



THE DECIMUS BURTON MUSEUM

A vision

By Paul Avis

Most of us who watched the recent televising of Queen Elizabeth II's funeral cannot have helped but notice the important place that the Wellington Arch played in the ceremonial proceedings. This triumphal arch, designed by Decimus Burton, suddenly took centre stage, and was seen by an audience of some 4 billion viewers.

Despite this, many feel the name Decimus Burton does not have the recognition it deserves, which is why there is the current project to create a Decimus Burton Museum. Burton was a unique architect whose career spanned the Georgian,



Fig 1. 9 & 10 Crescent Road (1827 on), home of the future Decimus Burton Museum.
Photo copyright Paul Avis

Regency and Victorian periods, and whose projects embraced a range of genres and styles. Not only did he design many villas, terraces and buildings in Regents' Park, including the Zoological Gardens

for example, but he also designed such iconic projects as The Palm House and Temperate House at Kew, The Athenaeum Club in Pall Mall, Phoenix Park in Dublin and the new towns of Calverley in



Fig 2. The Palm House, Kew Gardens (1845-8). Photo copyright Thomas Erskine



Fig 3. The Holme, Regent's Park (1817-18). Photo copyright Thomas Erskine



Fig 4. The Ionic Screen, Hyde Park (1824-25). Photo copyright Thomas Erskine



Fig 5. The Athenaeum Club, Pall Mall (1827-30). Photo copyright Paul Avis



Fig 6. Zoological Gardens, Regent's Park (1826-41). Collection of Paul Avis.

Tunbridge Wells and Fleetwood. The last two were innovations in town planning at the time. Within a career that lasted a half century he also designed country houses such as Grimston Park and Holwood House, as well as churches and

public buildings with several of his structures incorporating some of the technological and scientific wonders of the day. Indeed, there is a lot we can still learn from this remarkable architect that has a relevance in today's society.



Fig 7. Calverley Park Crescent, Tunbridge Wells (1827 on). Photo copyright Diana Blackwell.



Fig 8. Holwood House, Kent (1823-6). Photo copyright Simon Gooch.

When Tunbridge Wells Borough Council recently announced that they were looking at alternative uses for two council owned buildings designed by Decimus Burton as part of a programme to maximise community assets and raise much needed cash, it became apparent that here was an opportunity to create a museum of both local and national importance and one that could benefit communities beyond Tunbridge Wells by using Burton's connections and work throughout the country.

A Decimus Burton Museum located in Tunbridge Wells, which is less than an hour both from London and St Leonards (all locations containing examples of the architects work), is a good choice and one that would provide residents, students and tourists alike with a wide variety of educational

programmes and visitor attractions. In addition, the museum would not only help to realise one of the goals of The Decimus Burton Society - that of establishing a central archive of the architect's life and work through existing collections - but through its collections and educational programmes, could benefit communities throughout the country where Burton's work can be found. Archive material, exhibitions and study programmes could travel to, for example, Fleetwood, Phoenix Park, the RIBA, Kew Gardens, and St Leonards.

At the end of March this year Tunbridge Wells Borough Council gave the local Civic Society a year to develop a business plan to repurpose the two remaining semi-detached Regency Villas designed by Decimus Burton in 1829, and the car park in front, into

a museum. The two listed buildings in the centre of town are currently vacant save for one room which is occupied by the Ambulance Brigade on a short term lease.

The Civic Society was chosen to take the lead for the project not only because it contains several members of The Decimus Burton Society, but also because it has an established track record of having saved another building by Burton - Trinity Church - in the town. This

building has been re-purposed into a successful theatre, and after 40 years, Trinity Theatre is today undergoing further development which will add a heritage centre within the church's tower (see separate article in this issue p.66 for an update on the Trinity project).

In April a project management team was set up to develop the business plan for the museum. This team has grown in time and includes experts and advisers in

The Decimus Burton Museum's vision is that:

“By learning from the past, and inspired by the work of Decimus Burton, we will offer our visitors rewarding experiences that will encourage generations to change out futures for the better.”

Our aims and objectives are:-

- To conserve and restore 9 & 10 Crescent Road, the last surviving pair of Regency houses in Calverley terrace designed by Decimus Burton.
- To involve visitors of all ages in educational opportunities centred around Tunbridge Wells' social, cultural and architectural history, and its conservation.
- To record and celebrate the work of Decimus Burton as an innovative architect and pioneer of town planning.
- To establish the national archive of Decimus Burton's life and work within the museum, and recognise his influence within the UK and Ireland.
- To assist in the promotion of Tunbridge Wells as a tourist destination.
- To celebrate and promote sustainability and creativity through good design within the built environment.

the fields of project management, education, museum design and funding, conservation architecture, quantity surveying, banking and insurance, and local history as well as some of the leading recognised authorities on the life and work of Decimus Burton.

