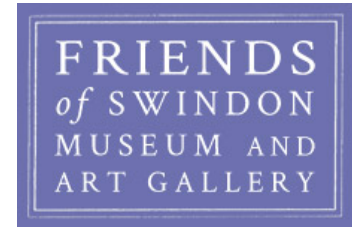




Newsletter

December 2021



Hello Friends

Best wishes for Christmas and the New Year from the Friends' Committee.

It's been a difficult year with covid and the closure of Apsley House but we are still here and look forward to more talks, trips and the re-opening of Swindon Museum and Art Gallery.

Friends' Christmas Social

Apologies, we have cancelled the Social because of the uncertainty around covid.

We look forward to arranging an outdoor gathering in the Spring and to meeting up again.

Monthly Zoom Talk

There won't be a talk in December but we have a provisional list of speakers for early 2022.

January: Neil Redfern, Executive Director of the Council for British Archaeology will give a talk entitled 'The Art of Archaeology'.

February: Michael Gray, conservation architect

March: David Dawson, Director of the Wiltshire Museum, on plans for the relocation of the Wiltshire Museum to the old Assize Courts building in Devizes.

The Annual General Meeting

Forty-two members joined in the AGM via Zoom on November 29th.

Over the year we have been informed and entertained by twelve talks covering a wide range of topics brought to us by artists, sculptors, archaeologists, curators and our patron, Desmond Morris. We have also had to deal with the closure of Apsley House and the subsequent campaign to bring the art and museum collections, which were destined for storage, back into public view.

Linda Kasmaty remains as Chair of the committee, Rosemary Savage was re-elected as Secretary and Barbara Swann elected as Deputy Chair. Brigid Harkness is the Treasurer, Susanne Webb organises trips and talks, Angela Atkinson looks after social media and Martin Newman and David Hughes are also committee members. Since the meeting two more members have volunteered to join the committee.

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**.

November's Talk from Grant Aston

Thanks to Grant Aston for his very interesting talk describing the development of his practice from the time of his ceramic sculpture 'Radioactivitat', in the Swindon Collection, to the present day. The photograph shows work inspired by visits to the overgrown Nunhead Cemetery and his 'day job', working with wood and antique furniture.

<https://friendsofsmag.org/you-tube-videos-of-talks/>

and there is more of Grant's work here:

<http://www.grantaston.com/>

A video of a walk through the New Cross area of London, includes a visit to Nunhead Cemetery at about 12 minutes in.

<https://youtu.be/fa1qDAy3Dsg>



Ongoing exhibitions

Civic Offices, Euclid St, Swindon

Eighteen paintings from the Swindon Collection are on display in the foyer of the Civic Offices, 9am – 5pm, Monday – Friday. Enter through the central doors and ask at the reception desk to see the paintings.

Eric Ravilious 'Downland Man'

Wiltshire Museum, Devizes. Until the 30th January 2022

For more information: www.wiltshiremuseum.org.uk or phone: 01380 727369

Twelve Friends had a very enjoyable visit to the exhibition. <http://friendsofsmag.blogspot.com>

A Century of British Art - Bournemouth Arts Club 1920-2020'

Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum, Bournemouth 1st October 2021– 1st March 2022

A selection of the paintings on display can be seen at:

https://artuk.org/discover/curations/view_as/grid/search/keyword:bournemouth-arts-club

Some Friends have already seen the exhibition and highly recommend a visit.

Included in the exhibition are nine paintings from the Swindon Collection, displayed together.

Instagram

Try out the Friends **Instagram account** with nearly 1,000 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/>

Swindon Museum and Art Gallery: where are we now?

Councillor Jandy presented the report 'Swindon Museum & Art Gallery – Medium Term Option at the Civic Offices' at the Cabinet Meeting on Wednesday 1st of December. The report makes the case for conversion of the empty first floor of the Civic Offices in Euclid St into a temporary Museum and Art Gallery. This promises to bring the Art and Museum Collections back on public display, but gives very little detail of how this will be done, on what appears to be a very low budget for the project. The report was passed but may have to go to the Scrutiny Committee and the full Council Meeting. Meanwhile the Council have not responded positively to the South Swindon Parish Council's offer to lease Apsley House from the Borough Council and take over the running of the Museum and Art Gallery there, pending the construction of the Cultural Quarter. Three members of the Save Swindon Museum and Art Gallery group asked questions at the meeting about the budget, the extent of the conversion work and the Council's response to the South Swindon Parish Council's offer. Written answers are awaited.



Over the last two weekends in November, members of the Save Our Museum and Art Gallery group were out leafleting and talking to people shopping in Regents St. and The Parade. We asked passers by what they felt about the closure of the Museum and Art Gallery. The majority of the people we spoke to were upset by the unexpected closure. Some people had not heard that Apsley House had been closed and were shocked by the news. Many said that the museum had been part of their childhood and they had hoped to take their children, grand children and even great grandchildren to visit. Some came to us for information, to clarify what they had already heard. The Croc, in all it's forms, was a great hit with the children and yes that is Superman helping out!

