

SIXTEENTH CENTURY TIMBER-FRAMED TOWNHOUSE IN GLOUCESTER RESTORED WITH £300K HISTORIC ENGLAND GRANT

- **26 Westgate, the largest surviving historic timber-framed townhouse in the country, has been extensively repaired**
- **The Grade-I listed 26 Westgate is now home to the Gloucester Antiques Centre and is open to the public**
- **Historic England supported the restoration with £314,163 grant funding**
- **Grant-aided works included repairs to the historic timber frame and oak windows, as well as a redecorated Tudor facade**
- **Research during repairs revealed remarkable insights into the building's architecture and history**
- **The restoration contributes to the ongoing regeneration of Gloucester's historic Westgate area**

Repairs to the Grade-I listed 26 Westgate in Gloucester have been completed, aided by a £314,163 grant from Historic England. The timber-framed merchant's house, dating back to the late 16th century, is the largest surviving historic timber-framed townhouse in the country and is now an antiques centre in the heart of Gloucester.

The building has been on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register since 2012 due to its decaying condition. When the repairs are completed, 26 Westgate is set to be removed from the Register this year, securing the building for future generations.

Local specialists from D.A.Cook (Builders) Ltd carried out the restoration, including repairs to the historic timber frame, wall panels and traditional oak windows, as well as roof repairs and fixing the rainwater system. Craft techniques like joinery and lime plastering were used throughout the project, preserving the historic features of the building.

The restored building has been redecorated with pigmented limewash and now features one of the finest Tudor facades in the country. It features reproduced historic signage for the Gloucester Antiques Centre and an elaborate gargoyle carving that was discovered during the repairs, now open to the public to see.

Comments

Ross Simmonds, South West Regional Director at Historic England, said:

"Historic England's funding for the repairs at 26 Westgate represents our commitment to preserving Gloucester's architectural heritage and supporting

businesses in historic buildings. The restoration of the Gloucester Antiques Centre is another vital step in the ongoing regeneration of Gloucester, breathing life back into a much-loved building and securing its place in the community for years to come.”

Andrew Malone, owner of 26 Westgate, said: “This repair work has been a long time coming but well worth the wait. The project has been extremely successful, and we are so pleased with how it went. I am very grateful to Historic England for making this happen and to D.A.Cook Builders for the really great work they have done.

“The building is looking fantastic and the door to Maverdine Lane is now open to the public to enjoy the amazing Tudor facade. We invite everyone to come along to the antiques centre – there is so much to discover, and the prices are very reasonable indeed. Join us in supporting the regeneration of our city centre and visit the antiques centre, sharing what Westgate Street has to offer.”

Richard Graham, Chair of Gloucester History Festival, said: “The restoration of this wonderful Tudor building means another shining jewel for visitors to see in Gloucester. I was delighted to include the story of the building and the partnership between business and Historic England behind this success at our Gloucester History Festival’s Spring Weekend. We look forward to highlighting and interpreting more good news stories as the heritage regeneration of Gloucester continues.”

Kathy Williams, director at the Gloucester Antiques Centre, said: “I am very pleased with all the restoration work that has been carried out by our landlords in collaboration with Historic England. This medieval gem is in the heart of Gloucester and after the restoration, the antiques centre will now be able to grow and offer more space to antique dealers. We would like to thank Chance, Andy Malone and Historic England for their investment in this lovely building and look forward to all the exciting opportunities it will now be able to offer.”

Kate Biggs, Principal Conservation Officer at Gloucester City Council, said: “The design and production of good quality and appropriate signage can have a very positive impact on the character of a conservation area or listed building - it helps to create a place where people want to linger. We are striving to set good examples in Westgate and 26 Westgate is one where the new sign gives identity and prominence to the building. It is difficult to control the introduction of poor signage, but we hope that setting good examples will inspire retailers to consider something more attractive than a plastic sign.”

Research discoveries

As part of the grant-aided restoration, Historic England’s Architectural Investigators carried out detailed research on the structure and history of the building.

The restoration works revealed that the west elevation of the building was originally as elaborate as the eastern Tudor facade, featuring close-studded timbers and projecting windows. These were likely removed in the 18th century.

The investigators also found traces of purplish-red paint on the timbers, indicating that the 17th-century timber frame would originally have been vibrantly painted.

The research confirmed that the building has two main parts: a front section built around 1620 and a rear section from about 1590. The rear part was built by John Browne Senior, a mercer (cloth merchant) and a prominent Gloucester citizen. His son, John Browne Junior, who was a brewer and three-time mayor of Gloucester, added the front section.

History

During the medieval period, the building fronted the main market area on Westgate Street and was known as 'the mercery' due to its concentration of cloth merchants. The medieval cellar also survives under the building and likely gave direct access onto Westgate Street.

In the early 19th century, the building served as the Judges Lodgings, although the for judges visiting the city disliked the accommodation and even called the building a 'foetid dog-hole'. It was briefly used as an antiques shop and later became known as 'Winfields' after G. Winfield & Co, a seed merchant that occupied the site from 1893 until 2015.

26 Westgate is now home to the Gloucester Antiques Centre, which is open to visitors. Though it has been altered over the years, it retains features from the 16th and 17th centuries, with a remarkable survival of contemporary windows and glazing as well as rare patterned leaded glass.

Supporting Gloucester's regeneration

The £314,163 grant continues Historic England's investment into regenerating Gloucester's Westgate area, following on from the successful completion of the Gloucester High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) last year. These projects continue to support the local businesses housed in the area's well-loved historic buildings, revitalising the historic streets of Gloucester.