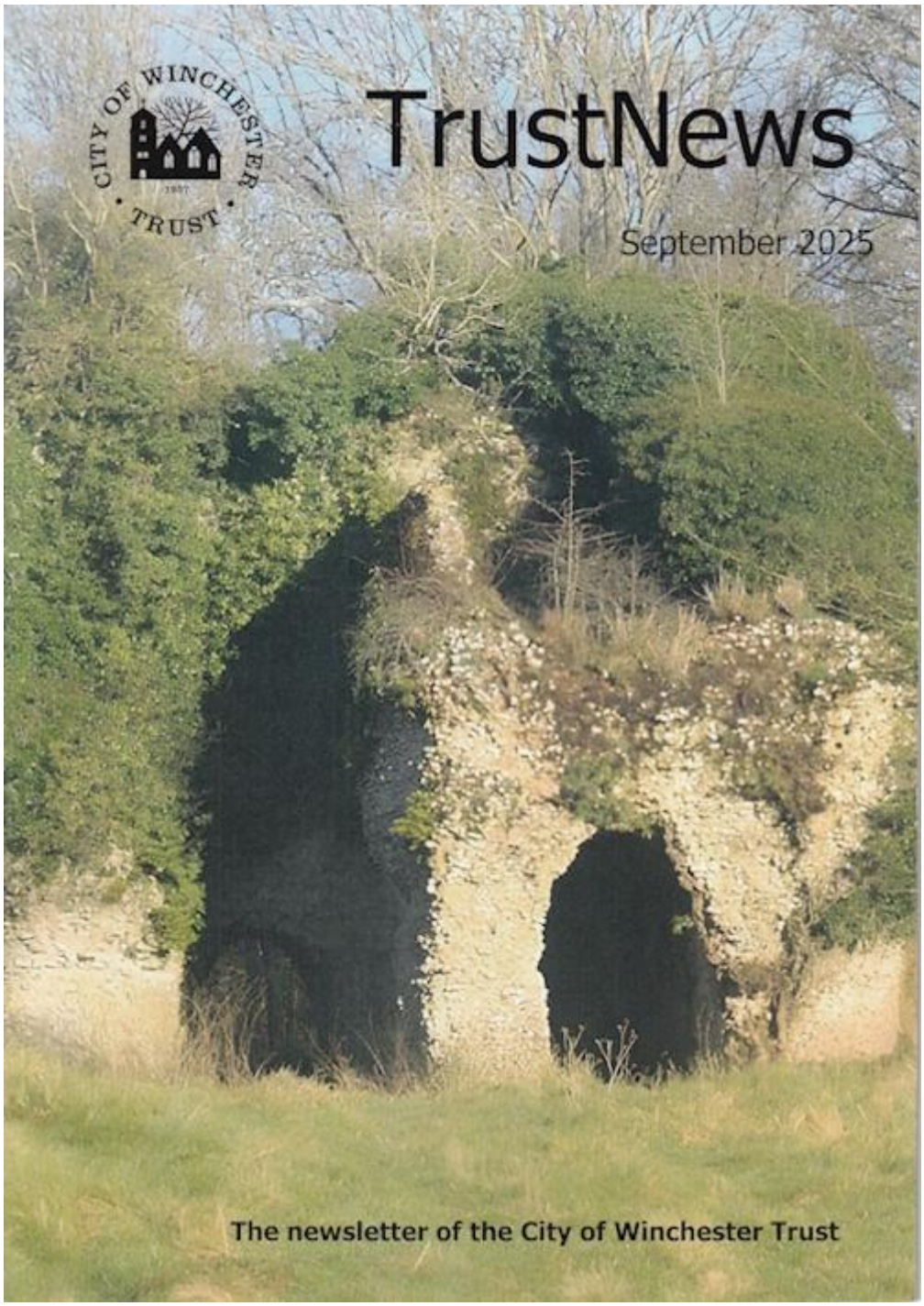
Merdon Castle before Restoration - TrustNews Sep 25



Merdon Castle before Restoration

Chairman's Jottings - TrustNews Sep 25



Members' visit to Merdon Castle - David Key explaining the ditches and ramparts (Photo courtesy of Geoffrey Sharman)

At the crossroads once again... a plan for Winchester and its landscape setting

We appear to be at the crossroads once again for the organisation of local government for Hampshire and the Solent as a whole. There appears to be no agreement as yet between authorities on proposals presented to us in the latest consultations (see article by Patrick Davies on page 6), but Yinnon Ezra's article in the Hampshire Chronicle was helpful and he summarised the differences which seem to be polarising around democracy of localism versus effective delivery of public services. So presented as an 'either/or' but actually what is really needed is a coming together, a 'both/and' Localism put simply for me is about 'people and places' 'both/and' apply again, and is best built on a strong sense of place, of identity and belonging. It's then an interesting question about identifying and valuing that sense of place and how best to plan, advocate, nurture and enhance it.

