



# Museum matters

Newsletter of Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd

Summer 2016 Issue 39

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**Dates of future Events - see Noticeboard enclosed**

## Highlights and Happenings From the Chairman

The 'Ocean World' exhibition, which had a Private Preview for Members on 19th February, has now closed. We also arranged a Private Preview for the next Exhibition 'Magna Carta' on Friday, 15<sup>th</sup> July, which was attended by over 50 members who enjoyed the occasion. I would like to thank Leah Mellors for all the effort she has put into these recent exhibitions; probably only a few of us know just how much time and expertise goes into each of these events.

Our store volunteers were very busy in the period up to the opening of the Shirehill Store on 11<sup>th</sup> April. In addition to the formal opening, some members took the opportunity to go on conducted tours of the new store during the day on the 17th and 18th April. The Society and Uttlesford District Council have been in partnership since the mid-1970s during which time I have, first as the Society Solicitor, then Vice-Chairman and latterly Chairman, worked closely with Council officers in the continuing development of the Museum. The Museum Management Working Group consists of four Society Directors and four

District Councillors supported by the Curator and Council officers in the oversight of the Museum and its development.

I would like to record the Society's thanks to two former Chairmen of the Museum Management Working Group, namely David Morson and Keith Eden. Despite their different political views, they have both led the way in laying the groundwork leading to achieving the completion of this new facility. I would also like to thank Adrian Webb and Richard Auty, Council officers, for all their work in the planning and construction of the new store and Nicola Whitman for her efficient management of the building project. The completion of the first three stages of the project, planning, construction and fitting out and moving in are a significant milestone in the history of the Museum. There is now the final task of making use of the improved access to objects and making the material available to interested groups. There is the urgent need to update the records of the artefacts - the Museum records currently show some of the objects are still in Newport!

The Development Committee has recently had the benefit of a report from Jonathan Bryant with suggestions for the redevelopment of the museum buildings within the context of the Museum/castle site. Discussions are initially being made with the Council regarding the castle and other interested parties. Meanwhile the Design brief discussions have been deferred. We will also now have to consider the effect of the recent Referendum on future funding of our re-development. Details of our proposals will be made available for your comments later this year.

The spring series of talks which began in January have suffered this year with two cancellations at the last minute owing to illness. However, there have been recent visits to St, May's Church and to Wicken Fen, and there is a visit to Payoocke's House, Coggeshall and Temple Crossing Barns planned for the 24th August.

Let's hope that the delayed summer will arrive in the near future - you may be able to sit on the new 'Listening Bench' outside the Museum!

**Tony Watson**

## Curator's Column

### Are You Battle-ready for Assandun's millennium?

The Year 1016 should be as famous as 1066 in English history, and have special meaning for Uttlesford district. Saffron Walden Museum has joined forces with Ashdon and Hadstock communities to commemorate *Assandun* with a special free public event on Saturday, 10<sup>th</sup> September at Waltons Park, Ashdon. This has been made possible thanks to a grant from Essex County Council, which has enabled the Museum to enrol well-known re-enactment organisation Regia Anglorum whose members will provide a 'living history' camp and re-enact the battle.

1066 was the 'year of live battles' - the culmination of a long and hard campaign waged by the Danes (Vikings) to take control of England from the Anglo-Saxon king {Ethelred II, popularly known as 'Ethelred the Unready', The last great battle was fought in October 1016 at a place called *Assandun* between the English forces, led by 'Ethelred's son Edmund Ironside, and the Danes led by Cnut ['Canute'], It ended with treachery and a devastating defeat for the English, but victory for Cnut. Within weeks of the battle, Edmund was dead and Cnut became king of all England.

#### Charging battle line

The battle of *Assandun* was not only a nationally important event, but also one of great significance for this area. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle makes it clear that the battle-site was in Essex, and *Assandun* may well be Ashdon north of Saffron Walden, At that date, 'Ash Down' could have referred to the undulating, ash-covered area around what we now know as the parishes of Ashdon and Hadstock. The battle site has been disputed since Tudor times, with various historians promoting the rival claims of Ashdon and Ashingdon in south-east Essex.



While the site of the battle may never be proved to everyone's satisfaction, there is good evidence to support Ashdon's claim, not least the fact those known to have taken part on the English side all had land and connections in the north-west Essex and East Anglia area, and none were from the south of the county. There are strong local traditions in both Hadstock and Ashdon about the battle site, foremost contenders being Red Field (Hadstock) and Waltons Park (Ashdon) - the site of our re-enactment. However, it does not matter where you believe the battle of *Assandun* took place to enjoy an historical, family-friendly day out.

Intriguingly, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle also tells us that in 1020 King Cnut returned to *Assandun* on a mission of reconciliation, and had a church built in stone there to commemorate all who fell in the battle. His priest Stigand was put in charge. The parish church of St. Botolph at



Members of Regia Anglorum at St Botolph's Church. Hadstock

Hadstock may well have been this church - it retains much stonework and even an ancient wooden door dating from the eleventh century, and there is no other obvious explanation why such a substantial stone church would be built here at this time. As for Stigand, he is known to have local connections too, later witnessing a land transaction in Wimbish and then rising through the ranks in the Church to become Archbishop of Canterbury. You can see Stigand in the Bayeux Tapestry, crowning the ill-fated King Harold II in 1066.

If you have children or grandchildren to entertain in the summer holidays, you may like to get them 'battle ready' at our Wednesday holiday activities on 3rd, 10th and 17<sup>th</sup> August. Make a helmet, mini-shield or help us make a mural about the Battle of *Assandun* to rival the Bayeux Tapestry! For details see the Museum's website

[www.saffronwaldenmuseum.org](http://www.saffronwaldenmuseum.org)

For more about *Assandun* see [www.battleofassandun.org](http://www.battleofassandun.org)  
Let battle commence! Will you support Edmund Ironside or Cnut?

