



# Museum Matters

Newsletter of Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd

Summer 2015 Issue 36

## In this Issue

### Highlights and Happenings:

Chairman	1
Curator's Column: Roman resident legs it to the Museum	1/2
Wallace takes the Biscuit: Carolyn Wingfield	2/3
Natural Sciences : Sarah Kenyon	3
Human History Collections: Leah Mellors	3
Internship experiences	4
Object of the Month: Leah Mellors	4/5
Exhibition	5
Museum Outreach News: Gemma Tully	5/6
Store Move Surprises: Richard Priestley	6
Museum Society News From the Treasurer	6/7
Membership	7
Reports on Talks and Events	7/10

### Dates of future Events - see Noticeboard enclosed

## Highlights and Happenings

### From the Chairman

The Board at its last meeting decided to postpone the date of the Annual General Meeting to the 25th September, 2015. This follows the resignation of the Treasurer Andrew Penman owing to a change in his personal circumstances. David Laing has agreed to return as a temporary Treasurer, but needed more time to complete the preparation of the annual Accounts and have these examined. Please make sure that you change the AGM date in your diaries to 25th September. The Board is most grateful to David for coming to help out until such time as we can find a new Treasurer.

The main event of the spring has been the Waterloo event which went with a big bang! 30th May began with the volunteers erecting the array of tents and the arrival of a detachment of British Soldiers. Their demonstrations of the one shot muskets used at the time of Waterloo were well supported, It was also possible to fight a virtual battle on laptops, well beyond my capabilities! The pop up tea room and the bookstall were well supported and resulted in funds for the Society. Well done everybody.

The new store shelving is at last complete. Work proceeds with the packing at Newport and continues in the new store in anticipation of the move in the next couple of months. By the time of the AGM in September, all should be complete and we hope to have a viewing for members in the autumn.

Both the Society website and the Museum website have been re-launched. Tony Morton, a member of the Support Committee, has made an excellent job of bringing both sites up-to-date. If you have not yet visited these sites, do have a look. There is now current information on the Society's affairs and the Museum site is full of interesting information. As a result of suggestions made by the Support Committee, the Donation Box has been moved to a more prominent position in the entrance hall. Try flushing your money to hear the audible thank you!

The new Development Committee has met twice and is making progress in setting up the framework for the plans for the re-development of the Museum buildings. The Committee spent some time visiting all the back rooms of the Museum and looking at the proposed site. We hope to have a Design Brief to consider at our next meeting This is however a long-term project so do not expect builders on site just yet!

The spring series of talks is now complete and two visits have just been published by Carol Law and Heather Salvidge. Thank you to Carol for the quality of the talks she arranges. The visit to the Polar Museum will have taken place by the time you read this, but you may still have time to join the visit to Fingringhoe Wick on 7th July.

*Tony Watson*

## Curator's Column

### Roman resident legs it to the Museum

New acquisitions do not usually arrive with a Police escort, but the latest addition to the archaeology collections on 16th June was a special case. Back in February, builders working on a new development near the top of Debden Road, Saffron Walden, unexpectedly uncovered the lower half of a human skeleton (leg bones and part of the pelvis of an adult; it has not been possible to establish gender or age at death).

The Police and Essex County Council archaeologists were duly summoned, the remains carefully recovered and the surrounding area checked: however this was an isolated burial and clearly of some antiquity, the bones being rather weathered. An iron nail found with the bones may be the only surviving evidence that the burial was originally made in a wooden coffin. Once Police formalities were completed, arrangements were made to deposit the human remains at Saffron Walden Museum, where they will join our study collection of human remains from other archaeological sites around the district.

The burial is probably from the later Roman period, in other words dating from some time between the 3rd and early 5th centuries AD. As today, there were different burial rites in use during the Roman period. In the late Iron Age and early Roman period, cremation burials were more usual, in which cremated remains were usually placed in a pot or other container, and other vessels with food and drink were buried alongside the urn in a pit.

Social status seems to have been reflected in the quantity and quality of the grave-goods; the so-called 'rich man's burial' from Stansted Airport contained a beautiful Italian bronze wine jug and serving dish, glass and fine tableware, which can be seen on display in the Museum.

During the later Roman period, inhumation (burying the body in a grave) became the predominant rite. In some cases this may have been linked to the adoption of Christianity and belief in bodily resurrection, but other beliefs and rites continued, especially in rural areas, and we certainly cannot infer anything from this burial about the religion of the person buried.

By law in the Roman Empire, burials could not take place within towns, so at Great Chesterford and Colchester, for example, we find cemeteries lining the Roman roads leading out of the towns, along with suburban development and workshops which sprang up outside the town walls. In smaller settlements and farmsteads, the community established family burial plots on their land.

Our anonymous Roman person was most likely from a small farm or hamlet nearby, buried in a corner of the land where they lived. The only other clue we have are records of some late Iron Age and Roman pottery found many years ago on the site of the water tower at The Friends' School, on the other side of the Debden Road (Essex Historic Environment Record 504 and 505).

