



Museum Matters

Newsletter of Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd

Summer 2018 Issue 45

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Notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of

Saffron Walden Museum Society Limited

will be held at

8.00 pm on Friday, 24th August, 2018

at Saffron Walden Museum

Refreshments will be available from 7.30 pm.

Members are reminded that only those whose subscriptions have been paid will be eligible to vote at this meeting

Highlights and Happenings; From the Chairman

This edition of the Newsletter 'Museum matters' covers one of the longest periods of the year. It has been a 'time of change'. Within this newsletter will be reports of events, people leaving and arriving and plans for the future.

You will all have noticed the effects of 'General Data Protection Regulations' and in particular the action taken by the Board to ensure that the Museum Society complies, so a very sincere thank you to Christine Sharpe who has spent many hours leading our compliance.

The Board has still to find a replacement for Sue Hollingworth as Secretary to the Board so if you would like to take a part in the running of the Society, why not consider if you could take on this role? Sue retires at the AGM next month. Please contact me or Paul Salvidge if you are interested and would like more details.

Our winter series of talks has now come to an end, so a vote of thanks to Vice-Chairman Paul Salvidge for the last set of talks this year. We have ranged from the Houses of Parliament, to Treasures of the Museum, the Friends' School, the Fens and George Stacey Gibson. We have heard from a present and past Curator, plus Sarah Kenyon, Jeremy Collingwood and even myself! Plans are well in hand for the next season starting in September.

The Development Committee continues to support the Curator in moving forward the planning for the next developments of the Museum. In February we welcomed 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.

Following the success of the current exhibition 'From the Hazely Brick Earth: Agriculture in North-West Essex', curated by Leah Mellors, we learned of her appointment as Curator to the Ripon Museums. On 10th May, a number of members gathered with staff to thank her for her time at our Museum and wish her well in her future career. On 11th June, Directors joined staff in thanking the volunteers for their contributions during the last year and the Chief Executive of Uttlesford District Council presented awards. We also received our fourth award by Trip Advisor. Sarah Kenyon was also able to report on her job share with new member of staff James Lumbard. I am also pleased to know that Jennifer (Jenny) Oxley has been appointed as Collections Officer (Human History) and will join the Museum soon. Leah left before we heard that our offer for the piano in which the gold hoard was found has been accepted, so we thank her for her efforts in bidding for this. We have already purchased some of the coins from the hoard to fill gaps in our collection. We look forward to trying to find space for the piano later this year.

On 16th June we had the 'Wallace's Great Bake Off'. This new event was the creation of Charlotte Pratt to provide a fund-raising event for the Society and to provide entertainment for both children and adults. The Society gave strong support, setting up gazebos, collecting entries and supervising the judging. The Chairman of Uttlesford District Council, Cllr Lesley Wells, and Adrienne Powell of the Wild Flower Kitchen kindly judged the entries. The weather was kind to us, no rain. The winners, both children, could teach us all how to bake! Thank you all.

Finally a starring role for your Chairman defending the 'attack by the Mayor at the 'Battle Ditches' at the recent launch of 'Saffron Walden Heritage Development Group which took place on 5th July. It has been a very busy few months and despite 'the beast from the east' in the spring, we have had some exceptional hot summer weather. I hope to see you all at the AGM on 24th August, and please a volunteer to be Secretary!

Tony Watson

Curators Column; All Change!

The staff team at Saffron Walden Museum has been undergoing some changes this year. Following the appointment of Charlotte Pratt last autumn as Learning & Outreach Officer, this April we welcomed James Lumbard who jobshares the Natural Sciences Officer post with Sarah Kenyon. James introduces himself in a short article in this Newsletter, and is already tackling a number of tasks and projects with enthusiasm – we are delighted to have him on the team.

Another welcome appointment has just been made to the post of Collections Officer (Human History) vacated by Leah Mellors in May (Leah is thriving in her new job as Curator of Ripon Museums in Yorkshire). Jenny Oxley, currently curator of Royston Museum, will be joining us later this summer and we look forward very much to having a complete staff team again. Jenny will be introduced formally in the next Newsletter.

One consequence of this is that the Curator's Column this time will be very short, as I have been covering the essentials of the Collections Officer post as well as my own; also, the managerial and administrative nature of most of my work is not conducive to producing interesting column inches! However there is one change planned for the local history displays which allows us to bring some previously undisplayed objects out of the store.



Enamelled metal totem 'Great Chesterford', 924mm long and double-sided enamelled metal direction sign to Saffron Walden LNER station, 622mm long, photographed in store.



An historic signpost arm for Hadstock and Linton, currently in store.

For many years in the railway and transport display, a large Saffron Walden station sign has been displayed thanks to the generosity of its owner, on a long-term loan. This sign is now due to be returned, and its place will be taken by two smaller railway signs and an historic signpost, all of which have been acquired since the local history gallery was created.

The Great Chesterford totem was acquired in 1999 as part of a bequest from a local collector. The Saffron Walden LNER sign was acquired in 1993 and the signpost arm was purchased by the Museum Society in 2004.

