



Museum Matters

Newsletter of Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd

Spring 2020 Issue 50

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Coronavirus – Museum update

The Museum has been closed to the public since Wednesday 18 March due to measures to prevent the spread of Covid 19 (coronavirus). We now have a minimal staff presence during the week, undertaking essential tasks and work which cannot be done at home, while most staff are working all or most of the time from home or occasionally at the Shirehill store.

However you can still pay a 'virtual visit' to the Museum via our website and social media, or subscribe to our public E-Newsletter from our website, just use Ctrl + Click on this link https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKUTTLESFORD/subscriber/new?category_id=UKUTTLESFORD_C11. We'll be adding new on-line material, hopefully something to interest everyone while you are confined at home.

Our National Lottery Heritage Fund 'Resilient Heritage' project, planning for future redevelopment of the Museum, should be completed by our consultants as planned, except for the final stages of public consultation for the Audience Development Study, which we will pick up when circumstances permit.

Meanwhile, the lucky giant stick insects in our Natural History Discovery Centre have gone on holiday to a new temporary home with Charlotte, who is kindly taking care of them for the duration. We're disappointed that the new special exhibition *All Fired Up!* Will not be opening next week, but the good news is that Jenny has arranged with the Essex Fire Service Museum to reschedule it for the same time next year. Outside on the muddy areas of the Castle site, the newly-laid turf is settling in, and without so many walkers or vehicles on site, it should all be green and pleasant by the time we can return to normal business.

Highlights and Happenings; From the Chairman

The most current happening is the coronavirus. The Museum Management Working Group at its recent meeting discussed the actions that may have to be taken during the next few months. We are very dependant on our volunteers and the Council will take into account that volunteers may not be available. So far as the Museum Society is concerned it is likely that forthcoming meetings will have to be postponed or cancelled. Details will be sent to you as required.

Meanwhile there has been a lot of action on our current development planning. During the last two months we have been involved in meetings with the consultants for the re-development of the Museum. The interim report, over eighty pages long with two appendices, was received in January. The Society's Development Committee and Board had discussed this fully in preparation for a meeting with the consultants on the 10th February. There are numerous options suggested which we have discussed and have identified those which we feel are the most realistic. The Project Steering Group, which includes the Chairman of the Museum Management Working group and Council Officers, is planned to meet in April to agree the final report. In the light of a possible self-isolation for the Directors these meetings may have to be delayed, or held on line! We will do our best to ensure that the current difficulties do not hold up the excellent progress we have already made.

The preview of the exhibition "From Death Masks to Diaries" was held on the 15th November and we were pleased that some Councillors were able to join us. There was the usual support from members and a number of visitors. The annual Xmas party held on the 9th December was a great success and a relief from the election process! We had the usual excellent quiz arranged by Paul Salvidge and a profitable draw organised by Peter Walker. We were again well supported by members despite the weather.

The monthly talks programme continued in November with an excellent talk by Councillor Paul Fairhurst on "The Battle of Rorke's Drift. We discovered from questions at the end that a number of those present had been to Rorke's Drift and were grateful for the view of the Battle from the viewpoint of the Zulus. In January we were entertained by Peter Layzell with The Essex Regiment during World War One. This was so well attended we had to get out more chairs before the talk could begin. I missed the February talk on portraiture by Benjamin Sullivan but enjoyed the last talk on the World War I sawdust hearts. Our thanks to Paul Salvidge and his committee for these excellent talks.

Tony Watson

Curators Column;

Bronze Age Gold - Treasure Appeal

After last year's magnificent response to our appeal which enabled the Society to purchase a medieval gold reliquary pendant and three other special archaeological finds, we now have another 'treasure challenge' on our hands - quite literally, as these are two magnificent gold bracelets, dating from the Late Bronze Age, around 900 - 750 BC.



The large bracelet on the left, which is slightly distorted, is 8cms across and weighs 139g, while the smaller bracelet on the right is 7cms across and weighs 57g. Interestingly, analysis of the metal at the British Museum revealed that the small bracelet is just over 80% gold but the large bracelet is around 65% gold (silver being the other principle metal present). This suggests that they had different production histories.

The find-spot is sensitive and has to be protected from potential theft and illegal detecting by so-called 'night hawks', so the location of the find cannot be disclosed, except that it is in Uttlesford district. We do not know why the bracelets were buried, but prehistoric hoards of personal ornaments do occasionally occur on their own, without any evidence of a grave. We assume there was some special reason for their burial ('ritual' being the archaeologists' favourite catch-all explanation) or that the bracelets were concealed for safety at a time of conflict or disruption. The style of the bracelets is known from other Bronze Age hoards, such as the Milton Keynes hoard of gold bracelets and torcs (neck-rings) in the British Museum.

This is a rare opportunity for the Museum to secure a very special prehistoric treasure for the district's archaeology collections. We have £45,000 to raise by early June and have had encouraging discussions with various funding organisations. We hope to raise most of the money in grants but need £5,000 of local funding from the Museum Society to lever the grants. At this difficult time with much economic uncertainty, we feel it would be inappropriate to launch a public fund-raising appeal, but if any members of the Museum Society feel able to make a donation towards the purchase of the bracelets, please contact the Treasurer. Please contact Carolyn Wingfield, Curator if you would like any more information.

