



Museum Matters

Newsletter of Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd

Spring 2018 Issue 44

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Dates of future Events - see Noticeboard attached

Highlights and Happenings From the Chairman

The Spring edition of the Newsletter "Museum matters" this year introduces the appointment of Tony Morton as Editor. I hope you will all appreciate the work he has done in taking on this role. I understand that it is now more appropriate to view on modern technology. I would like to thank Sue Hollingworth for the development of the newsletter over the last ten years a role she took on in addition to her work as Secretary. The Board has still to find a replacement for her so if you would like to take part in the running of the society why not consider if you could take on the role of secretary. Sue retires at the AGM later this year.

The last Talk of 2017 enabled our Vice-Chairman Paul Salvidge, in my absence in Cornwall, to thank Carol Law for her role as Talks Organiser over the last ten years. We have benefited from her many contacts with varied speakers mainly linked to exhibitions held in the Museum. We have yet to find a new organiser but the new Organisation committee under the guidance of Paul Salvidge is providing a programme for this year, a lot of speakers known for other roles in the Museum have had their arms twisted including me!

The Xmas party on the 11th December was its usual success thank you to all those members who provided prizes, food and the bar facilities we have come to appreciate. The 26th January was the preview of the latest exhibition. From the Hazely Brick Earth: Agriculture in North-West Essex. Leah Mellors has again produced a wonderful history of Agriculture in and around Saffron Walden but it is a reminder of age when you can remember the markets in their working days! If you have not yet seen it do go.

The Development Committee continues to support the Curator in moving forward the planning for the next developments of the Museum. In February we were able to welcome our M.P. Kemi Badenoch for a viewing of

both the castle and the museum and we were able to explain how the museum benefits from the partnership of the Society with Uttlesford District Council in its governance.

The Organisation Committee, guided by Christine Sharpe, advised the Board on the requirements of the latest Data Protection rules. You will have had recently a form to confirm we can continue recording your details in our database. If you have not yet replied please do, we do not want to be in breach of the latest rules.

We were sad to hear in January of the death of David Haylock. David helped to preserve our farm carts for some time at his farm and was a valuable member of the old Management Committee for some years. Paul Salvidge represented the Society at his funeral.

As I write this the sky has turned from grey to blue so I hope that means that the Spring is here at last.

Tony Watson

Curators Column;

The Silk Road to Manuden

Readers of this Newsletter will know that I often write about recent finds of archaeological treasure which the Museum has been fortunate enough to acquire. The subject this time is a small and plain circular bronze brooch or buckle found in Manuden parish, which is giving rise to some very interesting research. It was found by metal detector in ploughsoil on the Hassobury Estate in 2017 and kindly donated to the Museum. The finder, Richard Gibson, is a local researcher and detectorist, whose detailed recording and painstaking surveys have added much to local archaeological knowledge and a number of important treasure acquisitions to the Museum's displays. There was other evidence of a medieval domestic site in the vicinity.

The brooch / buckle is only 15mm across. The distinction between buckles (used for fastening straps and shoes) and brooches (used to fasten garments) is not always clear-cut; in medieval archaeology, small plain rings with a swivelling pin attached have been described as either ring brooches or buckles. The Manuden example is perhaps best described as a buckle, as the relatively thick pin looks more suited to pre-formed holes in a strap, whereas a finer, more pointed pin would be needed to pierce textile garments. Small circular brooches were commonly used to close two parts of a garment at the neck, and typically date from the 13th - 14th centuries; small buckles would have been used for straps or laces on other parts of garments, belts and shoes. In London, where many brooches and buckles have been excavated, miniature shoe buckles dated mainly from 14th or 15th century contexts.

What makes the Manuden example unusual is the frayed piece of textile attached to it, apparently a rare survival. The textile appears to be deliberately looped through the buckle frame and not just accidentally caught on it. Despite its partially unravelled state, it is clearly the remains of a woven ribbon or thin strap, rather than a fragment of clothing.

The Museum was fortunate to get an expert opinion and analysis from Dr Margarita Gleba, ERC Principal Research Associate at the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research at the University of Cambridge. She examined the textile using a Scanning Electron Microscope (SEM) and kindly supplied copies of the high-magnification images with her report. She concluded that it was a ribbon or narrow tape in warp-faced tabby weave, using green and pink warp threads of raw (undegummed) silk; the weft threads had disintegrated.