From the 5th century AD, as Roman influence waned and a new Anglo-Saxon ruling class established themselves, burials reflected cultural changes in the range of distinctive jewellery and equipment accompanying the dead. Cremation and inhumation were both practised, with personal, local and regional identities expressed in choice of rite and grave goods.

Then in the late 7th century AD, everything changed: the Roman church became established and uniform burial practice was imposed. Bodies were interred aligned east-west without grave goods. Furthermore, burials were now made in churchyards, and although the Saxon churches were mostly re-built or replaced in Norman and later medieval times, the churchyards around them continued in use and many remain in use today. We know from 19th century excavations that the main focus of local Romano-British and Saxon settlement was along the valley of the King's Slade, in the area of Abbey Lane and running westwards into

Audley End Park. From the Abbey Lane area there is evidence of Roman-period burials and a later Saxon Christian cemetery, and we may guess that a small wooden church and the Saxon manorial centre were located somewhere in the vicinity. After the Norman Conquest, the new de Mandeville lords of the manor established their seat - Walden castle - and a new church (the forerunner of the present St Mary's) on the hill overlooking the valley.

Outside the Abbey Lane area, evidence of Roman occupation is relatively scarce in Saffron Walden - just a handful of potsherds here and there, recovered from various small excavations in advance of developments.

However, archaeological research often works in small incremental steps and through the gradual accumulation of evidence to reveal the bigger picture. One day we might have more evidence to place our lone Roman burial in context.

**Carolyn Wingfield**

*The Museum would like to thank Essex Police and Essex County Council archaeologists Maria Medlycott and Richard Havis for providing information on the circumstances of this discovery and its likely date. See Maria Medlycott's article in the Spring 2015 issue of the Saffron Walden Historical Journal for a photo and more archaeological information.*

### **Wallace Takes the Biscuit**

We always hope that our visitors will acquire a taste for museums, and now they can literally do just that with our exclusive Museum biscuits, featuring Wallace the Lion and our Ancient Egyptian sarcophagus!

The idea was cooked up by Gemma Tully and Rachel from The Biscuit Jar, a Saffron Walden based company. You may have seen Rachel's delightful Saffron Walden crocus biscuits at the Tourist Information Centre, or taken younger family members to her biscuit-making workshop Mouth-Watering Magic at the Museum in April 2013. This takes 'baking with mummy' to a whole new level and a limited number of the large, individually-wrapped biscuits are now on sale at the Museum for just £1.75 p each. Ideal for a special souvenir or original little gift for someone.



Crumbs, what will Gemma and the visitor services team think of next...?

**Carolyn Wingfield**

## Natural Sciences

### Sarah Kenyon

The last few months have been taken up with packing collections, dealing with Special Roadside Verge site issues and organising the 2015 programme of ecological surveys that will be carried out by the team of volunteer Verge Surveyors. If you fancy getting out and about to see local wildlife this summer, have a look at the website [www.uttlesford-wildlife.org.uk](http://www.uttlesford-wildlife.org.uk) for some walks or cycle rides that visit special roadside verges.

We completed packing of Geology at the off-site store and have been working in the Natural Sciences store at the Museum. The Store Team volunteers have done sterling work packing up 377 boxes.

Herbarium boxes in storage



The following table shows the number of boxes packed for each of the Natural Sciences categories of items:

Collections	Boxes
Amphibians and Reptiles	21
Birds' nests	3
Fish	11
Osteology (bones and teeth)	47
Invertebrates (sponges, corals, crustacea, sea urchins, starfish)	33
Herbarium (pressed, dried plants and wax models)	252

And here are just a few disparate examples of items packed!



Wax fungus model made by George Nathan Maynard.  
Curator of Saffron Walden Museum from 1880 to 1904



Pike called Big Bertha



Herbarium Sheet

And the stick insects from the last newsletter? They continue to moult and grow, and are now about 7 centimetres long!

## Human History Collections

### Leah Mellors

In April, I celebrated my one-year work anniversary at Saffron Walden Museum. It is hard to believe that I have been here for over a year - the time has flown by!

Packing up our collections for the store move continues. Every box and object that can be packed at the Newport store has now been packed and is awaiting transportation to the new store. With the help of our fantastic volunteers, I have also packed every box in the Organics store and have moved onto some of the larger items, such as furniture and wood carvings. Packing the Organics store has been very enjoyable and, as I have come across some amazing objects, I have had the opportunity to develop some ideas for future exhibitions and the re-displays of the permanent galleries.

Supervising the interns has also taken up a large proportion of my time over the past three months. Dorian and Nicola have both contributed greatly to our work on the collections, and you can read more about their experiences in this newsletter.

Exhibition changeover is looming on the horizon and Gemma and I have begun work on our next exhibition, Uttlesford: A Community of Collectors, which will explore the collections of ordinary people in our local community. Recently, we held a workshop for the participants of the project, where I gave them a crash-course in writing text for exhibitions and displaying objects. The participants will write their own text and install their own displays, with our guidance. I also gave them a tour of our stores and talked to them about how we care for museum objects to ensure they are preserved. The best part of the day was seeing our participants bond over their shared love of collecting.