For me, that sense of place for Hampshire has always been about its rich geography and centres of population. Winchester itself has a long history at the heart of Hampshire, as the capital of Wessex and, even further back, of England at its birth. People have come together in Winchester over millennia, whether for commerce and trade, governance and religion, or more recently for retail, hospitality and its heritage. Its historic buildings and streets stand as testament to this past and current life. According to the BBC, the Telegraph, the Guardian, Mumsnet, or Google/AI, to name a few, Winchester is still considered as one of the best places in the country to live and visit, and an ideal place to call home. However, as we all know it could be better still. There is real pressure on housing, particularly affordable homes in the city, and the ever present challenge of traffic/car movement across Winchester and particular pressure in the centre of the city.

There are currently three things running alongside the local government review which make this a good time to focus again on Winchester's sense of place and how best to plan for the future in the city for all. These are the A34/M3 junction improvements (we are told this work will unlock the opportunity for access and traffic improvements for the city), the local plan enquiry and revision next year which will impact particularly on housing, and the development of two key city centre sites,

Station Approach and Central Winchester Regeneration areas, which include the existing train and bus stations, both of which are at early design stages.

The timing of these is such that they will not be completed for a number of years and the Trust is now starting to become more proactive for Winchester by looking at the current access and movement issues which are fundamental to making things better across the city*. With others we will be looking at how this could best be done and what 'good should look like', building on our previous work summarised in our Vision for Winchester. Later this year we intend to share a proposal of how this will enable us to proceed with an approach that can support our vision of a future Winchester that continues its rich legacy.

I have overshot the word count for this edition so my thoughts about the city's landscape setting will come in the next edition. Please do get in touch in the meantime if you have ideas you would like to share as we start to put some shape to a future plan for Winchester.

Bob Wallbridge

**The Trust's AGM this year will feature guest speaker Richard Lewis, a strategic transport and town planner, who will present his vision of a movement strategy for Winchester.*

Details of the AGM are in the papers enclosed with this issue of TrustNews.

Local Plan 2020-2040 - TrustNews Sep 25

As we await the inspector's report, John Beveridge has an update.

After the public examination of the Local Plan finished in June, we have entered a period of waiting for the Inspector to consider all the written and oral evidence produced and then write her report. This will be sent to the City Council who will publish it later this year, probably sometime from September onwards.

The Inspector's primary task is to consider if the Plan is sound or unsound as defined by the government's National Planning Policy Framework. It is very unlikely at this late stage to be found wholly unsound and require a fundamental revision but it is possible she may require amendments to be made to make it sound. The area where this could be needed is the amount of land allocated for housing development. Since the end of the public examination, the inspector has asked for further representations to be made about the starting date for the 20 year plan period. The City Council has proposed 2020 but the developers have argued for later dates up to 2024, and if the Inspector agrees to this, it makes it more likely that she will require the City Council to find and allocate more land for housing to deliver the numbers needed.

The Trust will be particularly interested in seeing whether the Inspector gives any support to our wish to see a plan for the city of Winchester which the City Council has opposed for so long.

2025 Summer Walks Programme – TrustNews Sep 25

Jonathan Mardall rounds up a successful summer of walks

This year was pay-back time: last year, the first and last walks had to be cancelled due to rain (actually, more of a monsoon in the latter case). But this year, both these walks - Through the Private Part of Winnall Moors' and 'The Winchester Union Workhouse' - took place and both were a great success.

Part of the compelling attraction of these walks - in addition to the great pleasure of spending an hour with other like-minded members of the Trust and being guided round a part of Winchester on a - hopefully - sunny evening by a knowledgeable guide - is the nuggets of information that you learn along the way. Who knew, for example, that there are fossils encrusted into the Portland stone used in the Brooks; or that the Rising Sun pub (now closed) was once the prison for miscreants from St Giles fair; or that 24 St Thomas's Street has a Norman undercroft; or, finally, that the long front section of the Union Workhouse was called the Kempthorne wing, after the original architect, Sampson Kempthorne, who designed the format of a Y-shaped building inside a hexagon - the model for many workhouses.

Often too, the guide can conjure up the aura of the era: such as the lurch one felt in one's stomach on learning of the many corpses from the Black Death buried under our feet on the path leading from the square to the Cathedral; or the sense of almost being in the presence of William of Wykeham as we stood in the Muniments Room in Winchester College where he assembled the three foundation documents of the school in October 1382, where they remain to this day; or, again, when we stood, sheltering from the rain - yes, the season was not untroubled - under a Cathedral arch, listening to our guide read us lines in Anglo-Saxon about the lay-out of Nunnaminster, set 'between mill pond and willow tree'. These moments send a tingle down your spine.

