

# **Changing Attitudes to Building Conservation in Devizes**

**A history and theory essay submitted by**

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## **Synopsis**

The preservation of buildings in Devizes was predominantly unpremeditated, caused by outward growth of the street plan and by economic downturns. Only later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century did the conservation movement have significant impact, with greater age value becoming apparent through instances where modernisation schemes by the county authority threatened treasured sites. The future of the town is currently being shaped by a balance between residents' appreciation of their cultural heritage supported by improving conservation legislation versus the impact of highway improvement schemes and decreasing grants for conservation projects.

Front Cover: 17<sup>th</sup> century cottages in New Park Street demolished in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the council's 'slum clearance scheme'.

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## Introduction

To understand how local attitudes toward preservation and the underlying principles have changed through time, this essay studies whether the driving values, primarily 'age-value', existed in Devizes prior to the conservation movement and how this value has changed over time [Appendix 1]. Publications and records covering the medieval through to the modern town are examined followed by discussion of present issues and trends.

## The Medieval Town to the 16<sup>th</sup> Century

The town grew within the pattern of castle ditches [Figure 1 and Appendix 2] and the principal concern would have been a building's utility value. Durability of a structure would have been as desirable then as it is now, not due to any

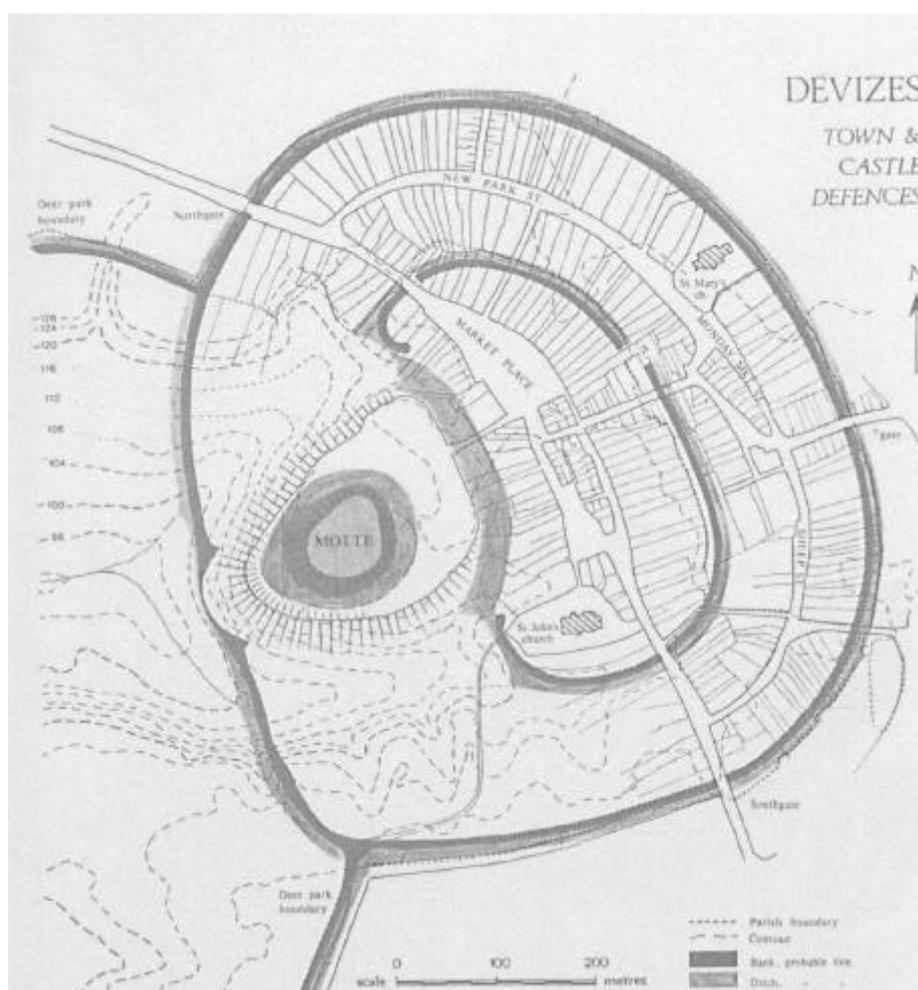


Figure 1. The medieval street plan developed within the castle ditches. From Haycock (1993).

emotional attachment, but rather the need to reduce the cost of repairs and avoid the expense of rebuilding [Appendix 3].<sup>1</sup> The medieval town's growth through to the 16<sup>th</sup> century encouraged the building along the existing street layout, but also resulted in infilling by the creation of new streets within the boundary of the existing settlement. No surviving records were found of attitudes towards rebuilding prior to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>2</sup>



Figure 2. The Town Hall of 1616 with colonnade and added portico. From Haycock (1997).

### 17<sup>th</sup> Century

The town's yarn hall was rebuilt during 1615-16. Borough commission records show the new design was by 'Andrews and other masons' and was repaired at various times throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>3</sup> In 1759, the hall is illustrated on a map with Tuscan colonnade at the open courtyard level and large Corinthian portico [Figure 2]. Records from 1680 do acknowledge the building as 'a very good Market House set on stone pillars', which illustrate the social and art values, but not historical or age values.<sup>4</sup>

### 18<sup>th</sup> Century Rebuilding

In 1724, the antiquarian William Stukeley found the buildings of Devizes to be 'old' and mainly of timber, yet since they were a

'good model' it made them 'tolerable'.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, most buildings at this time were still timber-framed and probably jettied in a manner still visible in St. John's Alley and St John's Street .<sup>6</sup> Their 'good model' suggests Stukeley recognised their social and use value, and the term 'tolerable' suggests they had no age-value.

In this period, it became fashionable to hide the timber framing by refacing. In the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century this was most economically achieved using local brick or by rendering. It was not until the 19<sup>th</sup> century that stone became readily available.

<sup>1</sup> Earl (1997), p.11.

<sup>2</sup> The absence of records before the 17th Century tells more of the limited surviving information than the lack of historical and age values.

<sup>3</sup> Wiltshire Record Office: G20/1/16, p.270.

<sup>4</sup> Haycock (2000), p.29.

