you all for your support

Friends' Website

Click on <http://www.friendsofsmag.org> to find details of talks, newsletters, news, videos of talks, a link to the blog and you can also **make a donation to FSMAG**.

We are putting together a list of paintings, artefacts, restorations etc. which Friends have contributed to Swindon Museum and Art Gallery over the years, to be added to the website.

Instagram

Did you know that the Friends have an **Instagram account** with over 900 followers? We share news of talks and other events etc on the account so do give it a follow.

<https://www.instagram.com/friendsofswindonmag/>

Don't forget the Friends' page on the '**We Are Swindon**' website:

<https://weareswindon.co.uk/swindons-charity-hub/friends-of-swindon-museum-and-art-gallery/>

SAVE OUR MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY



www.friendsofsmag.blogspot.com has information about the campaign, including photos
Below are excerpts from articles published in the Swindon Advertiser about our campaign to re-open Apsley House, over the last month:

30th August

Swindon Museum and Art Gallery repairs are 'no obstacle' to reopening, say supporters
THE closed home of Swindon Museum and Art Gallery needs either a new roof or the leaking current one repaired, its boilers fixed and a new fire alarm system.

But supporters bidding to get the Old Town building open again as soon as possible say the list of work needed is not prohibitive or insurmountable.

Apsley House, on the corner of Bath Road and Victoria Road, has been shut since the start of the pandemic in 2020.

Although Swindon Borough Council has agreed to consider opening it again, it has said it is not fit for purpose in the long term and that doing so would cost thousands of pounds and be uneconomic.

An official list of problems was supplied to Patrick Herring – the South Swindon parish councillor for Eastcott – by the borough council.

It lists seven issues caused by damp in galleries – mainly mould or water patches on ceilings and walls but also a bowed ceiling over a corridor.

It says both boilers are broken, a new fire alarm system is needed and water comes through the ceiling in the archaeology gallery.

The report says: "Roofers said roof needs to be repaired or replaced."

The issue has been passed to the council's property team but has not been updated.

Coun Herring said: "The long and short of it is that there is a list of maintenance work that has been compiled by the council's building services, and it doesn't appear that quotes have been sought for the work. You can judge for yourself exactly how much of this work is big enough to prevent visitor access, or how much money any of it would add up to."

Fellow parish councillor and chair of the Friends of Swindon Museum And Art Gallery Linda Kasmaty agreed. She said: "Patrick is right. This isn't a massive obstacle to getting Apsley House open again. "The council has money set aside for it, I don't know why it doesn't get on and spend it and get Apsley House open. "A town of Swindon's size needs a museum and art gallery. I know the council wants to open a new one in the cultural quarter but we don't know how long that will take. It should spend the money it has to fix these issues and get Apsley House open again."

Cabinet member for culture, heritage, leisure and town centre experience Robert Jandy said: "The essential works outlined just concentrate on the backlog maintenance that needs to be carried out on Apsley House.

"It does not take into account the considerable additional work that is required to improve accessibility so that everyone who wants to access the collections can do so.

"We know from previous estimates that this work would cost hundreds of thousands of pounds, but council officers have been re-examining this in light of recent discussions I have had with representatives of Friends of Swindon Museum and Art Gallery.

"A report looking at options for how we display our fabulous art and museum collections to the most people and for the greatest benefit is currently being drafted and will be presented to the council's cabinet for consideration."

6th September

Protesters make last-ditch effort to save Swindon Museum and Art Gallery

Protestors turned out in force on Saturday in a last-ditch attempt to urge Swindon Borough Council to change their mind about the fate of the Grade II listed Swindon Museum and Art Gallery in Old Town.

The demonstration follows a report that recommends the venue stays closed and is sold off, which the Save our Museum and Art Gallery (SoMAG) group has labelled as 'deeply flawed, inaccurate and misleading.'

The report suggests that Apsley House on Bath Road should not reopen until a suitable home is found for its contents, as the group have suggested, because it isn't financially viable to do so.

It also suggests that the council's own civic offices and even Lydiard's conference centre could be used to house some of the renowned art collection instead.

A cabinet meeting is set to take place on Wednesday, September 8, where a decision is expected to be made about the building's fate off the back of the report.

Linda Kasmaty of SoMAG said: "We have worked very closely with Councillor Jandy to try to re-open Apsley House until a space can be found that can do justice to our wonderful art and museum collections, but on reading the cabinet paper we were shocked to find that none of the reassurances he gave us have been kept.

"We don't blame Councillor Jandy for this – we know he has been requesting surveys from his officers for weeks, to understand the real costs of re-opening Apsley House, and he wanted to give us the chance to commission our own survey, too.