Workshop

Alongside all of this, I have been steadily addressing our documentation backlog and, with the help of our intern, Nicola, and my wonderful collections volunteers, I have been able to reduce this quite significantly. Almost all of our 3-dimensional social history objects are now on our collections database and we are making good progress with the 2-dimensional objects! Having this information on the database makes it so much easier to respond to enquiries and to select objects for displays and exhibitions. There is still a lot of work to be done but I'd like to take this opportunity to thank my collections volunteers (Hilary, Judy, Ian, Hamish, Will and Jill) for all their hard work so far.

## Internships

Leah Mellors

The pilot of our new internship scheme has been a great success. In April, we welcomed two interns to the Museum, Dorian Knight and Nicola Lawson. Dorian and Nicola worked part-time at the Museum for three months on a collections review and rationalisation project. This project aimed to audit a large proportion of the social history collections and to progress the rationalisation of the archaeology collections. Here they tell us about their experiences of interning at Saffron Walden Museum.

### Nicola Lawson



"I applied for the Collections Review RA (Social History) internship at Saffron Walden Museum because it seemed like a great opportunity to take the next step in my museum career. I started out volunteering in museums, then went on to do the Museum Studies MA at the University of Leicester. When I applied for the internship, I'd just finished the MA and gone back to volunteering in museums to gain additional experience while job searching. The internship allowed me

to take on more responsibility and work more closely with collections than I'd been able to do before. I've always loved social history, and the personal stories of some of the objects we discovered here have been a particular highlight - the other day in the store I found a fragment of the Berlin Wall!

Over the last ten weeks, I've been working my way through the Inorganics store, documenting objects, repacking them, and considering objects for rationalisation. I've also been very lucky to have had the opportunity to get involved in other projects, such as the Museum's *Uttlesford: A Community of Collectors* outreach project, and an *Object of the Month* display. Working on these diverse projects has allowed me to develop my skills in collections management and care, exhibition research and text writing, and understanding the processes and procedures of rationalisation. It has also been a thoroughly enjoyable experience. The skills have helped me to secure a two-year contract working as a Graduate Trainee Curator at the Beacon Museum in Whitehaven, Cumbria, which is an exciting new opportunity for me!"

### Dorian Knight

"I have always been fascinated by archaeology and the tangible



and sensory link it provides to the ancient human past. This internship has really allowed me to explore that interest! During my internship, I have been carrying out work to help with the process of de-accessioning, or

removing, artefacts permanently from the Museum's archaeology collection. There are lots of possible reasons for removing objects from the collection: some may be better off in other museum

collections or used for educational purposes in a school or in a handling collection.

On a daily basis this means rummaging through the archaeology collection and finding items that have potential for removal, then researching, documenting and packing those pieces, so they are ready for their new homes. This project has given me the opportunity to handle a wide range of objects in the collection, from time periods as diverse as the Stone Age through to Tudor England. Although I can't say I have one particular favourite piece (there's so much that's interesting!) I am quite attached to this ceramic Romano-British beaker, seen in this photo. Although the shape and colours are quite simplistic, the maker (approximately 2000 years ago) imprinted his thumb six times around the body of the object as a decorative device. That human aspect gives the object incredible vitality and life and a physical connection to those who lived so long ago.

I have had a really great time here working with the collections, and believe this opportunity has given me new skills that will really help me as my museum career develops".

One of the aims of the internship was to assist young museum professionals to progress in their careers. I was keen to provide support and mentoring for people in the early stages of their careers, as I received invaluable support during my own internship at Leeds Museums & Galleries. Whilst it has been challenging at times, supervising the internships has taught me a lot about people-management and mentoring, and I look forward to continuing with the internship scheme.

I am delighted that Nicola has secured a job at the Beacon Museum and that Dorian has had several interviews for entry level jobs in museums. We wish them both every success in their careers.

*The pilot of our internship scheme was funded by SHARE Museums East.*

## Object of the Month

Leah Mellors

As I have worked my way through the stores, packing up collections in preparation for our store move, I have come across some incredible objects that I believe deserve to be seen and appreciated! This inspired me to start a new Object of the Month scheme, as a way of engaging visitors with objects that are rarely seen on display.

Each month, a member of staff or a volunteer will pick an object that they find fascinating. The object will be researched and displayed in the Museum for a month and an accompanying article will be published on our blog ([www.saffronwaldenmuseum.swmuseumsoc.org.uk/blog](http://www.saffronwaldenmuseum.swmuseumsoc.org.uk/blog)).

Our **Object of the Month for May** was a case containing seven 'relics' or souvenirs, including a lock of Napoleon Bonaparte's hair and a lock of hair from Copenhagen, the Duke of Wellington's horse.

I chose this object to tie in with our celebrations of the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo. Most of the relics were donated to the Museum in the 19th century and they were mounted together in a case by a previous curator.

The lock of Napoleon's hair was cut from his head shortly after his death on the island of St Helena on 5th May, 1821. It was donated to the Museum by John Player in 1838 and we believe it came into the Museum with a letter written to Mr Player by Alexander Giffellan, one of the men stationed on St Helena to guard Napoleon.