<sup>5</sup> Pugh (2001), p.21.

<sup>6</sup> Crittall (1975), Vol. 10, p.233.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> Century industry was thriving in Devizes, bringing wealth to the town [Appendix 4]. Bath saw widespread demolition of earlier buildings due to urban planning whereas Devizes was adapted gently, with timber fronted buildings remaining alongside the splendour of Georgian façades. In 1803, the borough corporation commissioned the architect James Wyatt, not then known as 'The Destroyer', to draw up plans for enlargement of the vernacular Old Hall.<sup>7</sup> However, he promptly condemned it as,

'It is neither fit to undergo such alterations nor any alterations whatsoever. Most of the principal Timbers are decayed... Timbers which were connected and framed together (and which are necessary to be so for the preservation of the Building) are almost all separated from each other; & the whole in such a state.... to be in a very dangerous and alarming situation.'<sup>8</sup>

The corporation makes no comment about the value of its 187-year-old hall and, through unanimous conformity with Mr. Wyatt's opinion, it was subsequently demolished and rebuilt as the new 'Town Hall' from a design by Thomas Baldwin of Bath.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The written references to the Corporation's two hall sites changed with time and can be very confusing to the researcher or reader. The rebuilt 'Yarn Hall' in St John's Street became known as the 'Old Hall' during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The town's new building in Wine Street, initially referred to as the 'New Hall', became known as the 'Guildhall'. The rebuilt 'Old Hall' was also referred to as the 'New Hall' before becoming known simply as the 'Town Hall'.

<sup>8</sup> Cunnington (1926) Vol. 1, p.17.

<sup>9</sup> Pugh (2001), p.152.

## 19th Century

By the time the building of the Guildhall in Wine Street was completed for the corporation they had decided to remain in their rebuilt town hall and to adapt and lease out the Guildhall,

‘[With] an unexpected regard for amenities, the corporation resolved to preserve its external appearance’.<sup>10</sup>

As a new building, this could not be a reference to an age- or historic-value, rather an art value. It also represents the first clear local reference to a value other than utility or social. The corporation were obviously pleased with their new hall, despite the four windows and central column in the façade creating a naive duality [Figure 3].<sup>11</sup>



Figure 3. The 19<sup>th</sup> Century Guildhall in Wine Street. The new town hall can be seen in the distance.

The Improvements Commission, by the passing of the Improvements Act in 1825, were empowered to make significant changes, including: modification of doors and gates so they open inwards; bow windows, signs and rail grates to be cleared for carriages and pedestrians; and powers to widen or alter ‘narrow

<sup>10</sup> Cunnington (1926), Vol. 2, p.233.

<sup>11</sup> Clifton-Taylor (1984), p.161.

parts', including the authority to 'take down any buildings affecting the improvements'.<sup>12</sup> One such change was to allow construction at the end of St John's Alley, thereby stopping thoroughfare to Wine Street. This turned the alley into a backwater and had the unintentional effect of protecting the buildings from street widening.<sup>13</sup> The Act also banned the use and repair of thatch until the building 'burns down'. Given that fire was their expected fate, perhaps the commission inadvertently ensured the preservation these buildings by forcing their owners to re-roof using tile and slate. This modernisation is recorded by the 'National Commercial Directory' of 1831, stating that Devizes,

'for the most part contains marks of considerable antiquity, many of the houses being built of timber and plaster, but several of the streets have many handsome modern habitations. [...] Of late years its general appearance has been materially improved.'<sup>14</sup>

and also by Robson's Commercial Directory of 1836,

'[Devizes] is of uncertain antiquity, now rapidly rising in extent and comparative opulence; and handsome modern dwellings are fast displacing the venerable and respectable-looking timber-built houses which, not long since, were very numerous.'<sup>15</sup>

The value of the timber buildings therefore remained utilitarian and the modernisation applauded, yet it appears that 'venerable' and 'respectable-looking' might have been signifying an increasing appreciation and age-value of the vernacular.

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<sup>12</sup> Wiltshire Archaeological Museum, "Acts of Parliament, Wiltshire – roads, enclosures, municipal and general", pp.28-52.

<sup>13</sup> Pugh (2001), p.29.

<sup>14</sup> Wiltshire Notes and Queries (1896), pp.387-392.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. pp.388-389.

The well-connected residents continued to seek the advice of nationally-acclaimed architects for the care of their buildings. Mirroring the advice sought from James Wyatt 'the destroyer' half a century before, the church of St John was to receive a visit from 'the scrapers': two restorations dramatically changed the building with significant loss of historic features. Firstly, in 1844, the reredos, nave ceiling and stone spirelet were removed and imitation 12<sup>th</sup> century work added. Then, in the 1850's, with what we might now see as unfortunate timing, it was discovered that distortion of the aisle had worsened and professional advice was sought. The London architect William Slater was commissioned to repair the church and, with guidance from (Sir) Gilbert Scott, St John's was 'restored' during 1862-3. This included rebuilding the west wall to match the 15<sup>th</sup> style, in the process causing much loss of 12<sup>th</sup> century work.<sup>16</sup> The nave roof was given 'a more appropriate' pitch, the west gallery demolished and the interior walls 'scraped'.