We do not have much information on where precisely these signs were deployed, so if any railway buffs out there can help us date the railway signs more accurately, and place them in context, I would be grateful to hear from you. The signpost is a brain-teaser: can anyone identify the junction at which it might have been placed, 5 miles from Hadstock and 6 miles from Linton?

Carolyn Wingfield

Natural Sciences: Sarah Kenyon

My main item of news is that I started working part time on 2 April 2018.

The Natural Sciences Officer post is now a job shared by two people, Sarah Kenyon and James Lumbard, who both work for 18.5 hours per week. On Monday we each work at the Museum Store for half a day. James works at the Museum on Tuesdays and Fridays, whilst Sarah works Wednesdays and Fridays. Every four weeks one of us also does a Saturday at the Museum.



The last few months have been very busy with planned events and unplanned problems. Natural Sciences objects were on display in the Museum at the Uttlesford District Council Chairman's charity event for Essex Wildlife Trust and Support 4 Sight. The display featured photographs by Barry Kaufmann-Wright of landscapes, wildlife and plants in Uttlesford district. Barry was a volunteer with Essex Wildlife Trust for over 30 years and the warden at Sweetings Meadow reserve near Thaxted. A volume of G.S. Gibson's Flora of Essex was on show, with an illustration of Crested Cow-wheat, alongside a plant specimen the herbarium collection. This showcased the Special Roadside Verges project which protects sites where these rare plants still grow.



Study skins of tawny owls, illustrated below, show how the collections are used for research, in this case, to study changes in plumage and behaviour. Some British tawny owls now call out in daylight and have developed lighter brown plumage and white feather patches on the chest and face. This research was published in British Wildlife magazine, August 2014, volume 23, issue number 6, pages 391-399.



On Monday 11 June I was one of three speakers who had the pleasure of talking to Museum Society members about George Stacey Gibson. As a botanist, he recorded the plants growing in this area, discovered new plant species and collected specimens for his herbarium. This work culminated in the production of the first Flora of Essex in 1862. The copy of the flora at the museum is larger in size than the two copies in the Town Library. It is 27cm high, 20cm wide and is interleaved with so many illustrations of plants from Babington's Manual of British Botany and Sowerby's English Botany that it has expanded to six volumes. It may have been Gibson's personal copy. As a geologist, he collected and purchase minerals, crystals and fossils. His collection of two million year old marine fossils from the Red Crag rock of Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex is one of the jewels of the museum geology collection.

The natural history store at the Museum is cooled by an air conditioning unit during hot weather. Unfortunately this broke down in May resulting in high temperatures of up to 26°C in the store. This caused an outbreak of moths, as the insects hatch in warm weather. Imagine my horror as I entered the store to get out an object and found 15 live moths on the floors, walls and ceiling. We managed to kill eight moths, but the rest had to be sprayed with pesticide as they were out of reach. Moth larvae eat fur, feathers, skins, wool and silk. So the store has been checked each day to kill any live moths before they lay eggs on the specimens - a lot of extra work. The store has been fumigated now and we hope that bird, mammal and insect specimens have not been munched!

Finally thanks to the volunteers who have been updating storage locations on the Modes database, identifying zoology and plant specimens, and conducting ecological surveys of special roadside verges.



Brown House Moth

Natural Sciences: James Lombard

An Introduction

Hello! As I've been here since the end of April, it's well-and-truly time to introduce myself. I'm James Lombard, and I'm delighted to have been chosen to share the post of Natural Sciences Officer with Sarah Kenyon. I've really enjoyed my introduction to the job, the museum and the friendly staff and volunteers who make it such a pleasant place to work and visit. I'm originally from South Wales and moved to Suffolk two years ago, living in Stowmarket then Bury St Edmunds. I moved again in January to Manningtree, so it's great to have another lovely Essex town to explore!

I first discovered the wonder of museums while at university, thanks to an invitation to stay with a friend and undertake a summer work placement at the Powell-Cotton Museum in Kent. I was studying Natural Sciences at the time and



I've never looked back since those two weeks spent exploring what may be the world's oldest taxidermy dioramas, an attic full of animal skeletons and nearly tripping over a penguin from Shackleton's first Antarctic expedition.

More recently, I've worked as an intern at the Museum of East Anglian Life and as a trainee at Norwich Castle, on a Heritage Lottery-funded project to redevelop and transform the Castle Keep. After all that history, I'm very excited to be 'coming home' to the natural sciences at Saffron Walden Museum. It seems like a busy and interesting time to join the museum, with plans to make the building and collections more accessible. I have several projects to my name over the next few months, including addressing retrospective documentation for the specimens in the geology gallery, a deep clean of the natural sciences galleries and stored natural history collection, and assessing the potential of items currently stored in the deadstock freezer. I can't wait to start making meaningful contributions through working with my colleagues, the museum volunteers and the Saffron Walden Museum Society.

I look forward to meeting all of you in due course.

Object of the Month:

Object of the Month – April 2018 – Roman Roof Tiles

Chosen by: Carolyn Wingfield

April's Object(s) of the Month was a selection of pieces of Roman roof tiles with paw, hoof and foot prints left by animals and people over 1,750 years ago. The tiles came from a temple that was about 1km north-east of Great Chesterford, which was an important town in the Roman period.



