

WILTSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

INTRODUCTION: THE SOCIETY AND MUSEUM

SOCIETY CONSTITUTION

The Society was incorporated in November 1999 as a company limited by guarantee (no. 3885649) to take over from the original unincorporated Society (Charity no. 309534) which was formed in 1853. Both bodies are registered charities. The directors of the Company (Charity no. 1080096) are its Trustees and are also the Trustees and sole members of the unincorporated Society. The Company is governed by its Memorandum and Articles of Association and the Society is governed by its rules. The Company is the body to which all members belong. It operates the museum and library, employs all the staff and owns the premises and equipment.

The collections, comprising the museum, library and art collections, are held by a separate trust, the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society Collections Trust (Linked Charity Number 1080096). The Company is the Corporate Trustee and the Collections Trust is a linked charity to the Company. However, should the Company cease to exist the collections would not form part of its assets and a new trustee would have to be appointed.

The Endowment Fund, established in November 2006, is also a separate linked charity with its assets protected by its charitable status. It was formed to accumulate capital, the income from which would be paid to the Company whilst the capital remained as a permanent endowment.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SOCIETY AND IT'S MUSEUM

The Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society was founded in 1853 to acquire the John Britton's collection of Wiltshire books. In the autumn of 1853 a meeting was held in Devizes Town Hall, attended by 200-300 people, at which the Society was inaugurated with the Marquis of Lansdowne as Patron.

The original collection was housed in a room at the Devizes Savings Bank, but the rapid growth of the Society's collections resulted in a search for more extensive accommodation. In 1874 the Society acquired a small piece of land between nos 40 and 41 Long Street, Devizes and the school room which had formed part of no. 41, and, once sufficient funds were raised, erected a two storey building with a gothic façade (now the shop and Library Long room). The new Museum was formally opened on 8 September 1874. In 1894 the Society, again requiring additional accommodation, acquired the lease of no. 40 for £550 and in 1944 no. 41 for £3,000. In 1950 when the cellars were cleared one was found to be full of desks from when it had been a school and the other contained wine – which had unfortunately gone off! In 1972 major works were required to divert the main sewer from under the building (near the Natural History Gallery) to the side. When the extension was built to house the Natural History collection a well was found – just some two to three feet from the line of the original sewer...

The arrangement of the rooms has been changed over the years to accommodate the galleries, offices and storage spaces. The rooms now accommodating the Society offices were accommodation for the then Assistant Curator and his family.

The first professional curator, Nick Thomas, was appointed in 1952.

The collections have been 'Designated' (1999) and the Museum awarded 'Accreditation' status 2005.