**Carolyn Wingfield**

### Volunteering opportunities at the Museum

To keep the Museum open to the public and our programme of activities running, we need new recruits to our teams of Desk Volunteers and Learning & Activity Volunteers. If you are already a volunteer, or are unable to volunteer, don't stop reading yet - you might just know or meet someone who could be interested.

So here are at-a-glance descriptions of the volunteering roles, and the staff to contact for more information or an informal chat.

#### Desk Volunteers

Our dedicated team of desk volunteers work a shift of between 2 and 3 hours on a regular basis, Tuesday-Friday and Sunday and Bank Holiday afternoons. Main duties are to welcome visitors, sell admission tickets and souvenirs, answer the telephone and relay enquiries to the appropriate member of staff.

Contact after 22nd August: Wendy-Jo Atter, Museum Admin Officer, 01799 510644.

Email: [WAtter@uttlesford.gov.uk](mailto:WAtter@uttlesford.gov.uk)

#### Learning & Activity Volunteers

For those who like working with families and children, an opportunity to help with preparing and running our popular

holiday and half-term activities. Because this role involves direct contact with children, a DBS check (formerly known as a CRB check) is essential; this is arranged and paid for by Uttlesford District Council. This role would particularly suit anyone with experience of teaching and helping out at schools or running clubs and activities with young people.

Contact after 15<sup>th</sup> August. Carolyn Wingfield, Curator, 01799 510640. Email: cwingfield@uttlesford.gov.uk

### **Collections Volunteers**

Now we are settling into our new store at Shirehill, we need volunteers to help improve the packing of collections, and cataloguing collections on computer. Accuracy in recording information and experience in using computers, especially Microsoft Excel, are necessary but you don't need to have an in-depth knowledge of history or archaeology. There are also roles for people who are good with a digital camera or have good manual dexterity. Contact: Leah Mellors, Collections Officer (Human History), 01799510645. Email: lmellors@uttlesford.gov.uk

### **Archaeology Special in the Museum: 20th, 27th and 28th September**

We are hosting a visit from a team of specialists who are making a digital record of objects found in the Victoria Caves near Settle, Yorkshire in the 19th century.

A small number of objects found their way into the collections of Saffron Walden Museum, and the project team will be working in the gallery and talking to members of the public about what they are doing. There will be opportunities for a few volunteers to work with the Victoria Caves Team. There is a planning day on 20th September and provisionally two days in the gallery on 27th and 28th September. Provisional expressions of interest welcome - more information will be available later in the summer.

Contact after 15<sup>th</sup> August. Carolyn Wingfield, Curator, 01799510640. Email: cwingfield@uttlesford.gov.uk.

### **More from the early records of the Museum: the Dunn deal *Len Pole***

During 1833, various items were recorded as having been offered and accepted by the Saffron Walden Natural History Society, though not always accompanied by complete details. For example, in the notes of the meeting of 10 October, it states: "Received from Mr, Dunn, Algoa Bay, two roots of the (Elephants Foot): also a Box of dry bird skins, including 3 pair of the Golden Cuckoo" but no details of what else was in the box,

When, later in the century, George Nathan Maynard retrospectively made out the first Register of Accessions, covering the period from 1833 to 1879, which he "compiled from various sources", he entered this accession as 1833.68. He also adds the first reference in this register to other items From Mr Dunn: "a Copy of this Mr Dunn's account of the various articles Forwarded to Jabez Gibson Esq", Various articles, indeed! Three double column pages containing a list of hundreds of items, with the heading "Mr Dunn's Invoice of Natural Curiosities

collected by the order of Jabez Gibson Esq of Saffron Walden (and forwarded by Ship *Claudine* Capt Kean) for his account and Risk, Port Elizabeth Algo Bay 17th Decr 1833", This was at a time when the Society had no museum building in which to house any such "articles", never mind the skeleton and skin of a large Elephant, a Hippopotamus, Rhinoceros, Gnu, Ant-eater, to name but a few!

The first mention in the Society's Minutes book of the communication received from Mr. Dunn, was in the minutes of the meeting held on January 3 1834: "The Chairman reported that he had received a letter from Mr Hannibal Dunn, enclosing one from his Brother Robert, at Algoa Bay, advising that he had drawn a Bill of £400 on account of the Museum. Whereupon the Chairman was requested to wait upon Mr H. Dunn respecting this extraordinary circumstance", Further, at the following meeting held on 10 January "The Chairman reported that he had seen Mr H Dunn as requested, and that he would guarantee the Society from any loss if they would take up the Bill".

But at the next meeting on 17 January, the following was stated: "The members determined upon taking no further steps respecting the Bill drawn by Mr R. Dunn, until they received further information", The plot thickened further as recorded in a minute of the meeting of the Society held March 3 1834: "It was reported that a Bill for £492 6s 2 1/2d had been drawn upon the Treasurer by Mr Robert N. Dunn, for a Shipment of Curiosities: Resolved, That the said Bill be altogether rejected, in consequence of no Authority having been given to Mr Dunn for any such Consignment",

On April 10<sup>th</sup>, 1834, the members "Memorialised the Lords Commissioners of the Treasury to order Mr Dunn's Consignment to be passed the Customs, Duty Free", This letter, of which a copy of a draft is pasted into the retrospective Register 1, expresses a somewhat more conciliatory tone:

"The Memorial of the 'Natural History Society' of Saffron Walden in the County of Essex - Humbly sheweth, That by the Claudine Trader, Captain Keen from Algoa Bay, the Packages enumerated at the foot hereof containing specimens in Comparative Anatomy & other Departments of Natural History, have been consigned by Mr Robert Dunn to Mr Jabez Gibson, the Chairman of this Society, solely for scientific purposes, and with no intention of introducing them into the market (That some of the Skins which appear to have been partially tanned were prepared merely with the view of preserving them for setting up as Museum Specimens), That according to the invoice rendered to this Society, it is most probable a considerable loss will be sustained by Mr Dunn, since a number of the specimens are in Duplicate, and others, the skeletons and skins of large animals for instance, are of that character that they cannot possibly be set up for the gratification of the public according to the original intention, without incurring a serious expense, which renders them by no means objects of competition. That although the consignment was not made by any sufficient order of this Society, yet feeling that Mr Dunn's intention in sending home the Specimens for the Museum was laudable & praiseworthy, the Members are anxious for his sake as well as for other Collectors

in tropical & distant stations who may be similarly circumstanced, that he should not incur any charge which from the past and present liberality of His Majesty's Government, in regard to scientific objects, may be fairly avoided. Your Lordships' Memorialists therefore humbly pray that your Lordships will be pleased to give an order to the Board of Customs that the Packages in question may be delivered free of duty", [signed] Jabez Gibson [Chairman] et al,

Of course, as anybody who visited the Museum between about 1838 and 1958 knew, the "skeletons and skins of large animals" were indeed "set up for the gratification of the public according to the original intention", particularly the elephant, rhinoceros, koudou, and others, as described and illustrated in the Abridged Catalogue, published in 1845.

At a special meeting of the Society held on May 13, 1834 the following statement was minuted: "The Consignment from Algoa Bay having been brought to Walden and inspected and Mr Robert Dunn having subsequently arrived from Africa and produced the letters which led to so material a collection, Resolved, under the Circumstances of the Case that Specimens be taken by the Society, to the amount of one hundred and fifty pounds, including a sum of £16 12s 6d the value of the Specimens previously sent home," This latter sum presumably covered the Elephants Foot yam plant, the three Golden Cuckoo and whatever other bird skin specimens were in the Box.

It is this date, 13 May 1834, that is indicated in Register 1 as the date of acquisition of the collection, although the Museum numbers later given to the items, from 1833.81 to 371 relate to the date on Robert Dunn's invoice,

It is not clear exactly of what the "Specimens taken by the Society" comprised, To the extent that the list of accessions in Register 1. made out much later in the century by G. N. Maynard, replicate the list copied from that in the invoice of 19 December, it would appear that he assumed the sum covered all the items shipped by Robert Dunn. However, the Trustees Ledger Account and some entries in the Abridged Catalogue indicate a more complicated picture.

An entry in the Trustees Ledger Account [only a 'Rough copy' has survived) for 1834, indicates that an amount of £300 was "Advanced by Jabez Gibson Esq, Francis Gibson, Esq, and John Player, to secure several Skeletons to the Society and now in the Museum". Although the number and origin of these skeletons is not mentioned, it is likely the South African specimens from the Dunn consignment are the ones alluded to, as there were no other substantial accessions of skeletons made by the Society in that year, apart from those given by George Wombwell from his menagerie. Subsequently, in 1836, the sums of £50 each were repaid to these three Trustees,

In the absence of any other evidence in this Ledger Account, the remaining £150 constituted a donation to the Society's coffers; it may be assumed, at least in part, a reimbursement relating to the Dunn consignment. This is certainly what

G. N. Maynard believed, as he states in the retrospective Register], in relation to the Dunn consignment "The Major Part of the articles in this Invoice were presented to the Museum by Jabez Gibson Esq", although this does appear to ignore the sums contributed by the other two Trustees.

This conclusion is circumstantially supported by entries in the Abridged Catalogue. The African elephant, and the Gnu, both listed in the Dunn invoice, were stated to have been "presented by Jabez Gibson", so it would appear that the sum advanced by him was donated in order to secure these specimens, among others. Neither Francis Gibson nor John Player are mentioned in the Abridged Catalogue as donors of African natural history material.

More revealingly, in the section on Comparative Anatomy, which includes mention of skeletons of African elephant, two-horned rhinoceros and giraffe, acknowledgement is given to the acquisition of them as "the result of an African expedition [see Introduction)", This is what is stated in the Introduction: at the beginning of 1835, they [the Society] were enabled to arrange their Cases and Specimens in the new Building. They had recently received some valuable accessions, including the African Elephant, the Coudou, the double-horned rhinoceros, and many other of the South African animals. These were obtained through a gentleman then residing at Algoa Bay, who in consequence of a communication from this Society, explored in company with a hunting party, a considerable extent of that portion of the African Continent, and succeeded in procuring a great number of Specimens, most of which are now deposited in this Museum,"

This is a substantial revision of the "extraordinary circumstance" and subsequent comments expressed by the Trustees early in 1834! The Chairman reported "having received some Botanical specimens, and a Dress made from the Bark of a Tree, from the Marchioness Cornwallis,"

What almost immediately confirmed my concern about mislaid details about some accessions was a reference in the minutes of the meeting of 31 July 1834, to the mummy of a cat - but this was no exotic animal from Ancient Egypt. It was from much closer to home, as this carefully recorded minute makes clear:

"SW, Clarence, Esqr of Thaxted presented the Skeleton of a cat, with the following note: 'This cat was lost for some years, and upon repairing the house was found pressed between the Wall and a joist exactly in the state it now is' But in the Register made out at the end of the century by G. N. Maynard, the entry reads "1 dried mummy of a cat" without the local connection. It is a moot point whether such an item should be considered as a natural history specimen or a piece of social history.

At this meeting, it was also mentioned that an instruction had been made by the Committee to "our Correspondent at Algoa Bay" to procure for them "Any Animals they may desire to obtain from that locality", As the members of the committee were soon to learn, this sowed the seeds of an event which had

enormous consequences for the future of the Museum, which we can report in more detail at a future date.

**Len Pole**

## Natural Sciences

**Sarah Kenyon**

Over the last three months I have been busy with family holiday activities, Shirehill store opening events, doing conservation work before the schoolroom building at the Museum closed, and preparations for the Special Roadside Verges survey season.

