



# Museum Matters

Newsletter of Saffron Walden Museum Society Limited

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Dates of future Events on the Noticeboard enclosed

## Highlights and Happenings

### From the Chairman

As reported in the last newsletter, the New Store was handed over by the builders in June. Progress towards its occupation has been held up because of the need to reduce levels of humidity. Meanwhile, the tenders for installation of the racking have proceeded and work on the Natural History store is for the move is due to take place in November/December ready (see photographs on page 2). We are planning a formal opening of the store which will take place when the move from Newport is complete. Also received in September were the first two items for storage: the hay wagon and hearse that had been in temporary store in Ashdon were moved in, and the tip cart donated to Audley End has now been delivered.

Completion of the sale of 40 Castle Street has taken place. With the proceeds now in hand and a provisional budget to work with, we can now turn our thoughts to Phase II of the development. The Board discussed this at its last meeting. The Curator and I are to set up a working group to consider the options available to improve the Museum both for visitors and for staff.

## IMPORTANT

Notice from the Curator - see page 2

The highlights of the summer included the Tour de France on the 7th July with the 'Penny Farthing' in the Great Hall. This was followed by three busy Fridays in August. On the first Friday, I opened the World Wars I and II exhibition prior to the entertainment of World War songs by singer Alexandra Jones. On the following Friday the public were invited to 'Music & Memories', when Alexandra again provided the musical entertainment to the delight of the elderly residents of Highfields and Stanley Wilson Lodge, as well as over 150 members of the public (see Gemma Tully's Outreach article). Although the weather started with intermittent showers, the downpour fortunately held off until the end of the afternoon.

Finally on the third Friday, the Society held its Annual General Meeting. It was recorded that the Museum had had a very successful year despite the staffing difficulties and particular note was made of the funds raised, over £60,000, for the purchase of the North West Essex ring and other Treasure. After the formal business, Leah Mellors gave us a talk on her work of setting up the exhibition which had been a steep learning curve for her since her arrival as a new member of staff in April.

The work of the Board and its two committees continues. We are particularly pleased that the Society's website will soon be complete, and we have also been working with Uttlesford District Council to improve the Museum web site. The Society is very grateful for all the work Tony Morton has done in preparing this revision.

Susan Hollingworth represented the Society during the discussions for the 500 Charter Celebrations in May, and arranged the Society's participation with a display of replicas of Tudor artefacts and clothing. The beginning of June saw Susan also organising the Society's involvement in Societies Showcase where, with the assistance of Leah Mellors, we put on an interesting quiz. This involved a display of named objects with a brief description of their use. This provided opportunities for people to see if they could estimate the dates when these objects were used and there was much discussion among the 60 or so people who took part.

We are now in the planning for the Christmas party and that means another year is nearly over!

**Tony Watson**

### First arrivals at the new Store!



Arrival of the hay cart

Settled in with the hearse — and attendant de-humidifier. What a change from their previous location!



And below, the racking in Natural History Store nearly complete.



### Important Notice from the Curator

#### Service restrictions while we move to new store

Museum staff and a specially-recruited team of volunteers are about to start the huge task of packing and listing thousands of stored objects and specimens ready for the move to our new Shirehill store early next year. This will be a huge undertaking and will take most of our time well into 2015, so please bear with us while some enquiry and identification services are suspended.

From 17<sup>th</sup> November until further notice in early 2015, we have to suspend the following services for a few months;

- Identifications
- Enquiries about collections, loans and reproduction of images from the collections
- Access to stored collections
- Offers of objects or specimens for the collections

We apologise for any inconvenience this may cause. Our new store will bring big, long-term benefits in the way we care for and

provide access to all the Museum's collections in the future, so watch out for announcements in the spring of 2015!

The Museum's public opening hours, activity programme and services to schools will continue as usual. The Society's Museum Support Committee is assisting staff and it has been encouraging to see so many willing volunteers - Museum Society members and newcomers - step forward to help with this important project.

**Carolyn Wingfield**

### Natural Sciences

**Sarah Kenyon**

Come and see the new arrivals in the bug cage in the Discovery Centre gallery!

Seven baby stick insects have hatched from eggs laid by the adult female giant Malaysian stick insects. They are housed in a box in the cage to keep them together in a nursery until they are bigger in size. It has been a very exciting time, with new babies hatching out over a period of 3 weeks and now there is the anticipation of whether they will grow up to be male or female. Adult females will be bright green and the males will be brown.



