



Winchcombe's wish for 2021

The home of sparkling wine is looking forward to popping a bottle or two to celebrate a happier New Year in 2021

WORDS: Tracy Spiers

Clear protective screens have popped up everywhere in recent months. They've acted as shields preventing physical touch and infection, whilst enabling us to shop, carry out business and daily work. It's symbolic then that Winchcombe Museum now has its own protective glass. Traditionally historic artefacts are put behind glass to preserve them and this is exactly the sentiment behind this building make-over. Instead of open pillars underneath the old Town Hall, a glassed-in display space enables people to find out more about Winchcombe's

unique heritage – whether it relates to excavations of Belas Knap, the town's Postlip Paper Mill, Abbey site, pottery, social life or impressive castle. And whilst the upstairs part of the Museum – which includes Ross Simms' fascinating collection of police uniforms from a rare 1835 'Peeler' in his tall stovepipe hat to modern day – has been shut during the pandemic, the new glass-enclosed downstairs has provided historic nuggets and exhibitions to enjoy. "We haven't been able to open the museum this season, but we wanted to continue to reach out to people and

to raise the profile of Winchcombe and its rich history," explains Anne Crow, honorary curator of Winchcombe Museum. "We have been holding a series of exhibitions on Saturdays including one by Stephen Guyatt (aka Stephan von Clinkerhoffen), a Winchcombe resident who is not only a talented painter, sculptor and inventor, but also an award-winning author." It was 92 years ago that Winchcombe Museum, owned by Winchcombe Town Trust, began in the Parvis Room, above the porch at St Peter's Church. The

WINCHCOMBE

Points of interest on Katie B Morgan's map:

- Belas Knap:** Neolithic long barrow just outside Winchcombe.
- Kenulf:** In 798 Coenwulf or Kenulf, the King of Mercia, began to build a great Abbey and a palace here. Both no longer exist.
- St Kenelm's Well:** Kenulf's son, Kenelm, also King of Mercia, was murdered. His body was brought back to Winchcombe, and springs formed at every stopping place, hence St Kenelm's Well.
- Dissolution of the Monasteries:** In 1539 the Abbey buildings were destroyed by Henry VIII.
- St Peter's Church:** Known for grotesques, gargoyles, and the Winchcombe Imp. It is also a good example of a 'wool church'.
- Dent's Almshouses:** Named

- after local philanthropist Emma Dent (1823-1900). She lived in and restored Sudeley Castle.
- Sudeley Castle:** Home and burial place of Catharine Parr. Visited by Henry VIII, Anne Boleyn and Elizabeth I.
- Lewis Carroll:** It's believed the writer was inspired by one of the gargoyles, so creating the Mad Hatter.
- Champagne bottle and cork:** There is a Blue Plaque celebrating Christopher Merret (1614/1615-1695), the first to document the making of sparkling wine.
- Winchcombe Pottery:** Famous studio pottery. Master potters Michael Cardew (1901-1983) and Ray Finch (1914-2012) both owned it.
- River Isbourne:** Flows north, like the Nile.
- The Butler-Volmer equation:** John Alfred Valentine Butler

- (1899-1977), a physical chemist, was born in Winchcombe.
- Rugby ball:** International player William Ylend (1865-1939) was born in Winchcombe.
- Walkers:** Winchcombe, with its many footpaths, has 'walkers are welcome' status.
- Tobacco:** In 1619, local landowners began growing tobacco.
- Horse Fair Street:** The former name of North Street.
- Stocks:** Found near to the museum.
- Happenstance:** Mixed Border Morris side.
- Winchcombeshire:** In 1007, the town was the centre of its own county, Winchcombeshire.
- Suffrage:** Winchcombe formed a branch of the Women's Suffragette Society. They gave out leaflets in

- Queen's Square.
- The Winchcombe Psalter:** Now kept at Cambridge University, it was written in Latin and Anglo-Saxon between 1025 and 1050.
- Annual Mop Fair:** Held in October.
- Radio Winchcombe:** Find it on 107.1 FM!
- Miles Coverdale (1488-1569):** The translator of the Bible stayed at Sudeley.
- Zebra:** Zaza Zebra is a big sculpture kept at Winchcombe Reclamation. It was made by Dave Danson Hill, to recognise the plight of the endangered Grevy's zebra, in Africa.
- Clement Barksdale (1609-1687):** Religious author, born in Winchcombe.
- Brock the badger:** Book written by Lady Ashcombe about her old family pet.