Napoleon's hair

The case also contains a lock of hair belonging to Copenhagen, the Duke of Wellington's war horse. Copenhagen was used by the Duke of Wellington for the entire 17-hour duration of the Battle of Waterloo. At the end of the battle, Wellington dismounted and patted Copenhagen on the flank, causing the horse to kick out at him, narrowly missing his head! The lock of hair was donated to the Museum in 1838 by Chas Davis of Ascot, the Queen's Huntsman.

**June's Object of the Month** was a Braille slate, which is a tool used to write Braille. This object was chosen by Nicola Lawson, our Social History Collections intern. The Braille slate is made of brass, and has two arms which are hinged at one end. It is designed to hold a sheet of heavy paper between the two arms. A stylus is used to make indents into the paper, forming the Braille.



Braille slate

Braille was developed in the 1820s by Louis Braille, who wanted to create a method of writing for touch readers. He based it on 'Night Writing', which was a code developed by Charles Barbier for Napoleon, so that he could communicate silently on the battlefield.

The **Object of the Month for July** is a reconstructed Roman pot, which has been chosen by our Archaeology Collections Review Intern, Dorian Knight. Why not pop into the Museum during July to see it, or read about it on our blog?

## Exhibition

29th August-7th February, 2016  
*Uttlesford: A Community of Collectors*

## Museum Outreach News

*Gemma Tully*

Finally, a chance for me and my wonderful education and events helpers to catch our breath after what can only be described as May madness!

The fun all began on Friday, 15th May when the Museum took part in the national Museums at Night event, opening our doors to the public to explore by torchlight. The event is always hugely popular with families, but this year we were busier than ever with over 150 visitors flooding through the doors in just two hours.

May half term saw two big events take place in the Museum and museum grounds. We celebrated the Museum's, slightly belated, 180th birthday by holding parties for children from the local community. 40 children and their families came along and enjoyed a museum treasure hunt, traditional party games, a birthday tea and a spectacular cake made by Dorrington's bakers.



Birthday cake in the school room

To top it all off, we even had a visit from a very friendly 'real', 'live' Wallace the lion, who the children absolutely loved. Wallace joined in with lots of our games, including sleeping lions, as well as being available for plenty of high-fives and cuddles!

Partygoer meets Wallace the Lion



Two days later, the Museum's grounds were transformed into a Waterloo Camp to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo.

Soldiers from the 44th East Essex regiment, led by Colonel Parker, talked to visitors about life in camp and the Battle of Waterloo itself and gave musket demonstrations. The day really went off with a bang, even though the French troops who were also expected on the day didn't show up - the cowards!



Musket demonstrations

As well as the soldiers, visitors could also handle real artefacts from the Battle of Waterloo from the Museum's



Young recruits -  
taking the King's shilling!

collection, and were provided with fantastic stories and oodles of inspiring facts by Jenny Gibsone. As if this wasn't enough, families were then able to recreate their own Battle of Waterloo on a set of iPads which the Museum was able to borrow due to a grant from Essex County Council.

Waterloo iPad activity



With wonderful artwork created by Delia Delderfield, families could take the role of Wellington or Napoleon on their horses and even control their armies in a special Puppet Pals app, which lets users move characters and do voiceovers to make their own mini-videos. It was a huge success and definitely something we'd like to do more of in the Museum (donations towards an iPad fund are welcome!).

To keep visitors refreshed, we also had a pop-up tea room, run by our wonderful casual staff and volunteers, who we'd like to thank for all their hard work both making cakes and staffing the stall. The cakes, along with a second-hand book sale, made over £400 for the Museum Society and around 350 people came along and enjoyed the day. Thanks again to all those who helped, especially to the Museum Society members who assisted with all the marquee erection and heavy lifting duties!

As for what is still to come in 2015, next on the agenda are the summer holiday activities. This year we will be making clay figurines, hoop gliders and dinosaur feet. Check out the 2015 programme for details and drop in with the children or the grandchildren any time between 11 am-1 pm and 2-4 pm on the 5m, 12th and 19th of August. Hope to see you there!

### Store move surprises

Whilst the new store on Shirehill nears completion in terms of solar panels, IT connection, deep clean etc., the packing of objects has continued at Newport and in the Museum itself. A dedicated band of volunteers has now been working since last December to ensure that the actual move of objects goes as smoothly and safely as possible.

For those of us doing the packing, it has been an education as well as an enjoyable and sometimes surprising exercise. Acid-free tissue paper and bubble wrap have become old friends, and our wrapping skills are so honed that Christmas present wrapping will present no problems next December!

Items to be packed have presented interesting challenges such as the multi-pronged hay forks and pitch forks, to ensure that they were protected enough for transit and at the same time were sufficiently padded to avoid injury to the mover. The Victorians collected more molluscs - sea shells to you and me - than there are it seems on Southend beach! Padding these to prevent damage in transit was also a challenging experience. And you can imagine the trepidation felt on ensuring that a 2000 year-old Roman amphora was safely packed for the move.