The female stick insect grows to 20–25 cm in length



The nursery box

Other news! Racking has been installed by Link 51 in the Natural Sciences store in the new Store (see illustration on left). Handover and training in the operation of the mobile racking was carried out on 30<sup>th</sup> October.

### Exhibitions

14th February - 16th August, 2015 'Visions of the World' (dates provisional at the moment)

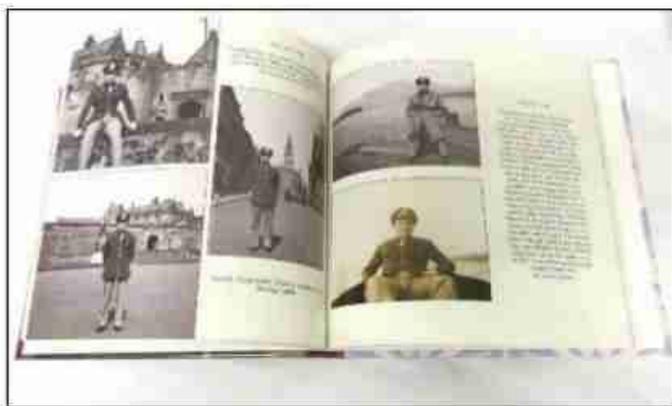
### Human History Collections

**Leah Mellors**

At the beginning of August, our current exhibition 'North-West Essex at War' opened with a private view for Museum Society

members and special guests. Since then, hundreds of people have visited the exhibition and their response has been overwhelmingly positive. Visitors have especially enjoyed the variety of objects in the exhibition and the emphasis on the personal experiences of individuals in our district.

One of the more popular personal stories in the exhibition has been that of Montie Weaver, an American airman who was billeted with a family on Little Walden Road in Saffron Walden. In October, Richard Weaver, the grandson of Montie, visited the exhibition and presented the Museum with a beautiful book of photographs of his grandfather (see illustration below). Richard had travelled from America and whilst at the Museum he met with Sheila Anderson, the little girl with whom Montie had stayed! This was a lovely reunion and I was honoured that the exhibition provided an opportunity for them to come together.



Although this exhibition is up and running, there is no rest for the wicked and I have begun work on our next exhibition 'Visions of the World'. This is a touring exhibition from the Royal Geographical Society, which showcases some of the most spectacular images taken by explorers as they have discovered new lands and cultures. With the assistance of Len Pole, former curator at the Museum, I have drawn up a list of objects from our own collection to supplement the images in this exhibition. 'Visions of the World' will run from February to August 2015 and I hope that it will engage people with our world cultures collection in a slightly different way.

Apart from the exhibitions, much of my time over the past few months has been taken up with preparations for the upcoming store move. In order to draw up detailed racking plans, the racking company needed every box and object to be measured, which was a time-consuming process but one that helped me to get to grips with the collections. We are now in the process of refining the plans for the human history racking and I am excited to see the final product installed.

Finally, documentation continues to take up a large proportion of my time, as I wade through the backlog of accessioning, loans paperwork and cataloguing. I have recently recruited a new volunteer, Will Martin, to assist me with this and I am starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel! One of the objects I have recently accessioned has been a Stanley 55 universal

combination plane (see illustration below) and I spent a long morning poring over an old instruction manual trying to identify each of the twenty-two pieces. This was a very satisfying job and, surprisingly, I found myself fascinated by the intricate workings of this carpentry tool!



### Museum Outreach News Gemma Tully

I can't quite believe that winter is upon us! We were so busy this summer with a range of events that - much like the Tour de France - time has whizzed by.

Leah's début exhibition North West Essex at War, which opened on the 2nd August, has been drawing visitors from across the county and beyond. I know this since we have recently initiated a visitor survey at the Museum's Welcome Desk so that we can build up a clearer profile of our visitors. Expect some interesting statistics in forthcoming newsletters. You might be surprised just how international our visitors are!



**Singer Alexandra Jones**

Even though the weather was unkind to say the least(!), almost 200 people turned out for the event, including residents of both Stanley Wilson Lodge and Highfield Care Home.