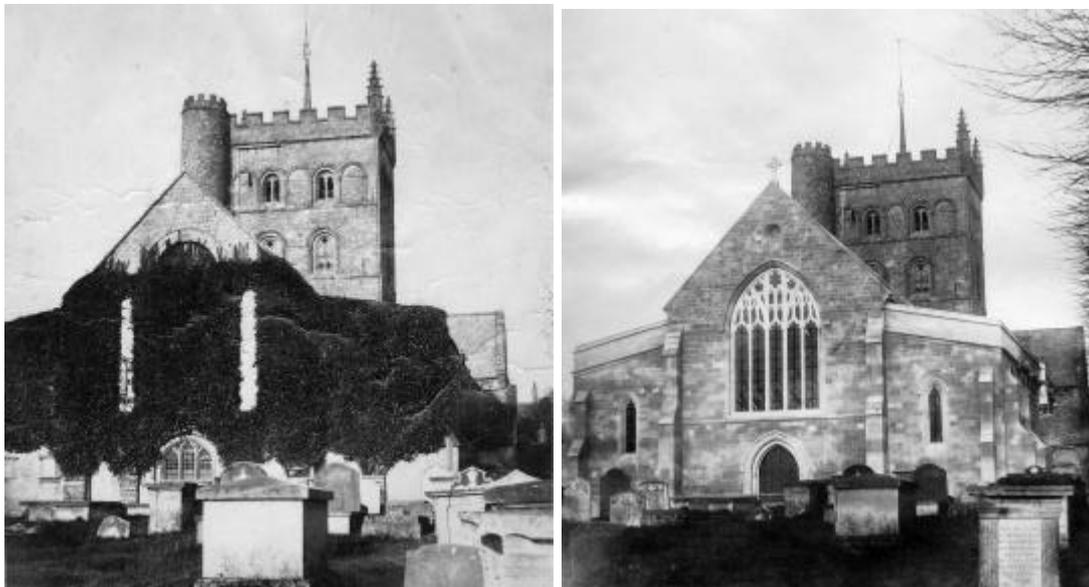


Figure 4. Romanesque west windows of St John's Church (left) were replaced during the 'restoration' of 1862-3 (right).

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<sup>16</sup> Pugh, p.185-186.

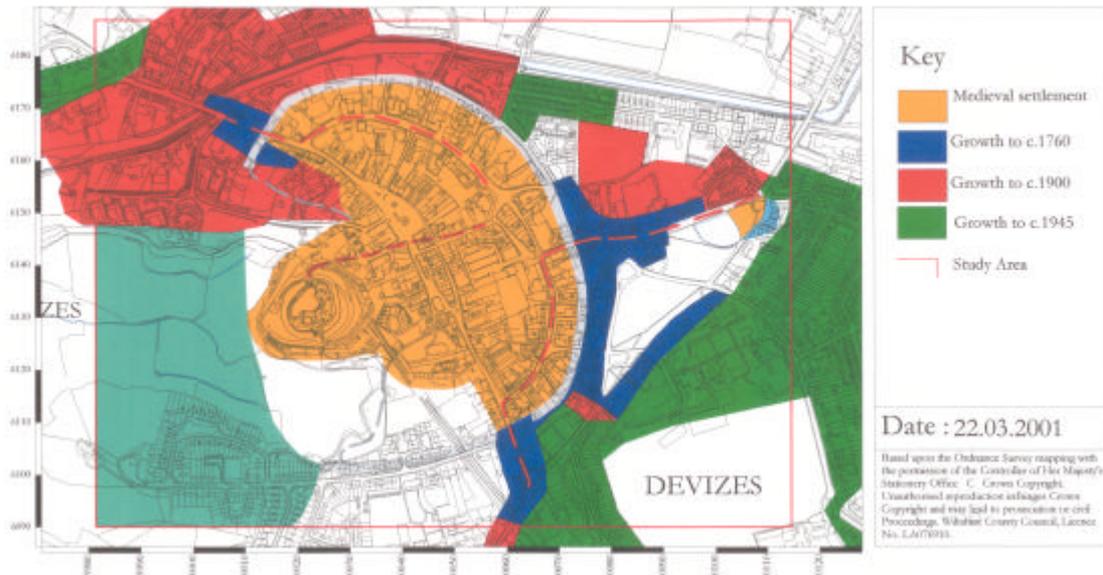


Figure 5. Repeated outward expansions of the town avoided the replacement of many older buildings. From Archaeology Service (2003).

In the latter half of the century industrial progress in Devizes subsided, protecting the Georgian town from gothic rebuilding in a similar manner that was to protect Georgian Bath [Appendix 5].<sup>17</sup> Additionally, most industrial expansion was on green land to the west, protecting much that had already been built against redevelopment [Figure 5].

Infilling with eighteenth and nineteenth century tenements in courts and along alleys between the medieval streets enabled many existing houses to be preserved, at least until the turmoil of the twentieth century. However, with the success of commercialism in Devizes, the situation in the shopping centre was quite different with many old buildings in The Brittox being replaced.<sup>18</sup>

The changes of the nineteenth century were summarised in a journal of 1895, commenting on the above directory descriptions,<sup>19</sup>

These improvements have robbed the town of much of its picturesque appearance, and it may be doubted in point of façade, the “handsome modern dwellings” spoken of in the Directory are usually anything like so beautiful or even so handsome as the “venerable and respectable-looking timber-built houses” which they replaced.’

Therefore, by the end of the century, the picturesque movement had instilled an age and aesthetic value for the vernacular houses of Devizes, the

<sup>17</sup> Bradby (1985), p102.

<sup>18</sup> Archaeology Service (2003).

<sup>19</sup> “The Old House in Wine Street Alley” (1895), p.389. [author unknown].

significance becoming comparable with the social and historic values of the more recent Georgian architecture.



Figure 6. Old houses and tenements in Sheep Street were demolished as part of the slum clearance scheme and replaced by municipal buildings.

## 20<sup>th</sup> Century

The break up of the surrounding large estates provided new land for the ever-increasing demand for suburbs.<sup>20</sup> In the 1930's the borough council condemned much of the inner town housing as 'slums' wishing to, 'sweep away the rabbit warren of courts and alleys' they commenced clearing the tenements.<sup>21</sup>

**Slum clearance move**  
 The Medical Officer of Health announced drastic proposals for slum clearance in Devizes. It was agreed that the following properties should be demolished; 1 and 2 Gable Court, 1 and 2 Waites Court and 60-61 New Park Street. The following properties are to be improved: Wharf Court, Short Street, Whitlock's Court, Vale's Place, Plank's Place and Carnal's Court.

Figure 7. In 1934 modernisation was often driven by the medical profession (WBR: 'Devizes – general')

These evaluations were based not on the inspections of building professionals, but the Medical Officer of Health [Figure 7] and what we now know is that many of these buildings could have been successfully modernised. However, 'modernism', with its yearning to clear and rebuild, dominated council attitude in the twentieth century, with clearance continuing up to the 1970's under the precept that the buildings were 'technically sub-standard'.<sup>22</sup> This stance of the authorities is typified by the Chamber of Commerce in their 1945 proposal to replace housing in Sheep Street with a bus terminus and in that they saw the scheduled castle as, 'largely a sham and of little use'.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Haycock (2000), p.88.