"But now this paper has been rushed out and will go before cabinet on Wednesday and the councillors will have to rely on the facts and figures in the paper, so much of which are clearly wrong, to make a landmark decision.

"Thanks to an FOI request, we are now aware that the Grade II listed building which the council owns and has failed to maintain has been knowingly left to deteriorate.

"This negligence means that the heating has now been condemned, the roof is letting in water, and the collections have been exposed to damp. This, in itself, is a disgrace.

"The building is planned to be sold off at a discounted price, in a dilapidated state, into the private sector, putting it at great risk of being bought speculatively by a developer and left to rot, alongside buildings like the Corn Exchange, Mechanics Institute and the Oasis."

Regardless of what happens Wednesday, SoMAG says it will keep fighting.

8th September

Swindon museum campaigners urge cabinet to rethink closure plan

Art-lovers have handed in a petition to Swindon Borough Council to try and get the town's museum and art gallery opened as soon as possible.

And they have urged members of the council's Conservative cabinet not to make any hasty decisions at their meeting tonight where a paper will recommend moving the collections out of Apsley House.

The report says exhibits could be put on display as a temporarily arrangement at the civic offices in Euclid Street and Lydiard House.

It says: "The existing building in which the collections are housed will be vacated, but not until a temporary home has been evaluated and fully costed. Following any agreed permanent closure, Apsley House would be declared surplus to operational requirements." The building could then be sold.

The paper recommends the cabinet authorise officers to arrange to move exhibits to the civic offices and Lydiard House "without delay" which would sound the death knell for Apsley House. It would remain closed and as soon as the collection was removed would be earmarked for disposal. The £400,000 the council has set aside for repairs to the Grade II listed Regency building dating from the 1830s will then be used to make suitable arrangements for display in Euclid Street and if needed, Lydiard House.

But members of Save Our Museum and Art Gallery said such a decision should not be made this week as they handed in their petition of over 4,000 signatures.

The group's founder Linda Kasmaty said: "The council is suggesting using the civic offices as an alternative to the art gallery. Yet the last time the council considered using the civic offices to house the paintings, it dismissed that idea because it would cost £1.8m. "In all conscience, members of cabinet cannot take an informed decision on this, because they have not been given the information they need. We are urging members to do the intelligent and responsible thing, and tell their officers to go back to the drawing board.

"Swindon's art and museum collections belong to Swindon people, not to the local authority. The least residents can expect is that the full council has an opportunity to see the results of professional surveys and costings, and make a decision based on the fact."

Fellow members agreed.

Tim Carroll said: "Only a very small selection of the collections will be able to be shown at the civic offices and Lydiard House. The permanent home will be a new museum and gallery built as part of the cultural quarter but that might be a very long time away.

Another supporter Rosemary Savage said: "The collection is nationally important and it should be opened, not just for the people of Swindon, but across the country.

"I know people come from London and Bristol and all sorts of places to see it."

The council's cabinet member for heritage and culture and leisure Robert Jandy said there would be no hasty decisions.

He said: "Any decision would have to be made in the public interest and also be made to support investment in the new proposed facility. The decision must in no way undermine the future provision of a new facility as part of the Cultural Quarter."

He said the previously dismissed suggestion to use the civic offices was not relevant to this decision.

"The historic options appraisal assessed options that would be good as a permanent home going forwards," he said. "It did not assess the reuse of existing rooms in the civic on a temporary basis. It assumed that major works would be undertaken internally to create

galleries in the civic and that only part of the first floor would be used, with offices remaining alongside. "What is now being proposed is that the first floor be converted into exhibition and education space without significant internal amendment, and this will provide a much larger footprint than Apsley House. This means that far less of the collection will be placed into storage. "All options are being considered and no decision has been made about any of these potential options. Further evidence is still being collated by officers."

The cabinet meets this evening at 6pm at the civic offices. The petition handed in is sufficient to spark a debate at the full council meeting on October 23.

11th September

Council urged to reopen Swindon Museum and Art Gallery at packed meeting

CAMPAIGNERS bidding to have Swindon Museum and Art Gallery reopened packed out a council meeting to have their voices heard. Swindon Borough Council's Conservative cabinet voted in favour of closing the gallery's current home at Apsley House and explore other options for displaying the art and exhibits on Wednesday night.

The move sparked an impassioned impromptu speech from one member of the public, Sandy Best. As others made their way out of the meeting room Ms Best held up three T-shirts her children had decorated at arts and craft sessions at the museum before lockdown.