<http://friendsofsmag.blogspot.com>

Recent Articles in the Swindon Advertiser

3rd November

Campaigners hoping to have Swindon Museum and Art Gallery reopened in Apsley House say they are stunned to learn Swindon Borough Council didn't apply for grant funding.

Euclid Street did not bid for any of the money, up to £5m, available from the Museum Estates and Development (MEND) fund, which was inviting grant applications from museums.

A spokesman for Save Our Museum & Art Gallery said: "The MEND fund is literally a gift to any cash-strapped council, so we were stunned to discover that Swindon Borough Council decided not to apply for funding for Apsley House. We were told by an officer that, despite MEND's being a good fund, the time wasn't right for Swindon."

The group says there is now £850m being made available for museums and says the council should make sure it applies: "The Chancellor says over 100 regional museums and libraries will be renovated, restored and revived. We implore Swindon Borough Council to bid for a share of the £850m, to make sure that Swindon Museum and Art Gallery is one of those museums."

A report on the next phase for displaying the Swindon collections will be made to the council's cabinet on December 1.

25th November

Transferring the Swindon collections to be put on display at the Civic Offices in Euclid Street instead of at Apsley House in Old Town will cost £400,000.

That includes £150,000 to prepare the spaces directly earmarked to be used as museum and gallery spaces, and £250,000 for general work on the Euclid Street buildings, particularly making the lift accessible.

A report to Swindon Borough Council's Conservative cabinet says the figure, which includes contingency funds, is less than the £450,000 it would take to bring Apsley House in Bath Road, which has been closed since March 2020, up to scratch.

If the report is approved, work will begin in December. The first set of rooms will be prepared for displaying the artwork and artefacts, and an application for permission to up-grade the lift in the listed building will be put in. It is expected the first rooms will be opened by April next year. The report says the full number of first floor rooms should be ready by March 2023.

It points out the first floor of the civic building is 930 square metres compared to 655 in Apsley House

Councillor Robert Jandy, the council's cabinet member for culture, heritage and leisure said: "Our museum and art collections have been tucked away in a corner of Old Town for many years, but the deterioration of Apsley House has given us the opportunity to explore how we can display them to so many more people.

"The Civic Offices as an interim location for the museum and art gallery ticks a lot of boxes. It is close to the town centre and public transport links; it has access to parking and it provides a significant amount of additional floor space to display our collections.

"I want to see coach loads of local children having the opportunity to see at first hand some of our incredible art and museum artefacts. We simply could not do that at Apsley House and the narrow spaces and small rooms over so many floors would not only make school visits difficult in these Covid times, but it makes it extremely difficult to access if you have mobility issues. "I hope my Cabinet colleagues will recognise the great benefits and opportunities that are available at the Civic Offices

and that we can start to look forward to getting our collections back on display for the public to enjoy.”

The report says as well as regular and special displays the council will continue its Art on Tour initiative of pop-up exhibitions.

Members of the Save Our Museum and Art Gallery group, who want to see Apsley House opened again as the home of the museum say the figures don't add up.

26th November

Members of the Save Our Museum and Art Gallery pressure group say the council's figures for moving the collections to the civic offices do not add up.

A report will be presented to the borough council's Conservative council next week asking for the go-ahead to progress using the upper floor of the building in Euclid Street as an exhibition space for the medium to long term.

The museum's former home Apsley House in Old Town is being fixed up to be put on the market. The report says it will cost £400,000 to get the civic offices ready – less than the £450,000 it says would be needed to do the same at Apsley House – but SoMAG is not at all convinced. A spokesman said: “We have always said we will support the conversion of the first floor of the civic offices to a museum and art gallery, as long as it is being properly funded to provide appropriate gallery and exhibition space.

“The collections, which we Swindon residents collectively own, include internationally significant art, objects and artefacts which need appropriate conditions and engaging interpretation and displays. SBC still has no budget allocated beyond making the space available, and their plans amount to no more than accessible storage.”

The group says past council papers show using the civic offices to show the gallery and museum's collections was considered much more expensive than the current report suggests.

It says: “In March 2019 cabinet was presented with five options for SMAG, and the most expensive one at £1,864,000 was the conversion of part of the first floor of the civic offices. Cabinet rejected that option.

“But this new paper estimates that it will now magically cost £150,000 to convert the entire first floor to a museum/gallery space, and an additional £250,000 to improve the lift so it's suitable for carrying people, rather than just goods. So the cost of converting a larger space has fallen by £1,464,000 in the past two-and-a-half years, yet there is no explanation of how that could be possible or how this new ‘estimate’ had been arrived at.

“The option that cabinet actually accepted in 2019 was to do some work on Apsley House (also including ensuring it has a working lift). Those costs were estimated to be £400,000. This paper's current estimate for necessary reparations etc is now £450,000. While the costs of converting the civic offices have plummeted, the cost of converting Apsley House has increased considerably. We can't reach any other conclusion than that numbers are being plucked out of the air to suit a particular argument, rather than reaching an evidence-based decision.”

The group also criticised what it sees as unnecessary haste to sell Apsley House to help fund the cultural quarter and a new gallery, saying that project is years from fruition and the listed Bath Road building will bring in more money if sold later.

With thanks to the Swindon Advertiser.