Natural Sciences: Sarah Kenyon

Good news! My broken arm has healed and is functional again. I almost have the full range of movement back. It is still stiff and slightly swollen, so the exercises continue..

We have been very busy with preparing revised and new documents for the Accreditation review of the museum service due in 2020. The National Heritage Lottery Fund Resilient Heritage project started in October 2019 and we have been working with consultants and stakeholders for the Audience Development Study of the museum service and the Options Appraisal & Feasibility Study of the museum site. What else has been happening? I've been producing the delayed annual reports for special roadside verges and collating the results of the ecological survey forms from the wonderful volunteers who survey plants at verge sites across the district. With funding from the Museum Society work has started to further manage asbestos present in the museum collections. An approved contractor removed asbestos from gas masks to make them safe. The next stage is to further seal and consolidate mineral specimens held in quarantine and dispose of some other items from the collections including asbestos soap.



Fiona Turnbull is now my natural sciences assistant, with extra funding for six hours per week, to provide assistance with administration, computer work, moving objects and driving to the museum store or verge sites. We are moving lots of objects in the museum natural sciences store to give access for the builders who are sealing up gaps in the ceiling and floor to keep out pests which eat collections. These are the insect cabinets during phase one of the move to their new position in the store.

Natural Sciences: James Lombard

Geology Documentation project

Starting with the most important news to me, I'm happy to say that the Museum Society have very kindly released funding for me to undertake a small project to improve the documentation of the geology collection. The upshot of this is that I will be employed at the museum for an extra day per week for a total of 15 days. Many of the objects on display in the Geology gallery have little information associated with them on our digital documentation system Modes, or may have no Modes record at all. My work, which begins in April, will ensure that all objects in the Geology gallery have a Modes record that meets the minimum 'Inventory' level requirement of Spectrum, the national standard for collection management. Working towards the nine Spectrum 'primary procedures' shows our commitment to maintaining the standards required by Arts Council England's Accreditation scheme for museums.



Object 108255, one of the objects in the Geology gallery with no Modes record.

Sudbury Museum Auction Mystery

A more recently-acquired hope of the above project is to shed light on an enquiry we recently received from the modern day Sudbury Museum Trust. They have a Heritage Centre in Sudbury Town Hall and were hoping to augment their displays with a loan of the fossils purchased at auction in 1872, following the closure of Sudbury Museum. The items in question were purchased on behalf of Saffron Walden Museum by Messrs Clarke and Tuke, alongside plenty of mounted bird skins and anthropological items from around the world. They all appear in the museum's accession register of that time, but only the fossils seem to lack modern records on Modes, so their location is currently unknown. From the descriptions in the original register, it's possible that they represent a reasonable number of the items on display in the geology gallery. I also mentioned the puzzle to natural history colleagues from across the region in a meeting a few weeks ago, and several of them jumped at the mention of Sudbury fossils. Perhaps the material was transferred elsewhere after purchase? I'm endeavouring to find out. Watch this space.

Museum natural sciences store improvements

The museum's loft-space natural sciences store is having some much-needed TLC. Gaps where the walls meet the floor and ceiling, and joins between wall panels, are being filled in with silicone gel to help eliminate potential insect pests from the store. We are halfway through the operation as I write this, with great thanks to dedicated help from volunteers when moving the taxidermy to what was once the Inorganics store on the ground floor of the Museum. This afternoon's work will involve moving a moth and butterfly cabinet from the lower to the upper level of the natural sciences store, and will start moving the more cumbersome mounted bird skins to the Inorganics store. You can see Richard and Peter with a great bustard, one of the world's heaviest flying birds, which may weigh up to 18 kg (40 lb).



Wallace the Lion on tour once again?

The Museum has been approached by the Museum of the Home (formerly Geffrye Museum) in Shoreditch, London, with a request to borrow our iconic Wallace the Lion. The Museum of the Home has recently undergone a major redevelopment and plans to re-open in summer this year, with new galleries, outdoor spaces and a special exhibition discussing pets. Should the loan go ahead, we would work closely with the exhibition's curators and a team of professional art handlers to remove Wallace from display and transport him to London in a custom-made case. Wallace's magnificent presence in London as part of a large celebration and exhibition would boost the profile of Saffron Walden Museum and the town, and revive the spirit of George Wombwell's original travelling menagerie!

Environmental Monitoring

Keeping track of temperature and relative humidity in stores and galleries, and adjusting if necessary, helps protect the items in the museum's care from degradation. We currently use clockwork thermohygrographs (THGs) and spot-checking for this job, but there are more efficient and accurate ways to do this in the 21st century. The Museum Society have kindly released funding for the purchase of a combined digital temperature and humidity monitor for a trial run of the latest technology. The internet-connected device will be trialled at various locations across the museum and stores, and checked for consistency against our existing recording methods. The information can be accessed from any internet-connected computer, or smartphone with the relevant app. If the system proves simple and effective at the Museum and Shirehill, we hope a full-scale roll-out will save the staff time required to check, change, transcribe and order new THG charts, and will provide comprehensive coverage versus time-consuming weekly spot-checks. Modern monitoring systems should improve our knowledge of the conditions across the museum, and therefore our potential to control them. This ability is essential if we are to take part in joint schemes with the national museums to host important loans and touring exhibitions.