**Care home residents and other visitors**



From dancing toddlers to World War II Veterans, everyone enjoyed the event and showed 'Dunkirk Spirit' during the downpours. However, all of the volunteers who made the event possible were the real heroes and heroines of the day, so I'd like to say a huge "thank you" from all of the Museum staff to all those who lent a hand.

We also had a host of family activities in the Museum over the summer. Without a doubt, the greatest success was our science event where we made and launched balloon propelled rockets. This attracted over 250 visitors, mainly children, and I have to confess that my lungs almost burst from helping to inflate so many giant balloons! ' Historical Hat making and Prehistoric clay pot making were also very popular, and I'm already putting ideas together for next summer's family fun.



**Historical hats**

October half-term has also been and gone. Making the most of the *North West Essex at War* exhibition, we held a special rationing event. Families were able to see how much of each kind of rations people would have been able to buy during WWI and WWII. With this in mind, they then designed their own food posters which encouraged people not to waste food, or to grow their own. It was a busy two days, and



**Rations set out**

even after giving my 'ration talk' 50 times, I still felt that the cheese and tea rations (1 oz of cheese 2oz of tea a week) were extremely small - I couldn't cope with it today, that's for sure!

As for what is still to come in 2014, we only have the annual Christmas tree decoration activity left! So, on Saturday, 6th December, come and join us for our feathery themed festive event. Make bird-like Christmas decorations to perch in your tree and pinecone bird feeders for your garden. Drop in with the children or the grandchildren any time between 11am - 1 pm and 2 - 4 pm.

## Museum Society News

### From the Treasurer

The last four months have brought some important changes to the finances of the Museum Society with the sale of the property in Castle Street and the acquisition of the lease of the new store on Shirehill.

These transactions are behind us now, but there remains the Society's share of the costs of moving the reserve Collection and the installation of specialised shelving and racking in the Shirehill store to accommodate the artefacts transferred from the Newport store. I hope that it will be possible for all these transactions to be completed in time for the results to be included in the Statement of Financial Affairs and Balance Sheet for the current financial year.

In spite of these movements, the finances of the Company remain in a healthy position though it is not yet certain what effect the Shirehill store will have on the running costs of the Society. This is something your Board will have to address in the months before the next Annual General Meeting.

I will shortly be resigning as Treasurer of the Society, a post I have held for more than ten years, and I would like to thank all those

Members, Trustees, Directors and Museum staff who have made this such a rich and rewarding time. I am sure I shall miss being so deeply involved in the Museum, but I hope to remain as a Director until the end of my current term of office in 2016. It is an interesting thought that my very first audit as an Articled Clerk was that of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society, a charity with a very similar history to that of the Saffron Walden Museum Society, if founded a few years earlier in 1822.

I will be succeeded by Andrew Penman who has acted as Examiner to the Company for the last two years and so is familiar with the finances and working of the Society - and he will bring down the average age of the Board by a good few years! I wish him well for the future.

*David Laing*

### Welcome to Andrew Penman

*We have asked Andrew to give us a brief pen portrait of himself*



My professional career started in the mid 1980s with the Inland Revenue (subsequently merged with Customs & Excise to become HM Revenue & Customs) before moving into roles in personal taxation. This was among a number of top 10 UK accountancy firms and, for a time, I headed a national personal tax team.

Along the way, I have assisted in the creation and operation of a number of charitable organisations principally advising on the tax-efficient creation of Charitable Trusts for successful entrepreneurs but also attending bi-annual Trustees meetings as ongoing adviser, ensuring the charities complied with the Charity Commission's regulations on proper application of funds. I also supervised the rather more mundane claims for refunds of tax due under Gift Aid, and filing of charity Commission Annual Returns.

I now live in Saffron Walden and run my own tax advisory business partly from a local address and partly from an office in Ely Place, London. I share my personal life with Sophie and our nearly 2 year old son, Alex, and our cats Archie and Alfie. Sophie deserves sympathy through being not only the sole female in the house but also the fact that us chaps' names all start with an 'A'!

When I have time I enjoy playing Bridge and, when I have compliant knees, the Badminton court claims my attention. My other principal interest is motor racing, and my claim to fame in that respect is that I met Max Mosley in Monaco in 2006. I hurriedly add that this was before the story about his private life broke!