*The buckle with textile remains attached.
Photo: Saffron Walden Museum*



Detail of buckle and textile. Photo: Saffron Walden Museum



Warp-faced tabby structure of the green threads and separate green and pink threads that may have formed the ribbon. SEM image reproduced by kind permission of Dr Margarita Gleba, McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, University of Cambridge



Looped pattern formed by the pink threads. SEM image reproduced by kind permission of Dr Margarita Gleba, McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, University of Cambridge

Dr Gleba concluded that a 14th to 15th century date was likely for the textile, as silk was being imported into England from Italy at this period, although the silk could have been spun and woven locally. Other details suggested that the two silks used (pink and green) were re-used from textiles of different dates and origins, silk being a luxury material which would have been likely to be recycled. This might also explain why a cheaper thread, such as linen, could have been used as the weft; the warp-faced weave would have left the cheaper weft thread almost invisible, maximising the effect of the more luxurious silk warp threads.

It is known that medieval silk ribbons were sometimes multi-coloured, but difficult to know from this fragment exactly how this ribbon and buckle were worn. Further lines of enquiry could involve other specialists to analyse the dyes used on the silk and an expert in textiles to comment further on the weave pattern. Meanwhile this tiny buckle and frayed ribbon provide a tangible link with a luxury import, prized and re-used by someone in the Manuden area over 500 years ago.

Carolyn Wingfield

Natural Sciences: Sarah Kenyon

Since November, new documentation volunteer Heather has been helping me to update storage locations in Modes (the computerised database of the museum collections) for the natural sciences objects that moved to Shirehill store. We've made thousands of changes and the end is in sight! Life in the Ice Age melted away on 15 January. The red art wall, filled with visitors colouring sheets and drawings of ice age animals, was impressive to behold. Volunteers and Support Worker, Madeleine, helped to take the down the exhibition and transport the fossils back to Shirehill store.

In the Discovery Centre bug cage nine baby stick insects hatched from eggs laid by the adult females. They are growing up fast. Can you spot all nine? We are waiting for one to turn green, to find out which ones will be females or males.





Madeleine with Heather at Shirehill Store

This was Madeleine's last exhibition. She retired in February, after nine years at the museum. She assisted me with six exhibitions, ranging from St. Aubyn to Butterflies to the Ice Age. We explored all parts of Uttlesford district checking and surveying special roadside verges. The stick insects were kept well supplied with brambles she collected on dog walks. The job included keeping the natural sciences galleries functioning, cleaning the stores and helping with holiday activities - Marine Masks was our favourite! We worked in stores at Newport, the Museum and Shirehill - culminating in the Store Move project. Another task was typing and data entry. This included deciphering my hand written notes to type up the monthly Staff Meeting minutes. However, her greatest achievement was to improve 14,000 old, incomplete records for the herbarium and other collections by adding species classifications and writing brief descriptions for the Modes records.

We've had snowdrops and snow in the museum grounds. But thoughts now turn to spring with the Essex Wildlife Trust Uttlesford AGM and planning the 2018 survey programme for the special roadside verges. Maybe by Easter we will be able to take the protective frost cover off the cracked boulder in the museum grounds?

Sarah Kenyon

Human History Collections: Leah Mellors

In January, after months of hard work, our current exhibition From the Hazley Brick Earth: Agriculture in North-West Essex opened with a private view for Museum Society members and invited guests. The exhibition examines how agriculture in north-west Essex has changed, or in some cases remained constant, over the past 400 years. It features a range of objects, from agricultural hand tools to paintings, as well as photography and film by Saffron Drones. The agricultural story is brought up-to-date through the stories of people who still make their livelihoods from the land, including scientists, thatchers, saddlers and farmers. The exhibition will be open until 29 July 2018.



James Carter thatching a roof in Langley Lower Green

Once the exhibition was installed, I could begin focusing my attention on another major project: fundraising for the Saffron Walden piano hoard. As many of you will have heard and read, in 2016 a hoard of 913 gold coins was discovered inside a Broadwood piano in Shropshire. Investigations into the piano strongly suggest that the coins were hidden by a Saffron Walden resident. I have been fundraising to bring the piano and a selection of the coins home to Saffron Walden and I have been overwhelmed by the support of our local community. I am delighted to say that we have now raised enough to secure the coins and the piano so a huge thank you to everyone who gave generously.