An internet-connected temperature and humidity logger from Files Thru the Air.

On a related note, we've been experiencing difficulties with the dehumidifier controls in the Natural Sciences store at Shirehill for a few months now. Following a routine calibration check and re-installation, we noticed after only half a morning that it had reduced the relative humidity to more than 10% below the preferred lower limit for collections storage. Low humidity is a particular problem in this space because the animal bone and ivory can crack, delaminate and begin to flake away as water evaporates out. The problem is compounded if humidity regularly fluctuates quickly by such an amount. Thanks to several months of relatively low-humidity weather, and the Natural Sciences store being quite well-isolated, humidity has stayed sufficiently stable to allow the dehumidifier unit to remain off. We are, however, looking forward to a visit from specialist engineers at the end of March to resolve the issue.

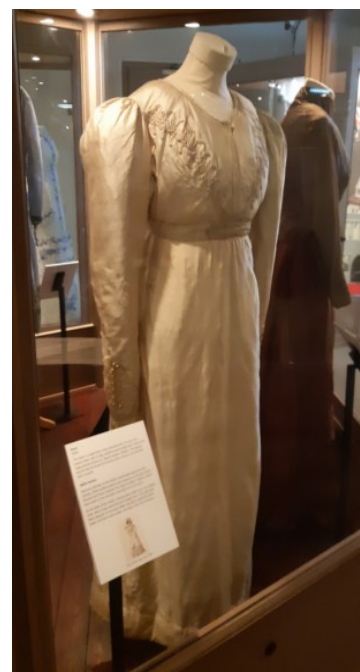
Human History Collections: Jenny Oxley

I've recently been researching for our Intended history of fire-fighting in Essex exhibition, "All Fired Up". It's been great visiting the Essex Fire Museum at Grays, Saffron Walden Fire Station and the Gibson Library. I'm really appreciative of all the valuable help I have received at these venues, as well as from Zofia at the Essex Record Office Access Point and from the local history recorders.

However, due to the current coronavirus restrictions the Museum has reluctantly decided not to open the Exhibition, but all of the preparatory work will not go to waste, and it will be postponed for one year and held next Spring.

We try to share our collections and their related information as much as possible. Recently I've been sharing information about our early 19th century social history and textile collections with the Gibson Library to help with their research for their one-day exhibition about 19th century portraiture which was held in February. This also served as a great tie-in with Charlotte's Death Masks to Diaries exhibition, which was based on different forms of portraiture.

A lovely example of early 19th century costume in our collections is an ivory silk dress c. 1820s which is on display in our costume gallery. The dress is very typical of its period, with its voluminous "leg of mutton" sleeves and a high empire-cut waistline.



Behind the scenes at the Shire Hill store on a Monday we're continuing to work on improving the cataloguing and digitisation of the museum's photograph and document archive collections, with a view to eventually getting these collections online and publicly accessible.

I've received a number of research visits from more past members of the former Saffron Sound Barbershop group, as a result of posting photographs of items from their history on our social media platforms. We are looking at the possibility of this being the theme for a forthcoming Your Stories – community co-curated display when the current Sawdust Hearts display finishes in July.



We recently had a visit from "On the Wampum Trail" a group of academic researchers funded by the Arts Council, who are studying historic items made from wampum which originated from North America for the Mayflower 400 Anniversary. Wampum is an Indigenous material derived from whelk and quahog shells which were harvested along the eastern shores of North America and used to produce small white and purple beads strung or woven into collars, bands, and belts. Historically, wampum strands and strings were used for condolence or adornment. Wampum belts were woven with designs that recorded historic alliances and agreements among Indigenous and European nations during the colonial period, so they have a fascinating history. They were particularly interested in a Great Lakes area glass beaded back ornament (sized to fit a child) and our other items on display which included wampum bead strings and belts, as well as moccasins, finger-woven sashes and other intriguing indigenous objects from Haudenosaunee, Abenaki, Huron and other communities which are on display in the world cultures gallery. They have shared pictures of them with contemporary indigenous artisans via social media. We hope this might be the start of a co-produced project to re-interpret these collections as part of any future re-development of the museum's displays. This is very timely considering the current discussions in the museum world about the growing importance of decolonising collections.

If you want to keep up to date with day-to-day activities at the Museum, you can find out more information by following us on social media – we're on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, and/ or sign up for the museum's monthly e-news (there is a link to sign up from the museum's website).