I have held the office of Independent Accounts Examiner for the Museum Society for the last two years, and have thoroughly enjoyed becoming more closely involved with the affairs of the Museum and indeed with the town as a whole. I very much look forward to continuing the excellent work overseen by the current Board, who have done a particularly good job of securing the future security of the Museum's artefacts through the Shire Hill project.

### **On the Move!**

#### **- to the new Museum store on Shirehill**

Plans are now moving ahead quickly for the move to the new Museum store. At the time of writing, the racking is being installed and thanks go to Uttlesford District Council, which is sharing the cost of the racking with the Museum. Recruitment for volunteers is now in full swing.

On Monday 3rd November, Carolyn, Leah, Sarah and I held an Induction Day for those who have already volunteered to help with the move. 18 people attended either the morning or the afternoon session. A number of the volunteers were Members of the Museum Society, but there were also other interested people. After a welcome and introductory talks from Carolyn, Leah and Sarah, volunteers were given a brief one-to-one interview to ascertain which of the three areas of work they were interested in (Recording, Packing and Moving). The next stage of the process is for those chosen to attend a compulsory Health and Safety training course on 24th or 25th November. And on 1st December the big moment will arrive when the packing at Newport starts!

If any other Members would like to join the team of volunteers for the move, will they please contact Carolyn at the Museum asap and certainly before 24th November.

**Richard Priestley**

Chairman, Museum Support Committee

#### **New Museum Store - equipment**

Many thanks to all those members who have so generously donated items of equipment for the kitchen at the new Shirehill Museum store; we are very grateful. But we are still short of a number of items. Can you help with any of the following?

Cups and saucers

4 Knives. 3 Soup spoons

6 Dessert/soup bowls

Glasses

1 Tray

Knives for paring (small), cutting, bread and cake

Tin opener

Corkscrew for opening wine

Kettle, Cafetière coffee pot

Teapot, Tea urn

Kitchen bin

Microwave

We will greatly appreciate your help with any of the above.

If you can assist, please contact Sarah at the Museum, telephone 01799 510333. Very many thanks.

**Richard Priestley**

### **Membership**

Thank you to everyone who paid their subscriptions promptly this year and saved us the time and expense of reminders. May I ask you please to make sure that if you move house or change your e-mail address, you remember to let us know so we can keep you up-to-date with the newsletters and other mailings. An e-mail or, even better, a note addressed to the Museum Society c/o the Museum should ensure that we stay in touch.

You may have noticed some changes to the membership renewals procedure in the spring. While a few minor adjustments are needed, I will welcome any comments or ideas as to how this could be made easier for us all, so please let me know.

**Christine Sharpe**

#### **Special Membership Offer**

From 1st December this year until the end of March 2015, anyone joining the Society will have up to 16 months' membership for the same price as 12 months - currently a bargain £10, so they would not pay a renewal subscription until 1st April, 2016.

The stronger the membership of the Museum Society, the better able it will be to safeguard and develop the Museum for the future. So, in the knowledge that they are helping to conserve our heritage for the future and with the benefits of Society membership, perhaps two or three friends of yours could be encouraged to join? Christine Sharpe will be delighted to send details by post or by email (tel: 01799 527546) or email: s.christinesharpe@hotmail.co.uk. All new members receive a Welcome Pack from Christine.

### **Talks and Events**

#### **6th July: Visit to the Roman Bath Suite at Welwyn**

This visit was a follow up to Tony Rook's talk in April 'Roman Welwyn and its Roman Baths'. Tony's background was originally in structural engineering but, soon after moving to Welwyn in 1960, he embarked on the process of becoming an archaeologist as well and forming a training group of archaeologists, now the Welwyn Archaeological Society (WAS).

The Society worked on several digs but returned to what is now known as the Dicket Mead Villa which is still to be fully excavated, although its basic layout has been established. Tony first came across it when, shortly after arriving in Welwyn, he went on a walk 'to find a Roman villa' and he did when he saw Roman tiles sticking out of the bank of the River Mimram. Ten years later, when a small bath suite associated with this villa had been excavated, it proved to be plumb in the middle of the route of the proposed A1(M) link. Tony managed to arrange for a steel vault with a smaller entrance tunnel and emergency exit to be built to protect it - you know the way one does! So now the bath suite sits 9 metres below the A1(M). This is what we went to see.

it was built as the bath suite attached to the 3rd century AD villa, the rest of which stretches back under the A1(M)

and at right angles up towards the Mimram. The entrance to the bath suite leads into the cold room (frigidarium) where you disrobe and put on wooden-soled sandals to protect your feet later on.



