



Museum atters

Newsletter of Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd

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*Exhibition
Living with our History
to 12th May*

Highlights and Happenings; From the Chairman

The spring edition of the Newsletter "Museum matters" this year can begin with excellent news! **The application to the Heritage Lottery Fund has been successful and we have been awarded £51,200.** This, with the contribution by the Society of £10,000., will enable the Museum to undertake studies and commission work to determine the best way of improving the Museum and to attract more people to the site, which it shares with the Castle ruins. There will also be assistance for the Society to developing our fund raising ability. Our Curator, Carolyn Wingfield, has worked very hard over the last six months to submit the application by the dead line for Resilient Heritage applications which closed two days after our application was submitted on the 16th January. Very well done Carolyn. We are at last able to start on the work for the re-development of the Museum. There will be a busy year ahead getting ready for the programme which will begin in January 2020 and last for nearly a year. Following the success of the development of the Store at Shire Hill we can now progress the exciting first stage of development of new facilities within and adjoining the Museum.



The Piano, in which the gold coins were found, was delivered to the Museum last August and was duly formally accessed to the Museum on the 30th November 2019. This was a very successful meeting to which the donors of funds and the donors of the piano were all present. There was a pianist present and led by the mayor there was quite a sing song! We thanked Leah Mellors, who we welcomed back for this occasion; Peter Walker for the successful crowd funding appeal, and Jenny Oxley, who picked up the project and organised the excellent display, including a secure case for the coins and their packaging. Saffron Walden pianist Gail Ford entertained us with an appropriate medley of pieces.

The Xmas party on the 10th 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 15th February was the preview of the latest exhibition. *"Living with History"*. This exhibition invites you to take a step back in time and look at the ancient origins of the district's main centres, and the influences on their rise or decline, from Roman to Tudor times. Chesterford was the main Roman town at that time, while Dunmow developed because of its convenient location on a main road. Newport and Walden vied for supremacy as the local market centre in the Norman period, and Hatfield Broad Oak was a thriving medieval market town. How Carolyn found the time to complete this excellent exhibition I do not know.

The Board have been pleased to welcome back Keith Eden as a Director. He has been co-opted for a term to expire at the next AGM, when he will be proposed as a Director for appointment by the AGM. We have also found a minute secretary, Alice Wilson; whom we will appoint at our next Board in April. Welcome both.

Tony Watson

Obituary

Brian Newman, MBE.FBHI.

You may already be aware that Brian Newman died on Saturday 9th March, aged 86.

Brian will be remembered by long standing Members of his years as Chairman of the 'old' Saffron Walden Museum Society.

Brian joined the Management Committee of the Society in 1963 having been appointed by the Saffron Walden Borough Council. Prior to the re-organisation of local government in the 1970s, the Society's Constitution was governed by a Committee consisting of members appointed by the Saffron Walden Borough Council, Essex County Council and the 'old' Museum Society. A new constitution was agreed in 1976 following the creation of Uttlesford District Council and Brian became a Society appointee on the revised Management Committee.

Brian became Vice-Chairman in July 1975 and chaired his first meeting in June 1976 following which he became Chairman in January 1977. I worked with Brian and other members of the Committee after I was elected in October 1971. We worked together first in my role as Hon. Solicitor and later as his Vice-Chairman. His role as Chairman came to an end in October 2004, a period of 27 years.

Brian remained a member of the Management Committee until this was dissolved in August 2013 after the Museum Society became a charitable limited company in 2008. He was appointed an Honorary Vice-President of the Society in recognition of his long service in 2013. This year was his fifty-sixth year of association with the Museum. During his time as Chairman of the Management Committee he was involved in the major changes to the Museum Galleries with the opening in 1983, performed by David Attenborough as he then was, of 'The Worlds of Man', and then in 1993 the changes to the former Great Hall to the 'Ages of Man'.

There is a private family cremation. A memorial service will be held in due course and we will circulate details of date, time and venue when available

Tony Watson

Curators Column; Carolyn Wingfield

Preparing for Transformation

As the Chairman has stated, the Museum has been very fortunate in being awarded a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and work will begin in April on a project all about 'preparing for transformation'. Most of you will know that we have been thinking for some time about the possibility of extending the building, making some much-needed improvements to facilities and re-displaying some of the older galleries, to name but some of the things on our 'wish-list'. The ultimate aim is to increase our visitor figures and public use of the Museum and the site, and by generating more income, 'future-proof' the Museum against continuing pressures on public funding.

To underpin our developments, we will be using some of the grant to commission an 'audience development study' from consultants. This will arm us with much more detailed information about why people do or do not visit the Museum, so our development plans will take that into account and enable us to draw in a larger and more diverse range of people to visit and work with us.

We will then move on, in 2020, to a feasibility and options appraisal, to examine the best way to develop the Museum building and service, and produce a costed plan – in effect, the blueprint for the next project, the capital development itself, which will follow from 2021 onwards. This will require more funding, consequently we are using some of our current grant to get fund-raising advice and support for the Museum Society. This will help us to raise sufficient funds, through the Society's charitable status, for the development project. At some stage in our 'Preparing for Transformation' project we will be asking Museum Society members and all our volunteers for their views and suggestions, and I will be using this column to provide a general update as we embark on an important new chapter in the Museum's history.

Our New Appeal to purchase three 'treasures' and a rare coin from 1066

The Museum Society needs to raise £10,880 in total by May 2019 to secure these four locally-found objects for the Museum. We hope to raise at least 45% of the funds needed through grants, but have to raise at least £5,000 locally to secure all these, so that they can be enjoyed and studied by local residents, visitors and students for generations now and in the future.



Medieval gold Reliquary Pendant in the form of a cross.

Probably 14th - 15th century, found in the Farnham area

The faces are decorated with engraved patterns and black letter script. The back-plate is still secured in place, so a tiny relic may survive inside. Length with suspension loop 29mm.

Reported through the Treasure Act 1996

(Image: Portable Antiquities Scheme)



Late Saxon silver Penny of Harold II

Dated to 1066, found in the Ugley area

Harold II reigned for less than a year before he fell at the Battle of Hastings. This is a rare opportunity to acquire a coin from a very important year in English history!

(Image, 'heads' side; Saffron Walden Museum)



Post Medieval gold Posy Ring

Late 17th – early 18th century, found in the Lindsell area

Bezel engraved with a heart, inside the hoop engraved 'Remember me in hope AT'. It is either a commemorative mourning ring or perhaps a betrothal ring. The diameter is 16 mm. Reported through the Treasure Act 1996.

(Image: Portable Antiquities Scheme)



Bronze Age gold and copper alloy Penannular Ring

Around 1,150 – 750 BC, found in the Lindsell area

This gold-plated ring with a copper alloy core was used for personal adornment in the late Bronze Age. We do not know exactly how they were worn; possibly on the ear or nose, rather than in the hair or on clothing. (Image: Portable Antiquities Scheme)

Donations should be made to 'Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd' and sent to the treasurer Peter Walker. We will also be launching a crowd-funding public appeal via the Museum's social media shortly.
Carolyn Wingfield

From the Archives: The continuing story of the Wedge collection of Aboriginal Australian items :Len Pole

The initial collecting policy statement (1834) of the Saffron Walden Natural History Society, later published in the Introduction to the Abridged Catalogue ... of 1845, states: 'The concentration of specimens peculiar to the District in which the Museum is established will form a leading feature in its arrangement'. Nevertheless, the Trustees were offered many items which would indeed have been 'peculiar to the district', but not quite in the way they had hoped. One significant example was the enormous collection of natural specimens from South Africa!