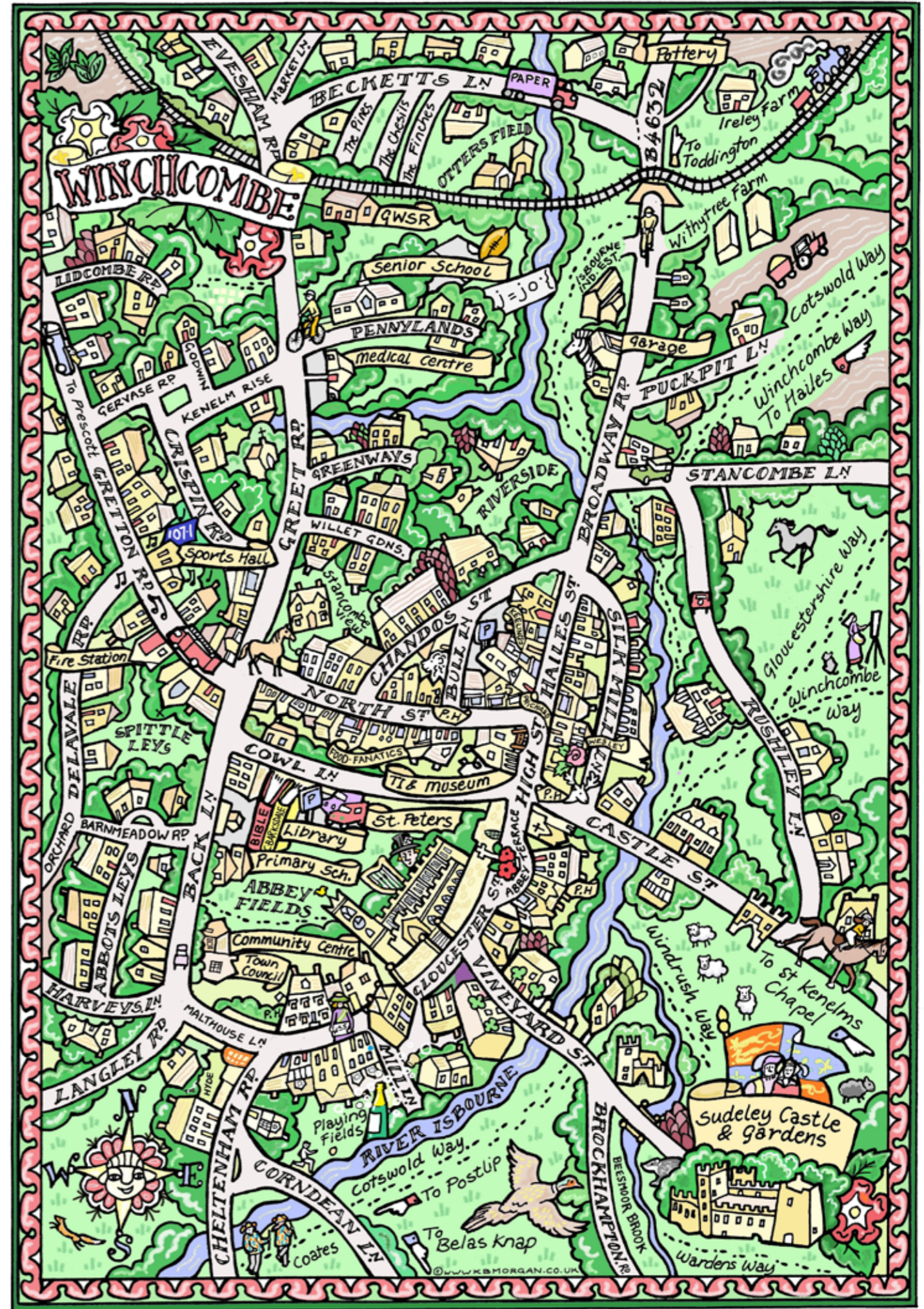


ILLUSTRATION: Katie B Morgan, kbmorgan.co.uk

collection was initiated by Eleanor Adlard, a local resident whose family ran Postlip Paper Mill. It moved to the Old Town Hall in 1983, when Ross Simms moved his police uniform collection there and invited the museum to join him.