I have been conserving objects in the laboratory before there is no longer access to the facilities in the lab. Several amphibian and reptile specimens preserved in alcohol and water and housed glass jars needed conservation. Because of the fumes from the industrial alcohol, I needed the fume cupboard to carry out the work. The fluid in four jars was changed, or topped up. In one jar, the specimens had fallen off the mounting board and they had to be re-attached. Once the conservation work was completed, the jars were moved very carefully by car to Shirehill store. They were transported in a bucket in case any of the jars cracked and spilled fluid. Two people were needed - one to drive and one to take care of the bucket - minimising vibration during the journey and removing the jars from the car before it travelled over the large hump in the road at Shirehill. There is a picture of the conserved specimens but don't look if you have a reptile or amphibian phobia,



A common buzzard mounted in a large glass case had been housed at Newport store due to lack of storage space. The glass needed to be cleaned and the bird and wooden case base checked for insect pests before it could be moved from the laboratory to the natural history store at the Museum. Four volunteers, Members of the Museum Society, moved it along the drive, through the Museum and negotiated two flights of stairs to get it into the store. There was no damage to the object and I am very grateful to John, Paul, Peter and Richard for their invaluable assistance.

**Common Buzzard**



The Special Roadside Verges scheme aims to preserve some of the last areas of chalk grassland in Essex; Uttlesford district has forty-four of these sites. Each year, 50% of the verges have ecological surveys to gauge whether the current mowing regimes are preserving the rare wild flowers and improving the condition of the verges. This survey work would not be possible without the help of a dedicated team of volunteers. We always need more botanical surveyors so if you are interested please telephone me at the Museum. For ideas of special verges to visit, see the Uttlesford Wildlife website [www.uttlesford-wildlife.org.uk](http://www.uttlesford-wildlife.org.uk)

## Ocean World

Some of the fossils supplied by the Travelling Natural History Museum for the Ocean World exhibition are for sale. If you are interested in purchasing a fossil, please contact Peter Ta'Bois for more information about the specimens for sale.

Telephone him on 01279 812276, or email him at [peter@TravellingNaturalHistory.com](mailto:peter@TravellingNaturalHistory.com)



**Crinoid fossils**

## Human History Collections

**Leah Mellors**

In the past few months, the move of collections from the Newport store and stores on the Museum site to the new Shirehill store has been completed, Scofield's, a Colchester-based specialist removal company, moved the large social history collections, including cart wheels,



mangles, musical instruments, agricultural implements and furniture. Although it was a difficult task to fit everything in safely, the Scofield's team were hardworking and respectful of the collections and they made the heavy-lifting look easy! My team of volunteers continues to work hard. I have been pleased to welcome two new volunteers - Emma Bastin and Vicky Geddes, who will be helping me to document our social history



**Emma Bastin**

collections, and to welcome back some of my long- standing volunteers, who were taking a break while IT facilities were installed at the new store. " All of them are contributing towards reducing the Museum's documentation backlog, by creating records for objects on our collections management database; inputting information from the Museum's early documentation into the database: and creating searchable lists that can be used to match up objects with their provenance.

The past couple of weeks have been a whirlwind of activity, as we have changed over our special exhibition. *Magna Carta*, a touring exhibition from Braintree District Museum and Castle Hedingham Parish Council, opened with a private view for Museum Society members and invited guests on Friday, 15th July. The exhibition explores the importance of Magna Carta in mediaeval Essex, the home of six of the 25 barons who signed the document. It features mediaeval archaeology from the Museum's collections, as well as a facsimile of Magna Carta and a replica of the seal of King John, which can be handled. The exhibition will run until 15th January, 2017.

I have also started work on a new community display, which is a legacy from the *Uttlesford: A Community of Collectors* exhibition. I believe that involving the community in the Museum displays and providing a voice for individuals and groups is incredibly important, and this display will offer a chance for people in our community to tell their own stories of the district. A new bespoke museum-standard display case has been purchased, with funds generously donated by the Gibson Walden Fund and the Museum Society. The first group to co-curate their display will be the organisers of the Dunmow Fritch Trials and this should be installed towards the end of the summer. Watch this space!

## Object of the Month

### *Leah Mellors*

*Object of the Month*, a project that aims to highlight objects rarely seen by the public, is going from strength to strength with staff, interns and volunteers all choosing objects to display in the museum and share online on our blog.

### April 2016

#### **Coggeshall lace**

April's *Object of the Month* was a table mat made from Coggeshall lace, dating from the late 1800s. The mat is part of a small collection of Coggeshall lace in the Museum's

collections which includes table mats, a shawl and two chemisettes.



Coggeshall lace is a type of tambour lace, made by stretching a net over a frame and creating a line of chain stitches with a fine hook. In about 1812, a French man named Drago and his two daughters moved to Coggeshall, a village in Essex, and began to teach women and children how to make tambour lace. Throughout the 1800s, tamboured net lace was made in tambour rooms and cottages in Coggeshall and the surrounding villages. Lace manufacturers and dealers obtained orders from London and elsewhere: Liberty & Co., the famous London department store, was supplied with Coggeshall lace.

Shortly after 1900, there was a great improvement in the quality of Coggeshall lace, thanks to the activities of two ladies called the Misses Spurge. They were the chief employers in the district and together with their brother William, an art teacher, they improved the standard of design. Regrettably, the invention of chain stitch sewing machines and machine-made laces led to a decline in the production of Coggeshall lace in the early 1900s, and this was made worse by the outbreak of World War I in 1914.

However, there was an effort to revive the production of Coggeshall lace in the 1930s Coggeshall lace was also made into dresses for Queen Elizabeth II (when she was a princess), Princess Margaret, Princess Alexandra and Queen Mary. Nevertheless, despite this royal patronage, the financial return was not great enough and the production of Coggeshall lace died out after World War II.

### May 2016

#### **Mystery object**



May's *Object of the Month* was a mystery stone object, found in 1903, by men digging gravel on the south side of the village of Wendens Ambo, near Saffron Walden.