Since April the project team has carried out a detailed measured and photographic survey of the buildings as well as having produced a report on the condition of the building, which together with a plan for the proposed use and layout of the buildings has

been used to put costs to the work that would be necessary to set up the museum. The building has also been valued. Alongside this, the team has carried out extensive research into comparable museums, local conditions, set up and running costs. This information has been used to develop a business plan with projections being subjected to variations and influences, especially with regard to increases in building and running costs as well as fluctuations in visitor numbers.

At the end of August through to

Fig 9. The leaflet from the museum exhibition at Trinity. Copyright Philip Whitbourn

Our Vision for Calverley Terrace

Decimus Burton Museum and Study Centre

Henry Keene Room
Regency Museum Bedroom, named after former resident of No.5, Henry George Keene (1791-1864), Arabic scholar and author of "Persian Fables". Grandson of the architect Henry Keene.

Adelaide Basevi Room
Museum/Function Room named after former resident of No.5, Adelaide Basevi (1795-1803), first cousin of Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli.

Caricature of Disraeli from Vanity Fair 1869

No.9 Dining Room
Part of the Regency Museum, but also capable of use, possibly in conjunction with the Drawing Room, for a Dining or Cream Tea experience.

No.9 Drawing Room
An authentic Regency Museum interior that can also serve as a venue for Chamber Music recitals, receptions, meetings, and other events.

Display Gallery and Lecture Room

Henry Keene Room

Adelaide Basevi Room

Archive and Study Area

Archive

Meeting Room

Education Room

Education Room
For use by visiting groups of students or school children. Below: Decimus Burton's National School of 1834, the foundation stone of which was laid by Princess Victoria.

1829 Archival Plan of Calverley Terrace

1834 National School, Green Street

Shop
Selling a range of local publications, postcards and souvenirs, currently located in *The Annulet*.

Decimus Burton
A History of the Queen's College

Decimus Cafe
A "go-to" place to meet for coffee. Proposed reinstatement of Regency style canopy on front, and creation of outdoor cafe-seating area in front garden.

Shop

Decimus Cafe

Town Planning Room
Decimus Burton's 1828 Calverley New Town, and other Planning projects.

Social History Room
NUWSS shop at nearby 14 Crescent Road.

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE SOCIETY
14 Crescent Road, c.1910
Copyright: North on the left

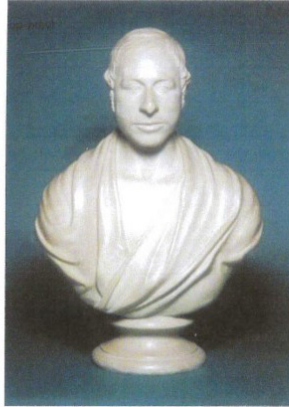
Exhibition Room
For changing exhibitions, or used for functions in conjunction with the Dining Room. Named after the novelist and former resident of No.10, Catherine, Lady Sturges.

1829 Calverley Terrace
showing canopies reinstated



Left: Portraits of The Revd. Henry Keene and his wife Anne in 1833

Revd. Henry George Keene, MA, (1787-1864), nephew of the 1st Baron Harris, and grandson of the eminent architect Henry Keene, and sometime resident of no.9, was a man of many parts. His career started as a soldier, serving in a regiment in India that formed part of a brigade commanded by Wellington. Then, after joining the East India Company, he became a Registrar of a District Court. In 1811 he entered Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, graduating in 1815, becoming a Fellow in 1817, and being ordained as a priest in 1819. Accomplished in Arabic and Persian, his published books included *Persian Fables* (1833) and *Persian Stories* (1835), a copy of one of which might be on display in the room.



