

WEAVERS COTTAGES KIDDERMINSTER COMPETITION

Abandoned for over a generation, building repair works have started on site to rescue three historic houses in Horsefair, Kidderminster, known as the Weavers' Cottages, thanks to National Lottery players. This follows purchase of the cottages by The Worcestershire Building Preservation Trust, detailed design work by a team of professionals with expertise in building conservation and the appointment of specialist contractors to carry out the building work.

The Weavers' Cottages is a row of three historically important cottages, the earliest of which dates back almost 300 years. All three have been empty and unused for a generation. They are modest in scale and sit almost unnoticed amidst more modern buildings in the Horsefair, attention drawn more by their derelict condition than their significance to the history of the town. Our proposals are to renovate and to then sell them to appropriate purchasers who will use them as attractive residential units.

As far back as the 1600s Kidderminster had a thriving spinning and cloth weaving industry. In around 1700 there were approximately 400 hand looms in homes all around the town. Many different fabrics with strange and wonderful names were woven on these hand looms but Kidderminster became known particularly for its Bombazine – an expensive material woven from silk and worsted yarns. Bombazine was generally black and used for mourning though there are a few samples of brighter colours in the collection at the Museum of Carpet. Bombazine hand looms were small and could easily be built in a high loft in people's houses.

It is very likely that 22 Horsefair was originally designed as a dwelling with a handloom workshop above. The other two cottages were built slightly later without the distinctive high loft workshop but they were certainly homes built for artisans, with trades ranging from confectionery to shoemaking. There is evidence that three members of the Slade family lived in the Horsefair and worked as weavers between 1757 and 1803. We don't yet know if they lived at 22, but we hope that more research will unearth further details. Later, 22 was occupied by tailors and carpet weavers.

As part of the application to Heritage Lottery Fund an Activity Plan was prepared and we are now implementing the actions identified. One of the activities is a competition encouraging young people to produce interpretive images for the cottages ie. what they may've look like inside when they were inhabited by weavers 250 years ago.

We envisage two age categories the first up to age 11 and the second 12 – 16 with a prize for each category. The prizes for the 12 – 16 years olds are 1st prize £75, 2nd prize £40 and 3rd prize £20. Prizes for the up to age 11's are 1st prize £35, 2nd prize £20 and 3rd prize £10.

The closing date for the competition is 1 July 2016 and the winners will be announced before the end of term.

Entries should be emailed to ian@ianparkin.co.uk or posted to Cherry Cottage, Manor Street, Dittisham, Dartmouth, Devon TQ6 0EX.