Between about 3000 and 4000 years ago, Bronze Age people had used that area to bury their dead, cremating the bodies and burying the ashes in large hand-made pots or 'cremation urns'. The diggers had unearthed pieces of an urn, together with this implement of shaped and grooved sandstone, approximately 19 cm long.

The pottery urn that the gravel-diggers found was not unusual, as many similar urns have been found across Britain. The stone object, however, was unlike anything archaeologists had ever seen. It was shown to many leading archaeologists of the day and fully published in 1916 by a noted scholar, Miller Christy, but no one could come up with a convincing explanation. Over 100 years since it was discovered, it continues to baffle everyone. The object is shaped like a cylinder and tapers a little towards the end. There are five grooves along its length, spaced equally around it, which could have been cut with either a stone or a metal tool. The tool measures 189 mm long and about 63 mm in diameter, weighs 1165 grams and is made of gritty red sandstone. It may have had a practical use, such as a roller for breaking or 'braying' flax or other vegetable fibres - we know that Bronze Age people spun and wove flax and wool, but we need more practical evidence. It is possible that it had a 'religious' or 'ceremonial' use, now lost to us, as there are other Bronze Age burials that contain apparently 'ritual' objects, such as small decorated chalk cylinders. Is it a practical tool, a 'sacred' object or a 'stone loofah'? We simply don't know! What do you think?

## June 2016

### Coronation Gown

June's *Object of the Month* was a framed sample of the material used to make Queen Elizabeth II's coronation robe. The Queen's coronation took place on 2nd June, 1953 at Westminster Abbey in London. The sample was chosen as *Object of the Month* to coincide with Her Majesty's official 90th birthday in June, 2016,



Queen Elizabeth II's coronation dress was designed by Norman Hartnell. It was ordered in October 1952 and took eight months of research, design and workmanship for its creation. Hartnell put forward eight different designs from which the Queen made her selection. It took at least three dressmakers, six embroiderers and the Royal School of Needlework to create the detailed embroidery.

The dress was made from white duchesse satin with a richly embroidered design completed in seed pearls, crystals, pastel-coloured silks and gold and silver thread. It featured some of the national flowers and plants of Britain and Commonwealth countries including the English Tudor rose, the Scottish thistle, the Welsh leek, the Irish shamrock, the Canadian maple leaf and the New Zealand silver fern. Unknown to the Queen, Hartnell added an extra four-leaf shamrock on the left side of the skirt for good luck, so that Her Majesty's hand could rest upon it during the ceremony.

Queen Elizabeth ascended the throne aged 25, following the death of her father George VI who died on 6th February, 1952. Her coronation took place more than a year later because it was considered inappropriate to celebrate a coronation during a period of mourning. It was the first coronation to be shown on television; although the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, advised against the idea, the Queen insisted that the event be televised. Sales of television sets soared in the weeks leading up to the coronation. Around 8,000 guests from across the Commonwealth countries were invited to the ceremony in Westminster Abbey. Before the ceremony, the guests passed through the streets of London in a procession, in front of about three million spectators. More than 20 million more people watched on television.

## Museum Outreach News

### Leah Mellors and Sarah Kenyon

Museum staff have been delivering activities in the absence of a Learning Officer. Every day throughout the Easter holiday children took part in an Easter Treasure Hunt. They solved



clues to find animals in the galleries and won a small chocolate prize for finding all six. The Ocean World exhibition inspired the family holiday activities. On 30th March, 227 visitors created fishy fridge magnets and, on 6th April, 182 people made masks of marine creatures either a shark, crab or octopus. -

For Museums at Night on 13th May, 106 visitors brought their torches and followed a night-time trail. Numbers were boosted by a group of cub scouts who came to the Museum for the evening. At half term in May, we celebrated seals which appear

in different forms in the Ocean World display and the Magna Carta exhibition. For two days families could make an animal seal out of clay or a charter seal from paper and card. In all, 320 visitors took part in these activities.

### Listening Bench

A set of eight listening benches are being installed by the Essex Record Office across Essex this summer, including one at the Museum, which is located just outside the entrance. The benches tell stories and play recordings of local history past and present, through in-built speakers.



The benches are part of *You Are Hear sound and a sense of place*, a project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Essex Heritage Trust and the Friends of Historic Essex. *You are Hear* is a three-year project to digitise, catalogue and make available many of the historically significant sound and video recordings in the Essex Records Office's Essex Sound and Video Archive. The project has worked with community groups in villages and towns throughout Essex, helping them to reflect upon where they live by engaging with the recordings. Each group created a montage of clips about their community from recordings in the Archive, which will be played on the sound benches.

At our bench, you can hear memories of life on Castle Street and in the town centre in Saffron Walden, back when the town still had a Corn Exchange, livestock markets, the Rose & Crown hotel and Victorian swimming baths. Why not take a minute to sit in our beautiful Museum grounds, with a view of the 12th century Walden Castle, and listen to memories of Saffron Walden in times gone by?

**Leah Mellors**

### Museum Society News

#### Membership

Thank you all for your patience and good humour in dealing with the increased subscriptions and the additional Gift Aid declarations for spouses. If your payment is still outstanding or needs to be increased to the new minimum figure of £15 per person, please pay without delay to save the time and expense of reminders. I am reviewing any outstanding subscriptions now, but would be happy to check individual cases if you wish to contact me. My telephone number is 01799 527546.

The Society appreciates the financial help of those members who are UK taxpayers and make Gift Aid declarations, thus enabling us to claim tax refunds which boost our funds. If you have not already done so, please consider whether you too, could help the Society in this way.

**Christine Sharpe**

### Talks and Events

#### Monday, 14th March

#### Wicken Fen, a National Trust Nature Reserve Past, Present and Future

#### Speaker: Dr. Peter Green

Dr Green introduced himself as a long-time volunteer for the National Trust both at Anglesey Abbey but principally at Wicken Fen. His talk covered its early creation, its usage in former times and in the present, and the Trust's vision for it in the future.