I have also recently installed a new display in the museum, as part of Your Stories, a co-curated community display that gives local groups and individuals a chance to tell their story. I have worked closely with Marguerite Daw and Saffron Walden Town Football Club to create a display that commemorates local man Paul Daw and his lifelong dedication to the football club. The display features objects and photographs on loan from Paul's family and the club and include a trophy and commemorative shirt marking 50 years of Paul's involvement. The display will run until the end of the year.

March 2018 was Women's History Month and to mark this, and the centenary of the Representation of the People Act 1918, I created a special display of the museum's suffragette material. The display featured a Holloway brooch (read more about this in the Object of the Month section), posters for events held by the Saffron Walden & District Women's Suffrage Society, and a quirky 'Votes for Women' collage. The collage provided the basis for a community event that we held on 20 March, where local women created their own collage inspired by dynamic women from north-west Essex. I really enjoyed researching these women and discovering the contribution they have made to our district.



Participants with their collages, made at our special event

Alongside all of this, work continues on cataloguing, repacking and auditing the human history collections and I am grateful for the ongoing hard work of my team of volunteers. I am also pleased to welcome new volunteers Julia and Tom to the museum, who will be assisting me behind-the-scenes work on the collections.

Leah Mellors

Object of the Month: Leah Mellors

December

December's Object of the Month was a pair of robins: one mounted, or stuffed, bird specimen that was given to the museum during the nineteenth century, and one preserved skin, which was found dead at Saffron Walden in 2000.

The European robin, *Erithacus rubecula*, is a member of the thrush family, so it is related to the blackbird and the nightingale. British robins do not move far from where they were born. They live in woodland, hedgerows, parks and gardens. Robins from northern Europe may visit Britain during winter, from September to April. A robin is 12.5 to 14 cm long. These small song birds only live for a couple of years on average. Robins eat worms, snails, insects, spiders and seeds, berries and fruits.



Pair of Robins

The robin is one of the few birds that hold a territory all year round for breeding and feeding. In summer a territory is defended by a male and female breeding pair. During winter each robin will hold an individual territory. Robins will always defend their territories from other robins, sometimes fighting to the death. The sole purpose of a robin's red breast is for territory defence. It is not used in courtship. Seeing a patch of red triggers territorial behaviour and robins are known to make persistent attacks on stuffed robins, and even tufts of red feathers.

January

January's Object of the Month was a curious metal box with two little mice, believed to have been used to store salt. The box was given to the Museum in 1898 by a Mr C Haggard of Saffron Walden. The register entry adds: "Probably used as a salt box for table use."

The box is made from spelter, an alloy of zinc with other metals. Spelter was cheaper than pewter and widely used from about 1860 onwards to make cheap domestic items and ornaments. The box was made in several stages: the sides and bottom of the box were cast as separate, flat pieces, which were then soldered together by hand, and the lid was fitted afterwards. The overall design of the box and the geometric patterns on three sides of the box are relatively crude. The mice were cast separately and then soldered onto the box. They are quite finely made by comparison and could have been the work of another craftsman.

Throughout history, salt has been an important and valuable substance for preserving and flavouring food. From medieval times onwards, special containers have been used for keeping salt. We believe our box might be a salt box, which were commonly made of wood, and also of pottery or pewter. Many were plain and some were decorated, but all had a tall back projecting above the lid, with a hole for hanging on a hook or nail. Salt boxes were hung on the wall by the stove or fireplace, where the salt granules would be kept dry. This stopped the salt from forming into lumps. Our box has a plain back which suggests it was expected to stand against a wall.



Salt Box with Mice

February

February's Object of the Month was a plaster cast of a great auk egg, made in 1856. It is a copy of an egg that belonged to John Hancock, whose collection founded the Great North Museum in Newcastle upon Tyne. The egg, and the mould from which it was made, were given to Saffron Walden Museum by Mr William Murray Tuke in 1896.

The great auk, *Pinguinus impennis*, was a flightless seabird that lived in the northern Atlantic Ocean. It was also called the gare fowl or garefowl. The black and white bird was about 75 centimetres long. Its wings were used for swimming under water, as they were only 15 centimetres long.