<sup>21</sup> Wiltshire Archaeological Museum, *Cuttings*, Vol. C, p.56

<sup>22</sup> 'Modernism' and its 20th century impact are reviewed by Hunter (2003), pp. viii – ix.

<sup>23</sup> Devizes & District Chamber of Commerce (1945), 'The Post War Planning of Devizes'. The lack of value expressed by the Chamber of Commerce was due to the castle being predominantly a 19<sup>th</sup> Century building. The 12<sup>th</sup> Century castle had been destroyed in the Civil War by Cromwell. Today, the site still includes 12<sup>th</sup> Century ruins and the base of one of two windmills erected in the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

The splendour of the Market Place was more widely appreciated, now clearly illustrating its historic and age values,

'Taking coffee and a bun over the confectioner's, next door but two to W.H. Smith & Son, while the east wind blows across the Market Place, one looks out of the window on to a rarity: an English town that has not been spoiled and has not been preserved artificially. ...Its chief blessings ... are its good minor architecture...'.<sup>24</sup>

The lack of regard by authorities for historical spaces in post-war years is illustrated by the Devizes Trades Council 1953 proposal to fill the Crammer, a large pond by The Green, to make way for a much-needed bus terminus.<sup>25</sup> At this time, legislation had not yet addressed conservation areas, but no doubt it was acts such as these that were to build a case for such legislation being introduced.



Figure 8. The authorities' attitude towards The Crammer increased public concern for conservation.

The 1944 and 1947 Town & Country Planning Acts resulted in the finest Devizes buildings being listed. In 1954, the Devizes Gazette reported that, 'Some of the most unlikely houses are to be preserved'.<sup>26</sup> In the same year, the council proposed building a relief road from Monday Market Street,

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<sup>24</sup> Piper (1948), p.125.

<sup>25</sup> Wiltshire Archaeological Museum, *Cuttings*, Vol C, p.65

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, p. 76.

requiring the demolition of Great Porch – a 15<sup>th</sup> century timber framed building.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps it was because of unsympathetic alteration and grime that they did not get the public respect they deserved.

Whilst the post-war planning was being carried out to great effect, opinion outside the county council gradually changed. A pivotal point came in 1967, not due to any demolition, but because of minor construction works. The council started to build a small retaining wall around the perimeter of The Crammer but this outraged residents [Figure 8]. A petition was created and the wall removed, but this had seeded the formation of the Trust for Devizes, a volunteer group of local residents that remained as a watchdog of authority activities. This council upon Devizes was what the demolition of the Euston Arch was to London – eyes had been opened and the authorities were now being observed.

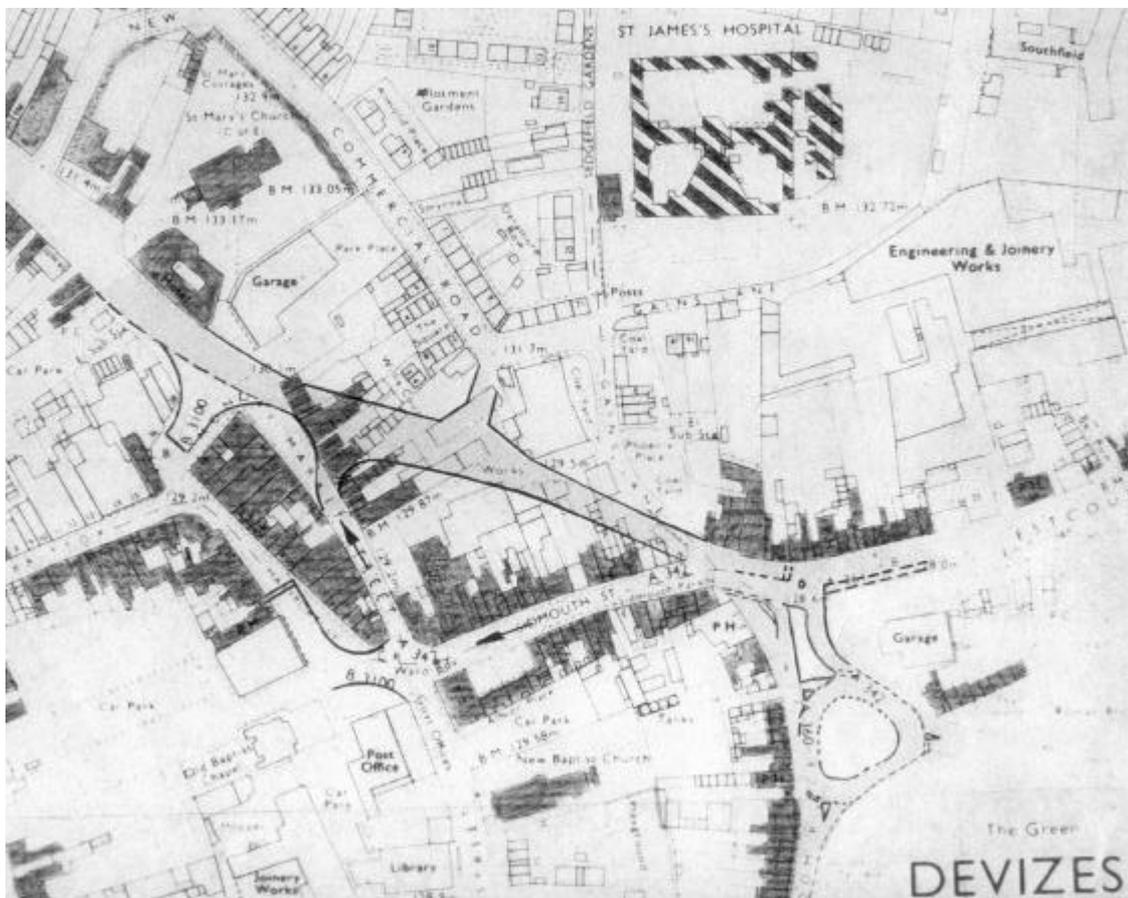


Figure 9. The proposed relief road required demolition of Great Porch and other listed buildings (shown as shaded).