For me, however, the most fascinating items to pack came when we moved on to objects made by Napoleonic Prisoners of War. Two memorable items in particular come to mind. The first was a box much like a vanity case with a lid that raised up. Inside this box were compartments with drawers on the outside. The whole box, compartments and drawers had designs on them like marquetry. Yet the whole thing was made of straw! The second object, however, was even more remarkable. It was a cherry stone, the inside of which had been hollowed out; an ivory cap had been made as a plug. Inside the stone were nine minute silver items which, on closer examination, were seen to be perfectly shaped tea spoons. Quite remarkable! It must have taken hours to perfect, but I suppose the prisoners did have time on their hands!

On behalf of the Board and the Curator, I would like to express the Museum's sincere thanks to all volunteers for their time and efforts in making the packing a smooth and even enjoyable operation. I hope that, like me, you have had a fascinating and educative experience, not to mention those Christmas skills!

**Richard Priestley Chair, Museum Support Committee**

### Museum Society News

#### From the Treasurer

There is very little to report after a hectic 2014/15, with the sale of 40 Castle Street and the acquisition of the new store in Shire Hill now completed. Subscriptions continue to come in and it is a great help that so many of these are now paid by Standing Order, and with the additional benefit of Gift Aid.

If you have not already paid your subscription for the current year, please answer the plea from the Membership Officer. If you are not already taking advantage of paying by Standing Order, and with a Gift Aid Declaration, please consider these options now.

Now that the Society is about to occupy the store at Shire Hill, the Directors are considering the financial implications of this and it may well be that an increase in subscription will be needed; any proposal regarding this will be put to the Annual General Meeting.

A reminder that the Annual General Meeting has had to be postponed until Friday, 25th September, 2015: this will be held in the Museum at 7.30 for 8.00 pm. I hope you will be able to attend.

*David Laing*

## Membership

If you have already paid your annual subscription - thank you very much: it's a great help and saves time and money in sending reminders! The Society also appreciates the financial help of those members who are taxpayers and have made Gift Aid declarations: this enables us to claim tax refunds which boost our funds. The declaration needs to be signed once only with no more action is needed, so it's an easy way to assist our funds further.

It's disappointing, though, that quite a number of subscriptions remain outstanding - they're actually due on 1<sup>st</sup> April. Could I ask you to check to see if you have overlooked this; if so, please pay without further delay it'll save time and not a little expense. If you would like me to check individual records, please contact me before a final review of outstanding subscriptions in July. My contact details are - telephone 01799 527546 or email: s.christinesharpe@hotmail.co.uk.

*Christine Sharpe*

## Talks and Events

**9th March**

**The Polar Museum in Cambridge**

**Speaker: Heather Lane, MA (Oxon), DileS, MCLIP,  
Keeper at the Scott Polar Research institute**

Aware that 2010 marked the centenary of the embarkation of the last of Sir Robert Falcon Scott's Antarctic expedition Heather Lane, then Librarian at the Scott Polar Research institute, in 2004 approached the Institute's Director. She considered this anniversary should be marked but that, currently, the Institute's museum was not fit to do so. Given her head, for the five years between 2005 and 2010, Heather set about the re-development of the Museum.

The Museum was set up in 1920 to reflect the science of and discoveries of knowledge about both south and north polar regions. Funding was from residual money from a fund initiated by Professor Frank Debenham to care for the widows and orphans of the men who had died on the Terra Nova expedition.

Heather Lane was told initially that there were 6,000 objects in the Museum but it turned out that there were more than 10,000 and then - Aaargh! A loft holding 15 large sledges and 3 kayaks also came to light. Heather's photograph of 'the store' showed an over-stuffed cupboard full of boxes, many open and with unconserved items. Radio-active material required safe disposal and asbestos removal alone took 9 weeks. There was no catalogue, just a series of accession registers. The Museum also suffered from outdated display cases, poor lighting, inadequate display arrangement and almost non-existent interpretation plates. For instance, Captain Oates' sleeping bag (the one he got out of to walk into the blizzard), rolled inside its carrying bag and just labelled 'Captain Oates' sleeping bag' with no story.

A successful bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) gave Heather a full-time assistant enabling more conservation work. A second HLF grant came; a documentation assistant was recruited as well as a design team of two, who persuaded Heather to reduce significantly the number of artefacts on display at any one time. The art collection alone held 3,500 paintings and drawings including water colours by Edward Wilson who had perished with Scott in March, 1912. Everything went through a freezer for 2 weeks at -40C which eliminated moths and other pests except vodka beetles that are 'dealt with' on a 6-monthly rota. Other curatorial decisions included the safe disposal of drugs taken to the south pole but not used such as cocaine and other opiates.

The official opening of the re-developed Museum took place on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2010, the centenary of the departure of the 'Terra Nova' expedition, in the presence of the Earl and Countess of Wessex. In 2014, the footfall was 53,000 compared with 3,000 in earlier times. Its work continues today; the collection expands with a name changed from 'The Museum of the Scott Polar Research Institute' to The Polar Museum. Now a grant from the Esme Fairbairn Foundation has enabled the modern digitisation of the whole catalogue and record.