Above Centre: Bust of George Basevi, FRS, FSA, architect of the Fitzwilliam Museum, and brother of **Adelaide Basevi (1795-1885)**, a former resident of no.9, and first cousin of Disraeli. Adelaide married Tycho Wing, and lived at n.9 after his death.
Above Right: Vincent Wing (1619-1668) of the illustrious Wing Family

Fig 10. Portraits of The Revd. Henry George Keene, MA, (1787-1864) and his wife Anne in 1833. Considerable research has been carried out into the buildings' occupants and neighbours, providing a wealth of material for local schools' projects that would fit within the national curriculum as well as being of general interest to visitors. Copyright Philip Whitbourn

the end of Heritage Open Days in September, a series of events were held at Trinity Theatre to promote the museum project to the public. These included an exhibition, an illustrated talk and a series of guided walks taking visitors around some of Decimus Burton's buildings in Tunbridge Wells (of which, there are more than seventy). The exhibition was accompanied by a short questionnaire for visitors to fill out. This proved an invaluable source

for market research and resulted in some changes to the layout and content of the museum. The questionnaire also showed that visitors to the exhibition were not only locals, with some coming from London and St Leonards. The management group is proposing to hold another exhibition early in the new year in a different venue within the town to further engage with the public. It is also planning a media campaign to help promote the project.

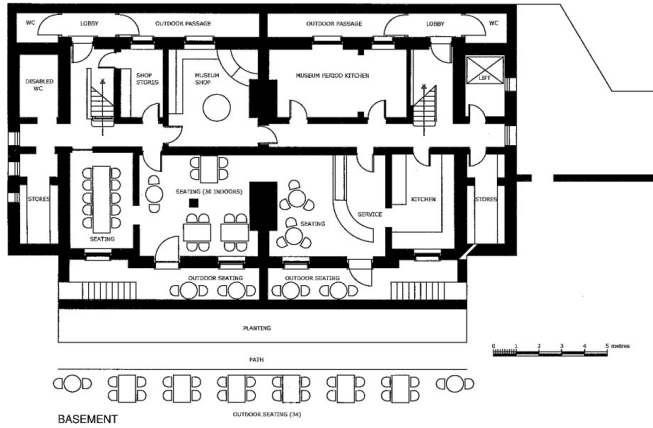


Fig 11. The Decimus Burton Museum – proposed basement plan. Copyright Paul Avis

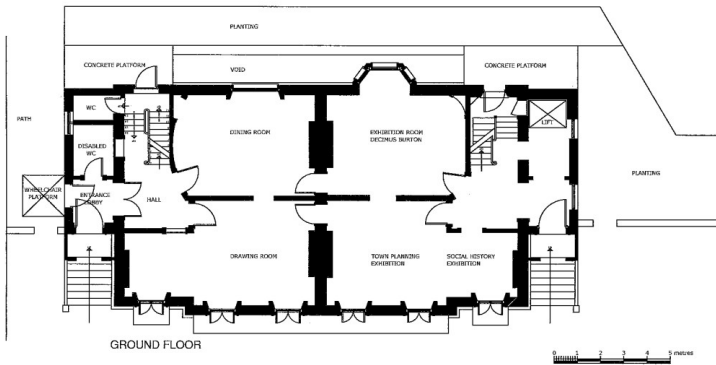


Fig 12. The Decimus Burton Museum – proposed ground floor plan. Copyright Paul Avis

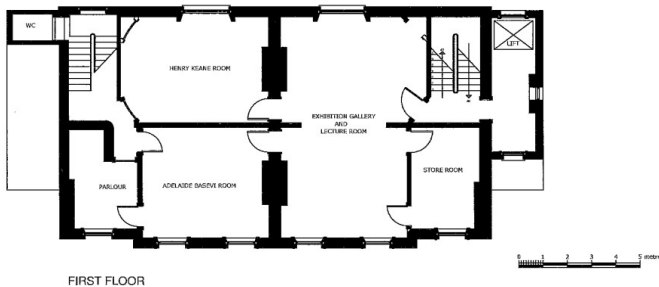
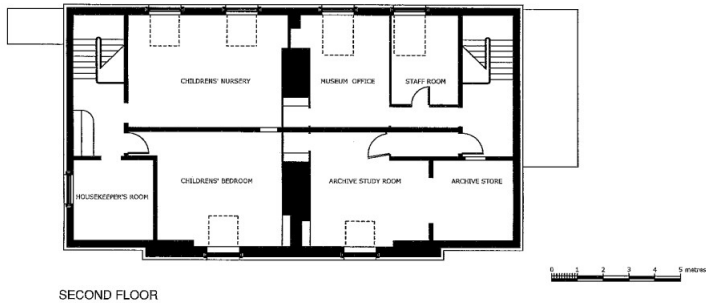


Fig 13. The Decimus Burton Museum – proposed first floor plan. Copyright Paul Avis



SECOND FLOOR

Fig 14. The Decimus Burton Museum – proposed second floor plan. Copyright Paul Avis