Object of the Month

December 2019

Christmas Doll's House room setting

Chosen by ; Jenny Oxley

December's Object of the Month was chosen by Jenny Oxley, Collections Officer (Human History), it's a very seasonal Christmas doll's house room setting, which was donated to the Museum in 1990 by Mrs E V Watt. It was created originally to replicate one of the rooms at the original owner's home, the grade II listed property, Watts Folly in Arkesden.

The earliest records of dolls houses date back to the 16th century. They were originally intended to be replicas of wealthy family homes, built as a record of the times rather than as a hobby or for children to play with.



January 2020
Nautilus shell
Chosen by Sarah Kenyon

January's 'Object of the Month' features a Nautilus shell from oceans on the other side of the world, *Nautilus pompilius*, a marine mollusc also called the Pearly Nautilus. It has been chosen by Sarah Kenyon, one of the Museum's Natural Sciences Officers.

They are the only living Cephalopods with an external shell. The animal uses its tentacles to catch prey, which it eats with a hard parrot-like beak and a radula with nine teeth. They were once common in seas across the world. Today only a few Nautilus species live in the Indian and Pacific Oceans around southeast Asia and Australia. They are now protected by international law.



The spiral shell is divided into chambers that are connected to each other by a hollow tube called the siphuncle.

The animal lives in the newest and largest outer chamber at the end of the shell.

Section through a Nautilus shell from Wikipedia

The older chambers are filled with gas and fluid. Buoyancy can be controlled by changing the amounts of gas and fluid inside the chambers of the shell and so the Nautilus can move up or down in sea water from shallow to deeper depths. It swims using jet propulsion. The animal can withdraw completely into its shell and close the opening with a structure called the hood. The hood is shown below in the picture of a Nautilus.



From Wikipedia

The Nautilus has large eyes, but its eyesight is weak. It can smell through up to 90 ridged tentacles to find and catch prey, which it eats with a hard parrot-like beak and a radula with teeth.

Cephalopods are considered to be the most intelligent invertebrates. They have large brains, complex behaviour and highly developed senses and eyes. These molluscs are predators in the open ocean and on rocky shores. The

head has a powerful beak, radula and tentacles with suckers. They swim using jet propulsion. There are about 700 living species. Nautilus kept their external shell. Squids and Cuttlefish have an internal shell which is found inside the body. Octopuses have no shell at all.

Two extinct groups of Cephalopods - the ammonites and belemnites, were common until they became extinct at the end of the Cretaceous period 65 million years ago. You can find fossils of ammonite shells and the internal guards of belemnites (similar to the squids of today) in the Geology gallery. Some ammonite shells were 2 metres in diameter!

February 2020

Snowy Owl

Chosen by James Lombard

February's 'Object of the Month' was displayed by James Lombard, one of the Museum's Natural Sciences Officers.

The Museum was celebrating Harry Potter Book Night on 6th February with a wizarding-themed Object of the Month - a snowy owl!

This is a female snowy owl, *Bubo scandiacus*. Female snowy owls, like Hedwig, have spotted and striped plumage, while the male bird is almost pure white. Snowy owls live in the Arctic Circle where they hunt for food over tundra and upland moors. These impressive predators eat lemmings and other rodents, birds and rabbits, and only very rarely visit the far north of Britain. This mounted skin was donated to Saffron Walden Museum in 2003 for the Education collection. It has come out of the store for Museums at Night, exhibitions and teaching sessions.



In 2004, the scientific name of the snowy owl was changed from *Nyctea scandiaca* to *Bubo scandiacus*, after years of research on their genetics and the shape of their bones. This showed that they were more closely related to horned owls and eagle owls, and should use the same genus name, *Bubo*. The Snowy Owl is Listed on CITES (The Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora). This 1975 agreement controls the international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants to ensure that trade does not threaten their survival. It is illegal to import or export a live snowy owl or dead specimen without a license.

March 2020

Medieval Floor Tiles

Chosen by Carolyn Wingfield, Curator.

This month's objects were a collection of Medieval floor tiles. Decorated tile floors were an attractive and practical way of embellishing a special building. Initially, such expensive floors were the preserve of royal residences and the great cathedrals and abbeys, but from the fourteenth century the tile-making industry expanded and decorated tiled floors became common in wealthy homes and local churches.

The tiles in Saffron Walden Museum's collections illustrate the most popular late medieval technique, inlaid or two-colour tiles. The pattern was carved on a wooden block, which was used to stamp the design into the surface of a red clay tile. The impression was then filled with white clay, and the surface was coated with a lead glaze. When fired in a kiln, the glaze made the tile appear red-brown with a yellow pattern.



The Museum's small collection of medieval floor tiles was acquired in 1870-80, from local antiquarians and collectors as far as we know, although the records made at the time do not tell us much about where the tiles came from. Fortunately, archaeologists' knowledge has increased greatly during the past 150 years thanks to new excavations and research, so it is now possible to say where many of the tiles were made, even if we do not know exactly where they were used. A recent research visit by Paul Drury FSA, an authority on medieval roof tiles, has provided us with much more information, which inspired this feature.