Part of the collection on display is changed every three months. There are now native Greenland objects held and the records of when aviation companies mapped the north polar region preparatory to developing trans-polar routes, and measuring the depth of the ice. There will be exhibitions to mark Shackleton's work including the 'Endurance' expedition 1914—17: work with schools and outreach visits continues: nearly always some objects are out on loan or touring the world. There is a special link with the Amundsen Museum in Norway.

All in all, a wonderful achievement in five years and one which, apart from our own Museum's staff, will be especially appreciated by those of us volunteering to help move the objects from the Newport and other stores to Shirehill.

*Heather Salvidge*

**13<sup>th</sup> April**

**The Fry Art Gallery and its Collections**

**Speaker: Gordon Cummings**

The building now housing the Fry Art Gallery was built in 1856 by Francis Gibson, a Quaker and Saffron Walden banker who also created Bridge End Garden. Its purpose was to show his own art collection that mainly consisted of Dutch paintings.



The Fry Gallery was opened in its present form in 1985 and is home to an impressive number of paintings, prints, illustrations and decorative designs by artists from the 20th century to the present day, who have local connections and who have made a significant contribution in their field. In particular the Gallery aims to tell the story of the Great Bardfield artists who lived in the village from 1930-1970. They were diverse in style but shared a love of figurative art. The Fry is the only Gallery holding and showing a comprehensive collection of their work.

Gordon Cummings went on to describe the lives and works of three of the Great Bardfield artists that are on display at the Gallery: Edward Bawden RA. Eric Ravilious and John Aldridge RA. Edward Bawden born in 1903 in Braintree, Essex, attended the Friends School in Saffron Walden. When 15, Bawden tried many forms of media at the Cambridge Art School : he then went on to the Royal College of Art, School of Design. London where he met his great friend, Eric Ravilious. The art world establishment at the time looked down upon those artists like Bawden because of their attendance at the School of Design - Bawden always described himself as a designer, not an artist!

In 1932 he married Charlotte Epton and moved to Brick House in Great Bardfield where Bawden began to develop his watercolour technique. During World War II he was appointed an official war artist. He witnessed the evacuation from Dunkirk: was on board the RMS Laconia when she was torpedoed, and was a prisoner of war in Casablanca before being liberated by the Americans.

Eric Ravilious (1903-1942) was born in Sussex and went to the Design School at the Royal College of Art. He studied under Paul Nash who was an enthusiast for wood engraving and who encouraged Ravilious in the wood engraving technique: it was Nash who proposed him for membership of the Society of Wood Engravers. In 1930 Ravilious married Tirzak Greenwood, also an artist and engraver. and they moved in [933 to Great Bardfield. He designed ceramics for Wedgwood, including a coronation mug, as well as glassware for Stuart Cystal. Like Edward Bawden, he was appointed an official war artist, painting scenes of ships, barrage balloons and coastal defences. He spent time at RAF Debden and Sawbridgeworth, flying regularly in Tiger Moths and sketching them. In 1942 while based in Iceland, he went on a mission to search for a missing aircraft: his plane failed to return and was never found.

The final Great Bardfield artist was John Aldridge RA (1905-1983). Aldridge was independently wealthy and taught himself to paint. He and his cats moved to Great Bardfield in 1933 and became friends with Edward Bawden.

The two artists collaborated in designing Bardfield wallpapers for Cole and Son. in 1941 Aldridge joined the British Intelligence Corps as an officer interpreting aerial photographs. After the War he returned to landscape painting and in the 1950s he opened his home, Place House in Great Bardfield. for summer exhibitions. He exhibited his oil paintings while his wife exhibited her hand-knitted rugs. The 1960s saw the Great Bardfield art community fragment, though John Aldridge remained there until his death in 1983.

The Fry Art Gallery has received Heritage Lottery funding to extend its collection and now includes works by Bawden's son, Richard, and examples of the varied works by artists who made their way to Bardfield in the 1950s - Marianne Straub, Audrey Cruddas, Sheila Robinson, Bernard Cheese and Walter Hoyle.

**Carol Law**

## 11th May English Saffron

**Speaker: David Smale**

Saffron is the world's most expensive spice: it is difficult, temperamental and labour-intensive to grow. Saffron probably originated many years ago in Greece and known as "krokus".

There are references to it in the M3 Bible: Henry VIII had some tights dyed with it and Anne Boleyn used it - a high status commodity indeed. it was smuggled into Essex in the 1500s and was grown extensively in the county and in



south Cambridgeshire in the 16th and 17th centuries. Walden itself, then Chipping Walden, was not so much a centre of cultivation but the main market town for it and grew wealthy on the proceeds. In 16th century, England was the biggest exporter of the spice. concentrating on growing the best quality.

The Saffron crocus, *crocus sativus*, is an autumn-flowering plant which has numerous sub-species - but not to be confused with the autumn-flowering mauve crocus, the *colchicum*, which is much easier to grow but poisonous.