Can you work out what sort of animal left the footprints?

How animals left their mark

At the tile-maker's yard, the wet clay tiles would have been laid out in the sun to dry before firing in a kiln. It was during this drying stage that tiles could be trampled over by any passing stray animals or domestic pets. Traces of footprints are found from time to time on Roman tiles, and the Great Chesterford tiles preserve prints from a number of different animals, including dogs of various sizes and cloven-hooved farmyard animals such as sheep, goats, calves or pigs. There is even the impression left by a hobnail boot or sandal, possibly from a workman trying to shoo away the animals that were treading on the unfired tiles!

The tiles with footprints are all pieces of tegulae – large, flat rectangular roof tiles with upturned sides. We do not know exactly where these tiles were made. Tiles and bricks were usually made near the building site if possible, where there was a supply of suitable local clay, water and wood to fuel the kilns. It was difficult and expensive to transport large numbers of tiles from a distance, though Great Chesterford's position in the River Cam would have allowed materials to be brought in by boat.

Great Chesterford Roman Temple

The site of the temple, north-east of the town, was a special place before the Roman Conquest. Local British people had a shrine on the site in the late Iron Age. After the Roman conquest, in the late 1st or early 2nd century AD, the temple was rebuilt in Roman style as a square building with walls of mortar and chalk rubble faced with flint and plastered, and a tiled roof.

By the mid-3rd century (around 250 AD) the temple had fallen into disrepair. Large amounts of roof tile and plaster fell off the building and it appears that the remains of the roof was cleared away before a big programme of rebuilding started in the late 3rd century.

You can see the tiles on display in the museum throughout April and find out more about Great Chesterford, the temple and Roman building materials in our archaeology gallery.

Object of the Month – May 2018 – Stag Beetle

Chosen by: Sarah Kenyon



This male stag beetle was found dead on the Recreation Ground at Great Dunmow, Essex in May 1999. It was handed in to the police station at Dunmow, and a Police Wildlife Liaison Officer gave it to Saffron Walden Museum to be preserved.

Stag Beetles

The stag beetle, *Lucanus cervus*, is the largest beetle in Britain. They prefer areas with low rainfall, high air temperatures and light soils, so stag beetles are widespread in southern England, especially the Thames valley, north Essex, south Suffolk, south Hampshire and west

Sussex. They are also found in the Severn valley, coastal areas of the southwest, and a few areas in Devon and Worcestershire. They live in hedgerows, parks, gardens and in the edges of woodlands.

Adult males are up to 75 mm long. They have large antler-like jaws, or mandibles, which are used for wrestling with other males during the breeding season.

A Long Life Cycle

Stag beetle larva (image by Anaxibia, from Wikimedia Commons)

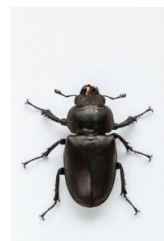
The stag beetle has a long life cycle. Three to seven years are spent underground in the larval stage. Larvae are large white grubs, with orange heads, that can be up to 11 cm long. When it is time to change into an adult, a larva builds an oval shaped cocoon in the soil up to 20 cm below ground. Cocoons can be as large as an orange and may take up to three weeks to build. Within the cocoon the larva becomes a pupa and finally changes, or metamorphoses, into an adult. An adult stag beetle emerges from its cocoon in the autumn, then it spends the winter and spring in the soil.



Breeding

Adult beetles usually emerge from the soil from mid May onwards. Males can be seen flying at dusk looking for a mate. Male beetles use their antlers to wrestle other males when competing for a female beetle.

Female stag beetle (Image by Q-bit array, from Wikimedia Commons)



Females are often seen on the ground looking for somewhere to lay their eggs. They lay small, round eggs below ground near to rotting wood in log piles, tree stumps and old fence posts. Female beetles prefer to dig down into light soil to bury their eggs, and newly emerging adults have to find their way to the surface. Very few stag beetles are found in hard, chalky areas like the North and South Downs.

By the end of August most stag beetles will have died after mating. They do not survive the winter.

You can see this stag beetle on display in the museum until 31 May 2018. You can also find out how you can encourage stag beetles to live in your garden!

Object of the Month – June 2018 – Abolition reticule

Chosen by: Leah Mellors

June's Object of the Month is a silk reticule or bag, made in the 1820s to support the campaign to abolish slavery. The reticule was chosen as Object of the Month by Leah Mellors, our previous Collections Officer (Human History). We featured the reticule on our blog last year, when we were raising money to fund vital conservation work.

Our previous Collections Officer (Human History), Leah Mellors, acquired funding to carry out conservation work on the reticule, which was in very poor condition. The silk had faded and was badly stained, large sections of the silk had shattered and were coming loose and the reticule could not be handled or displayed without causing further damage. With funding from the Daphne Bullard Award, the Saffron Walden Quaker Meeting and individuals in our local community, the museum was able to pay a textiles conservator, Poppy Singer to carry out conservation work on the reticule.