April 2020

Adoration of the Shepherds

Chosen by Jenny Oxley

April's Object of the Month was selected by Jenny Oxley, Collections Officer (Human History). It's a pen and ink drawing with additions in chalk, by Italian artist Gaspare Diziani (b.1689 d.1767) a biblical scene called the *Adoration of the Shepherds*.

This item recently came back off loan from the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. It has previously been out on loan to the Fondazione Cini in Venice for a special display of Venetian drawings. Before it came to Saffron Walden Museum, the drawing was originally housed at Ashdon Hall.

Diziani's original oil on canvas painting of the same scene (as this was the preparatory drawing) dates to around 1755 and is housed in a private collection. Diziani was an Italian painter and draughtsman who trained and practised art in Belluno in Northern Italy and Venice. He was known for his speed of production and technical assurance. He also worked as a scenery painter in Venetian theatres and travelled widely undertaking art commissions.



Drawing in the Saffron Walden Museum Collection



The Painted Version

Exhibitions and Displays: Jenny Oxley

Your Stories:

co-curated displays created in partnership with local community groups.

Sawdust Hearts (31st January-July 2020)

The 1568 Sawdust Hearts Project was set up by Helen Birmingham in Scarborough in 2018. It took as its starting point the inspirational work instigated by Queen Mary namely Sweetheart Pincushions, made by soldiers as part of their convalescence, an example of some of the earliest occupational therapy.

1568 Sawdust Hearts, this number signifies the number of days which the First World War lasted, one heart for each day of the war. The pre-stuffed hearts were packaged and sent out across the country. A local Sewing group led by teacher Tracey Fernandes heard about the project. 20 Hearts were decorated and sent back to Helen Birmingham for the national exhibition in 2018. After the exhibition they were all returned but it was felt that they were worthy of display in the local community. We hope that you had the opportunity to see a selection of the hearts on display in the Museum, before its enforced closure on March 18th.



The Museum Society Evening |Talk on 9th March was about the Sawdust Hearts project, and a report of this appears on page 14 of this Newsletter.

Museum Society News

Membership

By now, you will have received the usual reminder that subscriptions for the year to 31 March 2021 are due on 1 April. The minimum subscription is £15 per person but any extra is very welcome and, of course, will be used very wisely.

Membership cards were 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 desk volunteer may need to charge an entrance fee.

I keep a small stock of printed cards for members on email but without printers. If you would like a one of these please let me know.

Thank you

The society has received several cheques donated in memory of our friend and valued volunteer, Gillian Ram. This is very much appreciated, and we would like to extend our thanks to her family and friends for their generosity.

Strange times

Due to my great age (sh!) and the closure of the Museum, I will not be collecting post or other messages from the Museum. If you need to send me subscriptions or any other correspondence, please telephone 01799 527546 for my address

Christine Sharpe

Reports on Talks

11 November 2019

Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift - a personal perspective.

Speaker: Paul Fairhurst

The British Empire was being reorganised and having turned Canada into a confederation of states, the government wished to do the same for its South African territories. Much of the indigenous population, including the independent Zulu kingdom, was distinctly against the idea. The British did want Zululand to be part of it though; after all, it was close to the diamond fields of Kimberley. In December 1878, without consulting London, the High Commissioner, Sir Bartle Frere sent an ultimatum to King Cetshwayo of the Zulu to become part of the confederation and gave him 30 days to accept. What followed was not only the clash of two empires but of two very distinct and opposing cultures.

When the 30 days were up in January 1879 and King Cetshwayo had not accepted the demand, Bartle Frere ordered the commander of the British forces, Lord Chelmsford, to cross the river from Natal into Zululand and, after several days of manoeuvres, on 22nd January 1879 the two opposing armies found themselves confronting each other on the plain near Mount Isandlwana. The British forces numbered some 1,800, with some cavalry, the Redcoats - mainly infantry and some black African troopers. The infantry were equipped mostly with the new Martini-Henry breech-loading rifles which allowed them to attack the enemy from a distance. There was also the wagon train stationed at the rear but not in a laager formation, with its supplies, food, fodder and ammunition, looked after by about 400 civilians.

The Zulu were a fiercely militaristic people and the army now facing the British numbered around 20,000 or more. Their weaponry comprised assegais, the throwing spears, their oxhide shields and their short-handled clubs, iwisas, used for hand-to-hand combat. Some had old-fashioned rifles and muskets. They had their training from an early age when they were organised into groups of the same age. They fought naked. They made their initial impact using a routine of the rhythmic stomp which rumbled through the ground underfoot, then the shield bang and lastly the war chant. Their attack strategy was close-quarter fighting but their commander Ntshingwayo kaMahole Khoza also deployed the "buffalo horns and chest" strategy. In the middle, facing Chelmsford's forces, was "the chest" of warriors whilst the two "horns" circled wide each side to reach round to the back of the wagons thus taking the field by surprise and able to attack from the rear. So battle commenced.

The loss to British forces was calamitous especially those in the forward firing line and it did not help that many were equipped with pale pith helmets that made them easy targets and that ammunition ran out and could not be re-supplied from the wagons. In total, out of the 1,800 there were about 1,300 casualties. The Zulu casualties numbered somewhere between 1,000 and 2,500 - difficult to say - some killed but some wounded and despatched by the British.