Then there was a series of offers from the Wedge family, initially Charles, who lived in Shudy Camps and was one of the early members of the Society. The following is recorded in the Minutes of the meeting of 25 March 1835, being part of a letter from him
"I have sent for your Society, if they are worth acceptance, the skin and leg of an Emu, and some weapons used by the Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land". Van Diemen's Land was the name used in the early nineteenth century for the island later known as Tasmania.

The early story of the Wedge collection has been told before, as in the joint article by myself and Rebe Taylor in SWMS Newsletter 19, ten years ago. In summary, these items had been sent to him by his son John Helder Wedge. It is likely that he was aware of his father's connection to the new museum. John returned to England in 1838, knowing that his father, then in his 90s, was ailing. John was at that time living in what is now Melbourne, Victoria. He brought back with him a further set of items from that area, which he gave to the Museum.

This article is more concerned about somewhat more recent events relating to the Wedge collection, but even so over 70 years ago. In October 1946, N. J. B. Plomley, the Director of the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Launceston, Tasmania wrote to the then Curator, Hubert Collar, "to ask whether you would consider letting us have one of the three Tasmanian spears in exchange for some Tasmanian ethnological or natural history material. I would be glad, for example, to send a selection of Tasmanian palaeoliths, or you might be more interested to obtain some other type of local material". He had been informed of the existence of the spears by the headmaster of the Launceston High School, who had visited the Museum in 1938. It was made clear by Collar at the time that there was some doubt whether any of the spears in the Wedge collection, which was the only source of relevant items, were in fact from Tasmania; he said "Most of these items have since been pronounced Australian by experts, but there seems to be an element of doubt even now", suggesting that some may be from Tasmania. However, Plomley was clearly prepared to take the risk, as he said "I am at present organising an ethnological gallery which will feature the Tasmanian aboriginals and I find that we have no authentic Tasmanian spears in our collections" He described the distinctly Tasmanian spear form: "simple lances 5-15 feet long with one end sharpened to a point by scraping. They are



Hubert Collar, wearing the Mayor's robe and chain, 1947

made from a tough wood which is scraped to about finger thickness over the whole length. Tasmanian spears are never barbed and never carry heads”.

In his letter of 7 August 1947 to Plomley, Collar says he has selected a spear, with some advice from a local expert, and packed it up. He indicates that the Museum already has Tasmanian lithic material and “we are so crowded that I should find it very difficult to find room for any more. In the circumstances I think the transaction had better be regarded as a return of the spear to its native habitat”. In other words, an early example of restitution! He needed to arrange an export licence for it, through the shippers, Lock & Co. This had involved him in some expense. He then goes on to say “This I am sure you would not wish me to bear so I suggest in return, instead of sending cash, you send me a small food parcel. This is a very poor neighbourhood & a change from the present diet enjoyed by British people would be much appreciated. I would add that I have been brought in touch with the distribution of parcels in this town & I must confess to amazement at the generosity & good feeling of the people of Australia, Tasmania & New Zealand, who are beyond all praise in their endeavours to render assistance”. I should add that Collar was at this time Town Mayor, so he would have been well aware of the reality of this aid. It is notable that this letter from Collar was sent from his home, 40 Castle Street, rather than from the Museum, as were his previous letters.

In response to this request, Plomley makes it clear that while he acknowledges Collar’s generosity in presenting the spear to his Museum, he would like to present something to the Saffron Walden Museum in appreciation of this gift. The matter of sending the food parcel is treated quite separately by Plomley, who says “This latter is the sort of assistance we who are overseas can give, even though it is but a small particle of what you need”. Collar’s reply, this time from The Museum, is fulsome in his appreciation of receiving the food parcel in November 1947, and the difference it made in their diet: “My wife says she has never had so much dried fruit in the house since the war began & the other articles are equally welcome. One shilling’s worth of meat doesn’t go very far as the ration for one person for a week. She is consequently faced with the problem of finding something for one main meal a day. 1oz of bacon is not very substantial neither is 2oz of cheese & it seems inevitable that the woman deprives herself for the sake of her menfolk. Added to this, there is the clothing shortage & she must be perpetually mending & contriving, not only with clothes but all household linen, etc.”. Further parcels were sent.

The spear was despatched in November ’47, arriving in Launceston in June 1948. It was initially reported to have been broken in transit, but this was a mistake, as upon inspection in the Museum, it was realised that it had originally been made in two parts. Plomley diplomatically says “This is most interesting and I do not think it has been found in other known Tasmanian spears”; this is Curator-speak for “I don’t think it is Tasmanian, no matter what your opinion might be”. Consequently, Plomley cheekily asks for another one “of the normal type”. In a letter of October 1949 Collar agrees to send another, in a specially-made wood box. This is despite the fact that at this time he is no longer Curator, although he is still living in the Curator’s house, presumably as he has retained the role of Hon. Secretary of the Museum. The spear was sent off in November 1949 but languished in the London office of the Tasmanian Agent General for over a year. It was eventually delivered to the Launceston Museum in September 1951. The last document in the Museum relating to this event is a copy of a letter dated 5th September 1951 from Plomley’s successor at the Launceston Museum, I. Thomson, to Hubert Collar, telling him of the arrival of the spear, that “it appears to be purely Tasmanian, but is shorter in length than the majority of known examples” and that he is about to do a wood test on it. There is a note in pen, added later, which says “1951:47:1. (not Tasmanian)” no doubt as a result of the wood test.

So the outcome of this story is that the Launceston Museum apparently still did not possess any Tasmanian spears in its collection at this time, to use in its new Tasmanian Aboriginal gallery. It did have two more examples, probably from coast of New South Wales, to add to its collection of spears from the mainland! What a pity that Hubert Collar’s entirely laudable sentiments concerning the return of the first spear “to its native habitat” resulted in it ending up in another land, rather than its homeland.

The only saving grace is that at least the second spear was returned to the island in which it was collected. A letter sent by Rona Hollingsworth, Curator of Anthropology at the Launceston Museum in 1985, in response to my enquiry about the transfer of the spears nearly 40 years before, included a copy of the label on the second spear to be sent: “Van Dieman’s Land 1 Spear Pr by Chas Wedge 23{?}/3/35”. This indicates that it was one of the four items sent to his father Charles by John Helder Wedge, while he was working in Tasmania, and was in touch with Aboriginal men then working for his neighbour John Batman, who had arranged for them to be moved there from the area of New South Wales. Batman had specified that the men should bring their weapons with them. John Wedge may well have sent the items to his father in the knowledge that he would offer them to the new museum in which he was interested, and to which he had donated items already.

Natural Sciences: Sarah Kenyon

Natural Sciences News – 21 Again!

In January 2019 I had the pleasure of collecting my 20 year long service award in the Council Chamber at the Uttlesford District Council offices. I started work at Saffron Walden Museum on 2 February 1998 – I can't believe it is now 21 years ago!

My early working life was in finance roles such as credit controller for a large Leicester company and a spell as a Revenue Officer for the Inland Revenue. Later I studied at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne qualifying with a BSc in the Biology of Plants and Animals and an MA in Museum Studies. During my degrees I volunteered at the Hancock Museum in Newcastle, doing a variety of collection and public tasks, and with BTCV doing practical conservation work. My first paid museum job was Documentation Assistant with Tyne and Wear Museums mainly working at Sunderland Museum. Later I moved to London to provide Visitor Services for four medical museums (Hunterian, Odontological, Anatomy and Pathology) at the Royal College of Surgeons.



Congratulations Sarah !