The idea of the National Trust was batted about as early as 1884 but only came into fruition in 1895 when Octavia Hill, Sir Robert Hunter and the Rev. Hardwicke Rawnsley established the first site. They were concerned that working people had nowhere to go to visit open land for recreational purposes and sought to rectify this. They purchased the first 2 acres of Wicken Fen in 1899 for £10.00! Sir Robert Hunter used influence to have an Act passed in 1907 so that the National Trust could have the ownership of land and properties 'for everyone, for ever', Properties cannot be sold.

The shallow sea formed at the end of the last ice age covered what is now The Wash and, roughly, the fenland area, laying down impermeable grey gault clay. This came to be drained by the Ouse, the Nene and the Welland all of which, because of the low-lying nature of the area, were sluggish, meandering and silt depositing. This was the cause of frequent flooding leaving only the large clay mounds above the water. The chalk hills bordering the south of the area developed slightly acidic chalk water springs flowing into the river systems. Today, examples of well-preserved bog oaks are being discovered and, as they all lie facing the same direction, it looks as though years ago a catastrophic storm laid waste to vast tracts of woodland which never grew up again. What did grow were rushes and sedges which, of course, withered and died with the seasons and fell into the oxygen-poor water to decompose very gradually. Please note, *it takes 1000 years for 1 metre of peat to form.*



Peat traps water so that, even in summer, 80% of it is waterlogged. The fen was also home to many insects including mosquitos which tended to carry diseases but, nevertheless, early people took up residence on the clay mounds which, among other things, were defended by the surrounding fens and afforded good lookout points. The Romans arrived and started the first drainage schemes making the inland areas accessible by small boats, both for bringing stuff in and taking stuff out, e.g. reed and rush.

Then the Saxons came and became fen-dwellers despite the mosquitos. There was enough there to live on, fish principally: eels, caught in eel traps made from willow wands: wildfowl and some of the plants. They could trade some of these with other fen-dwellers for building materials, clothing and other foodstuffs and lived for free. For fuel they cut peat blocks, let them dry out and used them in their huts for cooking and warmth - and to keep the mossies out. Peat gives a long, slow burn which is difficult to extinguish which is why the Trust no longer burns off reeds and sedges as part of the management strategy, but cuts it instead.

As the Christian church became established and cathedrals and abbeys arose, the Church decided it owned the land and decided to charge rent to the fen people; this had to be mainly in the form of eels as there was hardly any cash about. The monks wanted money to drain the fens to create pasture for sheep as wool was a precious and valuable commodity, and developed the chalk stream lodes which tended to flood downstream so making some parts drier and others wetter. The improved lodes, however, became useful for transport using the flat-bottomed lighters.

After the Dissolution, the south fens were awarded to the Duke of Bedford and his successors, one of whom persuaded King Charles I to pass an Act to allow some fen drainage to bring the land up to arable standard. The profits would be split one-third each between the Duke, the King and the supporting company called the Adventurers. Charles agreed as he was faced with a rising population, many of whom were Protestant refugees from the Continent and they needed food. The new drains were huge despite the fact that the tools were mainly wheelbarrows and shovels. Much of the labour was supplied by prisoners and drainage continued into the 1630s

After the end of the Civil War work started again, this time under the direction of Cornelius Vermuyden, a Dutch refugee now a long-time resident in England. It is this drainage that keeps the fens dry today except when there is need to use 'the washes' created by Vermuyden to hold water at times of exceptionally heavy and prolonged rain. Today the relevant landholders get 14 hours' notice that the sluices are to be activated.

Here, however, our sub-soil differs from Holland in that we have the impermeable gault clay and they don't. So as you drain the fens, the peat dries out and no matter how much water gets into it subsequently, it never regains its former bulk; it begins to blow away and the peat layer shrinks as it both dries out and erodes. This is why today

the land level can be lower than the drains and the measuring pole at Whittlesey Mere, put in in 1848, shows shrinkage of about 7 metres! 50 wind pumps were used to lift the water which led to further drying out and even more so when mechanical pumps were used. The last remaining wind pump was moved to be the one at Wicken Fen. The last major flood for all the fens was in 1947, when a tidal surge combined with the rapid thaw of an exceptionally heavy snowfall - thankfully, Wicken Fen did not get inundated.

In the 1800s, various Victorian Cambridge-based naturalists bought further tracts of land to enlarge the reserve. It now has an astonishing range of some 9,000 recorded plant and animal species, 600 of which are on the endangered list. There is open water, marsh, reed beds, willow carr and the grass and flower droves are maintained for biodiversity. To help with keeping the vegetation under control, Konik ponies and Highland cattle have been introduced. Both these breeds can largely look after themselves and the herds increase. The sedge beds are cut strips at a time, on a three-year cycle, to maintain a continuous habitat. The Environment Agency has channelled in underground a supply of alkaline chalky water as the lower surrounding farmland was draining the natural supply. With its newest large extension, Wicken Fen is now 2,000 acres. The Rothschild Way links it with The Woodwalton Fen project; it is on the Lodes Way, a 38 mile-long path for cyclists, riders and walkers and about 60/70 schools visit each year. You don't have to be a member of the National Trust to visit.

The vision is for the Trust to acquire the land between Wicken Fen and Anglesey Abbey and use it for various public activities. A start has been made and land is already in various uses - a nature reserve, a cricket pitch, a woodland area, agriculture and village facilities - for everyone, for ever.

Peter left us with a delightful sequence of pictures taken by volunteers showing the seasons, moods and wildlife of Wicken Fen.