<sup>27</sup> Wiltshire Archaeological Museum, *Cuttings*, Vol. C, p.58. The council had already demolished two 16<sup>th</sup> century cross wings of Great Porch in 1934 as part of its 'slum clearance scheme'. The building was subsequently saved – See Page 16.

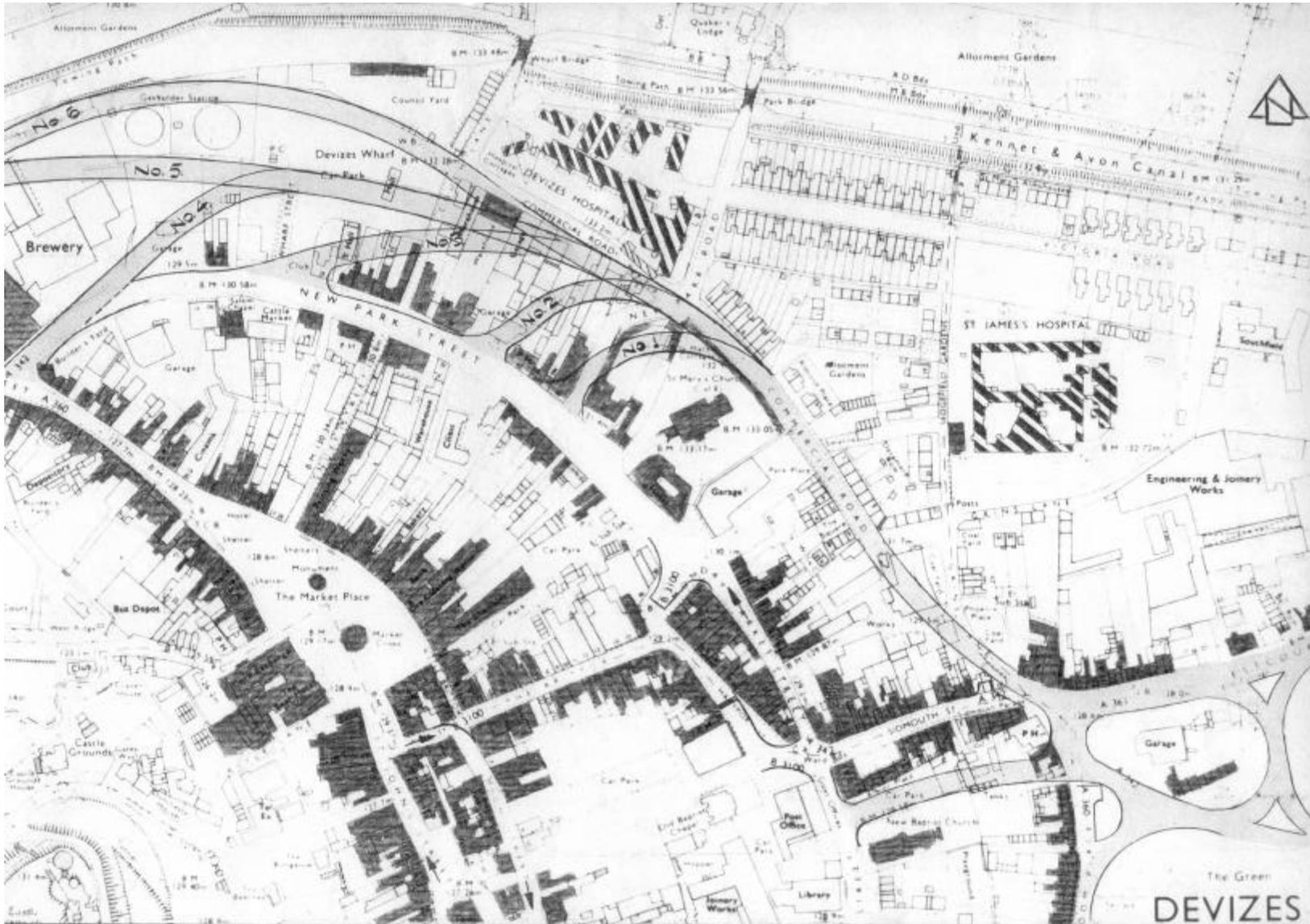


Figure 10. The council's alternative relief road proposals required demolition of other listed buildings and impact to The Crammer and The Green.

The environment entering the 1970s was one of commercial decline, prospective building and the county council continuing to have little priority for the conservation of historic buildings. It seems they had the same attitude of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Improvement Commission with the power to 'take down any buildings affecting the improvements'. Wiltshire County Council's proposal for an 'inner relief road', including the demolition of Great Porch, was finally submitted to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government [Figure 9]. This was to be the Trust for Devizes' next campaign. Prior to a public enquiry regarding the demolition, the owner of Great Porch had been 'restoring' the building, including the removal of brick infill to open the 'imposing entrance' and replaced two 'ugly windows' with 'more suitable' items. It is not clear how much historic fabric was lost in the 'restoration', but it can now be questioned whether the owner's work of restoring the appearance helped the public associate a greater age-value. There was a general appreciation growing, as the owner observed, 'Even in the last few years, an increasing number of people are beginning to realise the need to preserve some of the



Figure 11. Great Porch saved from demolition. Adjacent buildings had already been cleared, replaced first by a garage and then by the relief road.

irreplaceable relics of our heritage'.<sup>28</sup> The campaign was also assisted in 1970 by the 1967 Civic Amenities Act which enabled this inner part of Devizes to be designated a conservation area.<sup>29</sup> As a result, Great Porch and surrounding historic buildings were listed and the council instructed to consider alternative routes for their road [Figure 10 and Figure 11].<sup>30</sup> In addition to the refusal of permission, the Secretary of State for the Environment observed,

'Certain material factors have changed since the town map was approved in 1964. There has been a change in emphasis in recent years on preserving buildings of historic interest and conservation generally.'<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Wiltshire Archaeological Museum, *Cuttings*, Vol C. p.58.