At Saffron Walden Museum I can combine collections work, public services and environmental conservation. I have been responsible for the curation of extensive collections of natural history and earth sciences, including 53,000 specimens of animals, birds, insects, plants, fish and marine life, and 17,400 minerals, rocks and fossils. This involves documenting collections, vigilance in monitoring for moth and museum beetle pests and keeping stores or displays clean. The biggest challenge of recent years was the removal of the entire geology collection and a large part of the natural history collection to the Museum's new store at Shire Hill, a project which could not have been accomplished without the aid of wonderful store move volunteers. These Natural Sciences tasks are now shared with James Lombard.

We also deal with enquiries, identifications and biological records, all of which add to the huge volume of environmental information held at the Museum, ever more relevant today in understanding and protecting the environment. One of my roles is to co-ordinate the Special Roadside Verges scheme for rare plant species. Uttlesford boasts 46 of these special sites – more than any other district in Essex. When working with environmental groups, my finance experience came in very useful as I was Treasurer of the Essex Field Club for ten years.

Natural Sciences objects also contribute to the exhibitions programme. My first exhibition was Predators (1999) and the most recent Life in the Ice Age (2017). All manner of specimens have been brought out of the stores for the popular 'Object of the Month' feature, from a Stag Beetle from Great Dunmow to a dinosaur's footprint.

Finally I have to remark upon annual extremes of weather. Last year, in late February and early March, the UK was covered in snow by the 'Beast from the East' anticyclone and no plants were growing. In 2019 we have had one of the warmest February days on record. Flowers are blooming, trees sprouting their leaves and bees are out pollinating plants as they collect nectar. Will this summer be as scorching and dry as the one in 2018?

Natural Sciences: James Lombard

Summer Exhibition 25th May – 3rd November

Plans are coming along quickly for this summer's temporary exhibition, called Take Away the Walls. In the museum the displays and exhibits will discuss the wildlife and countryside of north-west Essex, and how wildlife populations have changed in recent decades due to human intervention – for better or worse. But it's not all about the wildlife. Getting outdoors can bring all sorts of personal benefits, from improved fitness to better mental health and personal relationships. In the exhibition you'll be able to find out about a whole range of free activities to feel confident getting out and about in Uttlesford: explore your local public rights of way, get involved in a nature reserve work party, or help out with animal surveys near you.

Call for volunteers

The first event takes place on Friday 17th May, a week before the exhibition opens. This year, Saffron Walden Museum hosts a Wildlife Extravaganza for Museums at Night, with activities and information at the Museum and across Saffron Walden. This ambitious evening requires an equally ambitious team of marshals and advice-givers to make it all run smoothly. That's why I call upon you, our committed Society members, to help make this a real night to remember for Saffron Walden Museum in 2019.

The evening is run in conjunction with Essex Field Club, Essex Bat Group, and Essex Amphibian & Reptile Group whose surveyors will lead visitors on wildlife survey walks between the Museum, Bridge End Garden and Swan Meadow. Your local knowledge will be invaluable in getting the groups safely to each location, and back to the Museum for moth trapping, craft activities and garden wildlife advice.

Who knows, you may even discover a new side to the town you call home.

Help plant our wildlife gardens

On Friday 31st May we hope to create more areas dedicated to welcoming wildlife in the Museum grounds, starting with planting up new nature tubs. This free event will provide new habitats for a range of insect species as well as food for our local birds. Pending permission from Historic England we also hope to create new planted borders and a small wildflower meadow area to help locally important butterfly species, as well as birds, mammals and reptiles. I ask for your help to prepare and carry out this exciting project, which will enrich the wildlife and learning experience of Saffron Walden Museum.

There are many ways you can help out, from lending garden hand tools for use on the day, to propagating seeds or cuttings, and donating established plants to create a 'buzz' straight away. Why not pop over and do your bit on the day – it's free after all!

We would greatly appreciate donations of aromatic plants, especially lavender, sweet/herb fennel, oregano, thyme and rosemary as well as pollinator-friendly border plants.

Collections Care Updates

In other news, the geology gallery has received a deep clean of all specimens on display, thanks in large part to our new collections volunteer Cali who has spent many hours with a paintbrush and conservation vacuum. This forms part of our rolling collections care campaign, and will also help update the documentation and images for these specimens. Next in our sights is to deep clean the natural history store. If you would like to help and are comfortable working at height, please do contact me for more information.

In January I attended a conference entitled 'Finding Funds for Fossils, Ferns and Flamingos' on how best to apply for funding to support natural science collections. It was an enlightening day organised by the Natural Sciences Collections Association, and I came home armed with plenty of advice which I hope to put into practice over the coming years.



Finally, I would like to thank the Museum Society Board Members for approving the preparation of six items of taxidermy, and Carolyn for ably making the case for their acquisition. The items come from our stock of frozen local specimens donated by visitors and members of SWMS alike. I hope you will be pleased to see several of them will be featured in this summer's Take Away the Walls exhibition.

James Lumbard, Natural Sciences Officer.

Human History Collections: Jenny Oxley

A significant part of my role is responding to collections enquiries. I cover the areas of local and social history (photographs, documents and objects), world cultures, costume and textiles and decorative and fine art, so the enquiries are usually quite diverse in nature. Here's just a few of the recent enquiry topics - the grapes outside Boots the Chemist, plaster heads of convicts, tattooing implements from New Zealand, 18th century costume, lantern clocks, bell-ringing and Police history!

Last week I collected a bequest of two lovely Staffordshire flat-back figurines associated with the Wombwell Menagerie (Wallace the Lion) from a flat in Pinner. They will shortly go on display featured as new items in the redecorated Ceramics Gallery and look out for them as a future Object of the Month later in the year.

We're all working on raising the profile of the Museum through social media and different marketing channels. Linking the Museum with external organisations and popular themes help us to stay relevant and accessible to our audience. Recently, we worked with Saffron Screen to publicise the Mary Queen of Scots glove in the Costume Gallery to tie-in with the recent film and are now meeting with them to plan their outdoor screening in the grounds on the 2nd June. We promoted our Tudor collections on social media as Dr David Starkey was speaking at Saffron Hall and contributed stories about our collections to a book about dogs being produced by the Tourist Information Centre!



With the decorating work now completed on the Ceramics gallery, I'm also in the process of re-installing the collections items back into the gallery, in time for it re-opening in the Easter holidays. The Furniture gallery has also had a mini revamp with fresh new labels and conservation cleaning of all the furniture and decorative woodwork.

Behind the scenes, volunteers are helping me with inventorying, checking and researching different sections of the collections. On Mondays Hamish helps me by inventorying the photograph collection, David and Jane Laing work on the document archive, whilst I work on the prints, watercolours and drawings. On Tuesdays, Len is researching some of the earliest collections records in relation to our world cultures collections and adding this vital information on to Modes. Ian is doing a sterling job on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, in getting the accession register entries onto Excel, which is a godsend when I come to catalogue the hundreds of items being listed as part of the ongoing store work. Paula has been helping on Thursdays with inventorying the ceramic store, which links perfectly with re-installing the collections in the gallery. The casuals and VSA's have also been scanning sections of the photograph collection so I can add these images to the Modes records. Having good catalogue records with pictures of the images greatly speeds up research enquiries and enables us to make the collections more accessible for research enquiries, exhibitions, events and publicity. So thank you for all your help, it is much appreciated.