Poppy discovered that the bag had been folded over at the top and sewn down to cover some old damage, so she undid the stitching, cleaned and reshaped the reticule to its original shape. She made an internal support bag and pad to support the new shape of the reticule, adhered the fragmentary silk, and added very fine netting over the top to prevent future damage. Thanks to Poppy's work, the reticule can now be carefully handled and displayed in the museum for short periods of time.

It is made from unlined pale pink silk with a drawstring at the top. On one side, the image of a seated male slave with his two children has been painted in black. On the reverse, there is a poem entitled 'The Slaves' Address to British Ladies'.

The reticule was made in the 1820s by a female campaign group, to raise funds and awareness for the anti-slavery movement. Although Britain officially ended its participation in the slave trade in 1807, slavery continued in the British Empire and in 1823, William Wilberforce formed the Anti-Slavery Society to campaign for the end of slavery in the colonies. Whilst women were allowed to join the society, they could not form part of its leadership, so a group of women in West Bromwich formed their own group, later called the Female Society for Birmingham. Other groups formed across the country and by 1831, there were 73 female organisations campaigning for the immediate and full abolition of slavery.

Many of these groups produced objects such as bags, jewellery, prints and pin cushions, decorated with abolitionist emblems, images and text, which were sold or distributed as part of their campaigns. Silk bags and reticules like the one in our collection were filled with campaign pamphlets and newspaper cuttings and distributed to prominent people, including King George IV and Princess Victoria, as well as to other women's anti-slavery societies.

It is very likely that this reticule was made by the Female Society for Birmingham. It is similar to reticules made by the society in the collections of the Victoria & Albert Museum, the Museum of London Docklands, the Library of the Religious Society of Friends, and the Daughters of the American Revolution Museum in Washington DC. However, another example matching this particular design has yet to be found.

The reticule is an important part of the Quaker history of Saffron Walden, which was home to some prominent Quaker families such as the Gibsons, Tukes and Frys during the nineteenth century. The abolition movement in Britain was established by the Quakers, who believe that all people are created equal (and therefore one person cannot be owned by another).



reticule before conservation



Reticule after conservation

Learning and Outreach News:

Since April we have continued to develop new learning and outreach activities at the Museum. We have run a full programme with the aim of drawing in new audiences. In April, over the Easter holidays, the Museum saw its first chick hatching project in the new “Curiosity Corner” learning display. 7 eggs from a local farm were incubated in for 21 days. On the 22nd 3 chicks hatched in the museum, witnessed by some very pleased children. One boy came to the museum every day over the 3 weeks incubation to see if the chicks had hatched! The chicks stayed in the museum for one further week and then went to live with the Museums Learning Officer. Further displays in “Curiosity Corner” have included pheasants, a UV light box showing how insects see the world and the current display of carnivorous plants. It is hoped that this display will enhance the experience of children visiting the museum.



As well as the chick hatching project there have been a number of craft activities from peg animals to book binding. The museum also held its first May celebration, with its very own May pole. Great fun was had by all; even the postman joined us for a dance.



Councillor Wells and the event winners

The 17th of June saw the first “Wallace’s Great Big Bake Off”, a joint venture between the Museum and the Saffron Walden Museum Society with the aim of building a community event and raising funds for the Museum Society. 17 cakes were entered in total with a small sum of money raised. There was support from local businesses who kindly donated prizes and delicious food and drink from The Kitsch Hen Catering and Tribbecca Coffee. Cllr Wells and Adrienne Powell of the Wild Flower Kitchen kindly gave their time to judge all the entries, which included trying a piece of every cake! The winning cake was an excellent Hedgehog cake!



The Museum has also been out and about with an outreach visit to Linton Book Festival. Despite having the Royal Wedding to compete with, it was a busy day and helped to bring the Museum to an audience that were less aware of the Museum and its collections. Visitors had the opportunity to handle a range of natural history specimens and create their own split pin puppet.

Charlotte Pratt

Exhibition
Worlds Under Glass:
Adventures in Taxidermy
11 August – 23 September 2018



An exhibition exploring the controversial history of taxidermy, from its wunderkammer beginnings to present day.

From its crude beginnings in Wunderkammer to use in scientific discovery, the controversial history of taxidermy is the subject for a new exhibition opening at Saffron Walden Museum on August 11th.

For hundreds of years taxidermy has held a mirror up to our relationship with the natural world. From science to fashion it has been part of our culture for hundreds of years. The exhibition aims to explore this fascinating relationship through the display of The Museums impressive Natural History collection including many pieces not usually on public display. The exhibition combines examples of taxidermy which could be considered crude in their technique, impressive displays of exotic birds, study skins, to modern examples of taxidermy which capture the character of specimens with incredible accuracy.

The exhibition offers the viewer a close view of a variety of fascinating specimens as well as a glimpse into the taxidermist's art through a display of materials and techniques.

Worlds under Glass aims to help viewers reflect on the subject of taxidermy and its place in our scientific, cultural and natural heritage.

Volunteer News: Wendy-Jo Atter

OUR VALUED VOLUNTEERS

Grateful Thanks

Volunteers' Week is a time to say thank you for the fantastic contribution volunteers make at every level of society. On 11 June 2018 Saffron Walden Museum hosted a Volunteers' Tea Party to mark the end of the UK wide week celebration of volunteering and thank our volunteers for the amazing work they do. The event, which was attended by representatives from the Saffron Walden Museum Society and Uttlesford District Council, also gave our volunteers a chance to meet each other and reflect on their experiences in the different areas of the museum.