The foregoing is - hopefully - a way of paying tribute to our wonderful guides, who are erudite and charming and give their time and expertise for free. And also to the walkers for their encouraging presence.

We hope to run a similar number of walks next year but with two probable changes: first, we hope to introduce online booking, as with the Talks; and, second, there is likely to be an increase in the £5 charge, which has been at that level for a number of years.

Below are photos of some of this years Summer Walks:-



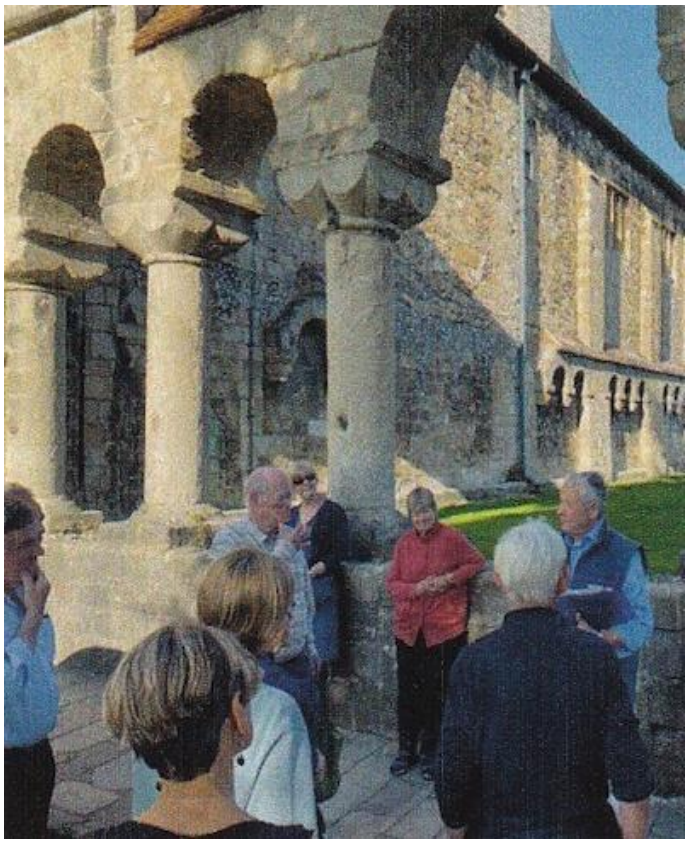
St Giles Hill Park Walk



St Giles Hill Park Walk



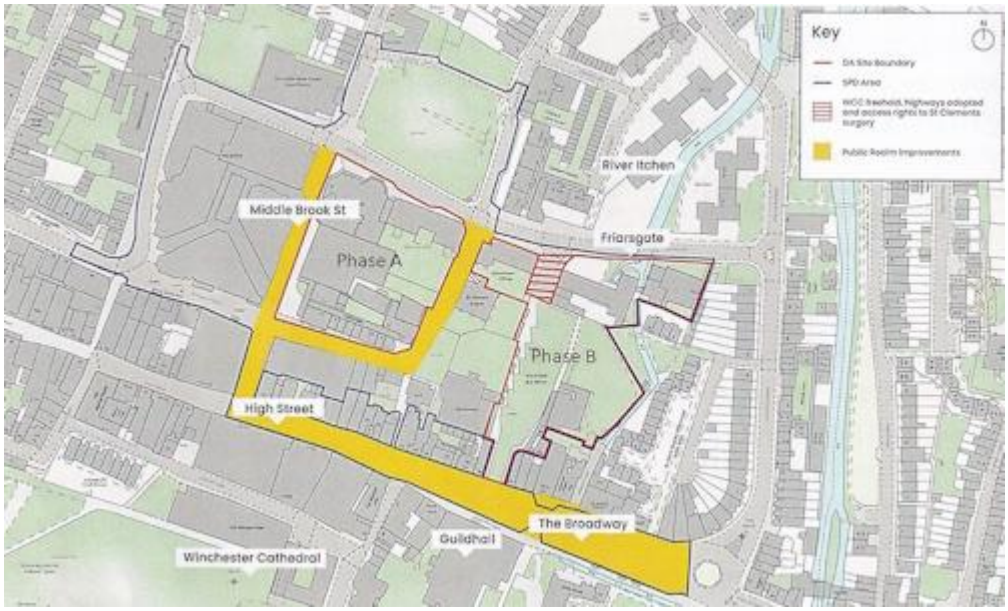
The Black Death in Winchester Walk



The Stones of Winchester Walk

Central Winchester Regeneration - TrustNews Sep 25

Liz Kessler on the latest



Map showing boundaries of the SPD (outlined in blue)
and the two smaller sites now being considered (in red).
The area in yellow represents public realm improvements. Map: Winchester City Council

Plans for the CWR area are proceeding. In July this year Jigsaw, the developers, organised a drop-in consultation event in the Guildhall at which they exhibited six panels, while members of the Jigsaw team were present to discuss issues.