Model of a great auk egg

Great auks bred in colonies on rocky islands around the coasts of the north Atlantic Ocean, such as St. Kilda, the Faroe Islands, Iceland and Funk Island off Newfoundland. Each breeding pair mated for life. They laid a single egg on bare rock. It was about 12.5 centimetres long. Sailors and island people hunted the defenceless birds for their meat, feathers, fat, oil and eggs. When the last birds were killed in 1844 on Eldey Island off the coast of Iceland, the great auk became extinct.

Mounted specimens of the birds, their bones and eggs are preserved in museums. This museum has a plaster copy of a skull in the Hessisches Landesmuseum at Darmstadt, Germany and copies of great auk eggs in the collections of Sir Walter Calverley Trevelyan of Wallington Hall, Northumberland and Mr Troughton of Coventry.

March

March's Object of the Month was a Holloway brooch. Holloway brooches were given to women who were imprisoned for their involvement in the women's suffrage movement during the early twentieth century.

The Holloway brooch was designed by Sylvia Pankhurst, a campaigner for women's suffrage. The design is symbolic of the suffragette's fight for voting rights. The brooch is in the shape of a portcullis and chains, which is the symbol of the House of Commons. In the centre, there is a broad arrow, which was a recognised symbol of government property that was used on prison uniforms. The broad arrow is in the three colours of the suffragette movement: green (symbolising hope), white (symbolising purity) and violet (symbolising dignity).



Holloway Brooch

The brooches were given to members of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) who had been imprisoned in Holloway prison and other prisons. Some brooches were inscribed with the dates of imprisonment. They were first awarded at a mass demonstration by the WSPU in the Albert Hall on 29 April 1909, which was held to coincide with the meeting of the International Suffrage Alliance. In an issue of the WSPU newspaper, *Votes for Women*, of 16 April 1909 the brooch was described as the 'Victoria Cross of the Union'. When WSPU prisoners began to use hunger strikes, the WSPU instituted the hunger strike medal, the first of which was presented four months after the first Holloway brooch.

Leah Mellors

Learning Services News: Charlotte Pratt

Since the last newsletter, the schools program has continued to develop through the documentation, revamping and repackaging of the learning collection. The task is still far from complete, but through the help of the grant from The Museum Society and the dedication of Jane Evans one of our learning volunteers, a number of new loan boxes have been developed.

The new loan boxes are housed in plastic tubs, which improve both presentation and protection of the objects. Objects are now also packaged in foam, with spaces cut for the individual objects, to allow for ease of use and easy checking of contents when returned. We hope that teachers will find the new loan boxes to be more professional and easier to use. Included in the boxes are also session plans and activity ideas, so that we are providing a "lesson in a box".



We have also been working to catalogue the collection using a spreadsheet which hopefully will eventually be uploaded onto Modes, this will enable the learning collection to be searched in the same manner as the main collection.

A number of new sessions have also been written to be delivered during school visits, these include sessions on Roman pottery and the Ancient Greeks. To facilitate the delivery of these sessions a number of costumes have also been made which help children to engage with topics and our collection. The costumes for the Ancient Greece session include Hercules' Nemean lion headdress which has proved popular with both school children and staff alike.



A Fantastic Beast



Our Curator Carolyn Wingfield modelling the Nemean Lion headdress

The pupils participating in the Ancient Greece session have also been producing some fantastic beasts of their own, using collaged material kindly donated by members of the Museum Society. More donations of images for these collages would be most gratefully received.

Charlotte Pratt

Exhibitions: .

Fry Art Gallery, 19a Castle Street, Saffron Walden CB10 1BD

BAWDEN AT HOME

1st April 2018 - 28th October 2018.

Open Tuesday Wednesday and Friday 2pm – 5pm

Saturday 11am – 5pm

Sundays and Bank Holidays 2.15pm - 5pm

The Higgins Museum, Bedford

Bawden's Beasts

10th February 2018 – 27th January 2019

Edward Bawden Gallery – Free Entry



The creatures that inhabit Bawden's work reveal his extraordinary talent for visual expression and storytelling, often using the simplest of lines. Inventive and humorous, Bawden put animals great and small to work in his commissions for book illustrations, advertisements and posters, in which they adopt human guises for their amusing antics: a giraffe dons a blazer, cravat and boater to advertise British Petroleum and an army of ants armed with mops and brooms adorns the cover of *Take The Broom*. Wallpaper designs, drawings, prints and murals reveal Bawden's fascination with animals and marine life, anthropomorphic insects and the macabre. The

exhibition will feature Bawden's work in a range of media throughout the course of his career, including his imaginative advertisements for Fortnum & Mason, and evocative prints of Aesop's Fables.

