

Heritage and Archaeology

Welcome to the autumn 2023 edition of the South Gloucestershire Heritage and Archaeology newsletter. This newsletter is a source of information for anyone interested in the historic environment of South Gloucestershire.

In this edition, find out about buildings that have been added to the National Heritage List for England, the excavation of a 12th century building complex at Lower Hazel, and how you can discover more about South Gloucestershire's historic environment.

Letter Box Listed at Tortworth

An early and rare example of an 1857 trial wall letter box installed into the boundary wall of the former Post Office at Tortworth has been added to the National Heritage List for England by Historic England at grade II.

The earliest post boxes in the British Isles were of the pillar-box type and were first erected in the Channel Islands in 1852 at the suggestion of the novelist Anthony Trollope, who was a Post Office Surveyor.

It became rapidly apparent that smaller letter boxes were needed in villages and other rural locations and specimen wall boxes were made for the surveyor of the Western District of England in 1857 and authorisation was given to site them in villages near Plymouth. None of these earliest wall boxes survive. At the same time a cast-iron wall letter box was being made by Smith and Hawkes for the Birmingham District, and after some improvements they were commissioned to produce new boxes. The first tranche of 1857 wall letter boxes included an inward-opening flap over the horizontal posting aperture. A modification of an additional casting in the form of a small pediment and hood over the aperture was introduced in 1859



1857 Wall letter box in Tortworth

and is believed to have been applied to about 100 of the first standard wall letter boxes. It was not added to the example at Tortworth, and this survives in its original 1857 configuration. According to the Letter Box Study Group, as of 2022, there are 18 known surviving examples of the original type of wall letter box in the UK without the pediment and hood modification, with just 10 remaining in service. This includes the example at Tortworth, which has been found to be a very rare example of the first type of wall letter box that was commissioned by the Royal Mail.

The 1859 changes to the design of the letter box can be seen in an example in Codrington which is a 'Second National Standard' wall box that debuted in 1859 and was seen as the upgraded version of the 'First National Standard' design wall box of 1857. This 'Second National Standard' design sought to prevent water ingress, incorporating an integral rain-hood and pedimented top. The doors of both designs were, however, set high on the front of the box which made collections awkward and wall boxes from 1861 had a larger, full-height door.

Wall letter box design continued to change during the later 19th and early 20th century, with the cipher of the reigning monarch often being the most obvious alteration. South Gloucestershire presently has another 11 letter boxes recorded on its 'Local List', most dating from the 1880s and 1890s, with three being from the 1930s.



1859 Wall letter box in Codrington



Ian Gething (Conservation Officer) next to the 1857 wall letter box in Tortworth

Excavation at Lower Hazel

An archaeological excavation has been taking place at a site at Lower Hazel in Rudgeway. Led by the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology at Bristol University and working alongside volunteers of the Thornbury Archaeology Group, the excavation has been focussed on a likely Medieval hunting lodge that might have become embroiled in the civil war of the 12th century called the Anarchy.



Archaeological excavation at Lower Hazel

When Henry I died in AD 1135, he had no male heir and so named his daughter, Matilda, as ruler of England. However, his nephew, Stephen, claimed the throne instead and this led to civil war. During this Anarchy period, Stephen was captured and held at Bristol Castle, which was largely impregnable. Unable to free Stephen from the castle, his supporters instead ranged around the countryside destroying

buildings connected to Matilda's supporters. And it is possible that this hunting lodge suffered this ignominious fate.

Certainly, something seems to happen in the 12th century that puts an end to the use of the building as a hunting lodge, or at the very least as a semi high-status building. Arrowheads and spear points have been found during the excavations, but it cannot be said if these relate to an attack or were part of the hunting equipment for the lodge.



King Henry I by Unknown artist, oil on panel, 1597-1618, NPG 498(02)

© National Portrait Gallery, London



Archaeological excavation at Lower Hazel

What is clear is that the site was abandoned until, maybe, the 13th century when it was reoccupied as a small cottage. A small extension was found, and part of the site was remodelled into a kitchen. The investigations were undertaken as part of Bristol University's student excavations and as part of an international summer school. They are led by Dr Stuart Prior and will be continuing over the next three summers. Further information can be found here: [Hazel Anarchy Research Project – Bristol Archaeology News](#).



Archaeological excavation at Lower Hazel

Office Buildings Listed at Aztec West

When we talk about listed buildings, we often think of old, stone buildings from the Victorian, Georgian or post-medieval periods and, for the most part, that about sums it up. There are, however, interesting exceptions to this, and one recent example of listing was the group of office buildings on Park Avenue, Aztec West, designed and built between 1987 and 1988 to designs by Campbell Zogolovitch Wilkinson and Gough (CZWG) for the Aztec West business park.

The group of offices were listed for their historic interest as a flagship commercial development on Aztec West, itself a pioneering example of a post-industrial business park, and for being a good example of a commercial development in the Post-Modern style.