The panels suggested that the project is far from what was envisaged when the SPD (Supplementary Planning Guidance) for the area was agreed back in 2018. The SPD has been widely recognised as an excellent document; it developed consensus and was greeted with considerable enthusiasm that the area would be developed in a sensitive and attractive way, fitting in with the wider area of central Winchester, a mixed use area with distinctively designed elements, not one homogenous development. What is now being considered is a reduced area; it is smaller, with the Jigsaw team, who were appointed back in March 2023, only considering two sites (see map showing the area of the SPD outlined in blue and the two sites now under consideration outlined in red). Phase A will be delivered first, and subsequently Phase B, the area covered by the bus station, once plans for the buses have been agreed and implemented.

Jigsaw's appointment has been welcomed; the team they have put together is a strong one with designers who have a good track record of both design and implementation as well as a commitment to engagement using a similar methodology to that used in the development of the SPD. Since their appointment they have met with large numbers of groups and individuals in Winchester and

beyond, and carried out workshops. In March this year, with the launch of their Development Delivery Programme, they announced that they would now be progressing at pace, while continuing dialogue with a number of groups, including CWT. The panels shown at the recent exhibition did not however reflect anticipated progress.

There is no overall plan for the SPD area, and what was indicated for the two sites under consideration was thin. Given the considerable amount of background work that has taken place, and the known qualities of the team, what was presented demonstrated little progress; it can only be assumed that there is much more that is not yet ready for public viewing and discussion. Housing was suggested for much of the sites but little more. The architectural practices working on the scheme (Henley Halebrown Architects, who are co-ordinating the overall design, Peter Barber Architects and East Architects, Landscape and Urban Design) all have good credentials, so we trust will develop excellent schemes.

The exhibition raised all sorts of questions about the overall approach: working on two sites only without an overall plan for the whole area, how and when the public realm - the Broadway in particular – would be delivered, what uses were planned in addition to housing and where they would be sited and the future for buses, as well as the pace of progress. According to the programme, there will be more public meetings in October, December and February before planning applications are submitted for the two sites in May 2026. There was no suggestion of how, or when, the rest of the area will be considered. There is merit in phasing implementation especially if it helps speed delivery and respond to change, but it needs to be carried out piece by piece as the name Jigsaw implies, but not piecemeal.

In the coming months the Trust is planning meetings with Jigsaw and WCC to better understand how plans are developing. The general economic situation in the country is, in all probability, having an impact but it does seem extraordinary that the future of the bus station, and facilities for buses, have not yet been resolved.

Local Government Regeneration - TrustNews Sep 2025

Patrick Davies with an analysis



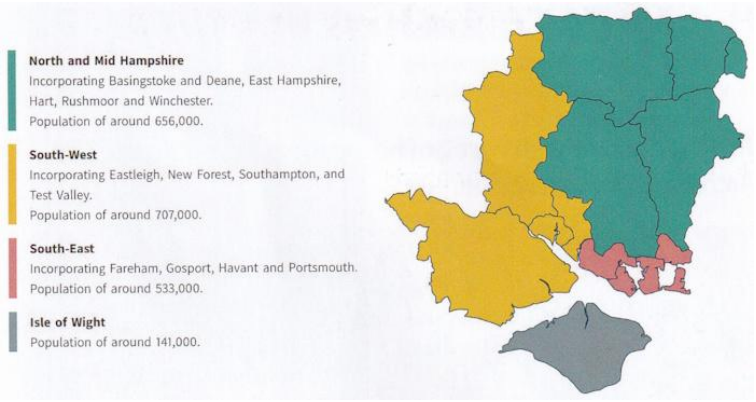
The three options being proposed by Winchester City Council and the 11 other councils. Maps: Winchester City Council

It's genuinely impossible to know where we really are with the future of local government in Winchester. We have just faced two rival "consultations" being undertaken by different combinations of the present local councils in Hampshire. Both these exercises have now ended.

In a nutshell Hampshire County Council, together with East Hampshire District Council, have proposed three new "Unitary" councils on the mainland, with the Isle of Wight remaining separate (see map on next page). Winchester City Council, with 11 other Councils, have consulted on three options for four mainland unitary councils (maps above).

The guidance for this exercise encouraged the maximum possible cooperation between the present Councils, based on the complete sharing of all the statistics from all of them. Sadly this joint working after many months broke down so we then faced these confusing and contradictory exercises.