Late in the day, the British forces who could left the field and headed along the river to the mission at Rorke's Drift where there was also a hospital and a temporary army post. Some, the Natal Native Horse, went on further, some more stayed for a while but left leaving about 150 infantry forces who had arrived there, exhausted, to find that there had already been some defence reinforcement of the mission by a small detachment of engineers led by Lt. John Chard. They had used mealie bags to make a defensive perimeter around the hospital and other buildings. Getting on for 4 P.M. a Zulu force of between 3 - 4,000 arrived and attacked, there was another assault at approx 7 P.M. when it was dark. There was another attack after 9:00 P.M. The defenders lost ground and eventually had to evacuate the hospital and its patients. They also suffered some casualties. Now the the British were hemmed into a smaller area but the fighting continued further into the night but at dawn they found that the Zulu had gone. Apparently that day was a 'bad' or unfortunate moon. So they went home. The mission had held out. Who won?

The result of Isandlwana was a disastrous defeat for the British, so much so that the invasion of Zulu territory halted. Rorke's Drift was counted as a victory for the defending troops to whom 11 V.C.s and four Distinguished Conduct medals were awarded. Chelmsford was recalled but because his replacement could not arrive till later, he took on the Zulu again at the battle of Ulundi where this time he was victorious. Bartle Frere was also recalled and replaced. The Zulu perspective was that " we out-generalled them; we out-nobled them"

This is a brief résumé of Paul's very detailed account of the background to, the personnel involved in and the progress of both engagements. He had brought with him an assegai and a hide shield and club for the audience to examine. Keith Eden provided an old rifle close to the type used by the British. This was a great idea and helped people to get closer to the action. Paul also gave us some titles of books to read:- Zulu by Saul David; Isandlwana by Ron Lock; Zulu War by Knight and Castle; Rorke's Drift by Neil Thornton. Thank you Paul.

Heather Salvidge

[Editors Note: There is a very full description of the events at Isandlwana on the Wikipedia webpage at;
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Isandlwana

]

13 January 2020

The Essex Regiment in World War 1 -

Speaker, Paul Layzell

At its high point, the Essex Regiment provided some 30 battalions to the British armed forces in WW1, seeing action in battlefields such as The Somme, Gallipoli, Egypt and Palestine. As it happened, when, on 4th August 1914, the war was declared the 1st Essex were stationed in Mauritius, the 2nd Essex were stationed at Chatham Barracks and the 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th were in the middle of their annual training camps. The 1st Essex were recalled, getting back in November, in their tropical kit, pith helmets and all. The 2nd Essex arrived in France on 23rd August and others that had been on training soon followed. The 5th Essex were the first to fire a shot in the war when, still stationed at Holland-on-Sea, a seal was shot and killed having mistakenly been thought to be a German combatant trying to land.

Across The Channel the war had started in earnest with the battles for Mons and Verdun and was not going well for The Allies. Our troops had had experience in the Boer War but the tactics used then were wholly inappropriate for the modern weaponry of the Germans and the advancing winter of northern France with its mud and ice. It was trench warfare and by mid-winter the trenches were static, and sometimes there were only about 60 yards between the two sides. It was on Christmas Day in 1914 that the famous truce happened between some of the opposing soldiers in various places, including the 1st Essex's trenches. Officers on both sides were horrified and saw to it that the guns were firing on Christmas Day 1915.

Personnel in the German army outnumbered ours by 3 to 1 so back in the U.K. recruitment was in full swing to make up the numbers. Essex regiments were full after two weeks and recruiting switched to enlisting in the new Regular Army. At one point there were 30 battalions camped in Essex, training. The 5th Essex were posted overseas but the 8th "The Cyclists" had a home posting using their wheels to patrol the coasts of Essex and Suffolk watching for enemy landings. Some other battalions were also given home postings. By December the war was going badly for us; The Essex Chronicle published its weekly "Roll of Honour" recording casualties. Mrs Gore Anley, a colonel's wife organised a scheme to provide 'comforts for soldiers'. These gifts were much appreciated as basic pay for privates was 7/6d a week with half going to the wives of married men. Things at home got a little better at home when women were allowed to do 'proper jobs' and earn some money - 18/s a week or more! Families also had to brace themselves for the arrival of the "regret inform" telegram. Losses were such that in 1916 conscription was introduced which led to the situation when there were "too many" recruits all needing training so some were sent home to await their 'call up'.