*Heather Salvidge*

**Monday, 11th April**

**Glassware**

**Speaker: Helen Ritchie, Fitzwilliam Museum**

The April talk did not begin well as there were technical problems which meant that the audience was unable to view the power point presentation prepared by the speaker, Helen Ritchie. However, Helen, who is a Research Assistant at the Fitzwilliam Museum, through her well-structured talk on glassware and her excellent delivery, was able to give the audience a description of each glassware object that more than compensated for the lack of images on the screen.

Helen began her talk by telling us that the Fitzwilliam Museum has five curatorial departments, one of which, the Applied Arts department, is affectionately known as 'the dustbin department' because of the breadth of material in its collections. There were more than 20,000 objects in its glassware collection, most of which are British and come from private collections. Donald Beves had the best private collection in Britain and it was gifted to the Fitzwilliam in 1961. Sir Nicholas

and Lady Goodison have also been key donors to the glassware collection through the Art Fund during the 1990s.

Glass is a combination of materials but is predominantly silica that can be worked when liquid. It was found in Mesopotamia over 4,000 years ago. It was the Romans who discovered how to blow glass. Prior to the Roman period only small amounts of glass were found as temperatures of over 1000 degrees centigrade are needed to work it. The Romans developed the pyrotechnology and so glass objects became more common. Glassware are luxury goods, not because of the cost of the material but the skill needed to make them.



Helen described a Chinese glass bead (see left) " dated around 400 BC that was found in the tomb of a high-ranking individual.

Later during the Middle Ages in the Middle East, glass was enamelled then fired again to harden the enamel. Many mosque lamps were enamelled and hundreds would have been used to light each mosque. Today only 250 are left in the world and the Fitzwilliam has a fine example (see right). The enamelling process with its gilt decoration is quite specific to the Middle East during the 14th and 15th centuries. The Fitzwilliam glassware collection ' contains several Indian glass hookahs, also made in the 14th and 15th centuries.



Islamic sprinkler, Safajid c 1600-1800

However, from the 16th century onwards, it was the rise of Venetian glassware production that influenced the rest of the world, Murano being one of the key centres of glass production. Opaque and coloured glass were used to create a variety of objects but especially the tazza used to drink wine. It was very difficult to drink wine from a tazza elegantly but it was very much part of Venetian culture.



Tazza' Venetian, c. 1500.1515



Tazza, venetian, 1575-1625

Clear glass was developed in Venice by adding manganese. The technique was called 'cristallo' and was

Pilgrim Vase, Venetian, 1550-1600 Colourless and Opaque white glass (vetro a retorti) and latimo canes with 4 applied suspension loops



a closely guarded secret, but it eventually made its way across Europe and to London, an amazing melting pot of foreign craftsmen. Clear glass does not taint wine like gold and silver goblets and from now on wine glasses in all shapes and sizes were made in clear . . glass, the twisted stems copyinging furniture legs (see left).



English, 17th c.

In the late 1600s, George Ravenscroft added lead oxide to crystal glass that made it heavier, clearer and easier to work with. He obtained a patent from Charles land made a fortune



Ravenscroft, bowl and stand English, c.1676-1677

From the 1700s glass began to be mass produced. Glassware can be made in moulds, and handles and spouts can be attached later. Oil lamps were made of glass and the Fitzwilliam has several examples, plus a pair of glass candlesticks that imitate porcelain. Designers from the 19th century onwards began to look at glass as an art form. An example of Gothic Revival influence in the Fitzwilliam collection is a dark green decanter with silver mounts. The Fitzwilliam's glassware collection contains many famous 20th and 21st century British and Scandinavian glassware designers such as Tom Hill, Nanny Still, Tessa Clay and Amanda Simmons.

**Carol Law**

### Monday, 13th June

#### Tour of St. Mary's Church, Saffron Walden

*It was decided that, instead of having the June talk in the Parish Rooms with illustrations of aspects of the church it would be interesting to have the talk actually 'on site'.*

I was last on a group tour of St. Mary's in 1954 when in Eileen Harper's class at South Road Junior Girls' School and our guide was Canon Sinker, but I can't remember much of what he said. Our guide this time was Rosanne Kirkpatrick who shared her detailed knowledge to great effect. The church, now the largest in Essex, has during its time been part of various dioceses- London, Rochester and St Albans before finally coming to rest in the newly-created Chelmsford Diocese. It had been on the short list as the cathedral site but was deemed too 'off-centre' geographically. As many of you reading this will

know infinitely more about the church than I do, I shall not be too detailed.

There were in all probability two earlier churches on this site: a Saxon one, probably wooden and a later, much larger stone Norman one with 13th c. modifications. The major rebuilding in the perpendicular style of most of the church took place in the latter half of the 15th and early 16th centuries after the great storm of 1445. There is an engraving on a stone giving the date of 1526 which may be recording the completion.

There were fortunate circumstances surrounding this reconstruction: the services of two gifted masons. One was Simon Clerk who had been master mason at Eton about 1640 and later at King's College Chapel. His successor at King's was John Wastell, one of the best master masons, and he and Clerk were in charge of much of the building work. So if you see similarities between our St. Mary's, King's College Chapel and Great St. Mary's in Cambridge, that's why.

Saffron Walden was by now a wealthy town, thanks to the profits from wool and saffron, and the Vicar for the church between 1489 and 1521 was John Leche whose sister was a rich lady, Dame Johane Bradbury. She and members of other well-off families including Katherine Semar were able to support the undertaking financially. Have a look at the various coats of arms on display. A lightning strike in the 1760s or '70s left the roof in a poor state of repair but subsequently Sir John Griffin Griffin, Lord Howard de Walden and the first Lord Braybrooke came to the rescue financially. The spire was added in 1831 completing the external outline that we see today.