It is difficult to be sure what exactly happens next. The national timetable requires all the present County, City and District Councils to put forward their firm proposals covering the whole of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight by 26th September. It will be up to the Government to assess the alternative ideas and make a final decision by March next year, following a possible further round of local consultations.



The proposal from Hampshire County Council and East Hampshire District Council. Map: Hampshire County Council

One of the guidelines in the current exercise is the use of the present District Councils as the main "building blocks" to form the larger new Unitary Councils, though there could be some adjustments if a proper and careful explanation is put forward to justify the changes. Personally I have always been concerned that for the past 50 years we have kept boundaries in several areas which have little relevance in the modern world, most notably in areas immediately adjoining the big Cities of Portsmouth and Southampton. I suspect many Winchester residents would be surprised that much of the new development in Waterlooville and the spectacular Portsdown Hill overlooking Portsmouth are still in Winchester City! It would surely be sensible to include these and other nearby areas in the new Portsmouth unitary Council.

The other unresolved complication is the status of the "Town area" of Winchester. The City Council has been considering since January whether to conduct a separate "Community Governance Review" involving a possible separate parish as a Town Council for the present "unparished" area. Personally I have grave reservations about this but I have been unable to persuade the City Council to let me see the papers they are looking at in private meetings of a working group of Councillors. Some neighbouring Parish Councils are being consulted but it seems that they may not be keen on being included in the exercise for financial reasons.

The way forward may become clearer in September.

Hubert De Cronin Hastings - TrustNews Sep 2025

Judith Martin with part 2 of her article on the editor of the Architectural Review



Hubert de Cronin Hastings

In the last TrustNews I wrote about the visionary Hubert de Cronin Hastings and his owner/editorship of the Architectural Review (AR) from the 1920s to the 1970s. I mentioned his puzzling, alternately charming and tyrannical, character. Now I reflect on whether it prevented him advancing his remarkably advanced views. Of necessity, this is a very brief account of a long, full and complex life - an account that I hope will eventually become a book.

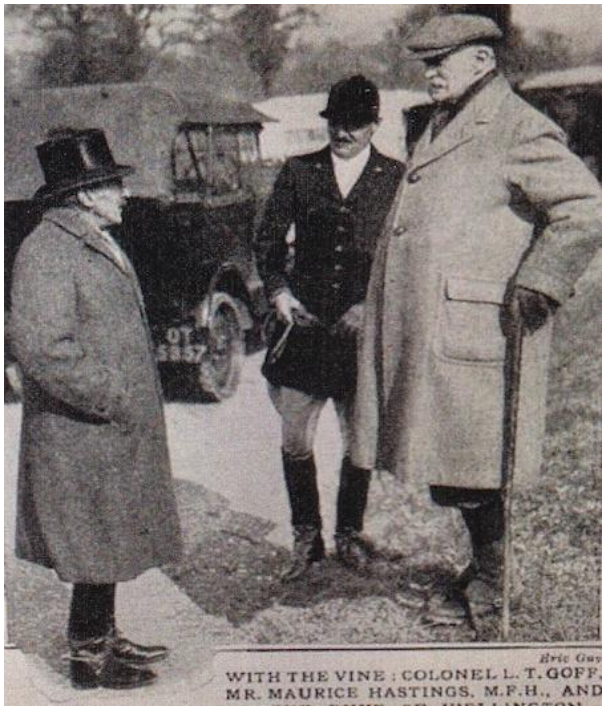
H de C was best man at John Betjeman's wedding, and they remained friends. Betjeman, who gave H de C the nickname 'Obscurity', wrote in the AR in 1974 on the occasion of H de C's retirement, "What I can never make out is his elusiveness. Can he have been overshadowed by brilliant older brothers? And the dominating personality of his father and the still more dominating personality of his grandfather ....?

When H de C died in December 1986, his obituary in the Architects' Journal, written by Colin Boyne, who had been editor between 1953 and 1970, said: "Why was [H de C's] behaviour tolerated? Partly because there was no other architectural magazine worth joining and partly, perhaps, from affection for a tough, sometimes brilliant mind and from the realisation that there was some flaw in his genes and in his upbringing that made him the way he was."

These two quotes are surely key.

And so to the influence of the 'brilliant older brothers', etc.

Grandfather Hastings, a non-conformist parson, died in 1937 at the age of 98, still speaking publicly and still concerned about the League of Nations and events in Spain. A good man who led a blameless life, the only adverse impact on H de C might have been his abstinence, which H de C did not share.



A photo from Tatler in the 1930s showing H De C's big brother Maurice

Father Percy so far is as shadowy as H de C although it was he who rose from advertising salesman to joint owner of the Architectural Press. It's possible he preferred to elide his origins.

There were two older brothers, Maurice and Graham. Maurice was described as a 'rich, capricious alcoholic', a Squire Mytton character. The money came from his American heiress wife, but his funeral was attended by 'his young and utterly devoted boyfriend' as well as his son (but not his three daughters).