She said: "What about the kids? I've heard people tonight talk about the collection and putting it on display and making sure people can see it – but what about the children who need somewhere to go and something to do now? "My kids made these T-shirts at the museum, we need to think about what children need now and the damage done to them because they don't have somewhere to go." Earlier cabinet member for culture and heritage Robert Jandy answered public questions and introduced a report which recommended keeping the Bath Road building shut and spending hundreds of thousands set aside for repairs to look at other ways of displaying the artefacts – including converting rooms at the civic offices in Euclid Street.

Although many in the public gallery feared this was the death knell for Apsley House as a venue, Coun Jandy said: "This is the start of the conversation. "We've been criticised for not having more details, costing and the like, but we can only get those if this report is approved so we can go out and get that information.

"If there are any issues, then this will come back to cabinet."

He added: "This is about making the collection accessible to more people than those who have currently been coming to the museum and gallery. It's great to see the passion for the arts in this room. "I want to involve the Friends of the Museum and Art Gallery in any discussions."

Chair of the friends Linda Kasmaty challenged the council's view that Apsley House is not fit for purpose and will cost too much to repair. She asked whether the council's surveys could be made available. The council's legal officer Lisa Hall said she would look into the matter. Labour Old Town councillor Jane Milner-Barry said the civic offices were not suitable for hosting an important art collection. She said: "Look at these windows, single glazed, steel framed, some don't open, some don't shut."

As he and his colleagues voted to approve the report Coun Brian Ford said: "I do have some concerns about this building as a venue. I'd like to see more on how we can make it more secure."

15th September

Swindon museum and art gallery to be moved to civic offices

Apsley House – the current home of Swindon Museum and Art Gallery – will not reopen.

The collection held there will be taken out to allow the building to be sold

by Swindon Borough Council – and work will begin on preparing the upper floor of the civic offices in Euclid Street as a temporary gallery and museum.

And councillors were told a new exhibition space could be ready by the end of the year.

Members of Swindon Borough Council's scrutiny committee accepted a decision by the Conservative cabinet to move ahead with the closure of the 1830s building in Bath Road and work on ways of showing the collection of art and artefacts in the civic offices – possibly as well as Lydiard House – and continuing with the Art on Tour travelling exhibitions.

But before the decision was ratified cabinet member for heritage and culture and leisure

Robert Jandy and director of strategic growth and development Richard Bell faced a thorough grilling from both councillors and members of the public who had turned out in some numbers. Mr Bell had told the committee that once officers were directed to progress the work, the upper floor of the civic offices could be ready to open its first display by the end of the year. He added: "There's more floor space in the civic than in Apsley House, it's more accessible, we'll be able to show more of the collection. The only significant work that needs doing is to the lift.

"The work that would have to be done at Apsley House would take longer and it would not be as good or as accessible as here at the civic." A sum of £400,000 that was allocated two years ago for repairs to Apsley House will now be used for work at Euclid Street to enable exhibition there.

One of the members of the public, Rod Hebden, queried the council's sums. He said: "We have looked at how much it would cost to open here. "It's between £4.5m for all-singing, all-dancing to £1.8m for something more modest, or you could just have very few works on show, maybe just one. Which one is it going to be, or are we getting the pound shop version?"

Mr Bell said: "We have costings by experts, and they are very different to yours."

Coun Roger Smith said: "The cultural quarter is years away and in light of this council's questionable record on regeneration projects, what's the impact if this building becomes the permanent home of the collection?" Mr Bell said that could cost about £1m to £1.8m and added: "It would be no worse, and in many ways better than what we have at Apsley House."

21st September

Two petitions to be debated by Swindon councillors this week

Two petitions will be presented to and debated by councillors at Swindon Borough Council's full meeting this week.

One petition, which attracted more than 400 signatures will ask the council to instruct officers in the highways department to add St Mary's Roundabout to its list for urgent repairs

The other petition has been signed by more than 4,000 people in an effort to persuade councillors to re-open and maintain Apsley House in Bath Road as the home for Swindon Museum & Art Gallery.

Members of the Conservative cabinet agreed last week a report which says the building will remain shut and work done to provide a temporary exhibition space in the Civic Offices in Euclid Street.

27th September

Art lovers to snatch Swindon museum from the jaws of closure

Protesters brought inflatable crocodiles, posters and leaflets with their mascot and one even wore a crocodile onesie, in a last gasp attempt to save Apsley House from the jaws of closure as Swindon's museum and art gallery.

Swindon Borough Council's cabinet has already voted to approve closing Apsley House in Bath Road for good, moving the artworks and museum artefacts out and selling off the building.

But supporters of keeping it open were able to speak to the full council meeting after submitting a petition of more than 5,000 signatures.

Chair of the friends of the museum and gallery Linda Kasmaty addressed the meeting.