Then into the warm room (tepidarium) to sit and relax until you start to sweat when you - or a slave - rub oil on your body. After a bit, on to the hot room (caldarium) under which is the hypocaust system standing on stacks of pilae heating the floor and walls. The system is fed through a horizontal flue coming in from the adjacent furnace and stoke hole. This room is so hot it is where the sandals are necessary and it is where first you (or slave) scrape the oil off your body to cleanse it, using a strigil. Next you plunge into the en suite hot bath — which is hot. Then back to the cold room, and into the cold bath there to cool down, then dry off, re-robe and back into the villa. Bathing for Romans was a sociable leisure pastime and could take quite a while especially if family and friends joined you in your private baths. The public baths in Rome, however, had some time in the afternoon set aside for women only.

Tony had joined us for our visit and regaled us with the story of the discovery and rescue of these baths, explaining that the three white statues illustrating the baths were sculptures of himself, his wife and a WAS Member shown feeding the stoke hole. This provided a bonus for other visiting adults but appeared to be rather boring for some of the under-10s. Tony very kindly invited our group back to his timber-framed part 14th century house a short walk from the site, for a cup of tea and biscuits. We also had a look upstairs and had a chance to buy some of his publications and then back to the car park with Tony as escort.

If you go on your own, be careful not to end up on the motorway - nearby there are brown signs to help you find your way and (for Satnav) the post code is AL6 9FG. At the site, there are WCs, a car park (closes at 5 pm) and a picnic area. Admission for adults is £2:50; there are activities for children, very good explanation panels for when you don't have Tony, exhibits of finds and, of course, the chance to buy a souvenir or two. The website to check for the (very limited) opening times is

[www.welhat.gov.uk/museum](http://www.welhat.gov.uk/museum)

**8th September: The First 1000 years of Handwriting in England: Palaeography - 700-1700 AD**  
**Speaker: Dr Debby Banham**

Debby Banham, Director of Studies at Lucy Cavendish College, University of Cambridge and Lecturer at the Dept of Anglo Saxon, Norse and Celtic, explained that Palaeography was the study of old handwriting.

When the English converted to Christianity, they also received an amazing new technology for storing and transmitting information - handwriting. The Romans had brought in Roman writing during

their occupation of Britain but it was the Christian missions - the Roman mission led by St. Augustus and the Irish mission led by the Northumbrian monks from Iona - that brought books and manuscripts to Britain and began developing this amazing new technology. The Roman writing which, during the 5th century AD was known as the Uncial hand, went back to at least the second century: it originally had no special connection with Christian literature. The English version of the Uncial hand looks very like the Roman Uncial hand. The English scribes were very good at producing beautiful manuscripts and one of the first examples dated to the 8th century is the Vespasian Psalter which is in Latin. Most of the letter forms are recognisable today - the letter 'd' is the most difficult to recognise.

The Half Uncial was the script brought in by the Irish monks of Lindisfarne. An example is the Lindisfarne Gospels (circa 700 AD). The Half Uncial script was taught in Ireland at the time and Saint Jerome complained that it was large, fancy writing about one inch high! The 'a' and 'g' are different shapes in the Uncial and Half Uncial scripts and are the diagnostic letters for identifying the different scripts. Decoration was most important for both scripts - far more important than legibility!

Quicker and easier forms of Uncial script were being developed at Jarrow during the 7th century, an example being the St. Cuthbert Gospels dated circa 698 AD and which are now in the British Museum. There was much demand for the writings of the Venerable Bede so the monks at Jarrow developed the Insular Minuscule script that was borrowed from the Irish tradition. The Book of Kells was written in Insular Minuscule script as well as the Codex Aureus of Canterbury (Golden Book) which is heavily illuminated with gold leaf and produced in the mid 8th century. However there is an enormous gap in manuscript production during the 9th century, largely due to the Viking invasions.