Graham was certainly straight, appearing in court in 1927 as co-respondent in a divorce case: "Adultery at Pembroke Mews, Chapel St, Mayfair." Graham fled abroad and subsequently married an extremely interesting woman with whom he worked in BBC wartime monitoring.

Both Maurice and Graham were left out of father Percy's will.

In the Betjeman archive at the University of Victoria in Canada is a letter from Graham's wife congratulating Betjeman on being appointed Poet Laureate. It is in the form of a poem which perfectly sums up the family:

From the Cad, mad or bad,
in the grave surely a jeer

From Hugh the obscure
inarticulate cheer

from point naught naught [who must puzzlingly be the youngest brother, Alan]
one unconscious thought

from sad old Grarm
an alarm of charm

from me
to John B
for all the above
admiration and love

There is enough here to keep a psychologist occupied for many years. Would a less complicated family have made H de C better able to promote his remarkably advanced ideas? My research

---

Members' visit to Farley Chamberlayne and Merdon Castle - TrustNews Sep 2025

Sue Owers on a fascinating day


The beautiful interior of St John's with guide Hannah Boothman
(Photo courtesy of Geoffrey Sharman)

On a drizzly day in early June, 25 Trust members and friends met at the Wheatsheaf pub in Braishfield for lunch and we then made our way down the winding narrow lanes to the church at Farley Chamberlayne where we were given a fascinating introduction to the history and architecture of St John's Church by Hannah Boothman.

This unspoilt flint and rubble Norman church was built on the site of an earlier wooden Saxon church and despite its isolated position surrounded by farmland has had many connections to the great and the good over the centuries.

After the Conquest, the manor of Farley was given to William the Conqueror's Chamberlain, Herbert Fitz-Remi, which is why the village became known as Farley Chamberlayne. A visit to St John's Church is highly recommended. It is in a beautiful setting with fine views and is kept open every day.

We then made our way down even narrower lanes to the site of Merdon Castle, where we were met by the Home Farm Estate manager who had kindly consented to give us a tour of the ruins. Our guide was David Key who has spent years investigating the castle and its history. Happily for us a watery sun had broken through and the whole tour was a delight.

The castle is built inside a late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age hillfort which covers about 14 acres. The substantial ramparts and ditches are largely covered in mature woodland so it is not obvious from the surrounding area what a massive structure it was.

Inside the remains of the hillfort, a Norman Motte and Bailey castle was constructed in the late 1130s by Henri de Blois, Bishop of Winchester and brother to King Stephen.

When Henry acceded as Henry II in 1154, he was quick to reassert royal authority over the barons who had taken advantage of the chaos of 13 years of inconclusive warfare. Castles like Merdon which would enable nobles to defy the king were

quickly demolished. Merdon however, having been built by one Bishop of Winchester remained in use for another two hundred years or so. Its fortifications were destroyed and it was modified to serve as a Bishop's Palace - presumably his country retreat from Wolvesey Palace.



Merdon Castle after repairs-note the turf capping on the walls for protection
(Photo courtesy of Geoffrey Sharman)

As with so many similar structures, over time it gradually grew overgrown and ever more dilapidated.



The hatchments of Paulet St John and his wife.
Paulet St John built the Farley Mount monument in tribute to his horse "Beware Chalkpit" after they fell into a hidden chalkpit and survived.



The grave of Oliver St John,
direct descendant of Margaret Beauchamp, grandmother to Henry VII

In 1891 the famous Victorian writer Charlotte M Yonge related in her book Old Times at Otterbourne the legend that Oliver Cromwell sunk all his treasure in the great well at Merdon Castle, 300 feet deep. However when the well was cleared out in the mid - 1800s nothing was found but two old candlesticks, and a great number of pins, which had been thrown down because they caused curious reverberations in the great depth".