“Unless we have the Museum and preserve the town’s history, people won’t know anything about Winchcombe which would be a pity. It was such an important place and a key part of the UK’s history that has been overlooked,” says Carol Harris, one of the Museum’s volunteers.

She is right. Winchcombe may be relatively small, but it has a huge part to play in history. Once a prime seat of the Mercian kings in the 8th and 9th centuries, Winchcombe was the most important town in the county of Winchcombeshire in the 10th century and later the second principal town in Gloucestershire after Gloucester. In the early 16th century, Winchcombe Abbey became known as a ‘little university’ and recognised as an important centre for learning.

RESILIENCE

Of course, like any town there have been ups and downs. Losing the Abbey and the wool trade forced the town into poverty. But Winchcombe is a resilient community. It survived civil wars and has innovatively adapted over the centuries to provide work for its people. For most of the 17th century, tobacco was grown extensively, and cider was widely made with farmers using it to pay part of their workers’ wages.



Tribute to cider press history in Winchcombe

Bakers, potters, blacksmith, tanners, wheelwrights, builders and roofers were also operating and in the 18th century, manufacturers realised that the ready supply of water would be ideal for papermaking. It’s an industry that is still carried on today by Hollingsworth and Vose at Postlip Mills in a different way. At the moment they are making filter papers for the automotive and aircraft industry using wood resin rather than the rags of old. Winchcombe Museum displays artefacts from Postlip Paper Mill, including an intricate 19th century handmade unique dandy roll by George Tovey. It was designed to imprint the water mark on huge sheets of blotting paper.

In the 19th century, with the rebuilding of Sudeley Castle - which had



Winchcombe Coat of Arms, restored, cleaned and repainted by Stephen Guyatt

been neglected and derelict for nearly 200 years – and with the arrival of new industries including world-renowned Winchcombe Pottery, the town found fresh purpose.

Winchcombe Pottery was established in 1926 by Michael Cardew on the site of a pottery dating back to the early 1800s. One of the country’s longest running craft potteries, it produces some of the world’s finest and most practical domestic pottery. A large collection of artisan pots made from 1926 until the late 20th century, including those made by potters trained there, is now part of Winchcombe Museum.

TREASURES

As a history enthusiast, I enjoy discovering the social history of a town. It is the random objects that provide portholes into the lives who once dominated the community. Take for example, a carved 17th-century tobacco jar; the King marble, a prized toy of the 19th century; a Victorian riding boot – just one – found on the streets; a soldier’s lost powder flask; the two-handled loving cup for cider and then in the town itself, the bullet holes in the wall of the Belfry Tower of St Peter’s Church and tethering rings used during the great



Winchcombe, 2020

‘For most of the 17th century, tobacco was grown extensively’

horse fairs.

On other occasions, I have enjoyed an hour or two hunting out different landmarks, grotesques on the church and other items of interest with my children as we have carried out town trails here. Every town has its unique treasure and it does require an inquisitive attitude to go looking.

Another interesting fact about the town is regarding Winchcombe-born Christopher Merrett, a Fellow of the Royal Society, a physician, scientist, naturalist and metallurgist. As well as producing England’s first lists of British birds and butterflies,

he was the first person to record the deliberate addition of sugar to wine for the production of sparkling wine in 1662. This was 30 years before the French claimed to have invented Champagne. His former home in Gloucester Street is marked by a Blue Plaque.

Perhaps Winchcombe’s largest treasure is Sudeley Castle and Gardens which has royal connections spanning a thousand years. First owned by Ethelred the Unready in the 10th century, it remains the only private castle in England to have a queen buried within the grounds, namely Katherine Parr, the last surviving wife of Henry VIII. Other

notable historic royal figures such as Anne Boleyn, Lady Jane Grey, Queen Elizabeth I and Richard III all played a part in Sudeley’s story. During the Civil War, King Charles I found refuge here when his nephew Prince Rupert set up headquarters at the Castle.