The museum has over 65 volunteers who fulfil a number of different roles including running the welcome desk, sorting and cataloguing archaeology and natural sciences specimens at the museum store, and helping to run the popular learning and activity events during school holidays and half terms.

Collections volunteers: Jill Knight and Paula Evans have been assisting with social history and world cultures and David and Jane Laing have started a new project evaluating and checking local references in a sequence of 1940s-1950s diaries offered to the Museum with a Women's Land Army uniform from Takeley

Archaeology collections volunteers: Peter Morrissey, Peter Stribling, Peter Rooley and Joanne Pegrum have been busy working on the archaeology collections

Natural Sciences volunteers have been updating storage locations on the Modes database, identifying zoology specimens, and conducting ecological surveys of special roadside verges.

Admin volunteers Mary Adams works tirelessly on the accounts and Ian Sharpe continues his hard work inputting data

Welcome Desk volunteers continue to provide a friendly welcome for visitors, sell tickets and merchandise, provide information about the Museum, and direct enquiries to members of staff.

Learning & Outreach volunteers have been busy planning and delivering schools and holiday activities.

Directors and members of Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd. Have assisted in preparing and running Wallace's Great Big Bake Off event with the Learning & Outreach Officer.

Carolyn said: *"The museum could not operate without the dedication and commitment of our valued volunteers, who contribute over 2,500 hours to the museum throughout the year. We are delighted to celebrate and thank them for such terrific community support."*

If you would like to learn more about volunteering opportunities on the Welcome Desk or elsewhere at Saffron Walden Museum, please call 01799 510333 or email museum@uttlesford.gov.uk.

Congratulations

Three certificates were awarded to volunteers and staff by Uttlesford District Council's Chief Executive, Dawn French, and museum Curator, Carolyn Wingfield, for their nominations in the SHARE Museums East Volunteer Awards. The recipients were:

- Wendy-Jo Atter – Volunteer Leadership Award
- Ann Holloway – Visitor Experience Award
- Angela Jones – 'We Couldn't Do Without' Award



UDC Chief Executive and SW Museum Volunteers cutting the cake

Wendy-Jo Atter – Volunteer Leadership Award

Wendy-Jo Atter has gone ‘above and beyond’ in setting up systems, tackling issues and especially in her management of the Welcome Desk Volunteers team, which is critical for Museum opening and visitor experience.

Wendy-Jo has delivered beyond the normal expectations of the role. Her work with volunteers and front-of-house, have been used by SHARE as an example of good practice for other museums in the region.

To achieve all this in 16 hours a week, Wendy-Jo has shown great flexibility and diligence; a very impressive performance all-round.

She has consolidated her skills, successfully completing the Institute of Leadership and Management volunteer management qualification with distinction.



Uttlesford District Council’s Chief Executive, Dawn French, presenting Wendy-Jo Atter with the Volunteer Leadership Award certificate

Ann Holloway – Visitor Experience Award

Ann Holloway really understands what our visitors need and has gone the extra mile to enable them to get the most out of their visit.

In the absence of a Learning Officer at the Museum (Nov 2015-Sept 2017), school visits had to be self-guided. On her own initiative, Ann offered to dress as ‘Mistress Ann’ (she was formerly one of the ‘Tudor cast’ at Kentwell Hall) bring her own collection of Tudor artefacts and conduct hands-on activities with the school children.

This really made a positive difference to the school visits and we have received some wonderful letters of thanks from the school teachers and children.

Angela Jones – ‘We Couldn’t Do Without’ Award

Whenever she is needed, Angela Jones is already there!

Before the Volunteer rota has even been arranged, Angela has already put her name down to cover the Welcome Desk on Bank Holidays (a notoriously difficult time to get volunteer cover.) We could not open our doors to the public, on these very busy dates, without her!

Angela’s amazing commitment to Saffron Walden Museum was clearly demonstrated when she paid for a taxi to bring her to the Museum to cover a DOUBLE shift with a BROKEN ANKLE.



Ann Holloway, Museums East of England chairman Tony O'Connor and Angela Jones

Warm Welcome

We extend a warm welcome to our new volunteers;

Cath, who has completed her induction and is now fully operational in her Welcome Desk Role,
and Tom, who has recently joined the team of Collections volunteers.



Cath on duty at the Welcome Desk

Upcoming Events:

Evening Talks are held at 8.00 pm in St Mary's Parish Rooms, Museum Street, Saffron Walden.
members £1: guests welcome, £3: young people under 16 free.

10 September

Worlds under Glass - -Adventures in Taxidermy-

Speaker; Charlotte Pratt, Saffron Walden Museum

8 October

The Queen of Chardonnay- -Exciting Archeology at Chesterford-

Speaker; Jacqui Hutton, Network Archeology

Museum Society News

Much belated double Congratulations to Leah Mellors, firstly for passing her AMA – that's the Associateship of the Museums Association, the post-graduate professional qualification for museum curators. Leah has been studying for this qualification and completing the assignments while also doing her full-time job at the Museum, for several years. So it is a credit to her determination and stamina as well as a mark of professional merit! And secondly, Congratulations upon her appointment as Curator of Ripon Museums; a new post to manage the three museums within the Yorkshire town of Ripon. We know that Leah was very pleased to be able to return to her home County to work, and we wish her every success.