<sup>29</sup> The subsequent survey by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government also doubled the number of listed buildings in the town.

<sup>30</sup> In the 1990's the council finally built the relief road via Gains Lane which avoided Great Porch.

<sup>31</sup> Wiltshire Archaeological Museum, *Cuttings*, Vol. 27. p.62.

A further test of conservation legislation came in 1973 from a commercial owner of Brownston House, a Grade I listed property, seeking approval for the demolition of wing. This brought on mighty opposition by conservation organisations such as The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, The Georgian Group and the Trust for Devizes. The level of interest and the subsequent refusal of consent is a good illustration of the maturity of the conservation movement by this time and the effectiveness of legislation in such straightforward situations.



Figure 12. Intentional neglect of listed buildings in St John's alley by commercial developers in the 1970s, and now after conservation through government grants.

By the 1970's the use of historic buildings in Devizes as commercial property was waning, but the owners, many of them in the established construction industry, held on to them with an eye to redevelopment. Their plans were generally not to re-use the buildings, but to seek consent to demolish and replace. St John's Alley, remaining intact due to its closure after the 1825 Improvements Act, was at the time destined for such treatment. However, through government grants and assistance from the Trust for Devizes, the alley was improved to make it, 'a spectacle rather than a disgrace' [Figure 12].<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Wiltshire Archaeological Museum, Trust for Devizes newsletters, Minutes, April 1968.



Figure 13. An adaptive re-use policy by Kennet District Council saved these almshouses from slum clearance.

A saviour of conservation in Devizes came in 1974 with the formation of Kennet District Council. It might be cynical to suggest that being located in Devizes increased their awareness of local issues, but they duly adopted conservation policies that would still be reasonably regarded today.<sup>33</sup> Their conservation and re-use policy was demonstrated by their listing and restoration of the almshouses near Hare & Hounds Street and subsequently proved that re-use is often more cost-effective than rebuilding. In 1978, Kennet District Council started redevelopment of the redundant Wharfside bonded warehouse buildings, and restoration of the canal also began.

With building conservation in the forefront of public concern, a Devizes Town Scheme set up under the Devizes Historic Buildings Joint Committee set about restoring neglected historic buildings. It was funded by local councils, English Heritage and government grants and, in the following twenty years, it was to complete restoration of more than one hundred buildings.

Opinion in the 1980s was to develop further. In 1985, the commended author Edward Bradby states in 'The Book of Devizes' that,

'Clearance of some of the old courts and alleys in the town centre has enabled sensible provision to be made for car parking, especially in the areas of New Park Street and The Nursery', and, 'The town has fine modern library buildings ... and the police station in New Park Street adds distinction to [the town's] architecture'.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Bradby (1985), p.127 observes that the location of Kennet D.C. may help, 'ensure the town's needs are not overlooked'.

<sup>34</sup> Bradby (1985), p.126.

Now, just eighteen years later, it is very unlikely that clearance of terraces to make way for a car park would be approved and that the 'fine modern buildings' are presently considered of less architectural value than the historic buildings they replaced [Figure 14].



Figure 14. A few remaining tenements. Having avoided the clearance scheme and with updated services, they now create an attractive close behind Bridewell Street.

In 1985, Longs Buildings, formerly Anstie's tobacco and snuff factory and possibly one of the most important west country industrial buildings, were in danger of collapse due to decay and intentional neglect by prospective developer owners. In the mid 1990's, after an emergency works order was issued by Kennet District Council to save the structure, new owners completed a sensitive change of use to 27 flats through a grant-aided project. The council also battled with the 'updating' of many shop-fronts. Unfortunately, in a time of recession, permission by the Planning Committee was often granted due to the needs of commercialism in spite of opposition by the conservation office.

With the district council performing well as the primary conservation authority, attention of The Trust for Devizes moved to the finer details of conservation including shop signs, litter, cleaning and restoration of many old buildings.



Figure 15. County highways authority did not require consent prior to erecting this bus shelter in front of the Grade II\* listed Parnella House.

### The 21st century

An increasingly trend threatening the setting of historic buildings in Devizes is development, not by private owners and companies, but by the county council. Current legislation does not mandate that the authority consult conservation officers on proposed highways works within a conservation area or in the vicinity of a listed building. Examples include the placement of the blue bus shelter now obscuring the Grade II\* Parnella House in the Market Place [Figure 15], increasingly abundance of road signage around The Green and proposals for a mini-roundabout and traffic-calming along Long Street [Figure 16].



Figure 16. The view along Long Street has remained principally unchanged since the 18<sup>th</sup> century and would be damaged by traffic-calming apparatus.

Devizes still has its fair share of buildings at risk. The Assizes Courts, a regency building designed in 1835 by Thomas Wyatt, has been empty for seventeen years as various adaptive-use proposals have failed simply because they proved to be uneconomic for the developers. As re-use is seen as vital to the survival of such a building, listed building consent has been flexible, illustrated by the Georgian Group's statement,

'The application proposes significant and regrettable alterations to the listed building. However, it is acknowledged that this level of intervention is perhaps justified by the perilous state of the building. If this is the only way of securing a future for the building, then no objections are raised.'<sup>35</sup>

The recent concerns over the fragility of the economy also continue to take their toll on conservation. In a press article beginning, 'Commerce won over conservation', owners of two shops in The Brittox were granted permission by councillors against recommendations of the conservation officer to demolish a seventeenth century staircase, chimney breast dated 1642 and oak panelling.<sup>36</sup> Uncertainty is also steadily increasing due to decreasing grants from central government: the Devizes Historic Building Joint Committee has been dissolved due to lack of funding and some repair grants, such as for thatching, have ceased. The abandonment by Wiltshire County Council of a conservation role in 1999 and the run down of the Devizes Town Scheme during 2002 is, perhaps, evidence of conservation in the town having passed its peak.



Figure 17. The age-value model predicts that if this 1930's building avoids demolition, then it will eventually be respected.

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<sup>35</sup> Crooks (2002), p.5.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, 12 July 2001, p.9.