Alfred the Great made an effort to revive manuscript production during his reign and Alfredian or Pointed Minuscule makes an appearance, later developing into Square Minuscule which became the script of the Anglo Saxon Chronicles - the language is no longer Latin but old English or Anglo Saxon. The Square Minuscule script is flat across the top and the most distinctive letter is the 'a' with a flat top. Another distinctive script from Europe which survived until the Norman Conquest is the Caroline Minuscule, whose letter forms are familiar to us and is the script of the Doomsday Book.

During the Middle Ages the Gothic script was widely used from 11th to 13th centuries and continued to be used in Europe until much later. Gothic script developed from the Caroline Minuscule, the curves becoming more and more exaggerated over time. It is a difficult to read and eventually was used only for books, in particular religious books. During the 15th century, literacy became more widespread so that often documents were not written solely by professional writers and therefore became more difficult to read. Secretary hand came from France and the Low

Countries and was taken up in England in the 15th century, becoming popular for writing both books and documents when many more books were beginning to be printed. One final script came to England during the Renaissance Period - it was the italic hand. The Pandolfo Collection of manuscripts was written in this hand and presented to Henry VIII.

CL

### 24th September: Visit to Wrest Park

On the day of our visit it was a morning of intermittent downpours so Saffron Walden and Swan Meadow car park were awash. However, the rain was clearing eastwards and we were going west into Bedfordshire, our driver put the heating on in the coach so we arrived at Wrest Park pretty much warm and dry.

The mansion we see today was built in the 1830s to replace the old house which dated back to the reign of Edward the Confessor. The de Grey family first became linked with the old house in the 13th century and it was much adapted and altered over the centuries. The property was not sold out of the family until 1917.

We began with a guided tour of a large part of the garden which lasted nearly two hours, starting by the wyvern (emblem of the de Grey family). First, the pear orchard which was re-created four years ago and then the Italian garden, planted this year with a scheme of purple, scarlet and silver and is very formal. The rose garden has been reinstated with David Austin roses, donated by the company.



Passing on from the rose garden, we headed to the great garden and its woodlands and looked at the orangery from the outside. No longer used for growing oranges, it is now a popular venue for weddings and other functions.

Then on to the American garden, undergoing restoration, and thence to the Bowling Green House. This is a most elegant edifice and would be the envy of all the bowls clubs that I know of! It is richly decorated within and was used for entertaining and thus also has a service room and not just one, but two, small privies.

The gardens reflect the changing design fashions throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. Sometimes influenced varyingly by Italian, Dutch, French or English tastes. The 18th century woodland garden, which is vast, is in the formal French style with a network of straight rides, winding paths and quiet glades. These latter mostly have statues of some de Grey family members, a Graeco-Roman column or others of classical subjects.



There is also a dogs' cemetery. A significant feature is the 'long water' leading up to The Pavilion. This large, basically triangular building, has projecting bays "affording delightful prospects" to quote Gerard Hoffnung. Magnificently painted inside with 'trompe l'oeil' designs, it has a first floor with rooms and a cellar with a kitchen and, again, was much used for entertaining.



Lesley Green took a group photo of us all on the steps as a record of our visit.

The de Grey duchess of the time, Jemima, engaged Capability Brown to do some designs but had only some of them built and these were works to soften the peripheral canals. Passing the oldest tree in the garden, a yew dating to the late 16th century (see right), we arrived at the Petit Trianon and the Dairy Sculpture Gallery. Having had our fill there, we walked across the enormous terrace which overlooks the French garden and so to lunch in the Visitor Centre.



There had been a last-minute change to our afternoon schedule as Carol had been informed, with apologies, that our guided tour of the new English Heritage archaeology store had been cancelled owing to 'a local emergency' (my best guess is a roof leak). Anyway we had just about time to tell everyone before the day and had gracefully accepted their alternative offer of a guided visit to three rooms, not open unless by special arrangement, still hung with the original hand-blocked wallpaper.

The first two rooms were hung with Chinese paper, depicting scenes from rural life. The house records show an invoice for them dated 1792 so they must have been ordered for the original house and not only that but taken off the old walls and carefully transported to the walls in the new house. They are really stunning and our guide's interpretation added much to our



appreciation. The third room had paper from the house of Zuber, a French company still in business. The design is 'Eldorado' and illustrates America, Asia, Europe and Africa, one continent on each wall. Again, beautiful and stunning. The room was decorated thus in the 1850s as a honeymoon chamber for the then earl's granddaughter.