Tony Morton

Membership

First, a huge 'thank you' to the majority of members who paid their subscriptions promptly. If your payment is still outstanding please pay without delay to save the time and expense of reminders.

In recent years, membership cards have been sent out with the annual reminder. If you received notification by email, please remember to print and complete your own card as you may need to show it when visiting the museum. In the absence of a membership card the volunteer on the desk may need to charge an entrance fee. If you have a problem printing the card, do please let me know as I can let you have one of the spare cards I keep tucked away!

Just a thought. Do you have a friend or neighbour who might be interested in joining the Society? Talks start again on September 10 so why not bring someone along.

Christine Sharpe

Reports on Talks and Events

The History of the Friends' School – Otherwise The Four Site Saga -

Speaker Tony Watson

9th April 2018.

Tony Watson, our speaker, is the Chairman of our Museum's Board of Directors. Though not a Quaker himself, he was also a pupil at The Friends' for nine years, has family connections with the school and became the first non-Quaker to be the school's Clerk to the Governors. Thus he has experienced school life from many points of view. He stepped down from the governors in 2010.

Education in this country grew out of the church in its medieval Roman Catholic days, continuing this tradition after the change into the church of England. The C17th saw the Non-conformists taking some part in providing education in differing ways, some as charitable organisations.

Tony guided us through the development of education in the town from the early C15th desire of two assistant priests at St. Mary's that members of their congregation should know the rudiments of literacy, to the foundation of the grammar school in medieval times, later moving its premises to Castle Street in 1522 and to Ashdon Road in 1881 where it now is the site for Dame Bradbury's independent school. A church charity school was established in Castle Street and later a nursery department for it was built in Museum Street - now leased out as part of the Fry Art Gallery. The Boys' British School opened in 1838, the Girls' British (eventually South Road junior girls and mixed infants). Saffron Walden is a town, therefore, where education has been taken seriously for hundreds of years. So when did the Friends' play their part?

A leading Quaker, John Bellers, wrote in 1695 proposing the establishment of a College of Industry for the relief of elderly Friends and orphans and in 1702 the Friends' General Meeting for London and Middlesex agreed to fund such a College in Clerkenwell to house, feed and some provide occupation for elderly Friends and accommodation and food together with the chance to learn a trade for orphans. The adults were housed in one part of the building and the children in another. The boys, though not the girls, were given rudimentary teaching of the 'three R's': the girls also worked on inmates clothing. Thus starting the first Friends' School where they were better fed and cared for than standard poorhouse occupants, suffered from fewer diseases and and were given meaningful occupations. The Clerkenwell College became the first 'site' of the 'Four Site Saga' lasting there till 1786.

The encroaching development of London prompted a move the open area of Islington to a "rural villa" until 1825 when further some problems with the building took the College to the rural area of Croydon till 1879. By 1815, the Islington Villa was home to as many as 111 children and pupils were admitted from "out county" for the first time. The occupants were all boarders and enjoyed conditions which were still far better compared with the outside world; the rooms were more spacious and more appropriate, greater care was given to the sick and the education given to, by now, girls as well as boys was of a good standard. During the Croydon years, the education side of the work developed further as some pupils were instructed to be apprentice teachers to work in Croydon or at other Quaker schools that were now in being. In 1873, the first non-Friend pupils were admitted demonstrating the trust by non-Quaker parents for the standards being set. The numbers on roll increased and another move beckoned.



In Saffron Walden, George Stacey Gibson, a leading member of a prominent Quaker family, donated a 12½ acre site off Mount Pleasant Road and the building of “the school on the hill” started in 1877, finishing in 1879. 90 Boys and 50 girls were admitted on opening but the building work did not stop there and down the years more varied facilities were added and then sometimes adapted. The chemistry lab. was added in 1892, 1902 saw the opening of the swimming pool the first such pool in Saffron Walden, and in 1903 more staff accommodation was built. The new gym followed in 1905 and here Tony illustrated it with a photo of some girls in their 'gym tunics' as teaching was still segregated. The sanatorium, very necessary before the N.H.S. came on stream in 1911 and was subsequently adapted as boarding accommodation for boys and later still as premises for the junior school. Following a change in policy of separate teaching for boys and girls, co-educational lessons were introduced in 1910 leading to the first Matriculation class in 1912. Ironically, during WWI the school was evacuated for use by the Army. Many Friends are pacifists but not all are, and some former pupils were killed in combat and some also served their country by, for instance, driving ambulances in combat zones.

The newly formed Junior House opened in 1930 with Miss Barrie as Headmistress; later she moved it to the High Street when it separated from the senior part of the school. Building continued throughout the second half of the C20th, of note the Sports Hall and and Music Hall. Tony showed us a photo of the 1930's uniform: maroon and white striped blazers and, for boys, maroon and white striped ties.