More Information here - http://www.thehigginsbedford.org.uk/exhibitions-1/bawdens_beasts.aspx

Volunteer News: Wendy-Jo Atter

Warm welcome

We extend a warm welcome to our new volunteers, Melanie and Elisabeth, who have completed their inductions and are now fully operational in their Welcome Desk Roles.

Fond farewell

We would like to thank and wish a fond farewell to Margaret and Ann, who have both recently retired from Welcome Desk duties.

Photograph shows: Margaret with her 'thank you' gifts on her last Welcome Desk duty, February 2018

Get well soon

Unfortunately poor Ursula has suffered a fall and broken her ankle, we know that you will join us in wishing her a speedy recovery.

Grateful thanks

We offer our heartfelt thanks to Welcome Desk Volunteers Vic, who lent a strong pair of hands, and Ron, who helped repaint the walls, during exhibition changeover.

Wendy-Jo Atter



Margaret with her 'thank you' gifts on her last Welcome Desk duty, February 2018

Upcoming Events

APRIL

Brilliant Books

Tuesday 3 April

Create a concertina book &: write your own story for Children's Book Day (£1.50).
Animal stories in the natural history gallery (FREE)

Spring Day

Thursday 12 April

Create your own yarn sheep (£1 .50)
Animal trail (FREE)

MAY

May Day Celebration

Saturday 5 May

join us for a May Day celebration in the grounds (FREE)
& Make a May Day garland (£ 1 .50)

Reminiscence object handling

Tuesday 15 May

join us for object handling for Dementia Awareness

Museum at Night

Friday 18 May

Explore the museum by torchlight!

JUNE

Wallace's Great Big Bake Off

Saturday 16 June

Take part in Wallace's baking challenge.
plus craft activities. See website for details.

Fete de la Musique

Sunday 24 June, 12:00 - 8:00pm

The museum will be a venue for this musical festival

Museum Society News

Membership

With the usual subscription reminder, you will have received a consent form. In most cases this incorporates a request for details already known to us. Nonetheless, it is essential that the consent form is returned for every member of the Society as without one we will not be able to contact you after the new data protection laws come into force on 25 May this year. Please agree to at least two means of contact as in recent years there have been several occasions when one method has failed.

The minimum subscription for the year to 31 March 2019 is £15 per person but any extra will be very welcome and will be used very wisely... Please pay promptly saving the time and expense of reminders. Each year is a little better but it would be wonderful if no reminders were needed!

If you received notification by email, please remember to print and complete your own card to show when visiting the museum. In the absence of a membership card the volunteer on the desk may need to charge an entrance fee.

Christine Sharp

Reports on Talks and Events

Monday, 11th December:

The Society's Christmas Social Evening

It seems a long time ago, now that Spring is here, when the Society held it's Christmas Social Evening to brighten up the dark midwinter. A warm "Thank You" to those who provided the excellent buffet. The Quiz was well up to its usual challenging standard, and proved that we do not know as much about the history of Saffron Walden as we thought we did. Here are some photos of the evening provided by Lesley Green.



Tony Morton

The Buildings of the Palace of Westminster - Rt.Hon. Sir Alan Haselhurst 8th January 2018

Sir Alan's talk concentrated on the buildings post the disastrous fire of 1834 but outlined for us the history of their predecessors, going back to the C11th. There had been some sort of royal palace on a site around there even earlier but it is thought that another had been built comprising a collection of buildings after the Conquest. Then the king would occasionally summon the nobles from the shires to meet him at Westminster Palace, probably gathering in Westminster Hall and dismissing them when he felt it appropriate. In 2015 we marked the 800th anniversary of the signing by King John of the Magna Carta, at Runnymede rather than Westminster, agreeing to some of the Barons's demands as to their rights & powers but it was not until Simon de Montfort's parliament in 1265 that representatives from the Boroughs were also summoned, being the first "commons" to be called. By 1341 these Lords and "commons" ceased to meet as one chamber & began to assemble as the House of Lords and the House of Commons, meeting in various separate buildings on the Palace site as there were no purpose-built chambers for them to do so. It was Edward VI who granted the Commons the use of St Stephen's Chapel, a step which still influences the design of the chambers of our current Houses of Parliament.