Object of the Month

December 2018 – Piano Hoard

Chosen by Jenny Oxley

In 2017, 913 gold sovereign and half-sovereign coins were discovered in Shropshire, hidden inside this piano. The piano was originally supplied by Beaven & Mothersole Piano Tuners, who were based in 27 West Road, Saffron Walden. Their name can be seen just above the keyboard. Receipts show that they had purchased the piano direct from the London manufacturers, Broadwood & Sons Ltd in 1906.

It was only when the piano was professionally tuned, that the coins were finally discovered, nestled between the keys and the keyboard.

In 1983, the piano was bought by the Hemmings family, residents of Saffron Walden. They owned the piano for 33 years, before moving to Shropshire and gifting it to their local college, The Community College, Bishop's Castle, completely unaware of what was hidden inside.

Research has shown that the coins found date to between 1847 and 1915; so they originate from the reigns of Queen Victoria, King Edward VII and King George V.



It is likely that they were concealed within the piano by a Saffron Walden resident. Some of the cardboard packaging in the pouches, which encased the coins, were taken from Shredded Wheat cereal boxes.

The style of the packaging suggests that the coins were concealed around the time of the Great Depression, when there was great economic hardship across the world.

"The identity of the person who hid the coins and their precise motivation will probably remain a fascinating unanswered question"

Peter Reavill, Shropshire Finds Liaison Officer

When the coins were discovered, they were declared treasure under the Treasure Act 1996, as they were gold coins which were deliberately hidden and no rightful heirs could be traced. At the time of its discovery, this hoard of modern gold coins was the largest of its type.

We are delighted that a representative sample of twelve of the gold coins from the hoard, as well as their packaging and the piano in which they were hidden, have now been acquired by the Museum, as a result of a crowd-funding campaign and generous donations from individuals, as well as the Saffron Walden Round Table and Butler Smith Carriers. This fascinating mystery has captured many people's imaginations, having received local, regional and national news coverage and it is fantastic to see it going on display in the Museum.

January 2019 -The Holly and the Ivy Chosen by Sarah Kenyon

Holly and Ivy specimens from the herbarium collection of pressed, dried plants mounted on paper sheets. They were collected in 1864 by Joshua Clarke, a Botanist who lived at The Roos farmhouse on Debden Road, Saffron Walden with his brother Joseph. The plants were pressed, dried and mounted on paper with notes about when and where they were collected. Joshua liked to use blue paper for his herbarium specimens. The Holly is from Stansted Mountfitchet and the Ivy was collected in Saffron Walden.



Holly, Ilex aquifolium,
collected at Stansted
Mountfitchet in July
1864 Specimen
SAFWM 112452.5

Holly is traditionally used in Christmas decorations. Did you know that holly and ivy are also a fantastic resource for wildlife?

Animals struggle to survive in winter. Food is hard to find, days are short, the weather is cold and snow can cover the ground. Small birds and mammals spend all the daylight hours trying to find enough food. Deciduous trees lose their leaves in winter. However evergreen trees keep theirs, giving shelter and nesting sites, and their berries provide welcome food.

Female Holly trees produce red berries which are eaten by blackbirds, redwings, fieldfares and song thrushes. Caterpillars of the holly blue butterfly and privet hawkmoth feed on Holly leaves. When food is scarce in autumn and winter Ivy provides nectar, pollen and high calorie black berries. They are essential food for insects, small mammals and a variety of birds.



Ivy, Hedera helix,
collected at Saffron
Walden in November
1864. SAFWM :
112154.7

How Can You Help?

Animals will benefit from our help during the hard months of winter.

Let your Garden Go Wild

Wildlife prefers a garden that has undisturbed areas. A compost heap, piles of logs or leaves are places where animals can hide, shelter and hibernate. Insects can survive in plants over winter if shrubs and garden borders are not tidied up until spring.

Provide Water

Water is used to wash and drink. Put out fresh water in shallow bowls. You can stop garden ponds from freezing by putting a ball in the water. Put a sloping plank of wood, or bricks, at the side of a pond so animals can get out if they fall in. Cover water butts so animals don't fall in.

Feed the Birds

Feeding garden birds in winter can make a real difference to their survival. You can buy a bird feeder, or make your own. Fat balls are a good source of nutrition in the coldest weather. Providing unsalted peanuts, sunflower and other seeds, mealworms, scraps of cheese, apple or pear will attract a range of different birds to your garden. If you put the feeders near a window in your house you can enjoy watching the birds in the warmth of your home.

Hedgehog Food

Food and water can help hedgehogs visiting your garden. They like meaty tinned dog or cat food and crushed up dog or cat biscuits. Milk can cause diarrhoea, so put out clean, fresh water in a shallow bowl. Specialist hedgehog food is available from wildlife food suppliers.

Link your garden to your neighbours with a hedgehog highway, see <https://www.hedgehogstreet.org/help-hedgehogs/link-your-garden/>

Put up a Nest Box

The best time to put a nest box up is early winter. Blue tits and great tits look for nest sites in late winter, so get your box up in time. Robins like nest boxes with open fronts. National Nest Box Week is usually around 14th February.

Plant a Tree

You could plant a tree, or even a hedge, in winter when the ground is not frozen. Holly, hawthorn or rowan plants will provide berries for birds and mammals in winter and places for birds to nest in spring.

Joshua Clarke (1805 to 1890)

Joshua Clarke, and his older brother Joseph, were the sons of Turner Clarke, a farmer at The Roos farm in the valley on the road to Debden. After leaving home he lived at Fairycroft in Saffron Walden.

His first job was shoe-making, as an apprentice to his uncle Charles Baron. Later he became a maltster, first in partnership with the Gibson family, and later he ran a successful malting business of his own.

Joshua Clarke was a founding member of the Saffron Walden Natural History Society that built and ran Saffron Walden Museum. He was Honorary Curator of the Museum from 1834 until his death in 1890. His brother Joseph ran the daily affairs of the museum as its Administrator. Joshua was active in public life. He served as a town councillor for 48 years and was Mayor of Saffron Walden ten times between 1846 and 1873.



Joshua Clarke, JP Image © Saffron Walden Town Council



Birds of Paradise from New Guinea

As a naturalist Joshua was interested in botany and ornithology. He assisted George Stacey Gibson with his production of the first Flora of Essex, published in 1862. Joshua also won prizes from the Royal Horticultural Society for his collections of plants:

Silver Medal for Thirty of the Rarest British Plants in 1845

Gold Medal for the Best County Collection in 1851

Silver Medal for the Best Collection of dried plants from Essex in 1865.

Joshua made important collections of hummingbirds and birds of paradise that were mounted under glass domes by Saffron Walden taxidermist Joseph Travis. He was a close friend of John Gould the naturalist and illustrator. Joshua's collection of birds was left to the Museum. You can see some of his birds on display in the Victorian Museum Workroom gallery to the left of this display.

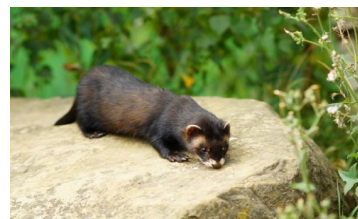
Object of the Month – February 2019

European Polecat

Chosen By; James Lumbard

The European polecat, *Mustela putorius*, was thought to be extinct in Essex since 1880 thanks to persecution from gamekeepers. The first modern sighting was in 1999 near Wendens Ambo and there are now numerous records from north-west Essex, though only from roadkill specimens.

Polecats are larger than the related stoats and weasels, and regularly hunt large prey like rabbits. They also hunt game birds, which caused their historic conflict with gamekeepers, and were easily caught in rabbit traps, which contributed to their near-eradication. More relaxed gamekeeping after WWI, and the end of commercial trapping to control rabbit numbers, allowed polecat populations to spread from mid-Wales to Northamptonshire. The modern local population probably came from a breeding and release programme in Hertfordshire in the 1980s.