There were, of course, siblings amongst the pupils and until co-education there were specific times set on a Sunday for brothers and sisters to meet. The place to meet was The Avenue where the children would walk up and down, turning at the end which was marked by a big stone which would be given 'a ritual kick'. Whitsun weekend was the time for former pupils to forgather and exchange news and keep up-to-date with the school. Many of the changes in the first half of the C20th were experienced by C.B. Rowntree, first as a teacher from 1905 and then as Headmaster between 1922 - 1934. On his retirement, he continued to serve the town, for instance by becoming Mayor. Over the years many former pupils developed careers of note; a few such are Edward Bawden, artist, Ralph, a gold medal architect, John Cardman, hockey player, Sally Tuffin, designer, ceramicist and part of the team which 'rescued' the Moorcroft Pottery. Tom Robinson, musician and song writer and the Rt, Hon, Tony Newton O.B.E. sometime conservative M.P. For Braintree.

One way by which the school marked the Millennium was with an overhead photograph of the members of the community standing on the ground to form the number 2000. In 2012 the new Nursery and Junior School opened and to those on the outside all appeared to be going very well. Alas, not so. In 2016 the school changed its name to “The Walden School” but this could not rescue it and it closed in July 2017 leaving pupils seeking new schools and teachers and other staff seeking new employment. Very sad.

Tony Watson told us that the Governing Body reckoned that the school needed 350 pupils to be viable. When he stepped down from the Board in 2010 there were just under 400. At closure it had dropped to 280. He surmised that since the financial crisis of 2008, fewer parents could afford the fees even though the cheaper weekly boarding option had been introduced and day pupils had been accepted since the 1930's. In the early years, the relevant Friends' Home Meeting had met the costs but by the 1930's it was parents who paid. Now, Tony said, his connection with the school was, together with Martin Hugall, a long time member of staff, spending time sifting through the stacks of paper to create a lasting, fitting archive that would properly record the stories and achievements of the school which had become such an important feature of the local Friends' community and of the town of Saffron Walden.

Paul Salvidge

Ouse Fen – Building Britain's biggest Reedbed
Speaker Hannah Bernie
Monday 14 May

Hannah Bernie, the Warden at the RSPB Ouse Fen reserve for the last five years, told us about this large scale and long term project to establish an important natural habitat that has almost entirely disappeared. In the 16th century, Fen wetlands covered 1300 square miles but that has now plummeted to 2.5 square miles, after centuries of draining and conversion to farmland.

The Ouse Fen project is a joint one between the RSPB and Hanson, which are excavating sand and gravel from the site at the rate of one million tons a year, over a thirty year period and they are about half way through. After the extraction in each section of the 700 hectare site is completed, Hanson return the top soil that was removed from that section and re-profile the land exactly as agreed with the RSPB, to produce the best environment for wildlife. The RSPB then raise the water levels in that section to produce a lot of islands with gently sloping edges, ideal feeding habitat for bitterns in particular. Volunteers plant unbelievably large numbers of reed plants (*Phragmites*), originally bought in but now grown on site, though the newly planted reeds have to be fenced to prevent geese eating them before they get established.



So far, just over 200 hectares out of 700 hectares have been restored with dramatic results. The reserve has bitterns, bearded tits, marsh harriers, water rail, reed buntings, yellow wagtails and the great white egret, as well as water voles and otters.

There are however challenges in creating new habitats on this scale. Over recent years, bittern numbers have fallen because their food, fishes, have been depleted. The RSPB are experimenting with submerging tree branches in the water to provide safer habitats for fish breeding and they have also released significant numbers of fish. And reedbeds need to be managed. This involves an annual cutting regime, which is far from easy on a fragile land surface and even worse, when you are successful, what can you do with the large amount of reed that you have cut and collected. This is still work in progress.

Hannah said that visitors to the site would find the visit rewarding, though at the moment, there were no facilities apart from a small car park. Visit rspb.org.uk/ousefen for more details.

Paul Salvidge

George Stacey Gibson – Aspects of his life and achievements
Speakers; Jeremy Collingwood, Len Pole and Sarah Kenyon
Monday 11 June



Jeremy Collingwood on G.S.G.s municipal, religious and charitable work.

George Stacey Gibson was born on 18 July 1818, child of Wyatt George Gibson and his wife, Deborah, nee Stacey. Young George was well connected, his paternal grandfather having made a propitious marriage to Elizabeth, daughter of the wealthy Wyatt family who were brewers. The house where young George was born, now numbered 4 and 6 was at the north end of the High Street and Jeremy took us on a mental tour of the houses and other notable buildings that had close associations with the Gibson family in the town.

Starting at the south end of the High Street with the U.D.C. building, formerly the Saffron Walden Hospital, Jeremy's tour included Hill House, no. 53 The High Street, George's childhood home, Bridge End Gardens, Myddleton Place, not only a residence but a maltings, the annexe to the almshouses in Abbey Lane, the fountain in the Market Square, Barclays Bank, the new frontage to the Town Hall and the Boys British School and the Friends' School, to name just two of their educational interests.