The beautiful alms-houses called Dent’s Terrace are connected to Sudeley thanks to the work of Emma Dent, who in the mid 1850s, forged strong links between Winchcombe and the Castle. The Dent family were glove makers from Worcester who restored and lived in Sudeley Castle and played an instrumental part in helping the town.

Sudeley Castle’s former archivist Jean Bray, who published a book about

Emma Dent, called ‘The Lady of Sudeley,’ in 2004, pays tribute to a remarkable woman who not only helped restore Sudeley Castle but was devoted to the local people.

“Winchcombe and Sudeley have lived together as neighbours for over a millennium through good times and bad. When Emma Dent died she left a lasting legacy in the town,” says Jean.

“To any stranger arriving in Winchcombe it would not have been too much to say if you wanted to see her monument then look around. The architecture of the town – including the church, school and almshouses – has the impress of her hand and her loving care.

LIVING HISTORY

As I visit in 2020, it feels strange to think that we are all living in historic times. Like it or not, how we behave, react and adapt will be recorded in history books and the year 2020 will be studied by future history students.

Winchcombe Museum has been encouraging community members in the town and the surrounding villages to participate in recording what is currently going on by sending in something about how COVID-19 has affected them.



Interesting architecture of Winchcombe



Winchcombe Fruit & Veg

“Experiences will be put on record at the Museum and saved for posterity as very personal insights into how the current community coped with and overcame this momentous time in our history,” says Anne Crow, who has written many books on the town, including *Discover Winchcombe* and *Weird and Wicked Winchcombe*.

Whilst the Museum has done its best to preserve the history of long ago, the Winchcombe business community of 2020 is working together to ensure it protects the local economy now and for the future.

Paul and Audra own John Keeling Newsagents in the High Street, which is celebrating its 60th anniversary. Set up by Paul’s Dad and Mum, John and Ann in 1960, the shop has played a key part in community life with many local families being involved with newspaper rounds. One family Mr Ron Hillyard started helping John in 1960. Later his son assisted and today his grandson is delivering papers.

“This year has been an interesting one, because we have felt an even stronger sense of community in Winchcombe. We have worked all the way through lockdown not only delivering newspapers and magazine to homes, and we would like to thank all our deliverers for that, but we also started doing essential grocery deliveries. We did that to help our customers and we are still continuing with it,” says Paul and Audra.

Clare Ballantyne, is the new owner of Winchcombe Fruit and Veg. In fact, she took on the business on April 1, a week after the country was forced into lockdown. She hit the ground running.



View of St Peter's



Clare Ballantyne, owner of Winchcombe Fruit and Veg



Chris and Bea Cranke from Honey Bea's Cafe

“A lot of our customers are elderly, so it was very busy. I was surviving on two to four hours sleep a night as I was taking 300 deliveries a day,” recalls Clare.

“We teamed up with the local butchers and bakers to do an all-in-one delivery service and we are still doing that today.”

“Our hope for 2021 is for people to support their local independents and

to support the local community. Don't forget us.”

Her wish is echoed by Martin Williams, managing partner at Food Fanatics, a popular deli and café which prepares bespoke hampers and buffet lunches. Like Clare, Martin and his staff have been operating a delivery service for local people.

“We would love people to come and use us as a first port of call, not as a back-up and to remember that we are here. It's a case of remembering that independent shops are for life, not just for Christmas,” says Martin.

Bea Cranke opened up her teashop Honey Bea's Café in October 2018. I appreciate her board outside the shop which says: ‘a coffee a day, keeps the grumpy away.’ We all need to keep the grumpies away in this season.

“Our wish would be that we don't have another lockdown. We will keep going and we really enjoy getting to know the locals. They all seem to like our soups, quiches, my Mum's scones and our gluten-free cake,” says Bea.

As Winchcombe gets ready for a new year and fresh challenges, it does so prepared and protected. As the local historians do their best to preserve Winchcombe's history, local businesses are doing their utmost to preserve the town's local economy. ♦



Paintings by Stephen Guyatt at Winchcombe Museum