A polecat at the British Wildlife Centre, Surrey. Peter Trimming/Wikimedia Commons

Canny carnivores

They belong to the group of specialised mammals known as carnivores, which includes cats, dogs, bears and seals, and means that their teeth are adapted to catch prey and cut through meat and bone.

The large canine teeth are used to catch and hold struggling prey, while long and sharp teeth (carnassials) at the back of the mouth can slice meat from the bones. Polecats can also use their long canines to catch prey by biting through the rear of the skull and into the nerves of the spinal cord. This paralyses but doesn't kill the animal, so the polecat can store fresh food in its burrow.

Polecat protection

Recording polecat sightings is very important to modern conservation efforts. Most sightings happen when males are active during the mating season in early spring, and in early autumn as young polecats move away from their birth place. You can help identify roadkill specimens, but only if it is safe. Wear gloves to move the animal to a safe place – you only need 3 photos: one of the underside, including the head, and photos of the head from the side and above. Polecats have dark paws and dark fur on the face which reaches to their dark nose, with pale cheek patches (see photo). If you think you have seen a polecat, please contact Essex Field Club and include any photos you may have. Their contact details can be found at www.essexfieldclub.org.uk.



Mounted Polecat skin from 1842

March 2019

Lamp

Chosen by Carolyn Wingfield



March's Object of the Month is an ancient bronze oil lamp recently donated to Saffron Walden Museum. Olive oil would have been poured into the lamp through the hole which has a hinged lid. The spout at the front was for the wick. There is a small loop for carrying or hanging the lamp on the back of the cross, which rises from the hinge attachment. Both the cross and the top of the lamp are decorated with engraved 'ring and dot' patterns.

The lamp was found in the Saffron Walden area along with pieces of glass bottles and china jars – a typical Victorian household rubbish dump! A rabbit had burrowed into the dump, bringing some of the rubbish to light, including the lamp.

The lamp however is much older, probably nearly 1,500 years old. It dates from the time of the Byzantine Empire, and was made somewhere in the east Mediterranean region, probably the Near East or Egypt, around 500-800

AD. The cross is a Christian symbol. Christianity was the official religion of the Byzantine (or Eastern Roman) Empire, and its capital was Constantinople, also known in the ancient world as Byzantium and today as Istanbul.

We do not know how and when the lamp travelled to north-west Essex, but can make a guess. Classical antiquities like this were popular souvenirs for gentlemen taking the Grand Tour in the 18th and 19th centuries. The lamp may have been such a souvenir, but discarded later in the 19th century in a house clear-out, or perhaps after its owner died.

Events: Charlotte Pratt

Coming up at the Museum

April

Easter Holidays: - 8–22 April

- **Wednesday 10:** Froggy Fingerprint Cards
- **Thursday 11:** Paper Butterfly Displays
- **Wednesday 17:** Paper plant Pot Sunflowers

May

May Celebration: - Saturday 11

Museums at Night: - Friday 17 May

An evening of activities for all ages, inspired by our upcoming exhibition, "Take Away the Walls".

Take Away the Walls - 25 May - 3 November

An exhibition for health, happiness and wildlife.

May Half Term: - 27 May–2 June

- **Wednesday 29:** Build a Bug Hotel (£1.50)
- **Thursday 30:** Build a Birdhouse (£1.50)
- **Friday 31:** Help plant our nature gardens (Free)

June

12th Century Live! - Saturday 1 10-3.30pm

Join us as the Museum and Castle grounds are transported back in time. Practice military drills, fire a Ballista and try on period costumes. Experience 12th century games, crafts and cooking. Explore local and family history with history societies from across Uttlesford (additional charges may apply for food & craft activities).

Saffron Screen at the Museum - Sunday 2;

Join Saffron Screen for an outdoor screening of The Princess Bride at 2pm. Gates open at 12 with food stalls and entertainment. We will also reveal the lucky winners of our Saffron Screen Prize Draw!

Tickets are £6.50 for adults and £4.50 for children

August

Wallace's Great Big Birthday Bake off - Friday 9

Join us to celebrate Wallace's 200th birthday.

Get your wooden spoon out and bake Wallace a birthday cake to enter into the competition.

Recent Events

February Half term saw three days of activities at the Museum. These were made possible by the kind donations of materials by the Museum Society members, many thanks to all who contributed.

The first activity of the week was "match box builds", when children used match boxes to create tiny houses. The activity proved very popular as it was simple enough for young children but gave plenty of room to be more creative and create more challenging designs.

The second activity was "mini museums". This activity made excellent use of the donated boxes to create small museums, which were divided into "rooms" which the children decorated with wallpaper and exhibited objects in.



Mini Museum

The last day called for our young visitors to create a miniature Saffron Walden, which again made excellent use of the donated recycling. Visitors made little models of buildings in Saffron Walden, including landmarks such as the library, The Eight Bells, and the Museum itself.

Upcycled Saffron Walden



Another big hit over half term was the introduction of the Museum explorer backpacks. The backpacks each contain a piece of dressing up such as an explorer hat or lion mask, a trail, chalk board and chalks, tactile toy, ear defenders and magnifying glass. The backpacks themselves were in the education store when I arrived at the Museum over a year ago, and I thought it would be great to put them to use again. The objects to go inside, as well as the paint for the new display boards and new clip boards were funding by grants from SHARE and Waitrose. The backpacks have had a positive response on Trip Advisor and Facebook, and I will be trying to think of some new ways to help children engage with our objects and galleries.

Learning at Saffron Walden Museum: Charlotte Pratt

The 2019 and Educational Services leaflet was sent out to all primary schools, care homes and SEN schools in January. The leaflet has helped to publicise the Educational services offered by the Museum to a wider audience and this has resulted in a greater range of groups using the Museum and its resources.

February and March saw a number of firsts since I started at the Museum in September 2018. Braintree Mencap Happy Snappers photography group visited the Museum for a photography session, using natural history objects from the teaching collection. A great day was had by all and the group thoroughly enjoyed their visit to the Museum as well as taking some really creative photographs. I hope to welcome them back to the Museum in the future.



Harlow College students at work

Students studying Level 3 Art and design at Harlow College came to research their Final Major project.

They participated in a drawing workshop based around their project themes of The Moon Landing, Under the Sea and Childhood. The project is a “live brief” which means that some of the students’ outcomes will be installed in a local hospital. I also discussed with the students the possibility of doing some work experience at the museum in the future.

Jenny Oxley and myself also carried out an outreach visit to a local care home. The visit was split into two halves; starting with a talk on natural history with a variety of taxidermy specimens available for the residents to hold. The second half of the visit was a printing workshop, which some of the residents really took to and created some brilliant prints inspired by what they had seen in the talk.

I hope that I can continue to build on the range of groups using the Museum, which is an excellent community and educational resource.

Volunteer News: Wendy-Jo Atter

Administration Volunteers

Mary Adams provides invaluable support with the financial administration and Ian Sharpe also continues to work hard on a weekly basis documenting the ascension registers.

Collections Volunteers

With the re-decorating complete the ceramics and glassware are now being re-installed back into the gallery, along with the Grandfather clock and 18th century paintings.

Conservation cleaning and photography of the collections in the Geology Gallery, is also speeding along, with excellent help from new collections volunteer Cali. These deep cleans help us improve our knowledge of the collections and ensure the museum meets national standards for collections care.