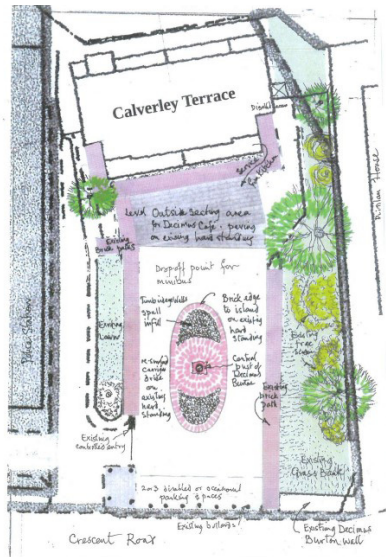


Fig 15. The Decimus Burton Museum – proposed front garden plan. The existing car park provides the opportunity to provide a sensory garden for the public in the centre of town. Around the oval planting bed which contains a statue or bust of Decimus Burton is a paved turning circle with disabled parking at the front. Copyright Philip Whitbourn

The proposed layout of the museum:

In general, the ground and first floors of the existing Grade II listed buildings are in a good condition

and retain many original features. The basement too is generally in a good condition. The second floor

has, over the years, been divided up into a series of smaller offices, and will require more work. The floor plans illustrate the proposed layout of the museum buildings and garden/car park.

The basic principle is that No9 Crescent Rd will be turned into a furnished museum illustrating the life and times of some of its occupants when it was built in 1829.

The light and airy semi-basement of both Nos9 & 10 will accommodate further period rooms, such as the kitchen, as well as the museum tea room, shop and stores. No10 will comprise on the ground, first and second floors exhibition spaces displaying not only the life and work of Decimus Burton, but local social history, and the important role that Burton played in the development of town planning at a national level. There is also the opportunity to show how current practices in architecture, design, engineering, landscaping and town planning relate to those of Burton's time, through a range of media from audio visual to models, photogrammetry and virtual reality. This approach to exhibitions will make the attractions accessible to a much wider audience including those with special needs.

It is often difficult visualising just from plans how buildings can be transformed or re-purposed. In this case, however, we have a relevant museum in the form of the Dickens Museum in Doughty Street, London, which shares many features with the Decimus Burton Museum, is proportionally very similar, and as Dickens moved there in 1837 can be considered of a similar period when it comes to interiors. I should, however, point out that it is proposed to furnish the museum in Tunbridge Wells in a late Regency style as opposed to the early Victorian style of the Doughty Street building. Nevertheless, the following images taken at a recent visit to the Dickens Museum should serve to give you a good idea of how the Decimus Burton Museum might look.

So let me take you on a tour of the period rooms. We enter the museum via the lobby in the entrance hall of Number 9 crescent Road. Wheelchair users will have access to the entrance via an electric platform on the side of the entrance. Inside, you will be greeted by a view similar to that in Fig 16. Our entrance door is to the left. The door at the end of the hall will take you to the outside, where there is a narrow courtyard garden

Fig 16. The entrance hall of The Dickens Museum, London. Photo copyright Paul Avis



separated from a town car park by decorative trelliswork (trelliswork was often employed by Burton in his projects). The stairs will take you up to the first floor bedrooms, and up another level to the nursery, children's bedroom and housekeeper's room. Behind these stairs is a further set that will take you down to the period kitchen, museum shop and tea room. A lift, located in number 10 is planned to access the other floors. If you walk through the door by the stairs on your right we can continue our tour. You will now enter the dining room.

The dining room has an interesting curved end wall with an original

curved door and corner cupboard. The table has been set for the family of the house, whose stories will be told, along with those of their staff, via a combination of traditional and audio-visual displays.

The Tunbridge Wells Civic Society is known for producing a range of local history books, and has researched not only the house, but the lives of many of its occupants as well as other local characters which will add an educational richness to the story that the museum has to tell. The society is currently working with one primary school on a local history project that fits within the national curriculum



Fig 17. The dining room with its curved door and matching display cabinet. Photo copyright Paul Avis



Fig 18. The study. Photo copyright Paul Avis

and which will form part of a book being developed jointly.

Continuing to the room next door, we have the family's drawing room and a smaller study area.



Fig 19. The drawing room looking towards the street. Photo copyright Paul Avis

Throughout the rooms, beautifully presented information sheets will highlight particular exhibits relevant to the former occupants, local history and a wider social context. At certain times of the year some of the rooms, like the drawing

room can have a period theme, such as Christmas. A piano could provide the opportunity for musical events and entertainment. Despite the wealth of interesting exhibits, the rooms have plenty of space for visitors to move around.