For the most part, the legislative system, supplemented by conservation organisations, is ensuring the built heritage of Devizes is being preserved for future generations, but examples exist where the correct approach is still open to debate. A contentious example is the 'eyesore' in the Market Place on the corner of Snuff Street [Figure 17], a 1930's shop viewed by Kennet District Council as,

'an unattractive building on an important corner site, a site that was formerly occupied by an attractive three storey brick and stone building under a pitched roof.'<sup>37</sup>

Will today's unattractive 20<sup>th</sup> century building be more valued in the future? Will value be solely age-related, or will we attribute an increasing historic value to the vernacular buildings of this period? Time will tell as to whether we have learned from past mistakes or whether such failings are perpetual.

### **The Development of Age Value**

Records therefore indicate that age value in Devizes did pre-exist the conservation movement, but was applicable only to the 'polite architecture' (i.e. the non-vernacular buildings) of the town.<sup>38</sup> So the vernacular 'old hall' that was 187 years old in 1803 had little value and was swiftly demolished. Repeated replacement of the less durable vernacular cottages and small houses was expected and therefore a question of their age value never arose. Only through the picturesque movement did the aesthetics of decay become appreciated in Devizes at the end of the nineteenth century, and only more recently have conservation methods improved the longevity of the vernacular that enables us to attribute ever-increasing age value to these buildings.

### **Conclusion**

The primary value driving the development and redevelopments of Devizes was utility value. A lack of regard for the elderly vernacular buildings shows that, prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, age-value was limited to polite architecture. During the 1900's, significant changes arising from council slum-clearance schemes, combined with increasing public awareness of historic building value and improving conservation legislation, shaped the course of building preservation in the town.

In comparison with conservation law of the early- and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the current legislative framework has become increasingly effective in preserving the historic market town. However, specific weaknesses in the law enable the county highways authority to make changes in sensitive areas without consultation with district conservation office, local civic trusts and conservation organisations. With a review of listed building legislation in progress, it will be interesting to observe how the new guidelines will affect the conservation of buildings in Devizes.

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<sup>37</sup> Kennet District Council (2002).

<sup>38</sup> 'Polite Architecture' is described by Brunskill (1971), p.27.

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## Appendix 1: Cultural Significance and Age Value

Today, the meanings of conservation and preservation are sufficiently well defined as to be useful guides in the majority of circumstances. They are based on the need to retain cultural significance of a building, including aesthetic, historic, social and spiritual values, and these may apply to past, present or future generations.<sup>40</sup> Historic value, Alois Riegl suggested, arose from the Renaissance of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and therefore might be evident

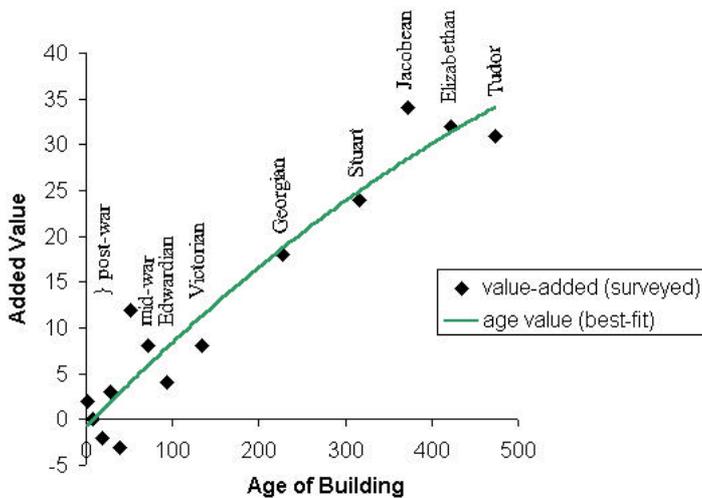


Figure 18. 'Age-Value' versus Building Age.<sup>39</sup>

during post-medieval development of Devises. He also stated that age-value – the aesthetic appreciation of the effects of decay – stems from ideas developed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but is primarily a 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon.<sup>41</sup>

The historic value of a building is often realised by recognition of its architectural style and the superimposed effects of decay are manifested as age-value.<sup>42</sup> Figure 18 shows the present relation between age-value and building age:

<sup>39</sup> The graph shows the premium paid for buildings of various styles and is independent of other variables such as size, associated land and its location. Data is from survey results published in English Heritage (2003).

<sup>40</sup> These values have been taken from Australia ICOMOS (1988), Article 1.1. Holtorf (2003) describes how the cultural significance of a building as a monument may be either 'intentional' or 'unintentional', as described at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Alois Riegl. In the context of a market town, nearly all preserved vernacular buildings are therefore unintentional monuments and many civic buildings were intentional monuments based on their social and aesthetic values.

<sup>41</sup> Holtorf (2003). It appears Riegl was inferring that age-value remained in the realms of 'polite society' until its appreciation spread to the middle classes during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The term 'polite society' is defined by Brunskill (1971), p.27.

<sup>42</sup> Ruskin (1880), pp.189-190 describes how age-value thrives of historic decay through his definition of the picturesque as 'parasitical sublimity'.

the premise is that there is a linear relationship as shown by the graph and that, by definition, the age-value of a new building shall be zero.<sup>43</sup>

Local records indicate that age value did pre-exist the conservation movement, but was applicable only to the 'polite architecture' of Devizes. Repeated replacement of the less durable vernacular cottages and small houses was expected and therefore a question of their age value never arose. Only through the picturesque movement did the aesthetics of decay become appreciated in Devizes at the end of the nineteenth century, and only more recently have conservation methods improved the longevity of the vernacular that enables us to attribute ever-increasing age value to these buildings.

Based on these findings and for the model of Figure 18 to remain valid, a constraint must be added that limits its use prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century to polite architecture.

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<sup>43</sup> The divergence from the theoretical line may be explained as modulation caused by current preference for particular architectural styles – the art value – and the ease of adapting to modern requirements – the 'utility value'.