Learning and Outreach Volunteers

The Learning and Outreach Volunteers were busy during the February Half-Term holidays making Matchbox builds, Mini Museums and Up-cycling Walden (creating a big map of the town centre in cardboard models) and launching the new explorer backpacks, which have 8 different themes, come and try them for yourselves!

Welcome Desk Volunteers

We extend a warm welcome to our new volunteer: Alexa, who is currently undertaking her induction and will soon be fully operational in her Welcome Desk Role.

Volunteering Opportunities

Our Welcome Desk volunteers provide a friendly welcome for visitors, sell tickets and merchandise, provide information about the Museum, and direct enquiries to members of staff. They usually volunteer for a 2.5 hour shift, every day except Monday and Saturday. We are currently looking for new Welcome Desk volunteers. We also need to recruit volunteers interested in helping with events and activities, wildlife gardening and collections cataloguing. If you are interested, please contact the Museum on 01799 510333 or email museum@uttlesford.gov.uk

Museum Shop

Our Museum Shop is run entirely by dedicated volunteers. We stock a full range of gifts in the Museum shop all year round, and there are always seasonal special offers and themed products linked to our collections....We have new English Village Designs kits as a tie-in with our new exhibition, Living with History. Perfect as an evening craft project!

Current Exhibition and Your Stories Display : Jenny Oxley

Your Stories:

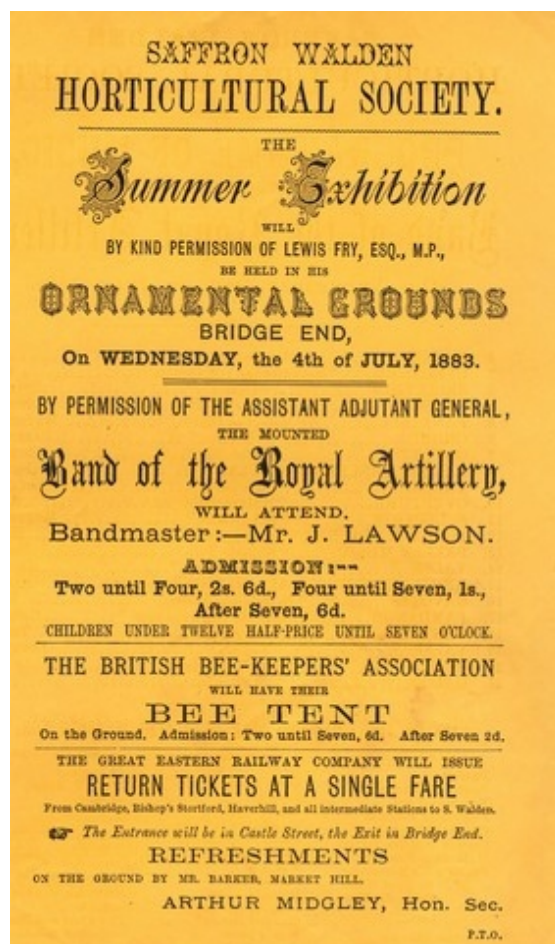
2019: the Bicentenary of Saffron Walden Horticultural Society

Established in 1819 by Lord Braybrooke (the Society's President) for the "encouragement of horticulture, botany and agriculture." Its membership grew steadily, and in 1829, Saffron Walden became the first town to allocate land for allotments. The Society held regular horticultural exhibitions, which developed into large annual shows "a parade of wealth and fashion" held at Audley End Park. Extra trains were laid on from Colchester and Cambridge to cope with the influx of visitors for these important events. There were horticultural trade displays, prestigious military band performances and a huge variety of prize competitions.

However by 1901 the Society had hit financial difficulties, with a loss of patronage and falling membership, it was decided to disband.

It was eventually revived in 1922 under the leadership of Town Mayor, David Miller, and in the inter war years, smaller shows were held in conjunction with other town organisations, such as the Horse Society.

Very few shows were organised during the Second World War, and by 1951 support for the Society had again diminished, so the decision was taken to disband the Society for a second time. A completely fortuitous revival occurred in 1977, when George Scrivener organised a Rose Show as part of the Jubilee celebrations, which later evolved into the Saffron Walden Rose Society, and ultimately the Horticultural Society was reborn.



Ever since the Society has gone from strength to strength and is now well established, boasting a substantial membership and a busy programme of events with which to celebrate their Bicentenary. This display will continue until August.

Current Exhibition : Living with our History

16 February – 12 May 2019

Before the Industrial Revolution of the late 18th century, most people lived villages, hamlets or farms scattered across the countryside. The district of Uttlesford is often portrayed as a traditional rural area of historic villages and small market towns, but now confronts 21st century challenges: the effects of modern motorway and rail links, an international airport, changes in population levels and local economies.

In its latest special exhibition, Living with History, Saffron Walden Museum invites you to take a step back and look at the ancient origins of the district's main centres, and the influences on their rise or decline, from Roman to Tudor times. Every era has brought its own opportunities and challenges.

If we go back 2,000 years to the Roman period, the most important population centre in north-west Essex was Great Chesterford, a town situated on a strategic junction of roads at a river crossing. Great Dunmow was also a Roman settlement of some significance, like Chesterford benefitting from its location on a main road, the Stane Street.

Early Anglo-Saxon society was not urban. In north-west Essex, an important mid-Saxon manor, or estate centre, was excavated at Wicken Bonhunt in advance of the construction of the M11. Although a rural site, some of the finds indicate it had long-distance trading connections and was probably providing joints of salted meat for the royal household of the kingdom of Essex. It was abandoned in the 9th century, as Viking raids took hold in East Anglia. The nearby site of Newport (literally, 'new market-town') became the focus in the late Saxon period; its location, on raised ground near the River Cam, offering a more defensible position in times of conflict with the Vikings, and good north-south communication along the river valley.

Newport could have become the main local town, had it not been for the political manoeuvring of the new Norman aristocrats, such as Geoffrey II de Mandeville, Earl of Essex. He exploited the instability of the civil war between Stephen and Matilda and in 1141 obtained Matilda's consent to remove the market from Newport to his new seat at Walden, thereby increasing his revenue through market tolls and rentals. Plain Walden became Chipping Walden, chipping being another word for 'market', until its specialisation in the lucrative saffron crop led to another change of name. Many of our local small towns and villages were granted markets in the Middle Ages but only a handful developed and survived as local centres. Thaxted flourished thanks to its cutlery trade in the 14th century. Hatfield Broad Oak was an example of a thriving medieval market which declined due to local economic circumstances and its location away from main routes.

Living with History at Saffron Walden Museum opens on 16th February and closes on 12th May 2019.

Saffron Walden Museum is open to the public from Tuesday to Saturday, 10am - 5pm, and Sundays and Bank Holidays, 2pm-5pm (closing at 4:30pm from November to February). Admissions: £2.50 adults, Discounts £1.25, children FREE.

Museum Society News

Membership

By now, you should have received the usual reminder that subscriptions for the year to 31 March 2020 are due on 1 April. The minimum subscription is £15 per person but any extra is very welcome and will be used very wisely. Please pay promptly saving the time and expense of reminders. It would be wonderful if no reminders were needed!

In recent years, membership cards have been sent out with these reminders. 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.