She said: "The petition you have received today is a reflection of the strong feelings aroused by this council's proposal to sell Apsley House and consign the town's museum and art collections to limbo for the next ten years, or however long it takes to build the new Art Pavilion as part of Swindon's grand vision of a new cultural quarter.

"Why sell Apsley House before a suitable replacement has been built?"

Ms Kasmaty added: "Swindon needs a museum and art gallery - it does have one, let's open it. It's a scandal that a town with 250,000 population contemplates closing its museum and art gallery for an indefinite period.

"It is really important for Swindon that we have a working museum and art gallery between now and when the cultural quarter is built. We need to wake up and not sleep walk our way into being entirely off the cultural map of the UK."

Earlier another supporter Sandy Best had spoken sporting her crocodile onesie.

She said: "The people of Swindon need the museum and gallery open. The council has not prioritised the mental health of the people of Swindon. When will you address our needs?"

Council leader David Renard said the moving of the collection to the Civic offices in Euclid Street would make it more accessible. He said: "The collection has 20,000 exhibits, with 824 on display. I want a better route to exhibit it."

Coun Renard said the cabinet decision was needed to allow a proper study of how to put on exhibitions at the Civic Offices - but said he would listen to other suggestions - including a **possible approach from South Swindon Parish Council** to take on Apsley House.

27th September

Parish to look at taking on Apsley House to save museum

A lifeline might be thrown to Apsley House by South Swindon Parish Council to keep it going as the home of the town's Museum & Art Gallery.

A motion has been table for the parish council's meeting this week which, if passed, could see Old Town Library open in Apsley House and the museum and gallery kept open.

The motion instructs the lower tier authority to : "Investigate the opportunity for South Swindon Parish Council to amalgamate the Old Town Library service with the museum and art gallery based in Apsley House."

The parish council will look at asking the borough council to transfer responsibility for the building in Bath Road to it for seven to 10 years and to be given £400,000 set aside for repairs. The motion will be discussed at the meeting starting at 7.15pm on Wednesday.

With thanks to the Swindon Advertiser.

Comments on the situation from the Friends' Committee

As can be seen from the articles in the Advertiser, during September Friends and supporters of the Save our Museum and Art Gallery Campaign held a rally outside Apsley House and went along to the Civic Offices to attend the Cabinet meeting, the Scrutiny Committee meeting and the Council meeting. We gathered beforehand with banners, placards and inflatable crocodiles, and were photographed and interviewed by reporters from the Swindon Advertiser, local radio and BBC Points West.

In the meetings we asked many detailed questions about the Council's plans for the future of Apsley House and the Museum and Art Gallery Collections. We didn't always get straight answers but we made our presence felt. The online and paper petition with nearly 5,000 signatures was presented at the Council meeting, and Linda Kasmaty made an excellent speech, which can be read on www.friendsofsmag.blogspot.com

Swindon Borough Council are keen to sell Apsley House as soon as possible saying that they intend to bring more art to more people by displaying the Museum and Art gallery Collections on the first floor of the Civic Offices and through 'Art on Tour' and 'Museum without Walls'. They intend to present their proposals for the adaptations to the Civic Offices at the Cabinet meeting on the 1st December (though this has already slipped from the October meeting)

South Swindon Parish Council have put forward a formal proposal to take over the running of the Museum and Art Gallery in Apsley House and we await Swindon Borough Council's response.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- We would like to keep up the pressure by asking questions at upcoming meetings, Cabinet on the 13th October 6pm and Scrutiny on the 18th October 6pm but we need more new faces to ask the questions. If you would like to get involved email: admin@friendsofsmag.org
- If you see any 'Art on Tour' or 'Museum without Walls' events around Swindon then please let us know about them and take photographs if possible. We must keep track of the paintings and artefacts, and the way they are being displayed and treated. We also need to check whether people are actually seeing more art than they did in Apsley House.
- Join the 'Save Swindon Museum and Art Gallery Facebook group and check for information.
- Contact Swindon Borough Council:

David Renard, Council Leader: drenard@swindon.gov.uk

Robert Jandy, Cabinet Member for Culture, Heritage, Leisure and Town Centre Experience: RJandy@swindon.gov.uk

Local Councillors, details on the Swindon Borough Council website

https://www.swindon.gov.uk/info/20021/councillors_democracy_and_elections

Or write: c/o Civic Offices, Euclid Street, Swindon, SN1 2JH

- Contact your Members of Parliament

Robert Buckland MP for South Swindon: robert.buckland.mp@parliament.uk

Justin Tomlinson MP for North Swindon: justin.tomlinson.mp@parliament.uk

Or write: House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

- Join the SOMAG mailing list, email: admin@friendsofsmag.org or phone: 07765 050470

ASK YOUR FRIENDS TO HELP TOO