Peter then described the circumstances of three of the men who were awarded military service medals. CSM Arthur Rowland was awarded the Military Medal on 11 October 1916. Born in Dovercourt in 1879 he worked on a farm as a horseman before joining up. He was posted to Gallipoli in 1915 and then to the Western Front in France where he fought in the battle of The Somme. He had worked his way up through the ranks to become Company Sergeant Major and thus it was he who accompanied his 2nd Lieutenant to the Company H.Q. to report on the latest manoeuvre. A rogue enemy shell burst directly over them as they stood outside and both were killed. It was on 18 October 1916. The Somme cost us about one third of our man power and Arthur Rowland was the last casualty from Essex in that conflict. Private 41946 Charles Victor Holman was also awarded the Military Medal. He was called up on 21 May 1915 to the 1st Norfolks was, transferred to the 1st Essex battalion, mobilised on 9th October and posted to France where he was wounded on 30th November by a gunshot wound. He received some treatment at home in the U.K. before being sent back to France to The Essex Regiment. His M.M. citation is not known but he was demobbed early. Despite his injuries he lived to be over 103 years old and in later life recalled the abysmal and "ghastly things" he had witnessed and the horrors of "going over the top". Frank Wearne was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross. The son of a Hampstead wine merchant he had studied at Oxford University and joined up in Colchester in 1917 joining the 3rd battalion of The Essex Regiment. He was

then attached to the 10th and made a Scouting Officer, a very dangerous position and was wounded sufficiently seriously to be returned to Blighty. On recovery he was attached to the 11th Essex, bombing enemy lines and while carrying out his duties on 27 June 1917 showed amazing courage and was mortally wounded. That meant a second telegram for his family as his elder brother had died a few weeks earlier.

The medical support network procedures said that if a comrade were wounded, you left him and the stretcher bearers would collect the casualty and take him to the regimental First Aid post. Then if necessary, to the Field Ambulance Station, then if necessary to a casualty clearing station and then if appropriate to a hospital train and on to Blighty for hospital treatment (no N.H.S. yet) so an 'ordinary hospital' or a V.A.D. one – there were 82 of these in Essex. If you were wounded at home you got a badge, not a medal.

During the Great War, 9258 members of the Essex Regiment were killed, 7029 on the Western Front and 1172 in Turkey and Egypt. According to the Commonwealth Graves Commission the rank most likely to die was that of 2nd Lieutenant if you compared how many of them were killed with the number of men who held that rank. The Essex Regiment itself "died" in 1958 and together with the Bedfordshires and Hertfordshires, to become part of the East Anglian Regiment.

Peter Layzell, now a well-known local historian, had got into the Essex Regiment's history through his developing interest in family history which had started while he was still in the Essex Police Force. He retired from his second career working with Maldon DC and as an adult education tutor to spend more time giving talks on his specialist subjects and to tend the two websites. His talk to us on The Essex Regiment, therefore, covered in much more detail than I have written here, its organisation, some more characters, daily routine, training, trench life and the home background, using testimonies, newspaper accounts and, of course, family histories all backed up by helpful slides.

Heather Salvidge.

20 February 2020
On Portraiture –
Speaker; Benjamin Sullivan

Ben graduated from Edinburgh School of Art in 2000 and started his career as painter of portraits. His introductory slide for us was of his most recent work, done in 2019, that of Richard Parks, Head Porter at The Garrick Club. In 2007, as his career expanded, he moved from London to Haverhill with his now wife, Ginny where he painted her in his new studio in their Victorian house. This portrait was exhibited in The National Portrait Gallery. Ben explained that the light in every studio is different and that light also changes throughout the day and with the outside daylight. When composing his portraits and their settings he adopts the technique of extended perspective. He said that this adds more to an artwork without compromising the composition. He spoke, too, of his early influences for example, Carol Weight, Norman Blamey, Stanley Spencer and Charles Mahoney and what they had added to his work.

In 2008 he completed two important commissions, one of Martin Rees, Master of Trinity College – now in the National Portrait Gallery – and the other for Girton College of Baroness Brenda Hale but which is now hanging in the University Library, Cambridge as part of the 'Rising Tide' temporary exhibition. Another major commission came in 2008 this time to paint a triptych for All Souls College, Oxford celebrating the work of College employees comprising a main central panel and two side panels each of these having a group of portraits. The financial crash of that year put the project on hold for a while and during this time Ben adjusted his composition so that the finished work now had the Buttery staff placed centrally and the gardeners, the Head Porter, admin staff, gardeners etc. on one side and the menders, cleaners and so forth on the other. Ben placed the portraits in the three panels so as to arrange an overall arc to the composition and bring the three together as one. The whole project was completed in 2012 after 3½ years.

Then came the commission to record life at The Reform Club by way of some very small sketches, drawings and watercolours. Two were a 'pair of Hattersleys' one a 'head portrait' and the other a 'half-seated' one and all these were exhibited in 2016.

Ben then discussed the importance of drawing in his work; as a medium in itself, as preliminary sketches for his portrait subjects and for the basis of the portraits themselves which were then painted over. He changed this technique to doing the detailed drawing on paper and transferring it to the canvas and so he had something else to sell. He took us through the several stages of a specific painting. That of his wife breastfeeding and entitled

'Breech'; the stages of applying paint and how this would change colour during the process and how paintings took on a life of their own. Several of his works have either won or been placed in important competitions.