Christine Sharpe

Reports on Talks and Events

12 November 2017

**Tumult and Tears – the Story of the Great War through
the Eyes and Lives of its Women Poets
Speaker – Dr. Vivien Newman**

When in the early 1990's the syllabus for one of the A-Level English literature courses changed, Vivien Newman was teaching the subject at her local Adult Community College. On introducing her new class to the idea that they were going to study an anthology of Women's War Poetry, she was somewhat startled at the group's resistance, they wanted to study the proper war poets, men like Rupert Brooke and Wilfred Owen. After all, there weren't any women poets and what did women know about the war, they weren't there! Vivien stuck to her guns and introduced the group to the background by showing a BBC documentary 'The Roses of No Man's Land'. This showed the class what women had to endure as nurses on the front at the Somme. Attitudes changed and the group members asked many questions. To answer these, Vivien started researching for more background and found that out of the 2,000 poets published during WWI, 500 of them were women. So yes, there were women poets and yes, some of them 'had been there'. Later Vivien did more research into the backgrounds of many of the women putting them in a wider context (and thereby gaining her PhD).

Dr. Newman took us through the poetry of the women who stayed "at home", the part that religion played in women's lives and poetry, how nature figured in some work, poems reflecting active service and and some about the grief people suffered. Talking about a selection of the women involved, she told us of their nationality, their family's status, their role in the war at home or abroad. She illustrated this with some slides of the period, at home or on the battle zones and read some of the poetry

Of the women "at home" some went to work in the munitions factories where there were many accidents, and the need for black humour, and so wrote about it. Kipling's "If" inspired many a new parody from various angles. There were those who coped with managing, in wartime conditions, the family left behind; those who wrote about "saying farewell"; those who joined the Women's Land Army or those who knitted and wrote about it, e.g. "My Socks". In October 1914 Alice Meynell was the first woman to have a poem published in The Times, it was called "Summer in England 1914" as it contrasted the long, hot summer just passed with the events across the Channel. Many wrote about the comfort gained from religion, others used the image of Christ's suffering to illustrate the suffering of the wounded soldiers, others the sorrow of the Virgin Mary as a mother. Enid Bagnold wrote of living in Kent and hearing, day and night, the sound of the guns across the Channel.

Women served abroad as WAACs, F.A.N.Y.s or through the V.A.D. as Red Cross Nurses, ambulance drivers or other roles. Their reasons for enlistment were varied and some became disillusioned. The V.A.D.'s were often called some horrible names but nevertheless continued to put their ordinary lives 'on hold' and at risk on active service. Agatha Christie was a V.A.D. working as an editor of a service magazine which published poetry, some by women, and ran a competition for poetry giving rather good money as prizes. In the section for entries by those on active service, Wilfred Owen came second but Alberta Vickridge took the top prize!

Mary Borden was another outstanding personality; a Vassar graduate and daughter of a Chicago millionaire, Mary was married to a missionary husband and was living in England. She joined the suffragettes in a march on the Houses of Parliament and was arrested for throwing a stone through a Treasury window. She was imprisoned until her husband paid the 25/- fine for her. At the start of the war Mary was heavily pregnant but nevertheless put her name down to do voluntary nursing and, having delivered her third child, left for France the following January – and though having no medical training became an excellent nurse. She became frustrated with the way things were run in her unit and using her personal fortune, developed her own unit and embedded it in the French Army. After a while she moved her 'hospital' south to the Somme inspiring the poem “At the Somme: the Song of the Mud”. Many soldiers died but Mary's unit achieved a survival rate higher than the 30% achieved elsewhere! While on service there she encountered Edward Spears who visited in an official capacity. Mary's marriage was failing and she and Edward fell in love and, eventually, married.

Another major contribution was made by the Scottish Women's Hospital Units where its members were nurses, ambulance drivers, cooks, scullions and so on. Agnes S. Falconer wrote of “Scottish Nurses in Serbia” and memorialised the deaths of some of her comrades who were among the first to die overseas. Such groups of comrades formed very strong bonds and some postwar associations lasted a long time, even into the '70's. The “Tumult and Tears” of the war aroused some very strong and sometimes conflicting emotions; one nurse asked about some patients “Better to die in the trenches/ Than to drag out a maimed life”.

Women wrote about their grief. So much loss, sons, husbands, sons-in-law, daughters, patients, comrades, some laid in graves at home, some overseas, some with no known grave. Another recorded marriage was, alas, very short-lived; Guy Cranmer and Elsie Brede were married by special licence on 23rd September 1917. They had five days together before his recall. Guy was killed on 9th October. Elsie did not remarry but she wrote about her grief in poems, even one about the premonition she had of Guy's death. The postwar memorials of all types gave some comfort, but the grief and loss did not always fade, even after years. Dorothy Ratcliffe's “Remembrance Day in the Dales” and Carla Oman's “The Menin Road, March 1919” gives an idea of how it was for some but as Jessie Wakefield asks in her poem “Whose” ‘Whose is the harder part?’

In 'Tumult and Tears', Vivien has compiled a wonderful anthology of writing about WWI by women poets, amplified by biographical notes and longer pieces about the times and attitudes of the era, so if you missed the chance to buy a copy on the evening, it and other books that she has written are available through Pen and Sword or Amazon.

Heather Salvidge.

14 January 2019 Cambridge Science Festival
25 Years of Engaging the Public with Science -
speaker: Dr. Lucinda Spokes

Because Dr. Spokes told us mostly about this year's Festival and its contents which, alas, will have finished by the time this newsletter is published, I have tried to give the flavour of what happens so that, if you are interested, you can look out for next year's programme when it comes out next January. She started by telling us about the University itself, the breakaway from Oxford in 1209, that there are now 39 colleges admitting undergraduates and two which admit only post graduates; Peterhouse is the oldest and Robinson the youngest. Currently, a little over 11,500 people are employed directly by Cambridge in many diverse roles including five people in the Public Engagement Team and about 19,200 students. In a recent year the University, as opposed to the colleges, spent £1,807 million and had an income of £1,870 million which includes the income from research. There are two other annual public engagement festivals; the Festival of Ideas in May and Open Cambridge in October.

The first Cambridge Science Festival happened in 1995, lasted seven days and had 17 events. In 2019 there are 364 events planned to take place over 14 days and around 62,000 visit are expected. Visitors could choose to see laboratory spaces and meet some of the researchers, attend some events in The Guildhall, in cafes, in pubs and The Arts Theatre and take part in events held in museums and other community spaces to encourage Cambridge dwellers to visit. Its earliest roots stem from the foundation of the Cambridge Philosophical Society in 1819 by Professor Sedgwick when undergraduates were invited to meet to discuss a variety of topics. It was independent of the University itself.

This year also marks other anniversaries, e.g. the 150th of the publication of the modern Periodic Table of Elements; 75 years of the M.R.C. Brain Unit and 25 years of the Biomaths Institute. This year's programme features Healthcare in the N.H.S., Obesity and Genetics, new Therapeutic Drugs, Climate Change, Dinosaurs vs.

Mammals, Mathematics and Puzzles, Biodiversity in Cities, Cancer – treatments, outcomes and detection i.e. the new “breath test” for cancer.

So who comes? Families bringing their children up to the age of 11/12 – after that teenagers tend not to accompany parents – or even come; a range of people in their 20s/30s/40s but lots of 45+s. There are some school groups, workshops for secondary age pupils and some talks on what is a scientific career and what is an academic career? Some first year PhD students talk about their research, what it is and why they are doing it. Some of the feedback comments range from “Brilliant – I was never bored!” to “Too much fluff” and opinions in between.

Booking opens in February, either by phone or on-line. To look up the two other festivals on-line go to www.festivalofideas.cam.ac.uk and www.opencambridge.cam.ac.uk. For the Science Festival go to :- www.sciencefestival.cam.ac.uk.

If you do get to one of these, I hope you won't think that there's 'too much fluff!' and chances are, you won't be bored.