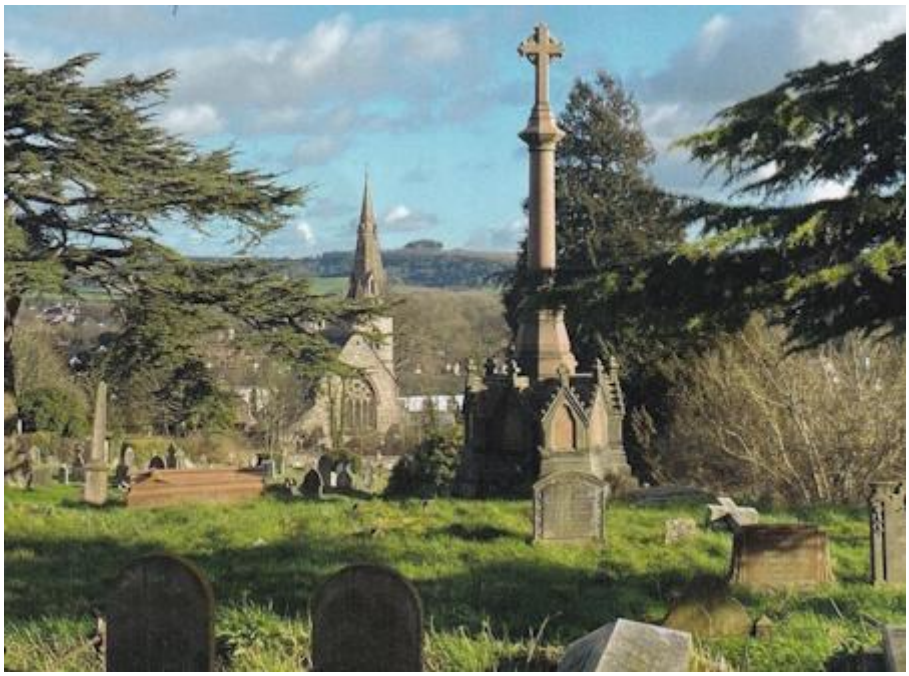
Unusually, the site had a new lease of life in the 20th century. At the outbreak of the First World War Sir George Cooper made the whole of Hursley Estate available to the War Office and tented encampments sprang up all over the estate, including inside the ramparts at Merdon. The same thing happened in the Second World War. Hursley Park was requisitioned for the designers and management producing Spitfires, and British and American troops preparing for D-Day were in huts on the Merdon Castle site.

By the late 20th century, the castle was in a very poor state, overgrown and disintegrating despite being a Scheduled Monument and on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register. When most of the Hursley Estate acreage was sold about 15 years ago, the new owners Home Farm were able to enter into partnership with Historic England and a grant together with contributions from the landowner has funded specialist repairs, repointing and capping the ruined walls and the well described by Charlotte Yonge to stabilise them and prevent further deterioration. Excitingly, the site is being used to train students in the survey technologies, archaeological field and building techniques and project management skills necessary for this kind of work. The stabilisation work was completed in late 2023 and the site is no longer on the Heritage at Risk Register.

Our thanks are due to the churchwardens of St John's, to Penny Lownds, Estate Manager at Home Farm and our guide David Keys.

Charles Wittam Benny 1794-1870: Mayor and entrepreneur - TrustNews Sep 2025

Richard Baker with the first part of another article in our occasional series on people that have shaped Winchester

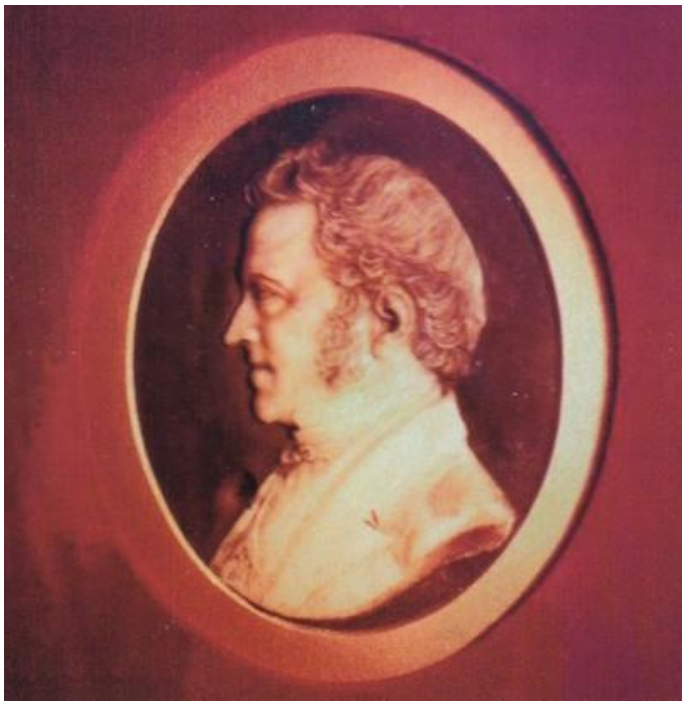


West Hill Cemetery (Photo City of Winchester Trust)