In 2018 The R.A.F. Club commissioned Ben to paint Her Majesty the Queen at Windsor and he was granted an hour's sitting which overran a little. He took photos of the jewellery, the dress etc. and made preliminary sketches and went away to work on the portrait which the Queen unveiled in the R.A.F. Club in October that year. Ben said that working to commission was as if you had two clients; one was the commissioner and the other the sitter and you had to please them both.

He then showed us a slide of a delightful dual portrait entitled 'Two Artists'. It showed his daughter, then aged three, studiously drawing in Daddy's studio and, reflected in a full-length mirror Daddy drawing his daughter and himself! Both 'The Breech' and 'Two Artists' have been borrowed by Trinity College, Cambridge.

Ben was generous with the slides he used to illustrate both his own and the work of other artists. He is a natural, open speaker and gave us detailed insight into the technique and details of his own approach to portraiture and those of other artists. His paintings are wonderful and his drawings astounding. As I have not covered everything he discussed with us you might wish to follow up on www.benjaminsullivan.co.uk.

Heather .Salvidge

9th March 2020

1568 Sawdust Hearts

Speakers : Tracey Fernandes & Helen Birmingham

Tracey Fernandes, who runs a local sewing group, by chance in November 2018 visited an astonishing exhibition in Scarborough which displayed hundreds of stuffed sawdust hearts. Intrigued by the story behind the exhibition and being told that there were still some of the kits to make these hearts on sale at £20:00 each, she bought 20 kits and on return home passed them on to those interested. All the heart kits had their own number in numerical order – from one to 1568 – and were issued in that order. They did not, of course, all come back in that order. Tracey had found out who had organised the whole scheme, Helen Birmingham, whom she then introduced to us and who then “picked up the threads” and explained why and how it had happened.

Helen told us that it had taken over for 2½ years of her life but had raised good money for 'Combat Stress'. In 2016 she had become aware that during WW1 some wounded soldiers were encouraged to decorate heart-shaped bags, filled with sawdust, as a convalescent therapy. There were no stitches in these hearts, the designs were made with pins and, where possible, the silk “cigarette cards” then available were pinned on as decoration. It was also O.K. to make patterns by using wool or thread to wind round the pins. Helen outlined the history of people making sawdust hearts, sometimes they were even used as love tokens because pin cushions were useful household items. During WW1 on one of her visits to hospitals, Queen Mary saw wounded soldiers working on the hearts, and realised how therapeutic they were to the men. So she summoned the ladies of her sewing guild and got them to make the hearts to be sent on for soldiers to work on.

As an initial fundraiser for her project, Helen made 100 boxed sets of the hearts which she then sold with the idea that they would be on display when the centenary of The Armistice was held. This was so successful that she took a deep breath and decided to go for 1568 hearts; 1568 being the number calculated by her as the number of days WW1 has lasted – from the shooting of Arch Duke Ferdinand to the Armistice. Funds were raised by the participants in the scheme from sales, donations and by volunteering as there were no grants to be had. Helen herself made the hearts by sewing them around, slashing a 'wound' turning them inside out using the 'wound' for this and for stuffing. This was sewn up ready to be boxed and made ready for posting. She spent 6 months wearing an anti-dust mask as she stuffed. The prepared boxes were stacked in piles in Helen's sitting room, much to the cat's displeasure. Helen had many slides of them showing designs of flowers, especially poppies, abstracts and even a 'barbed wire' one There was another that gave her a weird sense of 'deja vue'. Some people had enclosed a letter with their completed hearts which Helen read to us. Some of course telling of family losses in the Great War, some said they were for those shot as 'deserters' whom now we might now understand as suffering from PTSD and some who said how calming it had been to work on them.

The exhibition opened on Armistice Day in November 2018 in a house called “Woodend” in Scarborough, this was the Sitwell family home and where Edith Sitwell had lived during WW1. Not all the hearts sent out were returned. The numbers on those were noted and their place in the display taken by special 'Missing in Action' hearts, placed between those returned, which were all displayed on 43 boards. To complement these there was

an original heart from 1918, all the tags from the non-returned hearts, which in number amounted to the same percentage as the percentage of combatants who never came back, a real Queen Mary's Needlework Guild medal and a display of unsold hearts, and a white poppy. There was a map of the U.K. with a pin in it for every location of where the returned hearts came from with a cluster of 20 around Saffron Walden. These modern hearts, unlike the WW1 ones, were decorated with embroidery and appliqué as well as a variety of pins and were wonderfully diverse.

The Armistice Day opening of the exhibition was very moving. There was background music composed for the occasion by John Pattison, the 43 boards of the hearts and the other displays. The emotional impact was such that many visitors left in tears. Some of the unsold hearts were sold and a cheque in excess of £7,000 was handed to Combat Stress and, when the exhibition closed, all the hearts were returned to their families, an important part of the scheme.

Since then some people have formed their own groups to make their own hearts or other similar kits. There were some card kits available at the talk for people to take by making a donation. The 1568 Hearts display will be in the Museum until July and the workshop day there is scheduled for 9th May. I may not have got all the technicalities correctly recorded, so I hope Helen will forgive me. Do go, though, and see the display in the Museum, either to remind yourself of the designs or to see them for the first time.

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.

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