Heather Salvidge.

11 February 2019

Surnames, D.N.A. And Family History

Speaker: Dr. Mark Carroll

Dr Mark Carroll's background lies both in biochemical genetics and in researching family history; he is Secretary of the Waltham Forest Family History Society. Before early work in 1940 and later in 1953 by Crick and Watson on D.N.A. and chromosomes, family historians were largely dependent upon the written and spoken word. Surnames were a great help and the more unusual the better except that historic spelling was not always consistent and there are an awful lot of people with the surname 'Smith' or, in Wales, 'Jones'. Also, because surnames are – usually – passed down the male line, the paternal side of the family often leaves a stronger trail. With the maternal side, however, the surname changes – usually – with each generation. Mark's mother's family surname was Orris and another example of an uncommon one was Attenborough, familiar now through the careers of Richard and David, but in one census restricted to only 992 people of that name being recorded. Attenborough is a village near Nottingham.

Human D.N.A. is packaged into 23 pairs of chromosomes – 22 plus one pair of sex chromosomes. Females have 2 X chromosomes and males have 1X and 1Y. Men pass on not only their surname but their Y chromosome to their male descendents. One per cent of human D.N.A. is in the cells' mitochondria which is passed down only through the matrilineal line. These facts allow family historians something else to work with when the written and spoken records hit a blank wall. Analysis of blood groups had been used and were of some help but they are not nearly as specific as an individual's D.N.A. “finger print” which can identify a single individual person, except for the difference between identical twins. Now that much further work has been done on developing means of sequencing D.N.A., it is better and cheaper.

It is not foolproof despite the fact that between them, Fred Sanger and Craig Ventner have laid down the human genome which has 3,000 million bases. Now all Y chromosomes can be traced back to an ancestral “Adam” who lived in Africa about 180,000 years ago and all mitochondrial D.N.A. to an ancestral “Eve” who lived about 200,000 years ago. There are, though, several factors that can throw a genetic trail off track. Human behaviour for one. If there is a mismatch between the Y chromosome found and the one expected, it may be because of an “N.P.E.” or “non-predicted event” sometimes referred to as a “non-paternity event”. It could be that there were informal and unrecognised adoptions or formal adoptions. Sometimes D.N.A. can and does, mutate, possibly as a result of disease. Mutations can be either a small change or a more significant one. There is also the process known as “drift” where some chromosomes are blocked out over two or more generations. Work has been done which suggests that, globally, there are seven “daughters of Eve” and that in Europe the MT D.N.A. falls into a further seven clusters. Mark said that his traced back to the Tara Group, established in Italy 40,000 years ago.

Nowadays people use D.N.A. analysis for a variety of reasons; to establish historical facts e.g to discover where Richard III lay buried; to trace own ancestry including long-lost cousins; to identify possible medical risks or to break down a genealogical 'brick wall'. Understanding and interpreting the results may have technical difficulties and sometimes the agreement between genealogy and D.N.A. analysis is poor when you look at very old maps of where surnames occur. The different companies offering D.N.A. analysis services use different data bases e.g.

some are U.S.A. based and some U.K. and these can vary and give different results. Bear in mind that not everyone wants to be traced for a variety of reasons including privacy.

Dr. Carroll's talk was well illustrated by slides and he spoke, too, about his own family researches and his difficulties. He continues with his researches to discover more about his ancestry. Any misinterpretations of the science involved that he told us about are entirely mine and for which I apologise.

Heather Salvidge

11th March 2019

The University Museum of Zoology, Cambridge

Past, Present and Future

Speakers : Dr. Rosalyn Wade and Matthew Lowe

Our speakers were Dr. Rosalyn Wade, Learning and Interpretations Officer and Matthew Lowe collections who told us that, now, the Museum's collections comprise over 2 million specimens. How did it all begin?

Much of it is based on small private collections made during the late C18th and first part of the C19th by several learned gentlemen associated with the University. One such was Sir Busick Harwood, Professor of Anatomy from 1785, who was as well an early pioneer of blood transfusions, using dogs for his experiments and making slides of parts of the anatomy of various animals including a cross-section of an elephant's trunk. There are 30 of Busick's objects in the Museum. Adam Sedgwick and John Stevens Henslow founded the Cambridge Philosophical Society in 1819, independent of the University but open to undergraduates. Both the men had collections which became associated with the Society. Leonard Jenyns, another don, was asked to join the voyage of The Beagle but did not want to leave his young family for five years. Charles Darwin, however, did accept. Jenyns spent some his time collecting vast numbers of beetle specimens from the Cambridgeshire area now in the Museum, along with much of Darwin's Beagle voyage work.

It was Henslow who moved the University Botanic Gardens to where they are now, freeing up the original site in Downing Street for a zoology museum. William Clark, a contemporary of Sedgwick and Henslow, was also an accumulator who had set up a Museum Of Comparative Anatomy as part of his work but by 1862 it was rather overcrowded and needed more space. The collections acquired by the Cambridge Philosophical Society were also outgrowing their premises so in 1865 the Museum of Comparative Anatomy and the Museum of Zoology were built on the Downing Street site to house both these collections. The two museums formally merged in 1877. The building lasted till 1965 when it was demolished and a new one erected, The Arup Building opened in 1971 but it was immediately stuffed to the gills with much left in store. Alas within 40 years, the building had deteriorated so much that the choice was between demolition and rebuilding or a major renovation. They plumped for the latter and the project, supported by H.L.F. funding, was completed in 2016. Matt took us through the trials and tribulations of moving the entire collection, including the Finback whale, into temporary storage and then redisplaying the collections. Roz then took over implementing the new Learning and Interpretation policy. We in Saffron Walden can, perhaps a little smugly, note that our Museum started 30 years before this one and is still in the same building. On the other hand they do now have a superb display of fascinating specimens.

The largest is the skeleton of a Finback whale, 20 metres long, acquired in 1865 after it had been washed up on Pevensey beach. Among the Vertebrae collection are the oldest 5-digit fossil, discovered within the last ten years, and a Tasmanian tiger (a now extinct marsupial). They have the very last passenger pigeon and Carolina parakeet, both extinct now. There is an extinct UK burbot in the Fish section while the Insect collection contains 1.2 million items and there are a quarter of a million shells in the mollusc collection.

The Asian elephant skeleton was brought out of 'retirement' from the stores. It hailed from Sri Lanka and was a 'rogue' elephant that had been shot. Its skeleton was eventually bought and delivered to the trustees but minus its tusks – too valuable – and so its Victorian owners had replicas made carved out of wood. It was used in Stanley Kubrick's film, "2001: A Space Odyssey".

The Darwin display include the Fen beetle collections from his undergraduate days and the specimens from the Beagle voyage. After the Beagle voyage, Darwin decided to look at "a barnacle" and then spent years producing four large volumes on the whole range of the species, alive and extinct. After the publication of "The Origin of Species" he wrote "The Descent of Man" which includes the proposition of sexual selection, illustrated by

examining the primary feathers of a cock Argus Pheasant which showed that they were intended for display to attract a hen rather than being designed for efficient flying.

To learn more about the Museum and its services and to access the website just type in 'Museum of Zoology, Cambridge' and search for it. Have fun!

Heather Salvidge

Recording the Talks

We hope that you enjoy reading these accounts of the Museum Talks. However for the last year and a half, Heather Salvidge has been writing them all, single handed. Would one or two of our readers like to share the task with Heather? There are 9 talks a year so with two more people involved it would only mean three talks each a year. Please get in touch with Heather on 01279 814153 to discuss.

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.

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