After that we admired the grand staircase, the other public rooms and exhibitions and the conservatory before relaxing with a cup of tea and then joined the coach for the drive home.

There is much more to see at Wrest, especially in the grounds and I have omitted a wealth of detail about the building and its use in WWI and later, the gardens and the de Grey family. So if you would like to know more, you will have to visit and see if you can successfully book a tour of the archaeology store.

HS

*And we have only been able to select a few of the many splendid photographs taken by Lesley Green, to whom many thanks indeed. Ed.*

**13th October:**

**Late Roman Emperors and Essex Coin Hoards**

**Speaker: Roger Barrett**

Given Roger's position as Chairman of the Essex Numismatic Society, we are fortunate that Roger lives locally and is familiar with the Museum's coin collection indeed, he has done some valuable work on them. Roger was kind enough too, to bring along a selection from his own coin collection, including some rarities.

So why were coins and other valuables left in buried hoards? Well, there were no banks or money houses, so this was the way of concealing your surplus valuable coinage and other precious things for safe-keeping, both in ordinary times and more so in times of increasing insecurity. By the late 4th century, this was the case and the Roman empire had been divided into two (and occasionally three) blocs for governing purposes. By the middle of the 3rd century, the succession of emperors was becoming more and more unstable with revolts, feuds, the creation of mini internal empires, defeats in battle and murders. Diocletian managed to rule for about 20 years and appointed two Caesars as 'junior partners', one to rule in the east and one in the west.

In the 4th century, there were few long-reigning Emperors, Constantine I (the Great) and his three sons Constantine II, Constantius II and Constans who each had a chunk of the empire. Constantine II got Britannia as part of his share but, after three years, was murdered by Constans who took it over. In between there were other rivalries between Caesars and Emperors - leading to fratricide and other murders - and would-be emperors who held part of the Empire for a short time before defeat and death. But Emperor or Caesar, long or short rule, they had their own coins minted even if one only ruled for 28 weeks!

Roger's slides were excellent showing the great detail that the moneymakers achieved. Generally, the coins had the head of the ruler on the obverse and these depicted quite a degree of individuality. The reverse tended to refer to their major achievements, qualities or beliefs, for example showing the 'Chi-Rho symbol'  $\chi\rho$  if they had become a Christian.

Roger introduced us to some of the more notable of the treasure hoards of the southern part of Britain from the Bridgnorth hoard to

those found at St. Albans, Mildenhall, Hoxne and Ashdon. The Hoxne hoard has items in it dating from 364 to 408 AD and the Ashdon hoard, discovered in 2009 and now in our Museum, has coins (mostly clipped) and jewellery items from the same broad period, i.e. the time of Julian II into the reign of Honorius. There have been two other hoards associated with Ashdon, one unearthed in the 1840s and another in earlier times. Roger pointed out that, if you traced a route between St. Albans and Hoxne, it just happened to go through Ashdon. His illustrations were an excellent complement to his narration, some linking directly to those from the Ashdon hoard on display in the Museum as well as other objects from other hoards and finds.

It is amazing how the sequence of coinage can chart and illustrate the course of history and bring one in touch with the people who commissioned their minting, used the coins and then sometimes cached the surplus intending to recover it but, for one reason or another, never did.

HS

**10th November: The History of Duxford Airfield**

**Speaker: Mike Barrett**

In the year that marked the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of WWI, it was fitting to have this talk not just because 'it's up the road' but because Duxford Airfield started life during that conflict. Built at the same time as its 'twin' Fowlmere in 1917, it was on a large area of flat Cambridgeshire countryside with the domestic site across the road being added in 1918. As Training Depot No. 35, it was large for its time with 600 personnel, 150 of whom were women; it had four hangars, three of which survive and are listed buildings. All aircraft were bi-planes but young men were eager to enlist and fly even though average life expectancy of aircrew in combat was just three weeks.

At the end of this costly war, the British Government was nearly broke and rapidly reduced the number of air force stations from 155 to 20. Fowlmere closed, Duxford didn't, possibly because it was fairly close to Cambridge and very close to Whittlesford railway station. It became No. 2 Flying Training School of what is now the Royal Air Force, formed from the merger of the Royal Naval Air Service and the Royal Flying Corps. Because of all the interest and possibly as a recruitment ploy, there was an open day in 1921 when attractions included a paid flight in a bi-plane fine for the brave but I guess not many dared to do it.