Saffron crocuses reproduce by propagation of the corms and planting the daughter corms. The three orange stigma are the principal commercial part (these days some use is made of the petals and stamens for other purposes). It likes light, calcareous, well-drained soil and is grown in plots or fields called 'gardens' in raised beds with about 8 rows of corms. It likes to be lifted and replaced regularly, usually every 8 years. Then you have to keep pests away, provide fertilizer, irrigation and protect from wildlife. Harvesting starts in autumn between late September and December.

In harvesting. each flower is picked by hand. A good 'croker' can pluck 1.000 per hour which is just as well as, for a dried weight of 1 gram ,you need 150 flowers i.e. 150,000 per kilo. When plucking, it is desirable to keep the 3 stigma together. Drying the stigma is a tricky business and relies on the judgement of the croker: too wet and it rots. too dry and it crumbles.

Nowadays English Saffron is used in dyeing, for health benefits and for culinary purposes. Its health-giving properties include being an anti-oxidant: an anti

depressant as in 'as happy as a man in a bag of Saffron': a narcotic (it sends bees to sleep): of assistance in the treatment of heart diseases, some skin conditions and blood disorders.



In the culinary field it has many uses both sweet and savoury and can be used for alcohol enhancement - David had brought some lovely yellow gin. When using saffron, it is far better to infuse it for a minimum of two hours, then use half this in cooking and half at the end. Avoid grinding it and heat it (before cooking that is). When buying, choose carefully; English Saffron is top quality and can be found in specialist outlets and delicatessens. Countries currently growing the spice are Iran, Kashmir, Spain, Greece, Morocco, France, Switzerland, Pennsylvania in the USA. and of course England.

David's output in a good year is about 200 gms and, stored carefully, saffron can keep for years. It is an extraordinary spice, very highly valued with many excellent properties, but very temperamental to cultivate requiring specific conditions. Perhaps the good burghers of Saffron Walden were wise in making the town the marketing centre rather than a major place of cultivation.

**Heather Salvidge**

**8th June**

**Sir Thomas Smith**

**Speaker: Jeremy Collingwood**

Few of us in Saffron Walden have heard of Sir Thomas Smith, scholar and diplomat, but as he was born in Saffron Walden in 1513, he deserves to be better known in his own town. Jeremy Collingwood has written a book entitled 'Sir Thomas Smith, Scholar, Statesman and Son of Saffron Walden' and was keen to inform the Museum Society members about Sir Thomas' life and works.

He was born in Saffron Walden in 1513, the second son of Agnes and Tom Smith, a farmer and draper. He was a solitary boy who enjoyed reading and wood carving. He went to the local Grammar School and then on to Queens College, Cambridge. He stood



out " immediately as exceptionally / intelligent among the many bright students there. He was made a King's Scholar and then in 1533 became a public reader or professor. In 1540 Smith went abroad and, after studying in France and Italy and taking a degree in law at the University of Padua, returned to Cambridge in 1542.

He and his friend Sir John Cheke were the great classical scholars of the time in England, and he took the lead in the reform in the pronunciation of Greek that aroused much controversy. He was appointed the first Regis Professor of Civil Law, earning a salary of £40 per annum.

He was Vice-Chancellor of the University in the same year and became Provost of Eton College in 1547, and also Dean of Carlisle Cathedral. He had wide-ranging interests that included astronomy, architecture, languages and had 350 books in his library. Smith was a pedant who annotated his books excessively; he bequeathed his library to Queens College.

He was an early convert to Protestant views, which brought him into prominence when Edward VI came to the throne.

He became Secretary of State and was knighted in 1548 as well as becoming a Member of Parliament for Marlborough. In June 1549 he retreated to Eton as Provost and began writing his book *De Republica Anglorum: the Maner of Gouement or Policie of the Realm of England*. It was eventually published in 1581 and was an impressive economic analysis of Tudor England. On the accession of Queen Mary, he lost all his offices and spent time in the Tower of London.

In the reign of Elizabeth I, he again became prominent in public affairs becoming a Member of Parliament for Liverpool and Ambassador to France where he remained until 1566. He was one of Elizabeth's most trusted counsellors, being appointed in 1572 Chancellor of the Order of the Garter and a Secretary of State. Elizabeth I granted Smith land in Ireland to set up an English colony but this venture ended in disaster, as did a venture to make copper from iron and vitriol.

Sir Thomas Smith married twice, both of his wives bringing considerable dowries. Between 1567-68, he rebuilt his property Hill Hall at Theydon Mount, Epping (a visit is being arranged for 23rd September). Here his interest in architecture and the influence of his European travels can be seen. He suffered from cancer of the throat and died at Hill Hall in 1577, where he had designed his own tomb. He was a man who was never at home at the Tudor Court, lacking an interest in dance and was awkward with women. Although he had a career as a diplomat, he was blunt and easily made enemies. However from relatively humble beginnings he achieved much wealth and power in his life.

**Carol Law**

**Visit: 23rd June**

**The Polar Museum, Cambridge**

As a follow-up to Heather Lane's talk earlier this year, Carol arranged a visit with a guided tour of the Museum so that we could see the results of her work five years down the line.