George had formed a keen interest in the natural world and spent time wandering over the local countryside and keeping notes. By the time he was 24 he was active in not only the newly formed Literary and Scientific Institution but also in the Natural History Society, founded by Uncle Jabez and John Player, which Society morphed into our Museum. Aged 25 he produced a scholarly list of the flora around Saffron Walden, listing some 588 plants.

In 1838 the family disposed of much of their brewing and malting concerns but they still had property holdings of all sorts in and around the Town and of course, the Saffron Walden and North Essex Bank which had prospered, even more so after the collapse of Searle's Bank in 1825. Also in 1838 the Boys' British School opened and George became Treasurer of the School Committee; in 1939 he was made a partner in the S.W. & N.E. Bank. He was also active in the Quaker Meeting, representing S.W. at the Monthly Meeting and later at National level.

He married Elizabeth Tuke from York and moved to Hill House. A daughter, Mary, was born in 1853. He was elected Town Councillor in 1859, an alderman in 1864 and Mayor in both 1875 and '76. When the Saffron Walden Railway Act was passed, George became Treasurer of the Company. He was also involved with the Girls' British School, became Vice-Chairman of the Union Board, Vice-President and Treasurer and the Chairman of the new Hospital Management Board and gave the land for the new Friends' School in Mount Pleasant Road.

The banking business thrived becoming Gibson's Tuke and Gibson and moved from Market Hill to their newly-built handsome premises in Market Square (now Barclays). George paid for the 'Tudor' front to be added to the Town Hall and also gave money to the Training College. He continued being active in civic life until taken ill in London at the Yearly Meeting and dying there in April 1883. In today's money, George's estate would be valued at around £25,000,000. He left money to many people and causes, including the Museum, several charities and to five schools. His daughter Mary did not marry and lived in Hill House until her death in 1926 when the Hill House estate was broken up.

We can still see much of what he donated to the Town but, as Jeremy said, we shall never know the depths of his private charity. If you want to know more about George, then Jeremy's book "Mr Saffron Walden. The Life and Times of George Stacey Gibson (1818 - 1883)" is still available.

Sarah Kenyon on George Stacey Gibson - Naturalist

Sarah Kenyon's talk concentrated on George's role as a botanist and geologist. In his youth he made many excursions into the countryside, keeping field notes and starting a herbarium, that is a collection of dried, pressed plants mounted on sheets of paper, and sometimes bound into a book, with descriptions of when and where found. When he produced his work on the species of plants to be found around S.W. he had recorded 588. He corresponded with many noted botanists of the day, including Hooker and Joseph Banks. In 1862 George published *The Flora of Essex* at a cost of 6/- It remained the standard reference work for a century comprising common and rare plants growing in Essex. There are original copies in the Town Library.

He did not neglect the cultivation of garden plants and trees either, as the gardens of Hill House amounted to near 11 acres and he enlisted the services of William Chater the Saffron Walden nurseryman, best known for his hollyhocks. Between them they created a variety of 'gardens', and in the summer there would be Open Days when the public were invited in.

For his geology he collected fossils and rock samples, buying some and finding some notably from the cliffs at Walton-on-the-Naze. On the corner of Margaret Way, the road now adjacent to Hill House, are some boulders which formed part of his collection.

Both during his life and in his will he donated valuable objects and collections to the Museum, for instance part of his herbarium – the other half is in the Natural History Museum – butterflies, two cabinets of moths. Minerals, fossils, shells, birds' eggs and as a curiosity, a case containing a redstart's nest made in a skull from the Saxon cemetery.

Len Pole on George Stacey Gibson – and Saffron Walden Museum

As a former curator of the Museum Len Pole is well placed to recount George's work for and contributions to Saffron Walden Museum. The Museum grew out of the Natural History Society and the private collections of its members. Lord Braybrooke donated some land for the Society to have its own building and the Museum opened in May 1835 sharing its function with other societies and housing the collections on the first floor. George's father had been on the Museum's Board since its inception in 1834 and in 1841, George was appointed to it.

Len then described the range of donations that George had made to the Museum starting with a 'collection of fossils and shells from Walton-on-the-Naze and a display case'. Very practical. Then there were some local artefacts - the Holy Water stoop, originally from Thundersley Church but which had been found in the cellar of George's house; the painted panels from the Sun Inn; the portrait of Henry Winstanley and drawings of the lighthouse. George had an Anglo-Saxon cemetery in the back garden of Hill House and George organised a thorough excavation in 1876 and some of the artefacts are in the Museum.

The Museum's ethnography collection benefited by the donation of several items including a decorated bark cloth, a Navahoe saddle blanket and a green arrow head from New Zealand that had found its way to Cardiff Docks. The assembly of autographed letters from eminent people included correspondence from Henry VII, Napoleon, Joseph Banks and Queen Victoria. Practically, he also devoted much time to the organisation of the Museum and the collections and in his will he left funds to provide a salary for a Curator – and thus George Maynard became our first paid Curator.

Grateful thanks to our three contributors.

Heather Salvidge

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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: Tony Morton 523489

Talks/Visits: Heather 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)

Charlotte Pratt, Education and Outreach Officer (cpratt@uttlesford.gov.uk)

James Lumbard, Natural Sciences (jlumbard@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