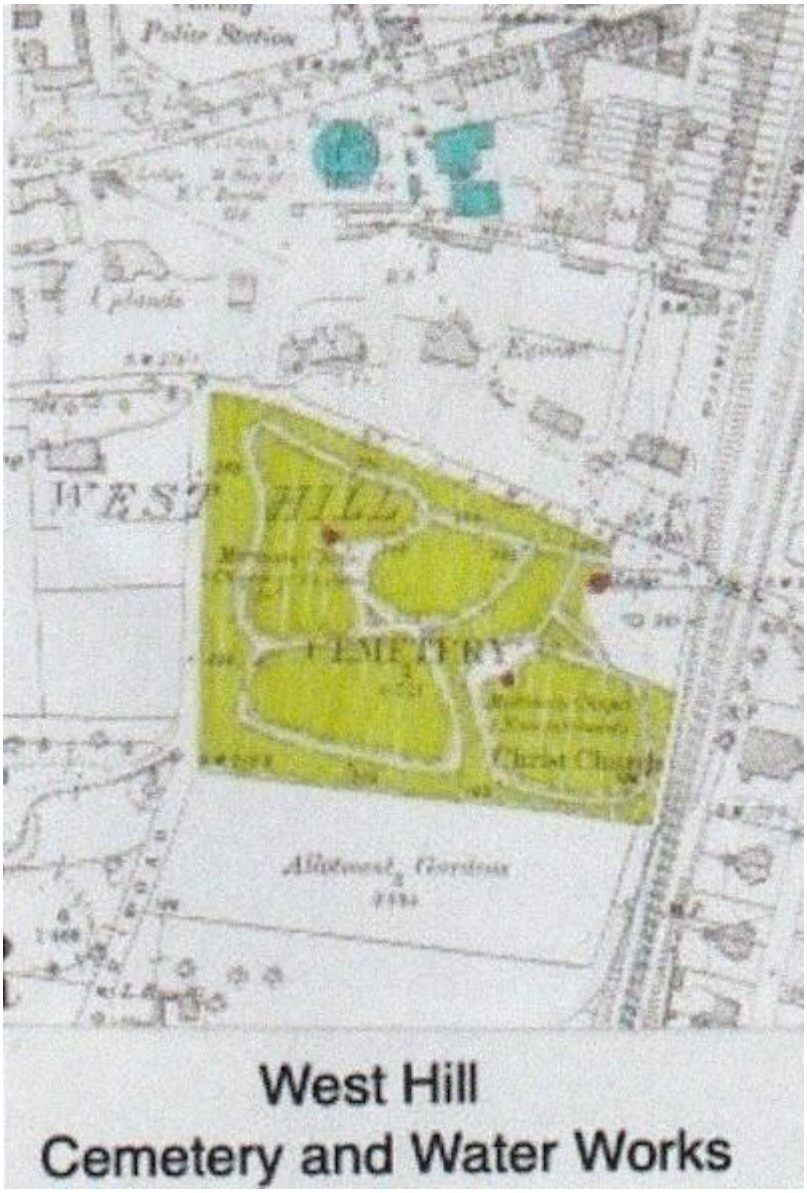
Charles Benny was a native of Chichester and had connections with Portsmouth, where his wife Charlotte came from. In the 1841 census for Winchester, he is listed as a grocer on the north side of the High Street, at no 107 between Eastgate and the City Mill. He had become an established figure in Winchester. He was elected as a Pavement Commissioner in 1823 and as a Freeman under the old Corporation in 1828 and was a City Bailiff from1829 to1830. He was heavily involved in the local

Conservative party. He was twice mayor of Winchester in 1833 and 1842. He retired from civic life in 1853.

He progressed from being a grocer to a property developer and an entrepreneur of civic schemes. In 1844 he bought Carlisle House in St Thomas Street from Miss Heathcote, who was in touch with Jane Austen at the end of her life and found her lodgings in College Street.



Charles Wittman Benny



Map of Westhill Cemetery and Water Works

It was around these periods of being mayor that Benny was instrumental in establishing infrastructure projects that helped shaped the development of Winchester. in the mid-nineteenth century the population of Winchester was growing and the city was getting full.

Graveyards of city churches were overcrowded and the Cathedral stopped new burials in 1840.

In 1839 the Winchester Cemetery Company was formed under the chair of Charles Benny. The Company raised capital of £5000 in £10 shares, to purchase 7 acres of land on the south side of what was then known as Barnes Lane, that today is St James Lane. In 1840 the Company was incorporated by Act of Parliament. The Company commissioned the architect Owen Carter, who designed the Corn Exchange in Jewry Street, now the ARC, to design a lodge, boundary walls and two chapels. One chapel was for Anglicans on consecrated ground, the other for non-conformists on non-consecrated ground.

Both chapels were demolished in the 1920s. The Lodge by the entrance in St James Lane remains. This Benny nsisted was occupied by the Keeper and a dog to protect the graves of recently buried people from the attentions of grave robbers. This provision was made against the sad event of the wife of his brother George Benny having died in childbirth. Soon after being interred at a cemetery in Bognor the body of both Mrs Benny and her child had been stolen from the grave for anatomical experimentation.

The author wishes to thank the Worthys Local History Group for providing access to their archive on Charles Benny.

Footer - TrustNews Sep 2025

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