The front entrance from Lensfield Road is welcoming. The entrance hall has been left uncluttered but with sufficient artefacts on display to lead you in to the stories that the Museum tells. There you find the two polychrome domed maps set in the ceiling, one depicting the Arctic region and the other Antarctica. The decoration of this memorial hall reflects the Polar expeditions with mosaics set in the floor of the Southern Cross and the Great Bear. At the top of the pillars each side of the 'southern' doorway, penguins are represented whilst on the 'northern' side there are polar bears.



Our guide, Greta, has a two-year post to work through all the items in the collection describing, measuring and recording as well who used them and what for, by whom they were made or manufactured, and then putting the information into an on-line catalogue.

The Museum tells the stories of peoples who are indigenous to the Arctic (Antarctica has no such indigenous peoples), those who have explored there and in the Antarctic and have used the resources. So we moved into the display area about the lives of those who had the Arctic as home. There is a kayak with some of its accoutrements - kayaks were made to fit the specific size of the user and always by women. Another object was a pair of double-thumbed kayak mittens. When you wear them in a kayak, the water trickles down the paddle shaft and the mittens get wet, cold and heavy. So you turn them over and use the other thumb allowing the air to dry the wet side or, if it freezes, let you knock off the ice - see?

There was a gut anorak, again made by women and you can tell that it was made in winter as the skin is freezer rather than air-dried and thus is rather opaque. There were more lovely, useful everyday objects made by the people of the Tumulit. Then displays of Inuit art and other objects, some dating back quite a while; there are many carvings, relatively modern since the encouragement given by the Canadian Government. This display changes every three months: we saw exquisite bird carvings. Then came explanations about Shamans and the spiritual life of the Inuit and what they ate, for example caribou, whales, seals, fish, berries, seaweed and eggs. There is the harness used with reindeer and other winter equipment, and examples of the difference made to available objects when the Siberian peoples could conduct more trade with people from the south. There is also an Emperor penguin - huge - brooding a tiny wee chick.

You then move onto the stories of the explorers, some more successful than others starting with Frobisher in the 16th century and the many attempts to find the North West passage.

The names of Ross, Parry, Franklin. The quest to be the first to reach the North Pole, the undisputed success here was not achieved until Wally Herbert in 1969. Then various expeditions to Antarctica to map it and reach the South Pole which Amundsen was first to do. You can see some of the equipment which people took with them which included not only sledges but objects and pastimes to stop them going mad in the long, white winter - a barrel organ, for instance. Sailors and other men made scrimshaw from sperm whale teeth and others made model ships. Later a photographer, an artist and a surgeon were vital members of the expedition teams. Some food items on display are a tin of pemmican, a tin of nut pemmican and one of 'Brand's Consolidated Pea Soup'. Sounds delicious!

The displays tell you about the men themselves, for example, Robert Falcon Scott and how he was both a scientist - interested in the development of torpedoes for example - as well as a man who was interested in the arts; he was married to Kathleen Scott, the sculptor. There is the log of Captain Frank Worsley, captain of the ill-fated 'Endurance' who navigated, by use of his watch, the

life boat James Caird from Elephant Island to South Georgia in 1916. There is Captain Oates' reindeer-skin sleeping bag - with the whole story, and extracts from the last written words of others on that expedition of Scott's and much more.

New media for communication and information

If you have an email address and would now like the Society to communicate with you by email, please send an email to Paul Salvidge at [SaffronWaldenMS@gmail.com](mailto:SaffronWaldenMS@gmail.com) and he will add you to the database (on the Society's laptop). We assure members that their details will not be made available to any other organisation - and many thanks for your understanding and co-operation.

Legacies

Are

you making or revising your Will? Could we ask you please to consider a legacy to the Saffron Walden Museum Society. Any special wishes regarding the bequest will be carried out, enabling you to designate your gift for a particular purpose if you wish. And don't forget legacies to charities are not subject to Inheritance Tax.

*David Laing*

**Museum Society e-mail address**

**[SaffronWaldenMS@gmail.com](mailto:SaffronWaldenMS@gmail.com)**

**Museum Society web site**

**[www.swmuseumsoc.org.uk](http://www.swmuseumsoc.org.uk)**

#### *Who to contact . . .*

#### **Museum Society**

Donations/legacies: David Laing 01799 550348

Membership: Christine Sharpe 527546

Newsletter: Susan Hollingworth 550220

Talks/Visits: Carol Law 521727

helped by: Heather Salvidge 01279 814153

#### **Museum**

Carolyn Wingfield, Curator [[cwingfield@uttlesford.gov.uk](mailto:cwingfield@uttlesford.gov.uk)]

Sarah Kenyon, Natural Sciences

Leah Mellors, Collections (Human History)

Stefan Shambrook, Security & Premises Officer

Gemma Tully, Visitor Services & Learning Officer

Telephone numbers:

Museum 01799 510333

Saffron Walden Museum Society Limited

Museum Street

Saffron Walden, CB10 1JL

Telephone: 01799 510333



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