When Walden Abbey was dissolved in 1538, the proceeds initially went to the Crown but Henry VIII's right hand man, Thomas Cromwell, then 'awarded' it to Lord Audley who subsequently made an endowment to the church. By the time of the Reformation under Edward VI, St. Mary's had a large collection of church plate and an array of vestments. Edward's commissioners confiscated much and left the bare minimum of these objects. Equally we can conjecture that this may be the reason why there is only a very small piece of medieval glass left for us to enjoy. The font itself dates to the late 15th c. though the oak cover is modern. When some of Oliver Cromwell's troops were billeted in Walden, the church was used by the soldiers as a meeting place (it is not known whether or not they did bring in their horses) to discuss, among other things, their grievances - they hadn't been paid. They were eventually moved on to south London where the better known 'Putney Debates' took place,

The chancel screen was also lost during the Reformation and not re-instated until 1924 together with the rood loft; the rood figures were added in 1951. The chancel roof is said to have been brought from St. Gregory's in Sudbury by Thomas Audley, but I have a vague recollection that Canon Sinker told us it was from Audley End. Perhaps later research has found more evidence. There aren't that many intact memorials to individual people or families and perhaps this is the result of the Reformation and/or the Commonwealth. There are, however,

excellent interpretation tablets by these monuments for those of you wishing to know the details.

You can also amuse yourself by listing the number of times the shape of the saffron flower is used in all sorts of ways to ornament the interior. It was Charles II who, in 1660, ordered all churches to display the Royal Coat of Arms and St. Mary's is dutifully displayed on the tower arch. Lord Braybrooke gave the painting now hanging over the altar in 1793. It is a copy of the Madonna and Child with St. Jerome by Correggio and it cost him 50 guineas! In 1860 it was loaned to the Museum and remained there until it was returned in 1900. Also in 1860 the vault under the choir stall was closed. The Minton tiles in the chancel date to 1866.

Church music is commemorated by the easternmost window which is dedicated to church organist John Frye. There is a fine peal of bells, some dating back to 1798 and an excellent organ, now enriched with 'trompeta real' pipes. The life of the church, of course continues as does its ornamentation: a roundel of stained glass based on the Mothers' Union banner: two modern statues: 330 kneelers and Lord Butler's Garter Banner, which used to hang above his stall in St. George's Chapel, Windsor.

I think those of us who enjoyed the evening and are not really familiar with the church will return at a quiet time to read the interpretation tablets, use the Walk-Around Guide (no charge) and maybe buy one of the booklets of particular personal interest.

Heather Salvidge

#### **Thursday, 30<sup>th</sup> June**

##### **Visit to Wicken Fen**

Although the month of June was very wet, sixteen Museum Society members were fortunate that the very last day of the month was warm and dry for their visit to Wicken Fen.



It is one of Britain's oldest nature reserves, and was the first reserve cared for by the National Trust, beginning in 1899. It is also one of Europe's most important wetlands and supports an abundance of wildlife. There are more than 8,500 species, including a spectacular array of plants, birds and dragonflies. Our members had some previous knowledge of Wicken Fen as Peter Green, our March speaker, gave a talk on the history and recent developments at the reserve.

The visit began with a guided tour of the ancient sedge fen - a unique remnant of undrained fenland that once covered the lowlands of East Anglia. The raised boardwalk made the sedge and reed beds accessible to all members of the party. Our guide was one of the volunteer rangers who was very knowledgeable and so enthusiastic. He reminded us that the fen was not a natural landscape; humans had managed it for centuries through annual reed and sedge cutting for thatching, peat digging and land drainage. Our members were able to see the last remaining wind pump. There were many hundreds of these iconic wind pumps across East Anglia from the seventeenth century onwards, when there was a great push to drain the fens for use as agricultural land. Our guide pointed out a modern metallic wind pump that is now used at the fen - not at all romantic!



**Bog Oak**

There are two hides in the ancient sedge fen. Members spent some time in one of them that overlooked a pond that had once been a quarry, worked for the clay that was made into bricks. The pond was surrounded by hawthorn, alder, willow and oak. There was a moorhen and a young grebe on the pond but, unfortunately, no sight of any kingfishers. Our members were lucky enough to see three marsh harriers on the wing but, although snipe are common in the fen, they did not hear their well-known drumming. Owls are found at the fen as well as bitterns but our guide focussed on information about the cuckoo and the warblers. There are several varieties of warblers at Wicken Fen and the reed warbler seems a favourite of the cuckoo to use to lay its eggs in their nests.

Our guide also pointed out the many varieties of wetland flowers that were seen during the tour of the ancient fen, such as meadowsweet, purple vetch, marsh valerian and marsh irises whose flowering season was just coming to an end. During the tour dragonflies, mayflies and butterflies were in abundance, too many to try to identify! Our guide made a plea for the water vole which he considered needed protection as it could soon become extinct; the water vole is now rarely seen in the fen. After lunch at the very pleasant café at the reserve, members went on a boat ride along the Wicken Lode and onto Reach Lode. The waterways were the means of transporting goods in and out of the fens. The village of Reach was once an important trading post as its position on the edge of the fens meant goods could continue their journey by road. The flat-

bottomed boat was called the Mayfly and took twelve passengers. The trip along the narrow Wicken Lode was beautiful. The reed and sedge beds grow to several feet and the Lode is covered in white and yellow water lilies. On the banks were swans and Canada geese, and best of all, members were able to get a glimpse of the Konik ponies and Highland cattle in the distance. The cattle and the ponies are used as part of the management of the fen to stop it turning into scrubland. The visit ended with the opportunity to visit the Fen man's cottage and workshop to see how people lived and worked on the fens in times gone by.



**Carol Law**

*Many thanks to Gill Mulley for her photographs. Ed.*

#### **New media for communication and information**

If you have an email address and would 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, This would assist our administration greatly, and we assure members that their details will not be made available to any other organisation, Many thanks for your understanding and co-operation.

**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: Peter Walker 01799 521868  
 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

Telephone numbers:  
 Museum 01799 510333  
 Shirehill 01799 510631

Saffron Walden Museum Society Limited  
 Museum Street  
 Saffron Walden, CB10 1JL  
 Telephone: 01799 510333



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