In 1923, it became a fighter station and remained one until its closure in 1961. It was home to the University Air Squadron when all pilots were officers, but also operated the RAF apprenticeship scheme which was the brainchild of the Marshall of the RAF, Lord Trenchard. In the 20s and early 30s the buildings were painted white to make them easier to find from the air but, by 1934, they were in camouflage again because of fears over worsening international tensions. 95% of our aircraft were still bi-planes but, in Germany, the Messerschmitt 109 was being developed and here work started on what were to become the Hurricane and the Spitfire. In 1938, this latter was the aircraft supplied to No. 19 Squadron at Duxford which was dubbed 'the home of the Spitfire'.

So to 1939 and WWII. There was little flying in the first winter because of ice and snow and 'the phoney war' but post-Dunkirk in the late summer, the Battle of Britain changed all that.

Duxford was allotted to Group 12 area, defending the Midlands and its industries whereas Debden, a few miles 'down the road' in Essex was in Group 11 defending the south east and London. The aim of the Luftwaffe was the destruction of aircraft and airfields, but we had RADAR by then and had warning and were able to carry the fight into northern France. Planes were parked in the open, under trees if possible, and hangar space reserved for those aircraft under repair. For sound aircraft, the turn round time between missions per plane could be as fast as 20 minutes and the 5 squadrons, 60 planes, could be airborne in formation in 19 minutes. The German aircrews had been led to believe that by now we had only a few aircraft to put in the air, so our actual strength would have been an appalling realisation for them.

The station had its personalities, principally Flt. Sergeant George Unwin who was credited with 13½ victories and Group Captain Douglas Bader. Although the latter had lost his legs in 1931 and left the RAF after a series of ground postings, he re-joined in 1939 and became a pilot again. He was not always easy to work with, possibly because Duxford was in Group 12 not Group 11 and therefore not front line. He had to sit out much of the war, though, as a Prisoner of War after he was shot down.

The Polish and Czech squadrons stationed at Duxford had a reputation as very fierce warriors probably because of what happened to their countries. And then there was 242 Squadron, the Canadians. After 1941 Duxford ceased its role as a fighter station and became 'an air fighting development unit', among other tasks evaluating captured German aircraft.

Then in 1942 the Americans arrived in the shape of the USA 78th Fighter Group, flying fighter escort to the B47 bombers in daylight raids on Germany. They were keen to establish goodwill and used their resources to host Christmas parties for children, very popular in times of rationing, generally socialising and holding an open day on the base in August 1945 but, by December, they were gone. Even then there was still not a solid runway surface.

1946 onwards saw jet aircraft at Duxford but, because of the emerging Russian threat during the 1950s, many squadrons were moved to Germany. After that, with the development of guided missiles, the role of piloted aircraft changed and Duxford closed as an operative station in 1961, mothballed under a care and management regime. By 1965 it was pretty dilapidated.

Then, during the filming of the 'Battle of Britain', Duxford was used for location shots and some action which was when, simulating an attack on an airfield, one of the four original hangars was blown up for real. This use of the airfield brought Duxford to the attention of the Imperial War Museum which, by this time, had a collection of historic aircraft scattered among various locations. Restoration work started and aircraft were moved in item by item. The Concorde arrived one Sunday largely unheralded because someone realised in the nick of time that the M11, then under construction, was about to cut through the long runway needed for

her to land. (As she came in very low, very noisy, Concorde nearly deafened members of the then Saffron Walden Art Group which was painting in Duxford village (I know because my aunt was there and she told me!).

The super hangar was built in 1982 and the American aircraft hangar around 2000 so by now, not only was it the largest aviation museum in Europe, but it also housed the largest collection of American aircraft outside the USA.

As an accredited guide at Duxford Museum, Mike Nicholas knew his stuff and happily engaged with members of the audience, some of whom were also very knowledgeable. What is missing from my account of this excellent talk is Mike's wonderful selection of photographs, some nearly 100 years old. Some he used to illustrate a 'virtual walk through' of some of the exhibits showing, to name but a few, a Tiger Moth, a Lancaster, a Sunderland, a Harrier Jump jet, American aircraft, a spy plane and an assembly of Spitfires in their traditional home.

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**David Laing**

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