Fig 20. The drawing room, set for Christmas. Photo copyright Paul Avis



Fig 21. The drawing room, with piano for entertainment. Photo copyright Paul Avis



Fig 22. Henry Keane's bedroom, complete with slipper bath? Photo copyright Paul Avis

On the first floor we have two bedrooms belonging to the master and mistress of the house. The rear bedroom we have called the Henry Keane Room after a former resident

of No9, and the front bedroom, with its parlour, we have called the Adelaide Basevi Room after another resident of No9.



Fig 23. Adelaide Basevi's bedroom, with her clothes laid out on the bed? Photo copyright Paul Avis



Fig 24. the Children's nursery. Photo copyright Paul Avis

Throughout the museum are exhibits where visitors and students can learn not only about Decimus Burton on a national and local level, but also where they can learn about their local history. There are plenty of opportunities for local residents and students to participate in the daily life of the museum, as guides for example or assisting with workshop's archives and exhibitions. It is planned to have some guided tours taken by volunteers in period costume. Linking up with the acting talent of the nearby Trinity Theatre and its educational programme could also provide participants with an ideal stage set whether for guided tours, small scale theatrical productions or book readings.

Continuing up to the second floor we have the children's nursery at the back with their bedroom and housekeeper's rooms at the

front. Tunbridge Wells has a high proportion of schools with many local primary schools, and as an integral part of the social history programme for the museum we will be emphasising the roles that staff and younger family members played in the history of the buildings, thus making the experience more relevant to a wider age group.

Back in the basement, our tour takes in the period kitchen, which has the ability to double up as a study/workshop room. Visitors can then visit the museum shop and get light refreshments at the tea room. We call it a tea room as this is the period when afternoon tea started to become popular. The opportunity to offer visitors an afternoon tea experience with staff in black and white dress, will help to set it aside from the competition of local cafes.



Fig 25 - The period kitchen, which can double up for group workshops.
Photo copyright Paul Avis

No10 Crescent Road is primarily dedicated to exhibitions, the archives, museum office, staff room and stores. On the ground floor is the main Decimus Burton exhibition space with further spaces illustrating his important contribution to town planning as well as local social history. On the

first floor is a large exhibition space for specialist exhibitions, which can double up for lectures and talks, while on the second floor is the museum office, Decimus Burton archives and study room, and staff room. Throughout the buildings there is ample storage and toilets.



Fig 26. Architectural models for sale in the museum shop. Photo copyright Paul Avis



Fig 27. Mabledon, Decimus Burton’s childhood home. A photogrammetry reproduction using drones that gives access to projects remotely allowing visitors to do a walk through without having to visit the building. This technology opens up tremendous education opportunities as well as accessibility to individuals that might otherwise have difficulty in experiencing an exhibit. Copyright Blayne Jackson.



Fig 28. Using photogrammetry to help local residents achieve a better understanding of current planning issues that might affect them. 1 and 2 show two sites in the centre of Tunbridge Wells that have been the subject of recent applications. Copyright Blayne Jackson.



Fig 29. Decimus Burton was a pioneer in town planning long before the profession existed.

This early view of his scheme for the Town of Fleetwood is an example of a design for a town that considers not only the built environment, but the services and infrastructure that is needed when creating large developments. We have a great deal to learn from the past.

Copyright Fleetwood Museum.



Fig 30. An exhibition room showcasing a range of exhibits on not only the built environment but the social history of the locality. Burton's Caverley New Town included housing, shops, a market, school, Town Hall, Baths and Library, which could provide a wealth of material for exhibits. Photo copyright I Royal Crescent, Bath.

With three months to go before the presentation of the business plan to the council, the team are continuing their efforts on attracting sponsorship for the project. Initial enquiries with the Heritage Lottery Fund have indicated that they believe it to be a project that would qualify for the higher level of funding (ie £250K - £5M), and we have already received pledges from organisations and individuals for museum exhibits. Understandably, the year that the council has given the team to develop a business plan is very little time to secure sponsorship for the project. Consequently, we are probably left with two scenarios: either an individual or organisation comes forward with the funds to purchase the buildings on behalf of the museum trust, which would allow it to raise the necessary capital to finance the project from funding institutions; or sufficient pledges of financial support are obtained to convince the council to enter into a partnership arrangement with the museum trust that would enable the project to proceed. Without financial support/pledges for the project it is likely that the council will sell the buildings for development, and this once in a lifetime opportunity to provide a museum of local and national importance will be lost forever.

By Paul Avis, Chairman of the Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society and The Decimus Burton Society