## Appendix 2: Early History

Devizes castle was established by the 12<sup>th</sup> century and fortified with concentric ditches beyond the motte. The medieval town grew within the oval pattern of these ditches, with primary gates to north and south, and a secondary gate to the east.<sup>44</sup> The town's growth was driven by trade, and its strength increased by the grant of a merchant guild and market by 1228.<sup>45</sup> The 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries saw increasing diversity of industries coming to Devizes.<sup>46</sup> By the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Devizes' forte was cloth and weaving.<sup>47</sup> This encouraged the building along the existing street layout, but also resulted in infilling by the creation of new streets within the boundary of the existing settlement. Such a street was probably Morris' Lane, likely to have been defined when Henry Morris had a weaving workshop there.<sup>48</sup>

Continued growth in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries came from new markets, especially wool, and later tobacco, snuff and the brewery industry.<sup>49</sup> These trades brought new wealth to the town, and as a result, fashionable buildings were built. Many of these buildings replaced existing ones, but many timber-framed buildings were modernised with new facades and interiors. Further trades came to Devizes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, notably agricultural engineering and construction firms. This pushed the growth beyond the outer ditch, and therefore left the inner town intact. By this time Devizes had also become a vibrant commercial centre for the region with shops and several markets.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Pugh (2001), p.13.

<sup>45</sup> Pugh (2001), p.80.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, p.82.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, p.82.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, p.83.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, pp.86-101.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, p.102.

### Appendix 3: Decay and Replacement

Regardless of their past values, the buildings of Devizes would be subject to replacement due not only to decay but also from planned redevelopment. The effect of this upon a population of vernacular houses is described by R Brunskill as the 'vernacular threshold' and explains how lesser buildings would more rapidly disappear [Figure 19].<sup>51</sup> This modernism approach to decay being followed by routine demolition and replacement was only interrupted in Devizes when the effects of the conservation movement took a hold towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>52</sup>

#### THE 'VERNACULAR' THRESHOLD

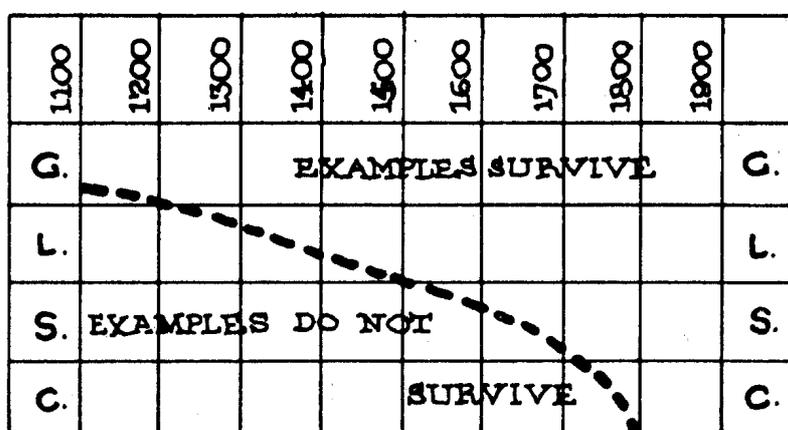


Figure 19. The 'vernacular threshold' illustrates how smaller buildings in Devizes would not survive. From Brunskill (1971).

<sup>51</sup> Brunskill (1971), pp.27-31.

<sup>52</sup> This is not to say we are now able to completely halt the processes of decay, rather that the value of an historic building is now assessed prior to repair, alteration or demolition.

#### Appendix 4: Georgian History

The primary industry of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century was cloth, and this ensured Devizes was retained as the regional commercial centre. This brought in new industry, such as the building of John Anstie's mill in New Park Street, his son's tobacco and snuff business in New Street (now Snuff Street), brewing and maltings in Northgate Street and associated services such as banking and educated people such as the surgeon, John Needham.<sup>53</sup> By the end of the century, residents included Henry Addington, later to be prime minister and friend of William Pitt and brother in law James Sutton.<sup>54</sup> As a result, Devizes gained many large and fine town houses, and new money enabled other buildings to be retained and brought up to date. 18<sup>th</sup> century Bath saw widespread demolition of earlier buildings due to carefully planned development whereas Devizes was more gently adapted, hence leaving us the double benefit of timber frame structures as well as the splendour of Georgian facades [Figure 20]. Many of these buildings would have replaced earlier ones, but much of the expansion occurred on the fringes of the town, spreading beyond the outer ditch. This ability to expand outwards enabled the retention of many older buildings within the medieval town. A continuation of this expansion was also to preserve many older buildings during the nineteenth century expansion.



Figure 20. A jettied timber-framed building updated with Georgian brick façade.

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<sup>53</sup> Bradby (1985), pp.76-78.

Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the most significant changes to the street layout were due to the building of turnpike roads. These created new roads out of the town to the north, south, east and west, requiring the broadening of streets for carriages. The coaching inn trade also flourished as the result of the town being on the main route between London and Bath.

In 1750 the town corporation decided to build a 'New Hall' in Wine Street, but also decided to keep the existing hall for meetings [Figure 21].



Figure 21. The Old Town Hall viewed from Long Street.

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<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, p.89.

## Appendix 5: 19<sup>th</sup> Century History

By the time the New Hall in Wine Street was completed, the corporation decided to remain in their rebuilt town hall and to lease out the New Hall. In 1810, the Kennet and Avon Canal was completed, enabling transport of heavy goods such as brick, stone, coal, corn, and cheese.<sup>55</sup> Having been built beyond the outer ditch, demolition of buildings was mainly avoided. The canal enabled the cheap transport of Bath stone and it had become a popular material for rebuilding in Devizes by the late Georgian period.

Primarily due to the interests of the Cunnington family, the Wiltshire and Natural History Society based itself in Devizes and a history of the Borough of Devizes was published in 1839.<sup>56</sup> It is conceivable that this would have inspired local interest and recognition of residence as to the value of the buildings.

In the latter half of the century the railway was brought to Devizes, cloth, tobacco and brewing industries continued, plus new ones such as engineering developed. Devizes continued to be a centre for markets and shopping, but dropped behind in industrial progress.<sup>57</sup> The increasing population had been accommodated by infilling with tenements around Sheep Street, Hare and Hounds Street and New Park Street and expansion on the west side of the canal around The Nursery.

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<sup>55</sup> Bradby (1985) p.99.

<sup>56</sup> Bradby (1985), p.103.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*, p.102.