During the C18th & C19th the role of both Houses developed and the political parties were formed. But in 1834 a great fire took hold and the buildings were burned to the ground with the exception of Westminster Hall one of the old Palace buildings. It is said that the then Prime Minister, Lord Melbourne, attended the fire and ordered the brigade to train all their hoses on to that building thus saving it but losing the rest.

So a new modern Palace was required and in the meantime before it was built the Government & Parliament continued to meet; the House of Lords in the Painted Hall & the Commons in the ruins of the House of Lords. There was a competition for the design of the new buildings which attracted 97 submissions. Charles Barry was selected as the architect working with Augustus Pugin, who was to concentrate more on the interior. Those in Parliament who had backed Barry's rivals stirred up trouble and made difficulties and there were lots of them, partly because Barry kept changing his mind even though there was a Select Committee appointed to oversee the project. But at last it was completed and opened in 1860 though neither Barry nor Pugin lived to see it. Since then, very little was done that was not essential routine maintenance until the House of Commons took 14 direct hits in WWII on 10th May 1941. The War and postwar period were not the best of times to repair so much damage and it was 1950 before it reopened.

The needs of M.P.s and the Parliamentary staff developed and became more complex over the years and continue to do so. By contrast, during the period when there were still rotten boroughs and no staff, M.P.s might become sufficiently outraged if a constituent wrote to them about a matter as to send a furious riposte! The Parliamentary Estate has also grown to meet the growing need for space by taking over nearby civic buildings including the former Scotland Yard Norman Shaw Houses and No. 53 Parliament Street. Although even as late as 1950, some members didn't see the need for an office, by the time Sir Alan was first returned as an M.P. in 1970 for a Manchester seat, M.P.s had a secretarial allowance of £500 but could only afford this, by now essential, assistance, by sharing one with a fellow M.P. Much more had also changed; rotten boroughs might be long gone but when the 'new' Houses of Parliament were built women were not allowed to sit as M.P.s, there were no designated facilities for people with disabilities or indeed motor vehicles. Prewar telephones were installed. Postwar, there developed a shortage of meeting rooms to accommodate Select Committees & the 600+ All Party Parliamentary groups. More recently, of course, I.T. facilities have become 'a must'. There is also a much greater need for a modern archive building to cope with the huge amount of nationally important records going back for hundreds of years. The pressures on working space had been eased somewhat by the expansion of the Estate and in the 1980's Michael Heseltine organised an exterior cleaning of the building but by now some of the stone itself was crumbling and the frailty of the building was becoming apparent. In 2010, during Sir Alan's time as Chairman of the House of Commons Organisation Committee, Michael Cockerell's Channel 4 film on Parliament was broadcast. It covered not only the roles of Members of the Commons & the House of Lords but also discussed the nature of the buildings, the sometimes cramped and awkward working conditions, the subterranean tunnels & passages & the miles of cables, not all of which had a known purpose. It also laid bare some of the other mounting pressures on the buildings, both the adequacy of the facilities for its modern use and the increasingly parlous state of repair generally. Sir Alan therefore viewed its showing with some trepidation but was relieved when the public response was largely positive & sympathetic.

So what to do now to make the Palace of Westminster more fit for its role in C21st? Passions already run high. First it has to be agreed what the modern needs are and how Members's demands can be met; how to balance security with the need for public access and how can they be kept safe. M.P.s and others have been shown to be at

serious risk; Sir Airey Neave was killed when his car was blown up by the I.R.A. when on the premises, Jo Cox was killed in her constituency by a lone individual and recently, a policeman on duty on the Parliamentary access road was killed by a terrorist. Set times for lobby votes are well known & M.P.s hurrying to make deadlines are not only potential targets but have to negotiate London traffic in Parliament Square. Televised debates often show the chamber sparsely attended but this is usually because M.P.s are on other duties e.g. attending Select Committees or meeting constituents. Now that I.T. can make communication over distances possible, could the Library and Research Department of both Houses be relocated out of London? None of this is made any the easier because Barry did not bequeath any detailed plans!

