

RED BRICK BUILDING

COMMUNITY • ARTS • EDUCATION • ENTERPRISE

History of the Site

Morlands and the Sheepskin Trade

The Red Brick Building Centre is an exciting industrial building between Glastonbury and Street, Somerset, which was previously a sheepskin tannery.

For centuries, Somerset has been important for rearing sheep. Much of the wealth that created Somerset's churches in the middle ages came from wool. Associated with this are tanning and the manufacture of sheepskin rugs.

The business, that was eventually to become Morlands, was established in 1822 in Street. By the 1860s the business needed bigger premises and moved to a tannery at Northover, Glastonbury. In 1870 a new partnership between James Clark, his son William, and John Morland, James's son-in-law, was formed, bringing new capital into the business. The firm, Clark, Son and Morland, went into production in 1871 with sixty-five employees.

In 1906 Morland's introduced sheepskin motor rugs and footmuffs for passengers in motor cars. Footmuffs were kept on the floor of the motor car and took both feet. By 1919 Morlands slippers were in production. In 1922 some 12,000 were sold.

In 1925 the firm became a public company. Overshoes, designed to be worn over motorist's ordinary shoes, were a popular product.

During the Second World War Morland's made flying boots for the Air Ministry, and skins for other firms to make into flying clothing. The technical advances made to meet Ministry specifications lead to improvements in the quality and appearance of the products so that with the peace the demand from the civilian market increased.

After the war and the firm concentrated on fleece lined leather footwear. Acquiring skins of the right type and quality became more demanding as production increased. The market demanded a greater range of styles and colours and the business grew in the post war years, and with A.J. Baily and Co. Ltd, Morlands became Glastonbury's largest employers.

However, in a changing market and under pressure from foreign manufacturers Clark, Son and Morland Ltd went into receivership in 1982. A new company under the direction of Baily's was set up to make lines formerly made by Morlands but this itself closed in 1992 and tanning ceased and the building fell into disuse.

Saving the Building from Demolition

It was saved from demolition in 2008 by concerned local young people who had a vision for its future. Since then, a group of local people transformed the building into a dynamic enterprise and community hub that responds to local needs and opportunities.

The Centre integrates three strands of activity that were identified in community consultation and feasibility studies, which are complementary and mutually supportive. These three strands are social and micro enterprise support, arts and community activity, and training in and demonstration of sustainable construction and refurbishment.

To this end, the Red Brick Building Centre Community Benefit Society was formed in August 2009 to take forward the plans

In December 2010, after long negotiations, we signed a Development Agreement with the then owners, South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA) to undertake a first stage programme of work to make the building safe and waterproof. This work was undertaken by Ecos Homes, with help from volunteers.

The local communities of Glastonbury, Street and surrounding villages had worked hard to raise finance so the project could develop the next stage. A community share offer in December 2010 attracted 180 local shareholders who raised £105,000 by the closing date of February 28th 2011.

We created an innovative RBBC Investors Club and five local investors have between them contributed £215,000. We are also received a loan of £40,000 from the Co-operative and Community Finance Company (now paid back) and have received local grants.

On March 31st 2011 the freehold of the site was transferred to the Red Brick Building Centre Ltd from SWRDA. We have registered a mortgage on the building to give security to the Investors' Club. The legal structure of the Community Benefit Society means the RBBC has secured the building as an asset for the communities of Glastonbury and Street and surrounding villages forever. No individual can ever make personal money from this project.

The sheer scope and size of the building, 30,000 sq ft, demands a large but realistic solution. We have decided to keep all the interesting architectural features and layout. This layout lends itself to a viable mixture of offices, studios, workshops, meeting rooms, exhibition spaces and a cafe.

Volunteers of the Red Brick Building Centre played an essential role in the building work, particularly the internal fittings and the space outside the building.

Since the first part of the work was completed in early January 2011, many developments have taken place. In January 2013, the Building finally opened its doors to new Tenants, ranging from Artisan's Local business and community and Charity support groups.