Office building on Park Avenue, Aztec West

The buildings were designed with bold geometries based upon two intersecting squares, high quality polychrome brickwork (contrasting red and buff brick and pre-cast concrete), courtyard balconies and full height vertical window strips; a modern twist on the classical columns of the Georgian era. The landscaped circular entrance courts were based upon the turning circle of a car, celebrating the form of transport that enabled the out-of-town workplace while the interiors were planned for flexible subdivision to accommodate multiple units of different sizes. The original entrance canopies, incorporating extruded, Art Deco-inspired lettering have, regrettably, been replaced.



Office buildings on Park Avenue, Aztec West

Post-Modern architecture emerged in the 1970s as a critical reaction to Modernism. In Britain it was closely associated with the economic boom of the 1980s. After a period out of favour, the 2011 exhibition 'Style and Subversion' at the V&A marked a revival of interest in Post-Modernism.

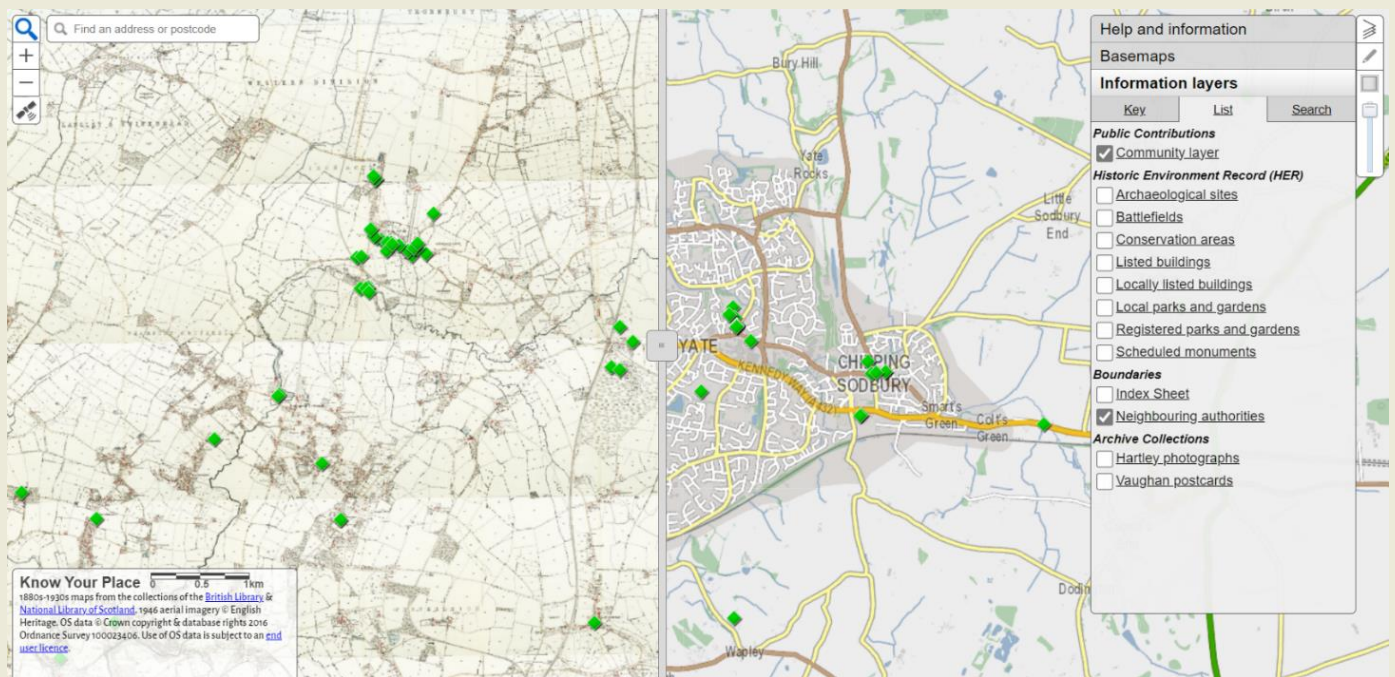


Know Your Place



If you would like to find out more about our local historic environment, the Know Your Place website is a great resource to use. Know Your Place is an interactive digital collection of historic maps which offers a unique insight into the history of South Gloucestershire. It provides the opportunity to explore our neighbourhoods and how they have changed, through using old maps, historic images, and other heritage data.

One of the features of Know Your Place is its Community Layer, which members of the public can add any heritage related information to. This could be about something someone has an interest in or has fond memories of. Contributions can be made in a variety of ways, such as sharing memories of people and places, mapping dug-up discoveries from back gardens, or recording a local architectural detail or building that has personal meaning. This information can be provided in different forms, such as photographs, personal memories, or documents. Anyone is welcome to add to the Community Layer and the information added will be available for everyone to discover.



Know Your Place Website

The Know Your Place website can be used on a range of devices, such as laptops, computers, mobile phones, and tablets. Know Your Place South Gloucestershire is accessible via: [Know Your Place - South Glos \(bristol.gov.uk\)](http://bristol.gov.uk)

Once on the website, you can add a contribution to the Community Layer, and the process to do this is free and easy to use. A step by step guide on how to add to the Community Layer can be found here: [Know Your Place and the Community Layer \(southglos.gov.uk\)](http://southglos.gov.uk)