For the refurbishment for the Palace of Westminster, there are three options 'on the table' 1) a rolling programme over 25 – 40 years costing many, many, many millions; 2) a phased programme over 9 -14 years costing many, many millions & 3) a full evacuation over 5 -8 years costing many millions. Sir Alan favours option 3). Austria & Canada have parliamentary buildings of roughly the same age & experienced many of the same problems & both have chosen full evacuation.

But whichever is decided upon, the work will have to be done within the context of the Palace being a major visitor attraction, a Grade I listed set of buildings and a World Heritage Site!

It was a fascinating talk, an expert view on much that is normally left behind the scenes. One hardly noticed the absence of slides, given the polish of the presentation.

Heather Salvidge

Twenty Treasures from the Saffron Walden Museum
Speaker: Curator, Carolyn Wingfield
12 February 2018

Carolyn's talk marked the 20th anniversary of the implementation of the The Treasure Act. She started by sketching out the background to the Act and the new definitions of what now constitutes "treasure". The Act was passed in 1996, but came into force a year later in September, to abolish the legislation for treasure trove and to make alternative provision for 'treasure' and other bits of legislation that had built up since Anglo-Saxon times. Hitherto, if it was buried with intent to recovery the Crown had title; if not the landowner had it. At one time, magistrates had a duty to seek out people who appeared to have found treasure but not reported it. Thus the Bench would look for people who were 'living above their station', presumably by having too much money to spend considering their supposed means, and prosecute them. Treasure associated with burials was assumed to have been put in the ground without intent of recovery & so title was with the landowner.

The Act defined 'treasure' thus -: all coins from the same find if they are at least 300 years old and are at least 10% silver or gold ; if they contain less than 10% then there must be 10 or more; two or more base metal prehistoric objects if found together; any other (non coin) object found with more that 10% precious metal ; any object found together with treasure; any object less than 300 years old but made with a substantial amount of precious metal and concealed with intent of recovery & for which no owner or heir can be found. The find must be reported & there is a Coroners' inquest to determine whether it is treasure or not. Then an independent valuation is set and the object must be offered to the designated museums. If a museum buys it, the purchase price goes to the landowner. If the museum declines to purchase, the finder can retain it or sell. If the finder is not the landowner but was acting with permission, then the value is split between them. Archaeological finds that are not deemed to be treasure but are of interest and or value, are dealt with under the Portable Antiquities Scheme.

Carolyn then explained that Uttlesford had more treasure cases than any other district in Essex because of the great proportion of farmland that we have. This means lots of plough soil and the opportunity to search it by farmers & detectorists. The Museum has so far acquired 58 items under the new Treasure Act. These date from the Bronze Age through to Tudors & Stuarts and have been acquired by use of some of the Museum Society's own funds greatly assisted by grants from a variety of local and national bodies. She then introduced us to 20 of the Treasure items added to the Museum's collection since the inception of the Act.

She illustrated all the objects with slides with particular emphasis on four of them but the first item of the 20 was the oldest, a Bronze Age penannular ring in two colours of gold, thought to be a lock ring for hair & excavated as part of the Stansted Airport dig.



Then there was a late Bronze Age hoard from Littebury made up of ingots, scrap metal and axe heads.



Gold Solidus

carries a large cross in his right hand & a bird of prey in his left. "Floating" above his head is another large bird of prey all indicating high status. It has some stylistic similarities with among other objects, a buckle from Kent and a late Roman/Frankish betrothal ring found in Norfolk.

A late Roman hoard from Ashdon comprised a gold ring, silver siliquae and seven gold solidii from the reign of the Emperor Honorius. These solidii continued in circulation after the Romans withdrew. Carolyn told us that four gold solidii was enough to keep a Roman soldier of the period in food for a year! The North West Essex ring, now on display in a downstairs gallery, is a unique gold signet ring whose symbols seem to place it being worn – and lost – at the time when early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were turning to Christianity. The bezel is engraved and the hoop decorated all the way round. The man depicted wears few clothes, has long hair,

An item from the medieval period was a silver seal matrix from Great Hallingbury. It is in very good condition with fine engraving and would have been hung either from a belt or from the neck. The engraving on the die is of a pelican and chicks set over a lion sleeping beneath a tree. The pelican was then seen as a symbol of piety (see Psalm 102 v. 6 in the Authorised Version). There are two engraved scripts; "similis factus sum pelicanus solitudinis" or "I am like a solitary pelican in the wilderness. A shorted one reads "IE SV PRIVE E BEN AME" or "I am private and a good friend". The Saffron Walden Art Society donated some of the money for this lovely object.



Among the other treasures that Carolyn showed us were rings – a gilt one from Clavering inscribed 'IHS Nazareus' so would have had protective properties as would the sapphire in the gold ring from Stebbing. From Manuden had come a gold Anglo-Saxon ring and Viking currency in the form of a silver ingot and a medieval gold ring decorated with clasped hands and some random lettering which may have meant something to someone. From Thaxted there was a typical Viking ring of four twisted strands of gold, two thick and two very thin. Chrishall had yielded a silver-gilt brooch, possibly of Continental influence and a Pentecost item as it was decorated showing a dove with a cross on its back.

Not from the airport this time but still from Stansted there had come not only a silver ring set with an onyx depicting a smith, maybe the god Vulcan but more probably, Daedalus but also a late C17th ring inscribed on the inside of the hoop "Memento mori S C 17 March". Elsenham supplied a silver-gilt ring set with garnets and Canfield another dress item with Catholic symbols of Christ's passion and three nails for the Cross. This is dated to late C16th or early C17th at a time when England was distinctly Protestant so it would have been a very private possession. Another hoard had been found in Dunmow, this one comprising three gold quarter nobles, coinage of Edward III, second issue 1346 – 51. A ¼ noble = 1 shilling and 8 pence.

All these objects are not only beautiful but all have stories to tell. Not all are currently displayed but some are, so go and have a look when you have time.

As a fitting postscript to the evening there was an elegant presentation by Leah Mellors, Collections Officer for Human History, about a hoard of gold coins found in a piano. At the time when the coins were hidden in it, the piano had been in a property in Saffron Walden. The coins had had been designated as treasure and, with the piano, were now on the market. Leah is working to raise £3,000 to buy the piano, a dozen representative coins and their packaging for the museum. It would be good to bring them home.

Heather Salvidge

NOTE : A pair of suede gloves with fur cuffs were found at a previous meeting of the SWM Society. They can be reclaimed from the lost property box at the Welcome Desk at the Museum.

Editor's Corner

This is the first Society Newsletter with a new editor, and my first act is to thank Susan Hollingworth for all of the Newsletters which she has edited for the Society over the last 10 years. I hope that I can keep up the high standard which she set. It is also the first Newsletter with a new layout, as a single column rather than two columns, which The Society has chosen to make it easier to read. If you have any feedback for us please send an email to the Editor, the address is shown in the "Who to Contact" list at the end of the Newsletter.

The programme of Museum Society Talks for 2018 is now fixed, but if there are any topics which you would like to see in the programme for next year please let our Talks organiser know, email address in the "Who to Contact" section, and we will try to find a speaker.

Tony Morton

Distribution List

If you have an email address and would like the Society to communicate with you by email, please send an email to SaffronWaldenMS@gmail.com and we will add you to the distribution list. This would not only assist our administration greatly but also helps us in containing costs particularly of postage.

We assure members that their details will not be made available to any other organisation, Many thanks for your understanding and co-operation.

Who to contact ...

Museum Society

Donations/legacies: Peter Walker 01799 521868

Membership: Christine Sharpe 527546

Newsletter Editor: Tony Morton 523489 (tonymorton.net@gmail.com)

Talks/Visits: Paul Salvidge 01279 814153

Museum

Carolyn Wingfield, Curator (cwingfield@uttlesford.gov.uk)

Wendy-Jo Atter, Museum Admin Officer (watter@uttlesford.gov.uk)

Sarah Kenyon, Natural Sciences (skenyon@uttlesford.gov.uk)

Leah Mellors, Collections (Human History) (lmellors@uttlesford.gov.uk)

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

Company Registration no: 6469141 Charity no: 1123209



Museum Society e-mail address

SaffronWaldenMS@gmail.com

Museum Society web site

www.swmuseumsoc.org.uk